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Review

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The fourth chapter, "Retracing an Ancient Debate: How Insight Worsted Meditation in the Pāli Canon," makes the case that the emphasis placed on certain key doctrines in the Pāli Canon is the direct result of a convoluted series of debates among those early disciples who preserved the canonical texts. Gombrich applies this approach to explain why current recensions of the Pāli Canon give precedence to insight (*pañña*) over meditation (*samādhi*) and faith (*saddhā*) as the most effective means for achieving religious liberation (*nibbāna*). The argument is extremely intricate and sometimes difficult to follow, but the general point seems to be that whereas the Buddha himself and the earliest formulations within the canon do not privilege insight, later scholiasts read finer distinctions into the canonical sources to justify their own conclusions.

While Gombrich's book does not really tell us "how Buddhism began," it does give us valuable insights into early Buddhism and how the early doctrines developed into the institutionalized forms we find in the writings of Theravāda Buddhism. More than this, the book is a call for further scholarship that emulates its sound methods. *How Buddhism Began* is highly recommended reading for both the expert and novice in the field of Buddhist studies.

Understanding Eastern Philosophy. By Ray Billington. London and New York: Routledge, 1997. Pp. x + 197.

Reviewed by **Carl Olson** Allegheny College

In an earlier work titled *East of Existentialism: The Tao of the West*, Ray Billington argues that Western philosophy is incomplete without its Eastern counterpart because, for instance, to achieve a comprehensive ontological perspective requires drawing on Eastern ideas. In *Understanding Eastern Philosophy*, the author informs the reader in the preface that he wanted to compose a book that steers a middle course between "sentimental devotionism" and "inscrutable obscurantism" (p. viii). The author succeeds in his quest, but his work invites other types of problems. Regardless of the title, Billington cannot decide completely if he is writing a book on Eastern philosophy or Eastern religion. From chapter 13 to the end, he engages in a cross-cultural dialogue between Eastern and Western religions. Although he raises some interesting questions regarding, for example, comparative mysticism, the quest for immortality, moral absolutes, utopian ideas, sacred writings, and faith, these kinds of issues belong more to the sphere of religion and not necessarily to philosophy. A discerning reader can rightfully ask "Whatever happened to Eastern types of philosophy?" The author admits that it is difficult to determine definitively whether schools of Eastern thought are best regarded as religions or philosophies. He thinks that an agnostic position might be the wisest choice. It is this type of indecision that permeates the book, although he finally seems to favor treating Eastern schools of thought as religions.

The book is actually divided into two distinct parts: a survey of Eastern schools

of thought and a comparative part from chapter 13 to the final chapter 18. The author provides a useful introduction to Eastern thought by discussing Hinduism and its schools and the heterodox systems of Indian philosophy represented by Buddhism. Within the context of discussing Chinese philosophy, the author devotes two chapters to Taoism, another to the Yin-Yang School, and a final chapter to Confucianism. The first thing that strikes the reader about this approach is the total absence of Japanese or Korean philosophy. The author's discussion of Tibetan Buddhism concentrates on mostly religious aspects and tends to neglect its contributions to philosophy. In his survey of these various modes of thought, he does not really have anything new, unique, or insightful to relate.

Even though Billington possesses a good grasp of a wide range of topics in Eastern thought, there are some problems with specific statements. In comparison to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Hinduism is said to be based, for instance, on mythology rather than history because it does not have a founder. This kind of assertion is a good example of the author's indecision about whether this is a book on philosophy or religion. Furthermore, his approach to his subject is at times unhistorical. For example, he interprets the non-self doctrine of the Buddha by means of the later philosophy of Nāgārjuna as representing the actual teaching of the historical Buddha. He also claims unhistorically that "Zen does not really belong to any specific religion, not even to Buddhism" (p. 76). He seems to have read too many of D. T. Suzuki's unhistorical essays. Suzuki may also have led the author astray when he claims that the Sōtō School was skeptical about the use of the koan or any form of language during meditation, because this school of Zen did in fact use koans in its practice. Moreover, since the author includes a discussion of Pure Land Buddhism, it is possible for one to ask if this is, properly speaking, a school of Buddhist philosophy alongside that of the Yogācāra or Mādhyamika schools.

The purpose of the author's broad survey of mostly Indian and Chinese forms of thought becomes apparent when he begins to compare key Eastern ideas with their Western counterparts. Besides failing to take Eastern philosophy seriously in its own right, Billington plays a game of reducing the Advaita Vedānta philosophy of Shankara to a mysticism that can be discovered in all schools of Hinduism, and compares this kind of mysticism to Christian mysticism. When comparing Eastern and Western notions about ethics and human behavior, Billington introduces non-philosophers like George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, and St. Paul. These are further examples that the author cannot decide whether he is writing a book about religion or philosophy.

Another problem with this book is that the author makes generalizations about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism as if they did not have individual thinkers. For instance, he perceives the primary challenge of Eastern philosophy to the ethical and religious values of the West to be the rejection by the East of the moral absolutes of the West. Billington tends to simplify Eastern thought by suggesting that it achieves an awareness of nondual reality that is beyond the distinction between good and evil. From this condition of liberation, benevolent acts are based on an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all beings versus the observance of rules supported by

rational arguments characteristic of the West. Moreover, in chapter 17 and its discussion of authority, the author claims that the Eastern schools treated in his book accept individual experience rather than tradition or sacred writings. In order to discern the fallacy of this generalization, the reader need only consider the philosophy of Shankara and its emphasis on the revelation (*śruti*) of sacred Vedic texts. Exceptions to the author's claim that faith is a path to knowledge and not the goal of the spiritual quest can also be discovered in Eastern thought.

In his final chapter, Billington raises the possibility of a union among all religions. Again, this is a curious issue to raise in a book on Eastern philosophy. Nonetheless, this chapter helps us to understand the author's overall purpose, which is to use Eastern modes of thought as a way to demonstrate inadequacies in Western thought. From Billington's perspective, Eastern schools of thought can teach us that each person must find his/her own path to knowledge and to ultimate reality, whatever it is called. Eastern philosophy teaches the West that meditation, harmony with others, unity with the natural world, and the acceptance of the transitory nature of all things (although the author makes an exception with the ground of being) are all features that the West should embrace. Thus Billington wants to stress seeking unity and harmony. Although some ideas about achieving this kind of condition are better than others, the author's liberality is evident when he claims that no religious or philosophical expression of the numinous is without merit.

Even though Billington does not specifically state it, he appears to realize that comparative philosophy (assuming that this is really what he wanted to write) is concerned with alterity in such a way that the other always remains external and mysterious to us. The givenness of alterity within comparative philosophy is indicative of the necessity for engaging in it within the context of a life-world that calls into question the world inhabited by each participant. This encounter with the other refrains from reducing the other to the same, a tendency evident in this book, and it summons participants in the dialogue to take responsibility for each other in such a way that each person becomes radically significant for mutual self-understanding. Unfortunately, Billington tends to neglect particular Eastern thinkers and tends to stress various kinds of Eastern "isms." And these individual Eastern philosophers do not encounter Westerners like Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger in any extensive or meaningful way.

A genuine comparative philosophy is a promiscuous activity because the participants experience a broadening of cultural horizons, and experiment with new connections, new directions, new ideas, and different ways of thinking and being human. This promiscuous activity occurs on the margins of philosophy, which suggests the uncertainty, risk, and dangers associated with comparative philosophy and one's eagerness to venture one's self-understanding in the presence of the other. By means of his/her location on the margins of culture, the comparative philosopher is a liminal being, struggling with revealment and concealment on the margins of different philosophical cultures trying to make sense of the hermeneutical dialogue in which one is engaged. Billington's book lacks the promiscuity necessary for an interesting, insightful, exciting, and rewarding cross-cultural encounter. What

Billington does give us is a Western thinker who takes Eastern philosophy seriously and incorporates Eastern ideas into his/her own intellectual interests and agenda. Nonetheless, this book recalls the Romantic period and its vision of wholeness, its perceived need for renewal, and its attempt to unify religion, philosophy, and art. This book tends to fit into that type of vision.

Reconceptualising the Sciences and the Humanities: An Integral Approach. By S. C. Malik. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 1995. Pp. 294.

Reviewed by **Lori Witthaus** California Institute of Integral Studies

In *Reconceptualising the Sciences and the Humanities: An Integral Approach*, anthropologist S. C. Malik presents us with another perspective in the ongoing discussion of how the discoveries of quantum physics throw the basic assumptions of the Western worldview into question and prompt us to reevaluate the perennial wisdom of Indian religious and philosophical thought. By examining the epistemological and ontological presuppositions that underlie research methodologies in the social and human sciences, Malik offers a unique contribution to a debate that has been largely dominated by physicists and physics-made-easy explanations. In so doing, the author attempts to demonstrate that the methodologies currently employed in the human sciences are biased by and constructed upon an outdated scientific worldview. Malik contends that the implications of quantum theory contradict the implicit assumptions of the dominant Newtonian worldview, and urges academics to engage in a radical reconceptualization of how they investigate and interpret different dimensions of human existence.

The subtitle, *An Integral Approach*, describes the organization and style of the book. The major themes do not unfold in a linear or sequential fashion. Instead, each chapter stands as an independent essay or an individual voice. The use of the adjective 'integral' also bespeaks the project's broadly comparative methodology and spiritual overtones. Malik's attempt at a rapprochement between contemporary science and traditional Indian speculative thought is also bound up with an emancipatory impulse. He links the Western scientific paradigm with colonial oppression, and his book revolves around a quickly established victim-perpetrator motif. Set against the backdrop of a world dominated by the Newtonian worldview and teetering on the edge of destruction, Malik calls upon his Indian readers to overturn the last vestiges of their colonization by radically questioning the validity of this highly problematic, materially biased, and spiritually vacuous worldview.

Central to Malik's approach is an intensive exploration of the ways in which we understand time and consciousness. Malik contends that when Newton decreed the concepts of time and space as absolute, he essentially redefined reality. For the past three hundred years the Western scientific paradigm has maintained a worldview that is antithetical to religious and mystical insight. A major cause for this divergence of religion and science is the difference in the ways they understand time. When