



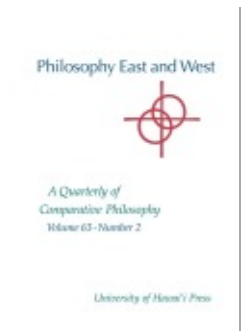
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Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy (review)

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superficial approximation and unmanageable comprehensiveness. He does an impressive job explicating Gaṅgeśa's account in language familiar to students of analytic philosophy, and makes a strong case for the relevance of Nyāya views to analytic epistemology and logic. *Classical Indian Philosophy of Induction* is a tremendous resource from which students of Western and Indian philosophy alike have much to learn.

Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy. By the Cowherds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xii + 251. \$35.00.

Reviewed by **Jeremy E. Henkel** Wofford College

Collaboratively written by some of the world's foremost experts in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist philosophy,¹ *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* is an unusual book. It stands somewhere between being a collection of essays and being a single monograph. The authors refer to it as a "polygraph" to acknowledge both their mutual influence on each other and the interrelatedness of the chapters; nevertheless, each chapter is independent enough to stand on its own as a separate article. The central theme of *Moonshadows* is the notion of conventional truth, particularly as it is elaborated in Madhyamaka. The book is not a historical exegesis, however; it is an attempt—and a successful one at that—to engage with the Buddhist notion of conventional truth not only on its own terms, but also from the perspective of contemporary Western epistemological discussions.

The first chapter contains an introduction to the notion of the "two truths" in Buddhism and the role that conventional truth plays in Buddhist philosophy as well as a summary of the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 addresses the issue of how a truth that is distorting, misleading, and ultimately to be abandoned—as conventional truth is taken to be—can properly be considered a "truth" at all. The authors argue that there is something legitimate here, that "conventionally true" is not just a roundabout way of saying "false."

Chapters 3 and 4 deal specifically with the epistemology of conventional truth, including what the legitimate epistemic instruments (*pramāṇa* in Sanskrit, *tshad ma* in Tibetan) are. Chapter 3 focuses on Candrakīrti's divergence from the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti analysis of the *pramāṇas*, and chapter 4 looks more closely at Tsongkhapa's development of Candrakīrti's analysis. Together, the chapters address concerns about how the grasping of what is only conventionally true can be considered knowledge, and how something can be said to exist (even if only conventionally) if analysis reveals it to be ultimately empty or non-existent.

Chapter 5 examines Tsongkhapa's and Gorampa's competing interpretations of what we should take Nāgārjuna's emptiness to be a denial of—the supposed intrinsic natures of objects, or the objects themselves. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the affinities between Madhyamaka and classical Western (both Academic and Pyrrhonian) skepticism. In chapter 8 the authors argue that, at least with regard to conventional truth,

the Madhyamaka position is best understood as a sort of deflationary theory of truth, rather than correspondence, coherence, or even pan-fictionalism.

Chapters 9–12 explore the question of how the notion of conventional truth can be accepted without truth thereby losing its normative force. For the notion of conventional truth to do the work that it is supposed to do within a Buddhist framework, there must be a difference between accepting that something is conventionally true and just slavishly following majority opinion. Relatedly, an account is needed of how there can be epistemic progress within the realm of the merely conventional.

Finally, chapters 13–14 look at the implications of different accounts of conventional truth for understanding enlightenment, and for attempts to justify a moral/ethical standpoint to those who do not necessarily share one's basic views.

The notion of the two truths is a central issue in Buddhist philosophy, but discussions almost always focus primarily or exclusively on the nature of ultimate truth. The authors of *Moonshadows* have done a great service to Buddhist scholarship in reminding us just how important, and how philosophically interesting, the notion of conventional truth is.

Note

- 1 – The contributors include Georges Dreyfus, Bronwyn Finnigan, Jay L. Garfield, Guy Martin Newland, Graham Priest, Mark Siderits, Koji Tanaka, Sonam Thakchoe, Tom Tillemans, and Jan Westerhoff.

Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage Through the Ages. By Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson. New York: Doubleday, 2010. Pp. ix + 293. Hardcover U.S. \$25.00, CAN \$29.95.

Reviewed by **Guo Jue** Western Michigan University

Almost a century ago, the renowned historian Gu Jiegang (1893–1980) remarked that each era has its own Kongzi, and in fact each era has had many disparate Kongzis. Such varying personalities, he continued, mystify Everyman, who is longing for a true Kongzi.¹ Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson's *Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage Through the Ages* is written with precisely these readers in mind. As a result of the authors' expertise in early China and late imperial China, *Lives of Confucius* chronicles not only the unsuccessful life of the historical Kongzi, a fact that has often been conveniently forgotten or apologetically explained away, but also Kongzi's legacy and cultural immortality as it has been shaped by the various agendas of self-appointed followers and ardent critics, and maintained through a much celebrated textual tradition and local and imperial cults.

Beginning with the two earliest available portraits of Kongzi in Sima Qian's *Shiji* and the *Analecs*, Nylan skillfully weaves the varied and piecemeal second-century B.C.E. accounts of the life of the historical Kongzi into a lucid narrative. By highlighting the major turns in an eventful journey of self-fulfillment in a troubled time, Nylan