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## Book Review: "Beyond Orientalism"

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confine myself to selective comments on themes and chapters. On the theoretical level the volume does an excellent job of distinguishing between ethnic and universal religions, pointing out that conversion is more apt to be associated with the universal religions. There is in this context the interesting suggestion that in Hinduism we may see a move from the ethnic to the universal in that conversion is a relatively recent phenomenon introduced by groups like the Arya Samaj. The tendency of the volume is to deal with conversion from and conversion to. Little attention is given to the phenomenon of assimilation or adoption a phenomenon that results in claims that one can belong to more than one tradition. Jordan Paper does pay attention to this in his chapter, but argues that assimilation and adoption should not be seen as conversion. This is, admittedly a debatable point. However, it should be noted that in the controversies over conversion in India, Indian scholars have treated assimilation and adoption as forms of conversion. Also, with the exception of the chapter by Paper and the chapter by Tim Edgar, not enough attention is paid to the business of conversion within, that is a movement from one indigenous or related community to another.

The paper on conversion in

Zoroastrianism provides a wealth of information on the controversy surrounding the idea of conversion in that tradition. Unfortunately, it tends to recite uncritically what might be seen as Hindu nationalist notions on the constitutional provisions for religious freedoms and the rather troublesome notion that religious minorities in India live there at the pleasure of the religious majority. The chapter on Gandhi, while making an important distinction between real conversions and harvesting souls, ignores much of the scholarly work that has been done on Gandhi with respect to his attitudes to other religions. Harvey's argument that coming out pagan is not really a conversion, but a discovery of who one has always been is suspect. After all, similar language is used in both conversion accounts and in accounts of enlightenment.

The issues cited in the paragraph above notwithstanding this is an excellent volume, one that should be on the shelf of any scholar or student interested in conversion. Perhaps its strongest point is that it is written in a style that makes it accessible both to scholars and to lay persons.

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***Beyond Orientalism.*** Fred Dallmayr. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, xxiii + 277pp.

IN THE LAST TWO decades, the exposure of Orientalism carried with it an implicit hope. Like Freud's hope in the exposure of the unconscious, much post-Orientalist writing implied that new ways of imagining others might be possible once bias had been identified. However, if the late 90's are any indication, identity politics between the "West" and the "East" have become worse and not better. But there are occasional books that take the responsibility of constructive engagement seriously and

creatively. *Beyond Orientalism* is one of them. Fred Dallmayr has written a set of erudite and bold essays in the theory of cross-cultural encounters which can move us toward the next wise steps in the minefield of cross-cultural engagement.

Dealing mostly with India as his dialogical partner, Dallmayr's chapters move methodically through a series of issues central to cross-cultural engagement: models for the representation of the other; the nature of democratic politics; the predicaments of

postcolonial thought; the possibility of Indian philosophy to contribute toward an authentically cross-cultural hermeneutic. Chapter One begins with a survey of modes of cross-cultural encounter, from the most oppressive to the most liberational and realistic. Arguing for an "agonistic" quality to exchange which moves between surrender and triumph, he moves on in Chapter Two to explore what an authentic respect for difference means in two lesser known works of Derrida and Gadamer.

Using this respect for difference, Chapters Three and Four turn toward constructive engagement with two twentieth century Indian thinkers, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and J. L. Mehta. Both scholars try to negotiate Indian and Western philosophy, Radhakrishnan leaning towards a kind of inadvertent syncretism, and Mehta navigating dialectically between the classical Indian tradition of Vedic and Vedantic knowledge and Western philosophy. Chapter Five assesses another writer in this tradition, the late Wilhelm Halbfass, and his attempts to use the categories of Indian darsana to move beyond early Indological modes of interpretation in literary criticism, political theory, and epistemology. In Chapter Six, Dallmayr attempts his own navigation between Indian and European modes of thought, and provides a critical reading of A. K. Ramanujan's distinctions in his famous 1990 essay, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (in McKim Marriott, *India Through Hindu Categories* [Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990], pp. 41-58).

The final three essays boldly attempt to imagine how democracy might be mediated in such an agonistic framework. Chapter Seven engages Indian writers such as Banuri and Nandy to think through the question of "development" from a localized perspective. Chapter Eight, in this author's view the most creative chapter of the book, links the Buddhist concept of emptiness to the political suggestion that sovereignty need not be national, or even global, but rather an "empty space" through which various political entities move.

What is particularly bold about this book? First, it is clearly committed to interpretive effort that involves honest and correctable engagement between Indian and Western thought. Reticence, silence, and assertion all have a place, as does critical assessment of both traditions. Radhakrishnan, Halbfass, Mehta and Heidegger are all examined using Indian and Western tools of inquiry. As a result, new modes of philosophising open up, such as viewing the Vedic traditions as models of openness and self-transgression in cross-cultural encounter.

Second, Dallmayr makes a move between position and counter-position in the endless round of identity politics that constitutes so much of the conversation about India today. He writes of the "futility of charges and countercharges" and calls instead of a "serious rethinking of such basic philosophical categories as equality (or sameness) and difference" (p. 134). The book is filled with such important suggestions, such as the politicisation of *sunyata* as a mediating category between the local and the global, and between the opposed logics of equivalence and difference (p. 192ff).

Third, Dallmayr argues that much of post-Orientalist scholarship makes the mistake of fusing concrete historical observations with fundamental epistemological and metaphysical claims regarding the status of knowledge as such. Building on Halbfass, he argues that the simple cancellation of Western categories is not the answer, since "the self-abrogation of Eurocentrism is at the same time its ultimate affirmation" (Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection*, [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991], pp. 9-12). Instead, scholars must develop a clear idea of the standards for exposing false constructs and superimpositions. Dallmayr takes up this suggestion in each of his essays and helps us toward building such standards from both Indian and Western perspectives.

One should be patient while getting through the introduction of this book. Because the first and second chapters

## 46 Book Reviews

discuss the Columbian legacy of "discovery" and its alternatives (1), and the framework of Gadamer and Derrida (2), they seem to repeat a great deal of what has already been said in post-Orientalist and cultural-hermeneutic circles. However, they are necessary groundwork for the highly original essays that follow. Dallmayr's style is similar to that of J. Z. Smith, in that each chapter suggests the outlines of an important

scholarly project yet to be embarked on but crucial to the field. If other scholars take up Dallmayr's many incisive and creative suggestions, we shall have come a long way indeed.

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***Religion and Public Culture: Encounters and Identities in Modern South India.*** Keith E. Yandell and John J. Paul, Eds. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000, 260pp.

**THE CHAPTERS** in this volume were originally presented at a conference to honor Professor Robert E. Frykenberg, well-known historian of south India. Happily the lead chapter in the volume is written by Frykenberg himself. As the title of the volume indicates the chapters are intended to deal centrally with the formation of religious identities and the importance of these identities as significant factors in public life. The volume is divided into two sections, the first dealing with orthodoxies and the second dealing with heterodoxies.

While the focus of the volume is modern India (generously interpreted to include developments in the 1700's) not all of the chapters are about modern India. John B. Carman for example, writes about Pillan's (ca. 1100-1150) commentary on the *Tiruvaymoli*, by Nammalvar. To be sure, Carman does relate the commentary to the development of a distinctive Tamil Hindu community and to ongoing theological debate. This cannot be said about Keith E. Yandell's chapter on Persons "*East and West*", an attempt at cross-cultural analysis of self-awareness from the perspective of "Cartesian Jainism" on the one hand, and "Humean Buddhism" on the other. Nor can this be said of James D. Ryan's *The Heterodoxies in Tamil Nadu*. His study deals with the social and material factors in the development of Buddhist and Jaina

influence in South India from the fourth to the sixth centuries C.E. He argues convincingly that, as it had in North India, that influence accompanied the development of urban culture in South India. More significantly the emphasis on individualism and self-effort in Jainism and Buddhism appealed to the warriors and merchants more than did the deities whose help the peasantry seemed to need. While one might question whether such an appeal to two psychologies ignores societal complexities, particularly within Hinduism, the author makes the provocative and useful suggestion that the social divisions implicit in his analysis may be a factor in the present day anti-Brahmanism discussed in Kolenda's study of the Brahmins of Dharmarajapuram.

Frykenberg, in *The Construction of Hinduism as a "Public" Religion: Looking Again at the Religious Roots of Company Raj in South India*, argues persuasively that "Hinduism", as we now know it, is a recent phenomenon emerging as part of a large political process and that as a developing public system it became an integral element in the public administration of the British East India Company. Pamela G. Price, in *Acting in Public versus Forming a Public: Conflict Processing and Political Mobilization in Nineteenth Century South India*, focuses on the caste disputes in Masulipatnam, a town on the Andhra coast.