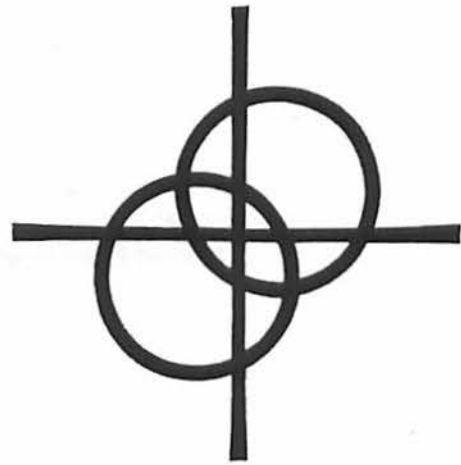


Philosophy East and West



*A Quarterly of
Comparative Philosophy
Volume 41 · Number 2*

University of Hawaii Press

BOOK REVIEWS

The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination.
By William C. Chittick. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989.

The appearance of William C. Chittick's book, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, is a great event not only for professional students of Sufism. This fundamental and thorough piece of research is sure to excite the interest of scholars whose attention is devoted to the history of religion, philosophy, and culture. Moreover, it will satisfy the interest (and the curiosity, too) that quite a number of our contemporaries have about mysticism in general and Sufism in particular.

Shocked bewilderment at the very real chance of mankind's destroying itself in either a nuclear or an ecological catastrophe has brought people to question the generally accepted (up to now) power and humanitarian value of science. Rationalism, both lay and religious, has been losing repute. Under these conditions, an especially eager and intense inquisitiveness about mysticism, about esoteric wisdom, has been emerging. The fact that some conceal this interest in mysticism makes mysticism doubly attractive.

The marketplace has lost no time in supplying the demands of new readers with shallow printed matter and exotic counterfeits that can only increase confusion and embarrassment in the minds and souls of men. Against this background, William C. Chittick's study can be hailed as responsible and important.

This book is estimable and praiseworthy in many ways. To start with, the choice of the subject itself is excellent since the mystical path of knowledge is of key importance in comprehending the sense and contents of mysticism. Secondly, the subject is represented through the beliefs of the brightest light in the constellation of Sufis who is distinguished not incidentally by the name of the Great Shaykh, the Greatest Master. Thirdly, Ibn al-'Arabī's metaphysics is expounded on the basis of his fundamental treatise, which until now has been practically unknown outside of the Muslim world—the 560-chapter treatise that is in its way an encyclopedia of Islamic sciences, the *Meccan Openings*, *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. Fourthly, the book contains an unusually ample collection of passages from the original texts—making up about half of the volume of the study—not found in monographic studies as a rule. Here readers are presented with the philosopher's original text and are thus enabled to consider it independently, to make their own estimations of the correctness and justice of the researcher's discriminations and

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Philosophy East & West
Volume 41, Number 2
April 1991

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valuations. Lastly, the monograph is the development of many years of painstaking, thorough, truly academic research.

The book is enticing but arduous to read. The task is formidable not only because of the specific character of the subject and the peculiar cryptography and occult symbolics of the Sufic texts. The difficulty seems to be increased by the loose structure of the book, a perplexing organization of chapters, and the embarrassing mold and distribution of their sections. For example, the chapter on Ontology contains several sections ("The Heart," "Cosmic Imagination," and others) whose proper place seems to be in the chapter on Epistemology. Ethical problems are dispersed in the chapters on Hermeneutics, Soteriology, Consummation, and so on.

Chittick intends to present Ibn al-'Arabī's opinions on different problems as accurately as possible. In order to ensure this, Chittick first explains the Greatest Master's point of view and then confirms, so to speak, or illustrates his formulation by quotations of the original text from the Shaykh's writings. This method of presenting the material has been chosen deliberately. "In writing the book," says Chittick, "I tried to avoid any preconceptions as to what Ibn al-'Arabī should be saying or what he has to offer. Instead, my goal was to translate or 'carry over' his teachings as they are actually found, mainly in the *Futūḥāt*, into a language which does justice to his concerns, not our concerns. I have tried to open the door to Ibn al-'Arabī's larder and allow the reader to look in, if not actually step inside" (p. xx).

This manner of exposition has its advantages and disadvantages. It is very effective for a reader who is well grounded in Sufism and is able to find his way "without any guide" through labyrinthian mystic texts. Yet for all other readers the researcher's unpronounced, non-lucid approach is certain to increase their embarrassment and to render very difficult if not even impracticable their attempts to perceive the main principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's philosophy, or to form an idea of his place in Islamic spiritual culture.

No matter how hard a researcher tries to be objective, he cannot escape subjectivity altogether. It is manifest in his choice of subjects, his emphasis on certain problems, his selection of quotations, and so on. Chittick gives high praise to his prominent predecessors in the study of Ibn al-'Arabī's heritage, H. Corbin and T. Izutsu, yet he cannot but reproach the former for his "highly individual tastes" and the latter for "personal predilections which deeply colour his perception of Ibn al-'Arabī" (p. xix). But has Chittick managed to be completely "neutral" himself?

Chittick's position is articulated quite definitely beginning with the first pages of the chapter on Ibn al-'Arabī's ontologic views. Chittick declares himself inimical to appreciating the Greatest Shaykh's main conception

of the Oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) as a variety of pantheism (p. 79). This determines the further sequence of discussion and the selection of quotations. Yet a paradox results, for the cited fragments far from confirming the correctness of Chittick's antipantheistic appraisal, on the contrary, make the reader reflect more deeply on the peculiar pantheism of Ibn al-'Arabī's views.

In particular, a careful perusal of pages 89 and 90 of Chittick's book—where the author acknowledges that, contrary to most of the Sufis, Ibn al-'Arabī did not treat the realm of appearance as a "deceptive veil" but asserted, "that which appears is in fact Being, the Divine Reality itself. . . . What appears to us is the One Being, but coloured by the properties of the nonexistent possible things"—and pages 94–95, where he quotes a passage from the *Futūḥāt* and a longer one again, makes the reader fall to thinking and doubting that Ibn al-'Arabī's treatment of God's transcendence is a gnoseological category rather than an ontological one. Are not the philosopher's eloquent lines most persuasive? "So understand that there is no ontological named thing (*musammā wujūdī*) except God. . . . There is nothing in Being (existence) but God, while the entities are nonexistent, in the midst of that which becomes manifest from them. . . . Hence existence belongs to Him and nonexistence belongs to you" (p. 95, quoted from *Futūḥāt* II, 54, 6).

In his interpretation of Ibn al-'Arabī's epistemology, Chittick has not been able to remain absolutely unbiased either. He breaks the promised "balance of metaphysics and imagination" (see p. x) in presenting the views of al-Shaykh al-Akbar at the very outset of the book, when he states that the philosopher's "main concern is not with the mental concept of being but with the experience of God's Being" (p. 3). It is not quite Chittick's fault that the balance is broken; the fault is rather due to Ibn al-'Arabī's own quoted sayings, which prove indubitably that al-Shaykh's main distinction from other Sufis consisted in his being a mystic-philosopher. The researcher has to acknowledge that when Ibn al-'Arabī deals with the conception of Being (*wujūd*), a conception of utmost importance in philosophy, he uses mostly the vocabulary of Muslim philosophers (p. 80), and again that he (as compared with other Sufis) emphasizes knowledge more than love (p. 147), or again that none but "Ibn al-'Arabī brought Sufism into the mainstream of serious intellectual speculation" (p. 289).

Chittick's manner of exposition may at times annoy the reader by its vague and indeterminate treatment of the material studied, but all the same, it is on balance quite attractive and estimable. First of all Chittick really tries hard to be as objective as possible (though he does not always succeed) and obliges the reader with ample quotations from al-Shaykh.

In the second place, this manner of exposition corresponds, I believe, to the "middle" position of Ibn al-'Arabī himself, who refrained from the

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extremes of both philosophical rationalism and religious dogmatism in discussing problems of ontology, epistemology, ethics, and so on.

Chittick has formulated the task he set before himself as follows: to ask "what does Ibn al-'Arabī have to contribute to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the present age?" (p. xvii). True to his principle of "neutrality," he does not provide a direct answer to the inquiry but guides the reader toward it by putting at his disposal al-Shaykh's own Word, thereby prompting the reader to attempt an *individual, personal* reading and comprehension of it. And just as, to quote Ibn al-'Arabī, "Every existent thing finds in the Koran what it desires" (p. 243; *Futūḥāt* III, 94, 2), so each of us reads and understands in his own way al-Shaykh al-Akbar as represented for us here by William Chittick.

Huangdi Sijing yu Huang-Lao sixiang (The Yellow Emperor's Four Classics and Huang-Lao thought). By Yu Mingguang. Harbin: Hei Longjiang People's Press, 1989. Pp. 370. 4.05 yuan.

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The archeological discoveries at Mawangdui in 1973 were widely hailed as a major boon for the understanding of ancient Chinese philosophy. In addition to the two earliest extant versions of the *Lao Zi*, four silk manuscripts belonging to the school of Huang-Lao were uncovered, providing sinologists the first glimpse of this important but hitherto undocumented school. Yet despite the rich potential of the Huang-Lao texts, their full value has remained unrealized. Although numerous articles have appeared—a handful in English, several in Japanese, scores in Chinese—there is as of yet no complete Japanese, English, or even modern Chinese translation (this is soon to be remedied by Robin Yates through Random House). Perhaps more importantly, commentators, discovering in the eclectic manuscripts many of the central ideas of pre-Qin philosophers, have failed to distinguish clearly Huang-Lao from other classical works and schools of thought. In this well-organized and thoughtful analysis, Yu Mingguang takes steps toward addressing these deficiencies. While he does not provide a complete modern Chinese rendering, he does append—in addition to collated versions of the two *Lao Zi* texts and the four Huang-Lao manuscripts—the most extensive commentary on the latter to date. Further, he begins the crucial task of differentiating *Lao xue* (the classical Daoism of Lao Zi) from *Huang xue* (the doctrines of the Yellow Emperor, or Huang-Lao Daoism), as a structural overview of the book indicates.

The book can be divided into two parts, the first centering on Huang-Lao, the second on Lao Zi and the relation between them. Yu opens with a survey of references to the Yellow Emperor in the classical corpus. He then provides a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the four Huang-Lao manu-

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scripts which he, following Tang Lan, takes to be the *Yellow Emperor's Four Classics* cited in the Han bibliography, the "Yi Wen Zhi." Though many have pointed out that there is no way to verify that these four manuscripts are indeed the *Four Classics*, this claim is not nearly as controversial as Yu's assertion that the manuscripts are mid-Warring States (late fourth to early third century B.C.) works. Yu not only repeats arguments advanced by Tang Lan which have been roundly criticized in the literature, but fails as well to consider the many persuasive arguments for a later dating brought forth by such renowned scholars and Huang-Lao authorities as Qiu Xigui, Zhong Zhaopeng, Wu Guang, and Kanaya Osamu.

Yu is on surer footing when he turns to an analysis of the central ideas of the Huang-Lao manuscripts. Anticipating comparison to Lao Zi, he examines Huang-Lao's cosmology, understanding of dao, theory of dialectics, political philosophy, and ethics. In one of the main contributions of the book, Yu then locates Huang-Lao thought within the historical context. After documenting the dominance of Huang-Lao as the leading court ideology in the early Han, Yu discusses the Huang-Lao policies of Han emperors and the influence of Huang-Lao thought on various high-level Han officials, including Xiao He, Cao Can and Chen Ping. He then brings to a close the first part with a brief review of the power struggle between the advocates of Huang-Lao and Confucianism, a struggle which eventually culminates in the victory of Confucianism and Huang-Lao's expulsion from court by Han Emperor Wu.

Part two opens with a study of the Mawangdui *Lao Zi* texts. Having examined the differences between these texts and previous versions, Yu lays the groundwork for his comparison by presenting the important characteristics of Lao Zi's Daoism, much as he did for Huang-Lao. He contends that while Lao Zi and Huang-Lao share much in the way of cosmology, their social and political philosophies differ dramatically. More specifically, Yu attributes to both Lao Zi and Huang-Lao the position that dao is the nameless, formless, and soundless ontological source of all things responsible for the structure and patterned regularity of the cosmos. Humans are to follow the way (dao); the human social order (*ren dao*) is predicated on and to be modeled after the natural order (*tian dao*). What this entails, however, differs for the respective schools.

For Lao Zi, there is a parity of all things vis a vis dao, the natural order, which militates against Confucian hierarchical social distinctions of noble and base. The ideal of Lao Zi—reminiscent of the communal egalitarianism of Shen Nung—is a small village in which all are on equal footing and the machinery of formal government is unnecessary. Huang-Lao, by contrast, finds in nature the justification for a hierarchical social order. Just as mountains are high and valleys low, as yang dwells above and yin below, some are to rule and others to be ruled.

Further, while both advocate that humans are to follow nature, for Lao

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Zi this implies a predominantly passive social policy, for Huang-Lao an active one. To be sure, Yu is quick to note that many commentators have overstated the passive/negative (*xiao ji*) aspect of Lao Zi's position. As he points out, in advocating small, egalitarian communities, Lao Zi is not gazing back longingly to the good old days but drawing conclusions about the future based on present realities. In the Warring States period, large states suffered the unabated ravages of war. Only small, isolated villages escaped unscathed. Thus, rather than aspiring to put an end to war through the unification of the empire as advocated by Huang-Lao, Lao Zi seeks peace in the relative tranquility of communities which, limited in both physical size and material wealth, would not be attractive takeover targets for marauding warlords.

That said, Yu does allow that Lao Zi's Daoism is more passive than that of Huang-Lao. One indicator is that Lao Zi places greater emphasis on personal cultivation while Huang-Lao focuses its attention on the order of society as a whole. The difference is even more obvious in their respective theories of *wu wei*. According to Yu, *wu wei* entails for Lao Zi mere acquiescence to nature. One is simply to go along with whatever comes one's way without struggle (*bu zheng*). In contrast, *wu wei* for Huang-Lao is to fulfill one's natural role. Each person has an assigned place in the natural and social order. Attached to this place are certain responsibilities. If one does not carry out one's duties, one is to be punished impartially and reliably, in accordance with the law. Thus Huang-Lao incorporates into its theory of *wu wei* the notion of *xing ming* (forms and names, punishments and rewards, based on performance of stipulated duties) and *fa* (law), both anathema to Lao Zi. Further, Huang-Lao considers struggle an inevitable part of nature. Since time immemorial not only people but animals have contended one with the other. Though it is foolish to think war can be avoided, there is a proper and an improper way. To *wu wei* militarily is not to go against nature and embrace pacifism, but to wage only righteous wars, and only when the time is right.

Yu is surely right to stress the importance of differentiating Lao Zi from Huang-Lao. And his general assessment that the two are more similar in their cosmologies than in their social and political philosophies rings true. Yet there remain important differences in their cosmologies, differences which explain in part their disparate social and political views. While both conceive of *tian* as an impersonal natural order, it is not for Lao Zi the predetermined, rule-governed order that it is for Huang-Lao. There is an ineradicable element of contingency, of spontaneity, of openness to Lao Zi's cosmos which militates against any attempt to reduce it to fixed rules. This explains in part why Lao Zi rejects any attempt to reduce human interactions to fixed rules, to circumscribe social order in terms of determinate roles. He criticizes Confucians for

Huang-Lao an commentators of Zi's position. In the Warring States period, Lao Zi is a small, isolated state. Huang-Lao put an end to the Warring States period. Huang-Lao, a small state, which, put an end to the Warring States period.

the passive than the active. The greater emphasis on the active is obvious in their writings. For Lao Zi, with whatever force, *wu wei* for an assigned purpose are certain. One is to be *wu wei*. Thus Huang-Lao's *ming* (forms) are of stipulation, Huang-Lao is immemorially other. Though proper and an active nature and only when the

ing Lao Zi from more similar philosophies, differences, different political views. However, it is not for Huang-Lao. The unity, of openness, attempt to Zi rejects any to circumscribe Confucians for

trying to dictate on the basis of the *li* (rites) what constitutes proper behavior, and admonishes those who think social order can be attained through the codification and enforcement of laws. To *wu wei* is for Lao Zi, as Yu contends, to respond appropriately to the particular situation rather than to fulfill one's duties in the preassigned social and natural hierarchy, as it is for Huang-Lao. Yet rather than reflecting passive acquiescence, this view allows for flexibility and the possibility of creative responses to one's situation. In contrast, Huang-Lao, by understanding *dao* as a preconfigured, rule-governed natural order which determines the proper social order, limits if not precludes the opportunity for novelty and human initiative. In the final analysis, it may be Huang-Lao which is best characterized as passive and negative (*xiao ji*) and Lao Zi as active and positive (*ji ji*).

Yu concludes his study with an examination of the intellectual influence of Huang-Lao followed by a broad and largely ineffectual survey of the culture of Chu, the alleged home of the authors of the *Lao Zi* and Huang-Lao manuscripts. Yu argues that many of the central legalist ideas of Shang Yang, Han Fei, Shen Buhai, and Shen Dao originate in the Huang-Lao manuscripts. He points out the occurrence of many similar passages, and notes that Sima Qian declares the writings of Han Fei, Shen Buhai, and Shen Dao to be based on Huang-Lao doctrines. Yu's arguments assume the highly dubious mid-Warring States dating. Yu also discusses briefly the *Guan Zi*, *Lu Shi Chun Qiu*, *Huai Nan Zi*, and *Lun Liu Jia Yao Zhi*, finding all three heavily influenced by the Huang-Lao manuscripts. While Yu's discussion of the first three is superficial, his treatment of the last (wherein he demonstrates that by *dao jia* Sima Tan intended Huang-Lao Daoism and not the classical Daoism of Lao Zi) is first rate.

There are numerous minor problems. For instance, Yu accepts the traditional belief that Lao Zi was a real person. And at one point (p. 101), he claims that to understand *yi* (one) as *dao* for Lao Zi is mistaken. Yet shortly thereafter (p. 144), he asserts that both the *Lao Zi* and the Huang-Lao manuscripts refer to *dao* as *yi*, and the "*yi* is nothing other than *dao*." Such minor quibbles notwithstanding, this book represents a major advance in Huang-Lao studies, and should be of interest to anyone concerned with the intellectual history of China.

The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory. By Yuasa Yasuo. Edited by T. P. Kasulis. Translated by Nagatomo Shigenori and T. P. Kasulis. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987. Pp. vii + 256.

The question of the relation of the mind and the body has plagued Western philosophy since the time of Descartes. It is therefore refreshing

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