

sanctioned by a 'really' General Council, made up of delegates from all the separated Churches of Christendom. He seems hardly aware, as so many Reformation Christians are not, of the powerful traditional witness historic Christendom has borne, from the beginning, to the necessity, by divine ordinance, of an always

existing visible unity. He has written, nonetheless, a moving and encouraging book of a markedly Catholic tendency; its readers will draw from it a vivid and lasting sense of the meaning of ecumenism and of its vital importance.

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ETHICAL PHILOSOPHIES OF INDIA by I. C. Sharma. *Allen and Unwin.*

In face of the very general view, especially among European scholars, that Indian religion as a whole is 'world-denying', there is a strong movement among Indian philosophers today to insist on the character of 'world-affirmation' in Hindu philosophy. At the same time there is a movement to see all Indian philosophy as an organic whole deriving from the Vedas, in which all its main principles are contained. It is along these lines that Mr Sharma attempts to 'bring out the ethical and humanistic elements in Indian philosophy. There is no doubt of the need to obtain a more balanced view of Indian Philosophy and to bring out the genuine elements of humanism in it, but in his attempt to do so Mr Sharma has ever-stated his case.

One's confidence in his judgement is not strengthened when one finds him claiming that Indian ethics is 'the oldest moral philosophy in the history of civilization' and that the Vedas are 'the oldest literature available in the world'. There is no evidence that the texts of the Vedas are older than the oldest Chinese texts, still less the Egyptian or Babylonian. Nor is one impressed by his attempt to show that all the fundamental ideas of later Hinduism, such as the idea of the four 'ends' of life and the four 'stages' (ashramas) and even the four 'classes' (varnas) are all derived from the Vedas, for which statements he gives scarcely any evidence at all. But one's confidence is finally shattered when he introduces a fantastic theory of his own, by which he tries to reduce all these very diverse elements to a unified system of social, ethical and metaphysical philosophy, supposedly based on the Vedas.

When he comes to the Bhagavad Gita with its strong emphasis on the place of 'works' (karma) in the spiritual life, thus opening the way to liberation to the householder, he is on firmer ground, and it is on the Bhagavad Gita that the movement towards a greater realism in Indian philosophy, as found for instance in Mahatma Gandhi, is based. But when he tries

to bring the advaita philosophy of Sankara into the same framework, he once more resorts to fantasy, trying to make out that the four requirements for Moksa in Sankara are equivalent to the four cardinal virtues. Mr Sharma never really faces the fact that if, as Sankara and, with him, the main tradition of Indian philosophy (both Buddhist and Hindu) maintains the individual soul is ultimately unreal, then the whole basis of the social, humanist ethics which he upholds is undermined, and to say that the 'goal of life' is 'universal love' is meaningless.

It is a pity that a book, into which so much solid work has gone and which is based on extensive reading of both eastern and western philosophy, should be spoilt by such lack of judgement. It is all the greater pity because Mr Sharma desires to his book to be a contribution to the 'ever-growing synthesis between Eastern and Western thought'. But here he suffers from another limitation. His view of Western thought, like that of so many Indians (it is one of the unhappy effects of British rule in India) is confined to the Greeks on the one hand, and modern European philosophers on the other. The whole of the thousand years between St Augustine and St Thomas More, is a closed book to him. Thus he thinks that the synthesis of the moral and metaphysical in Indian philosophy, its 'reconciliation of intellect and intuition', is 'unique'; but in fact a similar synthesis is to be found in the Christian tradition, and, one might also add, in the Islamic tradition, in the Middle Ages. It is only when Indian philosophy is brought into relation with these great cultural traditions, together with that of the Chinese, and not merely with Greek and modern thought, that one can hope for any real cultural synthesis between East and West. Yet Mr Sharma's book should at least serve to stimulate interest in this great task.

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