

Book review

Creative peace through encounter of world cultures

Beck H and Schmirber (eds). 1996. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 363pp

The German version of this book was published by Peter Lang Verlag in Frankfurt in 1995. The book has two parts: the first deals with general problems of intercultural encounter and world peace in which there are contributions by F. Wallner, P. Eisenmann and J. Pichler; and the second is concerned with culture in specific regions, namely Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. There are contributions on European cultures by A. Rieber, U. Voigt, and B. Despot; contributions on African cultures by C. Oniang'o, J. Kurasha, and M. Ramose; the contributions on Asian cultures are by E. Al-A'ali, R. Mall, B. Chauhan, H. Prasad, and E. Schadel; and those on Latin America are by A. Fernandez del Valle, and A. Perez-Estevéz. This book also contains a general introduction to the issues of creative peace and the encounters of world cultures written by H. Beck.

To discuss all the 19 contributions would require too lengthy an exposition. I will therefore attempt to be brief, commenting mainly on the main themes addressed by the contributors and on whether the contributions and the volume achieve their aims.

The theme of this volume is the possibility of promoting dialogue between cultures in the world as a means to creating world peace. In Part I, for instance, Wallner discusses the variability of world cultures and looks at how such differences would contribute to world peace. Using his theory of constructive realism (pp. 71-4), Wallner concludes that peace should be conceived as 'a stability of opposites, or better said, the stability of plurality' (p. 77) as opposed to conceiving it as the adherence to 'certain standards, rules or regulations' (p. 77).

In Part II, Voigt provides a clear exposition of Augustines's Comenius and Kant's conceptualisation of peace (pp. 146-60) and recommends Comenius' notion of peace since it is 'open to impulses from other cultures' and can 'play an important

role in the dialogue of world cultures out of which today solely can be decided what peace is and how it can be gained' (pp. 162).

In contrast, Ramose warns the reader about the elusiveness of the idea of peace (p. 225), having expounded an African conception of identity (p. 220), and humanity (p. 222). He does conclude, rather confidently, that 'the African conception of oneness will contribute a great deal not only in the contribution of one world family, but also in the understanding that peace is the constant renewal and concretisation of an ideal' (p. 235).

Similarly, the contribution by Prasad provides insights into how Asian cultures and philosophies can contribute toward world peace. From an exposition of Madhyamika philosophy, 'which is a philosophy of universal culture containing universal normative ethics' he shows that all other philosophies are 'subjectcentrically constructed', and as such they all 'restrict human beings from transcending their self-interest and cultural and national boundaries'. In Prasad's opinion, Madhyamika philosophy frees us from all 'these imaginary boundaries' by making us to realize their 'hollowness' and 'vacuous character'. 'Consequently the consciousness which appeared as many because of being imprisoned by these views gets liberated and becomes one' (p. 280).

The question of intercultural understanding and dialogue is addressed in the contributions by Mall, Schadel, and Perezestevez. They all assert the possibility of intercultural dialogue and encounter although, as Mall observes, 'nearly all cultural encounters show signs of tension and violence' (p. 249). Thus, what comes out quite clearly from this volume is that intercultural dialogue is indeed possible and peace is an ideal which all world cultures yearn to attain.

Professor Beck's contribution to the volume needs special mention: he propounds the theory that European, Asian and African cultures form a triadic and dialectical relation of the form of thesis-antithesis and synthesis, and claims that African cultures are closer to Asian cultures than to European cultures (pp. 30-8). It is an interesting theory but leaves one wondering why logical relationships should apply to cultures as assumed by the theory.

Finally, apart from the many typographical errors which should have been noticed by the proofreaders, the volume leaves the reader in the dark as to what the

distinction is between creative and world peace; what creative peace is; and the extent to which world peace is creative. Nevertheless, the book is a welcome contribution to the philosophy of culture.

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