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**Review of Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness, ed. by  
Eli Franco, in collaboration with Dagmar Eigner. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen  
Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009.**

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probably ever have been spoken. It remains to be hoped that many a purāṇa may find the attention of many a Greg Bailey.

Peter Schreiner

*Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. by Eli FRANCO, in collaboration with Dagmar EIGNER. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009. 8, 483 p. (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-Historische Klasse: Sitzungsberichte, 794. Band); ISBN 978-3-412-20202-6.

Edited volumes on a specific topic (often proceedings of conferences or workshops uniting the specialists of the chosen topic) are presumably read by few from beginning to end, apart from reviewers. *Their* evaluative priorities and critical acumen is likely to be determined by their own interests, research priorities and competence. It would not take *seventeen* contributors (in the case of the volume at hand) if any *one* person could master the general topic of “yogic perception, meditation and altered states of consciousness”, taking into account the necessary knowledge of the sources (in this case from India, Tibet, Nepal, Europe, America, written in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, ... English, German ...), the academic disciplines (psychology, psychotherapy, anthropology, physics, cosmology, philosophy, epistemology ...) and their methods (philology, field work, psychological therapies ... – none of these lists claims to be complete). Eli Franco (EF) as general editor surveys all of them while writing his introduction, thus looking at the whole from a position one step above the individual contributions. The reviewer who begins his reading with the introduction and consequently looks at the papers in its light and perspective is still one more step removed – not necessarily one step above, perhaps rather one step to the side.

EF seems to have an ambiguous attitude to the topic in claiming that “most scholars, myself included, are not looking at meditation as a source of knowledge of the external world” (p. 15), yet expecting that it “may tell us something new and significant about ourselves” – about the editor, or about scholars with meditative experiences, or about anthropological universals shared by yogis, shamans and people using drugs?

The major part of the introduction (p. 19–50) is devoted to summaries (extensive, 2–3 pages each), with more or less latent comments by the editor (footnotes, questions between dashes, cross-references, etc.); it is an interesting

exercise to reread the summaries after having read the contributions. They are detailed and exact and yet, each reader's perspective and perceptivity would lead to a differently accentuated summary. EF's comments completely abstain from criticism and value judgements, though he, too, must have found some contributions better than others. Six contributions to the symposium did not find their way into the printed volume (cf. p. 19, no explanation offered). Seven of the 17 contributors come from Vienna.

Buddhist thinkers seem to (be able to) agree on the terminology for *speaking about* human experience when they speak about objects, senses, perception, conceptualizations, inferences, cognition, consciousness. What and whether there *are* objects, how the senses function, which relation exists between perception, conceptualization and inference, such questions are on the other hand infinitely disputed without agreement even intended. There is the distinction between body and mind (generally accepted) and (in most traditions) an awareness (yet another of those consciousness terms!) of a transcending dimension of consciousness or spirit (*prajñā, ātman, paramātman, īśvara*, etc.).

Projected on the larger screen of an interdisciplinary study and in the light of the "truth question", will everybody who contributed to the volume be ready and capable of agreeing on a terminology and its being 'true' to what it describes and refers to? It could have been EF's task to attempt such a concord if – as *he* apparently is – one should be concerned about the truth question; at least his comment on Taber's contribution suggests as much to me. Buddhists and Hindus, philosophers and scientists, yogis and ritualists, the philologist and the psychologist are made to talk about the same 'thing' (topic, concept, function) called "Yogic perception" and/or "meditation" and/or "altered state(s) of consciousness" (cf. the title!), all of them recognize the 'thing' and understand what the other (colleague from another discipline) and his or her sources (philosophical tenets, treatises or commentaries in Sanskrit or Tibetan, tantras, āgamas, psychological experiments – though no brain scans, cf. p. 51) are saying.

In order to critically evaluate each contribution it would be necessary to first describe its sources, its methods, and its results. But even that cannot create the coherence (be it with regard to topic, to sources, to methods, or to results) or an interdisciplinary communication which the volume does not document (and which can consequently happen only in the mind of its readers, be they editor, reviewer, or interested public).

The reviewer at this point has several options: I could simply do it and write a ten page review. Or, I could boldly single out those contributions which I really like and be silent about all others, which would say more about the re-

viewer's preferences and interests than about the book. I choose the third option, i.e. to list the contributions (practically a reproduction of the table of contents, which, after all, serves to give the basic information about a book, especially if it is a collection) in the hope that readers will select and be stimulated to discuss and learn from the exchange.

Eli Franco: Introduction (1–51)

*Part I: Yogic Perception in the South Asian and Tibetan Traditions*

Larry McCrea: “‘Just Like Us, Just Like Now’: The Tactical Implications of the Mīmāṃsā Rejection of Yogic Perception.” (55–70)

John Taber: Yoga and our Epistemic Predicament (71–92)

Eli Franco: Meditation and Metaphysics: On their Mutual Relationship in South Asian Buddhism (93–132)

Anne MacDonald: Knowing Nothing: Candrakīrti and Yogic Perception. (133–168)

Vincent Eltschinger: On the Career and the Cognition of *Yogins* (169–214)

Dorji Wangchuk: A Relativity Theory of the Purity and Validity of Perception in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (215–240)

Orna Almogi: The Materiality and Immanence of Gnosis in Som rNying-ma Tantric Sources (241–262)

Philipp André Maas: The So-called Yoga of Suppression in the *Pātañjala Yogaśāstra* (263–282)

Markus Schmücker: Yogic Perception According to the Later Tradition of the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta (283–298)

Marion Rastelli: Perceiving God and Becoming Like Him: Yogic Perception and Its Implications in the Viṣṇuic Tradition of Pāñcarātra (299–317)

*Part II: Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness from an Interdisciplinary Perspective*

Karl Baier: Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe (321–345)

Diana Riboli: Shamans and Transformation in Nepal and Peninsular Malaysia (347–367)

Dagmar Eigner: Transformation of Consciousness through Suffering, Culture, and Meditation (369–388)

John R. Baker: Psychedelic, Culture, and Consciousness : Insights from the Biocultural Perspective (389–405)

Shulamith Kreidler: Altered States of Consciousness as Structural Variations of the Cognitive Systems (407–434)

Renaud van Quekelberghe: Mindfulness and Psychotherapy : The Revival of Indian Meditative Traditions within Modern Psychology, Psychotherapy, and Medicine (435–447)

Michael DelMonte: Empty Thy Mind and Come to Thy Senses : A De-constructive Path to Inner Peace (449–479)

One might ponder what the lack of an index tells about the ambition or the possibility to create uniformity or unity in the network of interdisciplinary, trans-cultural, multilingual understanding and communication. There are no concrete,

explicit cross-references or attempts at comparison with what the others had to say in the individual papers (except for a few general indications of complementarity or overlap, e.g. p. 75). The book is a collection on the three topics. “Altered states of consciousness” serves as umbrella term, “yogic perception” is a or the Indian example, “meditative traditions” points to the trans-cultural dimension (cf. p. 41 and footnote 76). The lack of an index and to some extent the fact that there are bibliographies for each paper separately make evident that the achievement of coherence and connectedness was not an editorial priority.

It strikes me as astonishing that the possibility of studying or even questioning contemporary yogis has not been realized at all (Sri Aurobindo, Gopinath Kaviraj, Krishnamacharya, Gopikrishna, come to mind for such research). It is common among contemporaries (practising yogis *and* Indian academic philosophers) to admit belief in the existence of altered states of consciousness or knowledge about cases of yogic perception. Even if there is no way to logically, philosophically prove or disprove the possibility or impossibility of yogic experience, the participants of the conference must yet have believed in it in order to talk intelligibly to each other about it. At least the talking about these experiences or states belongs to the external world.

Ideally such a conference has “everybody genuinely interested in learning something from colleagues, in trying to find out what we wanted to know and how we might go about finding it out” (O’Flaherty, introduction to *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, p. ix). The present collection is rich, stimulating, learned, yet inconclusive about the What it set out to know as well as about the How to know. If communication, understanding and perhaps agreement on what the papers are talking about and how one should talk about it are not possible or not intended or not desirable, well, there remains the historical perspective and the ambition to be exact about the differences in how the ‘thing’ was seen and analyzed where and when and by whom. It seems to me that the volume from this conference indicates a certain malaise with such an approach and its restriction to historical, descriptive exactness. A strategy to overcome it is hardly envisioned, the will to agreement hardly recognizable, but the fascination with the documented options for changing perception remains tangible. The disagreement, the plurality of methods, views, opinions, evaluations and the “Streitkultur” among those who hold these views may therefore continue ... so much the better.

Peter Schreiner