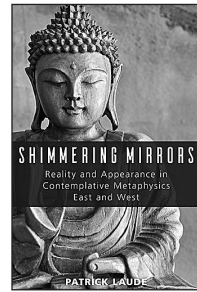


# Shimmering Mirrors: Reality and Appearance in Contemplative Metaphysics East and West

By Patrick Laude

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Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos



“Enter me, O Lord, into the deep of the Ocean of Thine Infinite Oneness!”<sup>1</sup>

- Ibn 'Arabī

It is apparent today that many people are endlessly seeking peace and freedom in the phenomenal world. But ours is a realm that is finite and imperfect, and thus it cannot fulfill our deepest longings. The human heart intrinsically yearns for a spiritual dimension that completes the human condition. A considered reflection on the world's religions will reveal that they possess an underlying metaphysical unity. Each has its unique expression and yet a common core can be discerned that discloses an ultimate reality that is the exclusive possession of neither the East nor the West. This pioneering analysis of comparative metaphysics articulates a shared ground whereby the Absolute can be understood across spiritual traditions.

<sup>1</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, quoted in Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), p. 11.

Patrick Laude has responded to the challenge laid down by Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993), who called for a “meta-historical” discourse that would crystallize into “a *philosophia perennis* in the fullest sense of the term.”<sup>2</sup> (p. 207) Interfaith dialogue remains as necessary as ever in establishing authentic modes of understanding among the world’s religions. However, Laude harbors no illusions as he identifies a central obstacle for a common ground across traditions. This is the phenomenon of *historicism* – the dominant ideology in academia today – which is skeptical of any attempts to essentialize doctrinal convergences, viewing metaphysics as a social construct without any objective basis. In response to this critique, Laude’s study presents a cross-cultural analysis – grounded in esoteric ecumenism – that seeks to discern the metaphysical core that unites the sapiential dimensions of each orthodox religion.

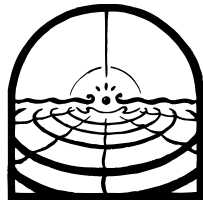
This work consists of six stimulating chapters: (1) Shimmering Reality: Contemplative and Mystical Concepts of Relativity; (2) Christian and Buddhist Insights into a Metaphysics of Salvation; (3) On the Good beyond Good and Evil; (4) On Hindu *Bbedābheda* and Sufi *Barzakh*; (5) Knowing the Unknowable: Upāya and Gods of Belief; and (6) Transmutation, the Sacred Word, and the Feminine.

Metaphysics today is often considered merely a matter of speculation and thus as having no real foundation. This is a misunderstanding. The Greek prefix *meta*, denoting what lies *beyond* what can be apprehended empirically is, precisely, what, in being ignored by empiricists, has contributed to their incomprehension of metaphysics. Today’s materialist mindset does not know what to do with metaphysics because it eludes our conventional understanding of phenomenal reality, so it simply rejects it as unimportant to our lived experience. This challenge of defining that which eludes definition is clearly outlined by the French metaphysician, René Guénon (1886–1951), who wrote:

Now, can Metaphysics as we understand it be defined? No, for to define is always to limit, and what is under consideration is, in and of itself, truly and absolutely limitless and thus cannot be confined to any formula or any system whatsoever. Metaphysics might be partially characterized, for example, by saying that it is the knowledge of universal principles, but this is not a definition in the proper sense and in any case only conveys a vague notion. (p. 211)

<sup>2</sup> See Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

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