

4-1-1999

Krishnamurti: Reflections on the Self

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Repository Citation

Chapple, Christopher Key, "Krishnamurti: Reflections on the Self" (1999). *Theological Studies Faculty Works*. 92.
http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/theo_fac/92

Recommended Citation

Chapple, Christopher Key. "Krishnamurti: Reflections on the Self." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 1999: 318. Print.

Krishnamurti: Reflections on the Self. By Jiddu Krishnamurti. Edited by Raymond Martin. Open Court Publishing Company, 1997. 214 pages. \$16.95 paper.

This collection of essays, based largely on informal talks, explores the notion of “self” from a variety of perspectives. The editor has grouped the essays according to the following themes: inquiry, emotion, self and identification, and freedom. The first section invites the reader to engage in the process of self reflection. The second section includes Krishnamurti’s thoughts on fear, loneliness, discontent, pride/ambition, anger, guilt, desire, and happiness. The third and fourth sections discuss freedom and the possibility of surrendering attachment.

Krishnamurti in many ways defined the allure of the East in the twentieth century: he was born into a poor Brahmin family, groomed

by the Theosophical Society of Annie Besant to become this century's avatar, lived a life of nonstop world travel, and successfully founded various schools. Despite his interesting past, Krishnamurti never allows his personal narrative to enter into his discussions concerning the self. Krishnamurti's philosophy, method, and life demands an immediacy, a presence without grasping—what he refers to as “passive alertness.” In one telling encounter, the great Buddhist teacher Rahula Walpola suggests that elements of Krishnamurti's teachings parallel Buddhism. Krishnamurti dismisses such analogizing, suggesting that when we fall out of our immediate experience and attempt to explain anything, we have lost our freedom.

Raymond Martin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Maryland, has chosen these excerpts well. Without oversimplifying Krishnamurti's thought, Martin's groupings indicate a cogent progression from the quest for truth to the discovery of freedom. The work provides an excellent introduction to the key ideas of Indian philosophy regarding the self, as indicated in the following sentence: “Many of us have experienced, at one time or another, that state when the ‘me,’ the self, with its aggressive demands, has completely ceased, and the mind is extraordinarily quiet, without any direct volition—that state wherein, perhaps, one may experience something that is without measure, something that is impossible to put into words” (p. 134). These and many other passages read like modern day Upanishads.

This well designed, easy to read, and modestly priced book serves as a solid introduction to the teachings and teaching style of Krishnamurti.

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