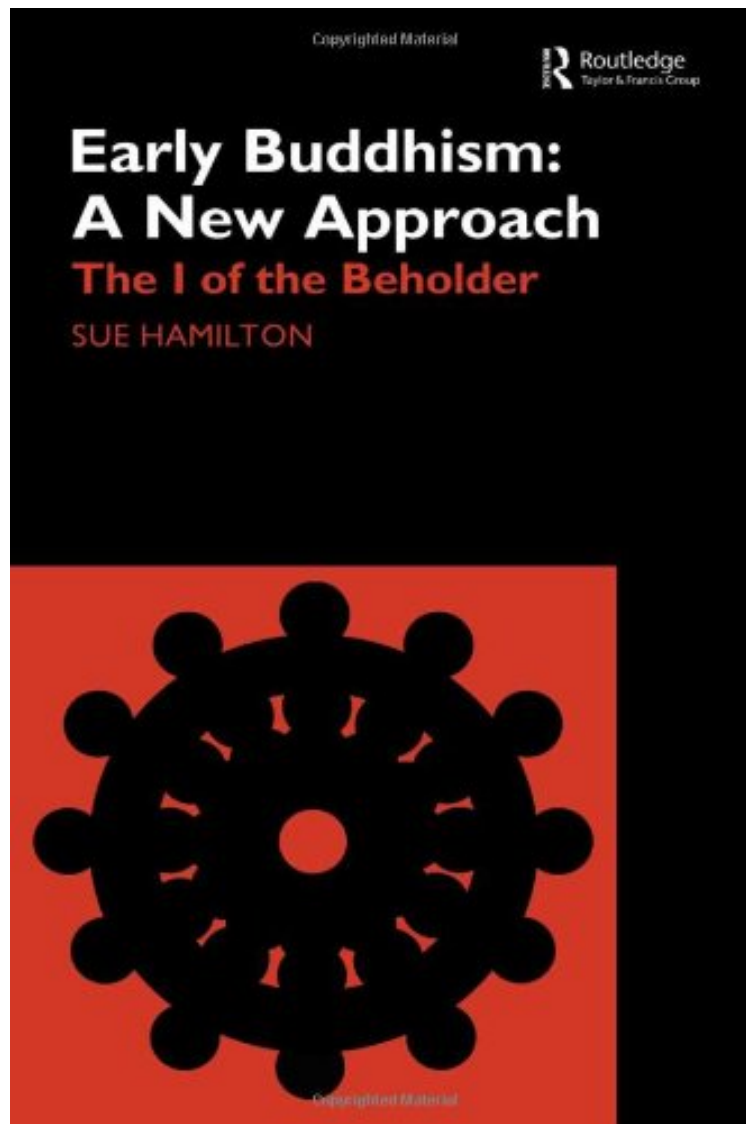


[Mobile ebook] Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism)

Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism)

Sue Hamilton-Blyth

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Sue Hamilton-Blyth : Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Early Buddhism: A New Approach: The I of the Beholder (Routledge Critical Studies in Buddhism):

24 of 24 people found the following review helpful. New perspectives on self, desire, and enlightenmentBy DaihoSue

Hamilton claims the Buddha has been misunderstood. She doesn't point fingers and she's not out to cast aspersions. She simply wants you to know there's more to the Dhamma than you might think. She works with some of the most common questions in Buddhism, such as, How can we experience the absence of self? How can we know something that is beyond knowing? How do we live with no desire? Her investigations begin with the concept of anatta, or no-self. In trying to understand how this might be experienced, she looks to what a self is said to be - the khandhas, traditionally referred to as the five heaps, or five aggregates - matter, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. Traditionally, they are thought of as the sum of human experience, as mind and matter, four mental aspects plus form. The division doesn't seem particularly intuitive and to those of us practicing meditation not something suggestive of our meditative experience. Hamilton's search through the Pali texts was inconclusive and unrevealing. The Buddha said little about the khandhas, particularly individual khandhas. So Hamilton went back to the Buddha's enlightenment experience, the one from which everything began and to which the teachings are meant to guide us. The Buddha summarized this experience in the Four Noble Truths, central to which is dukkha, or unsatisfactoriness. Hamilton claims there's more to dukkha than has been typically taught, that "dukkha is not descriptive of the world _in which_ we have our experience: it is not descriptive of everything we _perceive out there_ and then react to. Rather, it _is_ our experience." There is, in other words, no pre-enlightenment experience that is not dukkha. And what is dukkha? Hamilton's idea, she says, is the "linchpin" of her thesis. She quotes SN V 421, V 1 10: "In short, it is the five khandhas that are dukkha." Seen in this light, the khandhas are not things from which a human is made, but represent human experience, where pre-enlightenment humans are represented by dukkha. The khandhas are a kind of "experiencing apparatus," our "cognitive lens." To be liberated is to free the self from the khandhas, from the "the causal matrix of continuity." Regarding the self, Hamilton goes on to argue that the Buddha never categorically stated, "What I teach is that there is no self at all." Indeed the idea of a self is essential to the cognitive process (thus the title of the book). There is no knowledge, in fact no experience, without an objectifying self, a self that cuts up and gives names to bits of the data stream entering via the senses. As such, objectivity does not exist without a subject to initiate the process; the two are in a state of mutual dependence. So what no-self was the Buddha talking about in the idea of anatta? Hamilton argues against the common formulation of the absence of a self, that if the process of knowing is to be understood it is only through a self that engages in objectifying. This is not to be confused, however, with the idea of a permanent independent self, a subject of great concern to the Buddha's original audience. The reason there are so many suttas in which the Buddha talks about a self is because this is the very question students and petitioners demanded he address, the overriding philosophical and religious concern of the day. There remains the problem of how an objectifying self is to know nirvana, an experience beyond the Buddhist category of knowing. In what sense can nirvana or enlightenment be known? Hamilton believes the seeming paradox of a transintellectual truth can be reconciled by understanding that what is known is the process and limits of logic. It is not an escape from the system itself. The experience of the absence of objectification is acquired not by stepping out of the system, but by "extending the frame of reference." And this goes to the very core of the Buddha's intention - to teach the process of knowing. Once that is known, we know what can be known, what cannot, and how to live accordingly. Some have interpreted this to mean living without desire. But Hamilton notes that the desire to live, to maintain bodily health, to teach, to help others - such desires are adventitious and arise freely, unconstrained and without affective consequence. For one that has passed over, what ceases are "the cravings _that fuel continuity_," those consuming desires that cause us to act destructively toward ourselves and others, those desires that arise due to ignorance of the process of knowing. "The I of the Beholder" is not for beginners, but will certainly reward those with the patience to work through the text. The depth of Hamilton's thought is impressive, as is the obvious effort she put into clarifying her ideas. I came away from the book feeling I had gained new perspectives. I have not been successful in finding any information about the author nor any new work from her since the publication of this book and would greatly appreciate any leads readers of this review might be able to pass on. Thank you, Ms Hamilton, for stimulating my thinking.

#0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Lucid, suggestive, badly needed. By Patrick Lucid, suggestive, badly needed. Anyone who has ever struggled with the cryptic sayings attributed to the Buddha in the Pali canon concerning what are translated as "no self", "consciousness", the "world", and other deep matters of Buddhist teaching will be rewarded by a close reading of this book. Of particular merit for me was her elucidation of the philosophical "trajectory" so to speak of early Buddhism as somewhat similar to what in the West came to be known as transcendental idealism. I use "somewhat" advisedly here--as she points out repeatedly, in effect any attempt to explicate the Buddha's doctrines, be it metaphorically as he and many of the early teachers did, or as she does along sophisticated philosophical lines, are already missing the truth of the matter at hand. In much the same way that St. Thomas Aquinas found his philosophy to be "so much straw" after the mystical experiences he had late in life, so to with the Buddha, who would no doubt smile sadly at the folly of those who want to understand intellectually rather than experientially, if I can put it that way. Be that as it may, I found this work to be highly informative and very rewarding as it attempts to explicate many of the otherwise intractable doctrines of early Buddhism in a philosophical language that Westerners who have waded through their own hemisphere's philosophical canon can find illuminating and intellectually stimulating. Bravo!

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. One of the best books ever

written on early Buddhism By Elizabeth A. Gibson This book is brilliant -- challenging and deeply thoughtful and thought-provoking. Hamilton is an excellent scholar and researcher, of early Buddhist and Indian thought, and of Pali, the language in which the earliest buddhist teachings were written. What has impressed me most about this book is Hamilton's own very deep thinking on this subject -- how and why did the Buddha say the things he did in the ways he did (as presented in the early Buddhist canon)? Hamilton clears up some fuzzy thinking on a few topics -- chiefly anatta, not-self, and creates a rich, coherent picture of what the Buddha knew and wanted us to know. This is a fascinating, challenging, and deeply rewarding book. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

New interpretations of the central teachings of early Buddhism, mainly the relationship between identity and perception in early Buddhism.

'A stimulating and challenging discussion of certain aspects of Buddhism. - The Middle Way' This book contributes significantly to the on-going project of disentangling the teachings of Pali Buddhism.' - Journal of Religious History