



# **The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought (SUNY Series in Religious Studies)**

*Harold Coward*

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*Explores the issue of the perfectibility of nature in philosophy, psychology, and a variety of world religions.*

How perfectible is human nature as understood in Eastern and Western philosophy, psychology, and religion? Harold Coward examines some of the very different answers to this question. He poses that in Western thought, including philosophy, psychology, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, human nature is often understood as finite, flawed, and not perfectible—in religion requiring God's grace and the afterlife to reach the goal. By contrast, Eastern thought arising in India frequently sees human nature to be perfectible and presumes that we will be reborn until we realize the goal—the various yoga psychologies, philosophies, and religions of Hinduism and Buddhism being the paths by which one may perfect oneself and realize release from rebirth. Coward uses the striking differences in the assessment of how perfectible human nature is as the comparative focus for this book.

“...this is an enjoyable and wide-ranging book, and one that is sure to provoke fruitful disagreement from scholars while introducing a complex field to students and the interested lay reader.” — Philosophy East & West

“...a nicely balanced comparison of approaches to self-transcendence within major worldviews, both East and West.” — Journal of Ecumenical Studies

“Coward has found the most useful question to ask in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the clear differences between Eastern and Western philosophies and religions. In pursuing the notion of 'perfectibility' through Western philosophy, psychology, and religions, and Eastern philosophies and religions—a task he is eminently qualified to do—he brings a vast body of material into a manageable frame. By his choice of focus and his brilliant examination of this question through many traditions, he brings forth a new distinct point of view.” — Robert M. Garvin, University at Albany, State University of New York

Harold Coward is Professor Emeritus of History and Founding Director of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria. He is the author and editor of many books, including *Religion and Peacebuilding* (with Gordon S. Smith) and *Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism*, both also published by SUNY Press.

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