# Edward Slingerland, *Mind and Body in Early China: Beyond Orientalism and the Myth of Holism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); ISBN: 9780190842307; 385 pages.

Edward Slingerland's *Mind and Body in Early China* boldly tackles a number of thorny methodological issues in the humanities, particularly religious studies and anthropology. Though the subject matter specifically concerns the myth of monism in early Chinese philosophy, the concepts and arguments that surround that subject are widely applicable to academic practices. Further, Chapter 4 provides insightful instruction for how these established issues can be overcome with the use of technology.

Slingerland's volume offers a compelling methodological foundation for progress across the humanities. He takes care to not only dispute the conclusions drawn by those who argue for monism in early Chinese thought, but also interrogates the patterns of logic necessary for such conclusions. In doing so, he identifies a number of fallacies frequently seen in more shallow academic discourse. Some of the most notable points of discussion in this sphere are the issue of mistaking argument for assumption, and the problem of sample selection. The former fallacy is founded on the interpretation that writers from temporally distant or otherwise unfamiliar cultures are always describing in earnest the normative beliefs of their culture. This is, of course, not the case: even within seemingly stable cultures, there universally exists differences of perspective and competition between different avenues of philosophical inquiry within that cultural context. This is relevant not only to sinologists, but to all academics whose work integrates writing from unfamiliar cultural perspectives. It is vital to remember that an author's cultural background is not the sum of the context for their writing. Such rejection of cultural generalisation is vital to move past the persistent Orientalism that has plagued Western academia for so long.

The latter issue, that of sample selection, is nothing new; however, as Slingerland points out, we have never been more equipped to address such a problem. This discussion moves elegantly into Slingerland's discourse on the digital humanities and the utilisation of progressive technology. This is even more pertinent in 2024 than in 2019, with many university administrators appearing to preference technology over human academics. As Slingerland argues, it is vital that we learn to co-exist with technological advancement and identify where and how it can contribute to the humanities. Doing so not only refutes to human versus machine dichotomy, but also improves the quality of academia through accessible quantitative inquiry.

Given the due diligence offered in Slingerland's approach to methodology, and the author's obvious passion for thorough research, one aspect of the book stands out as lacking the nuance demonstrated elsewhere. This is the discussion of autism included in Chapter 5, integrated specifically into the discussion of Theory of Mind. In general, the author consistently fails to engage with autism as an aspect of natural diversity in the *Homo sapiens* species; a framing incongruent with the rest of the book, which repeatedly emphasises the importance of universal cognitive frameworks as a foundation for cultural inquiry.

Notably, the author defers to the work of Simon Baron-Cohen: an admittedly influential figure in autism research, but also a highly controversial one. Baron-Cohen's assertion of autistic mind-blindness in particular has been the subject of a great deal of debate, especially given the proposal of a competing hypothesis in the 2010s, known as the "double-empathy

problem." This framework proposes that autists do not lack Theory of Mind, but rather find more successful in interpreting their autistic peers' ToM than that of an allistic; notably, this issue is also reversed, with allistics struggling to interpret ToM in autists in the same way.[1] The "double empathy problem" framework has seen significant popularity, and has even been acknowledged by Baron-Cohen himself as a substantial improvement upon his work. At the same time, Baron-Cohen's work on ToM has fallen out of popularity.

Further, despite the book's otherwise insistent emphasis on a dialectical approach to the individual and society, autists are consistently understood as a monolith. The author does bring up Temple Grandin, perhaps the most famous high-functioning autist currently alive; however, Slingerland subsequently fails to identify diversity within autistic cognition as a foundation for further insight. It is understandable that limited space was allowed for the discussion of autism and cognition; this is a book about methodology in sinology, not a platform for discussing disability and cognitive science. At the same time, the lack of diligence afforded to the subject is at odds with the otherwise excellent discussion of human diversity and cognitive foundations present throughout the rest of the book. There is a distinct irony in the fact that Slingerland's excellent discussion of methodological diligence is undermined by a common oversight in the humanities, and as an autistic academic I was disappointed by it. To paraphrase Slingerland in the book's introduction, if Theory of Mind appears to be a cognitive universal for *Homo sapiens*, and autistics are *Homo sapiens*, then it would be extremely surprising if Theory of Mind was completely alien to them.

Despite this oversight in the discussion of disability, *Mind and Body in Early China* is a potent text that provides critical instruction for methodological diligence and excellence. It highlights not only the fallacies common to interpretation of unfamiliar cultural texts, but also how to overcome such shortcomings and engage in insightful inquiry. In particular, Slingerland's discussion of how to integrate technology into established humanities research practices is vital for the future of our disciplines in a changing world.

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[1] Damian Milton, "On the Ontological Status of Autism: The 'Double Empathy Problem'," *Disability & Society* 27, no 6 (2012): pp. 883-887; Morton Ann Gernsbacher and Melanie Yergeau, "Empirical Failures of the Claim That Autistic People Lack a Theory of Mind," *Archives of Scientific Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2019): pp. 102-118.

# Craig Martin, *Discourse and Ideology: A Critique of the Study of Culture.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); ISBN: 9781350246287; 274 pages.

Upon initial reading, Martin's examination of the power of critique, the role discourse analysis, and the multifarious forms of ideological study, is intimidating. This is not only because of the complex nature of the concepts discussed but also because of Martin's masterful historical and contemporary scrutiny of the interplay between these topics. Martin embeds this study - which can be considered a continuation of his first *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* - within a poststructuralist framework with continual reference to the works of classic thinkers such Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. Martin opens with critique, and carefully guides the reader through the text. A key aspect of Martin's interpretation of these thinkers is that they are all useful to draw upon. In the preliminary stages of the book, readers are introduced to some key signposts in the study of the ideology of critique, for example Foucault's critique of ideology and Immanuel Kant's conditions of possibility. Martin competently places his perspective in relation to these earlier scholars, and in doing so enables to reader to critically engage with Martin's argument in relation to the historical emergence of the critical study of culture.

The book is structured around critique, things, discourse, domination, ideology and recrement, each of which could be the principal focus in its own right. However, upon further reading Martin coherently threads concepts together expertly placing them in the context of racism within the United States for the final chapter. The reader is guided through these concepts with extensive reference and application of classical thinkers in a way that feels fresh and contemporary. For example, in the chapter on ideology Martin spotlights Karl Mannheim's formation of ideology, specifically referring to its utility in identifying 'falsehood or untruth'. Martin responds to Mannheim's by making a distinction between constitutive and empirical discourse as a manner to legitimate or further a group's interest. Martin utilises the interconnectivity between discourse and ideology with a mindful nod to a variety of previous thinkers. Although the works of Foucault, Derrida and Butler are most closely aligned Martin expertly draws from many others to create a sense that this work is a cumulative product. It therefore feels that the reader is an observer to an on-going dialogue across thinkers and positionalities.

To ensure the reader is not lost, the volume utilises a variety of examples that successfully demonstrates theoretically complex ideas. For example, Martin makes use of Bouck White's *The Call of the Carpenter* (1911) to demonstrate the functions of discourse. Martin uses the text as a site to discuss the usefulness of discourse, then draws on Foucault as a interlocutor regarding the sharp distinction between empirical and constitutive discourse. Constant reference is made to *The Call of the Carpenter* to situate these themes and in doing so the reader is given space to digest the themes discussed and to perceive the usefulness of the approach. This signposting of discourse analysis is utilised throughout the book as a methodological reference, but

also to reinforce the need for practical approaches. This is further evidenced in the analysis of racism in the final chapter.

A key strength of the volume is found in Martin's careful consideration for the reader in embedding concepts with accessible reference points. Martin skilfully discusses the techniques of ideological identification, empirical and constitutive discourse analysis to unpick various elements of racism within the United States. Topics range from the wealth gap, structural racism, stereotype threats, implicit bias, and white privilege. Martin systematically unpicks the empirical claims to truth made by various groups. In doing so Martin is demonstrating the use value of a thorough adoption of discourse analysis in relation to political, social and racialised ideologies. The book is therefore not only relevant for largely academic audience but also for general readers wishing the critically engage in ideological discourse. Martin focuses on race; however, the techniques in which Martin is advocated could be utilised in many different contexts spanning a variety of disciplines. Martin's book is timely, particularly in contemporary poststructuralist society in which discourse and ideology permeates society covertly. Martin offers both theoretical reference points, and practical tools to identify and critically engage with the plethora of misinformation which seems so integral to today's society.

The strength of discourse analysis is thoroughly demonstrated by Martin which challenges both methodological and theoretical assumptions in a variety of disciplines, notably religious studies and sociology. Finally, even though Martin works within religious studies, he acknowledges this research is not necessarily restricted to that field. An asset of this volume lies in its acknowledgement that power, discourse, and ideology are contingent on the dominant political and social narratives of the time. This is particularly useful today - when identity politics and the growing political far right jostle for public recognition – as there is clearly a need for Martin's reinterpretation of the ideological struggle, both at a national level, and also at the personal, individual level.

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Somdev Chatterjee, *Why Stories Work: The Evolutionary and Cognitive Roots of the Power of Narrative* (India, Singapore and Malaysia: Notion Press, 2023); ISBN: 9798889359388; 112 pages.

This short book grew out of the author's more than a decade's employment as a lecturer at a film school in India. Chatterjee notes that film students often resist advice to revise their scripts to strengthen the narrative structure, and also downplay the importance of stories, seemingly unwilling to accord to story the significance it merits. The study has four chapters. Chapter 1, "Tell It Like Your Life Depends On It," opens with chimpanzee research and the evolutionary history of humans and primates from common ancestors. Noting that humans became more intelligent to offset their reduction in physical might, Chatterjee asks what "led humans to create and inhabit imaginary worlds?" (p. 16) Stories and shared imaginary realms are prosocial and confer evolutionary advantages; humans love telling and hearing stories, and communities reified the tales, conferring meaning and on occasion sacrality on them. The nation is an imagined community, the corporation is an imagined entity, and the existence of such things enable humans to cooperate and progress. Chatterjee covers a lot of ground in this chapter, relying on 'big picture' authors like Yuval Noah Harari and Jordan Peterson to make a coherent narrative of human social development. The human need to manage the future, which requires us to be creative, and the negative potential of stories to divide humanity and create conflict are also covered.

Chapter 2, "Learning to Inhabit Unreal Worlds," begins with Richard Dawkins and the idea of simulation as a key human "learning technique" (p. 39). Chatterjee notes that fantasy aids humans to rehearse different scenarios, to practice how they will handle certain situations; he opines that "daydreaming is like going to the gym to tone up your 'simulation muscles'" (p. 40). This chapter covers early childhood cognitive development, how unreal fictions evoke real emotions (including negative emotions like fear or anger) in people, and also childhood play as rehearsal for adult life. Chapter 3, "Maps of Experienced Reality," discusses how human concerns limit our attention and Chatterjee argues that individuals "experience reality within a narrative framework" (p. 56), and that personal stories aid humans in dealing with the extraordinary complexity of life. Examples of popular culture narratives – *Star Wars*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Matrix*, *Harry Potter* – are examined to mine the ways they create meaning for viewers. Chapter 4, "How Stories Work," starts with brain chemistry and. picks up the thread of story-telling being an evolutionarily adaptive trait in human behaviour. Other neurological phenomena, such as mirror neurons, pattern seeking, and the human attraction to symmetry, are discussed in the context of puzzle-solving, the cognitive development of infants and young children, and the ways humans build meaning through these activities. There is a brief conclusion. Chatterjee has produced a clear, easy to read, study that is built on reasonably current research and may be of interest to students and teachings who are studying narrative in the context of films, novels, and other fictions.

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# Fernand Deligny, *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Catherine Porter (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing LLC, 2015); ISBN: 9781937561710; 252 pages.

*The Arachnean and Other Texts* presents Drew S. Burk and Catherine Porter's English translations of work produced by French sociologist, educator and filmmaker Fernand Deligny (1913 – 1996). This is the first book that allows non-French speakers (including myself) to access the catalogue of an innovator who is all but unknown in the English-speaking world. Fernand Deligny was an advocate for the rights of neurodivergent people and in 1967 he established a countryside commune for non-verbal and profoundly autistic youth. This was a radical act in 1960s France, where autistic children were often abused and institutionalised. Deligny lived and worked in the commune alongside the children.

Part I recounts Deligny's focus on the presence of networks as "modes of being" in the lives of those he studies, and their impulses for behaviour given certain stimuli. Deligny focused on the behaviours of the autistic children in his care, seeking to de-code and understand the minds of a community who were commonly mistreated, overlooked, and ignored by society at the time. Deligny mapped the webs of connection that these children developed among themselves and deployed the structure of the spider's web to compare this arachnean phenomenon to other networks formed by theoretical or physical 'webs' of connection that exist more broadly in human life. *The Arachnean* was originally produced by Deligny in 1981/82 almost two decades after he established the commune, and published in French in 2008, years after his death.

Deligny was fascinated by the daily practices of autistic children, believing their repeated movements formed patterns that could potentially provide us with a "map" of the neurodivergent brain. In Part II, *The Island Below, Summer 1969*, displays a collection of Deligny's photographs. Here we see his work in action, as the photos show children on the commune interacting with objects of interest in the garden, revealing new networks as they go. In subsequent chapters Deligny ponders the use of language in our categorisation of life. These chapters, which include "*That* Seeing and Looking at One*self*: and "Acting and the Acted", are a translational triumph. Burk and Porter maintain the light tone of Deligny's conversational musings, while still carrying over into English the intricacies of his arguments originally made in French. Footnotes provide further explanation of chosen words or phrases, including definitions of French words when clarification of meaning is necessary. Potentially the most impressive inclusion in this translation is a number of Deligny's "map" drawings. For example, *Monoblet (November 1976)* demonstrates how Deligny can transform a mundane experience into an opportunity for learning. The ink tracings illustrate the "movements of the three autistic children while bread is being made", separating eye movements, hands and strings of salvia into different lines and symbols to form a network view of the unfolding interactions (pp. 12-13). The interpretation of what this map then means is up to the viewer.

After finishing *The Arachnean and Other Texts*, the sole frustration I now have is the lack of additional academic work produced about Deligny and his methodologies – written in the English language. I hope that Burk and Porter's translation, although published over ten years ago now, will be discussed further among academics and spark fresh dialogue about the

author. Studies in Religion scholars will find this translation particularly fascinating from a methodological point of view. In my Honours thesis I appropriated Deligny's approach to map the behavioural trajectories of the Christian fundamentalist groups I was studying. The flexibility of Deligny's web or network model allowed me to better understand the connections held between extremist groups, and even foster a predictive capacity informed by the examination of behavioural trajectories. Deligny's methodologies could become a kind of subgroup of broader Network Analysis techniques that include the examination of nodes and ties. Moreover, Deligny's map making approach can be appropriated by religious studies scholars to display and interpret complex relationships occurring within religious organisations.

Deligny's radical approach to inclusion and unwavering desire to restore dignity to a group that had been marginalised from the mainstream is deeply moving. Burk and Porter have completed a public service by compiling, translating and publishing Deligny's work, as produced over the decades beginning in the 1960s and finishing in the 1980s. Any academic who encounters the study of human relationships should read *The Arachnean and Other Texts* and join me in revelling in its significance.

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