

Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts

By Barry Allen

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The first book to focus on the intersection of Western philosophy and the Asian martial arts, *Striking Beauty* comparatively studies the historical and philosophical traditions of martial arts practice and their ethical value in the modern world. Expanding Western philosophy's global outlook, the book forces a theoretical reckoning with the concerns of Chinese philosophy and the aesthetic and technical dimensions of martial arts practice.

Striking Beauty explains the relationship between Asian martial arts and the Chinese philosophical traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, in addition to Sunzi's *Art of War*. It connects martial arts practice to the Western concepts of mind-body dualism and materialism, sports aesthetics, and the ethics of violence. The work ameliorates Western philosophy's hostility toward the body, emphasizing the pleasure of watching and engaging in martial arts, along with their beauty and the ethical problem of their violence.

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Editorial Review

Review

Striking Beauty presents a beautifully and forcefully written account of the philosophical background of martial arts in Eastern and Western traditions. At the same time, it also presents the author's vision of a contemporary philosophy, and phenomenology, of the martial arts and their aesthetic, somatic, and ethical dimensions. It is a ground-breaking and inspiring book that will appeal to everyone interested in the practice, theory, and history of martial arts.

(Hans-Georg Möeller, University of Macau)

An incredible book that views the Chinese martial arts from every angle?philosophical, psychological, and practical?from their home of origin throughout the world at large, from ancient times to the present. Truly a breathtaking experience.

(Stanley Henning, independent scholar of Chinese martial arts history)

One might think that there is no connection at all between the martial arts and philosophy; but there are many, as Barry Allen shows in Striking Beauty. The book is both knowledgeable and perceptive, and Allen writes with a clarity that makes it a pleasure to read. This is an engaging book for any martial artist or any philosopher with an interest in the martial arts, as well as for any other philosopher who welcomes a novel perspective on his or her subject

(Graham Priest, Graduate Center, CUNY)

Striking Beauty is a necessary book, connecting themes from Chinese and Western spiritual and philosophical traditions with the embodied aesthetics of self-cultivation found in the martial arts. Allen's discussion is lively, wide-ranging, and multiply revealing. From Buddha and Laozi to Bruce Lee and postmodernism, from dance to sport to sculpture: Allen displays mastery of incredibly wide-ranging materials. Both philosophers and practitioners will find his treatment accurate, broad, profound, and potentially transformative, revealing much about combat and art, life and intellect, body and mind.

(Crispin Sartwell, Dickinson College, author of *Six Names of Beauty*)

Displaying a firm understanding of both Western and Chinese philosophical traditions, *Striking Beauty* instructively addresses the much neglected topic of East Asian martial arts philosophy, providing scholarly insights into ethics, aesthetics, and comparative philosophy from a convincing somatic perspective.

(Richard Shusterman, author of *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*)

Allen presents a dazzling display of intellectual moves that strike to the core of the wisdom behind the Asian

martial arts. As though we were on the mat, he gracefully throws the reader from illuminating historical accounts to pages of penetrating philosophical analysis. He locks up with broad issues about the nature of violence and power as well as such strange but compelling questions as how it is that some of us can find a violent punch an object of sublime beauty.Both a romp and a workout, this elegantly written book should be mandatory reading for all students of the martial arts.

(Gordon Marino, St. Olaf College)

Allen is our preeminent student of artistry in the applied arts, the beauty that comes as an unsought byproduct of devotion to instrumental effectiveness. Here he writes as a seasoned practitioner about Asian martial arts?disciplines whose devotion to bodily excellence and violence pose special challenges to sympathetic philosophical understanding

(David Hills, Stanford University)

A significant contribution to comparative philosophy, Allen's *Striking Beauty* is a focused investigation of the intersection of Asian martial arts, the philosophical traditions surrounding them, and Western philosophy.... Highly recommended.

(*Choice*)

About the Author

Barry Allen is professor of philosophy at McMaster University; has held visiting appointments in Jerusalem, Istanbul, Shanghai, and Hong Kong; and is associate editor at the interdisciplinary journal Common Knowledge. His research concerns aesthetics, technology, the theory of knowledge, and Chinese philosophy. He is the author of *Truth in Philosophy*; *Knowledge and Civilization*; *Artifice and Design: Art and Technology in Human Experience*; and *Vanishing into Things: Knowledge in Chinese Tradition.*

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