ROBERT E. CARTER, Becoming Bamboo: Western and Eastern Explorations of the Meaning of Life, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992, xvi + 224 pp.

In the Foreword, Ninian Smart remarks that Carter's approach is that of a pioneer writing constructive cross-cultural philosophy in a new key. Becoming Bamboo represents years of philosophical, cultural, and self-reflection. The book takes on a pivotal issue in philosophy, discusses a wide range of philosophers from Japan, Europe, and American, and it is written in a very readable and personal style. The book will be of interest to professors and students of philosophy, psychology and cross-cultural studies.

In the introduction, Carter argues for a comparative approach to the study of value theory because it will provide "... a wider and more adequate context of understanding that you come to comprehend yourself as inextricably linked with others: with the world, both culturally and physically, and with the cosmos, as widely conceived as we can imagine." (pp. 6-7). In the first Chapter, Carter builds a conception of "values and valuation" around Heidegger's analysis of "dwelling."

In the second chapter, Carter draws upon the work of the developmental psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg. Carter counters Carol Gilligan's criticisms, arguing that Kohlberg's Stage Seven--a moral concern for the cosmos derived from a sense of mystical union--"... specifically describes the conditions of and the environment conducive to a richly meaningful life" (p. 67). In the third chapter, Carter rakes through the fertile field of Victor Frankl's Logotherapy to develop an existential but critical approach to the meaning of one's life.

The next two chapters, "Relatedness," and "Where is Here?," mark the climax of Carter's comparative philosophy. First, he continues to build on Heidegger's sense of dwelling in the world, weaving in a Feminist critique and a Japanese aesthetic to show that Kohlberg's stage seven is reflected in various religious and philosophical traditions, and that reflection on and dialogue between the various traditions may provide "... a major source of meaning in your life and a vindication of the thesis of human relatedness and the interrelatedness of all things" (p. 124). Then, in "Where is Here"? Carter, shows that the answer to "Who am I?" is dependent on the matrix of relations, one's "place" (basho) where each individual constructs her or his "here and now" perspective. Carter draws in the significance of environmental ethics for the meaning of life. He works with a blend of transpersonal psychology, transpersonal ecology and deep ecology to develop a new way of thinking about and practically living a meaningful and moral life.

As I approached the final chapter, "Deconstructing Meaning," I was beginning to feel a bit discouraged because of the overly "universalistic" tone of the work--every tradition culminates in Kohlberg's stage seven, and with Zen everything is nothing. Carter foresaw this problem and so he deconstructs his own story of meaning and valuation. "The meaning of life is to be found in the living of it, and even for the individual a considerable range of possibilities and an unending flow of reflections upon your life constitutes part of that meaning" (p. 184). Carter's work leaves one with the challenge of going forward to create values and meaning despite their flux and transitoriness. James D. Sellmann

2/8/93

Dear L. J. Goldstein:

Enclosed, please, find my review of Becoming Bamboo (in less than 600 words).

The book arrived in February 1, but here is my prompt response.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Truthfully,

James Sellmann