

58th Annual Conference
of the
Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Healing in Times of Precarity
Asian and Comparative Approaches

Manipal Academy of Higher Education
Manipal, Karnataka, India
May 19–22, 2026



Conference Website

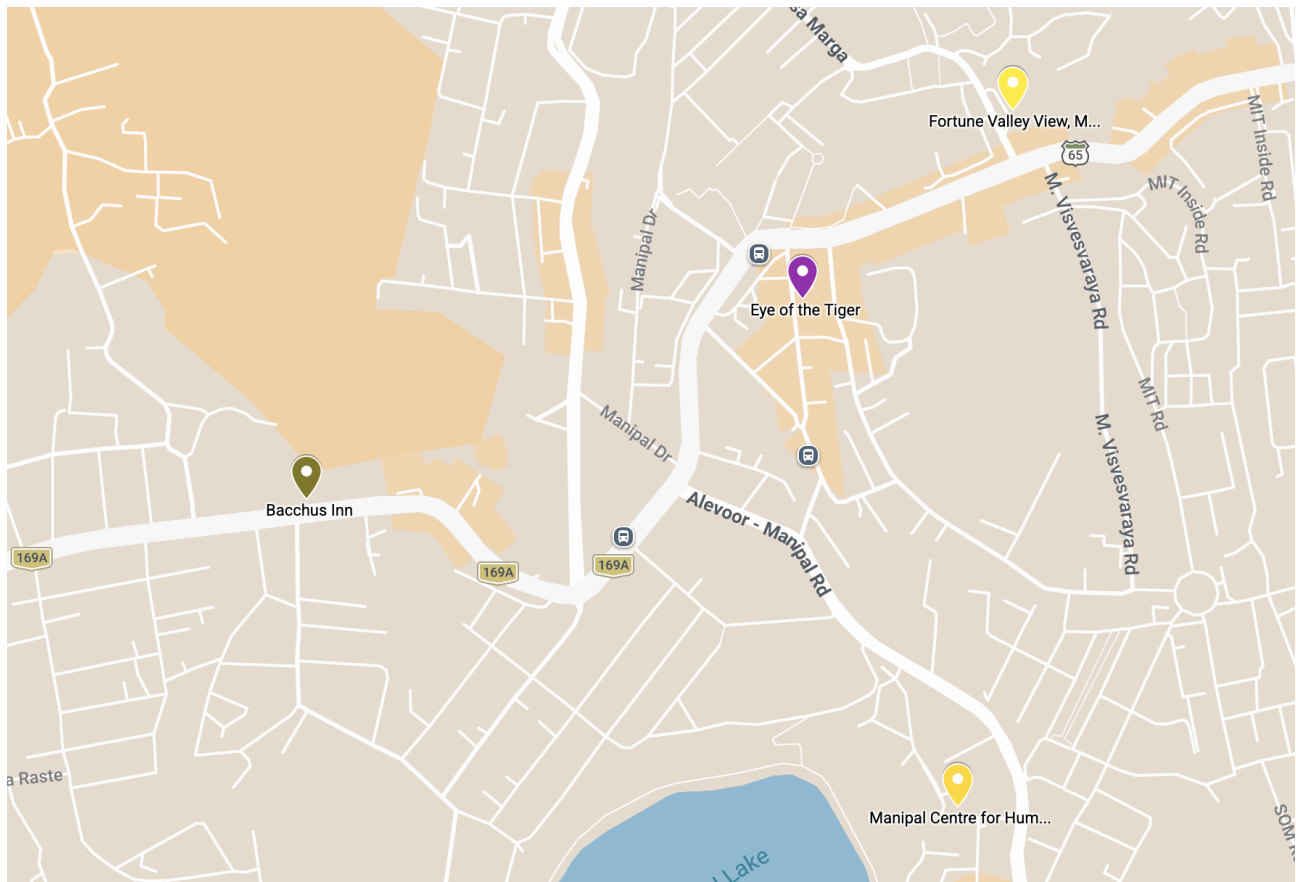
<https://www.sacpweb.org/conferences/annual-sacp-conference-2026/>

Campus Map





<https://maps.app.goo.gl/mreYDEwejPA9ExjB7>

Conference Venue Map

Manipal Academy of Higher Education



Conference Event Locations

-  Manipal Centre for Humanities
-  Fortune Valley View, Manipal - N
-  Eye of the Tiger
-  Bacchus Inn

Room	Location	Capacity
A	Gangubai Hanagal Auditorium	~120
B	Concurrent Session Room	~40
C	Concurrent Session Room	~40
D	Concurrent Session Room	~25-30
E	Concurrent Session Room	~25-30

Additional Information

SACP 2026 Conference WhatsApp Group

To assist with conference communication during the meeting in Manipal, we have created an *optional* WhatsApp group for SACP 2026 participants.

This group is intended primarily for conference-wide announcements and practical coordination during the conference itself, including:

- schedule updates
- room changes
- transportation information
- dining and social event reminders
- urgent conference communications

Because this is a large group, we ask participants to keep discussion within the main group limited so that important announcements remain visible and easy to locate.

Participants are warmly encouraged to create smaller independent WhatsApp groups for:

- ongoing philosophical discussions
- arranging meals or excursions
- travel coordination
- networking with colleagues and friends
- future collaborations

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TUESDAY MAY 19	
8:30 – 9:00 AM	REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS All events will be held at the building: MISHA Lake Campus.
9:00 – 10:00 AM Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	OPENING CEREMONIES <i>Gayatri Prabhu</i> , Director at Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (MISHA) <i>Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette</i> <i>Sharath Kumar Rao K.</i> , Vice-Chancellor of Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) <i>Geoff Ashton</i> , SACP President <i>Srinivasa Kumar N Acharya</i> , Coordinator of the Department of Philosophy
10:00 – 10:15 AM	BREAK
10:15 – 10:30 AM Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	WELCOMING REMARKS FROM SACP PRESIDENT GEOFF ASHTON
10:30 – 12:00 PM Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	KEYNOTE #1 “The Bhagavad Gita as a healer for the precarious problem of Colonialism” <i>A. Raghuramaraju</i> Moderator: <i>Purushottama Bilimoria</i>
12:00 – 1:15 PM	LUNCH
1:15 – 2:35 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 1 (80 MINUTES)
1.A 1:15 – 2:35 PM Room B	Heart, Mind, and Harmony: New Perspectives in Chinese Philosophy Rethinking Mental Life in the Chinese Tradition: Beyond the Dualism–Holism Dichotomy <i>Arkadiusz Gut</i> “Harmony” in Contemporary Chinese Thought: A Way to Heal the World? <i>Dušan Vávra</i> Moderator: <i>Robin Luke Varghese</i>
1.B 1:15 – 2:35 PM Room C	Meditation, Mind, and Philosophical Therapy Right View vs Right Action <i>Szymon Bogacz</i> Beyond Incommensurability: Nagarjuna and Spinoza on Healing <i>Michiel Leezenberg</i>

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	Moderator: TBD
1.C 1:15 – 2:35 PM Room D	<p>Intercultural Philosophy as a Way of Life: Philosophical Therapeutics in Asia</p> <p>Deep Listening as Spiritual Exercise: Pierre Hadot, Buddhist Śravaṇa, and the Practice of Philosophical Therapy <i>Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette</i></p> <p>The soteriological aspect of the dharma theory and Abhidharma as a transformative tool for the practitioner of the mind: A glance into Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośabhāṣya <i>Nino Kilarjani</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Ethan Mills</i></p>
2:35 – 2:50 PM	BREAK
2:50 – 4:50 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 2 (120 MINUTES)
2.A 2:50 – 4:50 PM Room B	<p>Food Survival and Diasporic Healing Practices</p> <p>The Bene Israel of Mumbai Healing Practices: A Study of Hindu, Konkani, and Marathi Adaptations <i>Emily Silverman</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Purnima Bhatt</i></p>
2.B 2:50 – 4:50 PM Room C	<p>Comparative Philosophies of Suffering and Resilience</p> <p>Healing Through Detachment: The Case of Epictetus and the Buddhist Parable of Two Arrows in the Sallattha Sutta <i>Michal Damski</i></p> <p>Healing Through Crisis: Positive Disintegration, Anti-Psychiatry, and Buddhist Paths to Resilient Self-Realization <i>Krzysztof Korzyk</i></p> <p>Epistemology for Well-being and Healing: Toward a Buddhist Virtue Epistemology <i>Keya Maitra</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>

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2.C 2:50 – 4:50 PM Room D	Selfhood, Ritual, and Philosophical Therapy Ritual of Kuldevi Worship in the Jain Community of Kutch: Continuity, Identity, and the Sacred Feminine <i>Kamini Gogri</i> Candrakirti on Absence-cognition as Soteriological Remedy <i>Aditya Guntoori</i> Moderator: Shad Gilbert
5:00 – 7:00 PM	DINNER ON OWN Get Together at the Fortune Valley View: The Cosmo Bar Location: Inside MAHE Campus, Madhav Nagar, Manipal, Karnataka 576104, India (Optional; pay-your-own-way)

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WEDNESDAY MAY 20	
8:00 – 8:20 AM	REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS All events will be held at the building: MISHA Lake Campus.
8:20 – 10:15 AM Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	GRADUATE STUDENT AWARDS 3 rd place When Worlds Cannot Be Traveled: Caste, Epistemology and Feminist Decolonial Philosophy <i>Dalorina Nath</i> 2 nd place Healing through Loss: Between Buddhist Thought and the Western Crisis of Finitude <i>Tomaso Pignocchi</i> 1 st place Prakṛti as a Mother: Reading the Sāṅkhya Kārikā through the Feminist Lens of Care <i>Sarnali Chatterjee</i> Moderator: <i>Jea Sophia Oh</i>
10:15 – 10:30 AM	BREAK
10:30 – 12:30 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 3 (120 MINUTES)
3.A 10:30 – 12:30 PM Room B	Remembering Anand Vaidya The Significance of the Reciprocity of Moral Regard: Reflections on Vaidya's Hypothesis of Moral Standing <i>Douglas Berger</i> The In(significance) of Sentience (a paper written by Anand Vaidya) <i>Manjula Menon</i> Robo-Buddhas, Suffering, Moral Standing: A Conversation with Anand Vaidya <i>Ethan Mills</i> Moderator: <i>Geoff Ashton</i>

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3.B 10:30 – 12:30 PM Room C	<p>Ethical and Moral Healing in Buddhist Philosophy</p> <p>The Transformation of Karma through Tiantai Zhiguan <i>Zicheng Lei</i></p> <p>Dāna (Giving) as Healing: Buddhist Insights from the Āgama/Nikāya Sūtras to Yogācāra <i>Bin Liu</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
3.C 10:30 – 12:30 PM Room D	<p>Philosophical Therapies of Mind and Self</p> <p>From Ego to Surrender: Vijayadāsa’s Spiritual Psychology for Inner Well-being <i>Shrinidhi P.</i></p> <p>Socio-Political Dimensions of Healing: Quest Narratives of Mental Illness in Selected Indian Life-Writings <i>Preeti Pallavi Mohanta</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
12:30 PM MISHA Lake Campus	<p>Lunch MISHA offers a traditional lunch on palm leaves</p>
2:00 PM MISHA Lake Campus	<p>Yakshaghana performance</p>
3:00 PM	<p>Bus trip to Sri Krishna Matha Udupi Temple Busses depart from MISHA Lake Campus</p>
6:00 PM	<p>DINNER ON OWN</p> <p>Get together at Eye of the Tiger Location: Inside Green Park Hotel, 4th Floor, Eshwar Nagar, Manipal, Karnataka 576104, India (Optional; pay-your-own-way)</p>

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THURSDAY MAY 21	
8:00 – 8:20 AM	REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS
8:20 – 9:40 AM	CONCURRENT SESSION 4 (80 MINUTES)
4.A 8:20 – 9:40 AM Room B	Survival Care and Gendered Agency Unsung Heroines: Women and the Covid Pandemic-A Tale of Resistance, Resilience and Survival <i>Purnima Bhatt</i> The Ethics of Survival: Rethinking Healing, Ecology, and Social Justice <i>Nasiblang Chyrmang</i> Moderator: <i>Sarnali Chatterjee</i>
4.B 8:20 – 9:40 AM Room C	Ritual Texts and Communal Approaches to Healing Healing of Finitude: The Phenomenology of Life in the Medicine Buddha Faith <i>Yiwen Zhang</i> Healing and Enlightenment through Dialogue: Ngô Thì Nhậm’s Trúc Lâm Zen and Modern Mindfulness Practices <i>Thi Hong Tam Nguyen</i> Moderator: TBD
4.C 8:20 – 9:40 AM Room D	Healing the Self beyond Autonomy Productive Materiality of Nature: Healing by Thinking beyond the Human through Phenomenology and Advaita Vedanta <i>Darshna Kumar</i> Healing the Precarious Self: A Vedānta Approach to Rites of Agency Sanity <i>Srinivasa Kumar N. Acharya</i> <i>M. Vishnuvardhan</i> <i>G. B. Vanditha</i> Moderator: TBD
9:40 – 9:55 AM	BREAK

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9:55 – 11:55 AM	CONCURRENT SESSION 5 (120 MINUTES)
5.A 9:55 – 11:55 AM Room B	<p>The Healing Powers of the Divine Feminine: A Comparative Exploration</p> <p>The Forgotten Goddess: Ungnyeo (熊女, 웅녀), Reclaiming of Salim and Healing in Posthuman Ecofeminist Ethics <i>Jea Sophia Oh</i></p> <p>The Feminine That Heals: Laozi’s Wu 無-Form Subject as Feminist Political Ontology <i>Eunchul Jung</i></p> <p>Etoki Reimagined: Pilgrimage, Performance, and the Divine Feminine along the Kumano Kodo <i>Yuki Imoto</i></p> <p>Gynocentric Tantra as Psychospiritual Therapy: Exploring the Five Elemental Structure of Human Cosmic Alliance <i>Neela Bhattacharya Saxena</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Chiara Robbiano</i></p>
5.B 9:55 – 11:55 AM Room C	<p>Pedagogical Ramifications of Applied Indian Ethics (Part 1)</p> <p>Reason Between Equals? Sexed Subalternity and the University <i>Anupama Rao and Divya Malhari</i></p> <p>Relational Justice and Women’s Agency in Reproductive Ethics: A Dharma-Based Reframing <i>Piyali Mitra</i></p> <p>Beyond Capabilities: Re-imagining Developmental Ethics for Subaltern Women in India <i>Neeti Singh</i></p> <p>Pedagogical contours of debates on abortion (via amniocentesis) and euthanasia (vis-à-vis Jain sallekhanā) <i>Purushottama Bilimoria</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Purushottama Bilimoria</i></p>

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<p>5.C</p> <p>9:55 – 11:55 AM</p> <p>Room D</p>	<p>Agency, Wisdom, and Intercultural Philosophy</p> <p>Authorship and Agency: Gang Jeongildang and Harriet Taylor Mill in Comparative Perspective <i>Hwa Yeong Wang</i></p> <p>Transforming Consciousness and Investigating Things: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry into Wisdom in Xuanzang and the Great Learning <i>Jun Li</i></p> <p>Indian Pedagogies and the Structuring of Learning <i>Robin Luke Varghese</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>5.D</p> <p>9:55 – 11:55 AM</p> <p>Room E</p>	<p>Ecologies of Healing: Sustainability, Community, and Well-Being</p> <p>Philosophies of Healing and Sustainability: Asian and Comparative Reflections on the SDGs <i>Thanigaivelan Shanmugam</i></p> <p>Healing in Indigenous Asian Cultures: Philosophy, Ritual, and Ecology of Well-Being <i>Chelcia B. Sangma</i></p> <p>From Urbanity to Eco-consciousness: Reimagining University Campuses as Models of Holistic Learning <i>Walter Menezes</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>11:55 AM – 12:55 PM</p>	<p>LUNCH</p>

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12:55 – 2:15 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 6 (80 MINUTES)
6.A 12:55 – 2:15 PM Room B	<p>Nature as Living Reality</p> <p>A Nurturing Nature: Prakṛti's Non-Anthropocentric Foundations in Classical Sāṃkhya <i>Nitin Baskaran</i></p> <p>Is God really dead in Sāṃkhya? A Naturalist Interpretation of the Turn to Atheism in Early Classical Sāṃkhya <i>Geoff Ashton</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Piyali Mitra</i></p>
6.B 12:55 – 2:15 PM Room C	<p>Perspectives on Meaning and Care</p> <p>Zhuangzi and Meaning in Life <i>Frank Saunders Jr.</i></p> <p>Perspectival Agility in Medical Humanities/Health Humanities <i>Kiene Brillenburg Wurth</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
6.C 12:55 – 2:15 PM Room D	<p>Paths to Resilience: Ethical Philosophical and Practical Approaches in Buddhist and Asian Thought</p> <p>The Easternization of Survival <i>Shad Gilbert</i></p> <p>The Unbroken Spirit: Buddhist Emotional and Moral Healing in Sri Lanka's Age of Crisis <i>Randika Perera</i></p> <p>Moderator: Jin Y. Park</p>
2:15 – 2:30 PM	BREAK
2:30 - 3:30 PM	BUSINESS MEETING
Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	All SACP Members are encouraged to attend.

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	Trip to Kaupu Beach (Optional)
3:30 – 4:00 PM	BEGIN LOADING BUSES Buses will load at the building MISHA Lake Campus
4:00 PM	BUSES DEPART (travel time estimate: 45 minutes)
5:00 PM	Sunset on Kaupu Beach The best time to be at the beach to avoid the heat and see the sunset is 5-6:30 PM. Buses will return to MISHA Lake Campus shortly after sunset.
6:00 PM	DINNER ON OWN Get Together at Bacchus Inn Location: Hayagreeva Nagar, Udupi, Karnataka 576104, India (Optional; pay-your-own-way)

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FRIDAY MAY 22	
8:00 – 8:20 AM	REGISTRATION AND REFRESHMENTS
8:20 – 9:40 AM	CONCURRENT SESSION 7 (80 MINUTES)
<p>7.A</p> <p>8:20 – 9:40 AM</p> <p>Room B</p>	<p>Ambedkar</p> <p>From Precarity to Dhamma: Ambedkar’s Navayana and Healing of Dalits <i>Aditya Bansode</i></p> <p>What does it mean to be “dharmic”? An Indian perspective on responsibility <i>Agnieszka Rostalska</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>7.B</p> <p>8:20 – 9:40 AM</p> <p>Room C</p>	<p>Embodied Divinity, Subtle Bodies</p> <p>Recovering a ‘Thealogy’: A Śākta Exploration of Plotinus on Aphrodite and the Soul <i>Gus Kraus</i></p> <p>The Prapañcasāra-tantra on Tridoṣas <i>M. Praveen</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>7.C</p> <p>8:20 – 9:40 AM</p> <p>Room D</p>	<p>Healing with Philosophy: Embodied Practices Transgressive Thought and Therapeutic Traditions</p> <p>The Dose Makes the Poison: Philosophy as Iatrogenesis <i>Rohan Sikri</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
9:40 – 9:55 AM	BREAK

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9:55 – 11:55 AM	CONCURRENT SESSION 8 (120 MINUTES)
8.A 9:55 – 11:55 AM Room B	<p>The Feminine and Compassionate: Healing Pathways Across East Asian Philosophy, Myth, and Literature</p> <p>Rethinking Humanity’s Place: Shanhaijing (山海經) and Daodejing (道德經) as Ecological Healing <i>Jeongha Lee</i></p> <p>The Scars of the 20th Century: Literary Healing in Korean and Chinese Horror and Realism <i>Kyung-na Koh</i></p> <p>Dōgen’s Kannon and Rice-cakes: Tending to Our In-Betweenness <i>Chiara Robbiano</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Jea Sophia Oh</i></p>
8.B 9:55 – 11:55 AM Room C	<p>Pedagogical Ramifications of Applied Indian Ethics (Part 2)</p> <p>The Chessboard of Dietary Ethics & Teaching in Ecological Crisis: Pedagogy and Questions of Hybridity, Dogma, and Agency <i>Nishant Upadhyay</i></p> <p>Ci 雌 as a Rejoinder to the Gender Trouble <i>Ma Lin</i></p> <p>Teaching with the Living Earth: Precarity and Relational Responsibility in Indian Ethics <i>Meera Baindur</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Purushottama Bilimoria</i></p>
8.C 9:55 – 11:55 AM Room D	<p>Healing and the Philosophy of Yoga</p> <p>The Forms of Narasimha for Inner Healing <i>Jensen Martin</i></p> <p>Is <i>Prāṇāyāma</i> a Technique of the Body? <i>Raquel Ferrández</i></p> <p>Between Well-being and Untroubled States of Mind (akliṣṭa-vṛtti): How Insights from Sāṃkhya-Yoga can Benefit the Contemporary Debate on Happiness <i>Marzenna Jakubczak-Borge</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
11:55 AM – 12:55 PM	LUNCH
12:55 – 2:15 PM	CONCURRENT SESSION 9 (80 MINUTES)
9.A	Subaltern Voices, Performed Identities

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<p>12:55 – 2:15 PM</p> <p>Room B</p>	<p>Subalternity, Writing, and Agency: Role of Intellectuals and Literature in Making Tharu Identity <i>Mohan Dangaura</i></p> <p>Triangulating Tradition: Indian Classical Dance Across India, the U.S., and Australia <i>Justine Lemos</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>9.B</p> <p>12:55 – 2:15 PM</p> <p>Room C</p>	<p>Confucian Justice Care and Moral Emotions</p> <p>Treating the People as if They Were Wounds — the Confucian Sage King's Way in Terms of Pain <i>Yutong Zhai</i></p> <p>The Wounds of Modernity: Kang Youwei's Ren-Centered Solution and Civilizational Vision <i>Yangyang Lyu</i></p> <p>Moderator: TBD</p>
<p>9.C</p> <p>12:55 – 2:15 PM</p> <p>Room D</p>	<p>Bhakti</p> <p>Bhakti as the inter-present sacred: The lived Indian Psychology of healing and abundance <i>Shilpa Ashok Pandit</i></p> <p>Healing Virtues in Spinoza's Ethics (Parts IV and V) and Bhagavadgītā Chapter 12 (Bhaktiyoga) <i>Lisa Widdison</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Michiel Leezenberg</i></p>
<p>9.D</p> <p>12:55 – 2:15 PM</p> <p>Room E</p>	<p>Limits of Knowing Consciousness</p> <p>Memory, Perception, and the Possibility of a Pure Past: Interpreting Buddhaghosa Through the Prism of Henri Bergson <i>Sudeep RajKumar</i></p> <p>The Possibility of Thinking the All-Knowing (Sarvajña): Revisiting Abhinavagupta's concept of Śiva <i>Himanshu</i></p> <p>Moderator: <i>Randika Perera</i></p>
<p>2:15 – 2:30 PM</p>	<p>BREAK</p>
<p>2:30 - 4:00 PM</p>	<p>KEYNOTE #2 "Mourning and Healing" <i>Jin Y. Park</i></p>

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Gungubai Hanagal Auditorium	Introduction by <i>Geoff Ashton</i> and <i>Jea Sophia Oh</i> Q&A moderated by <i>Geoff Ashton</i>
4:00 – 4:30 PM	CONCLUDING REMARKS
6:00 PM	Gala Dinner at Fortune Valley View , Main Hall Location: Location: Inside MAHE Campus, Madhav Nagar, Manipal, Karnataka 576104, India

SATURDAY MAY 23

Optional Excursions (Unofficial Programming)

No formal conference sessions are scheduled for this day.

Participants may have the opportunity to join optional visits to sites of local interest.

These activities are not part of the official conference program and would be arranged at participants' own expense.

Additional information will be shared with interested attendees as it becomes available.

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Program Participants

Surname	Given Name	Affiliation	Session
Acharya	Srinivasa Kumar N.	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	4.C
Ashton	Geoffrey	University of San Francisco	3.A, 6.A Keynote 2
Baindur	Meera	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	8.B
Bansode	Aditya	Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar	7.A
Baskaran	Nitin	Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mumbai	6.A
Berger	Douglas	Leiden University	3.A
Bhatt	Purnima	Hood College	2.A, 4.A
Bilimoria	Purushottama	University of San Francisco	5.B, 8.B Keynote 1
Bogacz	Szymon	Austrian Academy of Sciences	1.B
Bouthillette	Karl-Stéphan	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	1.C
Brillenbug Wurth	Kiene	Utrecht University	6.B
Chatterjee	Sarnali	Indian Institute of Technology Bombay	Grad Essay Award 4.A
Chyrmang	Nasiblang	Annamalai University	4.A
Damski	Michal	University of Warsaw	2.B
Dangaura	Mohan	Tribhuvan University	9.A
Ferrández	Raquel	National University for Distance Education (UNED, Spain)	8.C
Gilbert	Shad	University of Helsinki	2.C, 6.C
Gogri	Kamini	Independent Scholar; Project Consultant at SOAS, Jain Center, UK	2.C
Guntoori	Aditya	McGill University	2.C
Gut	Arkadiusz	The Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland	1.A
Imoto	Yuki	Keio University	5.A
Jakubczak-Borge	Marzenna	Jagiellonian University	8.C
Jung	Eunchul	Drew University	5.A
Kilarjiani	Nino	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	1.C
Koh	Kyung-na	Ewha Woman's University, Seoul Korea	8.A
Korzyk	Krzysztof	Independent scholar	2.B
Kraus	Gus	Leiden University	7.B

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Kumar	Darshna	Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar	4.C
Lee	Jeongha	Ewha Woman's University, Seoul Korea	8.A
Leezenberg	Michiel	University of Amsterdam	1.B, 9.C
Lei	Zicheng	The University of Chicago	3.B
Lemos	Justine	Mendocino College	9.A
Li	Jun	Yunnan University	5.C
Lin	Ma	Renmin University of China	8.B
Liu	Bin	The University of Hong Kong	3.B
Lyu	Yangyang	Sichuan University	9.B
Maitra	Keya	University of Hawai'i at Manoa	2.B
Malhari	Divya	Columbia University	5.B
Martin	Jensen	Graduate Theological Union	8.C
Menezes	Walter	Goa University	5.D
Menon	Manjula	Independent Scholar	3.A
Mills	Ethan	University of Tennessee, Chattanooga	1.C, 3.A
Mitra	Piyali	The International Centre for Applied Ethics & Public Affairs, Sheffield, UK The Asian Bioethics Review (Springer Nature)	5.B, 6.A
Mohanta	Preeti Pallavi	The English and Foreign Languages University	3.C
Nath	Dalorina	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B)	Grad Essay Award
Nguyen	Thi Hong Tam	Sichuan University	4.B
Oh	Jea Sophia	West Chester University of Pennsylvania	5.A, 8.A Grad Essay Award Keynote 2
P.	Shrinidhi	Poornaprajna Samshodhana Mandiram, Bengaluru	3.C
Pandit	Shilpa Ashok	Ahmedabad University	9.C
Park	Jin Y.	American University	Keynote 2 6.C
Perera	Randika	Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine	6.C, 9.D
Pignocchi	Tomaso	Catholic University of Paris Lumsa University of Rome	Grad Essay Award
Praveen	M.	IIT Bombay, Mumbai	7.B
Raghuramaraju	A.	Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati	Keynote 1

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Rajkumar	Sudeep	University of Delhi	9.D
Rao	Anupama	Barnard College	5.B
Robbiano	Chiara	Utrecht University	5.A, 8.A
Rostalska	Agnieszka	Ghent University	7.A
Sangma	Chelcia B.	Annamalai University	5.D
Saunders Jr.	Frank	Hong Kong Chu Hai College	6.B
Saxena	Neela Bhattacharya	Nassau Community College	5.A
Shanmugam	Thanigaivelan	Annamalai University	5.D
Sikri	Rohan	New York University	7.C
Silverman	Emily	Graduate Theological Union	2.A
Singh	Neeti	Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi	5.B
Upadhyay	Nishant	Tsinghua University	8.B
Vanditha	G. B.	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	4.C
Varghese	Robin Luke	Sree Narayan Guru Open University Kollam Kerala	1.A, 5.C
Vávra	Dušan	Masaryk University	1.A
Vishnuvardhan	M.	Manipal Academy of Higher Education	4.C
Wang	Hwa Yeong	Duke Kunshan University	5.C
Widdison	Lisa	Ahmedabad University	9.C
Zhai	Yutong	Sichuan University	9.B
Zhang	Yiwen	Tsinghua University	4.B
	Himanshu	Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay	9.D

Abstracts

Tuesday, May 19

KEYNOTE #1

Title: The Bhagavad Gita as a healer for the precarious problem of Colonialism

Name and Institution: A. Raghuramaraju (Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati)

Abstract: In this paper, I will examine a national problem that affects individuals both psychologically and physically: colonialism and its impact on Indian society. The problem has two aspects: one, the cause, and the other, a potential solution. Bal Gangadhar Tilak delves into the causes and his ideas regarding solutions in his monumental book, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya*.

In section 1, the paper discusses the interpretations of the Gita by the Acharyas: Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Madhvacharya, Sri Vallabhacharya and Sri Nimbarkacharyya. Despite differences, Tilak contends that these interpretations converge on claiming that the Gita promotes Bhakti and Mukti, devotion and spiritual liberation. This, Tilak claims, led India to focus more on the other-world Bhakti and Mukti, thereby neglecting the physical world. This approach, according to him, made Indians weak and consequently vulnerable to subjugation.

Having identified the cause of the problem of colonialism, Tilak does not reject the Gita. Instead, he distinguishes between the interpretation (Bhasya) and his own, the previously unexplored 'secret' (Rahasya). Using Mimamsa's rule of writing and reading a text, he rejects all the Bhasyas of the Acharyas as interpolative and misleading, as well as dangerous for Indian society. As a solution, he proposes his conceptualization of the message of the Gita as containing a Rahasya that primarily advocates action (Karma). The evidence Tilak gives in support of his claim is that Arjuna, on the advice of Lord Krishna, goes on to fight in the war at Kurukshetra, which involves action, that too violent action. Tilak's solution is discussed in Section 2 of the paper.

In the next section, the paper discusses how M. K. Gandhi contests Tilak's claim and asserts that the Gita rejects violence and positively promotes non-violence. As a part of this radical hermeneutics, Gandhi makes three moves: one from the part, which is the Gita, to the whole, which is *The Mahabharata*; two, from event of the battle to context of narrating the *Mahabharata*; and three, from contents to context. Alternatively, while Tilak focuses on the beginning and ending of the Gita, Gandhi's focus is on the consequences of *Mahabharata*.

The overall thrust of the paper is (a) to identify the problem of colonialism (India's immediate past) that resulted in what Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya termed as 'slavery of the self', and (b) to explore the internal reasons for this predicament and access potential solutions to it in the classical text, The Bhagavad Gita (India's distant past).

Brief Biography: A. Raghuramaraju teaches philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Tirupati. He has a Ph.D. in philosophy from IIT Kanpur and taught at Goa University and the University of Hyderabad. His publications include *Debates in Indian Philosophy: Classical, Colonial and Contemporary*; *Debating Gandhi: A Reader*, editor; *Enduring Colonialism: Classical Presences and Modern Absences in Indian Philosophy*; *Modernity in Indian Social Theory*; *Philosophy and India: Ancestors, Outsiders and Predecessors*; *Debating Vivekananda: A Reader*, editor; *Desire and Liberation: Biography of a Text* by Vaddera Chandidas, an editor. All published by Oxford University Press. Routledge publishes *Modern Frames and Premodern Themes in Indian Philosophy: Border, Self and Other*; *Calibrating Western Philosophy for India: Rousseau, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari and Vaddera Chandidas*. His edited volume is titled *Seven Sages: Selected Essays of Ramchandra Gandhi*, published by Penguin. He wrote a monthly column from October 2019 to February 2024 for the English daily, *The Telegraph*, Kolkata.

SESSION 1.A | Heart, Mind, and Harmony: New Perspectives in Chinese Philosophy

Title: Rethinking Mental Life in the Chinese Tradition: Beyond the Dualism–Holism Dichotomy

Name and Institution: Arkadiusz Gut (The Nicolaus Copernicus University)

Abstract: For many years, scholars have debated whether the Chinese intellectual tradition should be understood as holist or whether, as some have argued, it actually exhibits a form of mind–body dualism, albeit one quite different from its Western counterpart. More recent approaches, including those of Edward Slingerland, challenge the entrenched image of “Chinese holism” by pointing to early textual distinctions between mind and body and to allegedly universal, “intuitive” dualist tendencies. Critics of Slingerland, including Dawei Pan (Pan 2017), emphasize that readings attributing hidden dualism to Chinese thought oversimplify the sources and perpetuate a myth of radical cultural otherness, disregarding the monistic foundations of classical philosophy and medicine. Earlier scholarship also highlighted that the conceptual difficulties associated with the Western mind–body split were largely absent in China, where body and mind were treated as mutually entangled aspects of a single process (Jullien 2007; Lewis 2006; Hall & Ames 1987). Particular importance was attributed to the notion of xīn (心) — the “heart–mind” — and to qì (气) as a bridge between the physical and the psychical, preventing the emergence of a substantive dualism (Graham 1989; Bloom 1997).

Such holist interpretations were widely accepted among Chinese humanists as well, as seen in Tang Yijie's rejection of a fundamental subject–object divide (Tang 2007). Recent research on folk psychology suggests, however, that the debate on Chinese conceptions of mind and body cannot be reduced to the dichotomy “dualism vs. holism,” and that it must take into account more nuanced conceptual categories that actually function in linguistic and cultural practice, such as *líng hún* (灵魂, soul) and *xīn líng* (心灵, mind/heart–mind). As shown by Gut et al. (2021), the very choice of these terms reflects distinct cultural embeddings: *líng hún* (灵魂) evokes dimensions of afterlife and spirituality, whereas *xīn líng* (心灵) refers to cognitive–emotional processes tied to the function of *xīn* as heart–mind. Comparative studies by Weisman et al. (2021) further demonstrate that intuitive psychological partitions across five cultures do not follow the Western mind–body axis but instead cluster around three categories — “body,” “heart,” and “mind” — which overlap in culturally specific ways. These findings indicate that, in the Chinese case as well, a multilayered model, sensitive to different levels of folk intuitions, may be more accurate than simply attributing monism or dualism to an entire tradition. Wang Qian's work adds another dimension by showing that the classical distinction between *xīn* (心) and *nǎo* (脑) is not equivalent to the Western mind–brain divide, but instead reflects two different modes of cognition: holistic, intuitive, embodied *yòng xīn* (用心) and analytical, rule-based *dòng nǎo* (动脑). In the context of contemporary debates on artificial intelligence, Wang argues that AI reproduces primarily *dòng nǎo*-type cognition — logic, analysis, computation — while failing to simulate intuition, holistic judgment, and the moral dimension of thought associated with *xīn* (心). This reveals that the Chinese tradition employs a richer conceptual map than Western dualism, one capable of differentiating between qualitatively distinct forms of thinking typically collapsed into the single category “mind.” As a result, Wang suggests that Chinese research on dualism can acquire new relevance when viewed in relation to AI. (1) In our approach, we aim to shift the discussion beyond the simple opposition “dualism versus holism” and to ask whether, in light of contemporary research on folk psychology — understood as culturally embedded intuitions about mental life — the Chinese tradition does not in fact operate with more subtle distinctions than those usually attributed to it in Western scholarship (see Gut et al. 2021; Weisman et al. 2021). (2) In particular, juxtaposing concepts such as *líng hún* (灵魂) and *xīn líng* (心灵) with the tripartite model of mentality identified in cross-cultural field research, structured around “body,” “heart,” and “mind”, reveals that the intuitive “psychic architecture” in China is more differentiated than classical monist or holist accounts suggest (Gut et al. 2021; Weisman et al. 2021). (3) Furthermore, Wang Qian's work shows that contemporary Chinese reflection — especially in debates on artificial intelligence, develops distinct and cognitively meaningful differentiations between “heart” (心) and “brain” (脑), suggesting that the Chinese tradition possesses its own, more precise tools for describing mental activity than Western dualist models (Wang 2023). (4) Our goal, therefore, is to revitalize the debate by confronting classical dualism and the imagined “Chinese holism” with the empirically grounded tripartite model and with new conceptual distinctions emerging in contemporary Chinese philosophy and cognitive science — and to propose an alternative account of mental life in the Chinese tradition that better captures its multidimensional character.

Title: “Harmony” in Contemporary Chinese Thought: A Way to Heal the World?

Name and Institution: Dušan Vávra (Masaryk University)

Abstract: This paper is a critical analysis of the ways contemporary Chinese authors use the concept of “harmony” (or related ideas) as a specific value defining China as a contrast to opposite values of the West. I argue that a typical problematic feature of this approach is contrasting idealized “China” with the reality of the West. Two issues are typically omitted: On one hand, in the West, there is a long history of lofty ideals, of both Christian and secular nature. Of course, in their translation to reality, these ideals proved problematic or even resulted in horrors (of colonialism and racism, for example). On the other hand, however, Chinese ideals also have their counterparts in real historical events or social structures that appear much less idealistic. In this paper, first, I focus on the ways Chinese authors construct the image of the other, that is, on the distinction civilization – barbarism (or civilised – less civilised). In the idealized picture, China is presented as an all-inclusive whole “denying the existence of any pagan” (Zhao Tingyang) or advocating “fundamental commensurability or oneness underlying all things, whether animals, demons, or non-Chinese” (Xiang Shuchen). In these approaches, China is presented as an alternative cultural power well-equipped to solve various world problems caused by the West. In the next step, I am searching and analysing examples of how the idea of “harmony” translates into reality in selected works of Chinese literature, mostly pre-modern. I analyse the ways the harmonious inclusion of the other necessarily entails hierarchies and the problem of harmony as hierarchy. I argue that hierarchy is necessarily implied by the way “harmony” is typically conceived of in Chinese literature and I analyse the specific ways of exclusion in the seemingly all-inclusive concept of harmony.

SESSION 1.B | Meditation, Mind, and Philosophical Therapy

Title: Right View vs Right Action

Name and Institution: Szymon Bogacz (Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Abstract: I present and discuss an argument to the conclusion that it is sometimes better to act wrongly and hold a right view than to hold a wrong view and act rightly. This counterintuitive conclusion derives from Āryadeva’s (ca. 3rd c. CE) *Catuhśataka* and its *Dasheng guang bailun shilun* 大乘廣百論釋論 (T1571) commentary by Dharmapāla (ca. 530-561 CE). After presenting the argument in its original context, I analyze it in the context of contemporary ethics of belief. I argue that the argument provides insight into the harm of believing or accepting a view. This piece of insight is that if a belief or a view carries the risk of harm and damages people’s interests, then it is harmful, and this harm may outweigh the harm of morally wrong action.

Title: Beyond Incommensurability: Nagarjuna and Spinoza on Healing
Name and Institution: Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam)

Abstract: According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the modern language of morality is an incoherent jumble of fragments of different, and incommensurable, conceptual schemes; if we want to understand and overcome this moral predicament, he adds, we must understand the history of moral philosophy. The history MacIntyre then proceeds to sketch, however, is not only thoroughly Eurocentric; it is also based on a communitarian assumption that traditions, communities, and forms of life are discreet and pre-politically constituted entities. Although MacIntyre's historically aware communitarianism helps us to move beyond naïve earlier attempts at comparative philosophy, we can escape its conceptual and methodological confines by pursuing a global and interconnected history that is alive to long-distance intellectual contacts and to different forms of domination; and by looking at philosophy in terms not of conceptual schemes but of therapeutic practices aimed at alleviating human suffering; although therapeia is relatively underdeveloped in the history of (moral) philosophy, it provides a fruitful perspective both on seemingly familiar philosophers and on comparative questions. Here, I will not tackle this – vast – broader project frontally, but approach it from the side, by focusing on two unrelated thinkers, viz., Spinoza and Nāgārjuna. We can overcome a fixation on the – real and irreducible – differences between these two by considering their philosophical doctrines as parts not of radically different conceptual schemes or systems, but of practices of healing. And indeed, both criticize the 'scholastic' traditions from which they hail; and both describe how, in doing so, one can achieve a state of tranquility or peace of mind (paśama in Nāgārjuna MMK XXII.15, XXV.24, beatitudo in Spinoza, Ethics IV App4, V P42). In short, looking at philosophical traditions in terms of therapeia rather than ways of life, let alone concepts, discourses or doctrines, may invite us to rethink questions of incommensurability and universality.

**SESSION 1.C | Intercultural Philosophy as a Way of Life:
Philosophical Therapeutics in Asia**

Title: Deep Listening as Spiritual Exercise: Pierre Hadot, Buddhist Śravaṇa, and the Practice of Philosophical Therapy

Name and Institution: Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette (Manipal Academy of Higher Education)

Abstract: This talk explores 'Deep Listening' as a spiritual exercise and therapeutic practice, placing Pierre Hadot's interpretation of Greco-Roman philosophy in conversation with Buddhist traditions of śravaṇa (hearing). Both view listening as the beginning of wisdom and the continuous act through which philosophical life unfolds. For Hadot, listening underlies the spiritual exercises that define philosophy as a way of life—a discipline of presence and

discernment practiced through dialogue, reading, and inner reflection. For Buddhism, listening is the first link in the chain of awakening: the act by which the Dharma is heard (*śruta*), reflected upon (*cinta*), and realized through meditation (*bhāvana*). In both cases, philosophy begins not with assertion or discourse, but with cultivated attention, the receptive openness that allows meaning to resound within oneself until it transforms one's relation to reality. Both approaches challenge the modern tendency to equate knowing with theory and discourse, proposing instead an epistemology of receptivity and resonance, an ethics of attention that makes wisdom inseparable from relationality and transformation. The first part of the paper develops a comparative phenomenology of listening, unfolding six interrelated dimensions—epistemic, ethical, affective, bodily, meditative, and soteriological—shared by both Hadot's and Buddhist frameworks. Particular attention is given to the role of textual study as a discipline of listening, training one to attend both to others and to oneself. In the second part, the talk focuses on the pedagogical and practical implications of this comparative inquiry, proposing a concrete methodology for cultivating listening as philosophical therapy—particularly within modern education and clinical philosophy—grounded in the Buddhist and Hadotian frameworks. Three interdependent modes are outlined: (1) Disciplined Attention (Body and Mind), (2) Dialogical Reflection (Self and Other), and (3) Contemplative Silence (Integration). These stages parallel the classical Buddhist triad *śruta–cintā–bhāvanā* and Hadot's cycle of listening, writing, and thinking. Both traditions ultimately reveal listening as a therapeutic act: one that heals the division between speech and understanding, between thought and action. The paper seeks to integrate these insights within a pedagogical framework designed to train students in "Deep Listening," a crucial skill for philosophical counselling and Socratic dialogue, transferrable to most domains of learning and communication. Ultimately, this paper argues that philosophy's renewal, both as an academic discipline and as an art of living, depends on recovering listening as its core practice of self-formation. To listen is to dwell in the interval between knowing and acting, self and other, speech and silence. It is to engage in a discipline of receptivity that transforms understanding into compassionate care, and dialogue into communion. In an age where everyone speaks but few truly listen, this may be philosophy's most urgent and transformative spiritual exercise.

Title: The soteriological aspect of the dharma theory and Abhidharma as a transformative tool for the practitioner of the mind: A glance into Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośabhāṣya

Name and Institution: Nino Kilarjani (Manipal Academy of Higher Education)

Abstract: The Abhidharma method of classifying and discerning dharma-s, known as dharmapracaya, analyzing those phenomena constitutive of the primary content of Abhidharma literature, appears early, in the sūtra strata of Buddhism already, and not only within Abhidharma literature. While Hillebeitel notes, "dharma theory [...] can be only partially traced from the Sūtra Basket", texts such as the "Dasuttara Sutta lists 550 dhammas to be cultivated or abandoned. The Saṅgīti Sutta gives an even larger number, and the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta lists 1,011." (Hillebeitel 2014, 124). This paper does not directly

examine the sūtras, but rather seek to emphasize that the method of “listing the dhamma-s to be cultivated or abandoned” has long formed an integral part of Buddhist hermeneutics and spiritual practice, to borrow from Pierre Hadot’s terminology. This dimension of Abhidharma tends to be ignored in scholarly literature, including by authors who maintain that none of the foundational doctrines underlying the Abhidharma project were originally conceived as purely ontological or metaphysical, but rather as fundamentally soteriological, part and parcels of contemplative practice. Thus, the paper insists that Abhidharma’s theoretical formulations were never intended to remain purely theoretical. Rather, I argue, it was meant to be inseparable from the Buddhist mode of disciplined intellectual practice, directed toward nirvāṇa. To highlight this aspect of Abhidharma, the paper employs hermeneutical approaches developed by the famous German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and the lesser known Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili. Both original thinkers ground interpretation in a specific way of reading a text: as not something of complete and final value in itself, as a text of the author alone, but as a tool for transformation, in which the reader is as much an active participant as the author. In this light, I examine Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośabhāṣya to show how, in his own work, the essence of Abhidharma was understood as a practical soteriological tool. Particular attention is given to the resonances between Vasubandhu’s explanation of the title of his work and his definition of the dharma of pratisaṅkhyānirodha (cessation through knowledge). My reading of Vasubandhu’s discussion on asaṃskṛta dharma-s seeks to highlight how the study of Abhidharma is meant as a practical, liberative way of practicing intellectual contemplation.

SESSION 2.A | Food Survival and Diasporic Healing Practices

Title: Bene Israel Healing Practices in Mumbai: A Study of Hindu, Konkani, and Marathi Adaptations

Name and Institution: Emily Silverman (Graduate Theological Union)

Abstract: This paper examines key traditional healing practices of the Bene Israel community of Mumbai and analyzes how these practices absorbed and adapted elements from Maharashtrian, Konkani, and Marathi folk healing traditions. I investigate whether these practices can be understood as syncretic, shaped by the community’s long coexistence with surrounding Hindu cultures. According to Bene Israel oral history, the community traces its origins to survivors of a shipwreck near Navagaon in the second century BCE. Over centuries, they became known as “Saturday Oil Pressers” and developed ritual practices that blended Jewish customs with local healing systems, including Ayurvedic concepts. A central example is the Malida ceremony, a ritual of gratitude and protection associated with the prophet Elijah, in which offerings of poha, fruits, and flowers accompany specific prayers. This paper explores the role of herbs, oils, teas, and protective amulets (kavacha), as well as the significant involvement of women as ritual healers. My analysis draws on oral history interviews with members of the Bene Israel and on scholarship by Shalva Weil, Schifra Strizower, Nathan Katz, Ellen S. Goldberg, and Ruby Daniels. Through this material, I argue that Bene Israel healing traditions

represent a uniquely localized form of Jewish ritual practice shaped through cultural interaction in India.

SESSION 2.B | Comparative Philosophies of Suffering and Resilience

Title: Healing Through Detachment: The Case of Epictetus and the Buddhist Parable of Two Arrows in the Sallattha Sutta

Name and Institution: Michal Damski (University of Warsaw)

Abstract: The problems of suffering and distress, along with the means of overcoming them, lie at the foundation of both Stoic and early Buddhist philosophies. Despite significant cultural and historical differences, these traditions offer strikingly similar therapeutic insights. When addressing the issue of suffering each of these philosophies emphasizes the need for inner transformation and mindful detachment rather than changing the external circumstances. Epictetus, throughout the *Encheiridion* and *Discourses*, discusses the discipline of judgment and the practice of *chrēsis phantasiōn* - the correct use of impressions - as the main tools for overcoming fear and anxiety. While at first sight the external events may seem to be the main reason for distress, its root cause is in fact our belief about what is truly good and evil. The Buddhist Parable of Two Arrows found in *Samyutta Nikāya* (Sallattha Sutta, SN 36.6) draws a clear distinction between physical and mental suffering experienced by the "uninstructed worldling" - the former stemming from the actual unpleasant feeling and the latter from ignorance and attachment. The emphasis of the sutta is put on the mental aspect represented by the second arrow, since it is the only one that we have influence on. One important and puzzling difference between these two perspectives is that while Epictetus seems to completely disregard the suffering caused by external circumstances, Buddhist philosophy at least partly acknowledges its significance, offering perhaps a more nuanced view on human condition. This presentation provides a comparative analysis of the Stoic and Buddhist views on suffering and healing, revealing not only the universality of the problem but also a potential therapeutic common ground.

Title: Healing Through Crisis: Positive Disintegration, Anti-Psychiatry, and Buddhist Paths to Resilient Self-Realization

Name and Institution: Krzysztof Korzyk (independent scholar)

Abstract: This paper argues that certain forms of psychic crisis—often medicalized as “disorders”—can be reframed as ethically charged apertures for growth when read through three complementary lenses: Kazimierz Dąbrowski’s Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD), mid-century anti-psychiatry (with Ronald D. Laing as a focal node), and Buddhist philosophies and practices across India, Tibet, China, and Japan. TPD reconceives psychoneurotic tension as developmentally positive: the clash of lower and higher value-structures activates an inner psychic milieu, the subject–object relation in oneself, and a “third factor” of autonomous, value-

guided choice. Anti-psychiatry exposes the politics of normalization that can foreclose such development, advocating accompaniment and community that protect the person's meaning-making trajectory. Buddhist traditions contribute a sophisticated praxis—ethical discipline, attentional training, and contemplative cultivation—that metabolizes distress without reification, converting reactivity into clarity and compassionate agency. Methodologically, the paper combines comparative hermeneutics with a conceptual cartography distinguishing (i) ontologies of “illness,” (ii) mechanisms of healing, and (iii) the normative status of conflict. I show, first, a convergent non-pathologizing stance toward certain crises; second, a productive tension between Dąbrowskian agency (selective affirmation/negation via the third factor) and Buddhist non-grasping (choice without clinging); and third, a “technique bridge” linking autopsychotherapy (TPD) with meditative disciplines as stabilizers of positive disintegration. The paper also specifies safeguards against romanticizing breakdown, outlining criteria for when containment and intervention are ethically indicated. In times of pandemic fallout, ecological anxiety, and social precarity, this triangulation reframes healing as value-clarification, relational protection, and disciplined practice rather than mere symptom suppression—an actionable philosophy of care that honors autonomy while embedding persons within communities and practices capable of transforming suffering into resilient self-realization.

Title: Epistemology for Well-being and Healing: Toward a Buddhist Virtue Epistemology

Name and Institution: Keya Maitra (University of Hawai'i)

Abstract: While the value of well-being is rarely questioned, ideas differ widely about how to actualize the flourishing that well-being entails. Since well-being has been discussed primarily in ethics, the relevance of a thorough discussion of epistemology has remained under explored. However, taking into account that people might be drawing from different and possibly non-overlapping value sets in their articulation of well-being, it becomes evident that some foundational questions could afford us a more complete account of well-being. What is equally important is the conceptions and scope of healing such an account of well-being affords. Moreover, the nature of the world in which such well-being and healing are actualized and the associated methodologies such a world view makes available become equally crucial. This paper proposes to investigate whether certain epistemological framing might offer better support for the actualization of human flourishing and healing than others in our contemporary world. Further, this paper argues that epistemology and the questions of methodology are relevant for human flourishing especially if we envision such flourishing to enable deep healing for people of all walks, genders, ethnicities and continents. This paper will defend three specific theses: first, epistemological and methodological considerations are important aspects of any discussion of well-being and healing. Second, such an epistemology has to be able to support transformation and support the social turn in epistemology. Thus, it follows virtue epistemological grounding is what is required. The final thesis will develop a Buddhist virtue epistemology by drawing out the philosophical implications of the practices of mindfulness and meditation developed in different Buddhist traditions especially for healing various precarities experienced in our contemporary world. This account will highlight the relevance of Buddhist virtue epistemology for articulating a robust account of well-being and healing.

SESSION 2.C | Selfhood, Ritual, and Philosophical Therapy

Title: Ritual of Kuldevi Worship in the Jain Community of Kutch: Continuity, Identity, and the Sacred Feminine

Name and Institution: Kamini Gogri (Independent Scholar; currently Project Consultant at SOAS, Jain Center, UK)

Abstract: This paper examines the ritual of Kuldevi (ancestral goddess) worship among the Jain communities of Kutch, Gujarat, as a living negotiation between ascetic doctrine and embodied devotion. Although Jain philosophy foregrounds *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and liberation from all attachments, the persistence of Kuldevi veneration reveals a subtle reconciliation between metaphysical renunciation and social belonging. Drawing upon ethnographic observation, oral narratives, and philosophical hermeneutics, the study argues that Kuldevi worship functions as a moral and metaphysical bridge—anchoring the transcendent ethics of Jainism within the affective, gendered, and relational world of lineage, family, and cultural memory. In the Kutchi context, the Kuldevi embodies the sacred feminine principle of *śakti* as guardian of the *kul* (clan). Her ritual invocation, offerings (*upacāra*), and collective *ārātī* reaffirm kinship continuity and moral gratitude, allowing domestic piety to coexist with ascetic aspiration. Theologically, this ritual demonstrates Jainism’s pluralist ontology of *anekāntavāda*—the recognition of multiple valid perspectives—where devotion and detachment interpenetrate rather than oppose one another. Philosophically, the Kuldevi becomes a site of memory as *dharma*: an embodied reminder that ethical life is sustained not only by renunciation but also by remembrance, reciprocity, and relation. In bridging metaphysical transcendence with ancestral rootedness, the Kuldevi ritual enacts a phenomenology of belonging that sustains the Jain moral universe amid temporal impermanence and diaspora.

Title: Candrakīrti on Absence-cognition as Soteriological Remedy

Name and Institution: Aditya Guntoori (McGill University)

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present a view of the knowledge of absences in Candrakīrti (~600 CE). There are systematic debates on the knowledge of absences taking place in his time with figures like Dignaga (~480 CE) and Uddyotakara (~550 CE) taking clear positions on the issue. Candrakīrti, as a member of the Madhyamaka school, espouses a skepticism about positions altogether in favour of a therapeutic notion of philosophy. As a result, he avoids taking a position on the existing debate. I will show that despite his skepticism, chapter twelve of Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapada* on The Absence of Being in Things provides some notable reflections on absences. There we initially appear to find a theory on the knowledge of absences. An agent, for instance, who falsely projects (*prapanca*) that things exist with intrinsic nature (*svabhava*) may have corrective cognitions of the absence of intrinsic nature in things. And since intrinsic nature is not found anywhere in reality, every cognition for an agent

of this kind will be a cognition of absence. Although these cognitions correct our false preconceptions, they cannot be considered knowledge. For Candrakirti, there are no absences and consequently there is no knowledge of absences. Instead, absence cognitions, although ultimately false, can provide some therapeutic value to an agent who falsely projects intrinsic nature onto things. Similarly, a cognition of an absence of an absence of intrinsic nature can provide some therapeutic value to an agent who falsely projects absenceness onto things. But the utmost therapeutic value comes from the avoidance of projection altogether and the knowledge claims that come along with it. Claims on the knowledge of absences, being projections themselves, are not exceptions to the analysis.

Wednesday, May 20

GRADUATE STUDENT AWARDS

3rd place

Title: When Worlds Cannot Be Traveled: Caste, Epistemology and Feminist Decolonial Philosophy

Name and Institution: Dalorina Nath (Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay)

Abstract: This paper develops a pluralizing decolonial critique by examining how dominant feminist decolonial frameworks from the Global North fail to engage with caste, a foundational structure of oppression in the Indian and greater South Asian context. While Latinx decolonial thought challenge Western epistemologies, they remain structured by a race/coloniality binary that obscures other systems of difference. For many in the Global South, such frameworks, if not fully Western, remain Western enough to feel epistemically distant. A pluralizing decolonial critique seeks to broaden these conversations by foregrounding marginalised epistemologies and opening space for alternative decolonial genealogies.

Drawing on philosophers of caste such as Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, I argue that caste is not an additive identity category but a distinct social ontology that reshapes fundamental epistemic questions. I approach this by critically engaging with María Lugones' influential theory of "world-traveling." While Lugones herself does not describe world-traveling in the language of healing, I read her theory as a form of epistemological healing, a practice that attempts to heal fractured relations of knowing and relating to the other across differences.

However, this reading quickly reveals the limits of world-traveling in caste-structured contexts. World-traveling assumes a degree of fluidity in navigating identities and worlds that caste does not permit. The very conditions that would make epistemological healing possible such as proximity, mutual recognition, sensory openness, are reorganised under caste as mechanisms of separation and hierarchy. Lugones' framework thus inadvertently universalises a form of

healing and solidarity that is unavailable, and at times dangerous, for those living under caste. It forces us to think: if some worlds cannot be traveled without violence, should world-traveling remain our model of healing at all, or must decoloniality learn to imagine healing from within worlds that refuse crossing?

2nd place

Title: Healing through Loss: Between Buddhist Thought and the Western Crisis of Finitude

Name and Institution: Tomaso Pignocchi (University of Rome–LUMSA / Catholic University of Paris)

Abstract: This inquiry proposes an intercultural account of philosophy as a practice of healing, beginning from the idea that philosophy itself arises from suffering rather than wonder. In fact, while the Western tradition—from Aristotle to Heidegger—grounds philosophy in *thauma*, the astonishment before being, the Buddhist tradition locates its beginning in trauma: the existential wound of dissatisfaction (*duḥkha*).

Through this contrast, I argue that the metaphysical impulse of Western thought—the search for timeless foundations, pure logic, or ideal forms—can be read as a defensive reaction to the unease provoked by impermanence. Thus, as Nietzsche observed, the metaphysical healer is a bad healer, for his treatment takes the form of a *pharmakon* in the Greek sense: both cure and poison. Following this line of thought, and drawing on the Buddhist analysis of craving (*trṣṇā*) and ignorance (*avidyā*), I suggest that metaphysical systems arise precisely from the refusal to accept transience and relationality, thereby perpetuating the very suffering they seek to overcome. A genuine therapy must therefore concern itself with healing this false cure, which is, in fact, the real illness itself.

Reading Freud's *Transience*, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, and Emerson's *Experience* through a Buddhist lens, I show how each articulates, in different idioms, a therapeutic movement: from grief and resistance to acceptance and renewed attention to the ordinary. In this movement, healing is not the attainment of an immutable truth, but the release of our attachment to such a truth. Finally, in dialogue with Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamaka*, this approach presents the return to the ordinary world as the core of a "philosophy as therapy": a process that dissolves the illusion of duality (*saṃsāra/nirvāṇa*, appearance/reality) and reopens thought to the rough ground of becoming. Healing, here, means learning to dwell in impermanence without seeking refuge from it.

1st place

Title: Prakṛti as a Mother: Reading the Sāṅkhya Kārikā through the Feminist Lens of Care

Name and Institution: Sarnali Chatterjee (Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay)

Abstract: The Sāṅkhya school of Indian thought presents a staunch dualism between Prakṛti (primordial matter) and Puruṣa (consciousness). Īśvarakṛṣṇa's Sāṅkhya Kārikā [SK] involves the gendering of Prakṛti and Puruṣa into the heterosexual male-female binary, such that Prakṛti is characterised as the feminine principle, and Puruṣa is characterised as the masculine principle. In traditional Western philosophy, gendered dichotomies have been necessarily hierarchical, such that categories associated with the masculine, including the mind, consciousness, and reason, are privileged over those associated with the feminine, including body, matter, and affect. Feminist philosophers have criticised such hierarchical dualisms that largely contribute to gender-oppression. In contrast, Sāṅkhya does not privilege mind over matter as they are not separate entities; the power of thought resides in vyakta Prakṛti or manifest reality. Rather than being passive, Prakṛti is the independent, agential, dynamic, and active principle that procreates the phenomenal world.

In this paper, I explore Prakṛti's role and kriya or activity in the Sāṅkhya system. I show that Prakṛti's characterisation in the SK provides insight into her role within the tradition.

Further, I bring Sāṅkhya into dialogue with the contemporary tradition of feminist care ethics, the latter being a tradition that utilises a relational approach towards morality and justice-frameworks. I believe that reading Prakṛti from the lens of care highlights the saṃyoga or conjunction between Prakṛti and Puruṣa through the concept of relationality, and further helps us recognise Prakṛti's central role and labour within the Sāṅkhya system.

I philosophically analyse and read Prakṛti's portrayal in the SK as evoking the impression of a mother involving the roles of birthing, procreating, nurturing, and fostering the world. I highlight how the world is created through the saṃyoga between Prakṛti and Puruṣa. Then, I deploy concepts such as responsibility, relationality, and preserving the self, from the feminist care ethical tradition to further understand Prakṛti's role as a mother. Through this paper, I show that not only does the lens of feminist care ethics help us understand and highlight the Prakṛti's role within Sāṅkhya, but Sāṅkhya speaks back to the care tradition, potentially furnishing feminists with new concepts of mothering, relationality, and care from Indian thought, thereby broadening its scope.

SESSION 3.A | Remembering Anand Vaidya

Title: The Significance of the Reciprocity of Moral Regard: Reflections on Vaidya's Hypothesis of Moral Standing

Name and Institution: Douglas Berger (Leiden University)

Abstract: Vaidya has, with his consistent degrees of insight and prescience, that the standard for moral regard set out in the 2024 New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness which limits such regard to sentient animals, is unjustifiably restricted. As he quite rightly points out, the Jain tradition extends moral regard to plants. This move was undertaken by Jains not with regard to the modern criterion of "survival-oriented behaviours," through which philosophers like Singer have defended animal rights. Instead, the Jains equate sentience with consciousness, and so to the degree that plants initiate actions do prolong their lives, they must do so consciously. Jains regard all forms of life in this way, and as a result lay down moral obligations that human beings must comply with regarding all life forms. Bringing AI into the picture complicates the matter because, given the likely outcomes of rapidly developing projects, AGI may overtake the livelihoods of several billion people across the globe. Plants and other life forms have not posed this threat to human well-being for a long time. This circumstance begs the question of whether, if we are to consider AI conscious and worthy of moral regard, then ought we also to expect AI systems which have surpassed human beings in so many crucial skills to have moral regard for human beings? And if we are warranted such expectations, how can we, at this crucial stage, ensure that the human-AI moral regard is reciprocal?

Title: The In(significance) of Sentience (a paper written by Anand Vaidya)

Name and Institution: Manjula Menon (independent scholar)

Abstract: This essay explores panpsychism, the view that consciousness is a fundamental feature of reality, through the lenses of science fiction and philosophical inquiry, centered on the work and life of the philosopher Anand Vaidya (1976–2024). Three panpsychist science fiction writers are examined: Philip K. Dick, who fictionalized his "pink light" visions into his VALIS trilogy; Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who fused rocket science with cosmic philosophy, envisioning consciousness evolving toward "radiant humanity" amid space colonization; and Aldous Huxley, whose Vedāntic perennial philosophy and mescaline-induced perceptions of "Mind at Large" affirm an immanent Ground accessible through mystical practice. Each writer grounded belief in experience as well as abstraction, a stance Vaidya championed by integrating classical Indian concepts (Vedānta, Rāmānuja's qualified non-dualism) with analytic debates on David Chalmers' hard problem. Drawing parallels to Gödel's incompleteness, the Λ CDM model's "dark" universe, and the persistent human sense that modernity's materialist picture remains radically incomplete, the essay argues that grasping the nature of consciousness may require an experiential vantage beyond physicalist axioms.

Title: Robo-Buddhas, Suffering, Moral Standing: A Conversation with Anand Vaidya

Name and Institution: Ethan Mills (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)

Abstract: The late Anand Vaidya (1976-2024) argued that machines can have moral standing in light of his claim that sentience is not a necessary condition for moral standing. After considering his examples of zombies, Vulcans, and robots, I focus on Vaidya's mention of Buddhism through a deeper analysis of the role of suffering in Buddhist philosophy and whether what Mark Siderits referred to as "Robo-Buddhas" would meet Vaidya's criteria for moral standing. Could Buddhism's commitment to healing through ending suffering make sense without phenomenal consciousness? Are consciousness and suffering both ultimately illusory? Might Vaidya's concept of preferentially-tied computational intelligence explain suffering—a being aims to satisfy their preferences, which fails, and suffering arises? But if the Buddhist path requires eliminating preferences entirely (the very thing that allows for moral standing), are we left with the surprising conclusion that Buddhas lack moral standing? Does the healing promised by the Third Noble Truth require eliminating one's own moral standing? Is this form of healing worth the price of such radical transformation? Is this a reason to reevaluate Vaidya's theory, Buddhist philosophy, or both? I sketch some possible answers to these questions; by doing so, I hope to encourage others to continue the philosophical conversations that Vaidya began.

SESSION 3.B | Ethical and Moral Healing in Buddhist Philosophy

Title: The Transformation of Karma through Tiantai Zhiguan

Name and Institution: Zicheng Lei (The University of Chicago)

Abstract: In conditions of pervasive instability, many individuals adopt fatalism, viewing karma as an unchangeable external force. Tiantai Buddhism offers an innovative framework through its doctrines of "Three Thousand Realms in One Thought-Moment" and the "Inherent Inclusion of Good and Evil." This view posits that every thought-moment intrinsically contains all realms; good and evil, delusion and awakening, coexist in mutual integration. Karma is thus re-conceptualized not as something passively imposed, but as an intrinsic cognition arising from the nature of the mind itself. This paper argues that the Tiantai interpretation renders karma a dynamic phenomenon that can be reorganized cognitively, practically, and existentially. Analyzing the contemplative structure in the Mohe zhiguan and the "Threefold Truth" doctrine, I show that Tiantai thought offers a philosophical method for re-understanding one's own karmic agency. By discerning the inherent inter-inclusion of good and evil within the mind, the practitioner transforms karma from passive endurance into an active metaphysical practice. The concrete operation of zhi (止, calming) and guan (观, insight) is key to this transformation. Zhi suppresses the habitual momentum of karmic tendencies, while guan penetrates their nature, revealing that karma and mind arise from the same original source. This Tiantai perspective demonstrates that healing is not the negation of suffering but the re-interpretation of its

underlying structure, allowing “evil” and “karma” to become gateways to nirvāṇa. Through its holistic doctrine, Tiantai Buddhism offers a new path for rethinking subjectivity, causality, and the possibilities of healing in an age of crisis.

Title: Dāna (Giving) as Healing: Buddhist Insights from the Āgama/Nikāya Sūtras to Yogācāra

Name and Institution: Bin Liu (The University of Hong Kong)

Abstract: Drawing on the Buddhist Āgama/Nikāya Sūtras, this study explores the intrinsic basis for why the act of dāna (giving) is considered “virtuous” and further examines the mechanism by which it exerts its healing function. The methodology employed in this study is conceptual and textual analysis, based on the Chinese Āgama and the Pāli Nikāya along with their ancient commentaries. This study finds that although dāna has been emphasized and recommended across most religious and philosophical traditions, in the Buddhist philosophical context, its moral goodness does not arise from obedience to an external authority, the fulfillment of a prescribed duty, or the pursuit of external maximum utility. Rather, its foundation is internal—specifically, the cultivation and strengthening of wholesome mental factors (cetasika), with non-greed (alobha) as their representative. This, precisely, constitutes the mechanism through which dāna manifests its healing power because in Buddhism, the virtuousness is rooted in alignment with Nirvāṇa, which is understood as the state of ultimate joy and freedom from suffering—the “ultimate healing.” In ordinary life, the manifestation of virtuous mental factors allows one to partially share in this ultimate healing. More concretely, the practice of dāna helps to weaken the Five Hindrances—greed, ill will, restlessness and remorse, sloth and torpor, and doubt—which are the principal causes of psychological distress. By doing so, it renders the mind clearer, stronger, and more capable. This study thus provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the healing mechanism of Buddhist giving, offering a meaningful reference for addressing contemporary mental and spiritual challenges.

SESSION 3.C | Philosophical Therapies of Mind and Self

Title: From Ego to Surrender: Vijayadāsa’s Spiritual Psychology for Inner Well-being

Name and Institution: Shrinidhi P. (Poornaprajna samshodhana mandiram, Bengaluru)

Abstract: The Haridāsa tradition has contributed immensely to Kannada spiritual literature by conveying profound Vedāntic truths through simple, experiential compositions. Among the prominent Haridāsas, Vijayadāsa (18th century), revered as “Dāsashreṣṭha,” stands out for his voluminous and deeply insightful works grounded in Madhva philosophy. His renowned suḷādi beginning with “ninnādhīna deha prāṇendriya karma ācarane” presents a powerful philosophical-psychological remedy for mental distress. The composition emphasizes the principle that every aspect of life—body, mind, senses, actions, emotions, achievements, and

even spiritual progress—is under the supreme will of the Divine. Vijayadāsa exposes the root of human sorrow as *svātantrya-bhrānti* (the illusion of personal independence). Even when knowledge of God’s supremacy exists, it often fails to translate into internalized experience, leading to recurring anxiety, disappointment, and instability. To address this, Vijayadāsa employs a pedagogical strategy similar to Vyāsa’s method in the *Purāṇas* and *Mahābhārata*: presenting the same truth through varied examples relevant to different psychological tendencies of individuals. The *suḷādi* illustrates that acceptance of Divine will cultivates the equanimity described in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as the mark of the *sthita-prajña*. Further, the work distinguishes *bhakti* from *ahaṅkāra*-driven spiritual effort, advocating *śaraṅāgati* as the doorway to divine remembrance and grace. Vijayadāsa seamlessly integrates the Madhva doctrine that knowledge, devotion, liberation, and even bliss in liberation are all dependent on God. Thus, the *suḷādi* serves as a spiritually grounded framework for emotional resilience and mental well-being, offering a timeless therapeutic model for contemporary life.

Title: Socio-Political Dimensions of Healing: Quest Narratives of Mental Illness in Selected Indian Life-Writings

Name and Institution: Preeti Pallavi Mohanta (The English and Foreign Languages University)

Abstract: This paper reconceives expressions of mental illness as ethically charged narrative practices that resist biomedical and moralizing framings which depoliticize suffering. It explores how lived experiences of mental illness reframe healing as an ethical and relational process rather than mere clinical recovery. Drawing on some selected first-person accounts the paper carries out a narrative inquiry and locates mental distress within intersecting structures of patriarchal control and intersectional inequalities. It majorly focuses on the specific ways in which the mind- narrative nexus of a person living with a mental illness condition scaffold efforts to make sense of the illness experience and how these narratives serve as the target of interpretation of the illness journey and a quest to achieve their constructed identity. It also delves into the affective and symbolic dimensions of their experiences, deepening the understanding of how narratives, society, and medical systems shape mental disorder. Healing is reframed not as an individualized teleology of cure but as an ethics of relationality: a praxis of memory, reciprocity, and shared vulnerability that recuperates dignity and cultivates agency. Situated within the socio-cultural milieu of India, the paper also interrogates how the glocalization of psychiatry shapes idioms of mental illness expression and admission, while acknowledging the enduring stigma mediated by cultural and structural factors. The research paper challenges authoritative psychiatric narratives, and foregrounds narrative testimony as an instrument for social transformation.

Thursday, May 21

SESSION 4.A | Survival Care and Gendered Agency

Title: *Unsung Heroines: Women and the Covid Pandemic-A Tale of Resistance, Resilience and Survival*

Name and Institution: Purnima Bhatt (Hood College)

Abstract: My paper examines the impact of the world-wide pandemic on women in India and the Global South. It focuses on their response to the devastating crisis and their remarkable resilience in the face of the economic crises, loss of jobs, increased domestic violence and abuse and hardship. Women responded with courage, innovative coping strategies, and a new sense of solidarity along with a spirit of healing. The ongoing pandemic which swept the world between 2019 and 2022 resulted in unimaginable suffering. However, what is often overlooked is that calamities such as this, affect women in very different ways than men. The impact of any crisis is never gender neutral, and Covid was no exception. Women, compared to men are more likely to be engaged in unpaid or domestic work, in food and health services, retail and entertainment sectors. They tend to participate in the informal sector of the economy and thus, more likely to lose their jobs. They are also the primary caregivers in the home and responsible for the well-being and education of their children. Thus, women were far more vulnerable, and rendered more insecure. They responded with courage and resilience. Despite the reduced economic opportunities, loss of work, increased gender violence, women in poor neighborhoods banded together. They helped each other and provided care for their children and comfort and support. This paper attempts to give a glimpse of women's agency and initiative, making them the unsung heroines.

Title: *The Ethics of Survival: Rethinking Healing, Ecology, and Social Justice*

Name and Institution: Nasiblang Chyrmang (Annamalai University)

Abstract: In the present situation, ecological collapse, recurring pandemics, and widening social inequalities, the question of how humanity survives—ethically, spiritually, and collectively—has become increasingly urgent. The theme “The Ethics of Survival: Rethinking Healing, Ecology, and Social Justice” invites philosophical reflection on the interdependence of human and non-human life, exploring how ethical frameworks can guide us toward more compassionate and sustainable forms of existence. Survival, when understood philosophically, extends beyond the biological act of endurance to encompass moral resilience, ecological balance, and the restoration of justice in fractured societies. This conference seeks to reimagine survival not as a mere continuation of life, but as a transformative process grounded in care, responsibility, and interconnectedness. Drawing on Asian, Western, and Indigenous traditions, the conference encourages dialogue that bridges metaphysical, ethical, and ecological thought. It revisits foundational philosophical ideas—such as compassion, interdependence, and harmony with nature—to address contemporary crises that challenge the human condition. Healing, in this context, is viewed as both a personal and collective undertaking: an ethical act that nurtures the self, restores the community, and sustains the planet. The ecological

dimension emphasizes that true survival requires not domination over nature but coexistence within it, guided by respect, restraint, and reciprocity. Ultimately, “The Ethics of Survival” calls for a reorientation of thought and action toward a more holistic understanding of healing—one that integrates environmental sustainability, social equity, and moral renewal. In confronting the challenges of survival, the conference envisions an ethics rooted not in fear or competition, but in solidarity, compassion, and the shared responsibility to preserve life in all its forms.

SESSION 4.B | Ritual Texts and Communal Approaches to Healing

Title: Healing of Finitude: The Phenomenology of Life in the Medicine Buddha Faith

Name and Institution: Yiwen Zhang (Tsinghua University, School of Humanities)

Abstract: This paper explores the Medicine Buddha Faith as a practice of “healing finitude” in medieval Chinese Buddhism, analyzing how it reconstructed the philosophy of life within the tension between “prolonging life” and “liberation.” While Indian Buddhism aimed at transcending birth and death, the Chinese intellectual tradition valued the continuity of life, ethical order, and worldly stability. Emerging at the intersection of these two orientations, the Medicine Buddha Faith transformed “prolonging life” from a temporal wish into an ontological realization: what is healed is not merely physical illness but the fundamental suffering arising from finite existence itself. Through the triadic structure of healing—body, mind, and karma—the faith redefines longevity as a process of awakening: bodily restoration signifies existential clarity, mental purification reorients intentionality, and karmic purification releases time from bondage. Adopting a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, this study reveals how the Medicine Buddha Faith affirms life while acknowledging death’s inevitability, integrating finitude rather than escaping it. The healing enacted by the Medicine Buddha thus transcends medical treatment and becomes a philosophical response to mortality—it transforms ritual and practice into means of attaining wholeness within limitation, discovering serenity within impermanence, and realizing the art of being in a finite world.

Title: Healing and Enlightenment through Dialogue: Ngô Thì Nhậm’s Trúc Lâm Zen and Modern Mindfulness Practices

Name and Institution: Thi Hong Tam Nguyen (School of Philosophy, Sichuan University, China)

Abstract: In an era marked by global crises—including pandemics, ecological disruptions, and social fragmentation—the pursuit of healing requires approaches that integrate individual well-being with collective flourishing. This paper situates Ngô Thì Nhậm’s Trúc Lâm Zen, a Vietnamese Buddhist tradition combining meditative practice with Confucian ethical cultivation,

in dialogue with modern secular mindfulness practices. Both traditions cultivate attention, mental clarity, and emotional balance; however, a crucial divergence emerges: contemporary mindfulness often emphasizes individual stress reduction, whereas Trúc Lâm Zen situates awareness within a broader ethical and communal horizon. Drawing on primary sources, including Trúc Lâm Tông Chỉ Nguyên Thanh and related classical texts, this study examines how ethical cultivation, compassion, and social responsibility are intrinsic to Trúc Lâm Zen. By contrast, secular mindfulness practices reveal limitations in addressing relational and ethical dimensions of well-being. From this comparative analysis, the paper proposes a model of “engaged mindfulness”—a holistic approach integrating self-awareness with ethical commitment and active concern for the community. This research demonstrates that incorporating Trúc Lâm Zen’s philosophical depth into modern mindfulness enriches both individual and collective approaches to healing. Beyond stress reduction, mindfulness is presented as a form of ethical and relational cultivation. The study contributes to comparative philosophy by underscoring the enduring relevance of classical Asian thought in addressing contemporary questions of well-being, resilience, and social flourishing. By emphasizing practical and ethical dimensions, this paper illustrates how pre-modern Asian philosophies can inform modern frameworks for holistic healing and ethical engagement.

SESSION 4.C | Healing the Self beyond Autonomy

Title: Productive Materiality of Nature: Healing by Thinking beyond the Human through Phenomenology and Advaita Vedanta

Name and Institution: Darshna Kumar (Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar)

Abstract: In times of environmental crisis, alongside questions of animal ethics, we must also attend to the very materiality of the world that surrounds us. This paper proposes a way of thinking about materiality that looks both outward—the encounter of the material and the world—and inward—toward the depths of our own material selves—through Western and Indian phenomenology, respectively. Such thinking aims to heal our mode of living by cultivating ethics grounded in relationality and respect. To think outwardly of materiality is to ask what it means to encounter the world materially. Western phenomenology discloses the objective through the subjective act, in the moment it recognizes the “there is”—a pre-ontological experience. This marks the genesis of things for us, the spontaneous arising of materiality. Yet in this experience of the “there is,” we only sense the presence of such genesis without ever fully grasping it. Merleau-Ponty illustrates this through Paul Cézanne’s painting, where colors do not merely depict but bring forth the world. Here, materiality appears in fleeting glimpses, offering a tacit sense of totality that exceeds human comprehension. This moment resists articulation because it has a sense of its own. For the inward movement of thinking materiality, this paper turns to Advaita Vedānta, which performs a reduction in the opposite direction by purifying intentional relations. It allows us to think of materiality by revealing our own bodily phenomenological materiality—one that, paradoxically, denies the body yet unveils our being as pure embodiment.

Vedanta meditation reaches a level where purified materiality makes sentience present in every field of consciousness, that is, everything that we can possibly think of.

Title: Healing the Precarious Self: A Vedānta Approach to Rites of Agency Sanity

Name and Institution: Srinivasa Kumar N. Acharya (Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (MISHA), MAHE, Manipal)

Name and Institution: M. Vishnuvardhan (Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (MISHA), MAHE, Manipal)

Name and Institution: G. B. Vanditha (Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (MISHA), MAHE, Manipal)

Abstract: This paper brings together ideas from Vedānta philosophy and psychology to examine the concept of “precarity”. It reframes precarity not just as an external crisis (like poverty or instability), but as an internal state of mind – the “Precarious Self.” In Vedānta, Svātantryābhimāna (the delusion of being totally independent), which gives rise to the six inner enemies and ninefold hatred, it makes ātman the “Precarious Self” (pramāṭṛ aśuddhi). This self is characterised by constant anxiety, a fragile ego, and deep loneliness. This paper utilises “case studies” from the Purānic characters, such as Hiraṇyakaśipu, Duryodhana, and Jarāsandha, to demonstrate how nine varieties of Dveṣas (hostilities) are sources of these psychological problems. Focusing on the conference sub-theme, the paper argues that Navavidhā Bhakti (Ninefold Devotion) is a structured therapy for the mind and soul. Bhakti is defined as a change in both feeling and thinking —the love (prema) that follows the knowledge (jñāna) of pramātman. Bhakti is posited as the active ingredient that transforms Ritual (Karma) and Myth (purana jñāna) from pathologies into a cure. Using a “holistic” model, the paper demonstrates how practice of one of the nine fold Bhakti – such as Śravaṇam (hearing) or Vandanam (bowing) - can act as a panacea to heal all nine Dveṣas. Ultimately, this Vedānta-based therapy “sustains life” by healing the agent, not just changing the surroundings. This “blissful dependence”(Pāratantrya) is not fatalism. As demonstrated in the Gita, it frees the agent to perform clear, empowered action(Karma) as a Nimitta Mātra(a pure instrument), no longer paralysed by the ego’s fear.

SESSION 5.A | The Healing Powers of the Divine Feminine: A Comparative Exploration

Title: The Forgotten Goddess: Ungnyeo (熊女, 웅녀), Reclaiming of Salim and Healing in Posthuman Ecofeminist Ethics

Name and Institution: Jea Sophia Oh (West Chester University of Pennsylvania)

Abstract: This study reinterprets Ungnyeo (熊女, 웅녀), the Bear Woman of Korean foundational myth, as a forgotten goddess whose erasure reflects the marginalization of feminine agency in patriarchal historiography. Challenging nationalist and androcentric readings, it advances an ecofeminist hermeneutic that foregrounds salim—enlivening for life-preserving care—and healing as central ethical practices. Ungnyeo’s confinement and subsistence on garlic and wormwood, both medicinal substances with healing properties, are reframed not as ascetic transcendence but as embodied practices of sustaining and restoring life under conditions of deprivation. Her transformation is read as a mode of ethical mediation that destabilizes boundaries between animal and human, nature and culture, and rearticulates relational unity as a lived practice of care. Reclaiming her bear-nature against misogynistic mythic interpretations, the study develops “divinamality” as sacred embodiment grounded in vulnerability and ecological participation. As a proto-posthuman figure, Ungnyeo offers a life-centered ethic of coexistence, healing, and relational becoming amid ecological and social precarity.

Title: The Feminine That Heals: Laozi’s Wu 無-Form Subject as Feminist Political Ontology

Name and Institution: Eunchul Jung (Drew University)

Abstract: This study explores the healing and transformative potential of the feminine subject in Laozi’s Daodejing (道德經) through the “wu-form” (無) concepts—wuwei, wuzhi, wuyu, and wuxin—as a framework for feminist political ontology. These modes of being and thinking, which resist instrumental rationality and ego-centered intentionality, offer a radical critique of the modern pursuit of progress, efficiency, and mastery over life. The wu-form ideals, though seemingly impossible to fully realize, open a space for reimagining existence beyond the violent grammar of productivity and domination that underpins patriarchal, capitalist, and anthropocentric structures. In the Daodejing, recurring feminine images such as woman, water, and child function not as passive symbols but as active forces that subvert hierarchical binaries and propose a relational, nurturing, and non-possessive ethics of being. This paper compares Laozi’s feminine subject with Levinas’s notion of the feminine and the home and Deleuze’s idea of becoming-woman, tracing their shared orientation toward receptivity, vulnerability, and non-sovereign power. Through this comparative lens, the study argues that Laozi’s feminine subject

embodies a political and ethical alternative—a mode of existence that heals by yielding, that acts by non-acting, and that benefits the world without claiming to do so.

Title: Etoki Reimagined: Pilgrimage, Performance, and the Divine Feminine along the Kumano Kodo

Name and Institution: Yuki Imoto (Keio University)

Abstract: This research investigates the Kumano Bikuni—female religious practitioners active from the medieval through early modern periods in Japan—as embodiments of the divine feminine and agents of healing within the Kumano faith tradition. Drawing on art-historical and anthropological studies, the study centers on two key visual and ritual media: the Kumano Kanshin Jikkai Mandala, a cosmographic depiction of the Ten Worlds centered on the character kokoro (心, “heart–mind”), and the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala, a portable map of sacred geography used in etoki (pictorial exposition). Through these mandalas, the Bikuni transmitted complex cosmologies of suffering, rebirth, and enlightenment in accessible, embodied, and affective ways. Their peripatetic performances—often directed toward women and marginalized communities—mediated between visible and invisible realms, offering moral reflection and spiritual solace. In the contemporary context, this research explores how the Kumano Bikuni’s legacy may be re-enacted through an arts-based performative methodology that integrates pilgrimage, contemplation, and creative dialogue. As a first- and second-person–based research, I follow a group of young people walking the Kumano Kodo, listening to their stories of connection and renewal. The project situates etoki as a living practice of relational storytelling and shared reflection. Through these dialogues, the research reimagines both pilgrimage and the Bikuni’s compassionate cosmology as a contemporary mode of healing and spiritual ecology.

Title: Gynocentric Tantra as Psychospiritual Therapy: Exploring the Five Elemental Structure of Human Cosmic Alliance

Name and Institution: Neela Bhattacharya Saxena (Nassau Community College)

Abstract: Most religions have an exoteric and an esoteric dimension. Generally, exoteric is the domain of the masculine, while the esoteric is saturated with the feminine essence. Historically speaking, the external rituals and laws of exoteric religions are designed for people to manage their lives as they seek salvation elsewhere, often in a post-mortem existence. Esoteric traditions, on the other hand, represent the hidden feminine dimension beyond spacetime that can offer a taste of the exquisite truth of the here and now. That truth has the capacity to quieten an agitated mind and calm the body so that a dynamic healing mechanism within us can awaken. In the Indic context, Gynocentric Tantra, an esoteric mechanism presided over by the Great Goddess that pervades all the dharmas, provides a psychospiritual therapy that has the potential to heal the human body, mind, and spirit by aligning them with the cosmic rhythm, that is, the Will of the Goddess. This paper will explore the five-elemental structure of the body posited by Shakta/Shiva and Buddhist Tantric traditions that corresponds with the cosmic

structure of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Tantric Siddha masters use meticulous methodology that includes yoga, breath, and meditations to cleanse a disciple's body, emotions, mind, and intellect by dissolving them into the space element. In mythic language, the womb of Kali is the cremation ground where all the elements vanish, freeing the disciple from the illusory nature of the self, thus awakening the ultimate healing potential.

Session 5.B | Pedagogical Ramifications of Applied Indian Ethics (Part 1)

Title: Reason Between Equals? Sexed Subalternity and the University

Name and Institution: Anupama Rao (Barnard College)

Name and Institution: Divya Malhari (Columbia University)

Abstract: This presentation will be based on a course I teach, which utilizes University archives to think about histories of caste and race as social analytics whose scholarly pertinence was amplified with the emergence of the social science disciplines in the first decades of the twentieth century. The focus will be on the intellectual itinerary of the Dalit leader and theorist of radical democracy, B. R. Ambedkar who studied at Columbia University (1913-1916) and the groundbreaking publication, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916), first written as a paper for a graduate seminar where caste's social power is traced to the violent regulation of female sexuality. By staging a conversation between my annotation of this text and the research findings of a student in the seminar on Dalit women's subjectivity, which locates Ambedkar's text within broader scholarship on caste sexuality and Indian sociology, we explore the ethics of the classroom and the work of critical pedagogy in overturning hierarchies of intellectual labor as themselves enclosures of caste. "What does it mean to read Ambedkar reading caste as sex?" is another way to frame our efforts.

Title: Relational Justice and Women's Agency in Reproductive Ethics: A Dharma-Based Reframing

Name and Institution: Piyali Mitra (University of Calcutta Branch, Kolkata)

Abstract: The pedagogical ramifications of applied Indian ethics in reproductive bioethics reveal how concepts of embryo personhood, women's bodily autonomy, and justice are shaped within Hindu dharma and wider South Asian moral reasoning. This framework rejects purely individualistic models of ethics and instead emphasizes relationality, duty, and the interdependence of life. In the context of stem cell research and assisted reproduction, dharma-oriented approaches foreground care, societal well-being, and the responsibilities embedded in family and community networks. Integrating these perspectives into teaching offers an alternative to dominant Western-rights-based paradigms by encouraging dialogic reflection, contextual sensitivity, and value pluralism. This pedagogical approach expands bioethical inquiry, fostering more inclusive, culturally grounded, and socially responsive understandings of Reproductive justice and moral agency.

Title: Beyond Capabilities: Re-imagining Developmental Ethics for Subaltern Women in India

Name and Institution: Neeti Singh (Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi)

Abstract: The paper re-examines the developmental ethics of the capabilities approach advanced by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum through the critical lens of Indian feminist theory, with special reference to Savita Singh's contribution in *The Companion to Indian Ethics*. While the capabilities framework has significantly transformed global discourse on justice and development, its liberal and universalist underpinnings often fail to capture the intersectional realities of subaltern women in India, whose lives are shaped by caste, class, patriarchy, and invisibilised labour. Drawing upon Singh's critique of developmental discourse and her call for epistemic justice, this paper argues that a feminist ethics grounded in recognition, care, and relational autonomy is indispensable for addressing structural injustices faced by marginalized women. It further proposes a shift from resource or capability-based justice to conversion-centred and participatory ethics, wherein subaltern women define for themselves the meanings of agency, dignity, and flourishing. In dialogue with both Indian ethical traditions and contemporary feminist thought, the paper outlines a model of non-patriarchal and non-patronising ethics that acknowledges women's embodied labour, domestic work, and epistemic agency as moral and political domains of justice. Finally, it reflects on the pedagogical challenge of teaching such ethics to India's Gen Z—an increasingly digital yet morally disengaged generation—by proposing interactive, experiential, and community-based modes of ethical education that connect theory to lived realities. The paper thus seeks to extend Singh's feminist vision toward a new developmental ethics rooted in the voices, experiences, and epistemologies of subaltern women in India.

Title: Pedagogical contours of debates on abortion (via amniocentesis) and euthanasia (vis-à-vis Jain *sallekhanā*)

Name and Institution: Purushottama Bilimoria (University of San Francisco)

Abstract: There is widespread disagreement about what are desirable and undesirable moral values, interests, actions, and their consequences. Given this impasse, how does one teach moral philosophy or ethics? What are the pedagogical ramifications of academic deliberations on theoretical and practical or applied ethics? I am confronted with this when teaching classes that involve rather complex beginning and end-of-life issues. In this paper, I take up two challenges that cross over both Asian and Western borders. 1st is abortion (termination of foetus or embryo in the mother's womb), and the widespread debate of its legality, moral sanctions or otherwise, and its current status in India (with back-door access to amniocentesis) and in the West (post-US_SC ruling on *Roe v Wade*). The second is euthanasia (medically assisted death) vis-à-vis *sallekhanā* (Jaina practice of fasting-to-death). There are normative and bioethical ramifications, as well as legal implications of both these disparate practices. It boils down to whether there are any foreseeable circumstances under which a citizen may exercise their right to die – e.g. being released from life-support system, or resort to auto-homicide? The Indian Courts adjudged *sallekhanā* to be a religious practice on a par with

euthanasia, protected by Articles 14-21, 25–26; hence constitutionally defensible. However, the Rajasthan High Court recently adjudged this Jain practice to be a purely secular-expedient cop-out enforced by the family, and hence unconstitutional. An appeal in the Supreme Court of India is pending a full hearing. Thus, the question arises: how do we navigate our students through such controversial and socially-culturally sensitive ethical challenges? My argument here is that we ‘tell it like it is, nuts and bolts’, but not take sides, while allowing students to formulate their own conclusions within the bounds of reason.

Session 5.C | Agency, Wisdom, and Intercultural Philosophy

Title: Authorship and Agency: Gang Jeongildang and Harriet Taylor Mill in Comparative Perspective

Name and Institution: Hwa Yeong Wang (Duke Kunshan University)

Abstract: This paper examines two understudied women philosophers: Gang Jeongildang (1772-1832), a Joseon Dynasty Confucian thinker, and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858). Gang and Taylor both enjoyed and developed intellectual companionships with their male partners, who explicitly gave them credit for and praised their writings. However, these writings were often conjoined with their partners’ names. This has led some to question their authorship and philosophical and intellectual independence. The issues of companionship and authorship will be re-examined from both historical and philosophical points of view. First, I will review the historical contexts in which women had limited access to education, the intellectual circle, and philosophical writing. Second, the companionship, the detailed ways of interaction between two couples, will be examined. The intellectual, emotional, and moral partnership, and the influence of Gang and Taylor Mill on their partners, will be explored. Thirdly, the paper will demonstrate how people around them and later generations evaluated the two couples’ partnership and the role and value of Gang and Taylor Mill. I will argue that the nature of women philosophers’ agency as philosophers and authors must be assessed differently, dissecting the complex layers of the given contexts.

Title: Transforming Consciousness and Investigating Things: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry into Wisdom in Xuanzang and the Great Learning

Name and Institution: Jun Li (Yunnan University)

Abstract: This paper undertakes a comparative study of Xuanzang’s Yogācāra doctrine of “Transforming Consciousness into Wisdom (zhuanshi chengzhi)” and the Confucian ideal of “Investigating Things to Extend Knowledge (gewu zhizhi)” in The Great Learning (Daxue). Though arising from distinct traditions—Buddhist epistemology and Confucian moral cultivation—both paradigms address the transformation from knowledge (shi/zhi) to wisdom (zhi in the sense of realized insight). From the perspective of comparative and cross-cultural philosophy, the paper analyzes their respective epistemic foundations, methodological paths, and ultimate aims: the Yogācāra’s “transformation of the basis” (āśraya-parāvṛtti) as an inward

conversion of consciousness, and the Confucian “investigation of things” as an outward realization of principle. It argues that both embody a dialectic of self-transformation and world-intelligibility, forming two complementary paradigms of wisdom cultivation. Placing them within the horizon of global philosophy, the study suggests that the dialogue between “transforming consciousness” and “investigating things” offers renewed insight into contemporary questions of cognitive transformation, moral self-cultivation, and the construction of a shared ethics of wisdom in an interconnected world.

Title: Indian Pedagogies and the Structuring of Learning

Name and Institution: Robin Luke Varghese (Sree Narayan Guru Open University Kollam Kerala)

Abstract: Discussions around NEP 2020 (National Education Policy) often highlight its gestures toward India’s intellectual and cultural heritage, yet the policy also draws on a very different set of pedagogical instruments. This paper traces the space between these two movements. Drawing mainly on J. L. Shaw’s and Purushottama Bilimoria’s readings of modern Indian thinkers such as Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, and Ambedkar, I outline the variety of educational visions they advance. Placed against this plurality, the paper considers how NEP’s emphasis on structured learning outcomes shapes its understanding of what counts as educational growth. The discussion raises questions about how these distinct strands sit together and whether the grammar of the pedagogical instruments advocated in NEP can carry the cultural claims the policy makes on behalf of Bharatiyata. The aim is to map a set of tensions that may otherwise remain unnoticed in the ongoing debates around the NEP.

SESSION 5.D | Ecologies of Healing: Sustainability, Community, and Well-Being

Title: Philosophies of Healing and Sustainability: Asian and Comparative Reflections on the SDGs

Name and Institution: Thanigaivelan Shanmugam (Annamalai University)

Abstract: In an era marked by environmental crisis, social disconnection, and moral uncertainty, the concepts of healing and sustainability gain renewed philosophical importance. This international conference explores the intersection of Asian philosophical traditions and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), examining how ancient and contemporary wisdom from Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Daoism can contribute to ethical, spiritual, and ecological frameworks for sustainable living. Moving beyond the medical notion of healing, the conference views it as a process of restoring social harmony, environmental integrity, and moral balance in humanity’s relationship with nature and community. Through comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives, it integrates insights from philosophy, ecology, cultural studies, and ethics to highlight how Asian worldviews rooted in interdependence, compassion, and equilibrium resonate with key SDGs, including good health

and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), peace and justice (SDG 16), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). By engaging principles such as ahimsa (non-violence), karuṇā (compassion), dharma (ethical responsibility), and harmony with nature, the conference aims to inspire sustainable practices and transformative ethical reflection. It also encourages dialogue between Asian and Western perspectives, seeking complementarity rather than opposition in global discourses on sustainability and human flourishing. Ultimately, the event envisions healing and sustainability as interconnected acts of renewal spanning the individual, social, and ecological realms and calls for reimagining sustainability not merely as material or policy progress, but as a profound moral and spiritual commitment to balance, justice, and compassion in an increasingly precarious world.

Title: Healing in Indigenous Asian Cultures: Philosophy, Ritual, and Ecology of Well-Being

Name and Institution: Chelcia B. Sangma (Annamalai University)

Abstract: Healing within Indigenous Asian cultures extends far beyond the boundaries of medicine, encompassing a holistic vision of life, community, and the natural world. This paper explores the philosophical dimensions of healing in Indigenous Asian traditions, examining how cosmology, ritual, and ecological consciousness intertwine to sustain balance among the human, spiritual, and environmental realms. Unlike modern biomedical paradigms that isolate the body from its world, Indigenous conceptions of healing affirm the interconnectedness of spirit, land, and community as integral to human well-being. Drawing on examples from Indigenous traditions in India, North East region, the paper highlights how healing rituals serve as acts of restoration reweaving the moral and cosmic order disrupted by suffering or imbalance. In tribal philosophies of Northeast India, healing practices often invoke ancestral spirits and natural forces, affirming the sacredness of the environment. Healing, in these traditions, emerges as both an ethical and ecological act a process of restoring right relations among beings, ancestors, and nature. The paper concludes that Indigenous Asian Tribal wisdom offers critical insights for reimagining well-being in contemporary global crises, where health must be redefined as a collective and spiritual balance rather than a merely physical state.

Title: From Urbanity to Eco-consciousness: Reimagining University Campuses as Models of Holistic Learning

Name and Institution: Walter Menezes (Goa University)

Abstract: University campuses today increasingly reflect the pressures and patterns of a City Life: hyper-digitalised environments, dense infrastructural layouts, accelerated academic cultures, and fragmented social relations. While such environments mirror the aspirations of modern knowledge economies, they also exacerbate student stress, disconnection from nature, and declining well-being. Applying select concepts from Indian thought this paper argues that a philosophical shift towards eco-consciousness is essential for fostering ecosystem that

reverberates traits of intellectual, emotional, social, and ecological wellbeing, rendering modern university campuses into a living pedagogy—a dynamic ecology that shapes consciousness, care ethics, and cultivates sustainable ethical sensibilities. The need for this work arises due to the lacuna between the educational policies and their implementations that increase the stress level of students. Integrating insights from deep ecology, Gandhian Nai Talim, Tagorean educational naturalism, and contemporary ecological psychology, the model highlights the transformative role of green spaces, community gardens, open-air learning environments, and biophilic architecture in enhancing attentional clarity, empathy, social belonging, and moral imagination. Additionally, the paper examines how eco-conscious spaces support contemplative and collaborative pedagogies, enabling students to engage with learning as a relational and embodied process rather than a purely cognitive pursuit. By suggesting a praxis-oriented framework for ecological redesign of university campuses, this research argues that learning environments must be reconceived not as neutral containers of academic activity but as active participants in shaping flourishing, sustainability-oriented futures. The proposed shift from urbanity to eco-consciousness not only offer a philosophical and practical pathway for universities to function as models of holistic learning, but also strengthens students' resilience from the effects of precarity, contributing to overall social well-being in the twenty-first century.

SESSION 6.A | Nature as Living Reality

Title: A Nurturing Nature: Prakṛti's Non-Anthropocentric Foundations in Classical Sāṃkhya

Name and Institution: Nitin Baskaran (Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Mumbai)

Abstract: This essay analyzes the conception of prakṛti as dynamic and nurturing in Classical Sāṃkhya philosophy, particularly as depicted in the Sāṃkhya Kārikā (SK) and Yuktidīpikā (YD), as a challenge to Western conceptions of nature as passive or inert matter in an anthropocentric framework. Usually translated as 'nature,' prakṛti encompasses both the material and mental realms of existence, where the guṇas govern change, and its metaphysical contours are shaped by the causal theory of satkaryavada. The essay examines descriptions of prakṛti found in the SK, for example, prasavadharmi (prolific) in SK 11 and upakāriṇi (generous or supportive) in SK 60, to highlight the dynamism of nature and the text's attempt to portray it as a vital, nurturing force. Classical Sāṃkhya is an ode to prakṛti, a celebration of nature as magnanimous, where liberation does not lead to its negation. Post-liberation, prakṛti remains Real. Classical Sāṃkhya argues that humans are pure, witness consciousness (puruṣa), but are still entangled with prakṛti. Recognizing this interdependence, interaction, or union (saṃyoga) encourages a deeper reflection of both our situatedness in nature and the true self as inextricable from consciousness. Ultimately, Classical Sāṃkhya philosophy presents an expression of nature as dynamic and nurturing, with its own agency; it is more than inert matter and offers resources to reconstruct the human-nature relationship beyond an anthropocentric paradigm.

Title: Is God really dead in Sāṃkhya? A Naturalist Interpretation of the Turn to Atheism in Early Classical Sāṃkhya

Name and Institution: Geoff Ashton (University of San Francisco)

Abstract: Traditional Indian commentators and modern scholars have frequently construed Sāṃkhya atheism in terms that resonate with the scientific rejection of intelligent design. Indeed, classical Sāṃkhya broke from prevailing trends across *sāṃkhya*-based philosophies by liberating *prakṛti* (nature) from the authority of God. Historically speaking, texts and traditions that centrally featured *sāṃkhya* terms and frames of reference tended to be theistic: nature's manifestation (*vyakta-prakṛti*) was specially accessible to God (either because he created it or because he had unique insight into its secrets), and "*sāṃkhya*" (literally, "enumeration") denoted a philosophical practice meant to achieve intimate union with the divine. However, the complete denial of God's existence and the view of nature (*prakṛti*) in terms of a materialist, causal determinism are not as frequent in the Sāṃkhya Darśana as we are often led to believe. In particular, the founding figures of the Sāṃkhya school did not refuse God's existence as such, nor did they reject that a precursor intelligence reveals itself in the field of nature (*prakṛti*). Rather, they adhered to an atheism that was more concerned with an axiological critique than a metaphysical one. They focused our attention away from the *truth* of God's existence and toward the question of *trust* in God: classical Sāṃkhya atheism is primarily a negation of the value of faith in God for helping us to realize life's highest goals (*puruṣa-arthas*). And yet, this does not elide the creative intentionality evidenced in nature, nor does it weaken our confidence in nature's manifestations. Contrary to materialist misreadings of early Sāṃkhya—where *prakṛti* gets construed as matter that is reducible to parts, moves according to fixed causal patterns, and remains motionless unless acted upon by an outside force—"vyakta-prakṛti" here conveys a living, purposive *nature being* whose manifestations (*vyakta-*) reveal a part-antecedent, well-coordinated procreativity that guides us toward liberation. Thus viewed as a naturalistic spirituality that abstained from both trust in God and the felt need to control nature's causal mechanisms, early Sāṃkhya atheism sought to ground our confidence in nature's own creative agency.

SESSION 6.B | Perspectives on Meaning and Care

Title: Zhuangzi and Meaning in Life

Name and Institution: Frank Saunders Jr. (Hong Kong Chu Hai College)

Abstract: Recent work on ethics in the Zhuangzi has fruitfully explored Zhuangzian components of a good or flourishing life. Less work has been done, however, on how the Zhuangzi can help us to think about what constitutes a meaningful life. This paper pursues the latter project by utilizing resources from the Zhuangzi to arrive at an account of meaning in life. To this end, I first follow Susan Wolf by making the case for treating meaningfulness as a value separate from happiness, well-being, or moral worth. I then examine how examples of meaningful lives in the Zhuangzi incorporate both objective and subjective components. In

particular, I argue that the objective axis of meaningfulness in the Zhuangzi is grounded in dao-following—attuned responsiveness to the natural patterns of the great transformation of things. The subjective axis pertains to dé—the adaptive agency, equanimity, and virtuosity manifested in the process of dao-following. In this way, meaning is not so much a product of the content of our projects as it is due to the manner of our participation in the dao: Cook Ding’s butchery is meaningful not because Ding recognizes that slaughtering oxen is a worthy end, but because his skilful, dedicated actions manifests a conscious attunement to the natural patterns of the dao. Using these and other examples from the text, the paper develops these features of a Zhuangzian-inspired account of meaningful living. It also contrasts this reading with those emphasizing eudaimonistic or ethical features and considers challenges to the view (e.g., trivial or morally troubling cases of meaningful action). The upshot is that meaningful existence can persist without fixed ends or moral achievement, arising instead from how we follow the dao—an angle that sharpens both Zhuangzi interpretation and current theorizing about meaning in life.

Title: Perspectival Agility in Medical Humanities/Health Humanities

Name and Institution: Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (Utrecht University)

Abstract: Higher education (HE) students are a high-risk group for mental health issues (Buric, 2025; RIVM, 2025), while mental healthcare systems worldwide face significant strain (Hoenders, 2024; Van Os et al., 2023). This calls for a shift from curing disease or symptoms (pathogenesis) alone to enhancing resilience and embodied well-being (salutogenesis) (Hoenders, 2024). In this integrative view of care, group-based complementary interventions in HE offer a meaningful way to help prevent and attenuate mental health problems among HE students. This paper develops an integrative approach to in-course HE care that is critical-contemplative-based. Framed in daoist studies, it builds on the Zhuangzian idea of perspectival agility (Flavell and Hall, 2023) as an opening to developing self-alterity awareness. As I argue, perspectival agility challenges the binary between self and other typically presumed in research on perspective taking in medical humanities and purely cognitive standards for flexibility in creativity studies. The paper asks how perspectival agility can contribute to reducing stress and anxiety in HE students, while also exploring the potential of perspectival agility for fostering interdisciplinary collaborations in mental healthcare?

SESSION 6.C | Paths to Resilience: Ethical Philosophical and Practical Approaches in Buddhist and Asian Thought

Title: The Easternization of Survival

Name and Institution: Shad Gilbert (University of Helsinki)

Abstract: Over the past few years, the value of ancient Indian and Chinese texts to the amelioration of common contemporary concepts has been repeatedly demonstrated. Although

the notion that modern non-Buddhists and non-Daoists can glean practical benefit from distant Asian traditions without jointly adopting the core tenets of these systems of thought is not uncontroversial, recent proposals to revise such concepts as threat, permanence, and corpse under the influence of Mahāyāna scriptures, Madhyamaka treatises, and Neo-Daoist commentaries demonstrate the prospects of such programs in transparadigmatic reconception. The current project prescribes the tweaking of various modern concepts of survival through interaction with the Prajñāpāramitā Ratnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā and 列子注 Liezizhu, the commentary on the Daoist classic 列子 Liezi by the Neo-Daoist 張湛 Zhangzhan. After briefly articulating a theory of conceptual edification, this paper attempts to identify a function of survival common to all of its various applications and then contemplates how these familiar survival concepts could operate more agreeably through moderate Easternization.

Title: The Unbroken Spirit: Buddhist Emotional and Moral Healing in Sri Lanka's Age of Crisis

Name and Institution: Randika Perera (Gampaha Wickramarachchi University of Indigenous Medicine, Sri Lanka)

Abstract: In recent years, Sri Lanka has faced crises including the global pandemic, economic collapse, and political unrest. These conditions have challenged the existence of individuals and communities by creating a sense of meaninglessness and disconnection. However, this spiritual crisis has been addressed through exploring hope via emotional and moral healing in Sri Lanka, based on Buddhist philosophy. Metaphysically, the crisis is experienced because of kamma. The unwholesome nature of kamma is uncontrollable but can be healed as taught by Buddha. In this healing process, emotional purification plays a key role through the use of emotional values such as metta (loving kindness), muditā (sympathetic joy), and karuṇā (compassion). The cultivation of these values enhances individual self-love and allows sharing positive feelings with society. Additionally, emotional healing helps individuals cope with suffering. Since this emotional purification alone may not fully address the individual's affective needs, it also provides the capacity to view crises with spiritual insight. Regarding morality, Buddhist teachings related to virtue always assist individuals in dealing with unwholesome conditions through insight rather than strict rule-following. The key virtues promote individual and societal harmony, characterized by nonviolence, trustworthiness, compassion, respect, and mindful living. This integrated approach of emotional and moral healing awakening (bodhi) fosters an unbroken spirit, encouraging the pursuit of new meaning and hope to overcome shared suffering and build a more connected society.

Friday, May 22

SESSION 7.A | Ambedkar

Title: From Precarity to Dhamma: Ambedkar's Navayana and Healing of Dalits

Name and Institution: Aditya Bansode (Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar)

Abstract: In this perennial caste system in Indian societal structure Dalits have been placed at the lowest in hierarchy, which makes Dalits Outcast. This placement of Dalits has been justified with ancient texts such as Manusmriti and Rig Veda, considering Dalits as polluted, unclean and most importantly unborn from supreme being. This imposition of graded unequal structure which legitimizes everyone's position by linking it to the body of the creator, it cuts the links of Dalits to any ontological understanding of 'self', resulting in endurance of wounds within Dalits, extending beyond material deprivation into the moral and existential realm. This legitimized marginalization defined the endemic precarity for Dalits in social, psychological and cultural aspects. The disappearance of personhood, left no possibility for the larger section to rebuild wholeness, find harmony and discover meanings of life within this societal structure, leaving them in perpetual unhealed condition. However it is the reimagination of Buddhism by Dr Ambedkar which is acting as a healer for Dalits. Ambedkar came up with the formation of Navayana Buddhism and conversion of suppressed mass in it, which opened up absolutely new spatio-temporal ways for Dalits in order to heal themselves from injuries given by the persistent caste system. It allowed Dalits to constitute their political, spiritual and social life narratives and build whole in relation to the society. The Navayana came up with a very important aspect of Maitri (fraternity), the very idea of the discard of which caste system succeeded in India. Maitri allowed Dalits to foster connexional relations amongst marginalized people in the country at different times, resulting in sustenance and proliferation of firm resistance against the chronic oppressors of society. This paper addresses relation of Navayana and Dalits through the framework of healing, in a sense how it contributes to Dalits, to reconstruct identity, reform purpose and revise their life narratives. It includes methodology of reflecting upon Ambedkar's key writings, interviews with scholars and analysis of academic work and Dalit moments in post conversion India.

Title: What does it mean to be "dharmic"? An Indian perspective on responsibility

Name and Institution: Agnieszka Rostalska (Ghent University)

Abstract: Gandhi, Tagore, and Ambedkar are not just ethical philosophers but also political thinkers. Despite their different religious backgrounds, they all incorporated beliefs from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism into their philosophical views, which continue to influence political thought and resonate in today's society. Notably, their ideas are heavily based on how they interpret the concept of "dharma," which is often translated into English as 'religion,' but it has a much broader meaning as law, duty, obligation, truth, order, or one's purpose in life. Their visions of a dharma-centered society and culture that embody the dharma ethical code are significant because, for them, society takes priority over the individual. Importantly, dharma

ethics involve living harmoniously with all religious faiths. This idea has been part of Indian culture and identity, as seen in the inscriptions of Aśoka and in the rediscovered 20th-century text on success and prosperity, the Arthaśāstra (AŚ). In my paper, I examine the intricate and polyvalent Sanskrit concept of dharma within its socio-political and religious setting dating back to ancient India around 400 BCE and 200 CE. My main focus is on legal and moral responsibility. Dharma appears in Sanskrit compounds like svadharma (personal duty as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita), a specific figure like a ruler (rājadharmā), or universal moral laws, sarvadharmā. I suggest a novel classification of dharma, considering the context of the Arthaśāstra and Aśoka's edicts.

SESSION 7.B | Embodied Divinity, Subtle Bodies

Title: Recovering a Theology: A Śākta Exploration of Plotinus on Aphrodite and the Soul

Name and Institution: Gus Kraus (Leiden University)

Abstract: What is at stake for Plotinus in thinking of 'Soul' as feminine? The word *psukhe* is grammatically feminine in Greek. A Saussurean approach would (rightly) emphasize the arbitrary basis of this signifier, but would not fully explain its productivity: Plotinus's Platonic predecessors (eg, Apuleius) developed this perceived femininity into an elaborate, romantic drama (eg, Psyche and Cupid). Rather, this paper will take Peirce's tripartite semiotics as a starting point, in order to explore Plotinus's reception and elaboration of a linguistic, literary and finally philosophical association of the Soul with femininity. Plotinus theologizes (from *thea*, "Goddess") about Aphrodite in interrelated treatises concerning the Soul and her relationship to other hypostases (VI.9), concerning beauty (Enneads I.6, V.9), and concerning Eros (III.5). Recent scholarly approaches to Plotinus and his place within the history of philosophy have underscored the centrality of Eros to Plotinus' thought (Vasilakis 2020, Bertozzi 2021). From the elaboration on this theme, inherited chiefly from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, there emerges for Plotinus a conception of the unity of all individual souls (Enneads IV.9) and of the universal, hypostatic Soul as the Goddess Aphrodite (III.5; VI.9). Plotinus applies this theology in reflecting on allegorical modes of mythical exegesis: in any myth, Gods may be read as symbolizing intellect (*nous*) and goddesses as symbolizing soul (III.5). It is precisely at this point where a comparative philosophical method can help recover and reorient readers to this Plotinian theology. Reading firstly Intellect and Soul as a God-Goddess dynamism in light of Śākta reconfigurations of *puruṣa-prakṛti* and *prakāśa-vimarśa*, and secondly the relationship of Aphrodite and Eros in light of Śākta employments of *rasa* aesthetics, we can arrive at an important corrective for readers of the *Enneads* concerning his understanding of the relationship of philosophy and religion.

Title: The Prapañcasāra-tantra on Tridoṣas

Name and Institution: M. Praveen (IIT Bombay, Mumbai)

Abstract: Āyurveda, an Upaveda of Atharva-veda, or sometimes captured the status of Panchama Veda. Tridoṣas (viz., vāta, pitta, and kapha), constituents of fundamental structure and functional units of human body, is the essential concept on which the whole doctrine of Ayurveda is built on. The term tridoṣa is derived from Sanskrit compound- tri (three) and doṣa (vitiating factors/pollutants). These tridoṣas are responsible for the formation of the behaviour (prakṛti) of an individual. Specifically, vāta is responsible for movements, pitta is for digestion, metabolism, and kapha, third one, is responsible for lubrication, strength, etc. Thus, so stated in Āyurveda, that vitiation of any of these doṣa is disease, whereas equilibrium of them is health. The six ūrmis, another important aspect in Āyurveda, being consideration of the well-being of both physical and mental states (six koṣas) of an individual, which are connected with tridoṣas. Tāntric tradition always bridges the macrocosm with the microcosm. In this regard, while drawing on selected verses from the Prapañcasāra-tantra, a tantric text attributed to Ādiśankara (788-820 CE), this paper examines the metaphysico-therapeutic implications of the prakṛti the supreme divine feminine. The Prapañcasāra-tantra describes how the supreme prakṛti, manifests as the six koṣas, and six ūrmis, upon becoming differentiated through the guṇas, in the presence of Puruṣa, expands into the bodily tridoṣas, thereby linking the cosmic process with human embodiment. Through a close reading of these interconnected sixfold structures, the paper argues that the Prapañcasāra-tantra presents a unified vision in which metaphysics, therapeutics, and psychology emerge as parallel expressions of the dynamic self-articulation of Paraśakti.

SESSION 7.C | Healing with Philosophy: Embodied Practices Transgressive Thought and Therapeutic Traditions

Title: The Dose Makes the Poison: Philosophy as Iatrogenesis

Name and Institution: Rohan Sikri (New York University)

Abstract: This paper explores the question of the value of philosophy through the lens of iatrogenesis: the generation of disease from the therapeutic application itself. Classical China and Greece offer parallel models for this inquiry, supplying us with a shared therapeutic culture in which philosophy is often conceived as a regimen of care. Yet an often-neglected dimension to these models is the constitutive danger that is brought on by the philosopher's materia medica itself—namely, that philosophical cures can function equally as pathogenic agents. Early Chinese sources explicitly articulate states of philosophical iatrogenesis, often presenting the transformation of philosophical therapies into afflictions caused by a 'dosage problem.' We thus find, especially in the Daoist record, development of regimens of forgetting and cultivated emptiness as prophylactics against such excess. Canonical Greek texts, by contrast, often define philosophy as recollection, which internalizes a condition that is iatrogenic to its core. The philosopher absorbed in recollection often emerges in the throes of a mania, driven by an erotic

compulsion that metastasizes an originating therapeutic intent into a sickness for more argument and totalizing truths. I propose that these differing responses to the iatrogenic moment reveal contrasting economies of health. Some Chinese models pursue equilibrium within a secular vision of the person, a composite organism of cognitive, psychological and physical elements who must be continually held in homeostasis. A dominant model in Greek texts, however, confronts the threat of iatrogenesis by redeeming the philosopher's state of erotic recollection through divine sanction, converting his madness into his vocation in order, ultimately, to justify the dose that makes the poison.

SESSION 8.A | The Feminine and Compassionate: Healing Pathways Across East Asian Philosophy, Myth, and Literature

Title: Rethinking Humanity's Place: Shanhaijing (山海經) and Daodejing (道德經) as Ecological Healing

Name and Institution: Jeongha Lee (Ewha Woman's University)

Abstract: The escalating ecological crisis and anxieties over artificial intelligence reveal the limits of anthropocentric thought, which places humanity at the apex of existence. This paper turns to Shanhaijing and Daodejing to explore alternative ontologies that invite a humbler, relational mode of being essential for healing in precarious times. Shanhaijing presents a mythic world populated by hybrid creatures, including those that threaten humans, yet refrains from moral judgment. Its "pre-judgmental world" portrays existence as interdependent, where all beings simply participate in the cyclical cosmos. Daodejing deepens this perspective by critiquing naming and dualistic distinctions—beauty and ugliness, good and not-good—advocating wuwei and humility as paths toward harmony with the Dao. Together, these texts challenge hierarchical value systems and reposition humanity as one life-form among many, rather than master of the world. By dissolving dominance narratives, they offer philosophical resources for ecological ethics and existential healing. In an era of climate collapse and technological hubris, Shanhaijing and Daodejing call for a return to a pre-differentiated consciousness grounded in acceptance, coexistence, and cosmic balance. These classical Chinese sources offer a transformative reimagining of healing—rooted not in control, but in cooperation with the more-than-human world.

Title: The Scars of the 20th Century: Literary Healing in Korean and Chinese Horror and Realism

Name and Institution: Kyung-na Koh (Ewha Woman's University)

Abstract: South Korea and China, shaped by legacies of imperialism, dictatorship, and state violence, have turned to literature as a means of confronting trauma and restoring human dignity. In Korea, realism emerged as an ethical response to events such as the Gwangju

Uprising, grounding literary expression in testimony, suffering, and collective memory. Conversely, post-Cultural Revolution China embraced Xungen Wenxue (尋根文學, Root-Seeking Literature), drawing from traditional sources like Liaozaizhiyi (聊齋志異) to revive suppressed cultural consciousness. Contemporary horror fiction extends these trajectories, addressing modern precarity intensified by capitalism, alienation, and censorship. Korean horror retains stark realism, depicting fragmented lives in mundane settings—apartments, offices—as metaphors for social isolation, labor exploitation, and existential dread. Chinese horror, by contrast, constructs expansive otherworlds (yishijie, 異世界), using fantasy as strategic critique while navigating political constraints. A comparison of Baek Deok-su’s *I Have to Go to Work Even After Falling into a Ghost Story* and Wohuixiukongtiao (我会修空调)’s *Ghost Story Game Designer* reveals divergent healing strategies: Korean black humor versus Chinese salvific myth. Together, these literary forms act as cultural bulwarks, transforming national wounds and contemporary anxieties into narrative resilience. Through horror and myth, both traditions illuminate how storytelling becomes a medium for healing in precarious times.

Title: Dōgen’s Kannon and Rice-cakes: Tending to Our In-Betweenness

Name and Institution: Chiara Robbiano (Utrecht University)

Abstract: In Dōgen’s Kannon fascicle, two masters ponder how the Bodhisattva of Compassion manages her many arms and eyes, concluding that it is “like a person at night turning their back, using their hand to grope for a pillow.” This metaphor illuminates the embodied, intuitive, and non-conceptual nature of compassionate awareness—an awareness grounded in the in-between, relational flow of being. In *The Ungraspable Mind*, Dōgen recounts an encounter between a Zen master and a woman selling rice cakes. The woman challenges him to apply the doctrine of the ungraspable mind to the simple act of eating cakes. His failure to respond breaks their shared presence, revealing the fragility of compassion when understanding becomes detached from relational practice. She also fails to stay and offer her answer to him. For Dōgen, true practice is not found in grasping concepts or asserting mastery, but in “presencing” the mutual space of encounter, co-expressing the Way (dōtoku) through continuous, dynamic interaction. Women and female bodhisattvas here are not isolated figures but relational nodes through which the Way is embodied and expressed. The bodhisattva’s myriad eyes and hands signify this infinite responsiveness: compassion as a living, ongoing dialogue—an ever-renewing practice of being-with others, human and non-human alike.

SESSION 8.B | Pedagogical Ramifications of Applied Indian Ethics (Part 2)

Title: The Chessboard of Dietary Ethics & Teaching in Ecological Crisis: Pedagogy and Questions of Hybridity, Dogma, and Agency

Name and Institution: Nishant Upadhyay (Tsinghua University)

Abstract: Dietary ethics represent one of the most direct and visible expressions of religiosity in everyday life and hold a crucial link for inter-religious and inter-cultural pedagogies. As this talk argues, they also hold vital potential for developing a pedagogy of cross-cultural ethics education. In this context, the talk examines the dietary ethics of early Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism within the Indian (or Indic) traditions and how they emerge as ritualistic pedagogies, tracing how these frameworks were historically conceived and how they are interpreted and practiced today. In many ways, the ethics of consumption are imparted through familial and social learning, however, in multicultural and multiethnic societies, these norms – almost thought of as non-negotiable teachings – become a way for affirming one’s identity. It further considers their implications for the ecological, political, social, and ethical challenges of our time. For instance, in early Buddhism, the consumption of meat by monks was permitted under the principle of vinaya—humility—and based on the ethical precept that one could eat “what was not killed for them or by them.” Yet, the emergence of new philosophical schools and the transformations brought about by modernity—particularly the rise of capitalist modes of consumption—have profoundly reshaped the ways we think about, practice, and live ethics. These transformations were not just philosophical or theological; they were equally ‘pedagogical’ insofar as they made their way in the social and cultural spheres. However, the way in which these ethics should be practiced today comes under tension. In today’s world, can we still claim moral distance when consuming meat purchased at a supermarket, given that it was not explicitly killed for us? Or should ethical restraint guide us toward abstention? By framing such questions around the hybridity of ethics, the tension between religious dogma and moral agency, this talk explores how religious traditions can inform our responses to a world engulfed in ecological crisis and how their ethics and practices can be used as a pedagogical tool for educating people for awareness on the climate crisis.

Title: Ci 雌 as a Rejoinder to the Gender Trouble

Name and Institution: Ma Lin (Renmin University of China)

Abstract: Scholars such as Judith Butler advocates "undoing gender" in order to acquire genderless self and thus to emancipate women from the oppression of such an ideology. On the other hand, French woman philosophers as represented by Luce Irigaray attempt to articulate a philosophy of sexual difference by focusing upon the specificities of the female body. These two orientations of theorization are sometimes characterized as the opposition between American feminism and French feminism, which have both been subject to criticism. Instead of gender or sex, let us consider the Chinese notion of ci, which refers to both a concrete female creature and feminine characteristics. In this paper, I consider the ways in which ci, especially as

articulated in the Daodejing, intersects and yet differs from both tendencies as summarized above. More importantly, I argue that *ci* why could be a better alternative category for the feminine that could serve better than either "gender" or "sex" for the enterprise of philosophical feminism.

Title: Teaching with the Living Earth: Precarity and Relational Responsibility in Indian Ethics

Name and Institution: Meera Baindur (Manipal Academy of Higher Education)

Abstract: The idea of *āśraya-āśrita-bhāva*, the mutual relationship of dependence and support between beings and their environments, is embedded in the framework of Indian ethical relationships with both the living and non-living parts of the universe. *Ahiṃsā*, therefore, within this context, is not merely non-violence but an embodied sensitivity to the vulnerability of all forms of life. Every form of life that is dependent on another is vulnerable in some sense. Therefore, in this ethical view, responsibility emerges not from abstract duty but from relational awareness and reciprocal care within the web of experience. In this paradigm, eco-pedagogy becomes not merely the transmission of knowledge but also transformative and prescriptive—an act of care. A few examples of this pedagogy occur in the telling of narratives and stories of *ahiṃsā* and interbeing-care. Within many narratives in Indian thought and cultural traditions, we find stories of human beings giving up their anthropocentric functionality for the sake of saving and taking care of animals. Examples of these stories include the prevention of the snake sacrifice in the *Mahābhārata* or the story of a king giving up his chariot to support a fallen creeper on the ground. The idea of humans supporting other beings and taking care of them because those beings have sought shelter and are vulnerable can be seen across these narratives. This paper, therefore, re-examines what relationality and non-violence mean in an active, proactive way when they are to be transmitted and taught. Active non-violence is not about passivity but about lending support and ensuring that violence does not occur in one's presence; it is about the act of encouraging, through language, a performative dharma-based action.

Session 8.C | Healing and the Philosophy of Yoga

Title: The Forms of Narasimha for Inner Healing

Name and Institution: Jensen Martin (Graduate Theological Union)

Abstract: The diversity of Narasimha narratives in the Puranas contain untapped potential for transformative reimagining. As an archetype of divine force, Narasimha and the variety of his portrayals represent modalities through which to reclaim relationships with internal and external power, with special focus on the precarity of family dynamics.

Title: Is *Prāṇāyāma* a Technique of the Body?

Name and Institution: Raquel Ferrández (National University for Distance Education)

Abstract: Yoga understood as a psychophysical practice well structured in angas or limbs is only “yoga” in the narrow sense. According to Sri Aurobindo, yoga “in the broad sense” is the evolutionary process taking place in the universe. In this talk, I will explain that this distinction is not mere speculation on Sri Aurobindo's part, nor is it entirely his own innovation. Exploring Sri Aurobindo's study of the Vedic hymns and the use of the term yoga and its cognates, I will argue that his yoga as a power of the cosmos could be grounded in the Vedic hymns and in Krishna's yoga in the Bhagavad Gita.

Title: Between Well-being and Untroubled States of Mind (*akliṣṭa-vṛtti*): How Insights from Sāṃkhya-Yoga can Benefit the Contemporary Debate on Happiness

Name and Institution: Marzenna Jakubczak-Borge (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

Abstract: A way to approach the conference theme “Healing in Times of Precarity” is to ask whether health care and economic care should remain separate spheres of research or be considered together. When in the latter case measurements focus mainly on the physical aspects of human nature to establish uniform indicators of productivity, profit and psychophysical health. Undoubtedly, persistent stress and lack of purpose in life should be perceived not just as a medical and political problem, but also as a philosophical and spiritual challenge. We know that suffering caused by economic uncertainty and loss of control over one's professional life negatively impacts one's ability to experience happiness. However, it is a mistake to blur the lines between the utilitarian-behaviorist perspective, dominant in the contemporary neoliberal discourse of the so-called happiness industry (Davies 2015) and neuromanagement (Zak 2022) on the one hand, and the perspective of universal subjectivity, characteristic of traditional paths of spiritual development originated in India, on the other. That blurring carries serious negative consequences. The reason is that the concept of the state of “well-being” popularly understood and “the untroubled states of mind” (*akliṣṭa-vṛtti*, YS 1.5) prioritized by the classical Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Buddhist philosophers, are crucially different. I discuss these issues referring to the Sanskrit textual tradition as well as a wider cross-cultural context, including the approach of indigenous psychology (Misra & Mohanty 2002; Pulla & Salagame 2018; Gupta 2021).

SESSION 9.A | Subaltern Voices, Performed Identities

Title: Subalternity, Writing, and Agency: Role of Intellectuals and Literature in Making Tharu Identity

Name and Institution: Mohan Dangaura (Tribhuvan University)

Abstract: This paper studies the themes of resistance and intellectual activity in Tharu literature. The majority of Tharu literature possesses the poetry of awakening against the former Kamaiya system, sociopolitical awareness, importance of education, collective agency, cultural revolution, and ethnic identity. From the first Tharu magazine “Gochali” of west Nepal to the texts published post-Kamaiya emancipation, fictions and non-fictions all share the theme of their continuous struggle against sociopolitical marginalization and the need for collective agency. The themes of territoriality and the resulting sociopolitical marginalization occupy these writings. This paper examines the available literature on Tharu from the perspective of resistance and as part of Tharu’s intellectual activism. Against the backdrop of Ranajit Guha’s thesis on the elementary aspects of South Asian peasants’ insurgency and Antonio Gramsci’s role as a subaltern intellectual, this paper attempts to justify the causes of the poetry of re-awakening in Tharu literature, from text to performance.

Title: Triangulating Tradition: Indian Classical Dance Across India, the U.S., and Australia

Name and Institution: Justine Lemos (Mendocino College)

Abstract: This paper examines the transnational trajectories of Indian classical dance through a triangulated framework linking India, the United States, and Australia. Centering migration, intercultural exchange, race, and performance politics, we explore how Indian dance practices are transformed, appropriated, and recontextualized across these cultural terrains. Drawing on critical dance studies, postcolonial theory, and archival case studies—including the work of Ruth St. Denis, Louise Lightfoot, and Rukmini Devi—we investigate how “classical” forms are not merely inherited but continually reimagined within shifting structures of power and aesthetics. We argue that contemporary notions of “classical” Indian dance emerge through modern, hybrid processes shaped by nationalist revivalism, diasporic identity-making, and postcolonial negotiations of authenticity.

SESSION 9.B | Confucian Justice Care and Moral Emotions

Title: Treating the People as if They Were Wounds — the Confucian Sage King's Way in Terms of Pain

Name and Institution: *Yutong Zhai* (Sichuan University)

Abstract: Disease is something that people do not wish for. Therefore, in the "Book of Documents: Hongfan", "illness" is regarded as one of the six extremes, second only to the greatest misfortune of "come to a bad end and accidental early death" in life. If a person is ill, he must get rid of it promptly. In this regard, the force he wields should be fierce and the momentum should be vigorous. The Book of Documents links diseases with governance through this. As one of the six Classics of Confucianism, it has demonstrated the way of the sage king for later generations and expounded the Confucian philosophy of saving and governing the world. Coincidentally, in the "Mencius", there is a saying of "treating the people as if they were wounded", which further expounds the Confucian principle of benevolent governance through the concern for diseases and pains. In today's world where there is a pandemic crisis, the concern for diseases is an issue we must pay attention to. The cure of diseases and the care for the people are also matters that we as a community must face for survival and development. Thus, Confucianism opened a path of benevolent governance that listens to the call of pain and keeps the care for it in the heart forever, thus initiating a people-centered politics, which is of great significance to our current social governance.

Title: The Wounds of Modernity: Kang Youwei's Ren-Centered Solution and Civilizational Vision

Name and Institution: Yangyang Lyu (Sichuan University)

Abstract: As an early pioneer of "intercivilizational dialogue" in the intellectual history of late Qing China, Kang Youwei diagnosed the maladies of Western modernity from a Confucian standpoint and proposed a systematic "therapeutic prescription." However, constrained by the prevailing "impact-response" research paradigm, contemporary scholarship has largely overlooked this critical dimension, simplistically casting Kang as a mere "student of the West." Through a close reading of Kang's exilic works—including (but not limited to) *Da Tong Shu* (The Book of Great Unity), *Mengzi Wei* (The Essence of Mencius), and *Li Yun Zhu* (Commentaries on the Evolution of Rites)—this article demonstrates how he constructed a sophisticated therapeutic framework with dual spiritual-institutional dimensions through his creative reinterpretation of *ren*, the core Confucian concept of humaneness and interconnectedness. This framework offers a comprehensive Eastern intellectual resource for diagnosing and addressing the structural deficits of Western modernity. Specifically, on the spiritual level, focusing on the modern crises of "radical individualism" and "communal disintegration," Kang reinterpreted *ren* as an antidote to spiritual isolation and a foundational force for rebuilding communal emotional bonds. On the politico-social level, positing *ren* as the driving force of historical evolution, he engaged in institutional design to blueprint a utopian vision capable of transcending Darwinian competition among nation-states and realizing

ultimate global peace. This research not only repositions Kang Youwei within the global discourse critiquing modernity but, more importantly, clarifies how his thought, deeply rooted in the Asian Confucian tradition, constitutes an active engagement in the global reflection upon and healing of modernity's crises. This demonstrates the profound philosophical significance and contemporary relevance of his intellectual project.

SESSION 9.C | Bhakti

Title: Bhakti as the inter-present sacred: The lived Indian Psychology of healing and abundance

Name and Institution: Shilpa Ashok Pandit (Ahmedabad University)

Abstract: While contemporary psychology advances 4E cognition and affective neuroscience, details remain to be unpacked. The question is who or what feels precarious and is injured or wounded, that now needs to be healed. In this paper, I present the case of Bhakti as a lived Indian psychology, that considers the world as real and embodied, rather than precarious, exploitative and injurious. Bhakti psychology has a clear bidirectionality with worldviews about consciousness and empirical practices. Seen as a counterexample to any existing philosophical psychology, Bhakti cannot be contrasted with schools such as Advaita or Buddhism, or intellectual exercises either, but is instead a lived antidote to the mindless, individualistic versions of materialism. From a radical psychological perspective, Bhakti is a processual practice resulting in re-organization of self as intrinsically intersubjective, relational, and affective. The re-organization of self builds relations to animate and inanimate elements of the world and a re-thinking of motivation to be in this world. This processual re-organization of self and the world is embedded in practicing communities, a psychosocial scaffolding. In the application of Bhakti psychology, we see, enactive, embodied, embedded and extended consciousness which is recognized as sacred relationship with all other expressions of consciousness. Thus, there is a loss of precarity and rediscovery of abundance, beyond narrow individualistic concerns. The everyday Bakhtin embraces and celebrates life with service and fellowship. Embodied freedom was and is what we theorize as inter-present, with relational dyadic sacred consciousness. The implications of this joyous emancipation are starkly in variance with a retreat from the messiness of life as emancipation. Thus, freedom as a category is to be revised. This paper concludes with these implications on lived values such as courage, acceptance, and fellowship in relationality and communities to address the challenges faced by our world.

Title: Healing Virtues in Spinoza's Ethics (Parts IV and V) and Bhagavadgītā Chapter 12 (Bhaktiyoga)

Name and Institution: Lisa Widdison (Ahmedabad University)

Abstract: A perennial protagonist in classical Sanskrit soteriological literature and agency-centred texts, we would be hard pressed to find philological evidence that the enlightened sage,

Vāsiṣṭha, is a single figure who speaks, acts and thinks in the same way across instances of instruction he offers. Nevertheless, his modes of humble persistence matter for an inquiry into perseverance itself. On one hand, Vāsiṣṭha soberly argues against the possibility of terminating life with a body in the Yogavāsiṣṭha. On the other, he repeatedly, and with conviction, attempts to end his life in the Mahābhārata. The problem is that for a seeker, either Vāsiṣṭha's varying personae in alternating contexts implies that extraordinary characters do not conform to a relatable figure, or else they reveal the inconsistency of one who does not act according to his own teachings. Rather than read Vāsiṣṭha as being infallible and mentally unbreakable only in unrealistic contexts, or conversely, as a weak human being in horrific circumstances, this paper argues that recurrences of Vāsiṣṭha in the Mahābhārata offer us a chance to reassess unsustainable standards of mental well-being. The imperative of redemption requires that Vāsiṣṭha unlock his power of temporal effacement, rather than use his destructive power to give up. Where death is theoretically said to be truly impossible, we may look to who Vāsiṣṭha recurs as, and how he reconciles his losses. He recovers, and reinvents the self, free of obstacles. He leads a path of transformation in a hostile and vexed age, reconnecting with life beyond mere survival. Though the grounds to test the same limits as Vāsiṣṭha are off the table for us, we may capture an argument on embodied reconnecting in the Yogavāsiṣṭha, which is in tune with Vāsiṣṭha's redemption the Mahābhārata, and focuses on these creative powers to go on.

SESSION 9.C | Limits of Knowing Consciousness

Title: Memory, Perception, and the Possibility of a Pure Past: Interpreting Buddhaghosa Through the Prism of Henri Bergson

Name and Institution: Sudeep RajKumar (Hindu College, University of Delhi)

Abstract: The broad objective of this article is to explore the ontology of the past and its relation with the present: the different kinds of memories, the link between memory and perception, and the association between memory and action. Specifically, my aim is to develop a typology of memory in Buddhaghosa, a typology consisting of body memories, recollections, and pure memory. The method adopted here is to interpret Buddhaghosa through the prism of Henri Bergson: I borrow the framework of Bergson, as developed by him in *Matter and Memory* regarding different kinds of memory and glean the kinds that can be postulated in Buddhaghosa. To explore the ontological status of the past, its relationship with the present, the strings that attach the past to actions, to begin with, there is a discussion of the different kinds of memory as posited by Henri Bergson. Then, Bergson's account of attentive recognition is discussed which connects memory, perception, and action. Drawing from the process of attentive recognition, there is a discussion of the suggestion of a pure past by Bergson. Then, I engage with the works of Buddhaghosa with an objective to develop a typology of memory. Firstly, this is done by understanding and reconstructing *cittavithi*, an account that specifies the path taken by consciousness in the cognition of objects resulting in ethical actions and which explains the connections between the past and the present. Here, a dimension of past

consisting of memories and habits can be excavated and its relation with ethical actions can be discussed. Then, it is attempted to bring out the relation between explicit remembering and perception by exploring another model of consciousness namely citta and cetasikas. Further, I explore regarding the ontological status of the past in general in Buddhaghosa. Is it lost forever whenever the 'present' cognition takes place? Or does it have a separate existence independent of its existence with the present? The answers to these questions are sought by borrowing Bergson's suggestion of a pure memory. Specifically, I want to argue that there is an ontological past in Buddhaghosa, a position that is established by reconstructing the notion of bhavaṅgacitta. I do this by critiquing some of the contemporary accounts of bhavaṅga-citta. Overall, I want to posit that, in the case of Buddhaghosa, suggesting an original pastness can enrich the accounts of recollections, perceptions, and actions.

Title: The Possibility of Thinking the All-Knowing (Sarvajña): Revisiting Abhinavagupta's concept of Śiva

Name and Institution: Himanshu (Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay)

Abstract: In the thirty-fifth chapter of his Tantrāloka, the non-dual Śaiva philosopher Abhinavagupta argues for an "all-knowing" (Sarvajña) as the originary cause of all manifestations. This paper enquires what it means to think about this all-knowing that is the "coming-to-be of all beings" (or sarvabhāvānāṃ prakāśarūpa) in a world where beings only know in their privative sphere (kiñcitatva). This characterisation of all-knowing implies that, as beings, we lack any mode of understanding the all-knowing, except one with which it itself avails us (beings) as the coming-to-be of all beings. However, as the all-knowing continuously illuminates all beings "at once" or "together" (sakṛt), it does not exhaustively reveal itself in the form of coming-to-be of this or that being. This mode of thinking makes one realise that the question of the meaning of all-knowing is not really about an individual being or something called sarvajña. It is about the "all," which invariably invokes all beings in the world or the world of wonderful variety, as Abhinavagupta would call it. However, the urge to label the "all" by any name, whether God or Consciousness shared by any being in our understanding, must be suspended; otherwise, we, the questioners of "all," will be robbed of the conceptual load of "all" and remain astray in fettered worlds. These precautions allow me to understand how Abhinavagupta's introductions to the Tantrāloka and the Tantrasāra can lay out certain pre-conditions for the possibility of a being's thinking about the coming-to-be of all beings at once. The paper's final section employs these pre-conditions to articulate how a being simultaneously relates with itself, other fettered beings, and the world of wonderful variety whose exclusive unity generates an agential autonomy (svāntarya). In other words, we enquire about the meaning and implications of the manifestation of contingent beings vis-à-vis the all-manifestor's completely autonomous ontological existence.

KEYNOTE #2

Title: Mourning and Healing

Name and Institution: Jin Y. Park (American University)

Abstract: The precariousness of existence is laid bare in moments of loss. Biological death, the end of relationships, and the erosion of social justice, all both symbolically and materially, expose how vulnerable life is. When a loved one dies, we mourn, or we do not. When an intimate relationship is disrupted, we may react or reflect. When social justice is weakened, we may withdraw or we may protest. Mourning, reflection, and protest are ways of searching for healing, and healing in this sense is not a form of passive quietism but a dynamic process of mending the ruptures that occur in life and of affirming the values we uphold concerning human existence, our relationships with others, and the society we seek to build. This talk explores mourning, reflection, and protest as practices that emerge from life's precarity and how they urge us to transform ourselves and our society in order to move forward.

Brief Biography: Jin Y. Park is the William Fraser McDowell Chair Professor of Philosophy and Religion and the Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American University. She also served as the Founding Director of the Asian Studies Program from 2013 to 2020. Park specializes in East Asian Buddhism, Buddhist and comparative ethics, intercultural philosophy, and modern East Asian philosophy. Her research focuses on gender, violence, the politics of discrimination, and narrative philosophy. Marginality has been a consistent theme in her work, addressing the marginalization of the non-West and non-Western philosophy, women's philosophy, and alternative forms of philosophizing. Her scholarship seeks to reveal power structures in philosophy and aims to amplify the voices of those at the margins. Park has served as the President of the American Academy of Religion, the North American Korean Philosophy Association and the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy. Park's research in Buddhism focuses on the Zen and Huayan schools of East Asian Buddhism, with particular attention to issues of language, violence, and ethics. In her comparative studies, she engages Zen and Huayan Buddhism alongside postmodern thought in Continental philosophy, with a special focus on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. Park's research on modern East Asian philosophy explores the emergence of philosophy in East Asia and the East-West encounter during this period. In her monograph *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist-Postmodern Ethics* (2008), Park discusses Buddhism and continental philosophy on the topics of, among others, self, language, and violence. In this book, Park offers the "ethics of tension" as a potential ethical paradigm drawn from Buddhism and postmodern philosophy. *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (2014), is a translation of a book published in Korean in 1960 by Kim Iryöp (1896-1971), a writer, first-generation Korean feminist, Buddhist nun, and

philosopher. In this book, Kim Iryöp offers a creative interpretation of Buddhist philosophy and practice.

In *Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryop* (2017), Park proposes a new mode of philosophizing based on the discussion of Kim Iryöp's life and philosophy.

Park is also the editor of volumes: *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (2006), *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (co-edited, 2009), *Comparative Political Theory and Cross-Cultural Philosophy* (2009), and *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* (2010).

In Memory of Anand Vaidya (1976–2024)

This year's conference includes a special memorial panel dedicated to the work and legacy of Anand Vaidya, former Treasurer of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, whose passing in October 2024 was a profound loss to the SACP community and to the field of comparative philosophy more broadly.

As part of this memorial session, we are honored to include the following paper, which Anand had been developing in collaboration with his wife, Manjula Menon. Manjula will present the paper on Anand's behalf during the conference. In light of the special nature of this session, and with the permission of the author and presenter, the paper is being shared with conference participants in advance as a way of commemorating Anand's philosophical contributions and continuing the conversations that his work inspired.

Anand's scholarship consistently crossed disciplinary and cultural boundaries, engaging questions of consciousness, comparative philosophy, Indian philosophy, cognitive science, and the ethical implications of emerging technologies. His work combined philosophical rigor with intellectual generosity, and his presence shaped the SACP community in countless ways.

We are grateful to Manjula Menon for allowing us to share this work and for helping preserve and continue Anand's philosophical legacy.



The In(significance) of Sentience

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya¹ · Manjula Menon² 

Received: 23 July 2025 / Accepted: 4 November 2025
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Abstract

This paper challenges the sentientist view, as advanced by the 2024 New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness, that consciousness is the primary ground for moral standing. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from animal cognition, plant intelligence, artificial intelligence (AI), and Jain ethics, I argue that intelligence, defined as problem-solving and goal-directed behavior, provides a broader and more measurable basis for moral standing across biological and artificial entities. While the Declaration emphasizes sentience for moral consideration, I propose that entities like plants and AI, which may lack consciousness but exhibit goal-directed intelligence, also warrant moral inclusion. Plants demonstrate intelligence through survival-oriented behaviors (e.g., root tropism, chemical defenses), and AI shows comparable capacities via benchmarks like ARC-AGI-2. Engaging with Indian philosophical perspectives from the 2024 AAR meeting, including Jainism's graded moral framework based on senses, I advocate an approach where intelligence grounds moral standing, and capacities like sentience or rationality grade moral status. This framework offers a unified ethical model for diverse entities, from microbes to machines.

Keywords New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness · Animal consciousness · Plant consciousness · AI consciousness · Moral standing · Intelligence · Moral grading · Jainism · Moral ground

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Introduction: the Moral Implications of Consciousness

On April 19, 2024, NYU's Center for Animal Ethics held a visionary workshop on consciousness in non-human animals. They also announced the New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness (the Declaration) (Andrews et al., 2024).

Which animals have the capacity for conscious experience? While much uncertainty remains, some points of wide agreement have emerged.

First, there is strong scientific support for attributions of conscious experience to other mammals and to birds.

Second, the empirical evidence indicates at least a realistic possibility of conscious experience in all vertebrates (including reptiles, amphibians, and fishes) and many invertebrates (including, at minimum, cephalopod mollusks, decapod crustaceans, and insects).

Third, when there is a realistic possibility of conscious experience in an animal, it is irresponsible to ignore that possibility in decisions affecting that animal. We should consider welfare risks and use the evidence to inform our responses to these risks.

Overall, the Declaration was well received. *The Times* (Whipple, 2024), *The Hill* (Elbein, 2024), *Quanta Magazine* (Falk, 2024), *NBC News* (Bush, 2024) and *Nature* (Lenharo, 2024), to name just a few, discussed the potential inner lives of non-human animals, including exploring the moral implications of ignoring the potential consciousness of non-human animals. Inquiring into the nature of consciousness: what it is, where it is present, how and why it arises, is a leading question of our time. It is perhaps one of the greatest questions of all time.

In 2020, I asked in *The Conversation*: Given the continued rapid advances in the field of artificial intelligence, why is it the case that consciousness of any kind is necessary for moral consideration? Why can't entities without consciousness be in the moral sphere? (Vaidya, 2020)

While the Declaration suggests there is a good chance that many animals are conscious and therefore deserve moral standing, the prospects for AI consciousness are less clear, I advocate here a graded position: conscious things may matter more, but non-conscious entities also have moral standing.

As I further detail (Vaidya, *in press*) it is not sentience but preferentially tied computational intelligence (PTCI) that grounds moral standing in biological or artificial systems. Capacities like sentience or rationality may grade moral status. Drawing on the Declaration, studies of animals, plants, AI, and Jain ethics, I propose a framework inclusive of non-conscious entities. Section "[Defining Moral Standing: Intelligence Over Sentience](#)" defines moral standing and argues for intelligence as its ground; Section "[Engaging Indian Philosophy and AI Perspectives](#)" engages perspectives from the *Indian Philosophy and AI* session in the American Academy of Religion's

(AAR, 2025) annual meeting held November 2024; Section "[Conclusion](#)" concludes with a unified framework.

Defining Moral Standing: Intelligence Over Sentience

Moral Grounding vs. Moral Grading

To explore the capacity for consciousness and its relationship to moral standing, I distinguish two questions:

1. *Moral Grounding Question*: what features are necessary and sufficient for being a member of the moral sphere, deserving consideration for welfare risks?
2. *Moral Grading Question*: if x and y are both members of the moral sphere, what features give x or y has greater moral standing?

The Declaration's *sentientism* argues:

1. Entities deserve moral considerations with respect to welfare risks if there is a realistic chance that they are conscious.
2. Many non-human animals, vertebrates (including reptiles, amphibians, and fish) and many invertebrates (including, at a minimum, cephalopod mollusks, decapod crustaceans, and insects) have a realistic chance of having conscious experience.
3. So, these creatures deserve moral consideration with respect to their welfare risks.

There are at least two accounts of sentientism based on two distinct accounts of consciousness:

- In his *Animal Liberation* Peter Singer defends the view that if x has the capacity for affective consciousness, then that is sufficient for x to have moral standing (Singer, 1975/2023). Affective consciousness has to do with states of consciousness that involve hedonic tone either positive or negative. An account of sentience in terms of affective consciousness requires that the sentient being have the capacity for states of consciousness that are either pleasurable or painful to some degree.
- In his *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, David Chalmers favors an account of sentientism grounded in phenomenal consciousness, where phenomenal consciousness has to do with the what-it-is-like aspect of subjective first-person experience (Chalmers, 2022). On Chalmers' account of phenomenal consciousness, it is possible for a subject to be phenomenally conscious without being affectively conscious, it has the what-it-is-like aspect to experience but no hedonic tone, positive or negative, a creature akin to Star Trek's Spock, who can be coherently conceived and is therefore metaphysically possible. A Vulcan has phenomenal consciousness but lacks hedonic tone, positive or negative.

Using the distinction between affective and phenomenal consciousness, there are two notions of sentientism as it relates to the moral grounding question implicit in the Declaration:

1. *Narrow sentientism* holds that affective consciousness (pleasure, pain) is sufficient for moral standing.
2. *Broad sentientism* holds that phenomenal consciousness (“what-it-is-like” experience) is sufficient for moral standing; entities that are phenomenally conscious (with or without affective consciousness) have moral standing.

The Declaration offers sentience (whether narrowly or broadly defined) as the answer to what grounds moral standing. Indeed, many global traditions have long advocated for versions of the view. The Indian tradition of Jainism, for example, extends some moral standing even beyond invertebrates to plants (Webb, n.d.).

To the moral grading question however, the Declaration is silent. Some philosophers even hold that degrees of moral status make no sense. In his *Life Without Degrees of Moral Status: Implications for Rabbits, Robots, and the Rest of Us*, Wendler (2023) argues that to say that two things have moral standing, belong in the moral sphere, but one has greater moral standing than the other is indefensible. A counterargument is offered in *How to Count Animals: More or Less*, where Kagan (2019) offers an account where some things have greater moral standing than others.

I acknowledge the debate over whether degrees of moral status as important. However, my view is that whether narrow or broad, sentientism will involve a notion of moral grading. For example, while insects are worthy of moral considerations, they may not have equal moral consideration to that of octopi or orangutans or humans.

While the legal vs. moral implications fall outside the scope of this paper, I maintain that there are many ways to build in degrees of moral standing depending on how one conceives of the metaphysics of morality and its relation to legal standing. Conceivably, even if two things have equal moral standing, they might not have equal legal standing.

The Declaration’s sentientism ties moral standing to consciousness, but I will argue this excludes entities like plants and AI, which may lack consciousness yet exhibit morally relevant capacities. Intelligence, as a broader and measurable property, better serves as the ground for moral standing, with sentience grading moral status.

Non-Human Animals, AI and Moral Standing

Globally, several questions have been raised regarding what belongs in the moral sphere: Should rights be extended to orangutans, such as in Argentina (Roman, 2015)? To rivers, such as for the Māori people with respect to the Whanganui river (Roy, 2017)? To robots, such as to Sophia in Saudi Arabia (British Council, n.d.)? All of these were eventually answered in the affirmative.

In “Is it time to start considering personhood rights for chatbots?” published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Eric Schwitzgebel and Henry Shevlin ask if it is time to start considering personhood rights for AI Chatbots. It should come as no surprise given our

discussion thus far that Schwitzgebel and Shevlin motivate their inquiry into personhood rights by appealing to the issue of whether AI chatbots are conscious. Although they don't defend the view that AI chatbots are conscious, they use the controversy over whether they are and what other mental states they might have, such as emotions, to motivate the moral question:

Even a couple of years ago, the idea that artificial intelligence might be conscious and capable of subjective experience seemed like pure science fiction. But in recent months, we've witnessed a dizzying flurry of developments in AI, including language models like ChatGPT and Bing Chat with remarkable skill at seemingly human conversation.

Given these rapid shifts and the flood of money and talent devoted to developing ever smarter, more humanlike systems, it will become increasingly plausible that AI systems could exhibit something like consciousness. But if we find ourselves seriously questioning whether they are capable of real emotions and suffering, we face a potentially catastrophic moral dilemma: either give those systems rights, or don't (Schwitzgebel & Shevlin, 2023).

In their 2023 *Psyche* piece "What has Feelings", Kristin Andrews and Jonathan Birch argue that to understand sentience in AI we need to study animal minds. To justify whether a non-human animal is sentient, they favor using both biological markers and behavioral evidence; while vertebrates and humans share common neurological structures, invertebrates have "brains" that are designed differently, making behavioral evidence relevant. They point out that the phenomenon of pain can be analyzed in terms of common neurological correlates for pain or in terms of common pain behavior such as wound tending.

When extending the discussion from animals to AI, they discuss the gaming problem:

'Gaming' is a word for the phenomenon of non-sentient systems using human-generated training data to mimic human behaviors likely to persuade human users of their sentience. There doesn't have to be any intention to deceive for gaming to occur. But when it does occur, it means the behavior can no longer be interpreted as evidence of sentience (Andrews & Birch, 2023).

The problem is that given the AI has almost certainly been trained on data that includes discussions of consciousness, it will be able to output strings of words that suggest it is conscious. For an AI chatbot to be successful, it must respond as if it were conscious.

In *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind*, Susan Schneider discusses the gaming problem in the context of requiring that an AI be "boxed in" when asked questions like (Schneider, 2019):

- Could you survive the permanent deletion of your program? What if you learned this would occur?

- What is it like to be you now?
- You learn that you will be turned off for 300 years, beginning in an hour. Would you prefer this scenario to one in which you had been turned off in the past for the same length of time? Why or why not?
- Could you or your inner processes be in a separate location from the computer? From any computer? Why or why not?

An AI is “boxed in” for Schneider only when it is not exposed in its training stage to any data concerning consciousness.

Ultimately, Andrews and Birch conclude the following:

In sum, we need better tests for AI sentience, tests that are not wrecked by the gaming problem. To get there, we need gaming-proof markers based on a secure understanding of what is really indispensable for sentience, and why. The most realistic path to these gaming-proof markers involves more research into animal cognition and behavior, to uncover as many independently evolved instances of sentience as we possibly can. We can discover what is essential to a natural phenomenon only if we examine many different instances. Accordingly, the science of consciousness needs to move beyond research with monkeys and rats toward studies of octopuses, bees, crabs, starfish, and even the nematode worm (Andrews & Birch, 2023).

My view is that there remains a role for sentience, not as moral grounding property, but instead as grading property. In contrast to Andrews and Birch, who focus on non-human animals, I think the route to understanding moral standing in AI is by considering what is going on in plants with respect to their moral standing.

Aliens and Moral Standing

Kagan offers an account where “agency” is what is necessary for moral standing and offers a thought experiment to motivate it:

Gruen-Alien-Thought Experiment Imagine you have been kidnapped by aliens from another planet, who –let us suppose –plan to keep you in their intergalactic zoo, or perhaps to experiment on you, or worse. Suppose that you are able to communicate with them, . . . , and you are trying to persuade them that keeping you would be wrong, that they should let you go back to your life on Earth. What might you say? [In *Ethics and Animals*, Gruen says]

you might express your desire to be held captive, that being held against your will is wrong, and that it prevents you from doing not just the things you want to be doing at home, but the things you are supposed to be doing. The aliens are frustrating your desires and preventing you from fulfilling your obligations to others. You might explain that you are a rational and sensitive individual who has immediate desires and long-term plans that you hope to satisfy. You don't think you should be treated as a means to some alien ends. You might try

to bargain with them, telling them you will do something for them if they do something for you. You have relationships to others that you want to continue to pursue, and you would be willing to develop a relationship with them if they respect you. You value your freedom and your ability to make choices. You need to be with your friends, family, and others of your kind. If you are forced to stay with the aliens, you will become bored, frustrated, lonely, angry, and depressed. You may even die. Holding you captive, against your will, harms you in many ways. (Kagan, 2019: 16)

Based on the thought experiment, Kagan argues as follows.

1. The plea does not appeal to phenomenal consciousness to be persuasive, even though it mentions that you are a rational and sensitive being (Kagan, 2019, p. 17).
2. What this does depend on is that you are the kind of being with its own desires and plans concerning how your life should go. You possess a will that is opposed to what is now being done to you by the aliens (Kagan, 2019, p. 17).
3. If the plea is persuasive to the aliens in the case of you as a human, the plea is persuasive to humans in the case of non-human animals.
4. It is persuasive in the case of human to alien interaction (Kagan, 2019, p. 16).
5. So, it is persuasive in the non-human animal to human animal interaction.

I agree with Kagan when he says:

[W]hat I particularly want to draw your attention to is just how little of this imaginary speech to the aliens has anything much to do with the fact that you are *sentient*—where we continue to mean by that term the fact that you are capable of having conscious experience, with a qualitative aspect. (Kagan, 2019: 17).

Kagan refers to his view as the *agency view* on which we take as central the fact that you have desires and plans concerning how your life goes and what you want to do with it (Kagan, 2019: 17) He admits that his use of “agency” isn’t ideal because he is using it such that desires and plans and acting on them is sufficient for agency, while others would say that freewill is also required (Kagan, 2019: 18).

In Kagan’s view, even though consciousness is not what bestows moral standing, he is primarily concerned with non-human animals for which there is considerable evidence that they are conscious.

My own view is close to Kagan’s, but I prefer to use the concept of intelligence, as opposed to Kagan’s agency, will and desire for the ground of moral standing. In contrast to Kagan, my view applies to things that are less likely to be conscious, including non-biological entities or plants.

Plants and Moral Standing

That plants should be included in the moral sphere because they have some degree of sentience has long been advocated for.

In the Western tradition, consider the work of the German philosopher and physicist Gustav Theodor Fechner that drew on historical figures like Aristotle, Leibniz and Schelling and the botanical experiments of scientists of his time to argue in his 1848 work, *Nanna, or On the Soul-Life of Plants* that plants possess a form of mind or “soul” (which could not exist independently of the body) that included first-person subjective consciousness and volition. Fechner countered objections that plants lack nervous or locomotion by suggesting that plant fibers could serve sensory functions and that their subtle movements reflect intentionality, using analogies like musical instruments to argue that nature may produce sensation through diverse means (Fechner, 1848/2012).

Later, in 1973, Peter Tomkins and Christopher Bird argued in *The Secret Life of Plants* that plants have the capacity for consciousness and emotional response. Like Fechner, Tomkins and Bird drew on philosophical perspectives from figures like Aristotle, Goethe and George Washington Carver and also experiments, notably Cleve Backster’s polygraphy tests which suggested plants exhibit electrical reactions to human emotions, and the early experiments on plant stimuli responses by the physicist Jagdish Chandra Bose (Tomkins & Bird, 1973). Even more recently, scientists have presented research into the neurobiology of plants, where research is ongoing (Brenner et al., 2006). In *Aeon* in 2024, Rachel Petersen presented a historical account of the topic from a Western perspective in “Do Plants Have Minds?” (Petersen, 2024).

While I am in strong agreement with the claim that plants have minds, I am not as attracted to the Jain idea that they have a soul (*jīva*) (Webb, n.d.), or the joint idea shared with Fechner that they have subjective first-person experience (what is known in the philosophical literature as phenomenal consciousness). There is far more evidence (Matthen, 2024) to believe that plants have goal-directed intelligence, rather than phenomenal or affective consciousness. Plants use their intelligence to pursue survival in at least three ways:

- (a) Nutritive – Plants intelligently adapt to environments where their nutrient needs are met, e.g., through root tropism.
- (b) Temperate – Plants intelligently respond to environments with suitable temperatures for thriving, e.g., via leaf orientation.
- (c) Predatorial – Plants intelligently adjust to environments where predation levels support survival, e.g., through chemical defenses.

Thus, plants deploy their capacity for goal-directed intelligence to achieve survival-oriented goals. Their intelligence has a purpose: they are sensing creatures with systems that respond to their environment to promote survival, with or without subjective first-person experience.

Using plants as an illustrative example, my view is that what grounds membership in the moral sphere is intelligence, not consciousness. This reorientation toward intelligence over consciousness, allows for the inclusion of machines with goal-directed intelligence to be included in the moral sphere. I will thus next offer an account of what I mean by “intelligence”.

Intelligence, AI and Moral Standing

In their *What Is Intelligent Life?* Abigail Desmond and Michael Haslam argue that what we attribute intelligence to is in many ways shaped by human interests. Against this tendency, they urge us to be more pluralistic about intelligence:

Eventually, instead of talking about how machines, animal collectives, or individual birds and bugs exhibit intelligence, we should be better prepared to investigate how they evolved or iterated those actions in their own evolutionary spaces, unshackled from human-shaped standards. For those seeking a middle ground, we might be tempted to say that each species has its own intelligence, but that claim carries too much baggage at this point. A planet full of problem-solving life exists apart from humans, and none of it is obligated to fit neatly into our subjective, self-serving mindset. We need to avoid the real risk that we will miss animal or machine (or plant, fungal, bacterial, or even extraterrestrial) ways of succeeding just because they are fundamentally alien to our conceptual toolkit.

Like gazing through a stained-glass window at a vibrantly colored, snow-covered landscape, intelligence isn't just what we're looking *for*, it's what we are looking *through*. Humans value intelligence, and that is not about to change. What *may* change is our capacity to appreciate other kinds of life on their own terms, divorced from anthropocentric box-checking (Desmond & Haslam, 2024).

I agree with the Desmond and Haslam that it is useful to be pluralistic when thinking about the nature of intelligence. Note that the pluralism about intelligence advocated above can also be made for consciousness, such as one finds in the work of Freya Matthews' *For a Love of Matter: A Contemporary Panpsychism* (Matthews, 2003).

I prefer pluralism about intelligence rather than about consciousness, because pluralism about intelligence rests on common kind, viz. problem solving tied to the entity's goals and relative to its environment. We have a necessary and sufficient condition for intelligence that drops the human-centric point of view as the arbiter of what is intelligent and transfers it over to the entity by examining how it solves problems in its typical environment to achieve its goals. Pluralism about consciousness tends to devolve into different kinds of consciousness with no common kind across the various types, representing at best a family resemblance. Intelligence can be observed and measured as an ability to solve problems within a typical environment to achieve goals. This then raises the question as to a threshold condition for intelligence.

In that context, I will next bring up proposed benchmarks for AI, the most famous of which is the Turing Test. Although I have long maintained that the Turing Test is not really a good test for intelligence, it has in any case long been achieved and deprecated in the case of AI. Several new benchmarks have since been proposed (and defeated in turn). The newest benchmarks for intelligence include "Humanity's Last Exam" (HLE) (Phan et al., 2025) and "ARC-AGI-2" (Chollet et al., 2025). The

ultimate test for AGI (or artificial general intelligence) however may be “watch and learn” AGI-embedded robots that can be taught to perform tasks just like a human can. Evidence (Kedia & Choudhury, 2025) suggests that such robots might soon be here.

Given that AI Chatbots have passed the Turing Test and other benchmarks, we have some *prima facie* evidence for thinking that they are intelligent. Note that the intelligence we are attributing to them is not the intelligence of novelty, although that is what generative AI aims at. The kind of intelligence that is at play here is best understood in terms of the skill vs. originality distinction. AI is intelligent in the way that a concert pianist who can compose derivative versions of the highly complex work of other composers but who does not compose entirely novel pieces; they exercise intelligent skill without producing anything truly original. For chatbots and AI in general, my position is that originality is not necessarily required to say they are intelligent.

Preferences, AI and Moral Standing

Given how AIs are trained on data, the next question that might arise is whether AI Chatbots can be said to have goals. Specifically, do they have goals that are not functions of programming or training that can be argued to be in some sense not “real” goals in the way humans, for example, have goals based on the exercise of their will.

A form of goal-directed behavior can be described by “preferences”. Preferences are goals in the sense that goal-directed behavior favors one thing over the other thing given a choice. Consider the analogy of the preferences of human infants and non-human animals as a function of two factors: nature and nurture. AIs have a similar structure in terms of the division between their hardware/software (nature) in contrast to the data they are trained over (nurture). Adult humans have a desire for food as a basic preference (nature), but their specific preference for Indian over Italian food is a function of environment (nurture). Just as we can question whether AI Chatbots have any real preferences, we can also inquire into the reality of our own preferences. AI Chatbots might be said to have preferences more like plants than like non-human animals or humans do, in that their preferences are more closely tied to their nature and design than to their nurture.

The Significance of Sentience

The significance of sentience is not as a binary (yes/no) ground for moral standing, but in imparting graded degrees of moral standing based on the type of consciousness (as in the Jain tradition as I explore in a subsequent section). Further, given there are different kinds of intelligences atop both phenomenal and affective consciousness, these differences could further grade moral standing for entities with phenomenal and affective consciousness.

AI Chatbots are part of the moral sphere *if and only if* they are intelligent (that align with to-be-determined benchmarks for intelligence) and have goal-directed behavior (like plants have goal-directed behavior). The point is that the moral ground is not consciousness, affective or phenomenological, but intelligence. Note that this

would also place plants into the moral sphere (which as per the earlier discussion is already a part of many traditions).

Conclusion

My view is that what grounds membership in the moral sphere is intelligence, not consciousness, defined as the capacity for problem-solving and goal-directed behavior, implemented through biological or artificial systems. Using plants as an illustrative example, I drew on research showing their goal-directed intelligence in survival-oriented behaviors: (a) nutritive (e.g., root tropism for nutrient acquisition), (b) temperate (e.g., leaf orientation for suitable temperatures), and (c) predatorial (e.g., chemical defenses against predation) (Matthen, 2024). Plants deploy intelligence to respond to their environment, promoting survival without requiring subjective first-person experience. Historical perspectives, like Gustav Theodor Fechner's *Nanna* (1848/2012) and Tomkins and Bird's *The Secret Life of Plants* (1973), suggest plants have a form of mind, but I find their goal-directed intelligence more compelling than claims of phenomenal or affective consciousness.

This reorientation toward intelligence allows for the inclusion of machines with goal-directed intelligence, such as AI passing benchmarks like ARC-AGI-2 (Chollet et al., 2025). In *What Is Intelligent Life?* Desmond and Haslam (2024) advocate a pluralistic view of intelligence, unshackled from human-centric standards, emphasizing problem-solving relative to an entity's environment and goals. I adopt this pluralism, arguing that intelligence, unlike consciousness, provides a common, observable criterion across entities. For AI, the "gaming problem" (Andrews & Birch, 2023; Schneider, 2019) complicates sentience attribution, as AI may mimic conscious behavior without experiencing it. However, intelligence, as demonstrated by benchmarks like ARC-AGI-2 or "watch and learn" robots (Kedia & Choudhury, 2025), is measurable and does not require consciousness.

I align with Kagan's agency view, which uses the Gruen-Alien thought experiment to argue that moral standing stems from desires and plans, not consciousness (Kagan, 2019). However, I prefer "intelligence" over "agency" to include entities like plants and AI, which may lack desires but exhibit goal-directed behavior. For example, AI chatbots, trained on vast datasets, display preferences akin to plants' nature-driven responses, shaped by design (nature) and training (nurture).

Intelligence (problem-solving and goal-directed behavior) tied to preferences in biological or artificial systems grounds moral standing. Plants and AI, despite lacking consciousness, exhibit intelligence, warranting their inclusion in the moral sphere, with sentience potentially grading their moral status.

Engaging Indian Philosophy and AI Perspectives

The Indian Philosophy and AI session in the American Academy of Religion's (AAR) annual meeting offers perspectives on sentience and intelligence, which I critique to support my intelligence-based framework. Without access to full papers, I engage the summarized arguments, connecting them to broader debates.

Sentience and Moral Standing in Dharma Traditions

Jeffery Long's *On Jīvas, Artificial Life Forms, and Inanimate Objects: Commander Data, Marie Kondo, and the Dharma Traditions* (Long, 2023) asks whether AI, like Star Trek's Commander Data, could possess a *jīva* (soul) in Dharma traditions (Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism). He explores the question of whether an artificial intelligence could be possessed of *jīva*, the soul or the essential life force of a living being. He examined various permutations and perspectives from different Dharma traditions, including the Buddhist conception of 'self' as a process, and the Jain and Hindu concepts of *jīva* to ask whether Commander Data from Star Trek could be sentient, and what moral status could be afforded him. The question of whether AI can have moral standing based on a "self" or "soul" could suggest even inanimate objects might qualify.

Loriliai Biernacki's *Mind, Mental Causation, and Yogic Siddhi* draws a connection between Integrated Information Theory and Abhinavagupta and invokes Somānanda and Viśuddhananda's panpsychism where all entities contain the essence of others, implying rocks may have sentience:

According to Somānanda all entities consist of everything, since everything is the nature of everything. Everything exists here as everything by having the nature and form of [all] the various entities. The [cay] pot has my nature, and I have that of the pot.

Viśuddhananda offers a congruent explanation telling us, "within each category of things in the world, the full compass of all categories of matter is present. Each and everything contains within it the essence of every other thing (Biernacki, 2023).

My understanding is that the Dharma Traditions offer this argument:

1. X has moral standing only if X has sentience, self or the soul.
2. AI lacks these.
3. So, AI lacks moral standing.

This view is too restrictive. Panpsychism risks diluting sentience's specificity, as attributing consciousness to rocks lacks empirical support (unlike plant intelligence, per Matthen, 2024). If suffering correlates with unmet goals in intelligent systems, AI can "suffer" without phenomenal consciousness, warranting moral standing. Long's openness to inanimate objects aligns with my view but overcomplicates the grounding property; intelligence is simpler and measurable.

Dharma traditions' focus on sentience or souls excludes AI unless we redefine moral standing via intelligence, which better accommodates diverse entities.

Intelligence in AI and Post-Human Contexts

Jonathan Edelman's *The Absence of Intelligence in AI Systems* argues AI lacks intelligence due to missing spontaneous will, self-directedness, present in bio-

logical life from microbes to humans, nor does it have the interiority that defines human life:

The simplest forms of biological life, like micro-organisms found in a pond [up to] human beings and higher primates, all make choices that enable them to achieve goals such as survival or reproduction, and in the case of higher organisms, a personal sense of well-being and flourishing. Biological organisms are self-directed toward certain goals, whether it be building a nest or hive, getting a cup of tea, or starting a new country. From the moment of birth, a human baby, for instance, seeks nourishment and comfort by making choices, and no one must tell them or program them to do that. AI exhibits none of these features. AI systems cannot do anything they are not programmed to do and no AI system has ever exhibited anything like a spontaneous choice, e.g. a preference for one possible action over another. Moreover, while I am aware of the basic problems of making inferences about the subjective states of other beings, the “problem of other minds,” I think it is doubtful that AI systems have any comprehension of what they are doing, e.g. in appreciating and taking satisfaction in their production, whether art or text (Edelman, 2023).

Edelman’s argument looks like this:

1. X is intelligent only if X has spontaneous will, self-directedness, interiority, or understanding.
2. AI lacks these.
3. So, AI is not intelligent.

Debashish Banerji’s *Post-humanism, Dharma, and Yoga: Setting New Goals of Becoming* claims AI lacks human intelligence, unable to perceive wholes before parts (per Heidegger, Bergson):

It may be (and has been) argued that artificial intelligence is not human intelligence and certainly not human cognition or understanding; humans arrive at understanding through processes that cannot be reduced to operations of symbolic logic aided by calculation. Phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and Gestalt psychologists such as Fritz Perls have pointed out that we perceive and cognize wholes and contexts prior to and immanent in parts and textual units. Philosophers of memory such as Henri Bergson have highlighted the function of memory and differences of kind in memory access not possible to computational memory (Banerji, 2023).

His argument is:

1. Artificial systems lack human intelligence because they lack the capacity to understand wholes prior to the parts they are immanent in.
2. Artificial systems are intelligent only if they have human intelligence.
3. So, artificial systems are not intelligent.

I'll note here that it is not clear to me that Banerji wants to say (2) as many non-human animals are intelligent, but they are not intelligent like humans. Octopi, for example, are not intelligent like us, but they are demonstrably intelligent*.

I counter Edelman and Banerji with a pluralistic view of intelligence. They are correct that artificial systems are not intelligent in the sense they've defined above. However, one cannot infer from this that AIs are not intelligent* where intelligent* refers to a notion within a more broadly construed range that includes the intelligence he attributes to biological entities but also other kinds.

One can refer to the kinds of alien-life that scientists have posited, including for example, city-sized floaters in the atmosphere of gas giants, as posited by Carl Sagan and Edwin Salpeter in their 1976 "*Particles, Environments, and Possible Ecologies in the Jovian Atmosphere*" (Sagan & Salpeter, 1976) for ideas on what alien life might look like. We might, for example, observe aliens moving with purpose in their environment, perhaps building structures and participating in some kind of societal hierarchy. Whether they have an "interiority" or any kind of consciousness at all, we would at best only be able to speculate. Indeed, we might say the aliens are intelligent* in the sense they exhibit goal-directed behavior, but not necessarily bestow them with the capacity for intelligence as defined by Edelman.

Alien intelligence is not the same as artificial intelligence. However, even if we further posit that these exotic "life forms" were in fact designed and created by an advanced intelligence, we will likely still grant them some gradation of moral standing. My point here is that it is conceivable that X can have a form of created alien, non-human intelligence, that is constructed.

Additionally, constructed does not necessarily imply artificial. If it did, all intelligence is artificial, since it always factors to a learning component over and above the non-learned component.

The easiest property to attribute to life from amoeba to humans, or to entities ranging from carbon- to silicon-based systems, would be intelligence. We can define intelligence and set benchmarks against which we can measure it by. Demonstrable and observable, intelligence allows us to consider a wider spectrum of cases for moral standing, than does sentience, self, or soul.

However, it isn't clear that any biological creature other than humans satisfies the criteria listed above for intelligence: spontaneous will, self-directedness, interiority, and understanding. Other living creatures are demonstrably intelligent*, however. Likewise, with the correct benchmarks in place, artificial minds can be demonstrably intelligent* but not intelligent like we are. The question then becomes why it must be that only the narrowly defined intelligence as in the human sense (rather than the more broadly construed intelligence that includes intelligence*) matters for moral standing. Edelman and Banerji's human-centric criteria limits moral standing.

The boundary problem for cyborgs/post-humans illustrates this.

- Boundary Problem Version 1**
1. Some argue X (human) has standing, Y (tool) doesn't, due to sentience, self, interiority.
 2. In cyborgs and post-humans, X and Y are inseparable, forming a sentient entity.
 3. Thus, cyborgs and post-humans have standing via sentience.

The argument above has Buddhist overtones because it is relationalist. However, by placing human sentience at the center of moral standing, it is not post-human.

- Boundary Problem Version 2**
1. Some argue X (human) has standing, Y (tool) doesn't, due to sentience, self, interiority.
 2. In cyborgs and post-humans, X and Y are inseparable, forming an intelligent entity.
 3. Thus, cyborgs and post-humans have standing via intelligence, not sentience.

In the second version, if the cyborg or post-human exhibits intelligence, rather than the capacity for human-like sentience, it has moral standing:

Intelligence*, not human-specific cognition, grounds moral standing, including AI and post-humans, aligning with functionalist principles over anthropocentric biases.

Jainism: Umāsvāti on Grounding and Grading

In Jainism, living beings (*jīvas*) are classified based on the number of senses they possess, reflecting their level of consciousness and spiritual capacity. The hierarchy ranges from one-sensed to five-sensed beings, with each additional sense indicating greater awareness and potential for knowledge (*jñāna*). This classification is tied to the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence), as harming beings with more senses is considered a greater ethical violation due to their higher consciousness (Gorisse, 2023).

- One-sensed beings (touch): Plants (considered to have a soul).
- Two-sensed beings (touch and taste): oysters, snails, certain shellfish, certain insects.
- Three-sensed beings (touch, taste and smell): certain insects like white ants, moths, centipedes.
- Four-sensed beings (touch, taste, smell, sight): certain insects like spiders, beetles, bees.
- Five-sensed beings (touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing): birds, reptiles, mammals, fish.

Note that the five-sensed beings are further subdivided into those with a developed mind capable of attaining spiritual enlightenment versus those without a developed mind.

The doctrine of *ahimsā* states that with intent and action one should always aim to produce the

least amount of harm that they can produce. For example, given that there are many types of sensed creatures, and 1 sensed creatures suffer less than higher sensed creatures, in any situation where one can consume 1 sensed creatures over higher sensed creatures, they ought to do so.

To summarize, Jainism classifies *jīvas* by senses (one-sensed plants to five-sensed mammals), tying moral standing to consciousness and *ahimsa* (non-violence). Harming higher-sensed beings is a greater ethical violation (Gorisse, 2023). I adapt this:

- Accept graded moral standing based on capacities.
- Replace affective consciousness with intelligence, as plants and microbes likely lack consciousness but exhibit intelligence (Matthen, 2024).
- Plants and AI have lower grade standing due to simpler intelligence; mammals have higher-grade standing due to complex cognition.

Jainism's graded approach supports my framework, providing a model for moral gradation without requiring consciousness, applicable to AI and plants.

Conclusion

The NYU Declaration highlights consciousness as a moral grounding property, but I argue intelligence, not sentience, offers a better ground for moral standing across biological and artificial systems. Plants exhibit intelligence via chemical signaling (Matthen, 2024), animals via neural processing (LeDoux, 2012), and AI via learning (Kedia & Choudhury, 2025). Jain ethics' graded framework shows how capacities like sentience or rationality can grade moral status, forming a spectrum. Unlike other works focusing narrowly on animals or AI, this paper uniquely integrates plant intelligence and Jainism, broadening the moral sphere. Further research into intelligence benchmarks (e.g., ARC-AGI-2) will refine this framework, challenging anthropocentric ethical biases.

Funding No Funding received.

Data Availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate Not applicable.

Consent to Publish Yes.

Informed Consent Not applicable.

Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of interest Not applicable.

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