

21st Annual DANAM Conference 2023

Sponsored by

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San Antonio, Texas**

**Held in conjunction with the
2023 American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting**

ABSTRACTS

FRIDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2023

SESSION 1 (M17-104) 9AM-10:45AM

Theme: Food and Interreligious Dialogue: Jewish, Hindu, and Jain Perspectives

Convener/Presider: Yudit Greenberg Goldberg, Rollins College

**Dr. Melanie Barbato, University of Munster/Germany, and the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies/UK,
*Rethinking Food Security Through the Jewish, Jain, and Hindu Traditions***

Food security means the availability of sufficient nutritious food for all. Establishing and maintaining food security does not only depend on technology and logistics but also on a shared horizon for cooperation. Religious traditions can ground discussions about food security in a broader vision of human (and non-human) flourishing. Their practices and narratives can help to understand and promote beneficial attitudes towards food and those we may be required to share with. The report 'Collective Action for Ending a Collective Problem: A Multi-stakeholder Project on Global Food Security' that was published this year by the *Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations* at Dublin City University, Ireland, includes such interreligious elements in a document aimed at policy-makers. This paper aims to explore how food security can be rethought specifically through the Jewish, Jain and Hindu traditions and what categories could be the starting points for an interreligious discussion.

Dr. Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute, *A Survey of Nonviolence, Food, and Animals in Hindu Literature*

While many notable scholars have rightly indicated that South Asian ideas of nonviolence (ahimsā), cow-protection, and vegetarianism are not necessarily related, we can nonetheless see a recurring motif of respect for

animals related to issues of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and protection of cows and other animals across a wide span of Hindu sacred texts—especially in the overt injunctions against killing animals or eating meat. An overview of canonical Hindu literature reveals an overarching spirit of valuation of animals, and the eventual accretion of animal-related ideas towards a decidedly animal-affirming spirit of compassion, respect, and intrinsic worth. This provides ample recourse for those in the Hindu tradition who would use their abilities as constructive theologians and as effective allies in the global shift towards a stronger valuation of nature and non-human animals particularly in the global vegetarian, vegan, and animal protection movements. Moreover, an understanding of Hindu traditions as affirming vegetarianism and veganism creates an opportunity for solidarity with theologians of other traditions who seek to likewise articulate animal-affirming theologies from diverse world traditions.

Dr. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, Rollins College, *Food, Hospitality, and Ritual in the Jewish Tradition*

(no abstract on file)

Dr. Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute,, *Jain Veganism in Dialogue with Jain Speciesism: Clarifying Jain Intra-religious Dialogue as a Basis for Inter-religious Dialogue*

This presentation considers recent ethnographic encounters with Jains in both India and in the diaspora who draw, in various ways, directly from Jain texts to argue in favor of, or against, a dairy-free lifestyle. Drawing from the academic fields of Food Studies and Critical Animal Studies, the presentation broadly categorizes those in favor of a dairy-free lifestyle as “Jain Vegans” and those in favor of a lacto-vegetarian lifestyle as “Jain Speciesists.” The presentation identifies some of the main features and leaders of these debates, who use 3 primary strategies to make their arguments: 1) Extracting quotes directly from Jain texts to make sophisticated arguments to defend their position; 2) Drawing from popular Jain comic books and children’s stories based on Jain texts; or 3) Quoting Jain ascetics, who themselves quote Jain texts to advocate for or against veganism in the Jain community. By instrumentalizing Jain texts to support their arguments, Jain Vegans and Jain Speciesists bring unique Jain cultural logics regarding food into broader vegan and anti-vegan debates globally. This presentation therefore highlights these unique Jain contributions while also nevertheless demonstrating how many of the arguments Jains make for or against veganism fit squarely within the manifold global discourses pertaining to animal welfare, human health, and environmental concerns worldwide. Furthermore, this presentation also argues, based on insider ethnographic experience, how Jains are currently under pressure to publicly clarify their position around veganism and speciesism in light of their ongoing desire to present themselves as the global torchbearers of non-violence and compassion. To continue to advocate for animals in inter-religious dialogue, in other words, the global Jain community must first clarify this position through intra-religious dialogue.

Respondent: Alan Brill, Seton Hall University

SESSION 2 (M17-108) 11AM-1PM

Theme: Engaged Jainism

Convener: Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute

Presider: Corinna Lhoir, Universitat Hamburg

Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute, *An Argument for Socially Engaged Jainism*

Often religions are critiqued as being disengaged from worldly concerns since their locus of value is often believed to be transcendental and otherworldly, causing practitioners to become complacent regarding important social issues, or even complicit with various forms of oppression and domination. This critique can

dovetail with stereotypes about the Jain tradition being excessively world-denying, and therefore not providing viable paradigms for resistance against social injustices.

This paper will address these critiques from a Jain perspective by showing how key principles in the Jain faith, such as karma theory and metaphysical frameworks, can be employed in resistance to paradigms of violence and oppression. Understood like this, the Jain tradition does not require a turning away from the world. Rather, this paper argues, the practical and soteriological implications of the tradition may in some cases be best served by engaging with forms of structural violence such as racism, sexism, colonialism, ecocide, animal exploitation, LGBTQ discrimination, etc.

Jonathan Dickstein, Arihanta Institute, *Rejecting Species: Jainism and Sentient Rights*

Decades ago in *Practical Ethics*, Peter Singer issued the principle of the “equal consideration of interests,” whereby “we give equal weight in our moral deliberations to the like interests of all those affected by our actions” because “an interest is an interest, whoever’s interest it may be.” Singer’s point is that we cannot deny appropriate moral consideration to a being’s interest simply because the being has been classified as, for example, “pig” and not “human.” Provided the relationship of sentience to interests—and interests to moral considerability—Alasdair Cochrane argues for “sentient rights” rather than “human rights” or “animal rights.” Singer’s and Cochrane’s emphases on sentience and interests rather than species classification—especially “being human”—are shared by a Jain text composed over two thousand years ago. The *Tattvārtha Sūtra* teaches that the practice of ethical decision-making initiates not from categories such as “species,” but rather from the differential vulnerabilities and capacities of sentient beings. This talk explores the problem of “species,” the implausibility of speciesism, and how a perspective akin to “sentient rights” has existed in Jain traditions for millennia.

Venu Mehta, Claremont School of Theology, *Revisiting Gandhian Model of Swaraj and Jain Ethics of Aparigraha towards Economic Sustainability, Dignity of Life, and Non-Violence*

This paper seeks to revisit the Jain ethic of *aparigraha* (non-possession) to explore its potential harmonization with Mahātmā Gandhi’s model of *Swarāj*, of which Gandhi’s concepts of socio-economic system underline the dignity of an individual, decentralization, equality, and non-violence. By focusing on the Jain ethic of *aparigraha*, I aim to argue and propose that the Jain notion of non-possessiveness can be applied to economic sustainability, the dignity of life, and non-violence when it expands its philosophy to ethical choices. Putting together Gandhi’s economic model with Jain ethics, the paper explores applications of *aparigraha* to propose an opportunity for “ethical consumerism,” a model that encourages people to make choices of consumerism that strengthens the marginalized sections of an economic system amid the growing consumerism, globalization, and industrialization.

Shivani Bothra, California State University Long Beach, *Rethinking Ahimsa: Revolutionary Ideas of the 19th Century Acarya Bhikshu*

This paper aims to explore the dynamics of non-violence in the Jain tradition and challenge the dominant theories of non-violence that currently prevail in academic and international scholarship. While the non-killing of all sentient beings and the trilogy of war-violence-non-violence are widely accepted, there is a third area that requires scholarly attention - the distinction between non-violence for spiritual goals and non-violence for material goals. Drawing on the revolutionary theory of the founder of the Śvetāmbara Terāpanth tradition, this article questions whether sheltering animals has merit and whether protecting them fulfils the ultimate goal of *ahimsā* - the purification of the soul. Through various *dr̥ṣṭānta* (illustrations), this paper presents a unique perspective on *ahimsā* that departs from the commonly accepted notions of non-violence.

Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute, *Engaged Jain Epistemology: Integrating Climate Science into the Science of the Jain Tradition*

Using examples from my work with the Jain community over the years, this paper demonstrates how the epistemes of modern science and Jain tradition sometimes conflict, leaving contemporary Jains to create a number of strategies to cope with these conflicts that often inadvertently cause epistemic harm toward peer-reviewed climate knowledge and/or actual physical harm to our climate itself. However, with some epistemic flexibility, I show how Jains can embrace modern climate science as a form of their own empirical knowledge (*mati-jñāna*) to enhance their understanding of how they can avoid harm to the climate. Helpful here is the Jain tool of *naya-vāda*, one tool of the *anekāntavāda*, which, as I show, can be instrumentalized by Jains to accommodate the episteme of modern science as a partially true empirical viewpoint (*vyavahāra-naya*). In this way, Jains and anyone wanting to live the Jain way of life can avoid both epistemic harm toward climate science and physical harm to the climate itself.

SESSION 3 (M17-201). 2PM-6PM

Theme: Roundtable- The Dharma of the Scholar-Practitioner: Pedagogy, History, Philosophy, and Controversies

Convener: Jeffery D. Long, Elizabethtown College

Presider: Loriliai Biernacki, University of Colorado, Boulder

Rita D. Sherma, Graduate Theological Union, *Epistemic Justice and the Danger of Epistemicide Across the Global South*

This presentation will draw on well-known Latin American writers on epistemicide and use their work to rationalize the need for Dharma Studies, Hindu Studies, and South Asia scholars to be alert to epistemic violence, which harms the planetary community. The scholar-practitioner has a particular responsibility not to silence the voice of the tradition which carries its epistemologies—but any such reclamation must be done critically.

Shyam Ranganathan, York University, Toronto, *The Practitioner Scholar*

I consider myself a practitioner of Yoga according to Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, which begins with a distinction between interpretation (explanation in terms of propositional attitudes) and the explicatory method of Yoga, which renders explicit inferential relations (YS I 2-4). This is not simply an object of my research: every research advance I have made as a philosopher and scholar is an application of Yoga, and what this research reveals is that the wide spread failure in the academy to shed White Supremacy and its colonial artefacts (like the categories of religion and spirituality) is a result a choosing the anti-logic methods of interpretation. My Yoga practice now facilitates making the harms of Western colonialism transparent in my scholarship, while facilitating my own recovery as a racialized scholar.

Reid Locklin, University of Toronto, *On Being a Catholic Vedantin*

"Great! I wanted a real Vedantin on my committee." These words, pronounced by a Hindu student about my role in his studies, opened complex questions for me as a convert and moderately conservative Catholic theologian. In my presentation, I will reflect on these questions, including my emerging self-acceptance as a Vedantin Catholic . . . but probably not as a Hindu Catholic.

Jeffery D. Long, Elizabethtown College, *On the Ramakrishna Tradition of Vedanta*

As undergraduates at the University of Notre Dame, Jeffery Long and Patrick Beldio studied many of the same subjects, took courses with many of the same professors, and participated in some of the same social justice initiatives on campus. Though our tenures overlapped by three years, we only met many years after college. As we now compare notes on our personal inner journeys as scholar-practitioners of two different Dharma traditions, we find that while we have both departed from conventional Catholic boundaries, we find that, instead of a sharp rejection, our spiritual growth has included deeper levels of appreciation for the tradition of our upbringing.

Our presentations will focus on the traditions to which our journeys have led us—the Ramakrishna Vedanta tradition in the case of Jeffery and the Sufi tradition of Meher Baba in the case of Patrick—and the ways in which our Catholic upbringings have played a positive role in our respective journeys.

Ithamar Theodor, Zefat Academic College, *The Dharma of the Scholar-Practitioner: Pedagogy, History, Philosophy, and Controversies*

I have been a practitioner for about 10 years before having embarked on the academic path. Entering academia, I naturally wanted to study the topics close to my heart, but also wanted to rationalize my experiences as a practitioner. I have faced various obstacles generated by both non practicing academics as well as by fellow practicing scholars, and it has taken me time to define my path. However, gradually I was able to find my own path and at present I am encouraged by both academia and my tradition. Moreover, being situated as such, I believe that I am in a position to contribute to both academia and my own tradition.

Veena Howard, California State University, Fresno, *Dharma: A Principle for Creating Community Partnerships and Innovative Research*

Although Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh communities express the paradigm of Dharma/Dhamma/Dharam uniquely, this shared principle can "support" partnerships among various communities. Through my research and experience community initiative, I will explore how Dharma could help forge bonds among Indic communities and forge new frontiers in scholarship.

Pankaj Jain, FLAME University, *From Emic/Etic to Ethic*

“Are you an ‘emic’ (insider) or an ‘etic’ (outsider) student/scholar of Indic religions?” As the students from the Indian Diaspora enter the field of the academic study of Indian religions, they face this question in their careers, both from the etic side (co-students and teachers) and from the emic side (their selves). As I progressed through my career, this question kept incorporating more dimensions and newer challenges. In this paper, I reflect upon this issue with my experiences and potential suggestions to reconcile this emic and etic perspectives dichotomy. Can one transcend the emic and etic boundaries and develop a global perspective? Can one’s background merge with one’s academic training to reconcile “insiderism” and “outsiderism” and replace them with a peripheral perspective about a tradition? Can one study and teach different world traditions from a common ground? Looking at my own experience, I believe answers to these questions are affirmative. I want to keep working on forming intellectual bridges across the emic and the etic sides. I conclude that the situation will improve as more Indian students enter the academic discipline of religion. Fortunately, most scholars see this healthy trend in their classes. Such examples of syncretism between pedagogy and scholarship can help us progress toward the grand ideals of mutual harmony and ethical coexistence.

Respondent: Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa, Loyola Marymount University

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2023

SESSION 4 (M18-107) 9AM-11AM

Theme: Dharma, Post-humanism, and AI

Convener/Presider: Jonathan Edelman, University of Florida

Loriliai Biernacki, University of Colorado, Boulder, *Mind, Mental Causation, and Yogic Siddhi*

This paper addresses the nexus between mind, information and mental causality. How is it that the mind—what we think of as a mental entity, with a first-person perspective—how does the mind cause the *brain* to register particular neuronal states affecting the physical material of the brain and the body? As a way of probing the question of mental causality, we look here at the limit case of yogis using *mantras*, magical formulas, as a mental mechanism employed not only as a means for transforming a person’s state of mind, but also as a means to effect events outside of a person’s own physical body. This paper draws from a variety of sources, medieval Sanskrit texts, the work of the 20th century yogi scholar-adept Gopinath Kaviraj, contemporary neuroscientific work on the concept of information and mind to tease out the links between mind and the brain in relation to the workings of *mantras* as a form of mental causality that transcends our assumed models of physical causality.

Jeffery D. Long, Elizabethtown College, *On Jivas, Artificial Life Forms, and Inanimate Objects: Commander Data, Marie Kondo, and the Dharma Traditions*

The second-season *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode “The Measure of a Man” famously raises the question, “Does Commander Data have a soul?” Commander Data is an android and is one of the most beloved characters in *Star Trek*. This paper will examine the question, “Could an artificial intelligence, from the perspectives of various Dharma traditions, be possessed of *jīva*, the soul or essential life force of a living being?” The paper will examine various permutations of this question from the perspectives of different Dharma traditions. The Buddhist conception of ‘self’ as a process, for example, will be considered, along with Jain and Hindu concepts of *jīva*. The work of Marie Kondo, who recommends that we thank inanimate objects before we recycle them, will also be considered, along with the ethos of reverence for all entities, even those conventionally regarded as inanimate, which Kondo’s approach entails. This ethos can be seen as involving a convergence of ideas from the Advaita, Zen, Jain, and Shinto traditions.

Jonathan Edelman, University of Florida, *The Absence of Intelligence in AI Systems*

This is a work of philosophical reflection based on my formation in Indian and European philosophy broadly. My arguments are also based on my lay understanding and use of AI technology, as well as Erik J. Larson’s *The Myth of AI: Why Computers Can’t Think the Way We Do* (Harvard University Press, 2021). Larson argues that AI technology as it exists today and into the foreseeable future is not taking us one step closer to general intelligence, despite its dazzling ability to produce on command various images, prose, and poetry, and to organize data across an increasingly wide range of applications. The inferences that are required to comprehend a newspaper or hold a conversation with an understanding of its meaning cannot be programmed, learned, or engineered with our current knowledge of AI. There is no algorithm for general intelligence, and “no one currently has the slightest idea what such a breakthrough would even look like, let alone the details of getting to it” (Larson, 2021: 2). AI is, Larson argues, a scientific and cultural myth. I argue that AI should not be called “intelligent” because it lacks an essential and defining feature of biological life: the spontaneous will to be by the use of general intelligence. Even the most simple forms of biological life like micro-organisms found in a pond, what to speak of human beings and higher primates, all make choices to 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 has to 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. AI is not self-directed. 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. AI systems may assist human decision-making by helping to get one from A to B by mapping and organizing data, but it is doubtful AI systems enjoy the journey or the destination. In short, AI systems lack the interior being-- *atman* or *vijnana*-- who suffers and enjoys, the being who finds meaning in language and in action, but such a being is the basic presupposition of all Indian philosophies since it is this being that seeks liberation through reflection on words and by action. Within the context of Indian philosophy, I think the best one could hope for regarding AI is that an *atman* might attach itself to a mind-body complex. If that were to happen- I think it is highly unlikely- then AI would still not be intelligent, so defined above, because the intelligence would be borrowed from the *atman*, and it would not be solely caused by the AI system itself.

Debashish Banerji, California Institute of Integral Studies, *Posthumanism, Dharma, and Yoga: Setting New Goals of Becoming*

Critical posthumanism locates the human as a historical construct that is culturally and epistemically bounded. Modernity is a phase of the universalization or globalization of such a construct which has reached its limit. This paper will ask how one can understand dharma under these conditions and if yoga can provide us with new goals of becoming for our time.

Respondent: Anand Vaidya, San Jose State University

SESSION 5 (M18-108) 11:30AM-1PM

Theme: DANAM Annual Book Review Panel: *Contemplative Studies in Jainism: Meditation, Prayer, and Veneration*, Rita Sherma, Purushottama Bilimoria, and Cogen Bohanec, editors, Routledge Press, 2023.

Convener: Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute

Presider: Christopher Jain Miller, Arihanta Institute

Reviewers:

Veena Howard, California State University, Fresno

Ramdas Lamb, University of Hawai'i at Manoa

Stephanie Corigliano, Cal Poly, Humboldt

Laura Dunn, Santa Clara University

Respondent: Cogen Bohanec, Arihanta Institute