

24th World Congress of Philosophy 2018

Society Sessions organized by International Association of Japanese Philosophy (IAJP)

IMAGINING A BETTER WORLD THROUGH JAPANESE PHILOSOPHIES

(C 070023 IAJP)

August 18 4:10pm – 6:00pm

Room 401, China National Convention Center

Moderator: Anton Luis Sevilla

Speakers: Aaron Creller, Bret Davis, Leah Kalmanson, Sarah Mattice

Presentation 1

Title:

Better Living Through Science?: Coloniality, Objectivity, and Provisionality

Presenter:

Aaron Creller

Affiliation:

University of North Florida

ABSTRACT

In Jason Ananda-Josephson's book *The Invention of Religion in Japan*, he presents the efforts that early Japanese modernizers go through in wrestling with the Western categories of "religion" and "superstition". Erik Hammerstrom's work details the efforts of Chinese Buddhism to appear compatible with Western Science. Both instances are attempts at coming to terms with the force of Western claims to universality through science, backed by the political might of a colonizing West. This paper is an examination of these situations through the lens of Sandra Harding's work on "Strong Objectivity" to understand the relationship between the power structures of coloniality and the "value-neutral" objectivity of a universal Western science. Finally, the paper will conclude with a brief account of the epistemic and social values of provisionality.

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Presentation 2

Title:

Toward a Radical Cosmopolitanism with Cosmopolitan Roots: A Contemporary Dialogue with Nishida Kitarō

Presenter:

Bret Davis

Affiliation:

Loyola University Maryland

ABSTRACT

Nishida Kitarō, modern Japan's preeminent philosopher, developed his thought by engaging in a dialogue between Western philosophy and Japanese traditions of thought, especially East Asian Mahayana Buddhism. Moreover, among the topics of his thought is the very nature of such a dialogue between cultures, as well as the nature of the historical world in which cultural traditions develop by way of a dialectical interaction between individuals and their societal "species." The first half of this paper sets the stage for a contemporary dialogue with modern Japan's preeminent philosopher, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), by way of critically reflecting on the current resurgence of ethnocentric and xenophobic nationalism in the United States and elsewhere from the perspective of cosmopolitan teachings found in Buddhist and Chinese as well as Christian and Western philosophical traditions. The second half of this paper elucidates and assesses Nishida's attempted to find a middle way between a "cosmopolitanism" based on an "abstract individualism" that fails to recognize the cultural embeddedness of individuals and a "totalism" or "communalism" that denies the freedom and creativity of individuals. By way of taking up some core insights as well as engaging in an "immanent critique" of certain problematic aspects of Nishida's thought, the paper makes a case for a "radical cosmopolitanism" that acknowledges both the extent to which individuals are deeply rooted in their respective cultures and the manner in which they are, in a still more radical sense, citizens of the world capable of entering into a mutually enriching cross-cultural dialogue.

Presentation 3

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Title:

Life after Suffering: Dignity and Compassion in Utopian Buddhist Thought

Presenter:

Leah Kalmanson

Affiliation:

Drake University

ABSTRACT

In Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, were the bodhisattvas to accomplish their vows, then all sentient beings would be freed from suffering. This presentation considers the political dimensions of this Buddhist utopian thought. I first survey several visions of Buddhist heavens and other paradise-like realms, keeping in mind the teaching that only humans—not the devas in heavens—can attain full buddhahood. Turning toward the present, I look next at the role played by Buddhist heavens and paradises in contemporary political movements, such as, for example, the use of Pure Land (*jōdo* 浄土) imagery in environmental activism as well as early twentieth-century Marxist movements in Japan. Throughout, I want to challenge the common claim that negative experiences of suffering better allow us to “appreciate” positive experiences such as pleasure, joy, or goodness. Devas in Buddhist heavens are unmotivated toward spiritual progress, precisely because they appreciate their pleasures and joys. Moreover devas can and do become arhats and bodhisattvas. In this sense, Buddhist visions of paradise remind us that full buddhahood is a distant and nearly unattainable goal; and Pure Land thought in particular reminds us that taking such a goal as our own is only egoism in disguise. The appropriate goal, as is almost always the case in Buddhism, is reducing suffering wherever possible, through attainable means. This lesson is particularly important in politics today, where it seems that suffering must be addressed through structural reform. Although Buddhism is sometimes criticized for focusing too much on personal liberation, at the expense of systemic change, I conclude with a brief look at Buddhist kings and political leaders who did indeed enact structural changes to create more paradise-like conditions on earth.

Presentation 4

Title:

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Learning to Be Human Doesn't Mean Learning to Be Men: Conversations with Philosophers 何殷震 He Yin Zhen and 平塚らいちょう Hiratsuka Raichō

Presenter:

Sarah Mattice

Affiliation:

University of North Florida

ABSTRACT

In this presentation I consider the work of philosophers 何殷震 He Yin Zhen (1884-1920) and 平塚らいちょう Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971). Both women were active during the early part of the 20th century, primarily though not exclusively in Tokyo. Both women were associated with the founding of major journals—「天義」 *Tianyi* and 「青鞞」 *Seito*, respectively. And both women have been largely left out of the philosophical canon. I argue that not only does leaving these philosophers out of the canon present serious problems, but that putting their work into conversation, in particular on issues of humanity, freedom, and justice, adds a missing dimension to Ruist (Confucian) and Buddhist thought of the time. While other feminists of the early 20th century focused on gender as an accident of one's essential humanity, and so used that essential humanity as the basis for arguments concerning equal rights, He Yin Zhen and Hiratsuka Raichō draw on a wide variety of sources, including Ruism and Zen Buddhism, to critique rights-based and non-gendered approaches to the problem of being human in the modern age.