

Workshop: Relational Knowing and Subjectivity
9th-10th May 2023
Abstracts

Dominique Ankoné

Looking Beyond the Imperial Horizon: Tran Duc Thao's Theory of Relational Freedom and Situated Autonomy

Tran Duc Thao was a brilliant though largely forgotten philosopher from Vietnam writing in Paris in the wake of WWII. He published his own interpretation of Edmund Husserl, criticized Alexandre Kojève's reading of G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and discussed with Jean-Paul Sartre on the meaning of freedom. In the process, he formulated his own unique interpretation of freedom, that explicitly included the colonial dimension. This paper examines this theory of freedom as articulated in his work of the 1940's. The paper has a deliberate trajectory from a descriptive historical approach to a normative, philosophical approach. By doing so, this paper seeks to understand the development of Tran Duc Thao's thought as "constituted within the world itself." It will first present important findings on Tran Duc Thao's anticolonial activism in the wake of WWII. It will then sketch out the relational aspects of his theory of freedom which insists that every decision is inseparable from the situation in which it is made. Lastly, it will probe into some of the possibilities his theory provides for current academic debates about the legacy of colonialism. While the continental European philosophical tradition constructs the human consciousness as free and autonomous in an absolute sense, justifying the human exploitation of nature, animals and the "other", Tran Duc Thao insists on the material or natural basis of the mind. By making this move, this paper suggests, Tran Duc Thao's theory of freedom as situated autonomy provides a pathbreaking account to look beyond the imperial horizon.

Dean Anthony Brink

Kotodama and Philosophies of Relational Aesthetics in Japanese Poetry and Anime

This paper draws primarily on Japanese philosophical discourses and debates so as to redirect even the most ostensibly nationalist positions (regarding, for instance, a usually masculine warrior Yamato spirit 大和魂) into more general frame of aesthetic framing itself as defined by various discourses from the ninth through the 21st centuries. Writing in English can itself provide a distancing mechanism for avoiding any harshness in associations in Japanese with such terms, yet this intervention risks reintroducing a universalizing western philosophical foundation normalized within English itself. Nevertheless, by focusing on several critically acclaimed yet highly original creative extensions of anime production—*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *FLCL* and *Parasyte*—this paper reconsiders discourses on *Kotodama* 言霊, or the spirit of language, a key term in poetry-oriented foundational national and mythopoetic works (especially the *Kojiki* and the *Man'yōshū*) and later writings by National Studies (*Kokugaku*) scholars and later ethnographers of spiritual and supernatural phenomena. This paper explores how such alternative aesthetic framing used to describe poetry help situate elaborately edited and evocative anime that do not conform to linear storytelling and complicate character invocation and emergent community participation. This alternative modeling of language use and the framing of sustained mediums of presentation (poetry, radio, and anime) attempts to bracket western philosophical assumptions of having to treat certain topics in light of certain longstanding discourses on aesthetics, ontologies, epistemologies, or mental states, all of which reflect Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman assumptions. They are referenced, if at all, tangentially solely in the interest of communication, while remaining inadequate to the task of understanding *kotodama* and anime aesthetics today in light of Japanese philosophical writings. This project aims at not a vigilant policing of demarcations between Japanese and non-Japanese sources and thought (though some of the

writers referenced indeed do so), but rather a recognition of a broad spectrum of thought, each enabling diverse critical and philosophical framings. I do not argue that one is preferable to the other, only that they are different, and that thus far anime studies writ large has *not* problematized the de facto universal framing status allocated to western philosophy. This paper is the first step to explore such possibilities. It includes discussion of how *kami* (gods, spirits) are invested in not only all things, but words themselves in relation to both *kami* and humans and nonhumans. In a sense that needs to be better defined, “ethical” implications emerge. “Animism” too appears inadequate and reductive, as will be explored, given the relational aesthetics that appears in anime production and reception.

Yasunori Hayashi

The Figure of an Aporetic Knower Doing World Philosophy as Situated ‘Field’ Philosophizing in Northern Australia

In this presentation ‘I’ as the figure of a Japanese aporetic knower attend to particular heres-and-nows re-visiting particular moments of experience in developing an autobiographic reflexive account of becoming as a practitioner of world-philosophy. The beginning of this series of experiences was hearing and being captivated by the sound of the didgeridoo, a musical instrument perfected by Aboriginal Australians over millennia. I was working in Turkey at the time, but so enthralled was I that in the years that followed I would devote years to studying ethnomusicological analysis of this Australian Aboriginal music amongst other Japanese enthusiasts.

I first arrived in Aboriginal northern Australia some twenty years ago. Soon after my arrival in Bininj-Country, owned by the Bininj Aboriginal people of Western Arnhem Land, I was admonished by a Bininj Elder, with what I heard as an aphorism: “You gotta speak our lingo before playing *mako* (the name for didgeridoo in Bininj language)!” With the hope to be able to live according to that aphorism at least well enough, and hoping to become able to play the didgeridoo well enough, my aporetic journey now became one of engaging with words and languages. I tell of the experience of puzzling about the ways I could experience Aboriginal languages and cultures without reasoning and explaining away, and rather, cultivate my capacity to pause and stay with my disconcertments as an aporetic knower.

After twenty years I am still here in Aboriginal northern Australia, more or less comfortably grappling with embodied disconcertments that emerge while working with Aboriginal Elders with/through concepts in the academy of Charles Darwin University. I am experientially immersed in politicoepistemic work where taking concepts as situational practices affords possibility for generative dissensus to emerge in going-on together. Attending to the conceptual multiplicity that is a necessary part of such going on, an ethos of my knowing-self as situated Japanese ‘field’ philosopher, informs inquiry. At present our inquiry delves into the ways in which different knowledge communities might engage well enough and produce academic knowledge diplomatically.

Michael Kaulana Ing

Comparative Conceptions of Oneness: Kanaka (Hawaiian) and Chinese Views

The Confucian philosopher Mengzi (372–289 BCE) claimed that “all things are complete within me” 萬物皆備於我. Later Confucians built on this to assert that “the Heavens, Earth, and all things form one body” 天地萬物為一體. In a very different cultural context, a Kanaka (Hawaiian) creation chant called the *Kumulipo* describes how all things in the world were born from Pō, or deep darkness. From the fecund depths of the ocean, coral grows, as do other sea creatures, and eventually, creatures on land and in the air are born from the same power. Pō serves as the ancestor that unites all things in a single kinship network. Both Kanaka and Chinese philosophies assert that everything in the world is

inherently related. Yet these relations are predicated on differing theories of oneness, or the way in which all things relate to each other to form a single entity. This presentation will explore various accounts of Kanaka and Chinese conceptions of oneness to highlight how these ontologies lead to various ways of relational knowing.

Carl Mika

'Who are you?' When Maori Identity is Frustrated by the More-Than-Human

Quite recently, a New Zealand court attributed personhood to a river in New Zealand, somewhat in line with a Maori notion of the more-than-human. The case is significant for its highlighting of an entity being more than its physical, tangible components. It seems that the law, at least, is gesturing belatedly (and only partially) towards what Indigenous peoples have known for millennia: that an apparently distinct entity is materially interlinked with other things.

While this talk benefits from that concrete example, it does not delve into the specifics of the case. What is significant about the case for this talk is its link of the more-than-human with the human but also – and crucially – its dealings with two phenomena: water and identity. Both phenomena are tied to the term 'wai' in Maori. Wai, roughly translated, refers to both 'water' and 'who'. Thus, when someone is asked who they are, it is assumed that water is somehow involved in both the utterance of the question and the person to whom the question is directed. (Mika, 2019)

In this presentation, I speculate on how the term 'wai' can be interpreted and revived in the context of both its colonized and traditional backdrops. Extending even the terms 'water' and 'who' in an attempt to instill a Maori notion of interconnection within them, I also indicate that the writer/speaker must account for their own more-than-human identity to ethically work with the idea that all things are interconnected.

References

Mika, C. (2019). When 'water' meets its limits: A Maori speculation on the term wai. *Journal of Sámi Language and Culture Research Association*, 3(2), 20-33.

Merel Talbi

Can We Integrate Personal Narratives into Philosophical Knowledge-Production in a Non-Exploitative Way?

In the past few decades, epistemology has taken an increasingly social bend (Goldman 2010). Additionally and more recently, a critical social epistemology that aims to bring into focus the injustice and oppression that takes place in the process of knowledge production (Fricker 2007, Dotson 2014, Medina 2012), has also taken to making use of case studies, more qualitative empirical work and examples to provide illustrations (whatever that might mean) for philosophical arguments. We might applaud this tendency, as recent empirical scholarship from social psychology suggests that the sharing of personal narratives may increase perceived humanity and rationality in social interactions (Kubin et al. 2020). It is no small jump to assume that incorporating these narratives into philosophical work, may function to equally strengthen a political, emancipatory theory that strives towards inclusion. This aligns interestingly with calls from standpoint theory and the wish to include more *lived experiences* into our theoretical work as philosophers, as for example expressed in the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2008).

As philosophers and epistemologists, we might wonder how we can include these personal stories and lived experiences in a manner that is non-exploitative, and that respects those who share these experiences – sometimes in oppressive or risky environments. In order to address this question, I draw on the work of Hannah Arendt (1958), and explore how her understanding of the relational and shared public sphere might help us to think of philosophy as a form of storytelling *in itself*, where we can incorporate lived experiences alongside theoretical and political considerations. Additionally, I discuss Paulo Freire's seminal *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), to take into account how we can

dialogically include practical experiences in theory-making. In taking these views into account, I discuss how, as philosophers, we might integrate personal insights and lived experiences with our theoretical work, striving towards a richer and more inclusive way of doing epistemology.

Helen Verran

Relational Knowns and Knowers; Relational Epistemics. In the Collections Archive of the Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory (MAGNT)

Agreeing with James Heisig's judgement of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) as perhaps a first practitioner of world philosophy (Heisig, 2001), and agreeing also with Kopf's judgement that the core concept of his philosophy is difficult,

"the self-identity of absolute contradiction" (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu...*), constitutes a major obstacle for anyone attempting to figure out Nishida Philosophy [since] not only is it barely intelligible in either the Japanese original or its English translation, [but] its commentators fundamentally disagree on how it should be understood (Kopf (2004:74)

This paper argues that relational epistemics are core in world philosophy.

In making the argument the paper takes Nishida's improbable (impossible?) concept into the collections archive of the Museum and Art Gallery Northern Territory (MAGNT). The hope is that analytically (re)articulating this concept in the context of an archive of ethnographic objects will elucidate the concept, exemplify relational epistemics, and reveal the archive in contributing in contemporary world philosophy.