

**Summer Institute in American Philosophy (SIAP)
Virtual Edition 2021**

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

09:00-10:00 am (Pacific Time)/12:00-01:00 pm (Eastern Time). Room opens 15 minutes prior to start.

Opening Keynote Address:

“Compelling Descriptions: Pragmatism, Race and Social Justice,” Dr. Jacoby Carter, Howard University.

Abstract: Arguably, pragmatism has produced no sophisticated philosophies of race, nor has it produced novel theories of anti-black racism serviceable to the social justice interests of those racialized as Black in the United States. Instead, what we have seen are pragmatist philosophies of race that promote white racial empire, or the co-opting of theories of race and anti-Black racism from African American Intellectuals. Building upon the work of Leonard Harris, I present here several depictions of racialized Black suffering, and what I term *necro-depictions*, images of Black death and phenomena that make living a racialized Black existence a kind of living death as a means of interrogating the instrumentality of pragmatism for addressing this form of racial injustice. I argue that what is needed in part to address these forms of racialized injustice is an insurrectionist ethics that is incompatible with pragmatism.

10:15-11:45 am (Pacific)/1:15-2:45 (Eastern)

Dissertations-in-Progress:

This session will include brief presentations of each dissertation followed by open discussion. Sessions of this sort have proven to be very helpful to graduate students working within the American tradition. They are an opportunity to gain suggestions for further sources, insights into how to strengthen positions, and challenges to consider. Experienced faculty in particular are strongly encouraged to participate in these sessions to provide comments and suggestions.

- Apurva Parikh, University of South Carolina, Columbia, “A Deweyan Critical Reconstruction of *Dharma*”
- Danish Hamid, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, “Ambedkar’s Ethical Vision: Pragmatism and beyond in the project of Annihilation of Caste”
- Shunji Ukai, University of Oregon, “John Dewey on Philosophic Method and the Nature of Philosophy”

11:45-12:30 pm (Pacific)/2:45-3:30 (Eastern). Virtual Lunch/Social Time

Thursday, July 8, 2021

09:00- 10:00 am (Pacific Time)/ 12:00-01:00 pm (Eastern Time). Room opens 15 minutes prior to start.

Keynote Response Panel:

- Dr. Gregory Moses, Texas State University
- Dr. Aaron Shepherd, University of Massachusetts Lowell
- Daniel Westbrook, Emory University
- Dr. Jacoby Carter, Howard University

10:15-11:45 am (Pacific)/01:15-02:45 (Eastern)

Dissertations-in-Progress:

- Filippo Sanna, Sapienza Università di Roma, “Moral Education and Democracy. Between Contingency and Imagination.”
- Denise Meda Calderon, Texas A&M University. “Transborder Communitality: A Chicana Investigation of the Aesthetic and Ethical Responses to Re-Member our Dead”

11:15-12:00 pm (Pacific)/02:45-3:30 (Eastern)

Virtual Lunch/Social Time

Dissertation Abstracts

Apurva Parikh, University of South Carolina, Columbia, “A Deweyan Critical Reconstruction of *Dharma*”

Abstract: At the heart of most Hindu interpretations of moral life lies the concept of *dharma*, particularly as understood within the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition. The texts of this tradition, the most infamous of which is the *Manusmṛiti*, are dedicated to the articulation of this *dharma*, nominally understood as grounded in the transcendent authority of the *Vedas*. In *Annihilation of Caste*, Bhimrao Ambedkar provocatively argues in response to Mohandas Gandhi’s defense of this casteist and sexist brahmanical *dharma*, “[I]f you wish to bring about a breach in the system, then you have got to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the shastras....” (22.17). My aim in this dissertation is to do just that by offering a Deweyan critical reconstruction of the concept of *dharma*.

My critical reconstruction of the concept follows the model laid out in Dewey and Tuft’s *Ethics* (1932). In part I, after explicating the traditional concept of *dharma*, I engage in a Deweyan historical critique, undermining the traditions pretensions of transcendent Vedic authority by demonstrating that the various historical articulations of *dharma* in the tradition are all-too-human responses to historical problems faced by its brahmanical authors. In part II, I offer a reconstruction of the concept, arguing that we should understand *dharma* not as a transcendent system of norms of conduct, but as a Deweyan principle, i.e., a “tool for analyzing a special situation” (LW 7:280). Finally in Part III, while openly acknowledging that Dalits may legitimately reject the use of a critically reconstructed brahmanical concept as a liberatory tool, I argue that *dharma* thus understood can be a powerful anti-caste, social egalitarian tool. This is because *dharma* thus understood becomes a perpetual object of critique and reconstruction, not a transcendent model to be followed and preserved.

Danish Hamid, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, “Ambedkar’s Ethical Vision: Pragmatism and beyond in the project of Annihilation of Caste”

Abstract: B.R. Ambedkar was a social thinker, constitutionalist, founder of Navayana Buddhism and the most prominent anti-caste thinker of the 20th Century. My dissertation seeks to trace the roots of Ambedkar’s ideas and then to rationally reconstruct them in the light of that genealogy. I begin with Dewey’s pragmatism, who’s influence Ambedkar reverently acknowledged and which scholars have recognized (Kadam 1997) (Stroud, 2018). I also investigate non-pragmatist sources, both major and minor, based on close readings of Ambedkar’s texts and archival work in Ambedkar’s personal libraries. I locate the influence of Dewey’s naturalism, ‘social psychology’, and democratic theory, together with ancient Indian materialism, especially the *Carvakas*, on Ambedkar’s ethics of belief, his social philosophy and especially his reconceptualization of classical Buddhist concepts. With his repudiation of the doctrine of Karma, a central presupposition of Indian Philosophy (Potter 1963), Ambedkar takes Buddhist philosophy in a non-soteriological direction - a post-Darwinian naturalism, primarily, though not exclusively in the service of the emancipation of the Dalits. After showing how Ambedkar employs Deweyan ideas to reconstruct his Buddhism, I explain how his multi-pronged approach- epistemological, social, political, legal and religious- aims to dismantle the caste-system. In doing this, I resist recent attempts by scholars to confine Ambedkar within pragmatism, instead, while tracing the discordances from Dewey’s work, I highlight Ambedkar’s adoption of a version of ethical intuitionism borrowed from T.H. Huxley. After fleshing out the implications of Ambedkar’s naturalist metaphysic and a non-naturalistic ethic, and showing how

it informs Ambedkar's political and legal theory, I present the possibilities for a more philosophically systematic Ambedkarism.

Shunji Ukai, University of Oregon, "John Dewey on Philosophic Method and the Nature of Philosophy"

Abstract: This dissertation investigates the nature of philosophy in John Dewey's corpus. The particular topic that this dissertation focuses on is philosophic method, which is a topic that Dewey returned to throughout his career. Specifically, Dewey's discussions on method begins with "Kant and Philosophic Method" (1884) and "Psychology as Philosophic Method" (1886), and continues beyond the "denotative method" in *Experience and Nature* to, say, his comments in 1940 on the "genetic method" as "the proper method of philosophy" (LW14). Why did Dewey need to continue to return to the question of method? Is there a common theme or thesis in his articulations? What is, or is there anything, novel in Dewey's method, compared to more traditionally accepted methods, like the Cartesian methodic doubt, the Kantian imperative of reason, or Hegelian dialectics?

The guiding hypothesis of this dissertation is that Dewey's life-long failures to give a successful account of the nature of philosophy in the persistent attempts is precisely constitutive of his philosophic method. This hypothesis is based on the observation that, despite his changing positions (e.g., Absolute Idealism, experimental idealism, Pragmatism, and empirical naturalism), Dewey consistently required philosophy to explore and elaborate upon experience. The fact that Dewey was compelled to return to the question of method seems to indicate that there are traits in experience which resist a final exposition, thereby provoking further attempts. This dissertation takes a historical approach of seeking to trace out the multi-faceted themes related to this topic due to this hypothesis. Against the major interpretation that the common thematic of Dewey's philosophic method is "inquiry," this dissertation seeks to investigate whether it is possible to articulate it as varying attempts to provide "reminders."

Filippo Sanna, Sapienza Università di Roma, "Moral Education and Democracy. Between Contingency and Imagination."

Abstract: The aim of my paper is to present and compare Dewey's and Rorty's views of the connections between education and democracy. I will try to highlight how the attention around the changing aspect of reality and experience that characterizes the pragmatist approach also defines Dewey's point of view towards education. The purpose of education is to continue the action and the constant process of learning and development of life into a democratic social environment. I will proceed to investigate the Rortian figure of the liberal-ironist, focusing on the ways in which Rorty rethinks the relationship between public and private in terms of a re-description of liberalism in a non-rationalist and non-universalist key. This process implies the necessary awareness of the contingency of every paradigm, including liberalism itself, and the acquisition of an approach by which culture is understood as a constant comparison between "final-vocabularies". The inquiry aims to emphasize the link between educational contexts and a certain philosophical approach that identifies its advantages in the creative use of the imagination through language and in the individual's ability to redescribe himself, extending solidarity towards whom we perceived only as "them". In this sense, if on the one hand Dewey's approach aims to work on a general context of shared experiences of which language is certainly a part and which it helps to integrate, on the other hand Rorty intends to work on and with language to act on the world and on the individual in order to redescribe both.

Denise Meda Calderon, Texas A&M University. "Transborder Communalities: A Chicana Investigation of the Aesthetic and Ethical Responses to Re-Member our Dead."

Abstract: The topic of my dissertation research is death and the ways it can be understood as bolstering community relations as well as possibilities of resistance to social and political oppressions. In analyzing death and the communal practices surrounding it, my project asks: 'What are the histories of practices surrounding death?' 'What do they show about our relationship with death as a social phenomenon?' and 'How should we treat death in practices of community resistance?' By braiding strands of Chicana philosophy, Latina philosophy, scholarship of death, and resistance scholarship, I take an empirically grounded philosophical investigation to address these questions and frame death in its historical and social relations.

This dissertation examines the rich philosophical contributions of resistance practices by scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones, Laura E. Pérez, and Carlos A. Sanchez who theorize practices of resistance to oppressive colonial logics of purity. Following this scholarship, the philosophy of death promoted in this dissertation grants a relational dynamic between life and death that exceeds treatments of death as merely an individualized termination of life. Such a distinction, as this dissertation will show, is evident through rituals of death such as the altar making of Day of the Dead Celebrations. As embodied and lived relational activity with others, this dissertation contends that social rituals of death simultaneously revitalize communities that face different modes of oppression and reveal a multidimensional relationality with death that is not reducible to oppositional frameworks.