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C O V E R A R T
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FROM EDITOR'S DESK

Greetings!

Reflection – the annual newsletter of Department of Philosophy – is an endeavour to celebrate introspective thought in philosophy, and provides a forum to the students to express and share their deliberations on the topics and concerns they feel strongly about. The current issue of *Reflection* presents a collection of short essays, artworks and photographs, and a glimpse at the events last year. Contributors have presented their philosophical reflections and have raised crucial questions on a range of topics in areas like morality and ethics, philosophy of language, technology and art.

We highly appreciate all the contributions and sincerely thank all the teachers for their constant guidance and support.

Happy Reading!

CAN ANIMALS BE MORAL AGENTS?

I hear a woman arguing with the guard about a sign recently placed outside the elevator doors which says “Pets not allowed”. She is holding the leash of her husky, and ardently pleading that it’s not *just* a dog, “He is her *son*.” Just like this woman, people of New York found an ingenious way to evade the “pets not allowed on the subway, unless they are in a carrier” rule by carrying their not-so-small pets in huge tote bags. There are numerous instances like these where the mingling of humans with animals leave us amazed. We are often touched by the kindness, toleration and patience exhibited by these animals towards humans and their playful mischiefs are endured by us with an almost Zen-like calm.

At this point, there is a word that typically enters our minds: anthropomorphism – the misguided attribution of human-like qualities to animals. We describe our pets as “friendly”, “playful”, “gentle”, “trustworthy”, or “loyal” – a “good” dog or “mean”, “aggressive”, “vicious”, “unpredictable” - a “bad” dog. These are seemingly moral descriptions that we assign to these animals.



The idea that non-human animals have significant moral status is comparatively modern. It owes much to the work of philosopher Peter Singer and his 1975 book *Animal Liberation*. There is a set of debates whether animals have any moral status or not, and another line of debate is what I am interested in here – Can animals be seen to have moral agency? There have been dissenting voices especially amongst the scientists. They say that animals can’t be put inside the brackets of moral concepts that we understand, simple because they are not humans. Human beings have something that no other animal has: an ability to participate in a collective cognition. Unlike other animals, we are able to reflect on and make judgements about our own and others' actions, and as a result we are able to make considered moral choices. This suggests that morality is rooted in our evolutionary history. But just because humans are evolutionarily “superior” and therefore capable of making better moral judgements, should not suggest that animals are completely devoid of any moral compass. Frans de Waal (a Dutch primatologist and ethologist and a member of the United States National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) is in precisely the way we are.

Sciences) has argued in his book *Primates and Philosophers*, that animals are at least capable of proto-moral behaviour: they possess the rudiments of morality even if they are not moral. Marc Bekoff (professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado and the co-founder of 'Ethologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals'), has been arguing for years that animals can act morally.



There are evidences of animals exhibiting conducts which were considered to be exclusive to humans, for example, elephants, whose herds are headed by a matriarch and made of generally related females, babies, and immature males, have long been known to bond strongly with their kind. They celebrate births and mourn the dead. In Kenya, researchers have watched mother elephants and other adult females help baby elephants climb up muddy banks and out of holes, find a safe path into a swamp, or break through electrified fences.

The evidence of apparently moral behaviour in animals is large and growing by the day. Stanley Wechkin (a researcher in New York College) demonstrated that hungry rhesus monkeys would not take food if doing so subjected another monkey to an electric shock. One monkey persisted in this refusal for twelve days, almost starving itself to death. An experiment conducted by Russel Church in 1959 showed that rats would not push a lever that delivered food if doing so caused other rats to receive an electric shock.

But are these examples enough to ignore the dissenting voices? Can we disregard the official position of some philosophers and scientists who say that animals are not capable of acting morally?

If animals can act well, then, it seems they can also act badly. If animals can be morally praiseworthy, then they can also be morally blameworthy. At one time, animals have been put on trial by courts and, often, subsequently executed, as perceived indiscretions were not uncommon. But are these animals really responsible for what they do? A dog that kills or injures a child will be routinely destroyed, this is generally justified on grounds of safety rather than blame.

However, if animals are not responsible for what they do, this seems to imply that they cannot act morally. A central figure in the modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant, gave an "ethical formula": *ought implies can*, this establishes a link between obligations and abilities. It doesn't make sense to suppose that I ought to do something if I am incapable of doing it. Nor does it make sense to say I shouldn't do something if I can't help myself. To say that you ought or ought not to do something is to imply that you have a say in the matter – you are capable of choosing what it is you are going to do, or capable of refraining from whatever it is you are tempted to do. However, moral motivations seem to imply that you have this ability. So, animals can't act morally, it seems unless they are responsible for what they do – and then, it seems, we are back to medieval animals' trials.

A similar idea is also found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, it states that to act morally, we need to be able to scrutinise our motivations, understand whether or not they are morally good or bad, and act on them – or refuse to act on them – on this basis. If animals lack these abilities, they cannot act morally, and it seems likely they lack these abilities. So, if we imagine an Aristotelian dog, he would have to think to itself: “Would this be a virtuous thing to do?”. Many Philosophers would suggest that what is crucial is that the dog *cannot* do this because it lacks the ability to scrutinise its motivations and not simply that the dog did not engage in this sort of scrutiny of its motivation.

Can we challenge these philosophical orthodoxies? Is there another way of understanding the “ought” of moral motivation? Or do we accept the primacy of human's abilities? And even if some of our capabilities are advanced, does that mean the animals around us aren't also evolving? Isn't there a need to re-think our place in the animal kingdom and show a little more humility? Whatever may be the conclusion, whether animals do have a moral compass or they don't, human beings as moral agents have the responsibility to treat each animal with respect and acknowledge that they are splendid beings in their own right.

Shiwakshi R

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INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

Feminism in our country, India, has surely come a long way. From our legacy of *sati* and child marriages, to actually educating the girl child is an evidence to this long journey. Even though there still remains a lot of work to be done, there is no ignoring the fact that a lot of progress has been made and the status of womenfolk in the nation has considerably elevated in the past decade. The term 'feminism' is not something new – it has been around for a long while – it is just that people are encountering it more these days because of more awareness spread by feminist leaders and activists like *Savitribai Phule, Leila Seth, Indira Jaising, Kavita Krishnan, Nivedita Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Bibi Dalair Kaur* etc. We should be thankful to these people as they are the pillars who have helped shaping Indian feminism.

However, contemporary Indian feminism can take deeper consideration of catering to the needs and aspirations of women of all classes and sections. Feminism has many a times remained divided between the urban women and the rural women. This division nullifies the basic aim that feminism is supposed to fulfill. As Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* rightly points out that “Class is not a separate construct from gender, rather class is expressed in generic terms”. Over the course of time, feminism has mainly focused on the issues experienced by upper-class & middle-class women such as socialization, rape culture, glass ceilings etc. which invariably meant that the focus was more on educated women stuck in traditionalist roles while having modern mindset. This overshadows the struggles faced by women of lower classes like Dalit women, indigenous women, LGBTQ+ women, women from lower economic backgrounds, women with disabilities etc. Their oppressions and vulnerabilities are way different than the urban women. However their sufferings stay limited to near facts and data. In this way the very essence of feminism gets lost due to the social and economic differences.

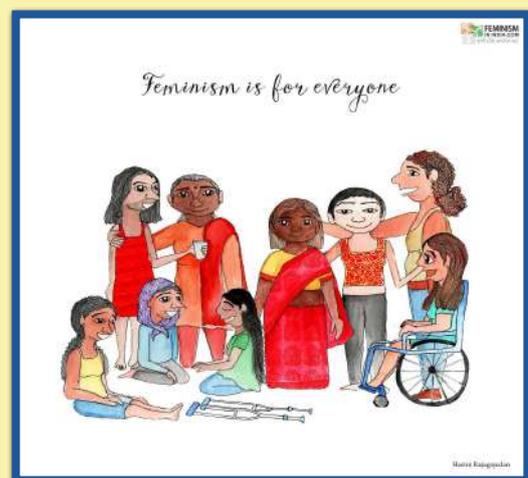
To rectify this problem Kimberlé Crenshaw, an advocate and a professor of Law at Columbia Law School & the University of California, introduced the concept of “intersectionality” 30 years ago to feminist theory. Crenshaw noted some of the ways in which intersectional feminism helps activists advocate for women of all backgrounds and identities. Intersectional feminism examines the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination that women face, based not just on gender but on ethnicity, sexuality, economic background and a number of other axes. As Crenshaw explains that “The way we imagine discrimination or disempowerment often is more complicated for people who are subjected to multiple forms of exclusion. The good news is that intersectionality provides us a way to see it. We might have to broaden our scope of how we think about where women are vulnerable,” she added, “because different things make different

women vulnerable.”

I think Crenshaw’s approach gives a perspective to examine and implement feminism on different parameters keeping in mind different subjects but at the same time keeping them under the same umbrella.

But this aspect is not altogether new for Indian Feminism. As tracing back to 1947-1950s during the formation of Indian constitution DR. B.R Ambedkar had the similar approach. He came to eradicate the gender inequality and bring women on equal surface as that of men by giving all women equal opportunities and rights. Being a Dalit himself, Ambedkar had closely witnessed the violence against women at higher rates, including types of violence that are specifically done to Dalit women. He also knew that Dalit women face different challenges than women in higher castes since they are more likely to be poor, uneducated and socially marginalized.

This is why he said that, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved." This is the reason why a lot of Dalit women formed feminist groups such as *National Federation of Dalit Women* and the *All India Dalit Women's Forum* along with several state-level groups inspired by leaders like Ambedkar. But the current times seem to show that urban feminism and rural feminism are two parallel groups which don’t associate with each other but as a different section altogether



This is mainly due to the different experiences that women face in each section, for instance – *Five months pregnant Suchitra Devi from Ghaziabad district in Uttar Pradesh miscarried in 2002 after being shoved, jeered at and humiliated by dominant castes while attempting to stand in the same queue to access the public distribution shop. She had been waiting for hours to receive her rations. The PDS shopkeeper furthered her humiliation by saying, “How many times have I told you, you don’t even have to wait in the queue! Just come to my house at night and I’ll give you all the ‘ration’ you want!” When she approached the traditional village panchayat for justice, they said that they could do nothing unless she knew who had pushed her. At this point Suchitra Devi realised “I will get no justice because I am a Bhangi”.* This case is not even as severe as the cases of female foeticide, dowry issues, kidnapping, rapes violence in the family or kidnapping. This is a case of ‘verbal abuse’. And if something like verbal abuse can humiliate a woman to this extent then the latter cases becomes unexplainably tough for the person going through it. It is not that only Dalit women face such cruelty, Brahmin women from rural areas are also not treated very well. They are mistreated by their families and have endless dominance and restrictions on them. Belonging to upper caste don’t privilege them in any sense. The privileges remain exclusive to the men of the family.

On the other hand, women in urban areas face problems like – the ongoing Sabrimala temple

case: where women are not permitted to enter the temple because of On the other hand, women in urban areas face problems like – the ongoing Sabrimala temple some ancient belief system that has its ground in the belief that that bleeding women (menstrual cycle) will make the temple ‘impure’ and thus women are not allowed to enter the temple in fact their presence even in the vicinity of the temple is ridiculed. This exclusion of women is not on the basis of caste/color/creed but actually on the basis of her body and its biological processes. How was that ever justified? And even if it could be justified in a certain time context, it is still shocking when women and men are protesting against it today, there is a sect of people who are still defending this ancient



and unfair idea. Other instances cases like households which stop women from going to work after getting married, the brother is given more favors than the girl so much as he is sent for higher education and she is either forced to get married or do household chores, judging a women on the basis of her clothes has always been a favorite hobby for the Indian society, misbehaving in public transport is normalized to such an extent that

women tend to just suppress and ignore it as they have no option but to live with it. Pay-gaps, domestic violence and dowry are challenges still being battled out by women.

Problems like pay-gaps may not sound as huge as the problems faced by rural women but that doesn't make they are less gruesome to women's freedom and their existence. In fact, if we look closely, urban and rural women share problem of same category like sexual harassments, rapes, domestic violence, dowry, cat calling, harassments in work place and more – all these have eventually the same root. This invariably leads to the idea of Intersectional Feminism that brings these women together to fight these hardships as a team that is not segregated by caste or economic and social backgrounds. This will also bring in more cases in notice as the two parallel groups will merge or at least the urban feminists will take in consideration the rural women problems while making measures and leading movements. Being ignorant about the downtrodden make one an oppressor as well. It is about minimizing our roles as oppressors and become a source of strength for one another.

Thus the goal is to see all the oppression as "our problem" and then fighting against it as one unit. So, practicing intersectionality in feminism will help in dismantle the social systems that ensure inequality not only among men and women but also among women in general

Baishali Chakraborty

THE MILLENNIAL IDENTITY

Forming an identity as a means of distinguishing oneself from another and gaining meaning for one-self is an intensely personal as well as social process. The sources one chooses or is born into, forms the foundation of this enduring sense of the 'self'. The history of persons and their identities has come a long way, from socially ascribed identities, which was at times imposed upon people such as the caste system in India, to identities derived from specialized professions-religious, political, agricultural and others; the world of the yesteryears restricted people into convenient blocks of monolithic identities. For example, a woman – her identity, as being derived in reference to a man, she was (and continues to be) seen as a mother, daughter and wife, she was supposed to be the primary care-giver circumscribed to the boundaries of the home she was born into and the married off to. Such narratives were prevalent, not just based on gender, but also on race, caste and religion.

Only those who had had access, agency and the ability to risk their lives and livelihoods, dared to challenge the social structures and question societies' stake and right to shaping one's identity to such an extent, it's illustrated most poignantly in the Suffragette movement and the spearheading of the feminist movement by the white women of the West.

The world has progressed, in part, from such harsh restrictions by contributions of all those who were so bold so as to defy it. The modern day culture of movements and globalization has challenged conservatism and societies' conventions of assigning identities. However, whether there is actually an increased propensity for one, to form one's own identity autonomously and independently, is still a question we doesn't have an answer to.



In today's day and age, despite one arguably having more freedom to navigate and choose, there continues to be an invisible but prominent limit on being and acting, one continues to feel suffocated and pressured to be a certain way. The modern millennial with access to the internet and more singularly access to social media and the 24-hours feed is exposed, if not bombarded with content which is visceral and saturated with attempts of validating and seeking validation. Such a cycle of seeking external confirmation and reassurance has resulted in a generational confusion surrounding identity and its expression.

Following trends, celebrities, shows, people one sees or meets has become a way of life both metaphorically and literally. There is a gradual shift in the type of content people choose to invest themselves in – from a more long term engagement, the obsession with the short term and immediate has become a common theme of preference. With such emphasis on rapidity, and focus on posts and people celebrating achievements, and gyration towards validation outsourced to the digital world – there is an increase in dissatisfaction and depression colouring the virtual citizen.



For the millennial, the internet is a double etched sword. With undeniable value which it adds and also subtracts to an individual. It is an organic component of the modern discourse on the evolution of the contemporary identity.

One's identity as a consequence of the ever-changing nature of the internet is just as transient as the trends, as a self-identification continues to be a struggle. The modern man despite of being "free" is held hostage by the expectations and the need of having followers, likes and subscribes. The social hierarchy continues to exist, however more mobile to social classes and groups, the pressure and source of identification continues to be virtual and external.

In the same connection, I would want to refer to Hubert Dreyfus' "Nihilism on the Information Highway", where Dreyfus argues that the internet as one of the most innovative invention of man has given rise to serious questions regarding one's identity and agency. He thinks that our deliberations and moral and social commitments have become very diluted which leads to inaction. Commitment to something or being passionate about something calls for nothing more than "joining" a group on a social media forum and does not necessitate action. One's choices, passions, decisions and real engagement with the world constitutes an essential part of one's identity. The millenials find themselves being over-consumed by the social medial and forums, and their identities often very scattered.

It can't be denied that social media also provides opportunities of individual expression, experiences and exposure to the external world. However, the pursuit of wanting and gaining acceptance from an equally desperate audience needs to be cognized and understood. For one to survive and sustain oneself with the virtual reality as a part of his everyday life, one needs to empower oneself and know, how big a part it plays in forming their identity. One's self-perception is largely contingent on how far one allows such influences to dictate his priorities. Only post such realization one can see oneself making tangible changes and autonomously use social media, and avoid social media from rather using them up.

Vaishnavi Bhaskar

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BUDDHIST ETHICS

The development and establishment of Buddhism as a religion happened much later than the recognition of its strong ethical values. In fact, in its original form, Buddhism is not a religion but is rather a tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development. Buddhists strive for a deep insight into the nature of life and do not worship god's deities. An essential feature of this spiritual development is perfecting oneself morally. In this article, I present a brief overview of the core values of Buddhist ethics.

The scriptures of Buddhism in every language speak eloquently of virtues such as non-violence and compassion and the Buddhist version of 'golden rule' counsels not to do anything to others we would not like done to ourselves. The constant emphasis on such values indicate how cardinal is being moral to not only belief in Buddhism but also in practice. The foundational ground for Buddhist ethics is *dharma*. *Dharma* can be understood variously – *dharma* can be taken to mean as 'natural or cosmic law and order' and it also applies to the teachings of Buddha.

The entirety of the Buddhist philosophy is contained within the Four Noble Truths:

1. *Duhkha* – All existence is suffering.
2. *Samudāya* – Suffering is caused by craving.
3. *Nirodha* – There is an end to this suffering.
4. *Magga* – The way to the end of suffering is the noble eight fold path.

It was in the discourse that the Buddha set the four noble truths, the last of which is the eightfold path, which leads to *nirvāna*. The path has three divisions – morality (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*) and insight (*prajñā*) from which can be seen that morality is an integral component of the path to Nirvana.

1. Insight (*Prajñā*)

Right view

Right Resolve

2. Morality (*Śīla*)

Right speech

Right action

Right livelihood

3. Meditation (*Samādhi*)

Right Effort

Right mindfulness

Right meditation

Morality in Buddhism is a code of conduct that embraces a commitment to harmony and self-restraint with the principal of motivation being non-violent. It has been variously described as virtue, Right conduct of morality, moral discipline and precept. According to the Buddhism human beings have free-will and in the exercise of free choice they engage in self-determination. In a very real sense, individual create themselves through their moral choices. By freely and repeatedly Choosing certain sorts of things, individual shape their characters, and through their character, their future.

The process of creating *karma* may be likened to the work of a potter who moulds the clay into a finished shape the soft clay in one characters, and when we make moral choice we hold ourselves in our hands and shape our nature for good and ill. To further one's understanding of how to practice morality in Buddhism, we may refer to the five precepts (*pañcasīla*) prescribed by Buddha himself which one must follow in the course of their moral perfection. These five precepts are undertaken as voluntary commitments in the ceremony of 'going for refuge' when a person become a Buddhist. The rigour of practising these precepts depends upon whether one is a monk or a laymen. However, the fundamental spirit and significance of the core values remains constant. The *pañcasīla* are as follows:

Precept to refrain from harming living creatures

The first precept maybe seen as corresponding to the Hindu and Jaina concept of *ahimsā* or non-injury, and is generally regarded as the most important one. Non-injury is the distinguishing mark of *dharma*. Taking the first precept rules out the intentional killing of any living being, human or otherwise. The object of this precept is not limited to the humans as all sentient being share in the cycle of rebirth and the experiences of various types of suffering.

Precept to refrain from taking what has not been given

The second is seen as ruling out any act of theft. The second precept covers fraud, cheating, forgery and falsely denying that one is debt to someone. Theft is seen as worse according to the value of what is stolen, but also according to the virtue of the person stolen from. The spirit of this precept is seen to entail such things as not stealing time from oneself by day-dreaming during time for meditation not greedily exploiting workers and carelessness with precious things.

Precept to refrain from sexual immorality

The third precept relates primarily to the avoidance of harm caused by one's sexual behavior. Adultery or going with wife of another is the most straight forward breach of this precept. The wrongness of this is seen as partly in terms of its being an expression of greed and partly in terms of its harm to others. Buddhist discussion of the third precept mainly focuses on various circumstances in which men and women can be seen as the breaking it.

Precept to refrain speaking falsely

The fourth precept is equivalent to the factor of “right speech” in the eightfold path. The precept specifically refers only to avoiding false speech. It is generally seen to entail avoiding other forms of wrong speech which cause mental turmoil or other form of suffering in oneself or others. The fourth precept is generally seen as the second most important one. It is said that a person who has no shame at intentionally lying is capable of any evil action. Any form of lying or exaggeration, either for one's own benefit or that of another is seen as breach of the fourth precept. Even non-verbal deception by gesture, or other indication, or misleading statements are a breach of this precept.

Precept to refrain from taking intoxicants

This precept is not listed under the path factor of “right action” or “right speech” but can be seen to act as an aid to “right mindfulness”. When one is intoxicated, there is an attempt to mask, rather than face the suffering of life. There is no mental clarity or calm and one is more likely to break all other precepts. Drinking intoxicating liquors adversely affects one's ability to remember which becomes an obstacle to the good path.

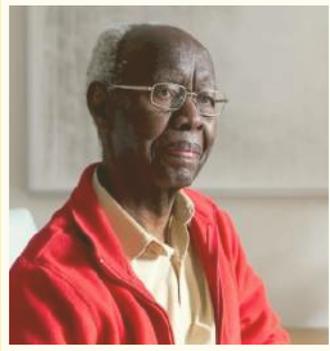


At the root of unwholesome actions are three evils of *lobha* (greed), *doṣa* (aversion) and *moha* (delusion). Buddhism recommends that these be uprooted so that one's vision becomes clear and one only engages in wholesome actions. Hence, non-greed, non-aversion and non-delusion are the central values of Buddhism and root of wholesome actions. They correspond to the Buddhist values of generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. Inculcating such values in oneself makes it easier for the practitioner to follow the *pañcasīla* also more efficiently. All the different Buddhist moral and ethical virtues are interdependent and are enhanced when conditioned in facilitation of one another.

Mansi Chaudhary

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Scholars of Early period tried in more reliable ways to assert African identity by establishing native African philosophical heritage. Some prominent scholars of this period were Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Placid Tempels, Amilcar Cabral, etc. **Placid Tempels** (1906-1977) in his work '*Bantu Philosophy*' (1949) proved that rationality was an important feature of the traditional African culture. By systematizing Bantu Philosophical ideas, he confronted the racist orientation of West which depicted Africa as a continent of semi humans.

Another important philosopher in this era was **John Mbiti** (b.1931). His work '*African Religions and Philosophy*' (1969) avidly educated those who doubted African possession of their own identities before arrival of Europeans by excavating and demonstrating the rationality in religious and philosophical enterprises in African cultures.

Middle Period

The middle period of African Philosophy is an era of twin movement called Afro-constructionism and Afro-deconstructionism. This was also called the Great Debate when two rival schools – Traditionalists and Universalists clashed. While Traditionalists sought to construct an African identity based on excavated African cultural elements, the Universalists sought to demolish such architectonic structure by associating it with ethnophilosophy. Other schools that thrived in the era include Hermeneutical and Literary schools.



Philosophers of this era include **C.S. Momoh, Olusegun Oladipo, Obafemi Awolowo, Uzodinma Nwala, Kwame Gyeke, Paulin Hountondji** and many more. **Paulin Hountondji** was of the view that African philosophy must be done in same frame as Western philosophy including its principles, methodologies and methods. It was with this sort of new orientation which emerged from disillusionment of the protracted debate that the Later Period of African Philosophy was born in the 1980s.

Later Period

This period of African philosophy heralds the emergence of the movements which can be called Critical Reconstructionism and Afro-Eclecticism. For the Deconstructionists of the middle period, the focus shifted from deconstruction to reconstruction of African episteme in a universally integrated way; whereas, for the eclectics, finding a reconcilable middle path between traditional African philosophy and modern African philosophy should be a paramount. The campaign for Afro-reconstructionism had first emerged in the late 1980's in the writings of **Peter Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, V.Y. Mudimbe and Olusegun Oladipo**. However, Afro-reconstructionism spontaneously evolved into Afro-eclecticism in early 1990s when emerging Critical Reconstructionism ran into brick wall of inactivity. **Andrew Uduigwomen**, the Nigerian philosopher was the one who gave official birth to Afro-eclecticism in his 1995 work, '*Philosophy and the place of African Philosophy*'. Identifying the Traditionalist and Modernist schools as the Particularist and Universalist schools, he created the eclectic school

by carefully unifying their goals from the ruins of the deconstructed past.

New Era

This period of African philosophy began in the late 1990's and took shape by the turn of the millennium years. The orientation of this period is conversational philosophy, so conversationalism is the movement that thrives in this period. The University of Calabar has emerged as the international headquarters of this movement hosting various workshops, colloquia and conferences in African philosophy under auspices of radical forum called The Conversational/ Calabar school of Philosophy.

A good number of African philosophers are turning their works into pattern of conversational philosophy. **Pantaleon Iroegbu**, for example, in his *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy* inaugurated the reconstructive and conversational approach in African philosophy. He engaged previous writers in a critical conversation out of which he produced his own thought, Uwa ontology.

In Southern Africa, **Mogobe Ramose**, **Michael Eze**, **Fainos Mangena**, **Thaddeus Metz** and **Leonhard Praeg** are doing this when they engage with the idea of **Ubuntu** ethics and ontology. Like all these thinkers, the champions of the new Conversational orientation are building the new edifice by reconstructing the deconstructed domain of thought in the later period of African Philosophy. Hence, the New Era of African philosophy is safe from the retrogressive, perverse dialogues which characterized the early and middle periods.

Thus, the evolution of African Philosophy through the above-mentioned periods shows that African philosophy is not only a critical engagement of tradition and individual thinkers but also a critical construction of millennium. On one hand some individual African philosophers engaged tradition critically in order to ascertain its universal validity and on other hand some were engaged in critical conversations with one another for construction of new thoughts in matters that concern Africa and are projected from native African thought systems. Keeping such differences in methodologies aside, the primary focus of African philosophers was establishing African identity through Philosophical analysis. And this marked the sign of their unity and made them achieve that, which in general could have taken centuries.

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Compiled by:
Adya Upasana Routray

MENGZI'S PERSPECTIVE ON HUMAN NATURE

Chinese Philosophy comprises of several schools of philosophical thoughts ranging from Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Legalism to Mohism. It boasts of a tradition spanning several thousands of years. The classic period of Chinese philosophy flourished around 500 BC, around the golden emergence period of Greek philosophy and it was during that time that the four major influential schools of Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism and Legalism were established, and this period was also known as the 'Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought'. This article is an overview of Mengzi's conception of Confucianism and Human Nature.



Confucianism

Confucianism was developed from the teachings of the sage Confucius (551 - 479 B.C.), and collected in the famous *Analects of Confucius*. Confucianism is a system of moral, social, political, and quasi-religious thought, whose influence also spread to Korea and Japan.

The major Confucian concepts include ren (humanity), Zheng Ming (Mandate of Heaven), Zhong (loyalty), Xiao (filial piety), and li (ritual). It introduced the Golden Rule which states to treat others as you would like others to treat you; the concept of Yin and Yang -two opposing forces that are permanently in conflict with each other, leading to perpetual contradiction and change, the idea of meritocracy, and of reconciling opposites to arrive at some middle ground combining the best of both. Confucianism is practiced by many Buddhists, Christians, etc. worldwide. The most famous Confucian after Confucius himself was Mengzi (or Mencius) (372 – 289 B.C.) who is also called the second sage after Confucius, who is widely regarded as the first sage.

Confucianist Perspective on Human Nature

“Hold it fast and you preserve it. Let it go and you lose it. It comes in and goes out at no definite time and without anyone knowing its direction.”

- Confucius

Eastern and Western philosophical traditions were always interested in understanding and defining

the ‘human nature’. The debate of nature and nurture has been in vogue since millennia, but with no conclusive result. What exactly is this human nature? Is it something we are born with or is it formed and shaped through socialization, acculturation, environment and education? Or does socialization and conditioning work on some fundamental foundation that is alike in all human beings that further develops and shapes our personalities that contributes to our different personas? Let us try to understand this debate in light of the ideas put forward by a branch of Chinese philosophy and an important one at that - Confucianism. The followers of Confucius dealt in depth with matters of human nature. I shall be discussing this with respect to the philosophy of Mencius/Mengzi, a famous follower of Confucius.

Confucianism is the most important and well-known philosophy of China. Kong Zi is the founder of this philosophy that has influenced varied social, cultural and religious aspects of the Chinese empires and present-day People’s Republic of China. Confucius (Latinised version of Kong Zi), didn’t particularly define human nature though he admitted that there is something called ‘human nature’. According to him, all people are born alike and ‘close’ to one another and through ‘education’ they become ‘far’ apart. It is interesting to note that Confucius didn’t care to say ‘how’ they were alike in birth, i.e. what is the *nature* of the human nature- whether it is loving, caring, evil, irrational etc.

Mengzi and Xun Zi, another follower of Confucianism did try to speculate on human nature and its composition, though surprisingly, both of them came out with polar opposite explanations. Mengzi held that human nature was essentially good and Xun Zi was of the opinion that human nature was basically evil.

Mencius on Human Nature

Mengzi was one of the first practitioners of Moral Psychology in ancient China. His contribution to Confucianism is second to only that of Confucius himself. He interpreted the thought of the Confucius while he simultaneously impressed Confucius’ ideas with his own philosophical ideas.



His famous ethical system is his theory of human nature though he had widely expostulated on theodicy, government and self-cultivation along with human nature during his wandering days. Those sayings are collected in his eponymous book *Mengzi* which is a series of 7 books, each book divided into 2 sections A and B and then further into many chapters. His work was probably compiled by his disciples or disciples of his disciples. It was subsequently edited and shortened by Zhao Qi in the second century C.E., who also wrote a commentary on the text. Mencius and his interlocutors carry on their debates in the *Mengzi* largely through the method of analogy. Although it is often said that classical Chinese philosophers did not place a premium on argumentation, Mencius was a master of the use and criticism of analogical arguments. This was the most prevalent method of approaching knowledge and establishing truth among 4th century B.C.E. Chinese thinkers. Mencius often used this method in his criticisms of other philosophers such as Mozi, Gaozi, Kao Tzu etc.

According to Mencius, all human beings are endowed with the potential and the tendency to be kind-hearted and virtuous. Everyone is born with the trace of the virtue of human-heartedness. Human-heartedness is a Confucian virtue also called '*ren*'. We have an innate disposition to be good, though it depends on the kind of upbringing that is provided to us. This implies that everyone is not a moral person, but that if we are trained and taught and nourished by practice and experience, we can attain our potential of *ren*. If not, then we will turn out to be bad. But still our innate disposition of being good will remain intact.

In a nutshell, Mencius means that all human beings share an innate goodness that either can be cultivated through education and self-discipline or squandered through neglect and negative influences, but never lost altogether.

Kao Zi (Gaozi), a famous Chinese philosopher argued that there is no human nature by giving an analogy between water flow and human nature. Water will flow in any direction- East/North/West/South when there are no obstructions. Water does not have any inherent tendency to flow in any given direction and similarly, human beings have no inherent nature, Kao Zi concluded.

But Mencius cleverly turned the tables upon Kao Zi himself. Mencius agreed that water can be made to flow in any direction, but water can flow only downhill. The water can be made to flow upwards, but that is completely unnatural since when we move the resistance, water will regain its natural tendency to flow downwards. Similarly, we can shape and mould human behaviour only by modifying an already existing human nature. Thus, Mencius concludes that human nature has the propensity to move toward the good, just as water seeks downhill.

Mencius believes in the goodness of human heart. He strongly believes that men cannot bear to see the suffering of other people. He illustrated his point with an example- when a person sees a child about to fall into a well, what does he automatically do in the spur of the moment? He has the feeling of alarm and distress and would want the child to survive from a certain death. This feeling is common among all the people, Mencius opines.

Mencius identifies the four basic qualities of human-heartedness --sympathy, shame, deference, judgment. These are not just distinguishing characteristics of human beings, these are what makes the human being really human and these are also the "sprouts" (*duan*) of the four cardinal virtues or the four beginnings. There are four beginnings or traces in human beings just as they have four limbs. These are – the feeling of commiseration- humanity (*ren*), the feeling of shame and dislike-righteousness (*yi*), the feeling of respect and reverence- propriety (*li*) and the feeling of right and wrong- wisdom (*zhi*). Humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are not found externally; rather they are within us the whole time. If anyone fully utilises and waters the four beginnings to attain gradual growth, then it will lead to the extension and development of the human being. We all have in common the principles of propriety and righteousness, i.e. the moral principles. Mencius draws a parallel between food and moral principles. Like food pleases our mouths, moral principles please our minds.

In the end, it may be said thatConfucius saw a unity of the inner and the outer, Mencius tended to privilege the inner aspects of concepts, practices, and identities. For Mencius, the locus of philosophical activity and self-cultivation is the heart-mind or the human-heartedness. Mencius' views of the divine, political organization, human nature, and the path toward personal development all start and end in the human-heartedness.

Chinese philosophy is a sprawling tradition spewing into many branches and sub-branches. It is impossible to expostulate on Chinese philosophy in a few pages since we would not be able to do full justice to this great philosophy. Through this article, I have attempted to provide a bird's eye view of a sub-branch of Confucianism as advocated by Mengzi.

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ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Developing in the late ninth century AD and evolving without interruption for the next four centuries, In the formative period of philosophy in the Islamic world – that is, up to the 12th century or so – “philosophy” was strongly associated with Greek culture. It was even called falsafa, a loan-word from the Greek philosophia. “Philosophers (falāsifa)” were pursuing a science with foreign origins, centred above all on the study of Aristotle, but drawing on numerous other sources. For this reason, “philosophy” was considered to be outside the Islamic sciences, and it was not grounded in scriptural authority. Notwithstanding the substantial influence that it has had on western philosophy, medieval Islamic philosophy is not generally regarded as part of the philosophical canon in the English-speaking world, and such figures as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) remain obscure by comparison with Augustine and Aquinas. More often than not, they are either considered curiosities deriving from an entirely different philosophical tradition, or preservers of and commentators on the Greek philosophical heritage without a sufficiently original contribution of their own.

In what follows, we try to give a basic grounding of some of the most philosophically intriguing figures of the Islamic tradition.



Al-Kindī

Practically unknown in the Western world, al-Kindi has an honoured place in the Islamic world as the ‘philosopher of the Arabs’. Today he might be viewed as a bridge between Greek philosophers and Islamic philosophy. Part of the brilliant ninth-century ‘Abbasid court at Baghdad, composed of literati of all types, he served as tutor for the caliph’s son.

He gained insights into the thought of Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, through the translation movement; although he did not make translations himself, he corrected them and used them advantageously in his own thought. Of the 260 works al-Kindi is believed to have authored, only a small percentage survive. His key extant work is *On First Philosophy (Fi al-falsafa al-ula)*,

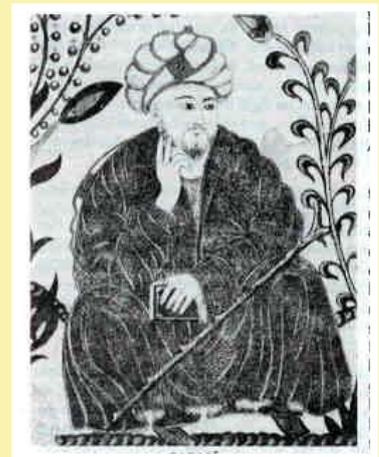
which appropriates numerous Aristotelian concepts, translating, refining and supplementing them to accommodate the new concerns of a world shaped by Islam.

The aim of the philosopher, according to al-Kindi, is not only to attain the truth insofar as it is possible, but also to act in accordance with it. Accordingly, his philosophy has a strong practical dimension, and he espouses a form of ethical perfectionism that draws from Socrates and the Stoics, emphasizing control of the passions and the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. Only a portion of al-Kindi's work survives, so judgment of him must necessarily be imperfect. However, al-Kindi's influence endured longer in the Western Islamic tradition than in the Eastern, as reflected in the writings of the twelfth-century mystic Ibn al-Arabi. With al-Kindi, who pursued reason against the background of revealed religion, begins the Islamic philosophical tradition which continues with the works of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd.

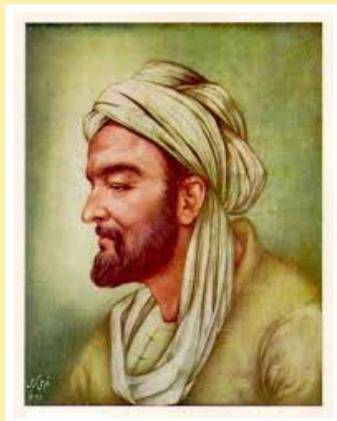
Al- Farabi

Al-Farabi (870–950), generally referred to in the Arabic sources as “the Second Teacher” (after Aristotle being known as “the First Teacher” in the East), occupies a unique position in the history of philosophy, as the link between Greek philosophy and Islamic thought. The philosophy of Al-Farabi stands in marked distinction to that of al-Kindī but is no less representative of the major trends of thought inherited by the Islamic world.

As the greatest non-conformist in Islam, he rejected the whole fabric of revelation and substituted for the official Islamic view five co-eternal principles, the Creator (Bārī), the soul, matter, space and time, inspired in part by Plato and the Harranians. Al-Farabi was held in particular high esteem for his logical writings (both commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon*, as well as independent treatises) and credited with the codification and establishment of logic in the Arabic-speaking world as a science independent of grammar. Not only in the sphere of logic, but also in cosmology and metaphysics, Al-Farabi stands out as a leading figure.



Al-Farabi may be regarded, therefore, as the first system-builder in the history of Arab-Islamic thought. He built upon Plotinus's emanationist scheme a cosmological and metaphysical system that is striking for its intricacy and daring. In the field of metaphysics, Al-Farabi is traditionally credited with drawing two crucial ontological distinctions – that between essence and existence, and that between possible and necessary existence – which would become a basic presupposition of Islamic metaphysicians. Al-Farabi is perhaps best known for his works on political philosophy, such as *The Virtuous City (Madinat al-fadila)*, *The Political Regime (al-Siyasa al-madaniyya)* and *The Attainment of Happiness (Tahsil al-sa'ada)*.



Ibn- Sīnā

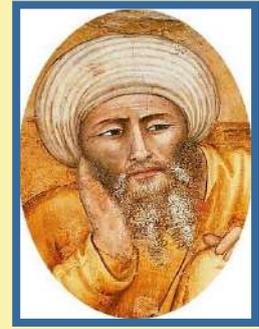
Ibn Sina – or ‘Avicenna’, as he was known to the Latins – may very well be the most important and influential thinker, not just of the Neoplatonic-Aristotelian school of Islamic philosophy in particular, or of the classical period of Islamic philosophy more generally, but of the whole Islamic philosophical tradition. His complex and original system might be said to revolve around two chief insights.

The first is that we have a basic, preconceptual intuition of being, rooted in an a priori awareness of our own existence unmediated by sense experience. Ibn Sina’s second chief insight is that the mode of our own existence (and of every other existing thing in the universe) is not sufficient unto itself; that is, it requires a more fundamental being to actualize and sustain it. In Ibn Sina’s terminology, human beings (and all such finite existents) are merely possible or contingent rather than necessary in themselves, which means that although they do exist, they could just as easily not exist.

Ibn Sina’s argument for the existence of God is essentially an attempt to explain the puzzling existence of composite, contingent beings. He maintains that God, the principle of all existence, is pure intellect, from whom other existing things such as minds, bodies and other objects all emanate, and therefore to whom they are all necessarily related. That necessity, once it is fully understood, is rational and allows existents to be inferred from each other and, ultimately, from God. Central to Ibn Sina’s philosophy is his concept of reality and reasoning. Reason, in his scheme, can allow progress through various levels of understanding and can finally lead to God, the ultimate truth. He stresses the importance of gaining knowledge, and develops a theory of knowledge based on four faculties: sense perception, retention, imagination and estimation. Imagination has the principal role in intellection, as it can compare and construct images which give it access to universals. Again, the ultimate object of knowledge is God, the pure intellect. In metaphysics, Ibn Sina makes a distinction between essence and existence; essence considers only the nature of things, and should be considered apart from their mental and physical realization. This distinction applies to all things except God, whom Ibn Sina identifies as the first cause and therefore both essence and existence. He also argued that the soul is incorporeal and cannot be destroyed. The soul, in his view, is an agent with choice in this world between good and evil, which in turn leads to reward or punishment. Reference has sometimes been made to Ibn Sina’s supposed mysticism, but this would appear to be based on a misreading by Western philosophers of parts of his work. As one of the most important practitioners of philosophy, Ibn Sina exercised a strong influence over both other Islamic philosophers and medieval Europe. His work was one of the main targets of Al-Ghazali’s attack on Hellenistic influences in Islam. In Latin translations, his works influenced many Christian philosophers, most notably Thomas Aquinas.

Ibn Rushd

Ibn Rushd or Averroës, as he was known to the Latins – was chief physician to, and favoured intellectual companion of, the Almohad caliph Abu Ya‘qub Yusuf. The philosophical works of Averroes range in size from short treatises on specific issues of logic, physics, psychology, et alia to his three sorts of commentaries on major works of the Aristotelian corpus.



Through translations into Hebrew the work of Averroes had a very substantial influence on the development of medieval Jewish philosophical thought. His *Expositions of the Methods of Proof* and *Incoherence of the Incoherence* fill in the specific details of Ibn Rushd’s defence of philosophy and critique of the destructive overreaching of theology. A common theme throughout his writings is that there is no incompatibility between religion and philosophy when both are properly understood. His contributions to philosophy took many forms, ranging from his detailed commentaries on Aristotle, his defence of philosophy against the attacks of those who condemned it as contrary to Islam and his construction of a form of Aristotelianism which cleansed it, as far as was possible at the time of Neoplatonic influences. His thought is genuinely creative and highly controversial, producing powerful arguments that were to puzzle his philosophical successors in the Jewish and Christian worlds. He seems to argue that there are two forms of truth, a religious form and a philosophical form, and that it does not matter if they point in different directions.

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Alfiya Khatoon, Samia Khan & Shiwakshi R

AN ARGUMENT FOR VEGANISM

One's casual introduction to the philosophy of veganism happens at very young age from caring for pets to crying when Bambi's mother dies. Human beings have always honed love and compassion for animals and it is almost inherent. The question I take up here is: Should this love and compassion for animals also not reflect in the food choices we make? I shall be presenting an argument particularly for veganism in this article.

What is Veganism and why should you care about it?



Veganism as a practical philosophy aims at reducing and animal suffering as far as possible. This is a movement growing in response to despite an abundance of choices in our everyday life, we pick those freely which involve animal harm. If we see to the practical aspects of this, being a vegan requires one to eat plant-based food (excluding dairy honey eggs meat fish etc) and abstain from using first hand fur , leather, silk or even products tested on animals. At first glance this all may seem very overwhelming and even

unnecessary. One may wonder whether it is even something they should be concerned about and probably whether one's concern would actually make any difference to the gruesome truth of something like animal farming.

The first question that arises is whether or not animal even have rights and what are these rights if so and how far do they extend?

I am interested in addressing the right-to-life of an animal. It becomes easier to understand this when we consider that all beings have the right to life regardless of their mental capabilities. The will to live and avoid death at all points of time can be understood to be the reason why we value our lives. One comes to realise that human beings and animals are more alike than we think – the fact the species desire and value life and avoid danger and feel pain, the fact both have unique individual experiences. At no point here are we saying to put the value of animals absolutely the

same as that of humans (there could be different parameters to argue in line of that kind of absolute equality) but just give animal lives a considerable value – value which is enough that we consider them when we make our daily life choices.

Coming to environmental impact of animal agriculture and understanding how using animals as resources does effect our planet at large. The fact that it isn't widespread knowledge that animal agriculture is the single biggest cause of green house gas increase (more than all of transport combined), species extinction ocean dead-zones, wildlife extinction rainforest destruction (more than 90% amazon forest has been cleared out because of animal agriculture) is honestly unfortunate. The fact that we grow food enough for roughly 17 billion humans but are unable to feed 7 billion humans because we feed these crops to the animals we eat. The fact we continue to kill a growing number of 70 billion and a total of 3 trillion animals every year shows exactly how oppressed these beings are. The fact that animal protein and cholesterol cause the top ten killing diseases and we still continue to indulge in these three times a day is just sad.

When I recently turned vegan, I faced a lot of challenges but the biggest one of them was coming to terms with that fact that I had been unaware and complicit in something I completely didn't agree was definitely not one of them. It should be made very clear at this point that the aim of this article is not to judge a person as bad or give moral superiority to vegans. That would again be ignoring the victim here the animal. It is hard for us acknowledge but the animals the quality of lives they live are at a mercy of our decisions. The sole purpose here is to appeal to open ourselves for further discussions on the topic.

We have conditioned ourselves into believing that using animals and reducing them to mere resources is acceptable. And to overcome this cognitive dissonance we need to think harder. Like every other oppression in the past we have victimised animals to an extent where we don't even consider them as victims. We as a society have turned them into inanimate resources from the individuals with unique experiences they are. It is hard to understand that our actions have direct sentient consequences . The question we need to ask ourselves is not weather they are rational or have the cognitive ability like that of humans but that they are sentient, they feel pain and that they want to evade danger.

The purpose here is not to prescribe that one goes vegan or vegetarian because that is a decision no one can make for another person. I also do acknowledge how it's a very daunting task considering the different cultures and upbringings of people. I only want to consider the victims behind our choices and give veganism a thought. At a privileged position where many of us are at where we can choose among the abundance plant products or cruelty free products we should give it a thought keeping in mind how Indian food is very vegan-friendly. Every drop counts and every decision we make against animal products makes a difference.

I am aware of how many unanswered questions one may have especially if they are new to the philosophy of veganism. I would, for that reason, like to recommend certain documentaries and books that may be of reference.

Books:

30 Non-Vegan Excuses - Earthling Ed

Documentaries and Videos:

Earthlings, *Cowspiracy* (Concerns the environmental impact of animal agriculture), *What the Health* (On health impacts of animal products), *Seapiracy* (On effects of animal agriculture on marine biosphere), *Infiltrating India's Dairy Industry - Animal Equality*, *What's Wrong with Eating Eggs*

Uttam Kanwar

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE: THE LINGUISTIC TURN

Language use is a remarkable fact about human beings. The role of language as a vehicle of thought enables human thinking to be as complex and varied as it is. With language one can describe the past or speculate about the future. Language allows one to share information and to communicate beliefs and speculations, attitudes and emotions. Indeed, it creates the human social world, cementing people into a common history and a common life experience.

Language is equally an instrument of understanding and knowledge. The specialized languages of Mathematics and Science, for example, enable human beings to construct theories and to make predictions about matters they would otherwise be completely unable to grasp.

The powers and abilities conferred by the use of language entail cognitive successes of various kinds. But language may also be the source of cognitive failures. Language, as the means of communication, implies that whatever is in the mind of one user of the language must be conveyed to another user of the same language clearly and distinctly. However, this is not always the case. Language is often loaded with ambiguity, redundancy, obscurity, sarcasm, complicated figures of speech and so on. The idea that language is potentially misleading is familiar from many practical contexts, perhaps especially politics. The same worries apply to the interpretation of works of literature, legal documents, and scientific treatises.

Philosophy of Language

Philosophy of language is the reasoned inquiry into the nature, origins, and usage of language.

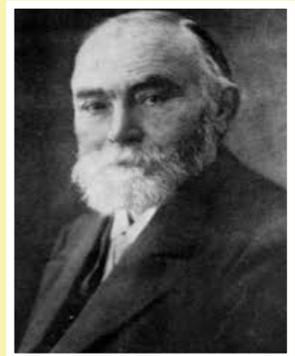
The topic that has received the most attention in philosophy of language has been the nature of meaning. The investigation into composition, or the question of how meaningful units of language are composed of smaller meaningful parts, and how the meaning of the whole is derived from the meaning of its parts has assumed central importance. Secondly, this field of study seeks to better understand what speakers and listeners do with language in communication, and how it is used socially. Thirdly, the question of how language relates to the minds of both the speaker and the interpreter is investigated. Finally, philosophers of language investigate how language and meaning relate to truth and the reality being referred to. They tend to be less interested in which sentences are actually true, and more in what kinds of meanings can be true or false.

Attention turned to language as many came to see it as a focal point in understanding belief and representation of the world. Language came to be seen as the "medium of conceptualization," as Wilfrid Sellars puts it. The history of the philosophy of language in the analytical tradition begins with advances in logic and with tensions within traditional accounts of the mind and its contents at the end of the nineteenth century. A revolution of sorts resulted from these developments, often known as the "Linguistic Turn" in philosophy. However, its early programs ran into serious difficulties by mid-twentieth century, and significant changes in direction came about as a result.

Frege – On Sense and Reference

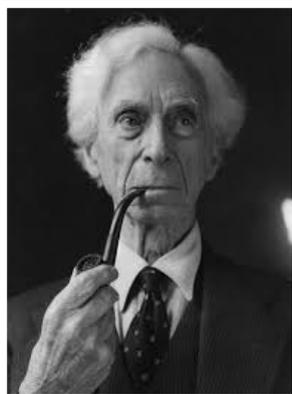
Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege (1848 - 1925) was a German mathematician, logician, and philosopher who worked at the University of Jena. Primarily a mathematician, Frege's interest in language developed as a result of his attempt to devise a logical notation adequate for the formalization of mathematical reasoning. As a part of this effort, he invented not only modern mathematical logic but also a ground breaking philosophical theory of meaning.

An enormously influential element of Frege's theory of meaning was his distinction between the referent of an expression and its sense. Frege proposed that we should think of expressions as having two semantic aspects: a sense and a reference. The sense of an expression would be its "mode of presentation," as Frege put it, that conveyed information to us in its own distinct way. The sense of an expression is its contribution to the thought expressed by the sentence. That information would in turn determine a referent for each expression. This led to a credo pervasive in analytical philosophy: sense determines reference. This solved problems of reference by shifting the emphasis to the sense of expressions first and to their reference later. Frege had effectively redrawn the map for philosophy. By introducing senses as a focal point of analysis, he had carved out a distinct territory for philosophical inquiry.



Russell – Logical Atomism

An important bridge between Frege and the English-speaking world was Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). Russell saw the potential in Frege's work and undertook an analysis of singular definite descriptions.



Bertrand Russell described his philosophy as a kind of "logical atomism", by which he meant to endorse both a metaphysical view and a certain methodology for doing philosophy. The metaphysical view amounts to the claim that the world consists of a plurality of independently existing things exhibiting qualities and standing in relations. The methodological view recommends a process of analysis, whereby one attempts to define or reconstruct more complex notions or vocabularies in terms of simpler ones. According to Russell,

such an analysis could eventually result in a language containing only words representing simple particulars, the simple properties and relations thereof, and logical constants, which, despite this limited vocabulary, could adequately capture all truths.

Wittgenstein – Tractatus

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) was Russell’s brilliant Austrian pupil. In his book “Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus”, he established that sentences are treated as “pictures” of states of affairs.

In part, this reflects Wittgenstein's early view that propositions "pictured" the world. This is not to say that a written inscription or a verbal utterance of a sentence visually resembles that state of affairs it expresses. Rather, the form of a proposition resembles the form of some fact of the world. Where we could do this, the language was stating something clearly. Where we could not, despite our best efforts, the words were not saying anything at all. However, this was not to say that everything about meaning and our understanding of the world was a matter of explicit definition, that is, something we could say. Rather than being said with our language, many things can only be shown. Wittgenstein held that “Language is a living phenomenon, and like most living things, there is going to be change and variation.”



The Linguistic Turn

If one thinks of minds as stocked with ideas and concepts prior to or independently of language, then it might seem that the only function language could have is to make those ideas and concepts public. This was the view of Aristotle, who wrote that “spoken words are signs of concepts.” This was the popular view for a long time until Frege and Russell initiated what is often called the “Linguistic Turn” in Anglo-American philosophy. This vision was stated with utmost severity and rigour in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921), by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Until that time, of course, language had provided certain topics of philosophical speculation—such as meaning, understanding, reference, and truth—but these topics had been treated as largely independent of others that were unrelated (or not directly related) to language—such as knowledge, mind, substance, and time. Frege, however, showed that fundamental advances in mathematics could be made by studying the language used to express mathematical thought. The idea rapidly generalized: henceforward, instead of studying, say, the nature of substance as a metaphysical issue, philosophers would investigate the language in which claims about substance are expressed, and so on for other topics.

For the practitioners of the new philosophy, modern logic provided a tool for exhaustively categorizing the linguistic forms in which information could be expressed and for identifying the determinate logical implications associated with each form. Analysis would uncover philosophically troublesome logical fictions in sentences whose logical forms are unclear on the surface, and it would ultimately reveal the nature of the reality to which language is connected.

Impact of The Linguistic Turn

The linguistic turn within philosophy has gained increased attention within social sciences. It can be seen as an attempt to investigate traditional philosophical problems by analysing the linguistic expressions used for these investigations. The Linguistic Turn had a great impact and brought about global changes in the objects, methods, and styles of many twentieth-century philosophical works.

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Ujjwala Chandra

A QUESTION CONCERNING AGENCY OF SELF DRIVEN CARS

Self-driven cars have been one of the pioneering innovations of the 21st century. They are engineered in a manner that facilitates a sense of comfort for its users and makes the experience of travelling more efficient. However, with the advent of such engineering, which gives rise to evolutionary technology, philosophy also has to evolve to answer and gauge questions that arise with it – questions of agency and morality.

This short article is an expression of questions which may be asked with respect to moral agency of self-driven cars – Can morality be universalised to the extent that it be applied even to self-driven cars? Can morality be programmed into a machine which makes seemingly randomised but pre-programmed moral choices?

A self-driving or fully automated car is one that drives on auto pilot, which means that it takes decisions on driving and navigation without any real time human assistance, which seems viable; however, the dilemma arises when it is in a situation similar to that of the famous trolley problem of utilitarianism. In a scenario where a child suddenly appears on a road, the car has two choices – swerve off the road, kill the driver and save the child, or to stay on the road and run over the child, saving the driver.



This is a very subjective moral dilemma – one that has no singular or objectively right answer. It is a dilemma which can be answered in keeping with what the person in that dilemma deems right in that moment. Can a pre-programmed machine, in such a situation, be seen to have a moral sensibility take a moral decision?

Multiple opinions on the programming of morality within machines have arisen. One of the prominent thoughts proposes a *randomisation* of moral decisions – in keeping with how the human mind also makes moral decisions. Researchers and philosophers working on this technology propose that the closest that a machine can be programmed to a human conscience is to randomise the way it makes moral choices, since that's what the human mind also does when it has to make split second moral decisions. The human mind also randomises a moral decision after taking into consideration certain factors – in the situation of the child on the road, the human mind knows that someone will be harmed – either the child or the driver, so after taking that into consideration and knowing that at least one agent will be harmed, the human mind then randomises the moral decision. Therefore, programming a machine in the same manner will ensure that it isn't making arbitrary decisions that may be attributed to unfair decision making or loss of life in the future.

However, on the other side, in opposition to this, many one may argue that no matter how much one gives ambit for randomisation or subjectivity within these devices, they still happen to be limited by virtue of being created by humans and being empirical in the sense that they will only be able to have randomisation in the set of choices that are pre-programmed, and this is a definite sense. Whereas, in humans this nature of definitiveness isn't necessarily present or cannot be objectively proved, and, therefore it is not objectively quantifiable. So, even if a device is programmed in such a manner, it can only mimic the human morality in a limited capacity and never truly replace it identically – that is – it cannot become a moral agent like a human being. Therefore, it is not a viable option to be explored in terms of making morality a decision of the technology, and not of the human.

These are two of the most prominent contrasting opinions on the spectrum of how morality is to be evolved within self-driven cars, and it is a question that continues to be explored in the field of philosophy of technology and techno-ethics. Since it is a very controversial topic, it continues to find new avenues to be engaged with in terms of how far can questions of agency, morality and ethics extend into the ever-evolving field of technology and their ability to cater to humans.

Damini Mehta

REFELCTIONS ON HEIDEGGER'S "THE QUESTION CONCERNING TECHNOLOGY"

Decades before television shows like *Black Mirror* made one nervously glance at their screens, or movies like *Wall-E* forced one to rethink about their lifestyle choices, Heidegger, prophetically, penned down the dangers of technology with a philosophical thoroughness which makes it a relevant and insightful read, especially in the Digital Age. With philosophy being branded as the discipline that ventures forth on the quest for truth, Heidegger in his "The Question Concerning Technology" fulfils this promise as he elaborates on the modes of unconcealment, which when forced may result in a semi-dystopian world, and when honoured and patiently responded, may result in being closer and sensitive to the *what is*.

Heidegger, in this process, attempts to bring to light man's relationship with technology's essence which, is not identified correctly due to the assessment of technology as an instrument or a means to an end. Connecting instrumentality with causality, Heidegger turns to ancient philosophy, unearthing the root of the word 'cause', derived from the Latin noun *causa*, stemming from the verb *cadere* or "to fall". While the Romans believed that a result 'falls' from the previous event, the Greeks used the word *aition*, 'debt', for cause, believing that a result was 'indebted' to another thing. Referring to the four Aristotelian causes, a chalice would be indebted to: the silver from which it was made (its material cause); to the silversmith who made it (part of its efficient cause); the idea of chalice or 'chalice-ness' that makes it the type of thing it is (the chalice's formal cause), and to the ends or purposes that a chalice serves (its final cause). However, Heidegger posits that, apart from the silversmith himself, the other three causes "owe thanks to the pondering of the silversmith." That is, the smith's handiwork 'releases' the other causes to 'bring forth' the chalice, like a flower bursting into bloom, making bringing forth the primal meaning of cause.

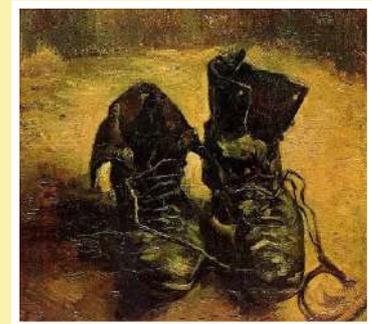
Following this train of thought, 'bringing forth', which Heidegger calls *poiesis*, is the essence of technology making technology "a way of revealing". In fact, technology is derived from *techne*, skills to make or to fashion, or the arts of the mind and the fine arts, making technology almost poetic. Unlike *episteme* (to know) which reveals things likely to have already existed, *techne* reveals thing which has not previously existed, making the former a mode of discovery, and the latter creation



Heidegger claims: “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.” However, modern technology does not reveal in the sense of *poiesis*, rather it “challenges forth” with an imperious air, controlling and destining this bringing forth which is originally fashioned to make man respond when called for. Instead, it is monopolistic, as this “enframing” has one aim: to extract and store resources from what it considers “standing reserve”. Ancient technologies, such as the windmill, didn’t do that: rather, they used aspects of the cycle of nature and so were part of that. By contrast, modern technology ‘reveals’ the Earth as a source of uranium; the sky as a source of nitrogen; the Sun as a source of solar energy; the river as a source of hydroelectricity; the farmer’s field as a source of cheap food; the ancient temple hilltop as a tourist destination. Commanding the world to unlock itself, modern technology coupled with science “pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces.” Heidegger even cautions about the possibility of humans being taken as standing reserve.

Enframing, hence, defines the technological world. Its byproducts - alienation, widespread poverty, environmental destruction, species extinction, showcase the dangerous results symptomatic to this specific mode of revealing.

However, the saving power is said to reside within these dangerous parameters, as recognising one’s mental state which is supposedly “modern” in its disposition can help stop this catastrophe. If man realises how his orientation fits with the world, as opposed to the enframing he imposes, he could save himself from the damage enframing has done, instead of pretending to be the “lord of the earth”, man could recognise the enframing resulting him to “enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” i.e. *poiesis*.



Heidegger emphasises on the need to go back to *poiesis* and *techne*, and the need to be poets and artists, since art too leads to the uncovering of *aletheia* as “essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.” As this philosophical masterpiece culminates with a call to the art to help reveal to the insanity of enframing, it concludes that art, perhaps in all its varied forms, whether it be through shows like *Black Mirror* or movies like *Wall-E*, will nudge one closer to revelations to be made about, what Heidegger calls, “the constellation of truth”.

Deepshikha Sharma

ABSTRACTION AND INTERPRETATION IN ART

If things were exactly the way they seem and exactly the way they were supposed to be, the very concept of abstraction may have never been born. And, that in itself would have been a big blow on art. What surprises me is that while humans express themselves artistically in abstract way, we never do so in practical life – we do everything in a very definite and fixed manner. Probably, that is why art comes as release. The departure and separation of reality from art and visual imagery is the key point of abstraction. While most artists consider this form of art liberating, yet many would beg to differ, claiming it to be ambiguous and misleading.

I believe abstract art and its meaning does not necessarily have to belong to the artist alone. Though the artist creates such a piece with something specific in his mind, adding his own colors and style to it, along with a pre-fixed meaning and story behind it, the audience of the same does not have to see or look for the same. In fact, I believe the meaning behind the abstract piece of art changes with each different perspective belonging to each unique individual. How a person chooses to depict or decode art depends entirely on his or her own self with no external influence besides the visual representation of the artist's figment of imagination. With every unique personality/individual attempting to de-construct the art, a new meaning and story is added to it. So, it could be said that art itself cannot hold any fixed and absolute definition. It is constantly flowing; almost like rivers: simply existing without a change to bare eyes, but never really the same. Art, being constantly changing and constantly flowing, can be compared to a white canvas, which can be dyed any hue depending on the how it is perceived.

Art and its virtue is in the eye of the beholder.

Anoushka Gogoi

#expressions



DUALITY

Anoushka Gogoi

#expressions



DREAM

Anoushka Gogoi

#expressions



DECAY

Anoushka Gogoi

THROUGH THE LENS OF
MANYA JINDAL

#expressions



THE WINDOW OF LIFE



PEACE, COMPASSION, STRENGTH, AND WISDOM

#expressions



A RAY OF HOPE



ROAD NOT TAKEN

ACTIVITY REPORT

In continuation of their **Annual Radhakrishnan Memorial Lecture Series**, on 6th September 2017, the Department of Philosophy hosted **Dr. Aakash Singh Rathore**, a professor, author and an Ironman triathlete. Dr. Rathore is a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Philosophy, Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi), and Director of the International Research Network for Religion and Democracy. Dr. Rathore addressed the audience on “**Ethics of Critical Thinking**” which was followed by an open house for questions and interaction between the speaker and audience.



On 10th August 2018, the department organised a lecture by **Prof. Aditya Kumar Mohanty**, Vice Chancellor of Tripura University and retired professor from Utkal University (Odisha). Prof. Mohanty delivered a lecture on the topic “**Journey Inwards – Indian Perspective**”.

Prof. Aditya Kumar

#biddingfarewells



2014 - 2017



2015 - 2018

APPEARANCE

(How freshers see Philosophy)

What is philosophy? Well according to various dictionaries, it is the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence especially when considered as an academic discipline. But is it really that simple? Does this mere definition of philosophy actually define its values? I think everybody has their own concept or perception of what Philosophy is. For me, it's a space where I can think, rationalise, introspect, and reflect without being judged. With studying philosophy formally now, I hope it teaches me tolerance and patience as it stretches out minds and our capacity to think. I am learning, thinking and becoming more self-assertive every day and philosophy has become my home. With our thoughts we make the world, with our actions we bring about change. And philosophy gives us that freedom to think and act better.

Swoyami Sharma



Philosophy came as a force of enlightenment to me. The inquisitive nature of oneself gets satiated with every attempt of understanding the philosophical nature of self and thus unravelling the world. My choice for philosophy to be taken as a course came more naturally than a mere coincidence of having to study it because of high cut-offs. If it weren't for philosophy, I would have been stagnant enough to not adjust the exploration of newness in this city. Easier said than done, it is a subject of life, understanding of which lies more within introspection than a mere understanding of content. I am glad to be a student of philosophy and look forward to grow with it in future as well.

Anam Mukhtar

REALITY

(How soon-to-be graduates see Philosophy)

These past three years studying Philosophy has been an incredible journey for me. I came across philosophers who made me question my ideas and ideologies, subjects which helped me critically and logically analyse, and, most importantly, I gained a new perspective. I accepted that my thoughts won't align with everyone at times and it's important to respect others opinions. I wouldn't say philosophy changed me completely as an individual, but philosophy has given a meaning to all my beliefs and notions. Studying philosophy has been an eye-opening experience and I have unravelled qualities about myself which I never knew existed.

I worked as a class representative for three years, I took part in some healthy discussions in class, and most importantly learnt how to rationalize, voice my opinions and stand by them.



Anjali Sarada



When I joined college and started my journey as a Philosophy student, my only expectation was to find 'answers'. But that wasn't what I got and honestly, I am glad that I didn't. Instead of answers, I found something that could lead me to them – skill to organised thinking. It is impossible to find final answers because the questions are endless, but one may always find and develop perspective which can't be mugged up from some texts written by philosophers. Philosophy taught me to find my own answers and maybe to accept the fact that there might not be any. After studying the subject for almost three years, I believe that human life lies between extremes of black and white. And that there is nothing wrong with grey.

Bhakti Kandhari

While I thought I would unlock all the secrets of reality by taking up Philosophy, three years of extensive lectures and readings made me realise that I know absolutely nothing at all! While Kant made me question even my abilities as reader, Sartre made me anxious about every decision I had ever taken. With every single aspect of my existence being picked apart, deconstructed, redefined, symbolized and de-symbolized by simply characters on pages, philosophy definitely humbled me about how transparency about the smallest of things is not as clear as I thought it to be. Most importantly, philosophy helped me learn how to unlearn.

Deepshikha Sharma



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