

# Figuring the Future

Saturday, April 27, 2019

9:15-10.30 | Finding the “Future” | Chair: Hwansoo Kim,

- **Phyllis Granoff**  
“The Future? Some answers from Indian philosophical and narrative literature”

This paper proposes that the understanding of time is one area in which the narrative literature of all three of India’s classical religions, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, reflects closely the concerns of philosophers. The Buddhist and Hindu philosophers explored here argued for the impossibility of something called Time, because past, future, and present are relative concepts and, in the end, cannot be distinguished from each other. Jains disagreed, but added something else to the debates: the distinction between proximate and remote past. The paper argues that underlying the treatment of time in the life stories of the Buddhas, Jinas, and Rama in the Ramayana, are views of time that correspond closely with what we find in the philosophy texts.

- **James Robson,**  
“The Future is now: the problem of the present in Buddhism”

10.45-12.45 | Many Futures | Chair: Elizabeth Sharf

- **Usha Colas-Chauhan**  
“Human rebirth and divine Creation: contingent futures?”
- **Robert Sharf**  
“Sarvāstivāda, the Block Universe, and Superdeterminism.”

My paper will take as its focus the signature Sarvāstivāda doctrine that past, present, and future things all exist. The Sarvāstivāda theory of time anticipates, in many respects, “block-time” models of the universe that are in favor today among theoretical physicists. In these models, time is a dimension spread out like space, and everything that ever was or will be has a fixed position within the block. My argument is that the similarities between the early Buddhist theories and contemporary ones are neither coincidental nor insignificant: in both cases they are attempts to respond to puzzles concerning the nature of change, causation, and the “flow” and “direction” of time.

- **Olivia Stewart Lester**  
“The Future—or the Lack Thereof—in the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Oracles.”

### 1.45-3:00 | Many Futures | Chair: Koichi Shinohara

- **Kirsten Wolf**  
“The Future from the Perspective of an Ancient Seeress.”
  
- **Adela Collins**  
“The Future and its Impact on the Present in Christian Apocalypses.”

It is well known that the Christian apocalypses attempt to influence the behavior of their audiences in the present by including promises of reward for approved behavior and threats of punishment for prohibited activities. But these works differ in the ways they elaborate these themes. This paper begins with a brief discussion of how the book of Revelation defines approved and prohibited behavior and what particular rewards and punishments are described. It then goes on to discuss the Ascension of Isaiah as a work portraying the future as a time of reward. It turns next to the depiction of the future as a time of punishment in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Paul*. It concludes with a brief discussion of the reception of these texts, referring to those who believe them literally and those who take them seriously but not literally.

### 3.15-5.15 | The future: for Better or Worse | Chair: Eben Graves

- **John Collins**  
“Not One World But Two. Despair and Hope in Jewish Apocalypticism.”

The Jewish apocalyptic literature that first appears in the Hellenistic period and continues into the Common Era developed a radically novel view of the future. As formulated in the apocalypse of 4 Ezra about the end of the first century CE, the Most High created not one world but two. This world must be utterly destroyed and replaced by a new creation. (This view of the future is inherited in the New Testament, most strikingly in the Book of Revelation). This view of the future would have enormous but ambivalent implications for western history. On the one hand, it threatened to undermine the importance of working for a better life in this world. On the other hand, it offered hope to those who would otherwise have no hope at all.

- **Michael Nylan**  
“No Future with a Capital ‘F’: Why the Ancients in Early China Thought More Clearly about Most Things”

In both China and the US, we are seeing many different groups who are invested in futurist fantasies of various sorts (many of them deeply destructive, for various reasons). My paper therefore addresses the question of why beliefs in a future with a capital "F" (meaning, a qualitatively different future) are at once so attractive and so damaging to human societies. All such futuristic Futures (as opposed to simple acknowledgements that there will be "later generations," as the classical Chinese texts assert) in effect rely upon two main fantasies: first, that technology will have ameliorated or resolved the most pressing problems of today's existence as in

mortality, climate change, and so on; and second, that humans, as adaptable creatures, will have adapted so quickly and thoroughly to new technological possibilities that they will be, in some sense, posthuman, meaning, not like us in their thinking and their motivations. The early Chinese thinkers acknowledged the impact over the ages of technological changes, but they believed that human motivations and the fundamental human condition have not changed over time. They urged that communities past, present, and future, recognize their reliance upon one another, as a preliminary step toward achieving what one modern philosopher has called "life-transcending interests," in the construction of workable sociopolitical orders.

- Daniela Berti

“Predicting Species Survival and the Future of Wildlife in India”

Preserving endangered species from an uncertain future has been one of the main objectives of India’s policymaking over the last decades. Not only have iconic species, such as tigers, received special attention in terms of scientific research, government funding, and managerial planning but a number of endangered species have been continually monitored to protect them from becoming extinct. While the issue of species survival mobilizes the academic and scientific community, it also involves a number of actors with different profiles and motivations – wildlife officers, conservation NGOs, politicians, ordinary citizens, environmentalist lawyers and activist judges. Today many cases are handled by courts, where this scientific expertise is used in combination with juridical arguments to support or oppose state or central policy. In this paper I will first examine the scientific and technical tools used by wildlife biologists working at the Indian Wildlife Institute in Dehradun (Uttarakhand) to monitor endangered species and to make predictive models aimed at influencing governmental policy and managing decisions. I will then focus on a court case recently decided by the Supreme Court concerning Asiatic lions, an endangered species which is found only in India and, up to now, only in the State of Gujarat. In spite of a Supreme Court decision to dislocate some of the lions to a Madhya Pradesh reserve – a project that has already been partly implemented by dislocating people from the future reserve – the Gujarat government strongly opposes the dislocation. The case shows how, in court, scientific data proving that the dislocation of the lions is the sine qua non of preventing the species from becoming extinct has to withstand not only scientific counterarguments predicting how the very dislocation will put this lion population at risk but also political lines of argument concerning state nationalism and regional pride.