

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

LIGHTFOOT ROOM, FACULTY OF DIVINITY

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

2 OCTOBER 2024

9AM-5PM

9-9.30AM	WELCOME AND REGISTRATION
9.30-10AM	OPENING REMARKS
10-11.30AM	<u>PANEL 1:</u> ONTOLOGY - WHAT IS THE SOUL?
11.30AM-12PM	BREAK
12-1.30PM	<u>PANEL 2:</u> EPISTEMOLOGY - WHAT DOES THE SOUL DO?
1.30-3PM	LUNCH
3-4.30PM	<u>PANEL 3:</u> COSMOLOGY - WHAT IS THE LOCATION AND DESTINY OF THE SOUL?
4.30-5PM	CLOSING REMARKS



PANEL DETAILS

PANEL 1: ONTOLOGY - WHAT IS THE SOUL?

Paper 1: “Who Am I?” Introducing Advaita Visions of Selfhood

Namrata Narula

This presentation will trace the notions of the self, mind, and body as articulated within the pre-modern Indic tradition (*darśana*) of Advaita Vedānta. Advaita thinkers argue that the innermost self (*ātman*) of all individuals (*jīva*) is non-dual (*advaita*) with unchanging and unqualified (*nirguṇa*) being-consciousness (*brahman*). All perceivable attributes, including the particularities of one's own embodiment, are false superimpositions (*adhyāsa*) that arise due to deep-seated ignorance (*avidyā*) of true being. This presentation will examine key arguments used by Advaita thinkers to establish both the reality of this supramundane self and the falsity of the mentally and physically individuated “I”. As we will see, these ideas did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum; they were responding to and developed within a highly demanding scholastic environment that included many Vedic (*āstika*) and non-Vedic (*nāstika*) philosophical traditions. I will thus additionally illustrate some crucial oppositions to these Advaita visions of self and not-self, and examine how this tradition has sought to overcome them.



Paper 2: Ismā'īl Gelenbevī on the Mind: Integration of Soul, Faculties, and Abstract Entities

M. Necmeddin Beşikci

This paper aims to establish the meaning of the term “mind” in Ismā'īl Gelenbevī's (d. 1205/1791) philosophy. While the term is generally understood as the faculty of human cognition, according to Gelenbevī's account, it is not limited to one particular meaning; rather, it must also include the soul (*nafs*), its external and internal faculties (*ālātuhā*) and abstract entities (*mujarradāt*). This broadened scope of the term is directly linked to his position on the theory of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), which simply affirms that quiddities are distinct (*tamayyuz*) from one another in a manner other than just their external existence. Thus, accepting this theory necessarily entails a broader understanding of the mind, transcending its linguistic association with human cognition. It is important to note that this perspective on the mind demonstrates a significant continuity with that of the earlier Rāzīan scholars. However, a key point of distinction emerges: Unlike his Rāzīan predecessors who employed a more systematic approach, the characteristic features of Gelenbevī's works—specifically his use of the problem-oriented writing method—necessitate the use of historical reconstruction to produce Gelenbevī's position regarding the theoretical framework of “mind” as a unified object of study. For the purposes of this presentation, our primary source will be his *Ḥāshiya 'alā al-Tahdhīb*, which offers an in-depth exploration of the term “mind” and mental existence. His works, such as *Risāla fī taḥqīq 'ilmihī ta'ālā bil-ma'dūmāt*, *Ḥāshiya 'alā Jalāl*, *Risālat al-Imkān* and *al-Ta'liqāt 'alā al-Siyāl-kūtī* also contain a multitude of philosophical discussions on this term.

PANEL 2: EPISTEMOLOGY - WHAT DOES THE SOUL DO?

Paper 3: An Evaluation of al-Fārābī and Avicenna's Views on the Self-Consciousness of the Nafs

Dr Yunus Emre Akbay and Dr Mehmet Ata Az

Although the concepts of *dhāt/self*, *shū'ūr/consciousness* and *al-shū'ūr bi-dhāt/self-consciousness* have become more prominent in the modern period in the field of philosophy of mind, depending on the data of neuro-biology and neuro-physiology, these concepts have been used in both Islamic and Western thought since the early period. Al-Fārābī (870–950) and Avicenna (980–1037), two important philosophers of Islamic thought, argued that the soul has a separate and distinct existence from the body and discussed the question of whether the soul is conscious of its own essence in different contexts. Al-Fārābī's works are controversial in terms of a reading of whether individual is conscious of him/herself (*dhāt*). This is due both to the absence of a clear text on intellectual experience, as in Avicenna's famous example of the "flying man", and to the change of attitude in his works. While there is a distinction between soul (*nafs*) and body in the works whose attribution to al-Fārābī is not disputed, the distinction between soul (*nafs*) and spirit (*ruh*) and body can be found in the works whose attribution is disputed. In the light of these two different grounds, the essence of the soul and its relationship with self-consciousness should be discussed. In this study, considering both different styles, an interpretation of the problematic of the soul's self-knowledge in the context of the philosopher's definition of the soul, the soul's powers and its relationship with the body, and the state of the soul after death will be proposed based on al-Fārābī's concept theory. On the other hand, Ibn Sīnā, in his "flying man", dealt with the essence of the soul, the fact that the soul has a different and independent existence from the body, that the soul has consciousness, and the distinction between the self-consciousness (*al-shū'ūr bi-dhāt*) and the consciousness of consciousness (*al-shū'ūr bi al-shū'ūr*). This paper will reveal comparatively that the self-consciousness implicitly pointed out in al-Fārābī becomes explicit in Avicenna, and that Avicenna defends the view that the soul has an immaterial essence separate and distinct from the body, and that the essence of the soul that prioritises the act of different faculties and combines these functions with "I" consciousness has essential self-consciousness.



Paper 4: Relishing the Self: Abhinavagupta's Epistemology of Delight

Jacob Kyle

Abhinavagupta's oeuvre is traditionally categorized into three domains: aesthetics, Tantra, and philosophical theology. While academic specialization has led to isolated studies of these arenas, this approach often obscures the underlying intellectual commitments that unify his work as a whole. This talk explores one such commitment: Abhinavagupta's comprehensive theory of the Self, capable of transformation through an encounter with the aesthetic delight (*camatkāra*) of its own essential nature. This *camatkāra*, or wonder, is posited as the Self's default state, with its realization hindered by various forms of intellectual and spiritual ignorance (*bauddha* and *pauruṣa-jñāna*). Abhinavagupta proposes that this ignorance can only be dispelled through aesthetic-cum-spiritual technologies, as well as *vikalpa-saṁskāra* – a process of refining one's conceptualizations.

This presentation will argue that Abhinavagupta's theory of aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) is integral to an understanding of his broader "embodied epistemology." This epistemology synthesizes discursive and non-discursive (aesthetic/symbolic) methods within a Tantric framework, ultimately leading to the re-cognition (*pratyaabhijñā*) of a state of pure delight. By examining these interconnections, this talk aims to suggest a more holistic understanding of Abhinavagupta's thought, bridging the gap between his work on aesthetics, Tantra, and philosophical theology.

PANEL 3: COSMOLOGY - WHAT IS THE LOCATION AND DESTINY OF THE SOUL?

Paper 5: Understanding the mind and spirit in Islamic Spirituality/Tasawwuf (Sufism).

Dr Merve Cetinkaya

The mind plays a central role in comprehending God within Islamic philosophy. It is intricately linked to embodiment, action, and cognitive extension in human experience. This presentation explores dualism from an Islamic perspective, delving into the relationship between the mind and spirit. It will draw on Islamic spirituality to examine concepts such as mind versus body, fact versus value, knowledge versus true belief, induction versus deduction, sensing versus perceiving, thinking versus behaving, denotation versus connotation, thought versus action, and appearance versus reality. Furthermore, it will elucidate Islamic spirituality and *Tasawwuf* (Sufism), offering insights into the interconnectedness of mind, body, and soul

Paper 6: Ripples in the Waters of a Mirage: The Mokṣopāya's Philosophy of Mind as Illusion

Aamir Kaderbhai

The *Mokṣopāya*, a 10th-century Kashmiri philosophical epic, contains both a remarkable method for presenting philosophy through dialogue and story, as well as a unique idealist philosophy that not only reduces the physical world to a projection of the mind, but reduces the mind to an illusory manifestation of pure consciousness. Selecting key sections of the text — some previously untranslated — this paper will determine how both explicit philosophy as well as imagined narrative worlds work together to deconstruct the reality of the mind, and thus react against other contemporary philosophical idealisms that it nonetheless is profoundly influenced by. Specifically, I will examine how the *Mokṣopāya* can be read as offering alternatives to an Upaniṣadic idea of the Self as the core of the individual, the *vijñānāvāda* Buddhist theory of memory as causally determined, and the non-dual *Śaiva* idea of individual being the real projections of a single conscious subject. In each of these cases, the *Mokṣopāya* deconstructs reifications in other idealist schools and presents its own uncompromising illusionistic alternative. I will conclude by speculating on how the *Mokṣopāya*'s story of *Līlā* might be read as wielding the text's own philosophy to present a radical solution to the problem of other minds.



Speakers:

Namrata Narula – PhD student, Centre of Gender Studies, University of Cambridge

M. Necmeddin Beşikci – PhD student, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge

Dr Yunus Emre Akbay – Associate Professor, Süleyman Demirel University, Turkey; Visiting Scholar, University of Cambridge

Dr Mehmet Ata Az – Associate Professor, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Turkey; Visiting Scholar, University of Cambridge

Jacob Kyle – Yoga and meditation teacher; founder of Embodied Philosophy, an online educational platform for wisdom studies and contemplative practices. Recently completed an MPhil in Sanskrit & Indian Philosophy and Religions, University of Oxford (2023)

Dr Merve Cetinkaya – Associate fellow in the Division of Psychiatry, Department of Brain Science, UCL

Aamir Kaderbhai – PhD student, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford