



# Book of Abstracts

## Spiritual exercises, self-transformation and liberation in philosophy, theology and religion

ONLINE CONFERENCE 22-24 MAY 2023 | [HTTPS://KONFERENS.HT.LU.SE/SPIRITUAL-EXERCISES](https://konferens.ht.lu.se/spiritual-exercises)



# PROGRAMME

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## DAY 1: MONDAY, MAY 22

11:00 - 11:40 CEST  
 19:00 – 19:40 AEST  
 14:30 - 15:10 IST  
 17:00 - 17:40 CST  
 10:00 - 10:40 BST

**Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad** | Lancaster University, UK | “What else than as a way of life?, or Indian philosophy on its own terms”  
 20 min Q&A

12:00 - 12:40 CEST  
 20:00 – 20:40 AEST  
 15:30 - 16:10 IST  
 18:00 - 18:40 CST  
 11:00 - 11:40 BST

**Matthew Sharpe** | Deakin University, AU | “Spiritual exercises and the question of ‘religion’ in Pierre Hadot”  
 20 min Q&A

13:00 - 13:40 CEST  
 21:00 – 21:40 AEST  
 16:30 - 17:10 IST  
 19:00 - 19:40 CST  
 12:00 - 12:40 BST

**Xiaojun Ding** | Xi’an Jiaotong University, CN | “Philosophical Practice as Spiritual Exercises towards Truth, Wisdom, and Virtue”  
 20 min Q&A

## DAY 2: TUESDAY, MAY 23

11:00 - 11:40 CEST  
 19:00 – 19:40 AEST  
 14:30 - 15:10 IST  
 17:00 - 17:40 CST  
 10:00 - 10:40 BST

**Marta Faustino** | Nova Institute of Philosophy, PT | “Spirituality without God. On the Philosophical Nature of Hadot’s Spiritual Exercises”  
 20 min Q&A

12:00 - 12:40 CEST  
 20:00 – 20:40 AEST  
 15:30 - 16:10 IST  
 18:00 - 18:40 CST  
 11:00 - 11:40 BST

**Karl-Stephan Bouthilette** | Manipal Academy of Higher Education, IN | “List-Making as Spiritual Exercise in South-Asian Gnosticism. The Interrelation of Ritual, Taxonomy, and Philosophy in Contemplative Practice”  
 20 min Q&A

13:00 - 13:40 CEST  
 21:00 – 21:40 AEST  
 16:30 - 17:10 IST  
 19:00 - 19:40 CST  
 12:00 - 12:40 BST

**Jordi Crespo** | Independent scholar, ES | “Back to the Future: Playing with Time as Galen’s Solution to Distress”  
 20 min Q&A

## DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

11:00 - 11:40 CEST  
 19:00 – 19:40 AEST  
 14:30 - 15:10 IST  
 17:00 - 17:40 CST  
 10:00 - 10:40 BST

**Jessica Frazier** | Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, UK | “Brahman and the View from Above: The practice of cosmos-comprehension in the Upaniṣads”  
 20 min Q&A

12:00 - 12:40 CEST  
 20:00 – 20:40 AEST  
 15:30 - 16:10 IST  
 18:00 - 18:40 CST  
 11:00 - 11:40 BST

**James Madaio** | Oriental Institute Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ | “The techné of attention: reality and transformative technique in medieval Advaita Vedānta”  
 20 min Q&A

13:00 - 13:40 CEST  
 21:00 – 21:40 AEST  
 16:30 - 17:10 IST  
 19:00 - 19:40 CST  
 12:00 - 12:40 BST

**Eli Kramer** | University of Warsaw, PL | and **Kevin Taylor** | University of Memphis, US | “Spiritual Exercises in the Rinzai Zen Tradition: Imminence and Disruption in Ikkyū Sōjun and Hakuin Ekaku”  
 20 min Q&A

## ABSTRACTS & BIO

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**Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad** | Lancaster University, UK | “What else than as a way of life?, or Indian philosophy on its own terms”

### Abstract

It is an irony that, having for much of the 20th c after finding Indian traditions of thought and practice being castigated by western philosophers for making no distinction between religion/spirituality and philosophy, its scholars now find themselves engaging with the newly flourishing reading, inspired by Pierre Hadot (and Foucault) of (Western) philosophy as a way of life and spiritual exercise. But a global conversation on the larger conception of philosophy that was so dramatically narrowed in modern philosophy is to be welcomed. In my talk, I will outline how various domains of what we would now call ‘Indian philosophy–’ topics that would come under the now-globalised fields of metaphysics, epistemology ethics or aesthetics– arise integral to the intersecting concepts of spiritual exercises, selftransformation and liberation. I will use as illustrations Vātsyāyana’s Nyāya theory of knowledge and Abhinavagupta’s articulation of transformative aesthetic consciousness, thereby spanning very different areas of philosophical practice.

### Bio

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad is Distinguished Professor of Comparative Philosophy and Religion, Lancaster University, and Fellow of the British Academy. He is the author of some fifty-five papers on a wide range of topics, and seven books. His *Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gītā Commentaries*, Bloomsbury, 2014, won the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies Best Book Prize, 2011-15. His most recent book is *Human Being, Bodily Being: Phenomenology from Classical India*, Oxford University Press, 2018. He is currently writing a book on a philosophical anthropology of emotions drawn from classical Indian aesthetics and literature.

**Matthew Sharpe** | Deakin University, AU | “Spiritual exercises and the question of ‘religion’ in Pierre Hadot”

### Abstract

One of the recurrent criticisms of Pierre Hadot’s work on PWL is that it collapses the distinction between philosophy and religion. Especial concern attaches itself to Hadot’s claims concerning ‘spiritual practices’, which seem to some to downplay the role of rational investigation and argumentation in ancient philosophy. In this paper, I will try to put the assessment of Hadot and ‘religion’ on a more adequate footing. I will do by noting that, far from collapsing philosophy into religion via the inclusion of ‘spiritual’ concerns, Hadot argues that in the West, pre-Christian religion did not include the concern we associate with Christianity, for the correction of souls through ethical and meditative practices. In fact, the early Church ‘Christianised’ many of the spiritual exercises originating in the pagan philosophical schools. Hadot’s position concerning neo-Platonism here will also be examined. On the one hand, he analyses Plotinus and Porphyry as philosophers without any hesitations (in comparison with John M. Cooper), and yet, on the other hand, he expresses strong hesitations about later figures like Iamblichus in which practices such as theurgy are introduced. The discussion of Hadot’s analyses of religion, I will claim, reflects the vagaries surrounding the category of ‘religion’, and the importance of not projecting contemporary sensibilities and anxieties onto the assessment of older philosophical culture.

**Bio**

Matthew Sharpe teaches philosophy at Deakin university, as well as being a practicing counsellor. He is co-author of *Philosophy as a Way of Life: History, Dimensions, Directions*, as well as *Camus, Philosophe: To Return to Our Beginnings*, as well as articles and chapters on philosophy as a way of life.

**Xiaojun Ding | Xi'an Jiaotong University, CN | "Philosophical Practice as Spiritual Exercises towards Truth, Wisdom, and Virtue"**

**Abstract**

The concept of spirituality has a long philosophical history. Based on detailed studies of a history of spiritual exercises from Socrates, the Stoics, Epicureanism, to early Christianity, Pierre Hadot has conceived philosophical practice as spiritual exercises in learning how to live a philosophical life. Following this idea, a number of philosophers such as Gerd B. Achenbach started the contemporary movement of philosophical practice in the 1980s, which aimed to apply philosophical theories and methods to discussions about issues people constantly encounter in their daily lives. In this talk, after showing that philosophical practice has already become a new frontier in philosophical research, I will further argue that philosophical practice as spiritual exercises is an exercise of reason and logos, while certain kinds of religious exercises such as Zen arts can also constitute an important part of philosophical practice. I conclude that in light of the distinct plurality of the methods and modes of philosophical practice and the spiritual exercises involved, philosophical practice can be considered a meaningful and applicable approach to pursuing truth, wisdom, and virtue, which is of great didactic and ethical significance in the hyper-connected age.

**Bio**

Xiaojun Ding is an Associate Professor of Philosophy Department at Xi'an Jiaotong University (China). Her priority lines of research are on philosophical practice, logic and critical thinking, analytic philosophy, experimental philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of science and technology, moral psychology, and positive psychology. She is a guest editor of the special issues "Religiosity and Spirituality in Philosophical Practice: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives" in the journal *Religions* (2023) and "Mental Health Promotion through Philosophical Practice" in the journal *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2023).

**Marta Faustino | Nova Institute of Philosophy, PT | "Spirituality without God. On the Philosophical Nature of Hadot's Spiritual Exercises"**

**Abstract**

This paper will discuss one of the most frequent criticisms made against Hadot's notion of spiritual exercises, focusing on one of his most fervent critics, John Cooper. According to the latter, the notion of spiritual exercises is derived from religion and Hadot's use of it inaccurately blurs the distinction between the philosophical and the religious way of life. The philosophical life in Antiquity, Cooper argues, was a life led in accordance with reason, in the context of which spiritual exercises would not only be unnecessary, but even incompatible with it. Although Cooper admits that a small number of spiritual exercises can be found in some late Hellenistic schools, he considers the latter decaying forms of ancient philosophy (in fact already contaminated by the rise of Christianity), the reason why they speak against—rather than for—Hadot's account.

After outlining and discussing this criticism in greater detail, I will argue that Cooper's critical reading of Hadot is strongly determined by a narrower understanding of spirituality and a competing conception of what philosophy is (and even should be), hence not doing justice to Hadot's account. To make this clear, I will clarify Hadot's notion of (nonreligious) spirituality and show how a closer reading of his description of spiritual exercises, as well as his own direct answers to similar criticisms, dispels most of Cooper's concerns while at the same time providing a more nuanced understanding of Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life. I will then contextualize the notion of spiritual exercises in ancient forms of askesis, underline their philosophical nature, and bring together Hadot's and Cooper's accounts on the matter, showing that they actually agree more than Cooper suggests in his texts. Hence, the paper concludes that Cooper's divergence from Hadot is more terminological than philosophical or even hermeneutical in nature, although their contrasting accounts do bring to light two different metaphilosophies and two competing understandings not only of what philosophy was in antiquity but also of what it should become in contemporary times.

**Bio**

Marta Faustino is an appointed research fellow at IFILNOVA (NOVA Institute of Philosophy), where she coordinates the Art of Living Permanent Seminar (CultureLab). She studied Sciences of Communication (2002) and Philosophy (2005) at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the NOVA University Lisbon and earned her Doctorate in Philosophy (2013), from the same university, with a thesis on Nietzsche's conceptions of 'great health' and therapy. She is currently working on an individual research project on philosophy as a way of life, with a particular focus on Nietzsche, Hadot, and Foucault. From 2018 to 2022, she was the coordinator of the Art of Living Research Group and she is currently leading, as Principal Investigator, the FCT Exploratory Project "Mapping Philosophy as a Way of Life: An Ancient Model, A Contemporary Approach". She is a member of LNG (Lisbon Nietzsche Group), GIRN (Groupe International de Recherches sur Nietzsche), HyperNietzsche, Red Iberoamericana Foucault and Mellon Philosophy as a Way of Life Network. She is author of several articles and essays on Nietzsche, Hadot, Foucault and the Hellenistic philosophers, and co-editor of *Nietzsche e Pessoa: Ensaios* (Tinta-dachina, 2016), *Rostos do Si: Autobiografia, Confissão, Terapia* (Vendaval, 2019), *The Late Foucault: Ethical and Political Questions* (Bloomsbury, 2020) and *Filosofia Como Modo de Vida: Ensaios Escolhidos* (Edições 70, 2022).

**Karl-Stephan Bouthilette | Manipal Academy of Higher Education, IN | "List-Making as Spiritual Exercise in South-Asian Gnosticism. The Interrelation of Ritual, Taxonomy, and Philosophy in Contemplative Practice"**

**Abstract**

The Interrelation of Ritual, Taxonomy, and Philosophy in Contemplative Practice With this presentation I offer a brief overview of my next monograph, to be published in the Brill series, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited by Michael Chase, Eli Kramer, and Matthew Sharpe. It will be the first title to cover South Asia within the series. The book examines the significance of taxonomical list-making as a determining feature of 'spiritual exercises' in South Asian gnostic yogas. It reflects on the practice in general as a universal habit significant to the study of human and natural sciences, with focus on literature, philosophy, and psychology. 'Yogic Gnosticism' is the generic term – and thus a theoretical category of thought, rather than an actual independent school of thought or *darśana* – I use to subsume the varied manifestations of *jñānayoga*, what I render as the 'yoga of knowledge.' As an etic theoretical category borrowing from emic sectarian classifications, 'yogas of knowledge' represent a genre of philosophical expressions which concurrently developed within Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina circles.

The book underlines the ideological radicality of this gnostic thought, framed within a renunciate way of life which I read as the actuation of ritual self-sacrifice, achieved through ‘doctrinal internalization–’ a less pejorative expression than ‘indoctrination.’ Internalization, I suggest, in this gnostic context, is pedagogically induced by means of ‘determinate negation,’ the analytical and dialectical negation of memorized doctrinal taxonomies which serve to mediate knowledge transmission. Within that context, what I argue is, that, as a spiritual practice, gnostic yogas teach one how to disentangle oneself from one’s nets of conceptual projection and identification, through list-analysis (parīkṣā) and list-discrimination (viveka), a ritual practice of philosophy which involves pivotal ‘operations of the mind.’ These operations are intellectual rituals casted in abstract metaphysical jargons. Borrowing from Hegel’s notion of ‘determinate negation’ (Aufheben), I read the philosophical rituals of gnostic contemplatives as embodied practices establishing a ‘determinate negation’ of the world (contra mundum) as symbolically represented in scriptures, where the negated cosmos is not only sacrificed in the flames of reasoning but (symbolically) rescued in the process.

#### Bio

Dr. Karl-Stéphan Bouthillette obtained his PhD (2018) in Indian Philosophies from the Institute for Indology and Tibetology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, in Munich, Germany. He is now Assistant Professor at the Department of Philosophy (DoP) at MAHE. He published extensively on the early developments of Sanskrit philosophical doxography and now researches on the phenomena of list-making and taxonomy within the spiritual exercises of South-Asian gnostic yogas.

#### Jordi Crespo | Independent scholar, ES | “Back to the Future: Playing with Time as Galen’s Solution to Distress”

#### Abstract

The presentation is split into three parts. In the first place, and echoing a lecture given by L. Gernet in 1945, there will be addressed a set of points in order to show that the origins of Greek philosophy are deeply rooted in religious beliefs and in the tenet of exercitation, what indefectibly will lead us to the notion of ‘way of life’. These former considerations will give place to a second part in which, by taking Galen’s *De indolentia* as a textual reference, we shall delve into the ins and outs of the ‘prefiguration of future evils’ (praemeditatio malorum), a sort of spiritual exercise which proves of particular interest either in strictly philosophical terms as well as in the assessment of the nature and the extent of the spiritual exercises as these are devised in the frame of the PWL. In the last instance, and taking into consideration the opinion of P. Hadot about comparative philosophy, to close the presentation and to give more room for a further discussion, in a much more freestyle I shall point out the air of resemblance or the possible connection, at least, between the ideas implicit in some philosophically relevant Chinese ideograms and some spiritual exercises from the Greco-Roman period.

#### Bio

Jordi Crespo Saumell is a Ph.D. in Philosophy, Epistemology, and History of Culture (Università degli Studi di Cagliari, 2017). His dissertation revolved around the *Anonymus Londinensis*, a papyrus of medical content in Greek from the 1st century C.E. Before that, he had coursed other related studies to this field: a MA in Ancient Philosophy (UCD, 2013); a MA in Classics (UCM, 2012); and a MA in History of Religions (UAB, 2005). In addition to this, he has worked as an associate lecturer of different subjects in Philosophy for the UPF of Barcelona. The most part of the research he has conducted to the moment falls in the fields of philosophy and medicine in Antiquity.

#### Jessica Frazier | Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, UK | “Brahman and the View from Above: The practice of cosmos-comprehension in the Upaniṣads”

#### Abstract

The study of Indian thought has made all too halting a progress toward one of India’s most pervasive and distinctive notions: liberation. This is perhaps because the array of forms it takes is so bewildering that it confounds attempts to provide general insights. It is often either associated with a gnostic style purification of consciousness, or a theistic devotional account. Both can seem to use substantive reasoning only as a deconstructive tool, to be discarded on the way to the final goal. This in turn can create a dichotomy between the constructive philosophical concerns of some traditions, and their soteriological goals, playing into the stereotype which sees reason as being at war with religion.

This paper considers some cases in early Vedānta schools (focusing on the Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad), in which metaphysical understanding is the considered, cultivated, core method of achieving transformation of self. Here 1. the self is taken not primarily as the site of problems such as suffering, but as a knowledge-builder seeking more pervasive and persistent scales of being, and 2. the building of this knowledge uses specific practices including i. inductive inferential analysis seeking generalities, essences, and grounding hierarchies in which the self is involved, and ii. phenomenological analysis that integrates consciousness into the wider project of cosmological understanding. The resulting tradition used metaphysics as a way of resituating the self in the cosmos.

#### Bio

Dr Jessica Frazier is a Lecturer in the Study of Religion at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on the ways that being, selfhood, value and divinity have been construed in different philosophical contexts, from classical India to twentieth century philosophy. Her books include *Hindu Worldviews: Theories of Self Ritual and Reality*, *Categorisation in Indian Philosophy: Thinking Inside the Box* (ed.), and *Reality, Religion and Passion: Truth and Ethics in Hans-Georg Gadamer and Rūpa Gosvāmi*, and her forthcoming book explores metaphysical arguments for a single ultimate foundation of reality in the Vedāntic scholastic tradition. She has a special interest in the metaphysics of the Bhedabheda Vedānta tradition of Indian philosophy, and also in phenomenology’s rethinking of the nature of reality, and the way that human life fits within it.

#### James Madaio | Oriental Institute Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ | “The techné of attention: reality and transformative technique in medieval Advaita Vedānta”

#### Abstract

This paper explores the comprehensive programme of attentional and dispositional training taught by Vidyāraṇya in his fourteenth century *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, or ‘Discerning Liberation-while-living’. In conversation with characterizations of transformative path philosophies articulated by Frederick Streng and Pierre Hadot, the paper homes in on the crucial role of conditioning (vāsanā) on the Advaita Vedāntic path to awakening. While arguing for the cross-cultural relevance of vāsanā, a term that overlaps with character, disposition, habit, tendency, etc., I closely examine Vidyāraṇya’s account of the cultivation of the tendency of ‘consciousness only’ (cinmātravāsanā). This contemplative discipline entails a phenomenological analysis of experience that inculcates a way of directing one’s attention. In light of what Alan Wallace has called the ‘attentional reality principle’, which draws on the work of William James, I will consider the close relationship between attending and reality, and the way in which Vidyāraṇya skillfully exploits it. As a ‘pure consciousness’ tradition, the practice of cinmātravāsanā culminates in nonconceptual samādhi, which entails the dissolution of the directionality of attention. The paper closes by considering the paradox of transformative paths within a non-dual, pure consciousness context.

**Bio**

Dr. James Madaio is a fellow at the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. He is editor of *The Journal of Hindu Studies* (OUP) and regional editor (Indic traditions) for Bloomsbury's *Introductions to World Philosophies* book series. He received his PhD from the University of Manchester and was a postdoctoral fellow at New Europe College (Bucharest) and an affiliated researcher at the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute (Chennai). He was previously a lecturer at the University of Maryland (USA), University of Manchester (UK), and Charles University (Czech Republic).

**Eli Kramer | University of Warsaw, PL | and Kevin Taylor | University of Memphis, US |**  
**“Spiritual Exercises in the Rinzai Zen Tradition: Imminence and Disruption in Ikkyū Sōjun and Hakuin Ekaku”**

**Abstract**

Zen Masters Ikkyū and Hakuin can both be characterized by their respective atopic disruptions. Ikkyū embodied the classical Zen master/wanderer whereas Hakuin attempted to remain hidden in the busy streets off the Tokaido road, under the radar of the Myoshin-ji administration. In both cases, these figures were eventually pressured by the Rinzai Zen establishment to accept posts in Kyoto against their will. Ikkyū's resistance was characterized by his “crazy Zen” whereas Hakuin stubbornly resisted a call to administration characterized by the philosophy of “great doubt” and his teaching of meditation in the midst of activity. In so doing, the Rinzai Zen paradox of teaching comes to the foreground as a deeply personal practice that resists administrative definitions of practice. Ikkyū's bawdy and bodily poetry is a spiritual exercise in disruptive access to enlightenment, reminiscent of Linji (the founder of Rinzai). Similarly, Hakuin's koan practice refuses to be confined to a monk in silent meditation. Both figures exemplify a commitment to disruptive transformation found throughout Rinzai teachings that break away from institutional roles.

In this paper, we will present Rinzai practices from Ikkyū and Hakuin as disruptive spiritual exercises that open the way to transcendence (enlightenment) through immanence (a return to the world in all its ugly distractions). This paper therefore seeks to explore Hadot's philosophy as a way of life (PWL) through Rinzai unique and often bizarre spiritual exercises. In doing so, this paper hopes to explore new grounds of PWL in the eccentricities of Japanese Rinzai Zen masters whose approaches wander and diverge, yet remain distinctively Rinzai in nature.

**Bio**

Dr. Eli Kramer is an Associate Professor (Profesor Uczelni) at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Wrocław. His work is devoted to developing philosophy as a way of life as a field. He connects this work to his activities in the philosophy of culture and the philosophy of higher education. Alongside Matthew Sharpe and Michael Chase, he co-edits the Brill book series, “*Philosophy as a Way of Life: Text and Studies*,” which organizes new translations, as well as putting out new studies. They also closely work with Marta Faustino on a number of projects to foster philosophy as a way of life research and practice inside and out of the academy. His first single authored monograph is on the nature and role of the associated philosophical life (as distinct from philosophy as a discipline): *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy, Volume One: Principles to Guide Philosophical Community* (Brill, 2021).

Kevin C. Taylor is Assistant Professor of Teaching in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Memphis and also serves as Director of Religious Studies. His work in Asian Philosophy focuses on Japanese Buddhism as well as Buddhist and Confucianism in applied ethics, especially data ethics and environmental ethics (especially mottainai as a Japanese philosophy of waste).



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221 00 Lund  
Phone 046-222 00 00  
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