

ABSTRACTS

NISHA DAGA and GEORGE KODIMATTAM JOSEPH

Indian Institute of Technology (Jodhpur, India)

*THE SACRED END:
EXPLORING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SALLEKHANĀ IN JAINA
TRADITION*

The inevitability of death remains to be one of the most profound and unsettling enigmas that haunts humanity. Confronted with the certainty of mortality, world religions have delved deeply into the question of how to face death with grace by contemplating physical, psychological, and ethical preparations for the final journey. Notably, Jainism, an ancient Indian philosophical tradition, stands unparalleled among religious philosophies for its unique exploration of the concept of death (*marana*), specifically by introducing *sallekhanā*, i.e., voluntary fasting to death. *Sallekhanā* is defined as “an ideal ritual of leaving body,” and it presents the conceptual fusion of ethical foundations, religious practices, and end-of-life decision-making considerations. Paying attention to the Jaina principles of *ahimsā* (nonviolence), *aparigraha* (non-attachment), and *moksha* (spiritual liberation), this paper examines the practice of *sallekhanā* both from the perspective of death – specifically, how one approaches it – and from the standpoint of the observance of austerity. From the perspective of death, *sallekhanā* raises several ethical questions about the nature of death, autonomy of persons, and the moral justification for choosing one's time of death, especially when viewed through the lens of modern bioethics. By engaging with Jaina canonical texts, this paper examines the philosophical foundations of *sallekhanā*, its historical and contemporary relevance, and the ethical distinctions that set it apart from other end-of-life choices. Additionally, the paper argues that while *sallekhanā* has been subjected to controversies, particularly in legal and ethical discourses, it stands categorically different from both suicide and euthanasia. The research concludes that *sallekhanā*, by challenging the dominant biomedical paradigms, offers a unique perspective on the notion of voluntary death and proposes sophisticated alternative conceptualisations of value of life, autonomy of persons, human dignity, and conscious dying.

CHRIS DURANTE

Saint Peter's University

RELIGION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC BIOETHICS:
A CRITICAL HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT AND PRAGMATIC METHOD
FOR INCLUSIVE DISCOURSE

Analyzing the sociopolitical context in which bioethics emerged I will examine the influence that secularism and liberal individualism had on the development of bioethical thinking, suggesting that it led to the marginalization of religious voices in the public bioethics arena and that models of bioethical deliberation grounded in these intellectual trajectories fail to adequately cope with the problems that arise in bioethics as a result of religious and cultural differences. As a possible solution, I will propose that a form of discourse I refer to as pragmatic perspectivism is capable of coping with the types of moral dilemmas and ethical disagreements over biomedical issues within the context of religious, cultural and ideological diversity. This method of discourse rests upon the three pillars of: (1) reimagining agreement as mutual justification that doesn't require shared modes of reason; (2) an acceptance of interpretive diversity regarding any agreed upon principles; and (3) a re-conceptualized notion of toleration as a practice grounded in empathy toward others' moral concerns. What makes this method unique is that consensus is not to be understood as a single event but rather ought to be viewed as an on-going discursive process amongst interlocutors seeking common-ground that is open to revision as the discourse continues. Further, recognizing that there is a lack of agreement on the foundations of a comprehensive view of the good life within global society, I will argue that agreement on the parameters of permissible actions, rather than agreement on the good itself, may have to suffice to achieve a non-combative co-existence in our morally pluralistic society.

HOSSEIN GODAZGAR

University of Warwick

A "SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST" APPROACH TO "MUSLIM BIOMEDICAL ETHICS":
EXAMINING "MUSLIM" OPPOSITION TO PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

Numerous Muslim medical professionals and associations assert the prohibition of “physician-assisted suicide” in “Islam,” citing the verse “don’t kill yourselves” (*Qur’ān*, 4:29). This traditional stance is based on literal interpretations and textual contexts understood by Qur’anic exegetes and Islamic jurists over centuries. This article introduces a novel methodological approach, termed “social constructionism,” to studying scriptures. This approach suggests that exegetes’ interpretations and moral judgments, including those on bioethics, are influenced by their geographical and socio-cultural contexts, which vary over time and space. To illustrate this, the study used snowball sampling to identify twenty-one influential Qur’anic exegetes from the tenth century to the present, selected through interviews with six Islamic Studies scholars from the Middle East. These exegetes represent diverse regions such as North Africa, the Levant, and West Asia. Employing a “library-based” research method, the “discourse analysis” and “hermeneutics” of the phrase “don’t kill yourselves” reveal that its meanings are not unitary, homogeneous, simple, or certain. This variability highlights the significant impact of social and cultural contexts on the exegetical process and underscores the need to consider these factors in contemporary bioethical discussions within “Islam” and beyond.

IRIA GRAMMENOU

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

SUFFERING AND DYING IN MODERN PANDEMICS:

A PARALLEL READING OF IVAN ILLICH, GIORGIO AGAMBEN AND
BYUNG-CHUL HAN

This article examines the meanings both physical suffering and death have gradually acquired in the light of the COVID-19 outbreak. In order to do so, it takes into account the work of three major thinkers, that is, Giorgio Agamben, Ivan Illich and Byung-Chul Han. Despite their differences, these three thinkers seem to hold convergent views regarding suffering and dying today. The article focuses on Agamben’s view according to which our current condition should be conceived in the context of three ideologies, that is, capitalism, Christianity and science, medicine in particular and it focuses on his view of medicine as the new western religion. Thus, following the Italian philosopher, I will show that, despite its emphasis on neuro-informed corporeality, modern medicine introduces a renewed version of metaphysical essentialism, thereby producing theological concepts of physical pain. While it aims at eradicating physical pain and celebrates a culture of analgesia, at

the same time it embraces pain and establishes commodified versions of asceticism, which thrives in gyms and aesthetic practices. What is more, in times of crisis such as the recent one, medicine takes refuge in pure biology, thereby cloaking both its own social history, and the social parameters of pain such as race, gender and class. Pain, then, becomes both alienated and alienating, it obtains a life of its own and becomes hypostasized. Modern medicine paradoxically mystifies our world anew by replacing spiritualism with a new type of religiosity. However, as Byung-Chul Han points out, this new type of religiosity lacks traditional religions' most crucial characteristic, as it fails to offer its bearer the prospect of salvation. By establishing a technoscientific phantasmagoria, that is, a specific regime of truth that produces normative concepts of health, it creates a radically new experience of suffering and dying that gets emptied of any meaningful content. Similarly, this article takes into account the work of Ivan Illich, especially his concept of iatrogenesis, and investigates the ways that suffering and dying are nowadays exiled both from "oikos", the home, as well as the community and pass under the authority of the specialist, thus losing their ability to produce cohesive meaning for their bearers.

KEVIN GRANE

University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology

FAITH AND TRANSITIONS: RELIGIOUS NOTIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY
AND GENDER AFFIRMING CARE FOR YOUTH

This paper explores the intersection of religious traditions and scientific perspectives on youth autonomy, particularly in decision-making regarding gender-affirming care. It examines how various religious practices across Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism mark gradual development toward autonomy, with significant milestones occurring between the ages of 8 and 16. These rites of passage signify moral and intellectual responsibility in a religious context. Scientific research on cognitive development, including studies on identity formation, limbic system regulation, and prefrontal cortex maturation, further informs the conversation. The paper argues that while religious traditions emphasize a measured approach to youth autonomy, scientific insights call for caution in granting full autonomy power during adolescence, given the ongoing development of critical cognitive functions. The paper concludes that legal frameworks should balance the need for youth agencies with the responsibility to protect their well-being, considering both spiritual guidance and scientific evidence to support informed, mature decision-making.

KAREY ALISON HARWOOD

North Carolina State University

RECONSIDERING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BIOGENETIC TIES

The moral significance of biogenetic relatedness between parents and children warrants further discussion in an era of reproductive technology use. This essay looks at the issue of anonymous gamete donation, specifically prospective parents who want biologically related children but need either a donated sperm or egg to conceive. How should prospective parents' interests be weighed against those of donor-conceived children who wish to know the identities of both biological parents? Using insights from religious traditions and feminist ethics, this essay seeks to honor both sets of interests and makes practical suggestions for policy change.

HOLLIS PHELPS

Mercer University

CONSTRUCTING MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES: A CRITIQUE OF THE MYSTICAL PARADIGM IN PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH

This paper discusses and criticizes the role of mysticism in contemporary psychedelic research. To understand psychedelic experiences and their therapeutic efficacy, several studies claim to take an empirical approach to mystical experiences, seeking to avoid religious beliefs and sentiments. However, the use of "mysticism" as an explanatory category, both for psychedelic experiences themselves and their acute effects and lasting outcomes, imports religious notions into psychedelic research, loading psychedelic experiences with theological presuppositions, desires, and commitments. Conceiving psychedelic experiences in terms of mysticism ultimately limits the potential scope of psychedelic research.

GENN RUAN

University of California, Riverside

XIAOQIAN ZHANG

Northeast Normal University

THE VIOLENCE OF CLASSIFICATION AND ETHICS OF SUICIDE:
A REFLECTION ON QIU JIN'S DEATH

This article examines the classificatory tensions at the heart of modern death ethics through a case study of Qiu Jin, a Chinese feminist, poet, and revolutionary who was beheaded following a failed uprising. Her death has been variously interpreted as suicide, martyrdom, and political sacrifice, yet each of these categories, when applied, proves conceptually unstable and ethically inadequate. We argue that the impulse to classify voluntary death risks obscuring its political intentionality and symbolic meaning. Drawing on Foucault's thoughts on power and knowledge, we interrogate the historical contingencies and normative assumptions behind dominant frameworks for evaluating death. This paper critiques four such systems including biomedical ethics, Durkheimian sociology, Christian theology, and Confucian moral theory. Qiu Jin's death does not neatly fit into "suicide" as understood in clinical or sociological terms, nor does it conform to theological models of martyrdom or Confucian ideals of righteousness. We suggest that Qiu Jin's death resists classification not due to a lack of meaning, but because of an ethical excess. She died as a political subject who claimed agency within overlapping regimes of nationalism, feminism, and moral rebellion. Her writings and personal transformation illuminate the intersection of gendered constraint and revolutionary self-assertion in late Qing China, and her execution becomes a limit-case that exposes the conceptual violence of ethical typologies. Rather than proposing a new category to classify her, we advocate a rethinking of classification itself: not as a neutral act of understanding, but as a mode of moral governance. Through Qiu Jin, the study calls for a death ethics attentive to cultural specificity, historical rupture, and the performative dimensions of revolutionary sacrifice. It concludes by proposing a genealogical approach as a way to resist universalist moral frameworks and to illuminate the politics embedded in how we interpret voluntary death.

YARON SILVERSTEIN

Hemdat Academic College

MEDICAL PROCEDURE IN THE HEAT OF EMOTION:

THE POSITIONS OF MILITARY RABBINATE PERSONNEL ON
POSTHUMOUS SPERM RETRIEVAL (PSR) FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 7,
2023 ATTACK

One of the most difficult events for any person is receiving notification of the death of a family member, especially a young soldier in military service. Following the Hamas attack of 10/07 and the opening of the swords of iron war, the IDF use a practice of offering bereaved families the option of performing a procedure of sperm extraction for the purpose of bringing children into the world from the sperm of the deceased in the future.

The IDF rabbinate deal with this issue after the 10/07 attack, both in the form of inquiries from bereaved families to them as unit rabbis and during the handling of the bodies. Most of the participants addressed this issue from the perspective of desecration of the dead, in the context of the chaos that prevailed at the Shura camp, as a violation of the dignity of other dead who were in the refrigeration containers. In the context of rejecting the concept of "planned orphans," some participants characterized the handling of this issue as "disgusting." Few of the participants noted that bringing comfort to the family and providing continuity for the deceased were significant considerations in their halachic permissiveness of the procedure. In practice, most of the participants in the study assisted in the required tests for identification, both out of an understanding that this was the halakhic practice of the IDF rabbinate, and out of a desire not to add to the pain of the families of the fallen.

The study revealed that many of the participants in the study had emotionally negative reactions to this procedure and did not consider the full range of halachic, ethical and emotional considerations in its performance.