

## Research Statement

Since my research interests have grown into their present shape from the beginning of my time as a philosophy student and have expanded considerably so as to grow a) beyond theoretical interests so as to include issues in practical philosophy, and b) beyond western approaches so as to also include non-western approaches, I'll briefly sketch their trajectory. As an undergraduate, I began my studies pursuing a Major in Indian Studies, with minors in Philosophy and Psychology. After taking courses in each of these subjects, it was announced that the Indian Studies department would soon close. During a research stay in India (I was especially interested in traditional Indian medicine at the time), the situation began to seem increasingly bleak, so I switched my Major to Philosophy, nevertheless keeping up with Hindi, Sanskrit, and taking further Psychology classes. Until then, I had already attended many philosophy classes on various topics, including classes on Plato, mediaeval and modern European philosophy, and analytic philosophy (epistemology and philosophy of science).

After shifting my focus to Philosophy, my interests initially focused on *Philosophy of Science* and *Logic*. In my M.A. thesis, I argued that Bas van Fraassen's *Constructive Empiricism* fares better than *Logical Empiricism* in terms of his account of scientific theories and in terms of his arguments against scientific realism. However, I showed that while van Fraassen may have succeeded in providing an account of science that empiricists might appreciate, he had not addressed the more specific question of how empiricists ought to think about (possibly theory-laden) experience in the first place.

For me, this prompted a shift of focus toward the question of how to characterize experience and, thus, from general philosophy of science to epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of perception. This became the first main strand of my research interests—I pursued it at length in my dissertation and it remains of interest to me. In the dissertation, I argued that the kind of presentationalist account of experience developed by Anil Gupta is superior to the two currently dominant kinds of views on perceptual experience: relationalism and representationalism. Drawing on my background in philosophy of science, I looked at the contemporary debate between proponents of these camps through the lens of the following question: can proponents of these positions accommodate effects that background doxastic states (e.g., beliefs) could have on experience—effects such as theory-ladenness, expertise, cognitive penetration, or projection effects (like *wishful experiencing*, say)? The most prominent relationalist accounts of perceptual experience, I showed, cannot currently accommodate many conceivable effects that doxastic states may have on the phenomenal character of experience. And although representationalists can accommodate such effects in principle, I argued that the defender of the best-developed account of this kind, Susanna Siegel, manages to do so only at a high cost, viz. by undermining what she takes to be experience's rational role—justifying beliefs. On Gupta's presentationalist view, in contrast, the rational role of experience—dubbed the *Hypothetical Given*—is to make rational background-view relative transitions to (*inter alia*) perceptual judgments. With some minor modifications, I argued, experience can play this role no matter what background effects beliefs may have on our experience, as long as it is granted (as everyone does) that our experience is not *determined* by such effects and can still diverge from our expectations. The *Hypothetical Given*, I concluded, is perfectly able to accommodate *theory-ladenness* and related phenomena.

The defense I mounted for the presentationalist account and its core element, the *Hypothetical Given*, was novel, drew on philosophy of science, contemporary philosophy of perception and epistemology, and served to rehabilitate a thinker—Norwood Russell Hanson—whose insightful work on theory-ladenness, I think, has been misunderstood and unduly neglected. It also suggested that the fundamental debate between relationalists and representationalists about whether experience has representational content is not as important as it is commonly taken to be. Indeed, I take it to be a significant feature that the *Hypothetical Given* is in principle compatible with either view and suggested what I dubbed the *Variable Content View* as an alternative to Gupta's account. In closing, I proposed that many debates in which experience plays an important role must be re-construed, given that they typically depend on conceptions of the rational role of experience that I think we should reject. Thinking about such debates in light of the account I recommend promises to have

transformative effects in them. Demonstrating this by intervening in various debates is one important aspect of my current research strategy.

The second main strand of my philosophical interests developed from the first. It concerns the question how to think about experience as laden not with *theory*, but with *value*, and how such value-ladenness might inform conceptions of moral perception, action, and progress. This interest grew through my fascination with Iris Murdoch's (and Simone Weil's) conception of love as just attention. I became convinced that love so construed is not just a central concept in morals but is also of epistemic and semantic relevance. My interest in Murdoch, together with my background in Indian Studies, has in the meantime led me to also investigate Buddhist conceptions of experience, Jaina philosophy (especially its epistemic perspectivalism and its ethical precept to engage in *ahimsā*—nonviolence), and strands of Vedāntic philosophy (in which love, too, is seen as playing an epistemologically salient role). My more recent interest in philosophical counselling as a way of bringing philosophy in touch with concerns of everyday life, finally, relates to this cluster of interests, too.

Although my administrative work as Associate Dean during the pandemic was very taxing, I currently have many projects (some of them collaborative) to complete. Each of them is related to the two clusters sketched above. Most closely related to the first are: a) a paper on the early reception of Hanson's view: *Off to a Bad Start. The Early Reception of Hanson's Notion of Theory-Ladenness*, b) a response to Gerhard Schurz on theory-ladenness: *No Theory-Neutral Observation Necessary*, c) a paper on cognitive penetration, predictive coding, and presentationalism: *Predictive Coding and Presentationalism – Natural Bedfellows?*, d) a paper labelled “*The Modality of Perception and the Perception of Modality*” (with Michael Picard), e) a paper on structural parallels between *anekāntavāda* (a central concept of Jaina Philosophy) and the *Hypothetical Given*: “*Anekāntavāda and Presentationalism: Two Peas in a Pod?*” [conditional acceptance from *Philosophy East & West*], f) *Synthesizing Perspectives Lovingly: Murdoch and the Jains*, g) a paper in which I apply the structure of reasoning implemented by the Hypothetical Given to practical reasoning: *Theoretically General, Practically Generalizable: the Hypothetical Given*, and h) an edited volume on the Prospects of Anil Gupta's *Reformed Empiricism* (final due date for contributions: Dec 15, 2023).

Regarding the second cluster, most closely related to it are the following paper projects: a) *RRME & EMRR: Rational Role of Moral Experience and Empiricist Moral Realism Reconstructed*, b) *Buddhist Elements in Murdochian Ethics*, c) *Murdoch on Love and Privacy*, d) *The Power of Love*, e) *Anekāntavāda, Intellectual Ahimsā, and Intellectual Aparigraha* (with Nic Bommarito), f) *Ideale polyamoröse Verpflichtung* [ENGLISH: *Ideal polyamorous commitment*] [forthcoming in *Zeitschrift für Praktische Philosophie*], g) *Inputs from Murdoch and Rosenberg for Philosophical Counselling* [published], h) “*Philosophical Health, Nonviolent Just Communication, and Epistemic Justice*” [forthcoming], i) *Viśiṣṭādvaitic Panentheism and the Liberating Function of Love in Weil, Murdoch, and Rāmānuja* [published], j) *Jain Perspectivalism and (Religious) Epistemic Justice* [accepted for conference presentation and publication], and k) *Dual Character Concepts and the Idea of Perfection* [R&R] (see [here](#) for a list and abstracts). I also mapped out a [book proposal](#) for a monograph entitled *Philosophy in the Key of Love. Murdochian Dialogues*, for which with *palgrave macmillan* has indicated strong interest. In it, I intend to integrate my interest in the two clusters by arguing how thinking about love as an epistemic notion and taking on board related insights from Buddhism, Jainism, and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta allows us to generate a conception on which moral and epistemic progress go hand in hand. Since there is a lot of material to draw on for the comparative aspect, I am considering expanding what will be one chapter in this monograph into a further self-standing monograph, tentatively labelled *Murdoch and the East: Belated Encounters*.

During my sabbatical in Pittsburgh, I made progress on a number of these projects (notably those marked above as *under review*, *R&R*, *accepted*, *forthcoming*, and *published*). In 2023-24, as PITT's inaugural *Bhagawan Vasu Pujya Swami postdoctoral fellow in Jain Studies*, I intend to focus on the Jainism-related papers, while also working on the monograph(s) and the edited volume. All in all, there is no risk that I should run out of things to write about anytime soon.