

Melanie Coughlin

Department of Religious Studies
Department of Philosophy
Memorial University of Newfoundland
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AOS: Japanese Philosophy

AOC: Classical and Modern Asian Philosophy, Modern and Contemporary European Philosophy,
Social Philosophy including Decolonial, Disability, and Feminist Theory

Education

McGill University (Montreal, Canada)

PhD, Philosophy, July 2021

Thesis: "Realizing Wisdom and Compassion Through Nishitani's Notion of the Emptiness in Affect"

Co-Supervisors: George di Giovanni, Philosophy, McGill University and Thomas Lamarre, East Asian Studies, McGill University and East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago

Internal Examiner: Garth Green, Religious Studies, McGill University

External Examiner: Takeshi Kimoto, Global Studies, Chukyo University

Kyoto University (Kyoto, Japan)

Japan Foundation Research Fellow April 2014

Research Project: Nishitani's Engagement with 19th Century German Philosophy

Research Supervisor: Keta Masako, Philosophy of Religion

Kansai University (Osaka, Japan)

MEXT Scholarship Research Student October April 2009

Research Project "Nishitani's Nietzsche: On the Historicity and Actuality of Conscience"

Research Supervisor: Inoue Katsuhito, Comparative Religion

University of Ottawa (Ottawa, Canada)

Master of Arts, Philosophy February 2008

Thesis: "Nietzsche's Re-Interpretation of the Promise-Making Conscience as a Will to Power"

Supervisor: Sonia Sikka, Philosophy

Committee Members: Jeffrey Reid, Philosophy, and Denis Dumas, Philosophy

Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada)

Bachelor of Humanities, Concentration in Philosophy June 2003

Senate Medal for High Academic Achievement (GPA 5.0)

One year of exchange at the Higher Institute of Philosophy of Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium

Fellowships, Awards and Grants

Research Assistant Procurement Grant, Digital Pedagogy Project, Chair in Teaching Innovation, Carleton University 2023
Design Grant for Asynchronous Online Course “PHIL 2700 Introduction to the History of Asian Philosophy,” Education Development Centre, Carleton University 2019
Design Grant for Asynchronous Online Course “RELI 1716 East Asian Religions,” Education Development Centre, Carleton University 2017
Travel Grant for the Seminar for the Study of Japanese Culture and Religion, Centre for Information on Religion (CIR), Tokyo 2014
Travel Grant for Interdisciplinary Translation Project, Centre for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Iowa 2014
Research Fellowship at Kyoto University, Japan Foundation 2013
Graduate Research Enhancement and Travel Award, McGill University 2011
Intensive Language Study Grant, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) 2009
Research Scholarship, Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) 2007-2009

Academic Work Experience

Assistant Professor

Memorial University of Newfoundland Fall 2024-present

Course Instructor

Carleton University Fall 2013-Winter 2024

Winter 2024	PHIL 2700 A Asian Philosophy
Winter 2023	FYSM 1210 A Special Topics in Philosophy “What We Argue About”
Fall 2022	RELI 2410 A Buddhism
Winter 2022	RELI 3420 A Early Buddhism
Fall 2021	RELI 2410 A Buddhism
Winter 2021	PHIL 2700 R Introduction to the History of Asian Philosophy
Sum 2020	RELI 1716 R East Asian Religions
Winter 2020	PHIL 2700 R Introduction to the History of Asian Philosophy
Winter 2020	RELI 1716 R East Asian Religions
Winter 2019	PHIL 2700 A Asian Philosophy
Sum 2018	RELI 1716 A East Asian Religions
Winter 2018	RELI 1716 R East Asian Religions
Fall 2016	RELI 1716 A East Asian Religions
Fall 2015	RELI 3233 A Buddhism Beyond India
Sum 2015	RELI 1716 A East Asian Religions
Fall 2014	RELI 1716 A East Asian Religions
Fall 2013	RELI 1716 A East Asian Religions

Contract Instructor, McGill University 2015

Summer 2015 PHIL 237 Contemporary Moral Issues

Education Development Contractor

Open Educational Resources (OER) Ranger at Carleton University, eCampus Ontario 2023-2024

Panelist, "Accessible Teaching and TAing Practices," Academic Disability Collective, Virtual, August 2022

Author, "RLST 2286 Chinese Religions," Department of Religious Studies, Laurentian University and University of Sudbury, 2021 (cancelled midway due to university's funding crisis and subsequent restructuring)

Workshop Leader, "Welcome to My Online Classroom for Faculty Members," Education Development Centre, Carleton University, May 2020

Evaluator, "Request For Proposal: Learning Management System" (Blackboard, Brightspace, and Canvas), Carleton University, February 2020

Research, Teaching, Grading, and International Exchange Assistant

Research Assistant, Philosophy, McGill University 2011-2014

19th Century German Philosophy: Translating German to English and editing essays

Teaching Assistant, Philosophy, McGill University 2010-2013

"Phenomenology" (4th year; Guest lecture "Heidegger and Hermeneutics")

"Philosophy of Religion" (3rd year; Guest Lecture: "Buddhist Phenomenology")

"East Asian Religions" (2nd year; Guest Lecture: "Intro to Buddhism")

"Introduction to Feminist Theory" (2nd year; Guest Lectures: "Butler's *Gender Trouble*,"

"Okin on Multiculturalism" and "Fausto-Sterling on Intersex")

"Introduction to Philosophy 2" (2nd year; Guest Lecture "Personal Identity")

Grading Assistant, Philosophy, University of Ottawa, Canada 2005-2007

"Contemporary Continental Philosophy" (3rd year)

"Fundamental Philosophical Questions" (1st year)

"Great Philosophers" (1st year)

"Critical Thinking" (1st year; Guest Lecture: "Equivalency")

International Exchange Assistant, International Conflict Management Program, Carleton University

Linguistic Facilitator for Soka University Exchange Students (2007)

Cultural Facilitator for Soka University Exchange Students (2006)

Language Teaching Experience

Japanese Language Teacher, Intermediate Level, Ottawa Carleton District School Board, Ontario, Canada, International Languages Program (2009-2010)

Assistant English Teacher, Aibetsu Town Board of Education, Hokkaido, Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (2003-2005)

English Teacher, European Language Communication Solutions, Brussels, Belgium (2001-2002)

Research

Works in Progress

Article under review: "A Critical Role for Karma in Caring to Know"

Editing Co-Translation: Keta Masako's "Individuality and Universality in Religion"

Drafting Monograph: *Nishitani's Way of Caring: Knowing One's Own Passionate Ignorance and Karmic Evil*

Forthcoming Publications

2024. Translation of Nishitani Keiji's "The Duty of Critique and the Problem of Fascism" in *Global Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Edited by Mohammed Rustom. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing
2024. "Religion, Ableism, and Identity: Jericho March Becomes Canadian Marathon of Hope in the Freedom Convoy," Carleton University Roundtable, *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses*

Peer-Reviewed Publications

2023. "The Nihilism of Idealism in Nishitani's and Nietzsche's Passionate Thinking of History," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 54 No. 1 (Spring 2023): 102-132.
- "A Translation of Kyoto School Philosopher Keta Masako's 'The Problem of Evil in Pure Land Buddhism'" with Jessica L. Main and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley. *Philosophy East & West* 67:1 (January 2017): 192-228.
- "西谷の宗教に対するリアリゼーションと根源的な悪の自覚" (Nishitani's Realization of Religion and the Elemental Awareness of Evil) 西田哲学会年報第9号 (9th Annual Publication of the Nishida Philosophy Association's Proceedings) (July 2012): 110-118.

Book Reviews

- Review of *Tanabe Hajime and the Kyoto School: Self, World, and Knowledge* by Takeshi Morisato," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 30 (2023): <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/2023/11/13/review-tanabe-hajime-and-the-kyoto-school/>
- Review of *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, by Bret Davis, Brian Schroeder and Jason Wirth. *Eastern Buddhist* 43 Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 2012): 299-303.
- Review of *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2: Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations*, by Victor Sōgen Hori and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley. *Eastern Buddhist* 40 Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 2009): 238-249.
- Review of *The Logic of Hegel's Logic*, by John Burbidge in *De Philosophia Graduate Student Journal* 19 No. 2 (June 2006).

Panels Organized

- "Modernity in Buddhism, Buddhism in Modernity: Non-Duality and Affectivity," Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, October 2022
- "Disability and Existentialism" co-organized with Chris Nagel as a joint session for the Canadian Philosophical Association and the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, University of Calgary, May 2016.

Invited Workshops

- Session Leader, "日本宗教・日本哲学と翻訳 (Japanese Religion and Philosophy and Their Translation)," Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, January 2024

Participant, "Workshop in Buddhist Ethics 3: Gender and Animal Ethics," University of British Columbia, September 2022

Presentations

R = Paper refereed in full prior to acceptance

- "The Problem of 'Humanity' for a Decentralized Philosophy of Religion," Panel on Decentralizing the Philosophical Inquiry into Religion, The Global-Critical Philosophy of Religion Unit, American Academy of Religion, November 2023
- R "A Critical Role for Karma in Care," Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, October 2022
- "Nishitani's Skilful Means for an Image in the Right to Die Movement." Association for Asian Studies, virtual, March 2021.
- "On Nishitani's Wartime to Post-War Standpoints: Is Nothingness to Emptiness Enough?" 49th Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference on Asian Studies, virtual, October 2020.
- "Nishitani's Critique of Fascism Applied to Recent Anti-Immigration Discourse." 69th Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs, virtual, October 2020.
- "Cunning Snakes and Crazy Harpies: Nishitani's Critical Confrontation with Unconscious Nihilism Today." Centre for Advanced Research in European Philosophy, Western University, Ontario, March 2019.
- R "Nishitani's Critique of Ideology: Emptiness in Affect." Canadian Philosophical Association, Université du Québec à Montréal, Québec, June 2018.
- R "Nishitani's Distinction between Skepsis and Doubt." Canadian Philosophical Association, Ryerson University, Ontario, June 2017.
- "Keta Masako and Remorse over Boundaries." Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy, Mount Allison University, New Brunswick, November 2016.
- "A Buddhist Contribution to Disability Studies: Nishitani's Notion of Non-Ability." Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, University of Ottawa, Ontario, June 2015.
- "西谷の宗教論—フォイエルバッハの感覚論は何故、問題であるのか (Nishitani's Theory of Religion: What is at Issue in Feuerbach's Understanding of Sensibility?)" at the CIR Seminar, Centre for Information on Religion, Tokyo, Japan, June 2014.
- "Nishitani's Engagement with German Philosophy" McGill-Centre for Research on Religion Graduate Conference, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, October 2012.
- "Nishitani's Philosophy of Religion and Shinran's Awareness of Evil." Canadian Jacques Maritain Association, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, July 2012.
- "Nishitani's Response to Nihilism Through Shinran." International Association for Shin-Buddhist Studies, Otani University, Kyoto, Japan, August 2011.
- "西谷のリアルな基準を問う：西田の宗教批判と対比しつつ" (Querying Nishitani's Real Standard in Comparison with Nishida's Critique of Religion). Nishida Philosophy Association, Nishida Memorial Centre, Kanazawa, Japan, July 2011.
- R "Hermeneutical Understanding Through Phenomenology." The Society for the Study of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University, Ontario, May 2011.

- “Nishitani’s Interpretation of Feuerbach: Toward a Phenomenology of the Imagination.”
Transcontinental Philosophy: Interpreting Philosophy Across Borders and Idioms,
Collegium Phaenomenologicum, Città di Castello, Italy, July 2010.
- R “MacIntyre’s Nietzsche and the Language of Postmorality.” Nietzsche’s Postmoralism:
Research Project on Nietzsche and Morality, University of Southampton,
Southampton, United Kingdom, July 2010.
- R “Re-interpreting Inside and Outside According to an Affective Notion of Will to Power.”
Western Canadian Philosophical Association, University of Regina, Saskatchewan,
October 2009.

Commentaries

- Commentary on Julianne Chung’s “Moral Cultivation: The Aesthetics and Ethics of
Karesansui Gardens.” Canadian Philosophical Association, Université du Québec à
Montréal, Montréal, June 2018.
- Commentary on Al Whitney’s “Thinking through Plasticity and Dying.” Society for
Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, Ryerson University,
Ontario, May 2017.
- Commentary on Casey Ford’s “Deleuze and the Ground of Difference.” Society for
Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, University of Calgary,
Alberta, May 2016.
- Summary Commentary for the “Disability and Existentialism Panel” by Joshua St. Pierre
“Temporality, Precarity and Disability,” Shelley Tremain “Dialogues on Disability”
and Jane Dryden “Freedom, Transcendence and Disability: Rethinking the
Overcoming Story.” Joint Session for the Canadian Philosophical Association and
the Society for Existential and Phenomenology Theory and Culture, University of
Calgary, May 2016.
- Commentary on R. Mason’s “Understanding Dukkha: An Argument Against Mark Siderits’
Interpretation.” Canadian Philosophical Association, Brock University, Ontario,
June 2014.
- Commentary on Mark Migotti’s “Bearing Life Lightly, Taking Life Seriously: Nietzsche and
Schopenhauer, Ethics and Crisis.” Western Canadian Philosophical Association,
October 2009.

Academic Profile

Professional Development

- Certificate in Blended and Online Teaching, Education Development Centre, Carleton
University, Ottawa, Canada (2017)
- Certificate in University Teaching, Education Development Centre, Carleton University,
Ottawa, Canada (2013)
- Japanese Language Program for Specialists, Kansai International Language Institute,
Osaka, Japan (2011)
- Intensive German Language Study and Homestay, Goethe Institute, Freiburg, Germany
(2009)

Linguistic Skills

Fluent Japanese, Translation from French, German, and Classical Chinese

Service

Co-Chair, Research Committee, Disability Justice and Crip Culture Collaboratory research lab, Carleton University (2023-present)

Committee Member, Asynchronous Initiatives, Disability Justice and Crip Culture Collaboratory, Carleton University (2023-present)

Committee Member, Accessibility and Consultations, Disability Justice and Crip Culture Collaboratory, Carleton University (2023-present)

Secretary, International Nishida Philosophy Reading Group (2021-present)

Referee, Journal of East Asian Philosophy (2021-present)

Working Group Member, Enhancing Engagement with Japan, Carleton University (2017)

Program Coordinator, Annual Meeting of the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, SSHRC Congress (2013-2015)

Co-Organizer, Centre for Research on Religion-McGill International Graduate Student Conference, McGill University (2012)

Co-Organizer, Philosophy Department Annual Faculty and Graduate Student Retreat, McGill University (2011-2012)

Assistant, Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy's 49th Annual Conference, McGill University (2010)

PhD Thesis Abstract

Realizing Wisdom and Compassion Through Nishitani's Notion of the Emptiness in Affect

My PhD thesis presents a new interpretation of the Buddhist ideals of wisdom and compassion in the magnum opus of the Kyoto School philosopher Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990) through the lens of his late theory of "emptiness-in-affect" (情意における空). Scholarship on Kyoto School philosophy is haunted by a divide between, on the one side, intellectual historians who condemn Nishitani's early work for its contributions to Japanese imperialism, and on the other side, comparative philosophers who uncritically celebrate Nishitani's magnum opus for its contributions to global philosophy. I bridge this divide by showing how Nishitani's thought changed after World War II through his historicization of the concept of karma in Shinran (1173-1263), the founder of True Pure Land, or "Shin" Buddhism. This historicization rearticulates the concept of karma to mean forms of complicity that are historically inherited through ignorance about one's own pre-reflective attachments to social identities. Nishitani's thought develops so that the realization of positive ideals like wisdom and compassion depends on negatively valenced Buddhist concepts rearticulated through a critical socio-historical lens. Realizing wisdom and compassion thus comes to mean realizing an awareness of one's own socio-historically inherited ignorance, viz., *avidyā*, complicity, viz., karma, and harm, viz. *duḥkha*. The originality of these rearticulated concepts is then defined through Nishitani's critical engagements with modern European philosophers, whereby he makes epistemological (Descartes), ethical (Kant), and metaphysical (Feuerbach) contributions.

This interpretive picture also comprises strong criticism of tendencies to idealize sympathetic understanding between self and other as a form of mental or physical immediacy. This critique explains the relevance of Nishitani's stipulation that Buddhist ideals must be adapted to the modern context of the nation-state. For example, I consider his 1949 condemnation of a false cause fallacy that uses mythical images to obfuscate the historical contributions of minoritized groups to modern nation states. The purpose of this obfuscation, he argues, is to falsely identify a currently dominant faction with the identity of the state as a whole and thereby resist transforming the state to address ongoing harms against minoritized groups. I investigate such strategies in the use of the image of the Harpy by Men's Rights advocates and the use of the image of Mother Earth by Right to Die advocates. My investigations highlight how these images have been used to facilitate an inordinate sense of a dominant group's own suffering, but my responses take a non-reductive approach: I explain how the same images can be used to facilitate mutual understanding and care across socio-political divisions.