

WHAT DO WE PERCEIVE?

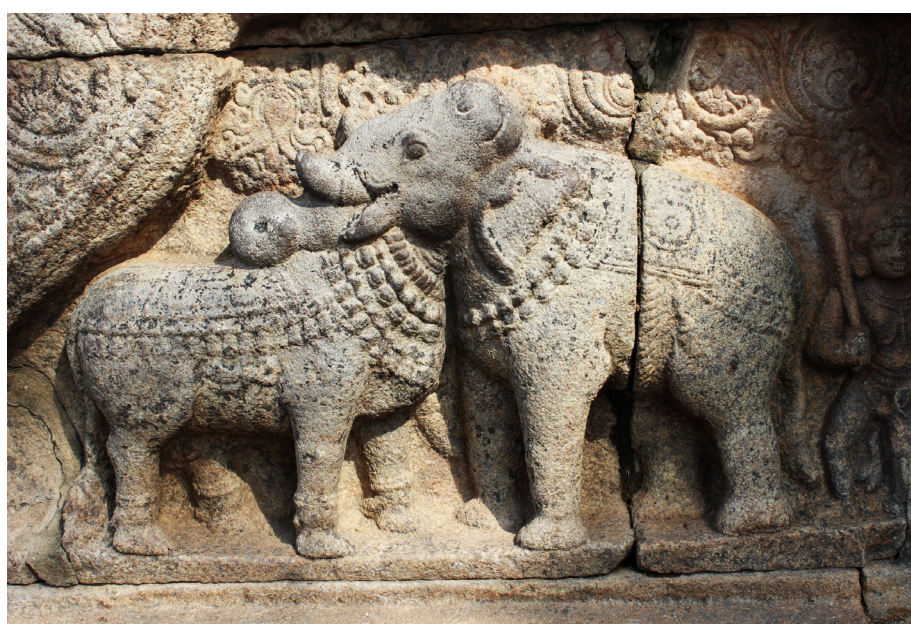
DIRECT REALISM, REPRESENTATIONALISM, IDEALISM AND ILLUSIONISM IN SOUTH ASIAN PHILOSOPHY

Symposium, October 7–9, 2026

In everyday experience, we assume our perceptions and actions engage physical objects that exist independently of our mind. Yet philosophers across time and traditions question this, suggesting we directly perceive only mental entities—an idea radicalized in what in Western philosophy is known as “idealism”. Such challenges have in turn motivated realists to defend their approach more rigorously.

This symposium explores the diverse theories, proofs, and arguments arising from the vigorous debates on perception’s nature and limitations that have animated South Asian philosophy, as well as Tibetan Buddhist thought. The contributions cover philosophers from the fourth to thirteenth centuries CE from Buddhist as well as Brahmanical (Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta) traditions. They address mental subjectivity and intentionality, the causation and phenomenology of mental events, as well as the metaphysics of action and the problem of solipsism. In doing so, the papers contribute to enlarging the canon of philosophy by drawing attention to the specific concerns and contexts that shaped philosophy in South Asia.

Organisation: John Taber (University of New Mexico, Emeritus) and Birgit Kellner (IKGA)



Bull or elephant? Sculpture from Airavatesvara temple, Darasuram
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Speakers:

Allison Aitken	Serena Saccone
Amit Chaturvedi	Akane Saito
Nilanjan Das	Marcus Schmücker
Elisa Freschi	John Taber
Pascale Hugon	Davey Tomlinson
Birgit Kellner	Alex Watson
Patrick McAllister	Jan Westerhoff

PSK, Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna, room 5 (4th floor)

Programme and abstracts: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/ikga/veranstaltungen/event-detail/direct-realism-representationalism-idealism-and-illusionism-in-south-asian-philosophy>

Registration: office.ikga@oeaw.ac.at (until October 2)