



GTU

POSTHUMANISM & THE POLITICS OF SENTIENCE Saturday, March 29 & Sunday, March 30, 2025

ABSTRACTS:

Thomas (Bharatdas) Abbott (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Indigenous Research Methodologies and a Land-based Approach to Epistemology

A post-Humanist epoch is needed to make room for Indigenous research methodologies, which are de facto de-validated by Humanism's ontology, epistemology, and teleology. Humanism believes objectivity can be obtained at a fundamental ontological level, and so research seeks to find the Truth, fueling human progress through discovery. Humanism possesses a deeply ingrained belief that the purpose of humanity is to progress—from the past to the future, from the false toward the True. This gives Humanistic research an oft-unspoken teleology: the progress of the human species. Meanwhile, Indigenous research methodologies take a land-based approach to epistemology, not a time-based one.

Indigenous ontology sees all beings in relationship, and its epistemology holds that truth is subjective due to this relationality. As a result, Indigenous research methodology tends to emphasize the process of discovering, maintaining and strengthening harmonious relationships. As such, this presentation will advocate for a post-humanist shift in academia to allow for the acceptance of more indigenous research methodologies.

Debashish Banerji (California Institute of Integral Studies)

Yoga and the Politics of Sentience

Yoga has had a number of meanings in the country of its origin as well as in its export to the West in modern times. These meanings relate to goals of becoming that have consciously or unconsciously supported a variety of social ontologies of world-making. Several of these goals of becoming have been individualistic, anthropocentric and/or subject to the neo-colonial designs of capital. The notion of the world or the non-human have remained underdeveloped in these. Posthumanism seeks to replace the exceptional and rationally privileged identity of the human that has been normalized in modernity by an identity of co-constitution with all its "others." This is mostly seen in ethical terms, but a moral ethics of rights and obligations puts us back in a rationally privileged identity of the human, which has not been able to sustain itself given the irrational elements in human constitution. At the same time, a strand of posthumanism sees human identity as open-ended and always transitional, capable of self-transformation.

A posthumanist yoga could hold out ethically sustainable goals of becoming in favor of actualizing the ideal of a cosmogenetic world-making in response to the crisis of our times.

Anirban Bhattacharjee (Santipur College, University of Kalyani)

Brahmadatta-Pujani Sambad in the Mahābhārata: The Avian Reason and the Virtues of Vengeance

Critical posthumanism challenges anthropocentric morality based on “human rights” displacing it in favor of the natural world as a bearer of rights, the rights of planetary sustainability. The Mahābhārata, as an epic centrally concerned with dharma, the law that “holds the world together” (yayedam dhāryate jagat, lokasaṁgraha), frequently interrupts its civilizational narrative to enlarge the scope of dharma to the non-human world. This paper, through a critical and close reading of the Brahmadatta-Pujani Sambad in the Śānti Parva of the Mahābhārata, attempts to look into the tortured insights of cynical reason when the bird Pujani, after an elaborate ratiocination, decides to take due vengeance upon the cruel and ungrateful behaviour of the little prince of Brahmadatta. The narrative takes an about-turn from an anthropocentric to a parallel tracking of animal life, underscoring the bird’s gaining of a kind of moral agency through speech. The paper particularly concentrates on the specific conditions or ābasthika dharma (situational ethics) that makes acts of vengeance (pratikṛtam) virtuous. Finally it tries to understand the avian ratiocination or the ‘birdly’ exegesis that moves into the experiential structures and the discourse of the unshareability of the intentional nature of pain (duhkham).

Purushottama Bilimoria (University of San Francisco)

Gandhi’s Letter to Posthumanism, after Heidegger’s Letter to Humanism

Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (1947), a response to Jean Beaufret's questions about humanism, is a key text where Heidegger explores the relationship between human existence, being, and the history of philosophy. He argues for engaging with the concepts of "Being" (Sein) and the world, arguing that humans are "Dasein" (being-in-the-world) and their meaning is derived from their relationship with the world, not the other way around. By decentering the human subjects as islands, and insisting on their interrelationship instead, Heidegger influenced Posthumanist thought in challenging human exceptionalism. M. K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, while he is considered to have leanings towards Posthumanism—as was his friend Rabindranath Tagore also—remained diffident and had certain misgivings about such conceptual approaches. This is so not because he is enamored of the Eurocentric Enlightenment’s Humanism, but because he would have posited that Posthumanism had not (yet) been hypothesized to countenance the colonial legacy across two-thirds of the world; neither had it experienced sufficiently the pain and struggles of the subaltern or actively engaged in decolonization of the subaltern; nor had it played a large part in the civil rights movements that emerged in many parts of the world. What

does Posthumanism understand about the questions of caste, gender, ethnicity, injustice and justice? Like Postmodernism, it has many promises; but in some ways, Gandhi would aver, their projects are a continuation in more fanciful ways and in the luxurious environs provided by Humanism and capitalism (read, corporate culture and media), of modernity and secularism. These are still beholden to technology that Heidegger shrewdly cautioned Asia against to its detrimental and dystopian trajectory, or in his words “the Europeanisation of the Earth”.

Cogen Bohanec (Arihanta Institute / Claremont School of Theology)

Sentience, Stewardship, and the Sacred: A Comparative Analysis of Dharmic Perspectives on Biophilia and Posthumanism

The intersection of Dharmic traditions and contemporary environmental humanities offers a rich field for exploring posthumanist ethics and the politics of sentience by examining the concept of biophilia through the lens of Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist philosophical traditions. With a focus on this pan-dharmic perspective, the paper will address the shared values and distinctive insights these traditions bring to understanding the interconnectedness of life, ethical stewardship, and environmental care. The paper outlines the significant tenets of biophilia and its relevance to environmental ethics. It then explores how Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain doctrines can inform a nuanced interpretation of this theory, highlighting principles such as *ahimsā* (non-violence), interconnectedness, and compassionate living, and how those principles relate to the mystical gnosis about the interconnectedness of life within traditional texts. By engaging with these teachings, the paper seeks to illuminate the philosophical and contemplative underpinnings that can contribute to a broader understanding of posthumanism, where human and non-human entities coexist in mutual respect and ethical consideration, and how such mutualism is a necessary requisite for spiritual development.

Through a tightly structured analysis, this paper demonstrates how dharmic perspectives can offer alternative approaches to addressing the ethical challenges posed by contemporary environmental issues and address the paradigmatic causes of ecocide in Western modernity. This paper reflects on how integrating philosophical insights from dharma traditions can reshape our understanding of posthumanism and influence future discourse in environmental humanities. This integration may also reconstruct and ameliorate existing patterns of human culture and behavior that drive individual and collective actions in modern times.

Amit Bose (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Posthumanism in Ecotheological and Ecofeminist Hindu Ritualistic Praxes of Bengal

“...Fascism arrives as your friend.
It will restore your honour,
Make you feel proud
Protect your house
Give you a job
Clean up the neighborhood,
Remind you how great you were,
Clear out the venal and the corrupt,
Remove anything you feel is unlike you...”
 (“Fascism: I sometimes fear...,” Michael Rosen, 2014).

As countries around the world are gradually shifting far-right in their policies, there is a growing tendency towards uniformity by removing or denying variegatedness which is the essence of the natural world. This global shift also encourages domination and exploitation. Hindu ritualistic praxes on the other hand, especially those practiced in Bengal, encourage environmental sustainability and establish a deep bond of mutual respect among all sentient and non-sentient beings as evident in the hymn of the *Mahā Upaniṣad* which describes the world as one big family.

Alysiana Carter (Graduate Theological Union)

Indigenous Psychedelic Ontologies and the Fall of Scientific Materialism

This paper explores the challenge various psychedelic informed indigenous ontologies pose to materialism by questioning the assumption that sensory perception offers a direct replication of reality. If even our most immediate experiences are subject to translation and interpretation, then the foundations of empiricism and scientific materialism begin to quake. The findings of quantum mechanics, particularly the double-slit experiment, further complicate the claim that observation is neutral — revealing that the observer plays a role in shaping what is observed. Despite these challenges, scientific discourse remains hesitant to engage with alternative ontologies, particularly those that gesture toward the noetic. Indigenous psychedelic traditions assert the reality of human connection to the living and sacred intelligence of plants, ancestors, lands, and spirits. These traditions expand “set and setting” beyond psychological and physical environments to include spiritual, ancestral, and ecological dimensions. If scientific materialism continues to dismiss these frameworks as symbolic rather than legitimate knowledge, it risks perpetuating epistemic bias. This paper argues that right relation with indigenous knowledge requires recognizing it as an equally valid method, rather than merely an object of study. To do otherwise risks incomplete knowledge at best, and outright racism at worst.

Somanjana Chatterjee (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Transcendence or Transmutation? Consciousness, AI, and the Future of Human Evolution

Perhaps for the first time in recorded history, humanity stands at a threshold where external technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), outpace inner spiritual evolution. This paper explores the intersection of posthumanism and the tension between sentience and machine learning by engaging with Sri Aurobindo's seminal works, particularly *The Future Evolution of Man*, *The Divine Life upon Earth*, which envisions an evolutionary framework for human consciousness beyond its current limitations. In comparison, in the recently released book, *Superagency: What Could Possibly Go Right with Our AI Future*, Reid Hoffman and Greg Beato propose a techno-optimist view on AI's role in aiding human potential. By juxtaposing these perspectives, this study interrogates the theological and philosophical stakes of posthumanism, questioning whether AI can be used as a tool for emancipation or a potential threat redefining human identity. Can AI catalyze a higher state of being, or does true transformation remain a spiritual pursuit beyond technological augmentation?

Wolf Gordon Clifton (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Do Hindus Still Need to Ask the "Animal Question?" An Ancient Discourse and its Renewed Urgency

Within Western thought traditions, the "animal question" – how humans should relate to non-human animals, and what moral obligations we owe them – was long neglected as a topic of serious ethical inquiry. From the end of classical antiquity until the 18th century, animal ethics attracted only sporadic attention from philosophers and theologians. The last two and a half centuries have seen the coalescence of the animal welfare, rights, and vegan movements, and the rise of animal studies, animal ethics, and animal theology as academic disciplines. In the Hindu world, however, the animal question has been treated as a matter of importance for millennia, especially concerning the ethics of killing animals for food and sacrifice. Discourse and debate have been driven partly by tension between the ethical principle of *ahimsā* ("harmlessness") and the apparent prescription of rituals involving animal killing in some sacred texts. Yet despite the richness of historical Hindu animal ethics, human-animal relations have changed in significant ways from ancient times to the Anthropocene. This paper will challenge contemporary Hindu thinkers to develop new answers to the animal question, grounded in tradition but responsive to present-day dilemmas regarding the moral and spiritual status of animals and their treatment by humans.

Mahjabeen Dhala (Center for Islamic Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Sentient Earth, Speaking Flesh: Qur'anic Testimony and the Posthuman Ethics of the Anthropocene

This paper explores the Qur’anic construction of sentience and testimony through narratives in which non-human beings—animals, elements, and bodily parts—bear moral witness. Focusing on Qur’anic narratives of Ṣāliḥ’s she-camel and Sulayman’s conversation with the ant-leader, alongside verses where time, earth, and human skin testify (Q 99:1–5, 41:20–21, 103:1–2), I argue that the Qur’an articulates a cosmology in which the more-than-human world is agentic, responsive, and ethically entangled with human action. Framing the Anthropocene as both a planetary condition and a theological moment of reckoning, I propose a Qur’anic politics of sentience that resists Enlightenment humanism and its anthropocentric logic. Drawing on Islamic feminist theology and posthumanism, this paper contributes a Qur’anic vision that centers relational accountability, interdependence, and divine justice. In doing so, it affirms the Qur’an as a vital textual resource for reimagining a planetary ethic of relational justice, humility, and interdependence.

Chantal Noa Forbes (California Institute of Integral Studies)

Becoming Earth: Prehumanistic Consciousness and Transspecies Sentience in the Practice of Tracking

This presentation examines the phenomena of interspecies transference or ontological assimilation of sentience experienced during the practice of cross-species tracking. Drawing from historical analysis of the science and art of tracking amongst hunter-gatherer communities in southern Africa, this presentation seeks to demonstrate that cross-species tracking facilitates an ontological process of transspecies ambiguity between humans and more-than-humans that underpins a prehumanistic consciousness critical to our continued posthumanistic existence as ecological species. The theoretical exploration of this work draws on both New Materialist and New Animist theory, using anthropologist Mathias Guenther’s animistic relational models of ontological fluidity amongst hunter-gather communities. Through these models, this presentation demonstrates that ontological fluidity performs the somatic intuitive function of assimilating one’s multidimensional environment, engaging different physical, emotional, and mythological aspects of the body and consciousness. This presentation concludes that the transspecies sentience experienced during tracking informs a metaphysics of Becoming Earth, where a posthumanist future depends on a prehumanist understanding of interspecies consciousness.

Sara Granovetter (California Institute of Integral Studies)

From Training the Puppy to Becoming Nature: Awakening as Posthuman Realization in the Ten Oxherding Pictures

Buddhist teachers often describe meditation practice as “training the puppy,” a form of anthropocentric guidance that suggests meditation is a process of exerting control over the body-mind as untamed animal.

Traditional interpretations of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, an ancient image series that visualizes the Buddhist training path to enlightenment, echo this anthropocentric bias. In traditional understandings, the steps of awakening are interpreted as the taming, training, and transcending of the ox, a symbol for Buddha-nature. In this paper, a critical deconstruction of the oxherding series offers an alternative interpretation, problematizing narratives that parallel dominion over sentient nature and Buddhist realization. From the perspective of the more-than-human world, series images that depict the subduing of the ox represent forms of delusion, not of spiritual discipline. Consequently, spiritual maturity is achieved only through the relinquishment of control over the ox and the willingness to be taught and awakened by the sentient more-than human world, rather than seeking to subsume wild others into a humanistic frame. Final analysis of the oxherding image series suggests that realization requires posthuman becoming, and involves seeing through the eyes of nature to awaken to the more-than-human ground of the human self. Through this alternative analysis of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, the images map not only the stages of individual realization but chart a course for the collective awakening required to address the immense damage wrought by the humanistic agenda.

Md. Monirul Islam (Presidency University, Kolkata)

The Human-Animal Divide and the Akhetik Khanda (Hunter Section) of Chandimangal: A Narrative of Contestation

The present paper aims to consider Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakravarti's Chandimangal, a sixteenth century Bangla narrative poem, with an objective to explore the representation of non-human animals in the narrative. Chandimangal is a mangal kavya, a poetic genre that flourished in Bengal roughly between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. Thematically, the mangal kavyas narrate stories of folk deities establishing their cult among humans. Written in the latter half of the sixteenth century, Chandimangal concerns the goddess Chandi and keeping with the Bengali folk tradition, she is presented as a forest goddess protecting both her human and non-human devotees. Although structurally it is divided into four parts, Chandimangal has two major narratives: the tale of Kalketu and Phullara, told in the Akhetik Khanda (Hunter Section) and the story of Dhanapati and his two wives, related in the Banik Khanda (Merchant Section). This paper primarily concerns the Akhetik Khanda where we encounter animals as social beings who suffer, form a collective, go on a war against their human oppressor (Kalketu), and complain to the goddess Chandi when their resistance fails. Taking into account the place of non-human animals in Indian thought, the presenter aims to analyse how the narrative underscores a fluidity of movement (/being) among the non-human animal, human and divine and how it contests the humanist/modernist configurations of the human-animal dichotomy.

Sara Ivanhoe (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

The Future of Yoga, Sleep, and the Post-Human Body

Yoga's telos has always been about self-transformation behind the normative human. Such a transformation is only possible through a healed body and mind. Sleep is one of the foundational autonomous systems that all humans share and is a phenomenon that all major texts related to Yoga mention--sometimes extensively. The "healing" of "sleep" is the basis for a transformed human consciousness. This paper will address the "yoga of sleep" as a foundational cornerstone to transformation.

Ahmed M. Khater (Center for Islamic Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

God's Attributes Between Materialism and Idealism

I will examine the question of whether God can be described using attributes and perceived through sensory experience, as well as the polemical debates that have arisen among various Islamic sects on this matter. Additionally, I will explore the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on this discourse and address the differing views of theologians, scientists, and philosophers concerning the nature of time and space.

Athena Lalitā (Lien Chun Lin) (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

The Views of Sentient Beings in Ecological Interconnectedness and Healing: Bodhisattva's Prajñāpāramitā Insights and Transformative Embodiment

This study explores the transformative insights of Prajñāpāramitā and divine wisdom, emphasizing the Bodhisattva's esoteric embodiment as a living connection that bridges spiritual engagement and ecological healing. Rooted in Prajñāpāramitā's view of sentient beings as inherently interconnected, the Bodhisattva path serves as a catalyst for spiritual transformation, extending beyond individual healing to broader ecological balance.

As a warrior of wisdom, the Bodhisattva does not merely dissolve into emptiness (śūnyatā) and reside in their mystical abode but engages in balancing sentient and non-sentient realms while embracing cosmic responsibility. Swedenborg's Divine Wisdom echoes this dynamic, not as an abstract ideal but as a protective force responding to the Earth and all beings.

This inquiry challenges anthropocentric worldviews, critiquing human-centered bias that positions humans as rulers over nature, fostering balance, reciprocity, and interdependence, emphasizing that enlightenment is inseparable from all sentient life. The Bodhisattva's vow, along with post-humanist critiques, also challenges biomedical individualism, advocating for holistic ecological healing beyond

śīla, ethics, and technological fixes, opening a dialogue where human, divine, and non-human beings co-participate in sustaining the sacred balance of existence.

Braden Molhoek (Center for Theology and Natural Science, Graduate Theological Union)

Human Nature, Anthropocentrism, and Evolution: Changing Human Nature and New Forms of Humanity

In this paper I explore ways of thinking about what it means to be human. Transhumanism seeks to improve human nature or even move beyond what it currently means to be human. I argue that this is ultimately an anthropocentric understanding of what it means to be human. Examining public perceptions of several forms of human enhancement, the kinds of things transhumanists wish to pursue, it appears that people who identify as highly religious are more concerned about technology changing what it means to be human than those who are not religious. Using examples of the Roman Catholic Church and Islam, I argue that the apprehension about changing human nature and being opposed to creating new forms of humanity are also anthropocentric and based on a view of humans as being distinct from the rest of creation. Ultimately, theology needs to rethink humanity's place in creation. In the final section, I begin this work by trying to identify when human nature would change enough for a new form of humanity to exist as well as challenge theology to think about the implications of human extinction.

Christopher Ocker (Graduate Theological Union)

Reassessing the History of Mind-Body Dualism

Nobody seems to like mind-body dualism, but have the critics succeeded in overcoming it? The mind-body gap is often described as a product of the European Enlightenment. To bridge the gap, some humanists and many theologians allege that everything is hermeneutical: science, a theologian or a “cultural critic” or a “social constructivist” will sometimes carelessly say, is no less an exercise in interpretation than interpreting the bible, the Gita, or a work of poetry or visual art. I have problems with both the way treatments of mind-body dualism restrict Europe's intellectual legacies in a way that over-emphasizes the difference between Europe or “the West” and other more traditional, less or non-“Europeanized” societies. And I have problems with hermeneutics as a solution to mind-body dualism. I will outline my objections and suggest that the answer to mind-body dualism is a rigorous, broad materialism.

María Paula del Portillo-Cure (Universidad de los Andes)

From Therolinguistics to Theropolitics: Vinciane Despret's Philosophical Ethology as Political Agencement

The Belgian philosopher claims to be impelled by a pressing obligation: “to always attempt, by all means possible, not only not to erase the presence of the animal, but above all to avoid relegating the animal to the status of a passive object. This is a moral, political, and epistemological obligation” that stands in opposition to the philosophical violence exerted towards the animal in the French tradition. Building on this statement, a question arises concerning the political status of Despret’s practice; namely, what is the role of philosophical ethology in animal politics? This paper argues that, on the one hand, extrapolating philosophical ethology to the realm of politics enables the reconfiguration of the latter as a zone of interspecies exchange. On the other hand, Despret’s therolinguistics stimulates political engagements with nonhuman animals —as foreshadowed by Brett Buchanan: “more specifically, the fable speaks to the ability to adapt creatively to the inheritance one receives” (Buchanan, 2015, p. 20). Both speculative practices constitute more-than-human political agencements which, in turn, lead to the invention of new relationships to animals as “companion-agents”.

Pravina Rodrigues (Starr King School for the Ministry / *Journal of Dharma Studies*)

From Power-Over to Power-With: A Theology of Sentience from the World of Śakti

This presentation counters humanist master narratives that are based on dualist and hierarchical understandings of the World that create oppressive categories of gender, race, species, class, etc. by placing them in opposition with one another. Drawing on ecowomanist methodologies, this presentation critically examines the interconnected relationship of identity between the Goddess, Earth, humans and non-human and presents them as not symbolic or representational, but substantive and real. This indigenous non-dual epistemology stands in contrast to dominant dualistic epistemologies that tend to contain fragmented perspectives of reality in which each entity stands over, sometimes alone, and in opposition to one another. Embedded in the theology of *Śakti*, in its cosmology, and the feminine principle is an Earth-honoring ethic that can be used in the face of environmental degradation and Earth justice. An intimate connection with *Śakti* understands this power as an essence that benefits all entities, is not egocentric, forceful, or controlling rather is harmonious. In this understanding, the flow of *śakti* runs through the entire cosmos granting sentience to each entity, humans and non-humans alike and is not power-over but power-with or “shared-power” as Raj Balkaran notes (2025). Its not power to be abused but power that engenders planetary flourishing. In this cosmology, the weak or strong, the mighty, medium, short, or small, are all made of the same materiality of sentience that is *Śakti*.

Rita D. Sherma (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

New Materialism and the Politics of Sentience

New materialism is a contemporary philosophical approach that challenges traditional views of matter as inert, positing instead that it is agentic, dynamic, self-organizing; arising and transforming in interdependent states of mutual causality. This position also points to the potential social and political implications, including the "politics of sentience" which explores how non-human entities and material experiences influence our understanding of the world. New materialism, which emphasizes the foundational agency of matter, overlaps with ecofeminism's critique of patriarchal structures and the exploitation of nature, offering a framework for understanding interconnected oppressions and promoting a more ethical relationship with the environment. New materialism also aligns with posthumanist perspectives, which question the anthropocentric view of the world and explore the interrelationship of humans with the greater-than-human world. This presentation will point to these interconnections of New Material and conclude with a exploration of the alignment of New Materialism perspectives with the ontological framework of one of the major branches of Hindu theology—the radically immanent ontology of Śākta philosophical theology.

Zipei Tang (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Evolutionary Definitions of Human and Integral Solution to Humanistic Impulse

This presentation briefly introduces the definitions of human in Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary metaphysical framework and takes a deeper look at the humanistic tendencies with regard to humanity's rational mentality and its life impulses. It then suggests a paradoxical solution to the human crisis, namely, it is by an integral fulfillment of the humanistic urges that humanistic momentums can be transcended and transformed. The presentation will also point to the potential emergence of a higher conscious principle embodied by a new human species which Sri Aurobindo calls the "Superman".

Kali Meera Tanikella (Center for Dharma Studies, Graduate Theological Union)

Divinity, Sentience, and the More-than-Human: Rethinking Consciousness Hierarchies through Viśiṣṭādvaita

Understanding the relationship between humans and non-humans has been a long and arduous pursuit, which began with the colonial aspiration of objectifying and consuming all non-human entities and believing them to be subservient to the dalliances of humanity. However, global climate change and the mass extinction events have demonstrated the fault in this human-centric view of the world, leading to the understanding that we are but one domino in the chain reaction set off by the modern industrial age. Posthumanism seeks to decentralize this narrative and expand the contemporary worldview to include these oppressed beings. This harmonizing and balancing is most evident in the Viśiṣṭādvaita school, a critical ontological view from within the Dharmic philosophies. It presents us with the view that while consciousness permeates all, it is further differentially concentrated in the human and the non-human,

thus serving the dual purpose of valuing the non-human without devaluing or excluding the human. This dialectical view is the need of the day, creating a framework that seeks to harmonize the pluralistic ways of beings within the earthly realm.