

Inculcating Ontological Competence: Seeing the World/Cosmos through Multiple Ontological Lenses

A Brief Concept Note

**14-15 January 2016
New Delhi, India**

Both the senior and junior scholar workshops sponsored through the World International Studies Committee (WISC) and the Institute for Research on India and International Studies (IRIIS) are exploratory with the aim of “thinking IR differently.” The task, it is proposed, is to find ways to consider and appreciate other ways of knowing and wisdom and the various realities generated through these forms of knowing, which historically have been discredited through the lens of Western-style academia. Once we are able to acknowledge these distinct ways of knowing, the next steps entail becoming familiar with them and learning how to operate between the different logics associated with them. Doing this effectively however requires being able to recognize the ontological assumptions that inform these other ways of knowing in contrast to one’s own assumptions and a basic grasp of how one’s own ontological assumptions have given shape to one’s particular conceptualizations of knowledge/knowing. Since international relations as a field of study specializes in examining how the peoples of the world interact, honing these capabilities among IR scholars is critical for comprehensively contemplating the complexities, richness and frictions generated through the interactions among people and other living beings who engage and co-create their existences in distinct fashions.

This workshop offers both junior and senior scholars of International Relations the opportunity to take a step back from a specific focus on IR to engage with ontology directly. To garner ontological competence, we will start by generating awareness of (1) one’s own embraced ontological lens and the assumptions that accompany it, (2) the existence of other possible lenses, and (3) the ability to move between lenses. Then we will focus on how the accompanying assumptions of these lenses afford some possibilities and not others both conceptually and materially. These basic tools will then allow us to explore the implications of each set of assumptions for how we understand knowledge/knowing and its purpose.

Participants for this workshop ideally:

- want to see/understand the boundaries/conceptual limitations of Western-style academic approaches to knowledge-making;
- have an openness or desire to engage with existence differently and see what these new approaches mean for how we conceptualize and interact in existence;
- are generally familiar with methodological debates whether that be in the social or natural sciences;

- have encountered contradictions or seemingly irreconcilable differences between methodological mandates and what one what one has studied; and/or
- simply want to know why ontology is an emergent focus within academic literature today.¹

¹ This workshop will not teach about object-oriented ontology or review the ontological turn within anthropology or science and technology studies. However, it will give you the tools to be able to discern the subtleties in the arguments made in these literatures.