Is there a future? Some answers from Indian philosophical and narrative literature

Phyllis Granoff, Yale University

This paper proposes that the understanding of time is one area in which the narrative literature of all three of India’s classical religions, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, reflects closely the concerns of philosophers. The Buddhist and Hindu philosophers explored here argued for the impossibility of something called Time, because past, future, and present are relative concepts and in the end cannot be distinguished from each other. Jains disagreed, but added something else to the debates: the distinction between proximate and remote past. The paper argues that underlying the treatment of time in the life stories of the Buddhas, Jinas, and Rama in the Ramayana, are views of time that correspond closely with what we find in the philosophy texts.