



Beyond Free Will: Variety in Understanding of Choice, Luck, and Necessity

20–23 June 2022

ABSTRACTS



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free will; determinism; fate; fortune; luck; choice; chance; karma; predestination; divine foreknowledge; supernatural agency; divination; astrology; prediction; luck rituals; teleology

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Introduction

Contemporary Western discourse on freedom and choice – some of the most championed modern values – is usually anchored in the concept cluster of free will and autonomous choice. In turn, academic research on free will in philosophy (including experimental philosophy) and psychology is largely based on a limited conceptual framework with roots in particular debates in Christianity and European philosophy. This framework is currently challenged by multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches applied in the fields of area and Asian studies, comparative philosophy, and also empirical research in cross-cultural psychology, and anthropology. One reason for this challenge is that the dominant Western academic approach, with its almost exclusive focus on concepts of free will and causal determinism, neglects the multitude of non-Western cultural traditions. In most parts of the world, these traditions continue to shape everyday practices and conceptualizations of free action, choice, and decision. Traditions also provide various strategies for navigating the constraints on human agency.

In the present multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary conference, we invited scholars from philosophy, psychology, anthropology, Asian studies, religious studies and other related fields to discuss theoretical alternatives to the dominant framework that are sensitive to cultural differences and local contexts as well as empirical research – especially cross-cultural and cross-linguistic – on conceptualizations of free and constrained action and cultural practices in dealing with these constraints.

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Keynotes

Cova, Florian

University of Geneva

Florian Cova is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University of Geneva Philosophy Department and Swiss Center for Affective Sciences. He works at the intersection of philosophy and psychology and has investigated how non-experts think about various philosophical issues: intentional action, morality, free will, aesthetics, and the good life. He coordinated the Xphi Replicability Project, an international collaboration aiming at assessing the replicability of experimental philosophy. He is currently in charge of a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation on the role of emotions in the experience of meaning of life. He has co-edited “Advances in Experimental Philosophy of Aesthetics” (Bloomsbury, 2018) and is the author of various papers, such as: “Moral responsibility and free will: A meta-analysis” (in *Consciousness and Cognition*), “Being Moved” (in *Philosophical Studies*), “De Pulchritudine non est Disputandum? A cross-cultural investigation of the alleged intersubjective validity of aesthetic judgment” (in *Mind & Language*). For more information about the speaker, click [here](#).

Can Belief in Free Will Be a Biological Adaptation?

Is belief in free will universal? One reason to think that it is lies in the claim that belief in free will might be a biological adaptation, common to all human beings. Such an adaptationist view of free will has been championed by several researchers, most of them psychologists. However, such claims are often riddled with conceptual issues and confusion. Take for example the claim that belief in free will evolved because it allowed us to treat wrongdoers as morally responsible for their actions. At first sight, this might seem like a plausible explanation. However, this explanation presupposes the existence of a universal, biologically ingrained belief that something like free will is required for moral responsibility. And why would we have evolved such a belief? Wouldn't it have been simpler for evolution to simply endow us with the belief that wrongdoers are morally responsible for their actions?

This argument is only one example of the examples I plan to develop in this talk to show the difficulties faced by the claim that belief in free will is biological adaptation. I will proceed by distinguishing two versions of this claim: that we evolved a belief in libertarian free will, or that we evolved a belief in compatibilist free will. I will first argue that belief in libertarian free will cannot bring us any distinguishable advantage, and that all purported benefits of belief in free will could be produced by a belief in compatibilist free will. Then, I will argue that the idea that belief in compatibilist free will is at best trivial, and that it ultimately reduces to the claim that theory-of-mind is an adaptation. I will however discuss the possibility that the concept of free will might have some adaptationist bases.

Empson, Rebecca

University College London

Rebecca Empson is Professor of Anthropology at University College London (UCL). Her work focuses on the intersection of forms of ownership, kinship, and material culture. She is the author of “Life in the Gap: Subjective Lives and Economic Transformations in Mongolia” (UCL Press, 2020) and “Harnessing Fortune: Personhood, Memory and Place in Mongolia” (Oxford University Press, 2011). She is also the editor of “Visions of the Future: Time, Causality and Prophecy in the Mongolian Cultural Region” (Global Oriental, 2006). She has recently completed a large ERC-funded project that explored economic subjectivities and forms of financialization in Mongolia. She is currently developing a project on Baltic democracies, building on previous sea-based research in Southern England. For more information about the speaker, click [here](#).

Freedom in Constraint: The (Geo)Politics of Peoples and Nations

Mongolia is a democratic country located between two great superpowers – Russia and China. It is ‘free’, in that in choosing not to align itself with either neighbour exclusively it can pursue a somewhat different track. However, this freedom is not simply by choice, luck, or necessity. It is a mixture of all and more than that. It is the kind of freedom that exists within a certain constraint that seems to repeat itself historically.

In this talk I explore this idea of ‘freedom in constraint’, both geopolitically and subjectively. In doing so I examine the Mongolian concept of rebirth as a way of caring for the fate and fortune of deceased relatives. When rebirth is not achieved (especially when people die at war), the souls of the deceased become wandering spirits that haunt their relatives and bring misfortune. When they are reborn as a new person they come to determine and prescribe the future for them.

Secondly, I reflect on the way Mongolia’s geopolitical squeeze between its two neighbours allows for a certain freedom, while also always forcing them to remain the same, navigating competing claims about freedom and truth. These parallel geopolitical and subjective positions will be explored in relation to historical and current forms of state violence and suppression where questions of freedom, choice and necessity come to the fore. Both examples point to the necessity of exercising freedom in constraint, bringing the past into the present in order to prefigure new paths for the future.

Repetti, Rick

City University of New York

Rick Repetti is Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York (CUNY), Kingsborough Community College. Member of the Board of Directors of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association (APPA). APPA-Certified Philosophical Counselor, Certified Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Practitioner, Certified Mindfulness Practitioner, Trained in Gestalt Psychotherapy. Multiple-decades Meditation and Yoga practitioner and instructor. His research is primarily on meditation and free will, and how meditation increases our agency while transforming our sense of self. He is the author of “Buddhism, Meditation, and Free Will: A Buddhist Theory of Mental Freedom” (Routledge, 2019) and of “The Counterfactual Theory of Free Will: A Genuinely Deterministic Theory of Soft Determinism” (Lambert, 2010). He is also the editor of “The Routledge Handbook on the Philosophy of Meditation” (Routledge, 2022) and “Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will: Agentless Agency?” (Routledge, 2017). His greatest joys revolve around ‘philosophy to the people’: practices that bring the tools of philosophical practice to the general public, such as philosophical counseling, philosophical fellowship, philosophy cafés and podcasts, philosophical tabling events (‘Ask a Philosopher’ booths in public spaces), leading public meditations, etc. He is co-founder and Chief Philosophy Officer (CPO) of a tech start-up company developing a decentralized validated knowledge repository on the blockchain, intended to provide an alternative to Big Tech’s centralized information networks, biased journalism, and other forms of misinformation: Knowledgecoin.io. For more information about the speaker, click [here](#).

Freedom of the Mind: A Buddhist Argument for Soft Compatibilism

The first order of business in a philosophical inquiry is, according to Bertrand Russell, to define one’s terms. What do we mean by ‘free will’? Once we clarify what’s meant by ‘free will’, the question becomes: Do we have any? I identify three basic positions on this: free will ‘optimism’, ‘pessimism’, and ‘agnosticism’: we have free will, we don’t, or we’re uncertain. There are dozens of variations on these, but this simplification suffices for present purposes. Once a position on free will is taken, the next question is: What arguments are there, for and against this position? Accordingly, first I identify different conceptions of free will within Western philosophy. Second, I present the major arguments against these conceptions within Western philosophy, science, and Buddhism, united in a comprehensive free will pessimism reflected in the argument for ‘hard incompatibilism’, the view that free will is incompatible with both determinism and indeterminism. Third, I propose a contrary comprehensive argument for free will optimism I call “Buddhist soft compatibilism”, the Buddhism-inspired view that free will is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism – an argument made intuitive by reference to Buddhist claims, but which is logically independent of Buddhism. Most free will arguments are primarily about compatibility, a logical matter: is free will logically consistent with causation, science, indeterminism? Mere logical consistency is only half the battle, however: Are our conclusions true? Thus, finally, I close with some extra-logical reasons to think my conclusion is true, and some unusual reasons to remain somewhat agnostic.

Wang, Robin R.

Loyola Marymount University

Robin R. Wang is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, USA. In addition, she is 2016-17 Berggruen Fellow at Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science, Stanford University. Dr. Wang is the author of “Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture” (Cambridge University Press, 2012), the editor of “Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization” (SUNY Press, 2004) and “Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period to the Song Dynasty” (Hackett, 2003). She has published many articles and essays and has regularly given presentations in North America, Europe, and Asia. She has also been a consultant for the media, law firms, museums, K-12 educators, and health care professionals, and was a credited Cultural Consultant for the movie Karate Kid, 2010. For more information about the speaker, click [here](#).

The Gift of Heaven and The Perplexity of Human Mind: The Daoist Transformation of Ming 命 (Destiny, Fate, Allot)

Our world is full of complexity and paradox. Classical Daoist text Zhuangzi (350 BCE) suggests that we should understand two constraints in life: (a) ming 命 (Destiny, fate, allot or unavoidable human conditions), such as the parents we have (despite what they are), and (b) yi 義 (responsibility, doing what fits one’s position), such as being a student or employee. Our ming, seeing as a gift of Heaven, is endowed with life itself and instantiates a recognition of a wider range of limitations in human living. These limitations are imposed by one’s physical capacities, temperament, emotional range, talents, society, culture, and political circumstances. To be wise is to be attentive to these limitations in the construction of one’s thought and action, as it would be foolish to be wilfully blind to them. Through ming we apprehend ourselves as an individual agent living in the conditions of our linguistic frameworks, ways of knowing and habits of doing. However, recognizing these situations does not necessitate surrendering who and what one is to over-determination by some external principle or standard rather making a choice of directing vital force and returning to the root of life. This is called “choosing ming,” or “destiny as subject to the exercise of human choice and free will.” This talk will offer some concrete Daoist theory and practice to illustrate our ming can be “understanding” (zhi 知) “conforming to” (shun 順), “grasping hold of” (“attaining” da 達), and “returning to” (fu 復). Altering and extending the ming decreed by Heaven make life meaningful, flourish and joyful!

Abstracts

Asma, Lieke

Munich School of Philosophy

Free Will, First-Person Authority, and Cultural Perspectives

Free will and action are deeply connected. If we have free will, it must have something to do with the fact that we can act for reasons. One aspect of acting for reasons and, by extension, free will has often been overlooked – especially in the scientific study of free will (e.g., Libet, 1985; Wegner, 2002) –, which is that many philosophers of action take it that acting agents have non-observational first-personal knowledge of their actions and the reasons for which they act (Anscombe 1963; Davidson 1963). When it comes to our actions, we have information observers do not have.

In this paper I have two aims. Firstly, I will explain our first-person authority of action in more detail and defend it against counterexamples. Secondly, I will examine the implications of this insight for different (cultural) perspectives on free will. If we know acting for reasons ‘from within’, it suggests that our ideas about free will depend on our personal experience of acting for reasons; the extent to which we have (had) the ability and possibility to act for reasons, for example. Another question I want to address is whether and to what extent our first-personal knowledge is influenced by the cultural tradition(s) we grew up in, i.e., which possibilities for action we have learned and what counts as a reason for action.

Beinorius, Audrius

Vilnius University

Negotiating Fate: On Divination, Agency and Indian Astrologers

An anthropology of destiny is, at its heart, the comparative study of diverse temporal orderings of human – as well as divine and cosmic – action (Elliot & Menin, 2018). Still there is a prevailing perception that the commitment of Indians to the so-called “law of karma” involves them in some sort of fatalism – an attitude of resignation in the face of some inevitable future event (Solomon, 2003). But is the causal account inherent in the functioning of the karma principle deterministic in nature or truly entails fatalism? The relevant concept of “negotiable fate” (Chaturvedi et al., 2009) refers to the belief that individuals can negotiate with fate for control, and they do this by exercising personal agency within the limits that fate or particular causal chain has determined.

Anthropological perspectives often overlook critical aspects of astrological advisory sessions, especially those aspects which deal with the person’s increasing awareness of their experiential situation and promoting the proactive psychological attitude. My presentation is based on the recent fieldwork done among the professional astrologers (jyotishis) of Kolkata. What brings Indian clients to astrologer: to find out what to expect in the future, or to learn how to behave presently? Which approach is emphasized in the consultation – fatalistic, deterministic or proactive, based on “personal choice”? What role does the religious worldview of clients play in counselling therapy and what particular religious remedies are prescribed? I argue, that astrological counselling constructs a new narrative of life and dealing with “negotiable fate” affirms the active and pragmatic coping with obstacles and reintegration of the individuals within the society and cosmos. It is by recognising the fixed and determined part of their destiny, that people can appreciate their responsibility in managing strategically the part that is up to them, often by resorting to specific cultural practices and selected experts.

Berniūnas, Renatas

Vilnius University

Bound to Share or Not to Care? The Force of Fate, Chance, Luck, God and Free Choice

How people across different cultures conceptualize different life determining forces? Broadly construed, there might be various external forces determining one's life trajectories and internal forces initiating those life trajectories. The latter might refer to free will and choice, as two most championed Western values. The former might refer to such notions as fate and god, two teleological forces determining people's life in some specific purposeful way; and to such notions as luck and chance, two non-teleological forces, playing out randomly, without a prescribed purpose. Further question could be, how these different life determining forces are related to prosocial behaviour? Are there any social effects of believing in fate, god, and luck, chance (external forces), on one hand, and free will or personal choice (internal forces), on the other hand? In this talk I will present and discuss preliminary cross-cultural data from two Western (American and Lithuanian) and three Asian (India, China, and Mongolia) cultures. The study was designed to address both questions. In response to the first question, we found that personal choice is an important life determining factor. But, more importantly, in response to the second question, personal choice had no effect on prosocial tendencies. However, there was a clear pattern in respect to teleological and non-teleological external life determining forces. Belief in teleological forces, overall, increases prosocial tendencies, while belief in non-teleological forces decreases prosociality.

Brusadelli, Federico

Università di Napoli L'Orientale; Polish Institute of Advanced Studies

Han Fei and Thomas Hobbes: A Trans-Chronic Dialogue on Free Will, Power and Politics

Legalism is traditionally mentioned as one of the main philosophical currents that thrived in the formative phase of the Chinese Empire (5th to 3rd centuries BCE), as the ominous question of how to rebuild a political order was addressed by the most gifted intellectuals of the time. The Legalist thinkers (Shang Yang, Shen Dao, Shen Buhai and most importantly Han Fei with his eponymous masterpiece) responded by envisioning an absolute and “amoral” State, exerting a total control over its subjects thanks to a set of secret and standardized administrative techniques, which would at the same time pulverize society and shrink any space of “individual choice” (even for the ruler himself) in the name of objectivity (Galvany, 2013; Vogelsang, 2016; Pines, 2017).

These views have been often compared to elaborations on State, authority and power produced by modern European thinkers, such as Hobbes and Machiavelli, especially with regard to their “realism” (a view of politics as separated from morality, religion or cosmology) and “absolutism” (a State provided with undisputed power over its subjects).

On this background, and in the wider framework of a comparison between the political and intellectual ferment of pre-imperial China and pre-modern Europe, my paper will compare Han Fei and Hobbes in their conceptualization of the “decision making” process, both at an individual and collective level. More specifically, I will try to put in dialogue the two philosophers’ approaches to the problem of “free-will” and of its role (if any) within a State conceived as an objective and “efficient” mechanism. Finally, through another trans-chronic link, their reflections will be observed from the viewpoint of the most recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (and in its use as a tool for government and social control).

Carleo, Robert A. III

East China Normal University

Intersubjective Autonomy in Medical Decision Making

Can we allow other people to choose for patients without violating patient autonomy? Standard contemporary medical ethics, founded in the priority of individual patient autonomy, allows this only within the parameters of “substitute decision making,” where authority to consent to treatment is shifted from one individual (the patient) to another (the designated proxy). This standard approach, however, has certain conceptual and practical limits, which theorists from cultures with conflicting values—mainly Mediterranean and East Asian—sometimes point out. This paper believes such critics are onto something and seeks to refine their alternative ways of valuing autonomy. After first outlining some challenges to the conventional approach to autonomy, it considers two cases that illustrate when and how a (non-substitutive) family member choosing for the patient may in fact respect and realize patient autonomy. It reviews familist models for understanding these cases, including Akira Akabayashi’s family-facilitation and Ruiping Fan’s family-determinism, which rely on intersubjective identity: expanding the “self” that is the agent of self-determination to include spouses, parents, and other close relations. I then attempt to refine their approach, proposing a revised relational view that highlights subjects’ interdependent agency. This inverts the relation between selfhood and autonomous choice so that we may identify parental and spousal decision making as facilitating autonomous choice in concert with the patient rather than as the mere proxy exercise of authority. Where Akabayashi’s and Fan’s models insist that family can co-constitute the self who chooses, this model sees them instead as co-constituents in the agency that chooses a path for the life of the patient. This makes better sense of the authority that parents and spouses can share with patients in decision making than previous relational models.

Charenkova, Jūratė

Vilnius University

Cultural, Social and Individual Facets of ‘Choice’ in the Context of Informal Care Decision-Making

Freedom and choice are some of the most championed values in modern society. However, the choice of adult children to care for their ageing parents by themselves or to use formal care services is not easy, considering how strong and deeply rooted normative intergenerational solidarity is in Lithuania (Žalimienė et al., 2019), as well as in other countries with a strong family care tradition. Scarce Lithuanian studies on motives for informal care (i.e., Užaitė & Naujanienė, 2006; Gevorgianienė & Pilkytė, 2016; Junevičienė, 2018) reveal that sense of filial duty to care for ageing parents strongly dominates caregivers’ narratives. However, these studies do not consider the complexity of informal care choices and the effect of the cultural and social context of the country on those choices.

Thus, the aim of the research was to compare three countries with a unique history of social services development, social and cultural context, and different (in)formal care traditions: Lithuania, whose social services system is only 30 years old and where the informal care dominates (Žalimienė et al., 2019), Finland being a leading country in Europe in terms of home help services provision and mainly focused on the formal care services (Kroeger, 2003), and Italy, where, as in Lithuania, most older people are cared for by families, even at lower levels of autonomy (Triantafillou et al., 2010).

During the presentation, preliminary findings detailing the context of (in)formal care choices will be discussed. The analysis will cover not only the individual level but also the broader cultural and social context of the countries revealing how nuanced, and culturally and socially embedded the “free choice” of caring for one’s ageing parents may be.

Chastain, Drew

Loyola University

Divination, Free Will, & Spirituality

The practice of divination is common to the spirituality of indigenous peoples, also showing up in pagan practices and in the earliest roots of Daoism in the I Ching, these days being revitalized in New Age popularization of cartomancy, runes, etc. Even many who do not pursue divination per se appreciate the appearance of signs in their day-to-day lives, which indicates a key sensibility that orients a practitioner toward divination – appreciation that a given event can have a sort of interactive telic significance for the one experiencing the event, seeming to be responsive to the witness personally while bearing a message. Though the practice of divination could potentially also be used as a form of sympathetic magic seeking effects on the world, I take the sign-bearing capacity of divination to be the core spiritual significance of the practice.

In previous work, I've developed an approach intended to illuminate the significance of all spiritual phenomena based upon a non-religious understanding of positive spiritual experience consisting in awe, vitality, connection, mystery, etc. Out of spiritual experience can come a spiritual normativity that reduces excessive concerns of the ego, such as concern for rational control, allowing for more intuitive forms of perception and a willingness to follow the influences of others who are worth trusting. Divination counts as a spiritual practice, not because anything supernatural is going on (even if there is), but because it brings us into the mysterious interactive moment of sign sensitivity that helps us to feel much more deeply connected to reality while opening us up to receptive, intuitive modes of self-understanding. This is not free will in the sense of asserting intention with full mastery, yet sign sensitivity can help us to cultivate attunement to an everchanging will so that it may be more freely acknowledged.

Cotton, Tori Helen

University of Arkansas

Aristotle's Luck

This paper addresses an apparent puzzle within Aristotle's *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, with respect to the causal status of luck, and the attainment of eudaimonia, or a life of reasoned Virtue. In order to accomplish this, it first explores the difference between luck, chance, and fortune within Aristotle's *Physics*, and then moves to consider luck in the broader context of virtue ethics. In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle indicates that acting or living well, requires particularized knowledge. However, if a man were to be consistently lucky, he might be cut off from understanding the natural consequences of his actions, and therefore, would lack the sort of particularized knowledge required for eudaimonia. Overall, it seeks to explore the relationship between luck, as an event which escapes reason, and happiness, and to ask if people characterized by consistent luck might become unhappy. It concludes that the lucky man would ultimately be deprived of necessary experience regarding the results of their actions, and therefore be deprived of the happy life consisting of reasoned Virtue.

D'Ambrosio, Paul J.

East China Normal University

A Reflection on Free Will and Contingency (with Reference to Confucianism)

Early Confucian texts are contingency-based, and yet morality and agency are still somehow possible. This paper explains how morality and agency can be possible in a completely contingent system. Instead of positing a pregiven principle, self, will, or even capacity for agency, Confucian texts assume morality and agency emerge out of contingencies. As such, morality and agency are categorically distinct from contingencies, and are thereby able to reflect on them, without being ultimately sourced from any power outside of contingencies. Thus, the Confucian Contingency Model provides us with an understanding of the self as a 'situatedly reflective person.'

Dranseika, Vilius

Vilnius University

Threats to Free Will. Ordinary Concerns vs Philosophical Theories

Current empirical research on the ordinary concept of free will predominantly looks at ascriptions (and denials) of free will in contexts that are very far from ordinary. For instance, study participants are asked to imagine completely deterministic universes with causal chains leading back to the Big Bang, universes in which everything is successfully predicted by super-powerful computer, or universes that are re-created over and over again starting from the same initial conditions and governed by the same laws. The reason for such far-fetched scenarios is that much of the empirical research on free will beliefs is motivated by philosophical theorizing about the compatibility of free will and free action with various global constraints imposed by causal determinism, logical fatalism, or omniscience rather than by the aim to describe our ordinary notions of free and constrained actions.

The literature on explicit folk characterizations of free will (and what is perceived to threaten it), however, is extremely scarce. A paradigmatic case here is (Monroe and Malle, 2010). In this study, they found that “the core of people’s concept of free will is a choice that fulfills one’s desires and is free from internal or external constraints” (p. 211). Importantly, this core concept is metaphysically neutral in the sense that it takes sides neither on the issue of mind/body dualism nor on the issue of determinism/indeterminism. In the present paper, I present new cross-cultural data that suggest that it is the presence of external societal constraints that is perceived to be the most salient threat to free will.

Ferrín, Emilio González

University of Seville

Tawakkul: Muslim Sense of Fate in the Light of Modernity

The classical sense of divine foreknowledge was shown in the Islamic tradition under the heading of TAWAKKUL, the necessary human submission to divine designs. However, with the encounter between Islam and Europe after the French invasion of Egypt and the start of the so-called ‘Islamic Nahda’ – or ‘awakening’ in the culture of Islam –, Muslim thinkers sought to build up a bridge between tradition and modernity that would lead their adaptation to the new times without breaking with the old traditions or, much less, without coming into conflict with the dogmas of the Muslim religion.

At the end of the 19th century, the Egyptian reformist thinker Muhammad Abduh wrote a short treatise on science and religion in which he conveys a new meaning of TAWAKKUL: shortly, “God knows everything, God can do everything, but through the human being in Liberty”. In his exposition, Abduh was trying to make the Muslim faith compatible with modernity, but he was also looking for a call to community action. In my talk I will try to synthesize the ideas expressed by this thinker in the context of Muslim historical meaning of FATE – Maktub, ‘written’ –, then I will put them in relation to other contemporary thinkers – most especially the Indian philosopher and poet Iqbal – and I will propose that in the history of Islam a philosophical gap appeared after the individual consideration of the free human being, while a failed ‘call to community action’ took place at a time when individual freedom had to be measured against widespread discontent following the loss of collective freedoms with the establishment of Colonialism. The ideologues of free will would try, in this way, to promote a freedom of conscience that could fit the calls for freedom and independence of the territories. Colonialism did put itself, in this way, at the service of the renewal of ethical and religious thought.

Gajdošová, Katerina

Charles University

Being One with the Dao – Notion of Freedom in the Chinese Huang-Lao Texts

In the so-called ‘Huang-Lao’ texts from early China, readers are encouraged to stop practicing divination and relying on ancestral authority, and to start distinguishing what is right and wrong from within themselves. This turn towards one’s self is sometimes described as “embracing the One,” “holding on to the One,” or “being one with the Dao.” In the philosophical discourse shaped by the ancient Greek worldview, there would be a contradiction in “looking for answers within oneself” and obeying a higher power or a transcendent principle. Yet the Huang-Lao texts arise from a different worldview, the one in which the self and the creative force of the cosmos may, under certain conditions, coincide. Through examples from the Chinese texts, the paper illustrates how the problem of free will and determinism can be reformulated in a different cosmological framework.

Giedraitis, Gediminas

Eötvös Loránd University

Spontaneity as a Path to Freedom: a Few Notes on Spontaneity and Karma in the Treatise on Eighteen Kinds of Emptiness (Shiba kong lun 十八空論)

This paper focuses on a Buddhist notion of spontaneity (Ch. *ziran* 自然), or more precisely on spontaneous and unhindered thought and action, which are the qualities of a person who has accomplished Buddhist soteriological goal of achieving Buddhahood. To highlight spontaneity, it is juxtaposed with the theory of karmic retribution (Ch. *yinguo* 因果). The paper mainly relies on analysis of the exegesis of both of these notions in the Treatise on Eighteen Kinds of Emptiness (Shiba kong lun 十八空論), a Mahāyāna Buddhist text leaning towards Yogācāra tradition.

This work has disputed authorship, but is arguably authored by Paramārtha (Zhendi 真諦; 499–569). It is a philosophical text which aims to establish an authoritative position on various subjects of Buddhist doctrine, such as emptiness, Buddha-nature, and so forth. It also has a didactic function to communicate Indian Buddhist ideas to the Chinese audience. The treatise employs postulated philosophical positions to provide both implicit and explicit instructions with regards to the practice of a Buddhist practitioner who wants to achieve Buddhahood.

The treatise postulates spontaneity as an activity of a free, liberated mind. This unhindered mode of cognition is shown to transcend the perceptions and experiences of karmic causality of an ordinary mind. Spontaneity of the mind is also given an ontological equivalency with the state of existence of all phenomena, which are also spontaneous. While the mode of free and spontaneous cognition is primarily attributed to deified beings, yet the treatise also suggest that such cognition is possible and even recommended for a person seeking liberation from the turbulences of never-ending existence.

Hanks, Michele

New York University

‘There are No Coincidences’: Navigating Fate, Time, and Coincidence among New York City Psychics

Coincidences abound in most people’s lives. They can take the form of bumping into a friend unexpectedly on a train or sharing a birthday with a new acquaintance. There is no causal connection between these events, and, in the United States and much of West, people tend to understand them as serendipitous. Ascribing meaningfulness to these coincidences is understood as misguided at best and irrational at worst. Psychics, individuals who have the capacity to predict the future, challenge these everyday assumptions about coincidence. In this paper, I draw on my ongoing ethnographic field research with New York City psychics to examine how psychics come to challenge these understandings of coincidence. Psychics’ purported ability to foresee events before they unfold challenges the belief that our actions and future are not pre-determined. Beyond that, for psychics themselves, the cognitive and psychological practice of generating psychic insights challenges common assumptions about the nature of cognition and coincidence. For psychics, any thought, image, or word that enters their mind can have meaningful correspondence with their own future or the future of their sitter, the person who they are providing a reading for. What does it mean to live in a world with no coincidences? In this paper, I analyse how psychics develop this view of the world and how it becomes a means for them to build a meaningful view of the world. I argue that denying the possibility of coincidence allows psychics to develop an interconnected view of the world in which even the most mundane event is potentially meaningful. Ultimately, this move toward interconnectedness, I argue, does not position psychics and their sitters as passive or without free will; rather, it provides them a framework for finding meaningfulness and exerting agency over the seeming chaos of modern life.

Kiseliova, Ina

Lithuanian Culture Research Institute

The Akbarian Tradition: The Mystery of Destiny (sirr al qadar) and Free Will (ikhtiyār) in Ibn Arabi

With the rise of Sufi thought in the modern world, the paraphrased ideas of Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi often emerge as romanticized fundamental truths of life. The fictional sayings like “The destiny of a person is determined by their efforts” implicate the existence of free will in changing one’s destiny, which was quite under question (as God is Omniscient) in the tradition of classical Islamic thought while arguing on the issue of divine predestination (qaḍā’ wa l-qadar).

The aim of my talk is to show that though invented and not found in any actual writings of Ibn Arabi, such sayings partly correspond to the view of destiny and free will proposed by the thinker and presumably could be compared to that of compatibilists.

Ibn Arabi joins the philosophical and theological ideas of his predecessors and sheds the new light by placing them in the core of mysticism (tasawwūf) and its basic Akbarian concept “unicity of existence” (Waḥdat al-Wujūd). Unique spiritual (metaphysical) experience and innovative philosophical theories lead him to alleged understanding of Mystery of Destiny (sirr al qadar) which is not accessible by thinking, but only by Divine revelation. Ibn Arabi proposes a solution by distinguishing between God’s creative command and God’s obligating command, where the submission to the latter is paradoxically determinant to human free will. This approach is based on his ideas that “knowledge is subject to the known” and on the concept of “immutable entities” or “the non-existent objects of God’s knowledge” (al-ʿayān al-thābita) which are of critical relation to Greek philosophical tradition, as will be discussed. Thus, Shaykh al-Akbar offers an idea that with knowing the metaphysical structure of destiny freedom is reachable for the Perfect Man (Insān-i Kāmil) or Sufi, which was hardly known to the earlier tradition and considered heresy by some later scholars and ummah.

Kokko, Ville V.

University of Turku

Time to Move Beyond the Question of Determinism

The traditional Western discussion of free will frequently revolves around questions of determinism. A typical starting assumption is that determinism in the world would preclude free will. Philosophers have noticed many problems with this idea, however, and the debate has turned to whether this is the case or not. Meanwhile, commentators from the empirical sciences are often quick to jump in, typically declaring their results show free will does not exist, without understanding the importance and nuances of this debate.

The first part of my presentation argues that the debate about compatibility between determinism and free will is at present largely a web of elaborately constructed confusions, and it should focus more on a few simple essential arguments. The whole positing of determinism as the opposite of free will is itself, arguably, the result of a psychological confusion at the very beginning of the debate. This confusion is also related to what Alan Watts called “the taboo against knowing who you are,” which, he argued, is particularly a Western phenomenon.

Secondly, I argue that empirical approaches to the question of how free we are should focus on evaluating our rationality and ability to act in our own best interests instead of being concerned with determinism or either trying to prove or debunk some pre-theoretical, thoroughly mysterious and often self-contradictory idea of free will. Looking at empirical results instead in terms of concrete rational control of our actions, we can see that there are practical limits to human freedom that we all need to be aware of. Many existing arguments about science disproving free will are related to this observation but put the matter in a confused and confusing way.

Kubeckienė, Vaiva

Vilnius University

Necessity and Choice in the Context of Vanitas in the Baroque Culture

Ecclesiastes, written c. 450-200 BCE by the name of Kohelet, proclaims “Vanity of vanities! All is futile.” and questions the meaningful existential position. Kohelet is unable to ascribe eternal after-life or ensure that wisdom is better than foolishness, or work is more valuable than laziness. All that man knows is that he will die whatever choices he will make. All attempts to penetrate this mystery and thereby gain the wisdom necessary to secure one’s fate are “vanity”.

Even though such a pessimistic position is quite exceptional in the Holy Bible and the Christian-Western mentality, it periodically appears in the Western culture in different contexts. The Baroque culture is one of them. At the end of the 16th c. and the beginning of the 18th c. Vanitas category and its variations emerged articulating scepticism towards the order of social hierarchy, economic or intellectual property.

In this presentation, the Vanitas category in Baroque culture is analysed on several levels. Firstly, the continuity and the difference are being noticed comparing Vanitas in the Baroque period and in Biblical times. The question is raised: what are the proportions of necessity and choice in these two forms of Vanitas. The second part of the investigation is focused on two important manifestations of Vanitas: the figure of a gambler and the figure of a playing child. These concrete visual and poetic discourses are being discussed using the cultural philosophy approach, and different strategies for overcoming Vanitas are analysed.

Kwiatek, Timothy M.

Cornell University

Bodhisattvas and Above Average Agency

Western responsibility theorists tend to employ a binary notion of agency. Either one is a free, responsible agent, or one is not. And in some way or another, attributions of responsibility and reactive emotions follow from that. Some theorists develop more subtle views of responsible agency in which one can be more or less agential and thus more or less responsible (i.e., one can be answerable, but not accountable). But even this preserves the sense of the concept as having two fully explored polarities. And importantly, average adults are at the most developed end of this sense of agency. We who make the theories consider people more or less like ourselves to be the pinnacle of the development of human agency. This sense of agency gives rise to interpersonal problems if we treat someone as less agential than they take themselves to be. It would be somehow objectionable to treat a responsible adult like a child. But what if there were a sense of agency that stood to adult agency as adult agency stands to the agency of a small child? I suggest we can find such a view implied in Shantideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. I call this Above Average Agency. With appeal to this and related works, we can see how the bodhisattva is depicted in Buddhist philosophy as having what seems to be an exceptional kind of agency. I argue that we not read this as being a supernatural power but an accessible skillset. This has the potential to reveal an essential misconception about freedom and human agency as it is discussed in western philosophy: ordinary adults are not as good as it gets. If we hold less agential adults to a lower standard of responsibility, should we hold more agential adults to a higher standard of responsibility?

Lan, Xing

University of Edinburgh

Dance Steps in the Heaven: A Preliminary Discussion on ‘Stars and Creatures’

The study aims to examine a rare but significant Chinese divination system named “Stars and Creatures” (qinxinshu, 禽星術) derived from a rediscovered text “A New Encyclopaedia of Stars and Creatures” (xinkan qindun daquan, 新刊禽遁大全) printed in 1499. “Stars and Creatures” is an astrological system established by the 28 constellations, each assigned a mysterious creature, in the Chinese lunar zodiac. Although this divination is believed sophisticated and significant, we know little about it because the resources are so rare and commonly fragmented. For a long time, even the imperial intellectuals could get a glimpse of merely several textual fragments, and some previous assumptions on such fragments are proven groundless and even misleading. However, the rediscovered text provides much new knowledge and leads to new possibilities. Reinforced by the text, the study attempts to examine the system and focuses on several key issues. The study first illustrates the primary mechanism and structure of the system and corrects some previous misinterpretations on this. Next, the study employs a few cases to exemplify the applicability and exceptionality of the system. Finally, the study illustrates how the system integrates other divination systems, such as the Five Phases and I Ching, to represent a magnificent amalgamation of Chinese divination. In doing this, the study will diversify and glamourise our study on Chinese divination, astrology and correlative thought.

Law, Jane-Marie

Cornell University

Drying Mushrooms in the Sun: Reflections on the View of Agency in Dôgen's Tenzo Kyôkun

Ten years after returning from Song China where he had studied Zen Buddhism for five years and was named a master in the Caodong School of Ch'an (Sôtô Zen in Japan), Dôgen Eihei (1200–1253) wrote what is considered to be his most accessible text, *Tenzo Kyôkun* (Instructions for the Monastery Cook). Compared to his other writings, this text employs a simple instructional and then narrative style to present the guidelines for the tasks assigned to the person in charge of cooking in a Zen monastery. This popular text has been reinterpreted throughout Zen history in Japan and was widely popular in the West after its introduction in the 1960s at a pop cultural level. It is often described as being a book not just about cooking and running a kitchen but actually about life itself. How this text is interpreted changes over time, and it can be argued that one gets the *Tenzo Kyôkun* for one's times.

In this paper, I discuss how the very pointed references Dôgen creates in his narrative of encounters with the *Tenzo* of Mt. Ayuwang Monastery in China and his clear manual for running a kitchen illuminate a very specific Zen understanding of the meaning of labour. This view of labour, while clearly there in the text itself, offers to the 21st-century reader an alternative to the binary of labour being either political or artisanal. The text can be read as a pointed argument for people in highly institutional settings such as monasteries finding a deep sense of agency by committing to contemplative labour on behalf of the community. Because discussions of free will often encourage thinkers to regard agency as the precursor of free will to act, this text suggests that agency becomes an end in itself for people with “way seeking min,” as the text refers to those engaged in Buddhist monastic practice.

Liu, Shuang

Leiden University

‘A Moth Darting into the Fire’ and ‘Drinking Poison to Quench Thirst’ — Representations of ‘Choice’ in Chinese Migrant Worker Literature

Since the 1980s, China’s rapid modernization and urbanization have propelled massive rural-to-urban internal migration. Hundreds of millions of farmers have flocked from the countryside to the cities in search of jobs. These migrant workers are indispensable to China’s economic growth. At the same time, they are a socially disadvantaged group that was once discriminately addressed as “blind flow” (盲流, to show their choice of migration was blind and aimless) in the late 1980s in government policy, media, and social-science discourses.

To complicate this picture, this paper will explore the literary representations of migrant workers’ choice by focusing on Luo Weizhang’s (罗伟章) novella “Our Road” (《我们的路》) and Zheng Xiaoqiong’s (郑小琼) “Women Migrant Workers” (《女工记》). In these texts, migrant workers’ choices can be categorized by two Chinese idioms: “a moth darting into the fire” (飞蛾扑火), i.e., the only choice, and “drinking poison to quench thirst” (饮鸩止渴), i.e., the unwise short-sighted choice. In both cases, migrant workers’ choices make them even more vulnerable. I argue that in literary representations, the vulnerability of migrant workers is not because they make choices “blindly”, but that their choices are too limited. In other words, their individual choice is not free but constrained by both the outside circumstance and their own knowledge. By analysing the literary representation of migrant workers’ choices, this paper shows the plight of migrant workers and the limitations of freedom of their choices, thus advancing our understanding of the nexus of individual choice and free will at large.

Marcus, Gad

University of Haifa

The Creation of Luck in Jewish Sources

It might of course seem as if there cannot be a place for luck in a God created world. However, I intend to show in this paper that a notion of luck might nevertheless emerge from both, rabbinic and perhaps even biblical, sources. This in return will have implications on Jewish philosophical and spiritual thought.

The word **מזל**, i.e., luck, does not appear in the Bible. However, there are relevant Talmudic passages that deal with it. Although the Talmudic rabbis seem to argue against the existence of luck for the Jewish people – they at the same time quite obviously acknowledge that there could be belief in it. For otherwise there would be no reason to mention or discuss the issue. Yet even more interesting – the way they understand luck is, similar to the ancient Greek, within a predetermined view of occurrences. That is, one's luck is predetermined – which is an understanding of luck that differs a lot from most modern philosophers.

For modern philosophers, it is precisely the randomness and unexpectedness, together with a certain risk that turn an incident into a lucky one. However, in contrast to the ancient Greek tradition, according to the Talmudic passage, the rabbis say that it is in our power to change our fate. Now, to consider that we could be in charge of our luck is kind of groundbreaking and I am therefore interested in understanding the outlooks of life that emerge from within Jewish thought, that might help us “influence” our luck.

Matthyssen, Mieke

Ghent University

Negotiating Fate in Contemporary China: The Paradoxical and Changing Role of Ming in Psychological Wellbeing

The concept of ming 命, usually translated as “command” or “fate”, has up till today deeply pervaded Chinese culture, both in the history of ideas and in folk religion. Despite the vast web of ming related convictions and practices, they rarely relate to fate and fatalism as they are most known in the West.

From a Chinese perspective, properly dealing with ming involves a healthy balance of both surrender to “the natural order”, and active self-cultivation. This ambivalence is embodied in the common term for “fate”, mingyun 命运. Mingyun exemplifies how each life journey is both determined by external forces (ming) and yet remains malleable during one’s life (yun). In contemporary Chinese society, this ambivalent approach to fate takes on quite modern characteristics. Whereas the elderly, traumatized by the atrocities of the Mao era, mainly experience powerlessness in the face of fate, those born during the 80s, when China still had to establish its position in the world, got infused with the ideal of combatting fate through personal efforts. By contrast, the young Chinese middle class (Generation Z), born only a decade later in the by then economically flourishing world power, has come to realize that their endless efforts do not necessarily lead to the expected rewards, and tries to change tack. In doing so, they challenge longstanding cultural values, and state policies.

Primarily based on personal accounts and data from digital ethnography, this paper explores how Chinese people, in solving the mental challenges imposed by the complexity and insecurity of modern society, creatively negotiate with fate through a flexible and sometimes paradoxical interaction of modernization, neoliberal values, and traditional heritage, to find a sense of wholeness and fulfilment.

Norris, Matthew

University of Reading

A Thomist-Molinist Synthesis, Necessity, and Creaturely Freedom

This paper focusses on the question of divine foreknowledge and free will through providing an account of creaturely freedom that synthesises the perspectives of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Luis de Molina (1535–1600). The synthesis defends a libertarian account of human freedom from the logical and metaphysical necessity ostensibly generated by theological – and, by extension, logical – fatalism. The approach argues that the concepts of providence and fate are not inherently deterministic but rather that free human agency, whether that is construed in terms of a principle of alternative possibilities or freedom from determinative constraint by an external force or agent, is consistent with providence and fate. On this approach, God’s divine foreknowledge is analogous, in a loose sense, to an author’s knowledge and providence over the plot of some work that they have written. By utilising Aquinas’ notion of *scientia visionis* and Molina’s notion of *scientia media*, it is argued that creaturely freedom cannot be impeded by divine foreknowledge since God’s knowledge takes prior account of creaturely freedom based on His knowledge of the ‘plot’ or ‘narrative’ of existence. Using the furnishings of a Thomistic ‘two mode’ ontology, this paper explains that God’s existence in eternity is essential to preserving creaturely freedom in the temporal mode. This novel perspective, then, provides an explanation of why different religious and intellectual traditions can meaningfully hold to both ‘providence’ and ‘freedom’, provided they hold to a relatively classical conception of ‘God’ whereby God is – to use more contemporary terminology – holochronistically timeless. Furthermore, if God is not timeless, then I argue that creaturely freedom cannot co-exist with God’s foreknowledge and providence without diluting the concept of God.

Nyíró, Miklós

University of Miskolc

Free Will versus Medial Agent. What the Voice Systems of Languages Tell Us about Notions of Agency

The presentation aims at exploring what comparative linguistics may teach us regarding cross-cultural conceptions of agency. Central to such linking of linguistics to philosophy – and thus, to my methodology – is the hermeneutical notion of the ‘medium of language’ (die Mitte der Sprache), namely, that “language is the record of finitude”, “a medium where I and world ... manifest their original belonging together” (Gadamer: Truth and Method, 453, 469). For, if language is such a first, all-encompassing, and unsurpassable medium, then its basic grammatical-structural features must be the elemental crystallizations of historical human self-understanding – they must reflect the fundamental ways in which humans proved to be able to come to terms with their historical existence.

Accordingly – and insofar as verbs express actions, events, and states –, I propose to investigate the different diatheses of verbs as the fundamental expressions of historically conceived, basic modes of ‘activity’ in general, and human agency in particular. I will rely on Emil Benveniste’s work, according to which the voice systems of the primordial Indo-European languages were utterly different from that of the major Occidental languages – the former consisted of middle and active voices, whereas the latter are primarily built up of active and passive ones. My thesis is that contrary to the Occidental opposition of active–passive voices, which promotes a kind of thinking in terms of subject and object, agent and patient – where agency is conceived of as a sovereign source of activity –, the middle–active opposition of the primordial voice systems still embodied a ‘medial’ world-view: it promoted a kind of thinking in terms of verb and ‘sub-ject’, ‘pure event’ and ‘medial’ (event-related) agent. My presentation aims at elaborating the main features of such a ‘medial view’.

Ott, Margus

Tallinn University

Transforming Freedom

The drawback of many discussions about free will and determinism is that they are limited to the realm of the actual, already formed subjects, objects, and mental states. The subject is deemed to have before her “choices”, and to choose between them. She is either claimed to be free in her choice or determined by some external phenomena, but in any case, the choices are already there.

Yet, these choices are retroactive extracts or abstracts from a certain lived experience during which the subject endured, matured, and changed (cf. Henri Bergson’s “Time and Free Will”). The choices reify certain tendencies of the subject, or rather, its certain phases.

What we see as freedom results from a power to withhold choosing for some time. In the absence of freedom, the stimuli immediately receive a response, and the entity has no capacity to delay reaction. On the other hand, some complex beings, like humans, are able to delay the reaction. In this interval, the situation shows greater nuances of itself. If I, in an arbitrary fashion, impose my “will” to the surroundings, this activity is not very free, since I obey the idea or goal that I want to actualize.

In my paper, I illustrate this with some examples drawn from the “Zhuangzi”. The “sitting and forgetting” in the “Zhuangzi” refers to the capacity to delay and withhold, and the “free and easy wandering” refers to an activity that is free – not arbitrary or voluntarist, but in good accordance with other beings, surroundings, and times.

To think about freedom, we have to reintroduce temporality or transformation into our discussion, together with the degrees of interpenetration or inclusion, and the power of differentiation or nuancing.

Pappapicco, Concetta

University of Bari Aldo Moro

The Free Will of Choice: The Case of Brain Drain People from Italy

In the philosophical sphere, free will is defined as a strong subjective experience that human thoughts and actions are freely and intentionally enacted (Wegner, 2002). Other currents of thought study free will as the result of causality between thought and action (Wegner, 2003; Wegner, Sparrow, & Winerman, 2004; Wegner & Wheatley, 1999; van Miltenburg & Ometto, 2020). Other scholars give a cultural definition, that is, free will is part of cultures that give importance or do not give importance to the observance of rules and constraints (Nichols, 2004). What unites all the definitions of free will is the centrality and complexity of the human being. This work does not aim to assess the existence or absence of free will but to investigate, in a psycho-social key, how free will is outlined in an important life choice, like that of those who leave their homeland to seek new job opportunities. The phenomenon investigated will be that of the brain drain from Italy, with the focus on decision-making. Indeed, in the process of decision-making different issues come into play, but as in common sense, the decisions made by the brain drain people, who plan to escape, fall within risky decisions, and in this work it is assumed that the decision of escape is the result of an evaluation linked to free will, intended as the set of personal values (Feldman, 2021). To verify this, the research question will be analysed via questions raised, in virtual communities, to qualified Italians who are deciding to leave. The questions collected will be analysed qualitatively, through Diatextual Analysis (Mininni, 2013), to trace the socio-epistemic rhetoric (Berlin, 1992) related to the free will of the decision. The results show a link to morality as a value that characterises free will at the time of decision.

Piedrahita, Oscar A.

University of California, Irvine

The Modal Moral Luck Problem

The classic formulation of the moral luck problem challenges our practices of blaming and praising once we realize that luck, understood as lack of control, is pervasive in our lives. Defenders of the modal account of luck (an event is lucky in case it occurs in actuality but doesn't in nearby possible worlds) have argued that this is a pseudo-problem since it depends on the wrong account of luck. Yet, they haven't seen a new moral luck problem that emerges from the modal view of luck. This new moral luck problem asks us to realize that the justification for our moral responsibility judgments seems threatened by the instability of the factors on which we ground those judgments. Luck as modal fragility is in a problematic tension with moral responsibility in the crucial sense that the processes by which one acquires, exercises and even shapes the capacities, in virtue of which one is morally responsible, could have easily gone otherwise.

After detailing this modal moral luck problem, I conclude by considering under what conditions the luck inherent to the acquisition and exercise of one's moral responsibility relevant capacities can still be compatible with the fairness of moral responsibility judgments.

Pundik, Amit

Tel Aviv University

Predictive Evidence in Criminal Trials: Why Criminal Law Should Treat People as if They Have Unpredictable Free Will

When determining in criminal proceedings whether an individual performed a certain culpable action, predictive evidence is often ignored. Most notably, and with few exceptions, base-rates are excluded. Using such evidence in court seems intuitively inappropriate. For example, using the high rate of crimes involving illegal firearms in a certain neighbourhood to support the conviction of an individual resident in a crime involving an illegal firearm (henceforth, the “crime-rates scenario”) seems highly objectionable. The objection to base-rates is not only aimed at the sufficiency of such evidence (on the grounds that “crime-rates are insufficient on their own to prove that the individual is guilty”). The objection also requires that such evidence should not be used at all in determining the individual’s guilt—that is, that crime-rates should be inadmissible in criminal proceedings. The hostility of criminal fact-finding toward predictive evidence is also apparent in the deeply-rooted suspicion of information regarding bad character and previous convictions.

In previous works, I have sought to explain this hostility by suggesting that criminal fact-finding implicitly adheres to the view that culpable conduct requires free will that is necessarily unpredictable. While theorists tend to agree that it is possible to predict a free action, at least with some degree of confidence, I contend that criminal fact-finding adheres to the view that free actions can have neither subjective nor objective probabilities. It is not only the lack of sufficient information that prevents an accurate prediction of how an agent will act freely: free actions cannot be predicted because their probability does not exist. However, even if unpredictable free will provides, as I argue, a unifying justification for why different types of predictive evidence should not be admitted in criminal fact-finding, it is admittedly both counterintuitive and demanding in its metaphysical commitments.

In this paper, I seek to defend the claim that, irrespective of the metaphysical questions of whether people have free will and whether this free will is unpredictable, criminal law should treat people based on the assumption that they have unpredictable free will. Criminal law sometimes adopts assumptions that are evidently false: ignorance of the law is not a defence because people are assumed to have knowledge of the law, yet it is difficult to believe that every defendant knows about the existence, let alone the exact definition, of all the criminal prohibitions that exist in their jurisdiction. Similarly, irrespective of whether people have unpredictable free will or not, there could be a rationale for criminal law to assume that they do (for example, if it encourages lawful conduct). After all, philosophers who are deeply sceptical about free will and consider it an illusion sometimes proceed to argue that society could, nevertheless, benefit from people continuing to believe that they do indeed have it. In this paper, I highlight the gains to be had from criminal law’s treating people as not only having free will but free will that is unpredictable.

Rimkevičius, Paulius

Kaunas University of Technology; Vilnius University

On the Nature of Philosophical Beliefs

It seems to be a defining feature of a philosophical belief that it is a belief upon which a large number of other beliefs depends. In other words, that it is, in a sense, central or fundamental. It is natural to suppose that, even before we reflect on philosophical questions, we rely in many of our actions on some working answers to them. If that is so, then philosophical beliefs are both intuitive, or held independently of reflection, and consequential, or having a pronounced effect on many of our own actions. In the discussion on philosophical beliefs, it is common to assume just this: They are intuitive and consequential. However, drawing on recent scientific work on beliefs about free will, I argue that there is at least some plausibility to the idea that we might lack such beliefs altogether. I then turn to consider what would be the implications if that turned out to be the case. I argue that simply dismissing intuitive beliefs as irrelevant is in tension with our thinking of philosophical beliefs as central and consequential. I also argue that it threatens to cut many of the ties that connect philosophy to areas of everyday thinking, of science, and of theology. I then suggest that we can avoid these tensions if we would come to view philosophical beliefs as transformative beliefs. That is, as beliefs that are not intuitive, but still consequential. Perhaps we do not have intuitive philosophical beliefs, but when we acquire them after reflection, they transform us. I conclude by discussing the implications of the proposal for the way we investigate philosophical beliefs scientifically.

Rožker, Jana S.

University of Ljubljana

Choice and Autonomy in the Chinese Context: Li Zehou's Concept of Free Will

Li Zehou (1930–2021) was undoubtedly one of the most prolific and influential Chinese philosophers in contemporary China. He was one of the most important and influential Chinese philosophers of our time and one of the few Chinese intellectuals whose works have found a wide readership abroad. In most of his works, he attempted to reconcile “Western” (especially Kantian and Marxist) theories with traditional Chinese ideas, concepts, and values to create a theoretical model of modernization that should not be confused or equated with pure “Westernisation.” His elaboration and reinterpretation of the concept of free will are among his most innovative ideas and are still of outstanding importance to current developments in contemporary Chinese philosophy. In this context, Li presents us with the certainty that we ourselves possess our freedom, not only in the sense of free choices, but also in a broader and much more complex sense of such individual free will, which can be fully realised only through the full recognition and implementation of our social and personal responsibilities, shaped on the basis of a specific interdependent and complementary relationship between the individual and the community or society. Such a specific concept of free will (*ziyou yizhi* 自由意志) and its close relationship with moral sentiments is crucial to Li's entire ethical system. This paper will analyse the theoretical foundations of Li's specific concept of free will, outline its significance in the context of contemporary Chinese theory, and show why and how it constitutes a call for a new humanism.

Sigurðsson, Geir

University of Iceland

Confucian Challenges to Contingency: The ‘Daological’ Limitation to Human Freedom

It may not be adequately acknowledged that the cosmology, here referred to as ‘daology’, underlying Confucian, Daoist and generally Chinese philosophy in the ancient period is one of indeterminism and only vaguely ordered recurrences. A cosmology, however, to the extent that it operates as a (consciously or unconsciously) informed understanding of world-operations, will almost certainly influence and condition whatever possibilities will be envisaged in the human sphere. Thus, any rules governing ethical, political, and generally inter-human orientation should be interpreted in light of these possibilities. In this paper, I wish to propose and explore the hypothesis that in the early Confucian understanding of human agency there is a decisive assumption of contingency and lack of ultimate control, perhaps most strongly emphasized in the notion of ming 命, which in traditional Western translations is usually rendered ‘fate’ or ‘destiny’ but is probably more appropriately interpreted as ‘force of circumstance’. Some well-known excerpts from the early Confucian corpus will be taken as evidence for the view that while we need to implement some guiding rules, or rules of thumb, to be capable of dealing with a largely contingent reality, such rules should not be taken as fixed or absolute. Early Confucianism presents itself as a philosophy of education, emphasizing the importance of developing individual capabilities to assess each circumstance encountered by individual human beings who are thus largely understood as life-long learners. Moreover, though, such continuous vigilance may be too demanding for most people, and, as in the case of many other philosophies, Confucianism therefore runs the danger of degenerating to a dogmatic version of itself, which, however, is entirely antithetical to its fundamental positions.

Silius, Vytis

Vilnius University; Sun Yat-sen University

Against the Passive Psychology of Fate

The aim of this presentation is to argue that there is a dominant framework of Western academia facilitating expectations and predictions of certain types of psychological attitudes and behavioural preferences among people who make references to fate. This framework, which I call a “passive psychology of fate”, assumes the lack of proactive behaviour and initiative, submissiveness and resignation in the face of difficulties, and reluctance to take up responsibility.

In this presentation, I will demonstrate a couple of examples from empirical studies that illustrate how this framework influences the analysis and treatment of those people who mention fate or subscribe to “fate beliefs”. Building on the ideas about the concept of fate from Robert Solomon and George Simmel, and on early Confucian discourse on ming 命, I will present the contours of an alternative interpretational framework for the psychology behind the concept of fate, that does not assume passivity and resignation from people who face and acknowledge the uncontrollable.

Šliavaitė, Kristina

Vilnius University

‘Grace Came Upon Me’: Negotiating Human Agency in the Process of Religious Awakening Among Members of Russian Orthodox Church Community in Lithuania

The paper focuses on the narratives of individuals who were born during soviet period, but became members of the Russian Orthodox church community after the break down of the soviet system. The empirical material reveals that there are two main ways to describe the individual path to religiosity: either as a process which was determined by human agency, or as a sudden change marked by some calling or non-ordinary experience. The focus is on the ways the research participants negotiate human agency and free will in both situations. The fieldwork data is interpreted in the framework of methodological and theoretical approaches towards narrative as a mean of identity expression and actor’s agency in such narratives. The paper is based on qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with members of Russian Orthodox communities in Vilnius and Visaginas in 2019–2021.

Stamatiou, Filippos

University of Copenhagen

Mental Luck

Philosophy and common sense largely agree that free will should be immune to luck. This assumption is particularly challenged by indeterminism, because in an indeterministic universe any event can be the result of some chance process. Seemingly free decisions are explained by factors outside the agent herself. Present luck (Mele, 2005) as it is sometimes called, is a common counterargument to libertarian accounts of free will.

In this paper, I argue that this problem of luck is not restricted to indeterminism. Regardless of whether the universe is indeterministic some of our decisions are prone to what I call mental luck. Mental luck has its origins in the limits of our mental life and decision-making under conditions of subjective uncertainty. An agent may end up in different decision outcomes, while her accessible mental states remain identical.

Most prominent theories associate the agent's moral responsibility with her practical attitudes and the outcome of her decisions. However, decisions that are prone to mental luck are not determined by the agent's accessible practical attitudes. Therefore, mental luck poses a challenge to most accounts of free will and moral responsibility. This conclusion points to a dilemma about the centrality of conscious awareness for the purposes of moral assessment. While it is possible to avoid the undesirable consequences of mental luck, doing so comes with its own set of problems.

The paper begins by presenting the problem of present luck. In section 3, I argue for a generalisable epistemic version of the problem of luck, which affects agents regardless of the metaphysical nature of the world. In section 4, I consider how mental luck matters for theories of moral responsibility. I finish the paper with a potential line of objection and a possible reply.

Stawski, Filip

Casimir the Great University

Affordances and Self-Control: A Neuropsychological View

Classical Western discourse on free will usually concerns causal determinism, moral responsibility, etc. In consequence empirical consideration of action usually focuses on autonomous choice and physiological mechanisms responsible for triggering a particular movement or decision. Such analysis usually seeks universal regularities independent of culture and social context as well as body factors.

That perspective may not be sufficient to explain self-control and decision-making, both playing a significant role in the free will problem. Neuropsychological research suggests that in making choices, the activation of particular neural structures is of equal importance to the inhibition of other structures. Lowering the ability to inhibit alternative behaviours results in decreased ability to self-control and make appropriate decisions. In extreme cases (e.g., addiction) this leads to the inability to make free decisions. In my talk, I am going to present a neurobiological mechanism of cortico-subcortical loops (CSL) that may be responsible for the active inhibition of specific action (behavioural and cognitive). The idea is that the CSL mechanism can play a relevant role in inducing motor as well as cognitive actions (like decision making). Such an approach is close to the concept of wide cognition (including ideas like embodiment, ecological psychology, affordances, etc.), which elevates the role of the body, movement, and environment (natural and sociocultural) in shaping cognition. For this reason, some researchers have suggested that the working of CSL may be responsible for the activation and inhibition of affordances. Affordance is the term coined by James Gibson referring to all action possibilities with an object based on the agent's physical and mental capabilities.

In my presentation, I will consider, from the standpoint of the CSL concept, whether cultural affordances shaped by sociocultural context can influence the human ability to self-control and inhibit behaviour and decision in response to specific sociocultural situations.

Stepien, Rafal K.

Nanyang Technological University

Does a Buddha Do? A Buddhist Conception of Non-Conceptual, Non-Intentional Volition

I assert that action is volition (*cetanā*), since it is by willing that one performs an action with the body, speech or ‘mind’. These are the words of the Buddha, as set down in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* or Numerical Discourses (III: 415), but where do they leave the Buddha himself? For if a Buddha does not generate karma, then it would appear that he either cannot act at all, or must act without *cetanā*, non-intentionally. But how would this be possible? Drawing on the work of Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250 CE), founder of the Madhyamaka school and second only to the Buddha himself in importance for the subsequent history of Buddhist philosophy, in this paper I set out an account of non-conceptual, non-intentional karma-less action.

In his magnum opus, the Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way or *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, Nāgārjuna states (MK:18:5):

With the cessation of action and defilement there is liberation
Action and defilement arise from dichotomizing conceptualization
These from conceptualization
But conceptualization is extinguished in emptiness

This verse posits a foundational role for conceptualization in the inevitably suffersome *saṃsāric* round of action. Given that *cetanā* – volition – is itself inevitably conceptual, action of any kind in this conception turns out to be ineliminably characterised by volitional intentionality-cum-conceptuality. This cannot characterise the Buddha, however, for as the liberated one, he is definitionally incapable of karmically causative action, and therefore, it turns out, of conceptualisation, intentionality, and volition. The Buddha acts and knows (indeed, he is omniscient and omniscient), but how he does so is and necessarily remains, unconceptualisably, *asaṃskṛta*, unconditioned by such mundanities as conception and volition.

Tiuninas, Algirdas

Charles University

Tracing the Psychological Underpinnings of the Free-Will Debate

The question of free will is a case of psychological puzzlement, a conflict between what we believe to be the definition of free action and what we come to know the physical world to be like. We learn in childhood that to act freely is, roughly, to be able to do otherwise. Yet later on we learn that the world is fully deterministic (let us say), and so we are never in fact able to do otherwise due to circumstances antecedent to our birth (and therefore to our influence). I believe that this is a confusion that can be traced to our psychological propensity to favour lie-to-children conceptualisations: simplified accounts of the world that have clear limitations, but that are good-enough for certain purposes (similar to, for example, lying to a child who asks where he came from that he was found in a cabbage field). In this particular case, the idea that to act freely is to be able to do otherwise is an oversimplification that comes back to bite us when we encounter a context that was largely irrelevant when formulating our good-enough definition. While this is seldom explicitly recognised, the debates in Western philosophy often centre around trying to arrive at a better definition of free will, implicitly suggesting, though not explaining, the limitations of common sense understanding. The pursuers of such debates, however, fall prey to another psychological propensity: the belief that there is such a thing as a perfect definition, and a philosopher's task is not complete until he finds it. As famously suggested by Wittgenstein, however (with the example of "game", as well as that of the "disappearing chair", both in *Philosophical Investigations*), there is no reason to expect there to be such a definition, a set of features that fit all and only cases of free action. I look at evolutionary reasons for both of these tendencies, thus suggesting that the interest of the debate lies primarily in providing us with a glimpse into the mechanics of human thought, rather than the metaphysical construction of the world.

Valmisa Oviedo, Mercedes

Gettysburg College

We Are Not So Free, but Oh, That’s Why We Can Be Free at All

Classical China offers us an alternative conceptual framework to understand the problem of freedom and constraint, where these are not only “compatible” in the sense of the Western compatibilist model between determinism and free will, but rather nondual. There is no freedom without constraint, nor constraint without freedom. We are not so free, but oh, that’s why we can be free at all.

In this presentation, I first discuss the relational ontology that is proper to Classical China, where relations are constitutive and primary, not subordinated to the presumption of individual entities prior to second-order relations. In such an understanding of the self that is not per se but constituted by others, the problem of efficacy and freedom of action becomes imperative. If our actions do not purely spring from ourselves; if our beliefs, preferences, and decisions are a product of our relations to others; moreover, if we depend on other entities to act—how can we ever exercise any control over our actions? In response to this larger concern with world-embedded agency, early philosophers devised and practiced a form of efficacious relational action that we do not find in other traditions and which I have termed *adapting*.

Using materials from my recently published “*Adapting. A Chinese Philosophy of Action*” (OUP, 2021), I will present the co-action paradigm as the Classical Chinese conceptions of agency via the Mawangdui manuscript *Wu ze you xing tu*. The co-action paradigm understands all actions as collective events: they necessitate multiple agencies in joint collaboration, including entities with awareness and intentionality (like humans) and without (like objects, concepts, and laws). I then introduce *adapting* as the most efficacious approach to intentional and purposive relational action within a relational ontology and a co-action paradigm, by analyzing passages from the *Zhuangzi*, *Huainanzi*, and *Sunzi*.

Van de Mortel, Jos

Fontys University of Applied Sciences

The Sasquatch of the Educational World: In Search of the Autonomous Teenager

There is a wide public debate in The Netherlands regarding the young age at which teenagers have to make choices that (arguably) have a profound influence on their future (<https://www.eur.nl/media/2016-05measuringtheimpactofpublicpolicyonsocioeconomicdisparitiesinhealth-bastianravesteijn> (see: chapter 4)). They choose the level of their high school at the age of 12 and their subsequent (vocational) school (level and subject) at around 16 or 17 – some even at a younger age. This has led some educational professionals to argue we should raise the age at which these teenagers make these choices (https://www.vo-raad.nl/system/downloads/attachments/000/000/868/original/Toekomst_onderwijs.pdf (DUTCH see paragraph 3.2)). Below follows a short introduction of a proposed research that revolves around the hypothesis: “(Perceived) undesirable outcome of school choices among Dutch youth are caused by a lack of ability to autonomously make life-choices”.

A group of Fontys students will research this hypothesis in the academic year 2021–2022 and hope to be given the opportunity to share their findings in the conference “Beyond Free Will: Variety in Understanding of Choice, Luck, and Necessity” in Vilnius. Questions that will (most likely) be addressed are:

Literature review

- What does autonomous choice consist of?
- What knowledge/skills/attitudes are necessary conditions for autonomous choice?

Field research

- How do educators and parents rate the ability of their children regarding autonomous choice?
- What influences do teenagers experience when making this choice.
- How do teenagers rate their own ability regarding autonomous choice?

Reasoning

- How might one’s ability regarding autonomous choice correlate with better school choices?
- How can improvements be made by teenagers, educators and parents regarding the level of ability among those teenagers regarding autonomous choice?

The aforementioned three steps will result in a conclusion which will aim to support or negate the original hypothesis. A few questions that are not specifically included in the research but might be addressed sideways are: How does one rate one’s ability to make autonomous choices? and Which practical measures could be taken to expand that ability in children (perhaps before their teens)? The research will end with a contemplation on possible next steps in researching this topic, with exceptional attention for continuing this research in areas with another prevalent cultural framework as seen in The Netherlands.

Van Duffel, Siegfried

Nazarbayev University

The Will and Morality

If the idea of freewill is rooted in debates in Christianity, why is the freewill “problem” still so hotly debated even among secular philosophers? Consider these two observations. First, it is generally accepted among scholars of the history of philosophy that the idea of freewill was invented in late antiquity. Similarly, an increasing number of scholars of Asian traditions have suggested that the problem of freewill is not a topic in these traditions, and some recent empirical work has suggested that this is still the case today. Second, some historians of ancient ethical thought have suggested that we find no notion of specifically “moral” obligation (or “morality system”) in ancient thought, and some scholars studying Asian ethical thought have argued either that these traditions do not have a concept of morality or that the moral (ethical) domain is structured differently.

My hypothesis is that the continued felt relevance of the freewill problem in the West, even among secular philosophers, is due to the continued prevalence of morality. The aim of the paper is to shed light on the connection between freewill and (“Western”) morality, by describing how the notion of moral duty or obligation fits into a law-like ethics. Morality is presented as giving us categorical reasons for acting (categorical in the sense of independent of our desires and/or aims). Moral duty is distinct from many other ethical notions in that it is directed exclusively to voluntary action (and omission). We are morally responsible for voluntary actions or omissions only. Moral duty is action-guiding in a specifically demanding way in that it attaches blame to violations of moral duty. It is the special force of blame connected with a law-like ethics that motivates the demand for a deep kind of freedom, or so I will suggest.

Veisaitė, Agnė

City University of Hong Kong

Accumulative Identities as Precondition for Freedom in the Zhuangzi

It has been argued that Zhuangzian freedom lies in the ability to change perspectives (Perkins, 2014) allowing to work responsively within the constraints of reality (Lai, 2022). It automatically assumes a “self” (an agent) that navigates given conditions and partially chooses potential responses. I suggest that Zhuangzian freedom instead appears when agency and control are minimized to the utmost, that is, when the sense of self cease to exist. In Zhuangzi, it emerges through entering the dream state or through a radical transformation when ming 名 (identity/name) shifts together with the given conditions ming 命 (often translated as fate).

Zhuangzi opens with the portrayal of the fish Kun transforming into a giant bird Peng. That is, when bodily transformation appears, the name designates accordingly (Hamm, 2020). It indicates that the shift of identity (ming 名) is followed by rectified conditions/environment – ming 命, the radical shift from the “thrownness” of water into the airy constrains. One’s freedom to rectify the “given conditions” ming 命 appears within the cognitive shift (such as a dream state) or a radical change of identity (transformation). Consequently, the limitations emerge not through the face-upon conditions but through the fixed identities to which one ties herself.

In addition, Zhuangzi suggests that instead of confronting the novel environment, one must willingly fall into it, depending on the outer constraints. Everyone lives under the constant coupling with the emerging conditions. In Zhuangzi we read, “The path is made in the walking, things are made in the naming”. However, environment must allow footing (being free of large objects) for a path to appear, which makes an agent (tied with ming 名 – identity/name) and the given conditions (ming 命) both – the outcome and the determinant. I argue that freedom in the Zhuangzi appears not through deliberate “footing” by an agent (self) but, contrary, through self-transformation into selves – when the footed through path turns to the open space that allows fresh footing – for the new constrained path to appear.

Volkova, Nadezda

Independent scholar

Plotinus on Free Will and Descent of Souls into Bodies

This paper treats the problem of free will in the context of the descent of souls into bodies in the philosophy of Plotinus. Plotinus disputes the Aristotelian concept of free will. Aristotle argued that a person acts voluntarily when he acts without coercion and knows what he is doing. Plotinus on the contrary stated that a person cannot act voluntarily in the physical world at all, because no one possesses the knowledge in its entirety (VI 8 (39)). This statement leads to the problem of imputation. How can a person acting involuntarily be punished for his misdeeds? This problem is especially acute in the context of the descent of souls into bodies. In the texts of the *Enneads*, the descent of the souls is presented in two ways: as a continuation of the Demiurgy by souls (IV 3 (27)) and as the fall into sin (IV 8 (6), V 1(10)). In the first case, the descent of souls turns out to be a necessary part of the emanation, thus the actions of the souls are involuntary. In the second case, the souls act voluntarily and receive punishment in the earthly life. In this paper the author tries to show the consistency of Plotinus' doctrine, referring to the concept of "divine law", i.e., the law of nature, reconciling the necessity of soul's fall and the justice of retribution.

Zawadzki, Przemysław

Jagiellonian University

Is It Justified to Punish Non-Neurotypical Agents on the Grounds of Free Will and Moral Responsibility?

Recent advances in the behavioural, cognitive, and neurosciences reveal that everyday folk understanding of persons as conscious, rational, and free agents is largely inadequate. These results have led many to question whether we have a kind of freedom that allows us to hold each other morally responsible. All of this applies to “paradigm agents,” that is, the neurotypical and healthy population. However, a large part of population is constituted by “non-paradigm agents”—e.g., addicts, patients with neurodegenerative and psychiatric diseases, survivors of trauma, and even adolescents can be so categorized. The scepticism about holding non-paradigm agents morally responsible can be even more pronounced than for paradigmatic agents because empirical research has identified and investigated external ‘pathological’ factors that influence internal ‘personal’ decision-making processes in non-paradigm agents. These studies have shown how susceptible to the interference are the higher mental abilities that have traditionally served as the quintessence of free will, and thus a condition of moral responsibility, e.g., reasons-responsiveness; the ability to act in accordance with moral reasons, one’s second-order volitions, or one’s Deep Self. In this context, burning questions arise with regard to appropriate free will and moral responsibility ascriptions to non-paradigm agents who behave ‘immorally’ or committed crime since these ascriptions serve as justification of severe practices such as backward-looking moral outrage, condemnation, and legal punishment. In this presentation, I focus on important but as yet unresolved issue implied by these questions, namely, what is the best justified response to crime committed by non-paradigm agents. By considering this issue in the light of the Public Health-Quarantine Model and forward-looking aspects of moral responsibility, I show that the best justified response is the one that favours treatment over punishment.

Zięba, Paweł

Jagiellonian University

Can Unconscious Perception Guide Action?

According to unconscious perception hypothesis (UP), episodes of the same fundamental kind as episodes of conscious perception can occur unconsciously. Ian Phillips, the champion of scepticism about UP, has argued that many putative instances of unconscious perception are cases in which unconscious perceptual representation of the stimulus is ill-suited to guide action. Consequently, there is no good reason to regard such representation as a personal rather than sub-personal state (i.e., to attribute it to the individual rather than to the individual's perceptual system), which means that it falls short of genuine, individual-level perception.

According to Phillips, unconscious perceptual representation cannot guide action because it is unavailable to Central Coordinating Agency (a placeholder for whichever subsystems of the nervous system subserve action; from now on, CCA). Nevertheless, if the distinction between personal and sub-personal states/events is applied to perception, consistency requires applying it to all mental phenomena, including action. So instead of identifying action in relation to the workings of CCA, Phillips should identify action in relation to the phenomenology of action and to the way we think and talk about action in everyday situations.

However, doing so renders the availability to CCA unnecessary for action. Many activities we engage in in everyday situations occur without any conscious deliberation (e.g., jumping out of excitement, tapping one's foot, unawares moving one's tongue in one's mouth while driving a car). No possible output of CCA (e.g., conscious intention, plan, or decision) seems necessary for those activities to occur. And yet such activities are things we do; they don't just happen to us. If action can occur without the involvement of CCA, unconscious perception doesn't have to be available to CCA in order to guide action, which undermines one of the key components of Phillips' scepticism about UP.

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