



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

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ABSTRACTS



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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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Abstracts

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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.

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