

Brain-to-Society Decision and Behavior Seminar

McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics

Neuroethics, Free Will and the Self: Distinguishing Levels of Intervention and Analysis

by *Andrea Lavazza*

Tuesday, June 29, 2021 | 11 AM to 1 PM EST (2 hours in duration)

For *Remote Participation*, please click [HERE](#)

Seminar Abstract: Neuroethic calls for conceptual and empirical advances in the domains of free will and the self. Free will seems to be one of the most cherished properties of human beings. It is usually defined by three conditions: (1) the ability to do otherwise; (2) control of one's own choices; (3) responsiveness to reasons. The compatibility of free will with determinism lies at the heart of the philosophical debate at the metaphysical level. This debate, while being increasingly refined, has not yet reached a shared conclusion. Considering that in most interpersonal, social, ethical, and legal interactions, the subject's responsibility and liability derive from their freedom, the usefulness of preserving the concept of freedom – which also responds to a strong commonsensical intuition – suggests the need for operational solutions. I'll consider control and behavioural repertoire as key features of free will so understood, since they can be taken to be measurable by a set of well-established neuropsychological and creativity tests. In this sense, one can think of forms of enhancement of free will. For example, increased awareness of environmental clues and priming effects can better our freedom. All this is analyzed at a psychological level which implies a thick or almost-thick concept of the self. But recent studies showed that one can inhibit automatic or improper behavioural responses thanks to pharmacological or neuro-technological interventions on the GABA system in the brain. This happens without a conscious effort by the subjects and does not entail a role of the self. I'll make a comparison between those levels of interventions and analysis and draw some conclusions about free will and the self.

Panel Discussion: A panel will follow the presentation to advance precision convergence science in discussing how integrative multi-systems models of decision making and behavior can be combined with computational and neuroethics approaches to studying human biology, brain and society to both (1) develop a deep and end-to-end understanding of all multiscale mechanisms involved in supporting *adaptive real world behavior and context* and (2) to inform better targeted and more impactful self-management/professional practice/innovation/interventions/policy within and across sectors and jurisdictions. What we have called precision convergence for lifelong wellness and resilience in both health and disease conditions ([concept paper here](#)). The webinar is chaired by **Prof. Laurette Dube**, Chair and Scientific Director, McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economic (MCCHE) and **Prof. Laurence Kirmayer**, James McGill Professor and Director, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University.



Presenter: Dr. Andrea Lavazza is a senior research fellow at Centro Universitario Internazionale, Arezzo, and adjunct professor of Neuroethics at University of Pavia, Italy. He also teaches at the master in Psychopathology and Forensic Neuropsychology at the University of Padua, at the master in Clinical Neuroscience at the Catholic University in Milan, and at the master in Nudge and Public Policies at the Bicocca University in Milan, Italy. His main area of research is neuroethics. He was among the founding members of the Italian Society for Neuroethics (SINe) and is currently the general secretary of SINe. His main areas of academic specialization are human enhancement, cognitive privacy and integrity, neurolaw, memory manipulation, and human cerebral organoids. His general research interests are focused on moral philosophy, free will, and law at the intersection with cognitive sciences. He is working on naturalism and its relations with other kinds of causation

and explanation in philosophy of mind and philosophical anthropology. Lavazza has published over 80 papers and 11 books both as author and editor.



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Chair: Laurette Dubé, initially trained as a nutritionist, also holds degrees in finances (MBA), marketing (MPS), and behavioral decision-making/consumer psychology (PhD). Dr. Dubé is Full Professor at the Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University. Her research focuses on the study of affects, behavioral economics, and neurobehavioral processes underlying consumption, lifestyle, and health behavior. Her translational research examines how such knowledge can inspire effective interventions. She is also the founder and scientific director of the McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics, a unique initiative to push the boundaries of science to tackle societal and economic challenges and foster individual and collective health and wealth.



Co-Chair: Laurence Kirmayer M.D., FRCPC, FCAHS, FRSC is James McGill Professor and Director, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University. He is Editor-in-Chief of Transcultural Psychiatry and directs the Culture & Mental Health Research Unit at the Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry, Jewish General Hospital, in Montreal, where he conducts research on culturally responsive mental health services, mental health promotion, and the anthropology and philosophy of psychiatry. His publications include the co-edited volumes, *Cultural Consultation: Encountering the Other in Mental Health Care*; *Re-Visioning Psychiatry: Cultural Phenomenology, Critical Neuroscience, and Global Mental Health*; and *Culture, Mind and Brain: Emerging Concepts, Methods, and Applications*. He is a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences and the Royal Society of Canada.



Mario De Caro, Ph.D. is a professor of moral philosophy at Università Roma Tre and regularly a Visiting Professor at Tufts University, where he teaches since 2000. Twice a Visiting Scholar at MIT, a Fulbright Fellow at Harvard University, and a former President of the Italian Association of Analytic Philosophy, he currently is vice president of the Consulta Nazionale di Filosofia, Hilary Putnam's literary executor, and Associate editor of the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* and of *Ancient Philosophy Today*. He has given lectures in more than one hundred academic institutions in eighteen countries, published five books in Italian, edited a dozen collections in English, and written more than one hundred scientific articles in six languages. His *Liberal Naturalism* is forthcoming for Harvard UP. Mario's research interests include ethics, metaphilosophy, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and action, neuroethics history of early modern science and philosophy, and philosophy of film.



Dr. Zhenfeng Ma is Professor of Marketing and Chair of the Marketing Department at Jiangnan University, China. Prior to joining Jiangnan University, he worked as an Associate Professor of Marketing at the Lazaridis School of Business and Economics in Canada. He earned his PhD in Management from McGill University in 2008. Dr. Ma's research focuses on consumer behavior, innovation adoption, and brand management. His research has been published in premium marketing journals including *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *European Journal of Marketing*.



Igor Grossmann, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Waterloo, Canada, where he leads the Wisdom and Culture Lab. As a behavioral/social scientist, Grossmann has been working on demystifying what makes up a "wise" judgment in the context of revolving societal and cultural changes. His chief work aims to uncover misconceptions about wisdom and societal change and identifying cultural and psychological processes that enable people to think and act wisely. He has been an Associate Editor of *Emotion*, and currently is an Associate Editor of the flagship journal for Social and Personality Psychology—*Social Psychological and Personality Science*, and co-hosts the "On Wisdom Podcast," aiming to disseminate scientific insights from cognitive and social sciences to the broad academic audience and the general public. Professor Grossmann holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan.



Merve Hickok is the founder of AIethicist.org. She is an independent consultant, lecturer and speaker on AI ethics and bias and its implications. She aims to create awareness, build capacity, and advocate for ethical and responsible AI. She collaborates with several national and international organizations building AI governance methods, and has been recognized by a number of organizations for her work - most recently as one of the [100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics™ – 2021](#). Merve has over 15 years of global level senior experience in Fortune 100 with particular focus on HR technologies, recruitment and diversity. She is a Senior Researcher at [Center for AI & Digital Policy](#), a Data Ethics lecturer at [University of Michigan, School of Information](#), an instructor at [RMDS Lab](#) providing training on AI & Ethics and responsible AI development and implementation. Merve is a Fellow at [ForHumanity Center](#) working to draft a framework for independent audit of AI systems; a founding editorial board member of [Springer Nature AI & Ethics journal](#); and a regional lead and mentor at [Women in AI Ethics Collective](#), she works to empower women in the field.