

Brain-to-Society Decision and Behavior Seminar

McGill Centre for the Convergence of Health and Economics

Sailing the ghost ship: The case for radical free will

by Ken Sheldon

Wednesday, May 5, 2021 | 11 AM to 1 PM EST (2 hours in duration)

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

Seminar Abstract: I will summarize my forthcoming book (Basic Books). The argument for free will depends on the irreducible top-down effects of successively higher levels of organization within the universe, including mental intentions, operating at the personality level. Selection among intentions is made by the symbolic self, which is the highest-level control process in the brain, and which is observable as Default Mode Network functioning. The symbolic self, located in system 2, partially directs its own mind and is a complex momentary synthesis of narrative, biological, and situational information. This moving synthesis is highly creative and its choices can never be fully predicted in advance by any scientific model (another argument for free will). Nevertheless, appropriate multi-level models might come closer and closer, especially with the future help of artificial intelligence models that have access to peoples' thoughts and feelings as well as their bodily condition. I will argue that the real question is not "are we free?" but rather, "can we use our radical freedom wisely, i.e. in service of our own and others' thriving?"

Panel Discussion: A panel will follow the presentation to advance precision convergence science in discussing how integrative multi-systems models of the self and decision making can be combined with computational approaches to studying human biology, brain and society to both (1) develop a deep and end-to-end understanding of all multiscale mechanism involved and (2) inform better targeted and more impactful self-management/professional practice/innovation/interventions/policy within and across sectors and jurisdictions underlying *adaptive real world behavior and context*. 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 co-chaired by **Dr. Gillian Bartlett**, Associate Dean for Population Health and Outcomes Research at the School of Medicine at the University of Missouri.



Presenter: Dr. Kennon Sheldon is a professor of Psychological Sciences at the University of Missouri, USA. He received his B.S. in psychology from Duke University in 1981 and his Ph.D. in social/personality psychology from the University of California, Davis in 1992. He is known for his research on well-being, motivation, and goals. His prominent research questions include "Can happiness go up, and then stay up?", "Can people be helped to pick life-goals that better express their developmental potentials?" and "how can the concept of personal agency be reconciled with the concept of a deterministic universe?" He is the prolific author of more than 200 academic articles and book chapters. He is also the author of *Optimal Human Being: An Integrated Multi-level Perspective*, and *Self-determination Theory in the Clinic: Motivating physical and mental health*, and he has written and edited several other academic books such as *Stability of Happiness: Theories and Evidence on Whether Happiness can Change*, and *Designing Positive Psychology: Taking Stock and Moving Forward*. He has been the recipient of several prestigious prizes and awards in psychology, and was named one of the 20 most cited social psychologists in 2010 (controlling for career stage; Nozok et al., *PSPB*).



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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: Dr. Gillian Bartlett is the Associate Dean for Population Health and Outcomes Research at the School of Medicine at the University of Missouri (Mizzou) where she is also a tenured Professor of Family & Community Medicine. She received her PhD in epidemiology from McGill in 2001 and her MSc in 1996. In 2014, she was awarded the Carrie M. Derick Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Supervision for McGill University and the Faculty of Medicine Honour List for Educational Excellence. Dr. Bartlett specializes in primary care research and knowledge translation. Her current concentration is on knowledge translation and stakeholder engagement around health care utilization and outcomes for vulnerable populations; implementation of precision medicine using patient-oriented strategies; and the use of education innovations to advance the discipline of family medicine and primary care. Dr. Bartlett was elected the Vice-President of the North American Primary Care Research Group in 2019. She is currently the Executive Director for the Network Coordinating Office of the Primary and Integrated Health Care Innovations (PIHCI) network. As of 2020, Dr. Bartlett is also the President of NAPCRG.



Dr. Richard Koestner is a professor of Psychology at McGill University. He did his PhD at the University of Rochester, and a post-doctoral fellowship at Harvard. He has dedicated more than 30 years of research to studying personality and human motivation. He is the Founder and Director of the McGill Human Motivation Lab, and he has published over 180 scientific articles. Dr. Koestner recently won the Canadian Psychology Association's Donald O. Hebb Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology as a Science (2021). In 2007, Dr. Koestner received the Canadian Psychological Association award for Excellence in Teaching, and in 2008, he won the Principal's Prize for Excellence in Teaching at McGill. Dr. Koestner is one of the world leading proponents of Self-Determination theory and his recent work focuses on how to effectively set and pursue personal goals.



Dr. Roy F. Baumeister is a psychology professor at the University of Queensland. He received his Ph.D. in social psychology from Princeton in 1978 and did a postdoctoral fellowship in sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. He worked for years at Case Western Reserve University and Florida State University. Baumeister's research spans multiple topics, including self and identity, self-regulation, interpersonal rejection and the need to belong, sexuality and gender, aggression, self-esteem, meaning, and self-presentation. He has received research grants from the National Institutes of Health and from the Templeton Foundation. He has nearly 700 publications, and his 42 books include *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty*, *The Cultural Animal*, *Meanings of Life*, and the New York Times bestseller *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*. Other scientists have referred in their publications to his work over 200,000 times, making him among the handful of most cited (most influential) psychologists in the world. He has received several major awards, including the William James Fellow award (their highest honor) from the Association for Psychological Science, and the Jack Block Award from the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.



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.



Dr. Nitish Nag is part of the MD / PhD program at the University of California, Irvine via the NIH funded Medical Scientist Training Program. His PhD work was completed in Computer Science with the Ramesh Jain lab towards developing future health technologies, specifically around the premise of using health navigation and state estimation techniques. Nitish also currently co-leads the Zepp Health Artificial Intelligence Research Lab and coaches high-performing athletes through Alpine Athlete. Nitish holds a triple major from the University of California, Berkeley in Molecular and Cell Biochemistry, Nutritional Physiology and Metabolism and Integrative Biology. Academic awards include: Academic Highest Honors (summa cum laude), Golden Key Honors, Alumni Leadership Award for both 2010 and 2011. His research at UC Berkeley includes studying how exercise lactate metabolism with the Brooks lab, elucidating mechanisms of nutrition and aging in the Hellerstein lab, and cellular signaling in adipocytes in the Sul Lab. In addition to academic research, he worked at Bexel Pharmaceuticals and Renovel Discoveries discovering therapeutics for metabolic and cardiovascular disease.



Dr. Ian Gold is the Canada Research Chair in Philosophy & Psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal. He completed a Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton University and did postdoctoral training at the Australian National University in Canberra. From 2000 to 2006 he was on the faculty of the School of Philosophy & Bioethics at Monash University in Melbourne and returned to McGill in 2006. His research focusses on the theory of delusion in psychiatric and neurological illness and on reductionism in psychiatry and neuroscience. He is the author of research articles in such journals as Behavioral and Brain Sciences, Mind and Language, Consciousness and Cognition, The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, World Psychiatry, Transcultural Psychiatry, Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology, and Cognitive Neuropsychiatry. No Mind is an Island, a book co-written with Joel Gold, was published in 2012.



Dr. Lucina Uddin received an undergraduate degree in neuroscience with a minor in philosophy as well as a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience from the psychology department at UCLA. Dr. Uddin then completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Child Study Center at New York University. For several years she worked as a faculty member in Psychiatry & Behavioral Science at the Stanford University School of Medicine. She joined the psychology department at the University of Miami in 2014, where she currently holds the positions of Associate Professor, Director of the Brain Connectivity and Cognition Laboratory, and Director of the Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience Division. Dr. Uddin's research combines analyses of resting-state fMRI and diffusion weighted imaging data to examine the organization of large-scale brain networks supporting executive functions. Her current projects focus on understanding dynamic network interactions underlying cognitive inflexibility in neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism. Dr. Uddin's work (over 140 publications) has been published in the Journal of Neuroscience, Cerebral Cortex, JAMA Psychiatry, Biological Psychiatry, PNAS, and Nature Reviews Neuroscience. She was awarded the Young Investigator award by the Organization for Human Brain Mapping (2017) and was a Canadian Institute for Advanced Research Azrieli Global Scholar (2018-2020) with the Brain, Mind & Consciousness program.