

Graduates (MA Philosophy) 2022

Name /date of graduation /Supervisor	Title /abstract of thesis
<p>Erik Meinhart</p> <p>February 28, 2022</p> <p>Johannes Brandl</p>	<p>How did human beings develop the ability for cooperative behavior?</p> <p>This thesis seeks to identify the cognitive differences between humans and non-human apes that are likely to give rise to differences in observable group behavior, specifically the disposition to perform unilaterally helpful actions and the ability to understand non-directive, informative communication. I discuss and compare two rival explanatory theories. First, a <i>mentalist</i> account by Michael Tomasello (2014), which suggests that human’s cooperative dispositions emerge due to them having unique altruistic motivations, the ability to represent the mental states of others in certain ways and the capacity for inferential reasoning. Second, a <i>teleological</i> account by Josef Perner and Frank Esken (2015), which suggests that humans stand out due to their teleological understanding of actions as being performed for reasons. I critically discuss a number of concerns with both accounts and suggest two ways in which they might be constructively combined into a unified theory. I suggest for both scenarios, that humans are teleological reasoners up until the age of four. In the first scenario, teleological reasoning is then <i>replaced</i> with mentalist reasoning schemas. In the second scenario, teleological reasoning remains the common strategy, but is <i>supplemented</i> by mentalist tools, which are used for the navigation of more complex situations where teleological reasoning fails.</p>
<p>Marie Langlois</p> <p>March 18, 2022</p> <p>Christopher Gauker</p>	<p>The paradox of unconscious representations in motor control</p> <p>In my thesis, I argue that some of the mental representations ensuring motor control may be unconscious. To be more precise, I do not accept that control over one’s action is strictly conscious, i.e., that it results from consciousness. I think that, in the category of proximal-intentions, which are intentions specifying and guiding action, there are personal-level representations that need not result from conscious processes in order to be responsible for the purposiveness and skilfulness of an action. Here is the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Proximal-intentions play a crucial role in motor control. (ii) Some proximal-intentions are perceptual (they do have perceptual content). (iii) There is evidence that perception* can be unconscious. (iv) If proximal-intentions (that play a role in the control of action) do have perceptual content and there is evidence that perception can be unconscious, then this is a good reason to think that perceptual proximal- intentions may be unconscious. <p>*Importantly, I take perception per se (i.e. conscious or unconscious) to benefit from some epistemic weight, which accounts for its intrinsic controlling feature. This analysis will lead me in distinguishing conscious from unconscious control, and more precisely, in accounting for a specific kind of unconscious cognitive control operating on a proximal and perceptual level of intentions. In my thesis, I hope to reconcile control and automaticity in arguing that there can be some intelligently unconscious kinds of behaviours.</p>

<p>Cornelia Mayer</p> <p>March 25, 2022</p> <p>Christopher Gauker</p>	<p>Counterfactuality in Subjunctive Conditionals</p> <p>From utterances of subjunctive conditionals, we can sometimes but not always infer that the antecedent of the conditional is false. Several theories have been proposed about how this cancellable counterfactuality inference should best be explained. In this thesis, I review the proposals by Iatridou (2000), Ippolito (2003, 2013), Mackay (2019), and Leahy (2018). First, I explain the broader theories that Iatridou's, Ippolito's, and Mackay's explanation of counterfactuality are embedded in, the past-as-modal approaches versus the past-as-past approaches. Then, I focus on the different ways they derive the counterfactuality as a conversational implicature, arguing that none of the four proposals is convincing. They either violate a minimal requirement that I establish, or they are forced to accept untenable consequences. Finally, I present my own explanation of the counterfactuality inference in the last part of the thesis, which rests on two main claims. The first claim is that a certain inference is often reasonable to draw from a subjunctive conditional, namely that the speaker does not believe that the antecedent is true. The second claim is a pragmatic principle called Competence that may be supported by some contexts. I predict that those contexts where Competence can plausibly be assumed to hold will facilitate the counterfactual reading of subjunctive conditionals.</p>
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