Conference
14 May 2025, de 16h00 à 18h00

Consciousness without Self: Perspectives on Subjective Experience from the Buddha to Neuroscience

Rejoignez-nous pour le prochain séminaire ECAI le 14 mai. Tomaso Pignocchi explorera comment la philosophie bouddhiste et les neurosciences convergent pour remettre en question l'idée d'un soi fixe, offrant ainsi de nouvelles perspectives sur la conscience, l'identité et la responsabilité morale.

S'inscrire

Tomaso Pignocchi
Tomaso Pignocchi est philosophe, affilié à l'Institut Catholique de Paris (ICP) et à l'Université LUMSA de Rome. Ses travaux explorent les intersections entre la philosophie bouddhiste, la pensée wittgensteinienne et les débats contemporains sur la conscience.

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RECHERCHE

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While the **Cartesian tradition** anchors the certainty of **personal identity** in the immediacy of **conscious thought**, **Buddhist philosophy** offers a radically different perspective. **Rejecting the very notion of a stable, enduring self** – a rejection motivated not merely by theoretical concerns but by a **fundamentally moral** and **soteriological intention** – it posits that what we ordinarily take to be a **unified subject** is, in fact, a **metaphysical construction**: an illusion with profound **moral** and **existential consequences**.

There is no need to assume a **stable core** as the source of thoughts and experiences; rather, **consciousness** is conceived as a **dynamic stream** of **causally interdependent psychophysical events,** devoid of **intrinsic unity** or **enduring substance (anatt)**, yet nonetheless possessing **operative efficacy**. Although prima facie counterintuitive, this decentered **account of the self finds** significant resonances across several **Western philosophical traditions**. **Hume's bundle theory** (1740) **describes** the mind **as** nothing more than a **succession of fleeting perceptions**, lacking any underlying substratum. **Parfit's reductionism** (1971; 1984) similarly **denies the existence of a deep**, persisting entity underpinning psychological continuity. More recently, **Metzinger's Self-Model Theory (**2003; 2009) argues that the **self is a transparent**, **dynamic construction generated by the brain**, devoid of any substantial ontological status.

What **emerges** from these **diverse traditions is** not merely a critique of the notion of a substantial self, but **a profound reconceptualization of subjectivity itself**. Conscious experience entails reflexive awareness, yet it does not presuppose a fixed subject beneath it; rather, s**elf-awareness appears as a contingent,** conceptually mediated phenomenon rather than a metaphysical foundation. Nonetheless, **the dissolution of the self-illusion raises significant moral implications:** if personal identity is a cognitive fiction, then traditional notions of moral responsibility, autonomy, and free will must be fundamentally reconsidered. Tracing this convergence **between Eastern and Western critiques** of the self opens a path toward a **new understanding** of **consciousness and agency:** one no longer grounded in the fiction of a substantial subject, but in the dynamic processes through which human experience continuously unfolds.

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