

10 x 2 Scholarships:

*Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science & Meditation Training*

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# The Mental Autonomy Project

## Project Description

The central idea behind the Mental Autonomy Project (MAP) is to finally get down to business and integrate so-called “first-person methodologies” into the multidisciplinary study of consciousness (Varela & Shear 1999). This will be done by integrating an academic PhD program with practical experience specifically focused upon formal meditation practice. MAP is a semi-structured, 3-year PhD program, which includes a systematic investigation of first-person, subjective experience as an explicit and active component. This program has both a third-person perspective (3PP) and a first-person perspective (1PP) component – it will approach its epistemic target from the outside as well as from the inside. This course of investigation will combine cutting-edge academic research in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science with formal and rigorous training in classical mindfulness meditation. Formal mindfulness practice arguably is *the* classical, systematic, first-person method and has been continuously developing over the last 2500 years. It may also be the approach that possesses the most direct and strongest relevance for a serious, philosophically motivated orientation toward conscious experience and the human mind.

Candidates accepted into the program will receive a two-component funding package, involving two interlocked kinds of financial support:

1. A standard PhD scholarship of € 1250, - per month (for a period of up to 36 months).
2. Funding for all expenses related to meditation training over the 3-year period, up to € 25.000.

### 3PP: Thematic Focus

All research projects in open-minded, interdisciplinary philosophy of mind and cognitive science and/or applied ethics are welcome ([Metzinger & Windt 2015](#)). In particular, applicants are not expected to write their thesis *about* meditation or related areas. The “third-person component” will be carried out in the spirit and context of the [MIND Group](#), and PhD candidates will be expected to participate in all activities of the MIND Group. Applicants are encouraged to look at some of the [topics of past meetings](#) and the [Open MIND-Project](#) website to learn more about the MIND Group and its thematic scope and to see [examples](#) of research conducted by junior and senior group members.

In addition to projects falling within the broad scope of interdisciplinary consciousness studies, there will also be a more narrow, but non-exclusive thematic focus centered on the notion of “mental autonomy” ([Metzinger 2013](#), [2015](#)). All projects from interdisciplinary philosophy of mind and cognitive science and/or applied ethics will be equally considered, but applicants are encouraged to align their projects with one of the following areas:

- Mental autonomy and mind wandering
- Mental autonomy and cognitive enhancement
- Mental autonomy and psychopathologies of consciousness
- Mental autonomy and applied ethics
- Mental autonomy and effective altruism
- Mental autonomy and the self-model theory of subjectivity
- Mental autonomy, mental action, and cognitive agency
- Mental autonomy and contemplative practice
- Mental autonomy across states of consciousness
- Functional analysis, mechanisms, and neural correlates of mental autonomy
- Computational models of mental autonomy, cognitive agency, and contemplative practice

Applicants are expected to provide evidence of an excellent MA or equivalent degree in philosophy or cognitive science. Only candidates younger than 30 years by the end of the funding period will be accepted (exceptions may apply in special circumstances).

### 1PP: Meditation Training

One central goal of the program is that all participants acquire experience in contemplative practice (resulting in a minimum depth of 1200 hours) by the time they receive their PhD. Following the completion of Module 1 (see below), participants will gradually deepen and refine their practice during a series of silent retreats, during which they will gradually expand their “mental toolbox” and develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the workings of the mind based on careful observation of their own subjective experience.

In keeping with this goal, every participant in the program is expected to commit to regular meditation practice throughout the entire duration of the funding period. This is a strict and binding commitment, including

- Two 30-minute meditation sessions per day for the entire 36-month period;
- Participation in an 8-week course in MBSR (*Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*) during the introductory period, specially adapted to this student group and the general aims of this PhD program;
- A minimum of 20 days spent on silent meditation retreats during the advanced training period.

Another central goal of the project is that, by the time they receive their PhD, all participants will have acquired the qualification to *teach* mindfulness meditation in a secular, academic context to healthy beginners. This program is aimed at the special needs and interests of junior researchers in philosophy and cognitive science, not at practitioners working in a clinical context. Besides training participants to teach mindfulness, this program will complement the other components of meditation training by providing students, over a substantial period of time, the opportunity to cultivate and integrate mindfulness practice within the activities and challenges of everyday life (including their experiences of “learning to teach”). After successful completion of the program, participants will receive, in addition to their PhD, a novel degree called the “Academic Mindfulness Instructor”, which will be certified and accredited by the European Center for Mindfulness in Freiburg (<http://www.ezfa.eu/>). In addition, the program will also function as a pilot project aiming at the development of an internationally recognized accreditation/certification procedure by a well-known university institution involved in mindfulness training and research.

The contemplative training and retreats overlap with classical MBSR teacher training, but the techniques and skills acquired throughout the funding period go beyond this. While candidates who successfully complete the program will formally receive two separate degrees, the idea is that the 1PP and 3PP component are strongly interlocked throughout, leading to the acquisition of a new skill set. This will be reflected in the practical meditation training as well.

In sum, the primary aim, both in practicing and in acquiring the qualification to teach mindfulness meditation, is to apply systematic contemplative practice to the interdisciplinary study of consciousness and mind, including the development of new research methods, both from the 1PP and 3PP. Nevertheless, participants who wish to obtain the traditional degree as a certified MBSR teacher will

be given the opportunity to do so as well and will, assuming they meet certain eligibility requirements, receive funding for this. Eligibility for this additional training will be determined, in part, in a personal interview with members of the teaching faculty.

## Module 1: Probation period

Beginning in January 2017, the first 3 months of MAP constitute a separate introductory module. In this probationary period, candidates will begin working on their thesis and participate in weekly group meetings at [Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz](#). They will also receive a first introduction to classical mindfulness meditation, immediately followed by an 8-weekend course in MBSR (*Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*). During or after completion of this module, both parties can withdraw from the contract without giving any reasons. If a PhD candidate wants to leave the program, they will have to pay back only the fees for the first introductory weekend plus the MBSR-course (maximally € 1500,-), but not the academic scholarship. If either the director of the program, the MBSR-teacher, or members of the contemplative practice faculty come to the conclusion that an individual candidate, say, for academic or psychological reasons, is not suitable for the program, they can also terminate supervision of the doctoral thesis and the mutual funding agreement. In this case, the candidate will not have to refund anything, but will not be able to continue with the program.

## Application Guidelines

The deadline for applications is **September 15<sup>th</sup>**, 2016. If you make it through the first round of the selection process, you will be invited to a first interview in Mainz (for international applicants, this can happen by Skype). Please send your application to:

Prof. Dr. Thomas Metzinger  
Philosophisches Seminar / *Gutenberg Research College*  
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz  
Jakob Welder-Weg 18  
55099 Mainz  
GERMANY

Alternatively, you can save all electronic documents in a single ZIP-file with your last name as the name of the archive and send it to [autonomy@uni-mainz.de](mailto:autonomy@uni-mainz.de). Please direct all future electronic communication to this specific address only.

A complete application includes:

- A short **covering letter** of no more than one page,
- A separate 1-page **statement of academic purpose**, explaining why you are interested in this very special scholarship and whether you already have any **previous experience** with contemplative practice (or, if you do not, why you are interested in this type of practice);
- **Transcripts** of all previous post-secondary education;
- An academic **CV** plus recent photo;
- **Samples of scholarly writing** (e.g., of your BA or MA thesis, or any publications if you already have any);
- **Letters of recommendation** from academic sources are encouraged, but not strictly necessary - but if you have some, please do send them along;
- A **research proposal** of about 15 pages (12pt, 1.5 spacing), explaining the kind of research you want to conduct in your doctoral dissertation (e.g., What is the specific *contribution* that you would like to make?). Your proposal should include
  - a **brief thesis plan** (e.g., a tentative table of contents, plus summaries of potential chapters
  - a first estimation of the **time** needed to complete individual work packages
  - a clear statement of the **epistemic goal** of your project (What exactly is it that you want to *know*?), as well as of the anticipated **argumentative goal** (What *thesis* would you like to defend?)
  - a short critical discussion of selected **examples of existing philosophical literature or empirical research** you expect to be central for your own research project (plus a selective bibliography).

Needless to say, all of this is not binding, in the sense that we do expect that your final research will diverge from the original thesis plan as it develops over the funding period. Likewise, we do not expect you to be able to fully and conclusively answer all of these questions at this stage. But we do want to get as good and detailed an impression of your current academic interests and your specific project as possible.

All training will take place in English. Applicants are therefore strongly encouraged to write their thesis and submit all application materials in English.