

**Call for Applications**  
**Doctoral School in the Framework of the**  
**“Consortium for Health Humanities, Arts, Reading & Medicine (CHARM)”**

*“Cross-cultural explorations into the role of fate, destiny, and predestination as agents for health and wellbeing”*

*16-18 September 2024*

*Organizing and scientific committee*

UGent:

Prof. Bart Dessein (Department of Languages and Cultures)

Prof. Jakob De Roover (Research group Critical and Comparative Research on Culture)

Prof. Johnny Fontaine (Department of Personnel Management, Work and Organizational Psychology)

Prof. Jürgen Pieters (CHARM Director; Department of Literary Studies)

Dr. Zoë Ghyselincx (CHARM Coordinator; Department of Literary Studies)

Dr. Mieke Matthyssen (Department of Languages and Cultures)

University of Antwerp:

Prof. Kristien Hens (Metrodora, Centre of Expertise Health Humanities)

Prof. Vanessa Joosen (Department of Literature)

KU Leuven:

Prof. Jessie Dezutter (Meaning Research Late Life, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences)

Prof. Joris Vandendriessche (Leuven Centre for Health Humanities - LCH<sup>2</sup>)

*Primary instructors*

Prof. Chaïma Ahaddour (Catholic University Leuven)

Dr. Renatas Berniunas (Vilnius University)

Prof. Christoph Jedan (University of Groningen)

Prof. Philippa Koch (Missouri State University)

Prof. Graham Parkes (University of Vienna)

Prof. Alan Weber (Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar)

### *Supporting instructors*

Dr. Mieke Matthyssen (Ghent University)

### *Registration*

Ghent PhD students: Registration through the Doctoral Schools website:

<https://www.ugent.be/doctoralschool/en/doctoraltraining/courses/specialistcourses/cross-cultural-explorations2324>

External participants: Please send an application to [mieke.matthyssen@ugent.be](mailto:mieke.matthyssen@ugent.be).

Deadline for registration: **15 June 2024**.

### *Course description*

This three-day interdisciplinary summer school delves into the complex interplay between cultural beliefs in fate, destiny, and predestination and their impact on individual health and wellbeing. A particular focus will be on (comparative) Eastern and Western cultural contexts.

Instructors come from different fields, including medical, cognitive, and cultural anthropology, literary studies, philosophy, psychology, and religious studies, offering a variety of disciplinary approaches both in methodological and conceptual/theoretical frameworks. In addition, the presented research covers different cultural and religious traditions: the Islam world, Lithuania, China, the US, Mongolia, India, Western philosophical and medical tradition, and various diaspora in Belgium. Dr. Renatas Berniunas will present an innovative cross-cultural approach and the limits of WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) research paradigms in investigating culturally informed concepts such as free will, choice, luck, destiny and predestination and their role in individual wellbeing. Prof. Philippa Koch will talk about concepts of religious providence/spiritual beliefs in relation to health in the U.S. Prof. Alan Weber will talk about the clinical dimensions of Muslim patients' fatalism based on qualitative data from Muslim medical students. Prof. Chaïma Ahaddour will address the role of predestination in religious coping and meaning making in the context of illness and loss among Muslims in Belgium. Prof. Christoph Jedan will discuss the Stoics' relation to and view on notions of fate and how these are supposed to relate to wellbeing. Prof. Graham Parkes will deal with Nietzsche's *amor fati*, with Dr. Matthyssen adding a Chinese flavor to this.

The multidisciplinary approach is not only embedded in the diversity of scientific backgrounds of the instructors, but also on the type of lecturing and in the division of the three days: day one is broadly devoted to lectures on methods and theories and presentation of case studies, followed by discussions; day two has a focus on medical and health contexts and the Muslim communities, and day three focusses on beliefs in fate and fatalism for "the good live" and wellbeing.

The summer school is intended for doctoral students and junior post-doc students in the fields of health humanities and cultural studies. The aim of the summer school is to provide a learning and exchange platform for doctoral students to enhance their understanding of interdisciplinary research methodologies and related theoretical and conceptual frameworks, especially those that involve critical cross-cultural perspectives. In the afternoons, students' own work (in progress) will be presented and discussed in group, with feedback from the instructors according to their expertise.

The course covers a wide range of topics within the field, from establishing and exploring theoretical and methodological frameworks for studying the complexities of cross-cultural and culturally specific of dealings with aspects of fate and predestination and wellbeing, to examining concrete case studies.

Themes that will be addressed include:

1. In which (Eastern and Western) sources or practices do we find cultural, philosophical, literary, medical, and psychological representations of beliefs in fate, destiny, and predestination in relation to wellbeing?
2. To what extent are concepts of fate, destiny, and predestination universal and/or culturally local, and how do they relate to cultural understandings of wellbeing?
3. How are these concepts embedded in everyday social practices and religious rituals, and how do they influence the lived experiences and wellbeing of individuals?
4. When do such beliefs become important for wellbeing (major life events and choices, positive/negative experiences, medical context e.g. illness, ...)?
5. Do beliefs in fate, destiny, and predestination change with changing personal conditions/contexts, e.g. growing older, illness, migration, loss of loved ones, ...?
6. How is the multitude of divination and fortune telling practices related to and grounded in various conceptions of fate, destiny, and predestination, and how – from a (cross-)cultural perspective - do they contribute to wellbeing?
7. What are possible theoretical and/or methodological frameworks to (cross-)culturally investigate beliefs in fate, destiny, and predestination in relation to wellbeing?

### *Programme*

#### **Monday 16 September: Cross-cultural Methodologies and Case Studies**

09.30-12.30 Welcome.

Lecture on "The weirdness of free will" and discussion on free listing as a method for cross-cultural research (Renatas Berniūnas)

(15' coffee break)

Insights from research on the link between free will, choice, and beliefs in fate/predestination with prosocial behavior and wellbeing; discussion case studies: Mongolia, Lithuania, India, China, US (Renatas Berniūnas)

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-17.00 Lecture on “God’s Providence: Religion, Health and the Body in Early America”; discussion on the relation of contemporary concepts of religious providence/spiritual beliefs with health, and how this can be scientifically investigated within the humanities (prof. Philippa Koch)

(15’ coffee break)

First student presentations: discussion and feedback on methods and contents of work in progress/papers sent in advance and presented by the PhD students (Alan Weber, Renatas Berniūnas, Philippa Koch; moderator: Mieke Matthyssen)

### **Tuesday 17 September: Health and Medical Perspectives**

09.30-12.30 Lecture on “Fatalism and predestination in Islamic conceptions of illness”; presentation of general ideas of the origin and meaning of disease in Muslim-majority societies and case studies in relation to wellbeing (Alan Weber) (15’ coffee break)

Lecture on “The role of predestination in religious coping and meaning making in the context of illness and loss among Muslims in Belgium” (Chaïma Ahaddour)

Interactive discussion speakers/PhD students.

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-17.00 Student presentations: discussion and feedback on methods and contents of work in progress/papers sent in advance and presented by the PhD students, with 15’ coffee break (Alan Weber, Renatas Berniūnas, Christoph Jedan, Philippa Koch, Chaïma Ahaddour, CHARM-members; moderator: Mieke Matthyssen)

### **Wednesday 18 September: Wellbeing Perspectives**

09.30-12.30 Lecture on “Drawing comfort from fate: the case of ancient Greco-Roman consolations” (Christoph Jedan)

(15’ coffee break)

Lecture on “Nietzsche’s *amor fati*, and some parallels to ancient Chinese thinkers” (Graham Parkes, Mieke Matthyssen)

Interactive discussion speakers/PhD students.

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13:30-17:00 Student presentations: discussion and feedback on methods and contents of work in progress/papers sent in advance and presented by the PhD students, with 15' coffee break (Alan Weber, Renatas Berniūnas, Christoph Jedan, Philippa Koch, Chaïma Ahaddour, Graham Parkes, CHARM-members; moderator: Mieke Matthyssen)

19:00-22.00 **Public Outreach Event**

- Position paper/pitch (15-30') on existing practices and challenges regarding cross-cultural and humanities approaches in the healthcare sector, followed by a roundtable on culturally sensitive care with panel members. After the panel, a musical performance and a reception will follow.
- Venue: to be decided.

*Bio instructors*

Primary instructors

1. Prof. **Chaïma Ahaddour** is professor Islamic Ethics at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, where she is a member of the Research Unit Theological and Comparative Ethics. She is currently the director of Leuven Center for the Study of Islam, Culture and Society (LCSICS). Her areas of specialization encompass Islamic ethics, “lived religion”, beginning-of-life issues and end-of-life care. Chaïma obtained her doctoral degree in Religious Studies at the KU Leuven. Her doctoral research focused on the attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding death and dying among middle-aged and elderly Moroccan Muslim women living in Antwerp, Belgium. Currently, Chaïma's research focuses on Islamic perspectives on issues at the beginning of life, including prenatal tests and termination of pregnancy. Some of her relevant recent first author publications are on ““For Every Illness There Is a Cure. Attitudes and Beliefs of Moroccan Muslim Women regarding Health, Illness and Medicine” (2017, *Journal of Religion & Health*), “Purification of Body and Soul for the Next Journey. Practices Surrounding Death and Dying among Muslim Women” (2017, *Omega*), “Submitting to God's will. Attitudes and Beliefs of Moroccan Muslim Women regarding Mourning and Remembrance” (2019, *Death Studies*), and “A Temporary Farewell. Practices of Muslim Women regarding Mourning and Remembrance” (2019, *Mortality*).

2. Dr. **Renatas Berniūnas** is currently Marie Curie Fellow at the Interacting Minds Centre, Aarhus University. Dr. Berniunas received his PhD on “Folk Psychology of The Self and Afterlife Beliefs: The Case of Mongolian Buddhists” from the Institute of Cognition and Culture, Queen's University, Belfast, UK (2012). Before going to Aarhus University, he has worked for over 10 years at the Institute of Psychology, Vilnius University (Lithuania), while also being research fellow at among others Neufchatel University and Rutgers University. He spent extensive periods of time in Mongolia for fieldwork. His research interests include cognitive anthropology, moral psychology, cognitive science of religion, cross-cultural

psychology, experimental philosophy, normative cognition, and cultural evolution. He has been principal investigator in several projects dealing with cross-cultural moral psychology and philosophy, covering Lithuania, the US and English-speaking areas, Mongolia, China and India. He published extensively in these fields in high-level journals, with a focus on cognitive and moral psychology, philosophy, and anthropology, often in an interdisciplinary team while adopting cross-cultural research methods. Some of his relevant recent first-author publications are “Being prosocial and happy: Exploring belief in life-determining forces across cultures” (2024, *Journal of Cultural Cognitive Science*), “Bound to share or not to care. The Force of Fate, Gods, Luck, Chance and Choice Across Cultures” (2023, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*) and “The weirdness of belief in free will” (*Consciousness and Cognition*, 2021).

3. Prof. **Christoph Jedan** professor of Ethics and Philosophy of Religion at the Faculty of Religion, Culture and Society, University of Groningen. Prof Jedan studied philosophy, classical philosophy and theology in Germany and the Republic of Ireland. After a PhD in Philosophy at the University of Bonn (on Aristotle and the Free will problem), he received his habilitation from the Humboldt University Berlin. His research interests include the intersections of religion and philosophy (e.g. religious aspects of ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, religion and politics, postsecularism), philosophy and theology as therapeutic forms of thinking (e.g. consolation), and questions of justice relating to public health and marginalized groups (e.g. funerary provision for migrant and minority groups). He has (co)authored and (co)edited a dozen books and collections, including *Willensfreiheit bei Aristoteles?* (2000); *Modalities by Perspective: Aristotle, the Stoics and a Modern Reconstruction* (2002, with Niko Strobach); *Stoic Virtues: Chrysippus and the Religious Character of Stoic Ethics* (2009); *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* (2010, with Arie L. Molendijk and Justin Beaumont), and *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss: Grief and Consolation in Space and Time* (2019, with Avril Maddrell and Eric Venbrux). In relation to the topic of the seasonal school, he is interested in how the concept of fate is mobilized in ancient Greco-Roman consolations for the mitigation of grief.

4. Prof. **Philippa Koch** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Missouri State University. Her research and teaching center on religion, health, and society in America and its global context. Her first book, *The Course of God’s Providence: Religion, Health, and the Body in Early America* (NYU 2021), considers how eighteenth-century Christians perceived sickness and health in an era of rapid changes in medicine and science. Her writing has also appeared in *Religions*, *Church History*, and *The Atlantic*. Koch is currently working on two projects. The first, “Religion and Medicine in America” is a textbook that will introduce instructors and students into the history of religious and medical encounters in the American context, covering the diversity of religious movements, the role of law in the defining of religion and health, and the place of religion in the rise of modern medicine and, more recently, wellness culture (under contract with Routledge). The second project, “Cartographies of Care: Religion,

Medicine, and the Intimacies of Empire,” explores how visions of nature shifted with developments in maternal medicine, colonial encounters, and global missions. In addition to books, she has published articles in *The Public Historian* (2024), *Religions* (2018) and *Church History* (2015, 2016), and her writing has also appeared in *Zocalo* (2021), *The Atlantic* (2016), *Notches* (2016), and *Sightings* (2012). More recently, she has written on the coronavirus pandemic and modern healthcare and vulnerability and aging, and participated in a forum on the role of religion in debates over the pandemic, church attendance, and vaccines. She serves on the Editorial Board for the journal *American Religion* and is the Chief Regional Officer for the Midwest Region of the American Academy of Religion.

5. Born and raised in Glasgow, prof. **Graham Parkes** was educated at the Queen’s College Oxford, in philosophy and psychology, and the University of California at Berkeley, where he received a PhD in philosophy in 1978. After three years of teaching in the Aesthetics Studies Program at UC Santa Cruz, he moved to the Philosophy Department at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa in 1979, where he taught Asian and comparative philosophy for almost thirty years. He was also an adjunct professor in the Division of Ecology and Health and the Academy of Cinematic and Digital Arts toward the end of that period. In the 1990s he spent three years as a visiting scholar at Harvard, at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies and then the Center for the Study of World Religions. In 2008 he moved to University College Cork in Ireland, where he was professor of philosophy and then Head of the School of Philosophy and Sociology. He founded the Irish Institute of Japanese Studies and served as Director for four years, until leaving Ireland in 2015. He has held research appointments in France, Italy, and Japan, and has been a visiting professor in Austria, China, Japan, and Singapore. He is currently a Professorial Research Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Vienna.

6. Prof. **Alan Weber** has taught literature and the Medical Humanities—including the history, philosophy and sociology of medicine and Islamic Medical Ethics—at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar for the past seventeen years. He has held previous appointments at Cornell University, the State University of New York, and the Pennsylvania State University. His cross-disciplinary dissertation *Shakespeare’s Cosmology* (1996) examined Shakespeare’s relationships with early modern natural philosophy and medicine. He is the author of a widely used textbook on the history of science and medicine, *19th Century Science* (2000) and managed the history of science journal *Isis*. He has published over 170 articles, books, and book chapters in a wide variety of fields, including e-learning, education, literature, and medical history. He has directed a number of narrative medicine and medical humanities projects in Qatar at the national level, including a public brochure on Health Website Reliability, an Arabic/English book of patient education cancer survivor stories for the Qatar Cancer Society, a QNRF nationally-funded research project on Literature and Medicine, six volumes of medical student essay writing, and the first cross-disciplinary Art and Medicine undergraduate course in the Persian Gulf (with Stephen Scott, M.D.). He conducted an interventional educational trial on the use of graphic novels in

medical ethics teaching in 2015. He has organized and Co-Directed eleven ACCME-accredited workshops on integrating the health humanities into clinical practice at WCM-Q. He was the lead organizer of the 1st and 2nd International Conferences on the Medical Humanities in the Middle East and also organized two national conferences on the teaching of English in Qatar in 2009-2010 as well as the 1st Conference on Healthcare Communications in the Middle East in 2020. His research on Internet Health websites in the Middle East won first prize in 2015 in the Qatar National Research Fund's annual research competition, and he serves as the Qatar National Representative for the International Association for Communication in Healthcare (EACH). He has also published base-line studies on medical education, provider-patient relations and communication in Qatar. He contributed a chapter to a collection that won the 2017 Outstanding Book Award from the U.S. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). He is currently developing national and international Arts in Health programs.

#### Supporting instructors

Dr. Mieke Matthyssen, FWO Fellow, Department of Languages and Cultures, Ghent University.

Colleagues from UA and KUL who serve in the scientific committee as well as CHARM-members that participate in the CHARM Kick-off event will be engaged for evaluation of student papers and presentations in a later stage according to their expertise.

#### *Venue*

Museum dr. Guislain, Jozef Guislainstraat 43B, 9000 Gent.