FULLY FUNDED PHD POSITION (Deadline May 20, 2019)

The Centre for Ethics at the University of Zurich is recruiting a **PhD candidate** for the interdisciplinary SNF project *Reading Guilty Minds*. The project is lead by Dr Markus Kneer (www.markuskneer.com).

Topic

The project *Reading Guilty Minds* explores the ascription of potentially inculpating mental states (*mens rea*) such as intention and knowledge. Its central goal is to systematically investigate biases in *mens rea* attributions of professional judges so as to devise strategies to overcome such biases.

Summary of the Project

Theory of mind is the capacity to ascribe mental states – knowledge, beliefs, intentions – to others and ourselves. This capacity is essential for our ability to explain, predict and evaluate behaviour. Just as for moral judgment, theory of mind is of key importance for the assessment of legal responsibility. An individual is legally responsible for a crime if she (i) causally brought about a harmful outcome (*actus reus*) and (ii) acted with a 'guilty mind' (*mens rea*). Four *mens reas* are particularly prominent in most systems of criminal law – intentionality, knowledge, recklessness and negligence – and they engender different degrees of culpability. In few other contexts are mental state ascriptions of similar consequence as in criminal jurisprudence, and so it stands to reason to ensure that our practices of *mens rea* attribution are reliable and lead to just verdicts.

The project aims to systematically investigate sources of pervasive bias in the ascription of legally inculpating states of mind, and to devises strategies that help alleviate such biases.[1] It is divided into four parts. Part I establishes the project's foundations: It elucidates the notions of criminal responsibility and *mens rea* from the perspective of philosophy and legal theory and explores the legal *status quo* in the criminal law of Switzerland, France, Germany, the UK and the US. Parts II and III, which are dedicated to empirical work, jointly constitute the centrepiece of the project. Part II investigates experimentally whether the attribution of mental states relevant for criminal jurisprudence is afflicted by pervasive biases. Part III

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[1] For representative work, see Kneer, M. & S. Bourgeois-Gironde, 2017, Mens rea ascription, expertise and outcome effects, *Cognition* (169) as well as Kneer, M. & E. Machery, 2019, No luck for moral luck, *Cognition* (182).

assesses empirically what types of measures help alleviate biases in *mens rea* ascriptions. The experiments will work with different sample populations – laypeople and legal experts – since the targeted countries have different systems and procedures. Whereas in Switzerland, for instance, criminal trials are decided by professional judges, Anglophone countries such as the UK and the US have a juror system. Part IV will evaluate the findings and advance concrete recommendations of how criminal jurisprudence could be improved so as to guarantee the presumption of innocence, as well as fair and equal trial conditions for all.

Requirements:
- MA (or equivalent) in law, psychology or philosophy
- A strong interest in theory of mind, criminal law and interdisciplinary research
- German is not necessary; experiments will be run in multiple countries and languages, command of multiple languages (in particular English and French) is an asset
- Previous experience with empirical methods not necessary but helpful

Tasks, Compensation, Duration

The Project *Reading Guilty Minds* lasts four years, during which the dissertation should be completed. The PhD candidate is expected to conduct research on the project topic and to support the PI with regards to organizational tasks of the project (conferences, workshops etc.). Full funding of the PhD Salary is secured until December 2022. The salary during the first year is ca. 40'000 CHF (about 40'600 USD) during the first year and gradually increases to 42'800 CHF (about 43'500 USD). Starting date is as soon as possible.

Application

Interested candidates should submit (i) a CV (no more than two pages), (ii) a letter of motivation (no more than two pages focusing explicitly on the project and relevant previous experience) and (iii) a writing sample (no more than 20 pages). Letters of recommendation are welcome but not required. All materials should be submitted by email with the subject line "PhD Guilty Minds" to markus.kneer@uzh.ch. The deadline is May 20, 2019. Candidates should specify by what date they could move to Zurich and begin their PhD.