



Biological Modality Workshop

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University of Leeds

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Evolution by natural selection can bring new kinds of systems into existence, with capacities never before instantiated. But it cannot ‘break the laws of physics’ – the biologically possible must be physically possible. This workshop will explore various themes within biological modality: what is biologically possible, and how does that relate to physical laws? Is biological possibility best understood as accessibility from a given location within a space of possibilities, such as Dennett’s ‘Library of Mendel’? Are there any biological laws that ground a specific kind of biological modality? What can astrobiology, the search for other instances of life in the universe, tell us about how life can be? And can synthetic biology be seen as the empirical study of what is biologically possible? How much of what we see around us in the living world is the result of evolutionary contingency, and how much is the way it is because it could not have been otherwise?

