



Topics in Economics and Philosophy, October 24-25, 2012

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**SPEAKERS: Gustaf Arrhenius, Katharina Berndt, Luc Bovens, Till Grüne-Yanoff,
Johan E. Gustafsson, Sven Ove Hansson, Stephan Hartmann, Wlodek Rabinowicz,
Stéphane Zuber**

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CONVENORS: Gustaf Arrhenius, Sven Ove Hansson, Wlodek Rabinowicz

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VENUE: The Thunberg Lecture Hall, SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala

October 24

12.30-13.30

Lunch at SCAS

13.45-15.00

Welcome

Björn Wittrock, Principal at SCAS

14.00-15.00

Concerns for the Poorly-Off in Ordering Prospects

Luc Bovens, London School of Economics and Political Science

Suppose that a policy maker is asked to order a set of policies. People will be affected in different ways by these policies and the outcomes are uncertain. How should a policy maker order these policies? Following Harsanyi, utilitarians aim to maximise the average expected utility of the persons affected. But this overlooks distributional concerns and ignores the plight of the poorly-off. Now there are many ways of being concerned about the plight of the poorly-off. I will provide a taxonomy and construct a calculus that integrates these various concerns. This exercise draws on *ex ante* and *ex post* interpretations of *prioritarianism* as discussed by Diamond, Rabinowicz, McCarthy and Fleurbaey.

15.00-16.00

Updating on Conditionals = Kullback-Leibler + Causal Structure

Stephan Hartmann, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München

Modeling how to learn an indicative conditional has been a major challenge for Formal Epistemologists. One proposal to meet this challenge is to request that the posterior probability distribution minimizes the Kullback-Leibler divergence to the prior probability distribution, taking the learned information as a constraint (expressed as a conditional probability statement) into account. This proposal has been criticized in the literature based on several clever examples. In this paper, we revisit four of these examples and show that one obtains intuitively correct results for the posterior probability distribution if the underlying probabilistic models reflect the causal structure of the scenarios in question. The talk is based on joint work with Soroush Rafiee Rad.

16.00-16.30

Coffee break

16.30-17.30

Interdefinabilities in decision theory

Sven Ove Hansson, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

Can preferences be defined in terms of choices? Can “good” be defined in terms of “better”? Conversely, can “better” be defined in terms of “good”? Can deontic concepts be defined in terms of evaluative ones? This presentation is an attempt to provide a comprehensive account of these and some related definability issues concerning concepts that are relevant in decision theory. A comparison between different proposed definitions may help us to clarify the more fundamental question what is required for such a definition to be acceptable.

17.30-18.30

Preference Consolidation with Endogenous Entrenchment

Till Grüne-Yanoff, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

This paper presents a model of preference consolidation that restores a preference base's consistency by performing a minimal contraction. Previous preference contraction models yield highly non-unique results, and therefore require exogenous information in the form of an entrenchment relation. I propose to derive information about such an entrenchment relation from the semantic properties of the alternatives ranked in the preference relation itself. The model thus endogenises information contained in the entrenchment relation. While such a model does not necessarily yield a unique result, it considerably reduces the amount of exogenous information needed to arrive at a contraction with a unique result.

18.30-19.00

Reception in the Thunberg Dining Room, SCAS

October 25

9.15-10.15

Goodness and Numbers

Wlodek Rabinowicz, Lund University and SCAS

In his (in)famous provocative paper (PPA 1977), John Taurek argued against the common-sense view that numbers count in life-saving situations. Frances Kamm responded to this challenge with what she called the Aggregation Argument in favour of the view that numbers count (Morality, Mortality, vol. 1, 1993; cf. also Utilitas 2005). Kamm's argument was defended by Iwao Hirose in a number of papers (Analysis 2001, Utilitas 2004), while Weyma Lübbe developed a defence of Taurek's position (PPA 2008, cf. also Lübbe 2009). In my talk, I will target Taurek's claim that there is something deeply problematic and illegitimate in judgments of goodness and betterness period, as opposed to judgments that concern goodness or betterness for someone. That the former are meaningful and can be legitimate is a basic presupposition of the Aggregation Argument - at least if we suppose that the premises of the argument (Impartiality and Pareto) and its conclusion are interpreted as axiological claims, as it is usually done. I am going to approach this issue from a particular perspective on goodness: more precisely, from the point of view of the fitting-attitude analysis of value.

10.15-10.30

Coffee break

10.30-11.30

General Consequentialism

Johan E. Gustafsson, Collège d'études mondiales, Paris, and Stockholm University

The central claim of consequentialism, following Parfit, takes as the ultimate moral aim that consequences be as good as possible. Applied to acts, this claim is commonly taken to imply a version of act consequentialism, that is, the view that an act is right in a situation if and only if it has as good consequences as every alternative act. In this talk, I shall argue that act consequentialism violates the central claim of consequentialism, and moreover I shall argue that any theory that, like act consequentialism, only assigns deontic statuses to acts, cannot give a complete account of a plausible consequentialism. Instead of act consequentialism, I shall defend a more general version of consequentialism, namely, the view that your obligation in a situation is to achieve, as far as things are up to you in the situation, an outcome that is as good as possible. Furthermore, I shall argue that this general consequentialism has advantages over global consequentialism.

11.30-12.30

On the Weighted Majority Rule

Katharina Berndt Rasmussen, Stockholm University

The weighted majority rule, as suggested by Harry Brighouse and Marc Fleurbaey, is a democratic decision rule that is promising from a welfare-perspective. This is so since the rule, given certain assumptions, can be argued to be welfare-efficient (that is, to maximise aggregate welfare). In my presentation I will examine some of these assumptions in order to assess the argument from welfare-efficiency.

12.30-14.00

Lunch

14.00-15.00

Escaping the Repugnant Conclusion: Rank-Discounted Utilitarianism with Variable Population

Stéphane Zuber, CERSES and Collège d'études mondiales, Paris

Evaluation of climate policies and other issues requires a variable population setting where population is endogenously determined. We propose and axiomatize the rank-discounted critical-level utilitarian social welfare order. It is shown to fill out the space between critical-level utilitarianism and (a version of) critical-level leximin. Moreover, it satisfies many conditions and principles used to evaluate variable population criteria. In particular, it avoids the repugnant conclusion even when the critical level is zero.

15.00-15.30

Coffee break

15.30-16.30

Inequality and Population Change

Gustaf Arrhenius, Stockholm University, SCAS, and Collège d'études mondiales, Paris

We usually examine our considered intuitions regarding inequality by comparing populations of the same size. Likewise, the standard measures of inequality and its badness have been developed on the basis of such comparisons alone. Many real world policies, however, will affect the size of a population, especially in the long run. For example, many health policies are very likely to prevent deaths and affect procreation decisions. Trivially, policies directly aimed at increasing or curbing population growth affect the population size. In addition, if we are interested in measuring the development of global inequality during the last thirty years or so, we have to take into account the great population expansion in countries such as India and China. Hence, we need to consider how to extend measures of inequality to different number cases, that is, how to take into account the complication that population numbers are often unequal between the compared alternatives. Moreover, it turns out that examining different number case is a fruitful way of probing our ideas about egalitarian concerns. It reveals as yet unnoticed complexities and problems in current conceptualizations of the value of equality and points to a new understanding of this value, or so I'll argue.