

workshop on cognitive value



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Kevin Mulligan *University of Geneva*

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How to model the epistemic probabilities of conditionals

Branden Fitelson *Northeastern University*

ABSTRACTS

Deferring to Doubt

Miriam Schoenfield

When we doubt a belief, we examine how things look from a perspective in which that belief is set aside. Sometimes we care about what that perspective recommends and, as a result, we abandon the belief we've been doubting. Other times we don't: we recognize that a perspective in which a certain belief is set aside recommends abandoning it, but we go on believing it anyway. Why is this? In this paper, I'll consider and then reject some proposals concerning when to defer to the perspective of doubt. I'll argue that ultimately the question of whether to defer to doubt on any given occasion can't be answered through rational deliberation.

Combining probabilistic and non-probabilistic beliefs

Sven-Ove Hansson

One of the major problems in modelling belief change is the difficulty of combining full (dichotomous) and probabilistic beliefs in one and the same model. I will argue that a model combining the two types of belief should treat full beliefs as "provisionally" having probability 1. This requires that we introduce some means for revising the probability of propositions currently held to have the probability 1. Two important features of the model I will introduce are (1) a distinction between update and revision, which is transferred from belief change theory to a probabilistic model, and (2) the use of infinitesimals as a convenient representation of probabilities of propositions that are currently too close to 0 to be taken seriously, but may later come to be taken seriously and assigned a real-valued probability. The negation of a proposition with infinitesimal probability is classified as undoubted but doubtable.

Welfare pluralism and the pragmatic foundations of a pluralist theory of theoretical normativity

Andrew Reisner

This paper explores the idea that both epistemically positive and non-epistemically positive (pragmatic) characteristics contribute to the cognitive value of beliefs. In particular, I explore the idea that there are irreducible epistemic and irreducible non-epistemic reasons for belief that interact with each other. I suggest a view on which such reasons all arise from considerations of wellbeing, but the wellbeing itself has being in positive epistemic states as basic constituent. The weighing relations between epistemic and non-epistemic reasons for belief are explained, I conjecture, by the fact that they follow the weighing relations between epistemic and non-epistemic constituents of wellbeing. The view, which I tentatively call 'welfare pluralism', holds that there are irreducible epistemic and non-epistemic (pragmatic) reasons for belief, but that all reasons for belief have wellbeing as the source of their normativity.

Radical interpretation and decision theory

Anandi Hattiangadi

H. Orri Stefansson

This paper takes issue with an influential argument for physicalism about intentionality based on the possibility of radical interpretation. A core commitment of physicalism is that the intentional truths—about what an arbitrary agent believes, desires, and means—supervene on the physical truths—those truths that are stateable in the terms of an ideal and complete physical theory. The interpretationist claims that we can get a handle on the supervenience of the intentional on the physical by considering the predicament of a radical interpreter, an ideally rational being who knows the physical truths and who sets out to deduce the intentional truths about an arbitrary subject without recourse to any further empirical information. If radical interpretation is possible, the interpretationist argues, there is an a priori entailment from the physical truths to the intentional truths, and the latter supervene on the former. One of the most compelling arguments for the possibility of radical interpretation, associated most closely with David Lewis and Donald Davidson, gives a central role to decision theoretic representation theorems, which demonstrate that if an agent's preferences satisfy certain constraints, it is possible to deduce probability and utility functions that represent her beliefs and desires. We argue that an interpretationist who wants to rely on the existing representation theorems in defense of the possibility of radical interpretation faces a trilemma, since for all these theorems, at least one of the following is true:

1. The theorems impose constraints on preference that are both too normatively and psychologically demanding, and hence are not even close to being satisfied even by perfectly rational agents, let alone ordinary ones;
2. The frameworks within which the theorems are proven contain objects the preference ranking of which the interpreter could not know on the basis of knowledge of the physical truths alone;
3. The theorems fail to deliver coherent comparative belief rankings derived from the agents' preferences.

Are probabilities values?

Wlodek Rabinowicz

According to the fitting-attitude analysis of value, to be valuable is to be a fitting object of a pro-attitude. In earlier publications, setting off from this format of analysis, I proposed a modelling of value relations which makes room for incommensurability in value. In this talk, which is based on the paper published in *Synthese* 2017, I shortly recapitulate the value modelling and then move on to suggest adopting a structurally similar analysis of probability. Indeed, many probability theorists from Poisson onwards did adopt an analysis of this kind. This move allows one to formally model probability and probability relations in essentially the same way as I model value and value relations. One of the advantages of this approach is that we get a new account of Keynesian incommensurable probabilities, which goes beyond Keynes in distinguishing between different types of incommensurability. It also becomes possible to draw a clear distinction between incommensurability and vagueness (indeterminacy) in probability comparisons.

How important is this question?

Graham Oddie

It is often claimed that not all questions are equally important. Some questions really do seem more important than others. The question of how many blades of grass there are on the lawn in the quad, whether the number of particles in the universe is odd or even seem not very important at all. The question of who will win the 2020 US Presidential election, what the causal relationship is between GHG emissions and climate change, and whether or not God exists, are important—or at least seem so to many. But the appearances are also a bit more subtle and interesting than this might suggest. A question might not seem important in itself, but it might seem very important relative to some other question. I would like a general theory of the importance of questions, one that ranks questions by their importance, while handling the full range of different ways in which a question might turn out to be important. And, finally, I would like an encouraging answer to the question in the title of this talk. (After all, I don't want this talk to turn out to have been a total waste of time.)

Cognitive values, rationality, and fallacies

Gustavo Cevolani

I study rational belief and rational decision making in the framework of cognitive decision theory, exploring the role that truth, information, probability, and other "cognitive utilities" play in human cognition and reasoning. In particular, I present and defend a "strongly fallibilist" view of human knowledge as based on the notion of truthlikeness or verisimilitude. First, I show how this view can deal with the well-known Preface and Lottery paradoxes. Second, I discuss within the proposed framework the so-called "conjunction fallacy" as studied in the psychology of reasoning. Finally, I present some preliminary results of an ongoing project devoted to the empirical test of different versions of cognitive decision theory.

How to model the epistemic probabilities of conditionals

Branden Fitelson

David Lewis (and others) have famously argued against Adams's Thesis (that the probability of a conditional is the conditional probability of its consequent, given its antecedent) by proving various "triviality results." In this paper, I argue for two theses -- one negative and one positive. The negative thesis is that the "triviality results" do not support the rejection of Adams's Thesis, because Lewisian "triviality based" arguments against Adams's Thesis rest on an implausibly strong understanding of what it takes for some credal constraint to be a rational requirement (an understanding which Lewis himself later abandoned in other contexts). The positive thesis is that there is a simple (and plausible) way of modeling the probabilities of conditionals, which (a) obeys Adams's Thesis, (b) avoids all of the existing triviality results, and (c) seems to be correct (both prescriptively and descriptively).