

The Philosophy of Neutrality

The 2025 Symposium of the Swiss Philosophical Society

27–29 August 2025

Keynote Speakers:

Thomas Hurka (Toronto)
Kevin Mulligan (Lugano)
Ralf Bader (Fribourg)
Anne Meylan (Zürich)
Wlodek Rabinowicz (Lund)

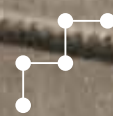
Organisation:

Michael Balmer
Olivier Massin

neuchtrality@gmail.com
[unine.ch/philo/evenement
/the-philosophy-of-neutrality](http://unine.ch/philo/evenement/the-philosophy-of-neutrality)



Supported by
Swiss Academy
of Humanities
and Social Sciences



Swiss National
Science Foundation

unine
Université de Neuchâtel

Program of the 2025 Symposium

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NEUTRALITY

27th August (Wednesday)

	Room B5	Room A1	Room B1
13:45 – 15:00 (1h15m)	Thomas Hurka (Room S1)		
15:10 – 15:50 (40m)	Claus Beisbart	Andrea Salvador	
15:50 – 16:10 (20m)	Break		
16:10 – 16:50 (40m)	Florian Gatignon	Dominik Renner	Francesco Franda
17:00 – 17:40 (40m)	A. Strollo & M. Carrara	Kyryll Khromov	Zoé Grange-Marczak

28th August (Thursday)

	Room B5	Room B1	Room A1
09:00 – 10:15 (1h15m)	Ralf Bader (Room S1)		
10:20 – 11:00 (40m)	Víctor Carranza	Lisa Hecht	Symposium Action & Games
11:10 – 11:50 (40m)	Marc Andree Weber	Sandy Berkovski	
11:50 – 13:45 (1h55m)	Lunch		
13:45 – 15:00 (1h15m)	Kevin Mulligan (Room S1)		
15:10 – 15:50 (40m)	Francis Cheneval	Jimena Zapata	Symposium Action & Games
15:50 – 16:10 (20m)	Break		
16:10 – 16:50 (40m)	Pablo Hubacher Haerle	Savvas Ioannou	
17:00 – 17:40 (40m)	Viktor Ivanković	Guillaume Durieux	

29th August (Friday)

	Room B5	Room A1	Room B1
09:00 – 10:15 (1h15m)	Wlodek Rabinowicz (Room S1)		
10:20 – 11:00 (40m)	Michael Balmer	Marcello Ostinelli	
11:10 – 11:50 (40m)	Gabriele Turati	Felix Koch	
11:50 – 13:45 (1h55m)	Lunch		
13:45 – 15:00 (1h15m)	Anne Meylan (Room S1)		
15:10 – 15:50 (40m)	Malte Hendrickx	Jonas Harney	Markus Pawelzik

Program of the 2025 Symposium

ACTION & GAMES

10:15 – 10:20: Introduction
10:20 – 11:10: Thomas Hurka (University of Toronto) – Title TBA
11:10 – 11:15: Break
11:15 – 12:05: Jonas Farias Costa (University of Salzburg) – ‘ <i>What do we do together when we play Lego together?</i> ’
12:05 – 13:45: Lunch
13:45 – 15:00: No talk (keynote speaker scheduled)
15:00 – 15:50: Sharon Casu (University of Fribourg) – ‘ <i>Gaming and the Metaverse: Who Does What (and to Whom)</i> ’
15:50 – 16:00: Break
16:00 – 16:50: Alexandre Declos (University of Neuchâtel) – ‘ <i>An ontology of toys</i> ’
16:50 – 17:00: Break
17:00 – 17:50: Louis Rouillé (University of Liège) – ‘ <i>Virtual Death: on counting, winning, and losing lives in a video game</i> ’

Thomas Hurka, University of Toronto (Canada)

A NEUTRALITY WITHIN NON-NEUTRALISM

Wednesday 27th August, 13:45 – Room S1

Abstract: This talk describes a kind of neutrality that can be part of a broadly non-neutralist view that affirms objective goods in human life and has no objection to state action to promote those goods. The neutrality comes in the characterization of two such goods, knowledge and achievement. It makes the degrees of value of instances of these goods depend only on formal properties such as their generality and not on the values of their objects; it ignores those values and so is neutral about them. This neutrality may be familiar for a cognitive good like knowledge but is less so for conative goods, which are more commonly characterized in non-neutral ways.

Ralf Bader, University of Fribourg (Switzerland)

THE AGENT-NEUTRAL VETO

Thursday 28th August, 09:00 – Room S1

Abstract: Agent-relative options are primarily invoked to counterbalance the demands of the agent-neutral good and are motivated by the thought that the agent-neutral good is excessively demanding and does not leave adequate room for the agent's own perspective. This paper will identify and discuss an important challenge for this way of countering the demandingness of the agent-neutral good, namely that the agent-neutral good would seem to be able to exercise a veto on relationships of partiality permissibly arising in the first place. It will be argued that responding to this challenge requires one to accept identity-based partiality, to accept that relationship-based partiality presupposes identity-based partiality and to accept that partiality to self is the strongest form of partiality that places an upper bound on other forms of partiality.

Kevin Mulligan, USI Institute of Philosophical Studies (Lugano, Switzerland)

EXCLUDED FOURTH

Thursday 28th August, 13:45 – Room S1

Abstract: Indifference and neutrality come in many shapes and sizes. Two of the more important are psychological or mental indifference and axiological indifference. I focus on two types of axiological indifference: the principle of excluded fourth – everything is valuable or disvaluable or indifferent – and indifference with respect to the value relation of axiological height or importance. What does indifference amount to in each case and what are their roles?

Anne Meylan, USI Institute of Philosophical Studies (Lugano, Switzerland)

ON ASKING ONESELF QUESTIONS

Friday 29th August, 13:45 – Room S1

Abstract: Suspension of judgment has traditionally been seen as the attitude that embodies doxastic neutrality—that is, the stance between belief and disbelief. It is also widely regarded as the central attitude of inquiry. In this talk, I will focus on the norms of inquiry, and in particular on those that appear to govern the act of self-questioning. After examining and setting aside accounts that treat self-questioning as being governed either by a practical or an epistemic requirement, I advance my own view: namely, that the requirement governing self-questioning stems from the very nature of the illocutionary act itself. Just as the act of promising gives rise to obligations, so too does the act of asking oneself a question generate a requirement to seek evidential reasons in order to answer the question posed.

PERSONALIZED NEUTRAL-RANGE UTILITARIANISM WITH INCOMMENSURABLE LIVES

Friday 29th August, 09:00 – Room S1

Abstract: This paper examines Neutral-Range Utilitarianism (NRU) – a utilitarian theory that posits a range of lives neutral in impersonal value: adding people with such lives doesn't make things better or worse. More precisely, I examine Personalized NRU (PNRU) that identifies impersonally neutral lives with lives neutral in their personal value: neither better nor worse for a person than non-existence. Personally neutral lives might be 'strictly' neutral, i.e., equally as good for a person as non-existence, or 'weakly' neutral, i.e., incommensurable with non-existence: neither better or worse, nor equally good. While all strictly neutral lives are equally good for a person, some weakly neutral lives might be better than others. Thus, they form a range. This range of weakly neutral lives may be fairly extended.

PNRU differs from the more familiar versions of NRU, according to which even good lives, i.e., lives that are better for a person than non-existence, may be impersonally neutral, either all of them or all up to some wellbeing level. Unlike PNRU, these familiar versions conflict with the basic welfarist intuition that, other things being equal, what is better for a person makes things impersonally better.

This paper considers PNRU in a framework that differs from the standard one for utilitarian axiologies in that it allows for incommensurable lives. Lives can be incommensurable in personal value with non-existence, but also with each other. Is utilitarian aggregation possible if all these incommensurabilities are allowed? The paper answers this question in the positive.

The second question addressed in the paper concerns the so-called Repugnant Conclusion. Given additional assumptions, PNRU implies that for any population there is a better one in which everyone's life is barely good – barely worth living. Such lives are close to not being good. However, the apparent repugnance of this conclusion is considerably mitigated if barely good lives aren't close to being bad – worse than non-existence. Even barely good lives are significantly better than bad lives, if they are separated from the latter by the extended neutral range. This claim, however, crucially depends on the argument that a framework that posits weakly neutral lives leaves no room for lives that are strictly neutral or for lives that are very close to being strictly neutral.

Unfortunately, PNRU also leads to another repugnant conclusion that does seem genuinely repugnant. So, like other utilitarian axiologies, it may not be a tenable view, after all.

Claus Beisbart, University of Bern (Switzerland)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING? A FRESH LOOK AT THE DEBATE ABOUT VALUE- NEUTRAL SCIENCE

Wednesday 27th August, 15:10 – Room B5

Abstract: To what extent is science value-neutral or free of non-epistemic values? This question has been at the center of a long debate in philosophy of science. This talk aims to show that most opposing parties are closer to each other than they might seem. In particular, they agree that scientific findings are ideally value-neutral. To show this, I clear the ground by analyzing Max Weber's thoughts about value-neutral science. I then analyze to what extent Rudner's argument and its extensions deny Weber's main point. I finally look at standpoint theory. I argue that the consequences drawn by proponents of Rudner's argument and standpoint theorists make plain their commitment to some kind of value neutrality. I conclude by analyzing the kinds of issues that really remain controversial.

Andrea Salvador, USI Institute of Philosophical Studies (Lugano, Switzerland)

IDENTICALS BY LOGIC. ON THE LOGIC OF DESCRIBING THE SAME FACTS

Wednesday 27th August, 15:10 – Room A1

Abstract: By asserting a statement, we say how things are, and this commits us to disagreeing with and remaining neutral towards certain other statements. The notion of generalised identity (GI) between statements, of them saying things are in the same way, is crucial for determining what you should disagree with or be neutral to. But what statements are generalised identical by logic? Correia (2016), Brast-McKie (2021) and Elgin (2023) recently answered this question. However, I give reasons for believing that their proposals lack the appropriate level of generality. Therefore, I provide an exact truth-maker semantics for GI which captures the correct logic of GI. This is done mainly by introducing states which consider certain propositions identical and certain propositions distinct. These are, respectively, identity-makers and difference-makers.

Florian Gatignon, University of Geneva (Switzerland)

COUNTERPARTS AND NEUTRALITY

Wednesday 27th August, 16:10 – Room B5

Abstract: I discuss the claim that theories that make use of counterpart relations are powerful because they display a form of neutrality in substantial metaphysical debates. They are neutral, for example, because they allow us not to have to decide between competing claims about the lifespan and modal properties of some objects. This is particularly manifest in cases of coincidence like that of the statue and the clay and in cases of fission. I then examine the objection that this wide neutrality is a problem, because it forces one to deny that the phenomena analyzed using counterpart theories (e.g., persistence, modality) are profound. I object that this is in fact a strength of counterpart theories. Besides, the counterpart relations may be restricted to avoid that worry, and the issue can be extended to competing theories. I conclude that counterpart theorists should not be worried about the neutrality of their theory.

Dominik Renner, Philosophische Gesellschaft Basel (Switzerland)

WEBER ON VALUE-NEUTRALITY

Wednesday 27th August, 16:10 – Room A1

Abstract: Max Weber famously championed the idea of the value-neutrality of the empirical sciences. In my contribution, I want to first clarify, how Weber himself understands the principle of value-neutrality. The main part of my contribution shall, however, be focused on the arguments Weber gives for this principle. In this way, the understanding developed in the first part can be checked against the text. On the other hand, Weber's arguments should be scrutinized as such. In this regard, my verdict will be entirely negative: Should they be conclusive, Weber's arguments would prove too much. On closer inspection, they furthermore turn out to be either circular or based on assumptions that are anything but unassailable. I will finish my contribution by touching on the question what conclusions we should draw from this negative finding.

MORAL AND POLITICAL VALUES IN SOCIAL THEORIZING: A DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH TO A NORMATIVE MATTER

Wednesday 27th August, 16:10 – Room B1

Abstract: Social sciences are often described as being imbued with moral and political values, more so—if not even unlike—than other scientific disciplines. This claim is sometimes invoked as a call to critically examine implied normative stances, while at other times, it is used to challenge the objectivity of these fields. In particular, moral and political values are more contentious: some argue that they negatively impact scientific objectivity, while others argue that they may benefit it. In this paper, I take a step back and ask: what does it mean to say that social sciences are value-laden? I argue that moral and political values influence them in two distinct ways: first, by making certain social concepts thick, containing both descriptive and normative elements; second, values play a role in guiding the theorists on how to shape the concepts, though this does not necessarily make the concepts themselves thick.

Andrea Stollo & Massimiliano Carrara, University of Padua (Italy)

IS THEORY CLOSURE A HALLMARK OF LOGIC'S NEUTRALITY?

Wednesday 27th August, 17:00 – Room B5

Abstract: Logic is often considered theoretically neutral, imposing no significant constraints on the world. In this talk, we explore how this purported neutrality can be understood, focusing on a proposal all has done. He suggests that logic should be viewed as the universal closure relation of theories. Under this view, a logic that just closes truths gathered by extralogical theories is superior to a logic independently proving logical truths. The main thesis of the talk is that the absence of logical truths can be interpreted as a hallmark of logic's neutrality. We present this proposal, examine its complexities, and ultimately argue that this account of neutrality is tenable when approached through a meta-linguistic framework.

Kyryll Khromov, University of Geneva (Switzerland)

THE NOT-SO-NEUTRAL GROUND: SCIENCE, VALUES, AND DEMOCRATIC DELIBERATION

Wednesday 27th August, 17:00 – Room A1

Abstract: Neutrality in science often takes two forms: objectivity, the ideal of unbiased facts, and common ground, the aspiration that scientific knowledge can guide democratic policy. Yet both ideals face challenges. Philosophers note that inductive risk—balancing the costs of being wrong—draws moral values into scientific judgments, while underdetermination shows that data alone rarely dictate one theory. Beyond these, Kitcher's concept of scientific significance demonstrates how social priorities can skew which questions get investigated, potentially undermining science's role as common ground. In response, proponents of “alignment” propose embedding democratically endorsed values into research processes. However, Stephen John cautions that cleanly separating epistemic from normative elements is often illusory. Rather than aiming at neutral scientific advice “out of the box”, we should cultivate reflexive awareness and robust public deliberation, thereby legitimizing use of scientific evidence for policy, while acknowledging that scientific advice can never be entirely neutral in pluralistic societies.

Zoé Grange-Marczak, École Normale Supérieure (Paris, France)

THE POSSIBILITY OF A NON-NEUTRAL WITHDRAWAL: SARTRE AND THE ISRAELI- PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Wednesday 27th August, 17:00 – Room B1

Abstract: Sartre's intellectual engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict from the 1940s to the 1970s serves as a crucial case study in understanding the limits and possibilities of philosophical commitment. His approach tries to reconsider neutrality not as a passive stance but as an active and sometimes paradoxical mode of philosophical engagement. Such non-neutral withdrawal depends on a specific definition of the role of the intellectual and philosopher, and Sartre's withdrawal was not a renunciation of responsibility but an attempt to remain faithful to the ethical aspects of political situations. Reading Sartre's interviews alongside his published philosophical work, I try to sketch out his idea of non-neutral withdrawal.

Víctor Carranza, University of Münster (Germany)

REEVALUATING PREDICATES OF PERSONAL TASTE: THE CASE FOR SEMANTIC NEUTRALITY

Thursday 28th August, 10:20 – Room B5

Abstract: This paper challenges the standard expressivist view of predicates of personal taste (PPTs), which holds that these predicates semantically encode positive or negative evaluations. Drawing on insights from affective sciences, I argue that PPTs signal that the object of the predication is relevant to the speaker's goals, but the specific evaluation (positive, negative, or neutral) is inferred pragmatically. In this view, neutral PPTs, such as “surprising,” do not semantically convey approval or disapproval, but indicate goal-relevance, and their evaluation depends on context and communicative intent.

Lisa Hecht, University of Dresden (Germany)

JUSTIFYING THE RIGHT TO NEUTRALITY IN ARMED CONFLICT

Thursday 28th August, 10:20 – Room B1

Abstract: In this talk, I propose a lesser evil justification for the right to neutrality in armed conflict. Neutrality is justified if it is an indirect permissible rights infringement. Just like it is sometimes permissible to directly kill one person if this is necessary to save a greater number of persons from death, it is sometimes permissible to enable another person to kill one if this is necessary to save a greater number from death. My justification appeals to the instrumental value of neutrality but it is more sophisticated than other instrumental justifications in that it takes into account the different moral status of the involved parties, i.e. the fact that some have forfeited their rights against harm while others retain their rights. Having presented and defended this novel justification, I show that appeal to a lesser evil justification permits neutrality in a wider range of cases than either appeal to consent or agent-relative prerogatives as alternative justifications of neutrality.

Marc Andree Weber, University of Mannheim (Germany)

DISAGREEMENT AND NEUTRALITY

Thursday 28th August, 11:10 – Room B5

Abstract: Being neutral towards some proposition does not merely consist in suspending judgement about whether it is true; it also comprises, as I will argue, the absence of intuitions regarding its truth or falsity as well as the absence of states of acceptance towards its truth or falsity. This insight is especially relevant for cases of peer disagreement, because it explains why we can still be motivated to proceed in our intellectual endeavours even though there might be little hope, according to at least some of the relevant accounts of disagreement, to arrive at justified beliefs about the matter under debate.

Sandy Berkovski - Bilkent University (Turkey)

PYRRHONIAN NEUTRALITY: A MIRAGE

Thursday 28th August, 11:10 – Room B1

Abstract: A distinctive feature of modern Pyrrhonism is the idea that, the deeper you dig into the epistemological arguments, the more you are led towards the radical scepticism of brains in a vat and malicious demons. To avoid this slide you should abstain from theorising. But the Pyrrhonist's abstention, his philosophical neutrality, is illusory. The investigation, when pursued properly, leads to radical scepticism. I conclude with a few remarks on political neutrality.

Francis Cheneval, University of Zürich (Switzerland)

SPECTATOR, ENABLER, REFEREE, PLAYER. ON THE ROLE-DEPENDENCE OF NEUTRALITY

Thursday 28th August, 15:10 – Room B5

Abstract: As a behaviour-guiding principle, neutrality can only be consistently honoured by agents (individual or corporate) in specific roles (status functions), best described as spectator and enabler roles, vis-à-vis agents who are in in-game roles, i.e. player or referee roles. The in-game roles consist of some form of involvement in a competition, which can be rule-based (debate, games, sports, market) or antagonistic (crime, war). To conclude, I spell out some consequences of this position contributing to an appropriate understanding of neutrality.

Jimena Zapata, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (Germany)

FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE NEUTRALITY: THE CONSEQUENCES OF NON-ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Thursday 28th August, 15:10 – Room A1

Abstract: Neutrality is often understood as a position of non-engagement or impartiality. However, this paper argues that the absence of engagement is not neutral in socio-normative contexts, mainly when these involve inequalities that can feed into discrimination. Particularly, it examines the consequences of bystanders' non-engaged reactions when facing hate speech. Drawing on empirical research, it claims that while such behaviours may be perceived as neutral when assessed individually, they take on a different meaning in collective settings. There, they interact with existing social norms, being perceived as one-sided, reinforcing harmful power dynamics. We argue that in contexts of inequality, non-engagement lacks a crucial component of neutrality: the recognition of abstention and impartiality by those involved, who must be able to distinguish it from tacit complicity. The paper discusses the limits of neutrality within moral philosophy and social epistemology, proposing a reconceptualisation of neutrality as a socially contingent condition rather than a fixed, abstract principle, one that accounts for its broader social consequences.

Pablo Hubacher Haerle, University of Cambridge (England)

SCEPTICISM AND SUSPENSE

Thursday 28th August, 16:10 – Room B5

Abstract: Scepticism begins in wonder. Do I know that there is an external world? Do I know that I have hands? By getting to ask ourselves those questions the sceptic lures us into a place of all-consuming doubt. Given this central position of questions and the resulting neutrality, it is natural to suppose that inquiry and suspense occupy important places to our study of scepticism. However, in contemporary treatments of the topic, they are routinely neglected. I argue that this is an oversight. If scepticism involves inquiries or the suspension of judgement which violate the recently proposed norms of inquiry and suspense, this might constitute a novel way in which the sceptic is irrational. One could hope that if we find that sceptical arguments rely on irrational inquiries or suspensions, they are blocked from undermining the justification of ordinary knowledge claims. In this talk, I explore this idea.

Savvas Ioannou, Independent researcher

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ABILITY TO BE CONSCIOUS

Thursday 28th August, 16:10 – Room B1

Abstract: Chalmers (1995) has presented the hard problem of consciousness: human conscious experiences do not seem to arise out of merely functional and structural physical properties. Panpsychists argue that their view can solve the hard problem of consciousness by claiming that micro-objects possess phenomenal properties. However, Nagasawa (2021) has argued that panpsychism leads to a cognitive dead end: we cannot know what microphenomenal properties are, and therefore, we cannot know how panpsychism can solve the hard problem of consciousness. I propose a new metaphysical account of the mind that solves the hard problem of consciousness: panmentalism. According to panmentalism, micro-objects possess the ability to be conscious, but they are not conscious. Still, phenomenal properties arise out of such objects and abilities. Conscious experiences occur, iff micro-abilities to be conscious bond through abilities-to-be-conscious bonding relations, create a macro-ability to be conscious, this macro-ability activates, and mental content is produced.

Viktor Ivanković, University of Zagreb (Croatia)

LIBERAL NEUTRALITY AND THE EFFECTS OF DEMOCRATIC DESIGN

Thursday 28th August, 17:00 – Room B5

Abstract: A principle of neutrality often implicit in democratic norms states that it would be wrong to frame a referendum question in favor of one competing view or use a default rule to entrench the incumbent government. But how far would such a principle extend? In our presentation, we elaborate an explicit version of this principle and explore three areas in which it should mitigate effects that may undermine neutrality between competing views vying for deliberative or electoral success: 1.) framing effects (particularly in referenda); 2.) agenda setting, and 3.) media presence. We admit that, while the elaboration of such a principle should have the purpose of mitigating more non-neutral effects in democracy, its implementation may run against three constraints: 1.) our inability to identify all non-neutral effects; 2.) our inability to mitigate identified non-neutral effects; 3.) conflicts with basic liberties, such as freedom of speech or freedom of assembly.

Guillaume Durieux, Paris-East Créteil University (France)

NEUTRALITÉ OU NEUTRALISATION SCOLAIRE ? DÉFENSE D'UNE CONCEPTION MINIMALISTE DE LA NEUTRALITÉ SCOLAIRE.

Thursday 28th August, 17:00 – Room B1

Abstract: Neutralité ou neutralisation scolaire ? Défense d'une conception minimaliste de la neutralité scolaire. Abstract: S'inscrivant dans le cadre du libéralisme politique classique, cette communication entreprend de clarifier les implications du principe de neutralité sur l'enseignement public primaire et secondaire. Rejetant les conceptions maximalistes du principe de neutralité qui défendent une neutralisation de l'espace scolaire, elle argumente en faveur de la nécessaire articulation entre ce principe et un engagement perfectionniste en faveur de l'autonomie. Elle montre aussi que, puisque les conditions de formation de l'autonomie sont légitimement controversées, les raisons qui soutiennent les pratiques éducatives le sont également. Les questions curriculaires et pédagogiques doivent donc être incluses dans la raison publique. Elle suggère enfin que les pratiques scolaires sont soumises à un réquisit de double justification qui envisage les élèves tantôt sous l'aspect des citoyens qu'ils deviendront, tantôt sous celui des enfants et des adolescents porteurs de droits qu'ils sont actuellement.

Michael Balmer, University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland)

WHAT IS A POLITICAL BELIEF?

Friday 29th August, 10:20 – Room B5

Abstract: What distinguishes a political belief from regular beliefs? Standard content-based accounts fail to capture their nature, as the same proposition can be political at one time and apolitical at another. I argue that political beliefs should be analysed in terms of their attitudinal stance rather than their propositional content. Specifically, I introduce the concept of politically held beliefs: beliefs held for political reasons rather than out of a genuine commitment to truth. This move is motivated by important functional dissimilarities involving voluntariness, vulnerability to conflicting evidence and action guidance. I propose that politically held beliefs are best understood as playing a role in determining our association to a social group: politically believing *p* does not entail a commitment to *p*'s truth but functions primarily to establish the subject's membership in a political group. Finally, I examine what it means to adopt a neutral stance toward a proposition, suggesting that neutrality requires accepting a proposition solely with a genuine commitment to its truth, thus without ulterior (political) motives.

Marcello Ostinelli, SUPSI (Lugano, Switzerland)

LA MISSION ÉDUCATIVE DE L'ÉCOLE PUBLIQUE ET LA CONTRAINTE DE NEUTRALITÉ

Friday 29th August, 10:20 – Room A1

Abstract: Une théorie philosophique de l'école publique est confrontée à deux exigences apparemment contradictoires. D'une part, elle est appelée à justifier la tâche éducative de l'école publique. D'autre part, elle doit prouver que ses buts n'interfèrent pas avec la liberté d'éducation des parents ; que ses enseignements garantissent la liberté de croyance des élèves qui la fréquentent ; que le contenu de ses programmes éducatifs respecte les diverses conceptions raisonnables de la vie bonne présentes dans la société. La première exigence implique que l'école publique poursuive des buts éducatifs ; l'autre exige qu'elle soit neutre. Ces exigences sont-elles compatibles ou contradictoires ? Ma communication examine quelques objections contre la possibilité pour l'école publique de remplir la contrainte de neutralité. Ma thèse est que la seule interprétation plausible du principe est la neutralité de la justification. C'est la raison publique qui peut énoncer une justification neutre. Ceci s'applique également aux buts éducatifs de l'école publique. Je conclus qu'il n'y a pas de contradiction entre la contrainte de neutralité à laquelle est soumise l'école publique et l'attribution à celle-ci de finalités éducatives conformes au contenu de la raison publique.

Gabriele Turati, Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa (Italy)

ON THE ONTOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL NEUTRALITY OF FORMAL THEORIES

Friday 29th August, 11:10 – Room B5

Abstract: This abstract develops a framework for analyzing the onto- logical and metaphysical neutrality of formal theories. I propose dividing the main question into four aspects: (1) ontological commitment, (2) metaphysical commitment, (3) ontological realism, and (4) metaphysical realism of theories. (1)-(4) define, respectively, four ways of interpreting neutrality (N 1 - N 4): to explain them, I clarify the distinction between metaphysics and ontology, and I differentiate between a theory's commitment to the existence of something and a theory's realism about it. Combining these two dichotomies, one obtains N 1 - N 4, which I apply to the case study of Truthmaker Semantics (TS), an impor- tant yet debated theory. Employing TS, I argue that N 1 represents a weak form of commitment, whereas N 2 is very philosophically significant. Lastly, I ex- plore N 3 and N 4 general applicability, showing how TS's correctness may im- ply its N 3 and N 4 commitments, and evaluating the risks of over-interpretation connected to the last two criteria.

Felix Koch, University of Zürich (Switzerland)

AUTHORITY, VALUE PLURALISM, AND NEUTRALITY

Friday 29th August, 11:10 – Room A1

Abstract: The the paper aims to understand (1) the sources and (2) the implications of irreducible pluralism regarding legitimate authorities, i.e. of the possibility of plural and competing – but ceteris paribus equally legitimate – authorities. On this basis, the paper (3) offers a novel interpretation of the idea of liberal neutrality. The paper proceeds by bringing out neglected complexities in familiar instrumental justifications of authority, arising from the plurality and incommensurability of values by which authorities may be guided and to which they may help their subjects conform. Neutrality, it is argued, is itself just one among such potentially competing values; specifically, it consists in the putative good of not being guided by other values that are subject to significant de facto disagreement in a given social or political context. The good of neutrality may itself be either outweighed or incommensurable with some of the values whose exclusion it recommends.

THE PRICE OF TAKING A STAND - MORAL BURNOUT AND MORAL MOTIVATION

Friday 29th August, 15:10 – Room B5

Abstract: A nurse in an understaffed hospital; an activist fighting insurmountable systemic injustice; an aid worker desperately triaging resources between victims of violence: individuals that take a stand run a significant risk of burning out. Unnoticed by philosophers, an empirical literature has sprung up to explore a chronic stress condition stemming from moral failure: ‘Moral Burnout.’ Individuals with Moral Burnout become so preoccupied with their moral shortcomings that they lose the motivation to act on their moral judgments. This article introduces the phenomenon of Moral Burnout. I then relate the phenomenon to a debate about moral motivation. Specifically, internalism about moral judgment is a popular view of moral motivation that holds there to be a necessary connection between judging an action to be morally right and being motivated to act on said judgment. This precludes the existence of amorality, i.e., individuals who are not motivated by their moral judgments. I argue that individuals with Moral Burnout are amorality. This makes them walking counterexamples to internalism about moral judgments. It is not the first amorality case to be raised: psychopaths and sociopaths have been offered as examples of amorality. But these existent cases are ambiguous and messy because it is an active topic of debate whether psychopaths and sociopaths are capable of making sincere moral judgments. This is different in the case of Moral Burnout, which leaves the capacity for moral judgment intact: Moral Burnout is thus a much clearer and unambiguous case of amorality.

NON-EXISTENCE CANNOT BE NEUTRAL FOR SOMEONE

Friday 29th August, 15:10 – Room A1

Abstract: Can existence be better or worse for an individual than non-existence? Most affirmative answers are based on the Neutrality Claim: Non-existence is neutral for an individual. I scrutinise and argue against that claim. The abstract state “non-existence” could have neutral value, but nothing can have the value in virtue of exemplifying the state. We could assign neutral value in a cross-world manner, but this is at odds with our common way of deriving comparative value. Neutral value could consist in the absence of value-making features, but this is unwarranted, sits badly with common theories of well-being, and has implausible implications. The idea of a null life doesn’t add anything to these proposals. Hence, none of these accounts vindicate the Neutrality Claim. Furthermore, we have reason to reject it. Non-existence is incompatible with value-making features for the individual – a condition that must be met by anything of neutral value for individuals.

PSYCHOLOGY CAN'T BE NEUTRAL

Friday 29th August, 15:10 – Room B1

Abstract: In order to obtain objective knowledge, the empirical sciences ought to proceed neutrally: Any kind of arbitrariness, partisanship or value/interest-driven influence is anathema because non-neutrality inevitably distorts the results. This meta-methodological ideal may sound plausible but is unrealistic. Science is something real people do; it consists in the actions of the members of a certain „Denkgemeinschaft“ (Fleck) and thus depends on language and categorizations, aims and values, traditions and negotiations. Put succinctly: all depends on decisions and decisions are never neutral. Besides the general practice-dependence of science, some scientific disciplines are genuinely anthropomorphic: Their subjects/domains depend on cultural self-understanding. My example is psychology: The behavior, psychologists study, is an emulation of social practices. In order to understand what persons do, one has to be acquainted with the psychologically ‚constitutional‘ common sense, i.e. the local normative practice of „doing mind“. Humans are animals that have to learn „to do mind“ in order to become normal, reciprocally participating persons. Their minds are hybrid entities - biological and cultural at the same time. Hence, any psychology that relies on the ‚social construction‘ of a shared lifeworld of interacting persons can't be neutral.