Free Will and Decision Theory `25 Program

LOCATION: ZEPP ROOM, M210, GESCHWISTER-SCHOLL-PLATZ 1 (UNIVERSITY MAIN BUILDING), MÜNCHEN, 80539.

Room finder link: https://www.lmu.de/raumfinder/#/building/bw0000/map?room=002102328_

	Thursday 3rd July	Friday 4th	Saturday 5th	Sunday 6th
8:30		Coffee	Coffee	
9:00		İbrahim Hansu	Daniele Conti	
9:30				
10:00		Coffee	Coffee	
10:30		Barry Loewer	Malcolm Forster	
11:00				Meet at coffee shop
11:30		Timothy Luke Williamson	Reuben Stern	English Garden Walk
12:00				
12:30		Lunch	Lunch	Informal lunch at Chinese Tower beer garden
13:00				
13:30				
14:00				
14:30		Christian Löw	Franz Huber	
15:00				
15:30		Melissa Fusco	Alison Fernandes	
16:00				
16:30		Coffee	Coffee	
17:00	Informal drinks and dinner at Max Emmanuel beer garden	Toby Solomon	Christian List	
17:30				
18:00		Unofficial Dinner	Official Dinner	
18:30				
19:00				

İbrahim Hansu

A FREE WILL ARGUMENT FOR DARC

Can I predict, or assign credences to, my possible actions while deliberating about what to do? Alan Hájek (2016) argues yes—"deliberation welcomes prediction"—contending that the opposing thesis (DARC: Deliberation Annihilates Reflective Credences) imposes heavy costs on Bayesian epistemology, and dismissing appeals to free will for DARC as "wishy-washy.". I offer a free will-based argument for DARC: If an agent's possible actions have determinate non-trivial probabilities, then standard chance-based arguments against free will (rollback, luck arguments) apply, undermining the free will that deliberation presupposes. If actions are undetermined but non-chancy—as agent-causal theories imply—then there are no determinate probabilities to guide credences, supporting DARC. Either way, free will does introduce unpredictability. I address purported counter-examples of reliable predictions of free choices including self-prediction of future choices, group agents, and third-person onlookers.

Barry Loewer

THE CONSEQUENCE ARGUMENT MEETS THE MENTACULUS

The “Consequence Argument” has spawned an enormous literature in response. The most notable of these responses is David Lewis’ which is based on his account of counterfactuals. My reason for adding to this literature is that I show that while Lewis’ diagnosis of the argument is on the right track, the account of counterfactuals he relies on to rebut the argument is defective and consequently, he rejects the wrong premise of the argument. I will develop a response that is in some ways similar to Lewis’ but relies on a different and better account of counterfactuals based on statistical mechanics. My account of counterfactuals is based on an approach that goes back to Boltzmann and has more recently been developed by David Albert in his book, Time and Chance. This account, which is called “the Mentaculus,” provides a framework for explaining and connecting the various so called “arrows of time,” including those of thermodynamics, causation, knowledge, and influence. It is the last of these arrows that is key to my response to the Consequence Argument. If my response is effective, then it will turn out that physics (together with some philosophy), rather than conflicting with freedom, is able to rescue it, at least, from the Consequence Argument. Digging more deeply I will argue that metaphysical views about the nature of time and laws underlies the arguments for the incompatibility of free will and determinism and more generally for the difficulty in seeing how there can be free will in a world in which the motions of material bodies conform to fundamental laws of physics. I will conclude by showing why this is so and how the Mentaculus response to the consequence argument involves relacing these metaphysical views with an alternative account of laws and time more in tune with Humean metaphysics.

Timothy Luke Williamson

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR CAUSAL DECISION THEORY?

In this paper I address a relatively new class of counterexamples to Causal Decision Theory, exemplified by Arif Ahmed’s Dicing with Death and Jack Spencer & Ian Wells’ Frustrator Button. In both cases, CDT tells you to do something that obviously sets you back in the pursuit of your own goals. And this has convinced many, even those sympathetic to CDT, that it cannot be the correct decision theory. In the first part of this talk I argue that the problem cases do not count against CDT alone, but CDT coupled with a simple theory of options. In the second part of the talk, I outline a theory of options that reconciles CDT with the correct verdicts in problem cases. The view is a permissive one on which agents may frame their options in multiple (and yet equally legitimate) ways, reflecting multiple (and yet equally legitimate) perspectives one may have on a decision situation. I conclude with a lesson about decision theory and free will. It is often thought that the distinction between CDT and Evidential Decision Theory (EDT) tracks a distinction in how

we think about free will and agency. That is, CDT seems to encode a first-personal stance on which we treat you as an intervener, more or less ex nihilo, in the world; by contrast, EDT seems to encode a third-personal stance on which we treat you as a part of the world. This tempting piece of folklore turns out to be misleading: whether CDT takes a first- or third-personal stance depends in large part on how you frame your options. And so while EDT may be committed to an essentially third-personal stance on agency, CDT can give appropriate weight to both stances.

Christian Löw

FREE WILL, ABILITIES, AND THE GRAIN OF EXPLANATION

"General Abilities Compatibilism" (GAC) says that the ability to do otherwise relevant for free will is a mere general ability. It thus explains how free will is compatible with determinism: Nobody believes that an agent who is lawfully determined to not raise her hand thereby lacks the general ability (or capacity) to raise her hand. At the same time, GAC faces the charge of changing the subject: General abilities to do otherwise are compatible with determinism because they ignore circumstantial detail. But why are these general abilities pertinent for free will? Why not specific abilities that consider the complete circumstances? In this talk, I develop GAC in terms of how general abilities explain the freedom (or unfreedom) of actions. We know from the philosophy of science that we often prefer abstract explanations that ignore circumstantial detail. I use this insight to motivate GAC and respond to the above challenge.

Melissa Fusco

AN AGENTIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE DIACHRONIC DUTCH BOOK

Causal decision theorists plan to conditionalize on their own acts, just like evidential decision theorists and rational pure observers do. But should they? A minority view on subjunctive imaging (Lewis, 1976; Gärdenfors, 1982) treats it as a competing norm of update. Conditioning---the thought goes---is the correct response to learning that A is the case, while imaging is the correct response to making A the case. Here, I defuse a major obstacle to the viability of the claim that it can be rational to update by imaging: the diachronic Dutch Book (Teller, 1973).

Toby Solomon

LIBERTARIAN DECISION THEORY

It is an old idea that practical decision-making presupposes some form of free will. It is a newer, but still venerable, idea that rational decision-makers follow causal rather than evidential influence in determining the likely outcomes of their choices—that we should follow a causal decision theory. Unfortunately, it has recently become clear that causal decision theories have difficulty dealing with the possibility that our choices are predetermined or otherwise constrained by things outside our control. Fortunately, the oldest of these ideas holds the key to resolving our recent troubles: the very possibilities that give rise to causal decision theories' difficulties are those which rational decision-makers suppose do not obtain in supposing that they have free will. In this paper I present a new decision theory—Libertarian Decision Theory—which precisely captures the intuition that rational decision-making presupposes free will and solves CDT's difficulties with deterministic cases. I motivate Libertarian Decision Theory in two, independent steps: First, I argue that rational decision-makers must suppose that their choice involve both Alternative Possibilities and Deliberative Efficacy, in short that they face DEAP choices, without taking a stance on the compatibility of DEAP choices and determinism or indeterminism. I then argue that CDT's difficulties show that we should understand DEAP choices in an incompatibilist manner, leading us to embrace Libertarian Decision Theory.

Daniele Conti

FREE-WILL LIBERTARIANISM AND OBJECTIVE PROBABILITIES OF ACTIONS

Free-will libertarianism licenses what we may call the Objective Probability Thesis (OPT) – i.e., the thesis that there are nontrivial objective probabilities of actions. If it is true that, at least in some cases, the past and the laws of nature leave multiple courses of action open to agents, then it is possible to attach objective probabilities to those alternatives, and not only subjective ones. In effect, OPT is very popular in the libertarian literature. But, although OPT is made possible by libertarianism, it is not directly entailed by it: it is equally consistent with libertarianism that actions are probabilistically indeterminate – that is, lacking any probability assignments at all. OPT, then, stands in need of independent justification. In this paper, I examine the two principal arguments typically offered in its favour: the Argument from Motivation and the Argument from Microphysical Probabilities. I argue that both arguments rest on premises that are either false or at odds with the libertarians' desiderata.

Malcolm Forster

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DECISION-MAKING COUNTERFACTUALS

Good decision-making depends on reliable judgements of the probabilities of outcomes that would occur if various mutually exclusive actions were taken, all of which will be counterfactual, except for the one action that is actual taken. If the possible actions are A1, A2,..., An, and B is the outcome under consideration, then we need a reliable evaluation of the set of counterfactual conditional probabilities P(B|A1), P(B|A2),…, P(B|An). We've heard of the problem of single case probabilities, but evaluating counterfactual conditional probabilities seems more like a problem of zero case probabilities! In statistics, these problems are addressed by the assumption of identical distributions (ID). We can learn from past instances of A and B if they have the same joint distribution by forming a frequency table from which we can estimate all the counterfactual conditional probabilities needed for decision-making. This talk is about the ubiquitous use of ID assumptions in statistical theory and practice. In its strongest form it appears in the IID (Independent Identical Distributions) assumption. But independence is not required. A weaker assumption is exchangeability. Then there is the even weaker assumption of stationarity, which can be weakened to local stationarity or asymptotic stationarity, partial asymptotic stationarity, and so on. Stronger assumptions, like IID, entail more, but they apply more narrowly. All of these weaker assumptions are sufficiently strong to entail the ID assumption in some form (which is why they all entail theorems about the existence of limiting relative frequencies). Collectively, they provide a general framework for understanding the epistemology of decision-making counterfactuals.

Reuben Stern

TIME TO INTERVENE: PUTTING DELIBERATION DYNAMICS OUT TO PASTURE

Interventionist decision theory is often motivated on the grounds that it capably delivers the same recommendations as standard versions of causal decision theory while improving on them in other respects. But there is a problem with this kind of argument. When causal decision theory is developed so that the agent's rational choice sometimes depends on their confidence that they will choose a particular option (à la Joyce [1999]), interventionist decision theory does not generally agree with causal decision theory. Here, I argue that it is interventionist decision theory that gets things right when these theories diverge—roughly because theories like Joyce's rely on a misguided account of how we should update our credences during deliberation, in light of our changing attitudes toward our eventual choice. The upshot is that we should prefer interventionist decision theory not only for the familiar methodological reasons, but also because it delivers better advice in cases where it disagrees with the competition.

Franz Huber

INTERVENING IS CONDITIONING

My thesis is that post-intervention probabilities can be understood as conditional probabilities whose conditions are sufficiently informative: they specify not merely that something is true but that it is made true. The thesis holds for post-intervention probabilities in acyclic causal models that are deterministic or ``structural,'' as well as Bayesian models that are not but satisfy the causal Markov condition. However, it does so for different reasons because these models have different characterizations of what counts as sufficiently informative condition. I argue that this renders causal decision theory a species of evidential decision theory that respects the ``principal of total evidence'': expected utility is calculated with respect to the probability conditional on not merely the evidence that an act is taken, but the decision maker's total evidence. Often, this includes the information that the decision maker decides to bring about this act (all) by herself, i.e., by a (hard) intervention.

Alison Fernandes

THE BRANCHPOINT PROPOSAL AND THE ROLE OF COUNTERFACTUALS

I introduce a novel method for evaluating counterfactuals. According to the branchpoint proposal, counterfactuals are evaluated by ‘rewinding’ the universe to a time at which the antecedent had a reasonable probability of coming about and considering the probability for the consequent, given the antecedent. This method avoids surprising dynamics, allows the time of the branchpoint to be determined by the system’s dynamics (rather than by context) and uses scientific posits to specify the relevant probabilities. I then show how the branchpoint proposal can be justified by considering an evidential role for counterfactuals: counterfactuals help us reason about the probabilistic relations that hold in a hypothetical scenario at which the antecedent is maximally unsettled. A result is that we should distinguish the use of counterfactuals in contexts of control from their use for reasoning evidentially. Standard Lewisian accounts run into trouble precisely by expecting a single relation to play both roles.

Christian List

DECISION THEORY PRESUPPOSES FREE WILL

This paper argues that decision theory presupposes free will. Although decision theorists seldom acknowledge this, the way decision theory represents, explains, or rationalizes choice behaviour acquires its intended interpretation only under the assumption that decision-makers are agents capable of making free choices between alternative possibilities. Without that assumption, both normative and descriptive decision theory, including the revealed-preference paradigm, would have to be reinterpreted in implausible ways. The hypothesis that decision-makers have free will is therefore explanatorily indispensable for decision theory. If we regard explanatory indispensability as an indicator of reality in science, decision theorists should embrace the idea of free will.