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Office Hours: (M) by appointment | (J) Thursday 2:30–4:30pm

DECISION THEORY & DEONTIC MODALITY

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We'll explore two topics whose interrelations have recently become an area of intense investigation. The first topic is how agents ought to make decisions, given what they believe and what they value—the central question of *decision theory*. The second topic concerns the meaning of deontic modals (e.g. “ought”, “should”) used to talk about how agents should behave—a tough issue in *semantic theory*. Standard accounts of deontic modality have traditionally not made use of the apparatus and results of decision theory. However, arguments have recently surfaced suggesting that the meaning of deontic modals can't be understood apart from the resources of decision theory. Whether this is so or not is, at present, an open question. After a primer on decision theory, and surveying relevant recent literature on deontic modality, we'll be reflecting together on how much, if any, of the technical machinery used in decision theory is required in order to understand deontic modals.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

20% Responses & Participation
80% Paper(s)

Responses: Every week, starting with our second meeting, e-mail both Mike and James a *very short* (roughly 1 paragraph) response or question by 9pm Wednesday night about *one* of the readings for the subsequent class. These are informal and meant to give us sense for what is troubling people in the readings. They won't be graded, but *must be completed for course credit*. There may be slightly different response requirements when guest lecturers come in the final classes.

Participation: We expect students taking the course for credit to participate regularly in class, even if only by asking questions for clarification.

Paper(s):

Option 1: Write a long (20-25 page, double-spaced) paper on any topic connected to issues covered in the course, due by **Wednesday April 27th** at midnight.

Option 2: Write two short (8-10 page, double-spaced) papers. The first paper, on a topic connected to Decision Theory, is due **Sunday February 21st** at midnight. The second paper, on a topic connected to deontic modality or puzzles of deontic logic is due **Wednesday April 27th** at midnight.

Papers may be penalized if they violate the length requirements. A late penalty of a half-letter grade per day will be imposed on late papers.

TEXTS

Readings for the course can be found here:

www.jshaw.net/courses/dtdeontics.html

(User/password are on the syllabus handed out the first day of class, e-mail James if you lost this document and forgot the password.)

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

* = Optional/Background Reading

Jan. 7th Introduction
 No readings

DECISION THEORY

Jan. 14th Decision Theory: Elements
 Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory* §§2.1–2.5
 Resnik, *Choices* Ch.2
 *Stanford Encyclopedia: “Decision Theory”
 *Suppes & Zinnes, “Basic Measurement Theory”

Jan. 21st Evidential vs. Causal Decision Theory
 Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory* §§4.1–4.2
 Lewis, “Causal Decision Theory”
 *Jeffrey, *The Logic of Decision*
 *Joyce, *Foundations of Causal Decision Theory* §§5.1–5.5
 *Gibbard & Harper, “Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of
 Expected Utility”

Jan. 28th Problems for Causal Decision Theory
 Egan, “Some Counterexamples to Causal Decision Theory”
 Arntzenius, “No Regrets; Or: Edith Piaf Revamps Decision Theory”
 *Gibbard & Harper, “Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of
 Expected Utility”

Feb. 4th Problems for Causal Decision Theory (ct'd)
 Hare & Hedden, “Self-Reinforcing and Self-Frustrating Decisions”
 *Paul Weirich, “Decision Instability”

Feb. 11th Risk Aversion
 Buchak, “Risks and Tradeoffs”
 Pettigrew, “Risk, Rationality, and Expected Utility Theory”
 *Schmeidler, “Subjective Probability and Expected Utility
 without Additivity”
 *Buchak, *Risk and Rationality*
 *Buchak, “Revisiting Risk and Rationality: A Reply to Pettigrew
 and Briggs”

DEONTIC MODALITY

- Feb. 18th Deontics: the Classic Framework (and “Deliberative” *Ought*)
Kratzer, “What “Must” and “Can” Must and Can Mean”
Kratzer, “The Notional Category of Modality”
*Kratzer, “Modality”
*Schroeder, “*Ought*, Agents, and Actions”
- Feb. 25th The Miners Puzzle
Kolodny & McFarlane, “Ifs and Oughts”
Charlow, “What We Know and What to Do”
- Mar. 3rd Miners, the Classic Semantics, and Decision Theory
Cariani et al., “Deliberative Modality Under Epistemic Uncertainty”
Carr, “Deontic Modals Without Decision Theory”
- Mar. 17th Conservatism & Decision Theoretic Expressivism: First Steps
von Fintel, “The Best We Can (Expect to) Get? Challenges to the
Classic Semantics for Deontic Modals” §4
Yalcin, “Bayesian Expressivism”
*Yalcin, “Epistemic Modals”
*Yalcin, “Non-Factualism about Epistemic Modality”
- Mar. 24th Decision Theoretic Expressivism (ct'd)
Charlow, “Decision Theory: Yes! Truth-Conditions: No!”
Charlow, “How (Not) to Think About the Meaning of *Ought*”
- Mar. 31st *No Class*
- Apr. 7th Class Visit: TBD
TBD
- Apr. 14th Class Visit: Fabrizio Cariani
TBD
- Apr. 21st Class Visit: TBD
TBD