

Preferences

Preferences

Edited by
Christoph Fehige and Ulla Wessels



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All I want is to sit on my arse and fart and think of Dante.

Samuel Beckett

Desires and wants, however intense, are not by themselves reasons in matters of justice. The fact that we have a compelling desire does not argue for the propriety of its satisfaction any more than the strength of a conviction argues for its truth.

John Rawls

Take any demand, however slight, which any creature, however weak, may make. Ought it not, for its own sole sake, to be satisfied? If not, prove why not. The only possible kind of proof you could adduce would be the exhibition of another creature who should make a demand that ran the other way. The only possible reason there can be why any phenomenon ought to exist is that such a phenomenon actually is desired.

William James

Preface

Preferences is a collection of essays on the concept and the role of preferences (desires, and the like) in practical reasoning. Ground covered includes welfare, prudence, rational decision making, and all areas of moral philosophy: ethics (applied and not so applied), metaethics, and deontic logic. A special symposium looks at *possible* preferences and their significance in matters of life and death, including the notoriously thorny question how many people there should be. All the essays are published here for the first time.

The book is not just for specialists. We have given it an introduction that, though it may move swiftly, at least starts from scratch; a selected bibliography is also provided.

Most of the authors were able to meet in advance, and to present, discuss, and then revise their contributions. But the line has to be drawn somewhere, and authors who receive a reply in this volume were not permitted to adjust their papers in the light of the final version of the reply. The initial exchange took place in Saarbrücken and Saarlouis in June 1992.

*

Everybody has been very kind to us. Georg Meggle – selfless and cheerful as usual – co-designed the project and supported it from beginning to end. When we proposed the meeting, we were backed up by Franz von Kutschera and Wolfgang Lenzen. Barbara Schumacher helped prepare and run it.

The editors of *Perspectives in Analytical Philosophy*, Georg Meggle and Julian Nida-Rümelin, have welcomed the book in precisely the form we suggested. The authors have been co-operative and patient throughout. Christopher Abbey and Seán Matthews have given valuable advice, linguistic and otherwise, to many of us. Kornelius Bamberger was able, and kind enough, to convert most of the data that the contributors sent us. Thomas Fehige gave these data a neat, uniform lay-out. Patrick Agsten, Monika Claßen, Franziska Muschiol, Ulf Schwarz, and Valentin Wagner have assisted us, efficiently and in numerous respects; the same holds true of Karin Thom. With this list in chronological order, one important acknowledgement comes last: de Gruyter publishers. Working with Hans-Robert Cram was a pleasure; ditto, at the technical end, with Grit Müller.

The conference that gave rise to this book was made possible by the financial assistance of: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur des Saarlandes, Universität des Saarlandes, and Vereinigung der Freunde der Universität des Saarlandes. The DFG (research project “Was zählt?”) has also funded our own work on this volume.

We thank all these persons and institutions for their support.

*

We share the belief, now regarded in some quarters as both unsound and old-fashioned, that, in essence, morality is all about welfare, and welfare all about preferences. Some of the contributors to this volume would agree, some would not. With luck, this collection will help advance matters a little.

Christoph Fehige and Ulla Wessels
Leipzig, January 1998

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Abstracts

These are abstracts of the papers that receive a reply, not of the replies themselves. The abstracts appear in the alphabetical order of the authors' names; for the contributions to the symposium on possible preferences, see the final abstract.

LENNART ÅQVIST

Prima Facie Obligations in Deontic Logic: A Chisholmian Analysis Based on Normative Preference Structures

(page 135)

The paper argues for an analysis of the W. D. Ross notion of prima facie obligation which results from adding a certain Chisholm-style definition to the system *G* of Dyadic Deontic Logic, supplemented with so-called propositional quantifiers. In the semantics for that system a von-Kutschera-inspired conception of *normative preference structures* turns out to be of vital importance.

UWE BOMBOSCH's comment, "The Meaning of 'Ought, Prima Facie' and Decision Situations", begins on p. 156.

RICHARD B. BRANDT

The Rational Criticism of Preferences

(page 63)

Preferences are rationally criticized if vivid representation of confirmed beliefs will result in a reversal or strengthening. It is universally agreed that plans can be so criticized but not basic preferences for types of events. Define "preference" as "desiring more". Psychologists agree that desire for an event-type is increased if an event-type has been associated with pleasant events in the past – conditioning by contiguity. (The status of bodily needs – like thirst and hunger – is different; such needs are fixed by chemical imbalances in the body.) But many events are pleasant for evolutionary reasons; if they weren't pleasant and hence the pleasant type of event wanted, the individuals would not survive. This connection – pleasant event, being wanted from classical conditioning, and hence preference – opens the way to rational criticism. For reflection on facts can alter preferences when the preference is seen to be a result (1) of inadequate representation of facts, or (2) of influence by temporary motivational states, or (3) of stimulus generalization from abnormal cases, or (4) of overlooking unpleasant facts about the object, or (5) of failure of making discriminations, or (6) as a result of suggestions by teachers, or (7) as a result of false or unjustified factual beliefs. The author suggests we

say a preference has been rationally criticized if reflection on these defects results in a modification of the preference.

ANNA KUSSER's comment, "Rational by Shock", begins on p. 78.

JOHN BROOME
Extended Preferences

(page 271)

Ordinalism is generally taken to imply that interpersonal comparisons of good are impossible. But some ordinalists have argued that these comparisons can be made in a way that is consistent with ordinalism, on the basis of extended preferences. This paper shows that this argument is mistaken, and ordinalism is indeed incompatible with interpersonal comparisons of good.

RUDOLF SCHÜSSLER's comment, "Wish You Were Me: A Reply to Broome and a Comment on Harsanyi's Extended Preference Theory", begins on p. 288.

SVEN DANIELSSON

Numerical Representations of Value-Orderings: Some Basic Problems

(page 114)

Measures of value or preference usually presuppose value or preference relations which are weak orders. Numerical representations of semiorders and of interval orders have to some extent also been considered. It is fairly obvious, however, that value- and preference-orderings often are not, and should not be expected to be, even interval orders. A way of representing partial orders is suggested.

ULRICH NORTMANN's comment, "Interval Orders Defended", begins on p. 123.

CHRISTOPH FEHIGE AND ULLA WESSELS

Preferences – an Introduction

(page xx)

In theories of practical reasoning, we can encounter preferences (desires, and the like) in five places. Two of them are the form and the content of rationality; the other three are the form, the content, and the foundation of morality. This introduction presents the terrain and explains its overall structure; it also pays a brief visit to each of the locations and points out some of the disputes surrounding them. The doctrine of preferentialism and its problems will be a convenient leitmotiv, since it is widely held and employs preferences, and preferences only, on all the five levels. The tour is structured as follows. After a prologue that sketches preferentialism, we will consider the very

concept of a preference (section 1). We will then look at the possible roles of preferences in rationality (section 2), and at the triad of roles they might play in morality (section 3). Finally, there is a selected bibliography.

ALLAN GIBBARD

Preference and Preferability

(page 239)

What does “good” mean? The paper starts with two vague truisms: That goodness is a matter of preferability, and that of two things, the preferable one is the one it is rational to prefer. In his book *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990), the author had proposed a theory of what “rational” means; this paper faces two questions: (1) What concept of preference, if any, fits the formula that the preferable of two things is the one it is rational to prefer? (2) How should this formula be filled out: Rational for whom to prefer, when? Classical decision theory treats preference as consisting in one’s disposition to choose. Such revealable preference will probably not serve as a good explanatory concept in a scientific psychology, it is suggested, but it may be much the concept that is needed for purposes of defining preferability. Roughly, the preferable of two things is the one it is rational to choose. This needs to be refined, though: Talk of what is preferable to what purports to be *neutral* among parties to the conversation. Indeed one use of the term “good”, prominent among philosophers, treats all humanity as our conversational group. If rational intrinsic preferences need not be impartial, then not all considerations that bear on rational choice need be matters of goodness so understood. Good-making considerations will be those considerations that bear on choices *consequentially* and *neutrally*, and goodness will be a matter of how these good-making considerations sum up.

JULIAN NIDA-RÜMELIN’s comment, “Goodness and Rational Preferability”, begins on p. 260.

RAINER HEGSELMANN

Experimental Ethics:

A Computer Simulation of Classes, Cliques, and Solidarity

(page 298)

The article deals with two questions: (a) Can relations and networks of solidarity emerge in a world exclusively inhabited by rational egoists, who are unequal and choose their partners opportunistically? (b) If networks of solidarity do emerge in such a world, what do they look like? By means of computer simulations it is shown that networks of solidarity can emerge in such a world. But the networks will show quite distinct features of some class segregation.

ULRICH KRAUSE’s comment, “Solidarity among Rational Egoists”, begins on p. 321.

FRANZ VON KUTSCHERA

Values and Duties

(page 163)

It is argued that both deontological and consequentialist principles have their legitimate place in ethics, and that neither kind is reducible to the other. The problem, then, is how to integrate them into a unified system. A simple solution would be to have duties override value considerations, and the discussion centers on the merits and shortcomings of this proposal.

WILFRIED HINSCH's comment, "Beyond Duty", begins on p. 172.

CHRISTOPH LUMER

Which Preferences Shall Be the Basis of Rational Decision?

(page 33)

Theories of rational decision normally distinguish basic and other preferences, using only the former for calculating an agent's utility function. The idea behind the distinction is that, on the one hand, a theory of *rational* decision must allow *criticism* of at least a part of the agent's actual preferences; on the other hand, so as not to lose touch with the agent's real interests, it must rely on his *factual* preferences. Different decision theories have declared as basic various sets of preferences, thereby arriving at very different utility functions. Therefore, the question of which preferences shall be basic is of large practical importance. Nonetheless, it has rarely been discussed.

The article criticises some standard approaches, but mainly develops criteria for the selection of basic preferences. One of the principles for the selection of basic preferences, for example, is epistemic rationalisation. From these principles, then, 12 conditions of adequacy for the selection of the preferential basis are derived, e.g. taking over only intrinsic preferences, and of these not the single preferences but their underlying criteria.

ANTONELLA CORRADINI's comment, "Intrinsic Desirabilities", begins on p. 57.

ELIJAH MILLGRAM

Deciding to Desire

(page 3)

We do not, and cannot, normally come to have desires by simply deciding to have them. It is argued that this is not a contingent fact, and that the explanation for this fact shows a widely held view of practical reasoning to be false.

SYDNEY SHOEMAKER's comment, "Desiring at Will (and at Pill)", begins on p. 26.

RAINER WERNER TRAPP

The Potentialities and Limits of a Rational Justification of Ethical
Norms, or: What Precisely is Minimal Morality?

(page 327)

Starting from the insight that, due to certain epistemological peculiarities of 'normative truth', normative statements cannot claim to be *objectively* (= *O*) true, the paper systematically works out the idea of basing the *O-validity* of general moral norms on their *O-utility* rather than on their *O-truth*. According to this idea any restriction of choice, in an *n*-person-conflict of interests *S*, qualifies as *O-valid* if it fulfills one of the two following criteria: Either compliance to it by at least a specifiable number *k* of the *n* individuals in *S* would make everybody already *in each instance of S* better off than norm-free anarchy (= *criterion (I)*, which establishes two classes of *unconditionally O-valid* norms each avoiding a corresponding type of *trap of prudence*), or it would, under certain assumptions of the interacting individuals on the probabilities of the roles taken in their respective lifetime-sequences of situations of type *S*, increase everybody's utility payoff *in the long run* (= *criterion (II)*, which establishes three classes of only *conditionally O-valid* norms). Thus even 'non-veiled' rational egoists refusing to initially concede any rationally ungroundable moral *protonorm* whatsoever, one that demands some (Harsanyian, Rawlsian, ...) *impartial standpoint* in considering an agreement on mutual restrictions of behaviour, will – so it is argued – have to contract on at least these norms in a fictitious original agreement. The latter's extension defines the system M_{\min} of *minimal morality*. Though being far more comprehensive than related approaches to 'morals by agreement' (notably Gauthier's), M_{\min} will finally be assessed as morally insufficient due to its not containing any *compensatory* norms. Since some of the latter, according to widespread convictions, are indispensable and since these, at the same time, are not justifiable as *O-valid* on the basis of whatever brand of *veil-free contractarianism*, any programme of founding a satisfactory moral system on mere *collective rationality* is considered as doomed to fail eventually.

ANTHONY SIMON LADEN's comment, "A Hobbesian Choice", begins on p. 361.

J. DAVID VELLEMAN

Is Motivation Internal to Value?

(page 88)

The view that something's being good for a person depends on his capacity to care about it – sometimes called internalism about a person's good – is here derived from the principle that 'ought' implies 'can'. In the course of this derivation, the limits of internalism are discussed, and a distinction is drawn between two senses of the phrase "a person's good".

GEORG MEGGLE's comment, "Motivation and Value", begins on p. 103.

DAVID WIGGINS

In a Subjectivist Framework, Categorical Requirements
and Real Practical Reasons

(page 212)

In this paper, the author tries to show that Hume, interpreted as a genealogist of morals – not as empiricist, prescriptivist, projectivist, expressivist or error theorist –, can do justice to the moral phenomena that moral philosophers discuss under the heading of the categorical imperative. His position on this matter is compared and contrasted with that of Kant. It is claimed that Hume discusses the real reasons, such as they are, why, regardless of inclination, we should heed the categorical requirements of morality.

DAVID GAUTHIER's comment, "Subjective Obligation", begins on p. 233.

MARCUS WILLASCHEK

Agency, Autonomy, and Moral Obligation

(page 176)

The paper proposes and, in part, defends an understanding of human agency, autonomy, and moral obligation as integral parts of our concept of a person. Specifically, the first part (sects. 1–12) argues for a causal theory of action in which the acting person plays a central role in the causal history of her actions. The person exercises her causal influence according to normative principles of rationality. That presupposes some independence from her own motivation including the ability to acknowledge or reject parts of it as a basis of her rational decisions. This ability is constitutive of the autonomy of the person. The second part (sects. 13–29) presents an argument to the effect that the concept of autonomy presupposes a general universalist principle of morality. Autonomy involves a distinction between motives that are 'authentic' and motives that are not. This distinction does not rest on a substantive idea of what autonomous action is, but rather on a formal or procedural notion. Nevertheless, it presupposes a normative standard which is different from and largely independent of the motives a person in fact has. This standard can be found in the ideas of impartial benevolence and universal rational consent which inform universalist conceptions of morality.

HILARY BOK's comment, "Autonomy and Morality", begins on p. 204.

CHRISTOPH FEHIGE, RICHARD M. HARE, WOLFGANG LENZEN,
JEFF MCMAHAN, PETER SINGER, THOMAS SPITZLEY, AND ULLA WESSELS

Symposium on Possible Preferences

(page 367)

Sometimes our actions make a difference not just to the frustration or satisfaction of preferences that exist (have existed, or will exist), but to the very question *which* preferences will exist; so they require us to look not only at actual, but also at *possible* pref-

erences. These actions, their morality and their rationality, are the topic of the present symposium.

Most choices concerning a preferer's life or death are dramatic and obvious examples of such actions (no life, no preference), and they have come to dominate the discussion of possible preferences, and this symposium as well. Thus, on the more applied level, this is a symposium about the morality of conception and contraception, abortion, population policy and killing, about the value of life and the badness of death.

For a guide to this web of issues, see the "Introduction to Possible Preferences" at the beginning of the symposium (p. 367); more information on the various contributions, and on how they relate to each other, is given in the last section (pp. 379–81) of that introduction.

Notes on Contributors

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JOHN BROOME is Professor of Philosophy at the University of St. Andrews, and was previously Professor of Economics at the University of Bristol. His recent publications include *Weighing Goods* (Oxford 1991) and *Counting the Cost of Global Warming* (Cambridge 1992). He is now working on a book entitled *Weighing Lives*, which deals with the value of creating lives and the value of extending lives.

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DAVID GAUTHIER is Distinguished Service Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. His work is largely in moral theory, both historical and systematic. He has proposed a contractarian account of morals from the perspective of rational choice. Currently, he is examining the role of intention in deliberation, and the relation between philosophy and autobiography in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Gauthier's principal books are *The Logic of Leviathan* (Oxford 1969), *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford 1986), and a collection of essays, *Moral Dealing: Contract, Ethics, and Reason* (Ithaca 1990).

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RICHARD M. HARE has taught in Oxford from 1947 to 1983, and at the University of Florida from 1983 to 1994. Starting from fundamental studies in metaethics, he has used ethical theory to develop a theory of moral reasoning which owes much both to Kant and to the utilitarians. This theory he has applied to a large number of practical

moral issues. His main theoretical works are *The Language of Morals* (1952), *Freedom and Reason* (1963), *Moral Thinking* (1981), *Essays in Ethical Theory* (1989), and *Sorting out Ethics* (1997), all published in Oxford. In the practical field, he has published (also in Oxford) the *Essays on Political Morality* (1989), *Essays on Religion and Education* (1992), and *Essays on Bioethics* (1993).

RAINER HEGSELMANN is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bayreuth. His research has focused on the application of game theory to moral phenomena, on practical ethics, the theory of argumentation, and the history of logical empiricism. Hegselmann's books include *Formale Dialektik: Ein Beitrag zu einer Theorie des rationalen Argumentierens* (Hamburg 1985).

WILFRIED HINSCH was born in 1956 and studied philosophy in Hamburg. He wrote his dissertation on Kant's doctrine of the categories, and received his Dr. phil. in 1984. From 1985 to 1988, he held a Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft postdoctoral fellowship; in 1986 he was Visiting Fellow at St. John's College in Cambridge, in 1987–88 Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. Since 1988 he has been Assistant Professor at the university in Münster, working on moral and political philosophy. Hinsch's publications include articles on moral and political philosophy and the following books: *Erfahrung und Selbstbewußtsein: Zur Kategorienduktion bei Kant*, Hamburg 1986; (edited:) John Rawls: *Die Idee des politischen Liberalismus: Aufsätze 1978–1989*, Frankfurt/Main 1992; (edited:) *Zur Idee des politischen Liberalismus: John Rawls in der Diskussion*, Frankfurt/Main 1997.

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FRANZ VON KUTSCHERA was born in 1932 and studied philosophy at the university in Munich. He has held a chair for Philosophy at the University of Regensburg since

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