

Workshop: Norms in Social Research

19-20 September 2019

Department of Philosophy, University of Bergen (Seminar room 1, 1st floor).

Abstracts

Stina Bäckström (Södertörn University, Stockholm)

Inside and Outside a Joke: Understanding Humor.

According to a strand of recent work inspired by the later Wittgenstein, psychological phenomena should be understood as ethical, and thus normatively laden, phenomena. One thing this means is that understanding such phenomena and applying the appropriate concepts to describe them has a practical dimension. Understanding people or other creature's states of mind is, on this view, inseparable from responding to them in certain ways.

Starting from this perspective, I want to look at one specific psychological phenomenon, namely humor. A practical dimension of understanding humor is smiles and laughter. What can laughing and smiling at humor *do*? One important answer to this question, I will suggest, is that smiles and laughter can work as ways of recognizing others (in a sense I will explain). In elaborating this answer, I will distinguish between two different cases. One, ethically exemplary, where laughter works as a recognition of the other person. The other, ethically problematic, where laughter works as a misrecognition of the other person, by virtue of a misrecognition of a third person.

Another way to put my point is to use the spatial metaphor of being inside/outside a joke. In the ethically problematic case, humor establishes a boundary between the people who are in, and the people who are out. The people who are out cannot respond to the joke by laughing, since the joke is exclusively on them. In such a case, the joke creates a misperception that the people who are "in" are exempt from being laughed at. The people who are "out" are, on the contrary, fit to be laughed at. This is an example of what I call a misrecognition both of the person who is doing the joking and the people laughed at. In the ethically exemplary case, however, the joke establishes this boundary within each person, so that the joke is on each and every one of us. Here laughter works as a form of recognition of ourselves as being both subjects and objects of laughter. I will explain what the ethical significance of this form of laughter is.

Sharon Rider (Uppsala University)

Coercion by Necessity or Comprehensive Responsibility? Hannah Arendt on Vulnerability, Freedom and Education

In this paper, I offer a reading of Hannah Arendt's collection of essays, *Between Past and Future*, as a sustained argument that might be characterized as a kind of phenomenological description of *Bildung* for our time, understood not as private self-realization but in the public and shared sense, as the vocation of being human. One of the key themes of the paper takes its starting point in Arendt's essay "Tradition and the Modern Age", where she describes a decisive break from a tradition of "ideas" to one of functional values. As absolute, ideas and ideals are outside of and beyond measurement and comparison, since, as principle of thought and action, they set the standard for measurement and comparison. In contrast, values have no intrinsic meaning. The notion of value is tied to commerce, exchange and expediency. They are inherently relative and, as Arendt points out, it hardly matters if some "idealist" should hold some value as higher than all others. The value is still one of relation ("higher"), and thus relative by definition. The equation of all things, both ideas and material objects, with value means making everything into some sort of social commodity. The consequences of this fracture in Western culture are vast, but what is important for my argument is that it entails a way of

thinking about cultural and political issues as matters of measurement. If ideas are values, then they can only seriously be studied as such. Ideas as absolute standards of, say, truth, are hardly comprehensible, because there are no absolutes, and hence no Truth(s), with regard to human affairs. Thus the study of the “highest” human things, the humanities, must necessarily cede their place to the social sciences. The paper works out the social and educational implications of the trajectory and examines the historical conditions of our current institutions of education and enculturation by making these explicit and evaluating them from the point of view of human action and decision, that is, of freedom.

Rupert Read (Reader in Philosophy, University of East Anglia)

What We Need to Learn from Cetacean Cultures: a Winchian Proposal

Winch famously wrote about "Understanding a [so-called] primitive society". In terms of intellectual history, his doing so, back in the early 60s, should be considered an early move in the direction of 'post-colonial' thinking. It helped shift us from looking down on 'them', into the zone of being-with them, and it makes possible learning from them. It does so by placing them at a *greater* distance from us: Winch warns against reading their practices as a kind of failed effort at our technology or science. What we have in common with them can only be seen clearly once we effect such a shift. At the present moment in history, we badly need to learn from 'primitive' (i.e. indigenous) societies. And yet: even learning from indigenous peoples is probably not going to be enough, so dire is our predicament. Such peoples might well still not be quite far enough removed from our destructivity. I move from understanding 'primitive' societies as a means to change our own society to understanding something one step beyond: *cetacean* societies. I suggest that Winch can instruct us not just in how to avoid misunderstanding 'distant' others - and how potentially to change ourselves as a consequence - when those others are humans, but also when they are non-humans, if those non-humans have cultures, as, it's now clear, the social species of cetaceans do. As Winch put it in "Understanding a Primitive Society": "Seriously to study another way of life is *necessarily to seek to extend our own*". Cetaceans can teach us the manner of such necessary extension, if we approach them in a broadly Winchian fashion.

Kevin Cahill (University of Bergen)

Why Ethology and Ethnography are Not the Same

The «demarcation problem» in the Philosophy of Science usually refers to the question, made most prominent by Popper, as to what essentially distinguishes science from other activities. Popper's main focus was physics and his answer was falsification. But of course the Philosophy of the Social Sciences has historically had its own version of a demarcation problem, viz., what, if anything, distinguishes the Natural Sciences from the Social Sciences. Traditionally, this debate took for granted a sharp distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, with positivists claiming scientific hegemony for the latter and interpretivists/hermeneuticists defending the integrity of the former. As Paul Roth (2011) has argued, however, this debate now seems outdated, even quaint, in part because there simply are no more positivists left against which the interpretivist side may define itself. For several decades now, positivism's dominance has been overturned by naturalism. And not just any naturalism. Many now believe that even physicalism is passé and should be displaced by a far more flexible methodological and even metaphysical pluralism (cf. Dupré, 1993 and Cartwright, 1999). Against the backdrop of a flexible, pluralist naturalism, it can be hard to see what interpretivists were ever upset about. In a paper from 2016, for example, Julie Zahle argues that there is no in-principle difference between the use of Participant Observation in the natural sciences and the social sciences. By drawing on aspects of ordinary language that I think Zahle neglects, I will argue that she misses a philosophically important, even though not metaphysical, distinction between the natural and the social sciences.

Julie Zahle (University of Bergen)

Epistemic Norms in Qualitative Data Generation

How should qualitative researchers proceed in order to validate their data set, that is, determine and ensure that their data set is suited to serve as evidence base for an answer to their research question? In qualitative method textbooks and beyond, this question is standardly addressed by pointing to various validation techniques such as “reflexivity”, “respondent validation” and “between-methods triangulation” yet without going into what exactly is being validated through their use. In this paper, I present a different approach to this question.

I begin by offering an account of what qualitative researchers should aim for in the sense of what epistemic features their data set should have in order to be suited to serve as evidence base for an answer to their research question. On that basis, I contend that the overall norm which should guide qualitative researchers in their efforts to validate their data set is “determine and make sure that your data set has all the required epistemic features.” Moreover, I show how this norm may be spelled out in terms of more concrete recommendations as to how qualitative researcher should go about this task. I defend some of these recommendations against criticism while also showing how some of the standard validation techniques may be fitted into this overall framework and hereby rendered more precise. In light of the discussion, I conclude that my answer to the question of how qualitative researchers should proceed in order to validate their data set is more systematic and practically useful than the standard one.

David Teira (UNED, Spain).

Relativism as a data-gathering norm in anthropology

Philosophers of science have extensively debated cultural relativism for already more than half a century. The consensual view is that it is only legitimate as a method to control for ethnocentrism in anthropological research, and objectionable in every other respect. Cultural relativism would be acceptable as a prescription for the anthropologist to suspend her own judgments in order to prevent the contamination of her fieldwork records with her native culture’s values. From a methodological standpoint, ethnocentrism would be a potential bias for the anthropologist and cultural relativism the debiasing device that should control for it. My claim will be as follows: debiasing methods such as cultural relativism are formulated in a way that makes impossible to adjudicate whether the data are actually biased and in which way they should be corrected. In other words, cultural relativism as a research method may be legitimate, but it is not very effective, as endless controversies among anthropologists illustrate.

In order to make my claim, I will first discuss why scientists agree on data collection methods and, in particular, on debiasing procedures. I will examine how these debiasing procedures can be transformed into methodological norms, comparing their role in medical experiments and anthropological fieldwork. I will discuss the different understanding of biases in both fields (causal interferences vs. hermeneutical slips) and the effectiveness of their different debiasing norms to make researchers agree on potentially contaminated data.

Eleonora Montuschi (Ca’Foscari University, Venice)

How do we choose a good method?

Good empirical inquiry (including social) is based on good evidence. Good evidence is produced by good methods. But how do we choose good methods? The question is partly normative and partly practical/pragmatic. In this talk I will give precedence to the latter aspect of the question, aiming to show how methodological rules don’t work in isolation, but rather from within a contextual tangle of several factors and research practices, often decisive in determining the ‘make it or break it’ of any method, even the supposedly best among them. The importance of context for the choice and use of a method of research is not a new idea. However, what will be particularly emphasised is that context should not be thought of just in terms of a backdrop of occurrence for the application of a method, but rather in terms of an active, dense interweaving of practices responsible for the definition of the domain of research from within which methods operate.

Kristina Rolin (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and Tampere University)

Social Responsibility in Research

For scientific knowledge claims to be socially responsible means that scientists have arrived at them in part by following “sound” moral and social values in different stages of scientific inquiry (Kourany 2010; Rolin 2012). Social responsibility is especially important when social scientists function as experts in society. Policy makers and citizens do not want to rely on social scientific research shaped by moral and social values they have good reasons to reject. My aim is to clarify what it means for social scientists to follow “sound” moral and social values in different stages of scientific inquiry. At least two questions wait for further exploration. One question is what roles moral and social values can legitimately play in different stages of scientific inquiry. I call this the *Proper Roles Question*. Another question is how social scientists can identify “sound” moral and social values, that is, the values that should play the proper roles in scientific inquiry. I call this the *Proper Values Question*. In my presentation, I argue that no single procedure can guarantee that social scientists receive adequate information about appropriate moral and social values. Philosophers’ attempts to define and defend an ideal procedure of pooling information about citizens’ value perspectives miss an important aspect of well-functioning liberal democratic societies: the on-going struggle to make visible the social experiences of subordinate or marginal social groups. Purely procedural approaches to the *Proper Values Question* will be incomplete as long as the available pool of moral and social values is incomplete.