

# Rational Partiality and Objective Value

Mike Deigan  
 michael.deigan@yale.edu

Pacific APA April 19, 2019

## 1 A Rational Constraint on Preference

State	Guided by	According to
belief	truth	Plato, Aristotle, et al.
credence	objective chance	Lewis (1980) et al.
desire	the good	Plato, Aristotle, et al.
<b>preference</b>	<b>objective value</b>	<b>Me</b>

Lewis (1980): the Principal Principle – credence is guided by objective chance

Me: the *Preferential* Principal Principle<sup>1</sup>

Preference:  $w > w'$   
 guided by  
 Objective value:  $w >^{\circ} w'$

'Objective': perspective invariant

## 2 The Problem: Rational Partiality

PPP →

**Impartiality:** all that matters in determining what it is rational to prefer is how one takes things to be in a given world, ignoring which position in that world one would occupy.

¬ Impartiality,

So, ¬ PPP

Why think ¬ Impartiality?

$w_1$ : my child drowns, but I rescue two other children  $w_1 >^{\circ} w_2$   
 $w_2$ : I rescue my child, but two other children drown  $w_1 < w_2$

## 3 Gerrymandering and Why it Fails

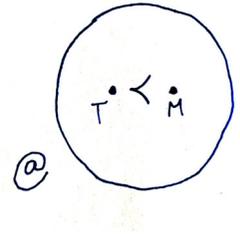
Can't we just gerrymander our objective betterness ordering?

$w_1 <^{\circ} w_2$   
 $w_1 < w_2$

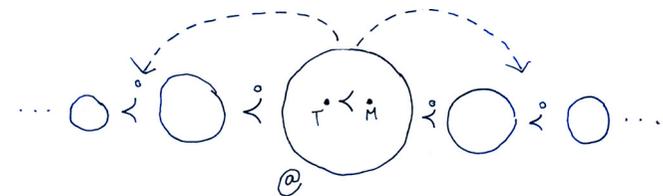
We can come up with more complicated cases, but it might seem we can always save PPP with more gerrymandering.

But in fact, this won't work with all cases.

*Preferring to be Oneself:* My life in the actual world has gone pretty well so far. But many people have led or are leading truly terrible lives. In particular, there have been plenty of morally vicious tyrants who have deliberately caused much needless suffering to innocent people and have done nothing to redeem themselves. Pick an arbitrary one of these tyrants; let's call him Terry the Tyrant. I strongly prefer living my life as it actually is (and will be) to living Terry the Tyrant's life as it actually was, I'd much rather be me than him.



This preference seems rational. But shuffle  $<^{\circ}$  all you want...

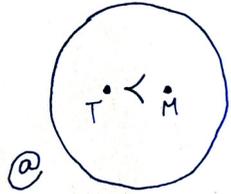


... wherever the actual world (@) appears, it will be exactly as good as itself.

So gerrymandering cannot rescue the PPP.

## 4 De Se Preferences and Centered Worlds

But how to make sense of this preference for being (actual) me to (actual) Terry?



?? < ??  
 @ < w? ✗  
 T < M? ✗  
 $\langle @, T \rangle < \langle @, M \rangle$  ✓ cf. Lewis (1979), Quine (1969)

preferring to be Terry in some other world  $w$  to being actual me:  $\langle w, T \rangle > \langle @, M \rangle$

## 5 Centered Betterness, Two Ways

But what about the PPP?

Preference:  $\langle w, i \rangle > \langle w', i' \rangle$   
 guided by  
 Objective value:  $\langle w, i \rangle >^\circ \langle w', i' \rangle$

So we need to make sense of:  $\langle w, i \rangle >^\circ \langle w', i' \rangle$ .

The usual way:

**Perspectival:**  $w$  is better from  $i$ 's perspective than  $w'$  is from  $i'$ 's (cf. Sen (1982))

Doesn't work for the PPP—objective value is supposed to be perspective invariant!

An alternative:

**Individual:** it is better to be  $i$  (in  $w$ ) than it is to be  $i'$  (in  $w'$ )

## 6 The Solution

**PPP:** prefer to be the objectively best individual-in-a-world

$\neg(\text{PPP} \rightarrow \text{Impartiality})$

**Intra-word partiality:**  $\langle @, M \rangle > \langle @, T \rangle$  and  $\langle @, M \rangle >^\circ \langle @, T \rangle$

**Normal partiality:**  $\langle w_2, M \rangle > \langle w_1, M \rangle$  and  $\langle w_2, M \rangle >^\circ \langle w_1, M \rangle$

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Fine print of the PPP:

$$EU(A|B) = \sum_{x \in R} C(EV(A) = xv|B \wedge E) \cdot xu$$

where  $EU(\cdot|B)$  is (conditional) expected utility,  $A$  and  $B$  are propositions,  $E$  is one's total 'admissible' evidence,  $C$  is (rational) credence,  $EV$  is objective expected value (i.e. sum of the values of the possible outcomes weighted by the objective chance that they obtain if the relevant proposition does), and  $v$  and  $u$  are units of objective value and subjective utility that have zero and unit points calibrated with each other.

## References

- Lewis, D. (1979). "Attitudes De Dicto and De Se". In: *The Philosophical Review* 88, pp. 216–212. Reprinted in Lewis (1983, pp. 133–159).
- (1980). "A subjectivist's guide to objective chance". In: *Studies in inductive logic and probability*. Ed. by R. Jeffrey. Vol. II. University of California Press, pp. 224–247. Reprinted with postscripts in Lewis (1986, pp. 82–132).
- (1983). *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. I. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (1986). *Philosophical Papers*. Vol. II. Oxford University Press.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1969). "Propositional Objects". In: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. Columbia University Press, pp. 139–160.
- Sen, A. (1982). "Rights and Agency". In: *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 11.1, pp. 3–39.