

Ideal Principles, Real behaviour, and possible experiments

May 22nd/23rd
Roskilde University

Workshop hosted by Sune Lægaard (Roskilde) & Jonathan Floyd (Bristol)
Funded by the European Consortium of Political Research & Roskilde University

22/05/23	Monday	
10am	Coffee & Welcome	
10-30am	Opening Remarks	Jonathan Floyd & Sune Lægaard
11am	Experiments & Engagement	
	‘Normative Behaviourism and the Political Theory of Climate Change’	Greta Favara (UniSR)
	‘Historical “Experiments” and a Public Political Theory of Extremism’	Jonathan Leader-Maynard (KCL)
12-30pm	Lunch	
2-30pm	Popular Behaviour & Participatory Experiments	
	‘Normative Behaviourism: Three problems and an experimental solution’	Ilaria Cozzaglio (Goethe-Frankfurt)
	‘Two Types of Behaviour as Guides for Improving the Status Quo’	Manon Westphal (Münster)
	What should we say to Denmark?	Hwa Young Kim (Zurich)
	Mentalism as an Essential Complement to Behaviourism	
4-30pm	Coffee & Cake	
7pm	Dinner	
23/05/23	Tuesday	
9-30am	Coffee	
10am	Brainstorming future plans – events, grants, publications	
10-30am	Experiments & Evidence	
	‘The Relevance of Empirical Experiments for Theory Acceptance in Moral & Political Philosophy’	Søren Flinch Midtgaard (Aarhus)
	‘Experiments in political philosophy: Overbridging the is-ought dilemma?’	Tereza Křepelová (Masaryk)
12pm	Lunch	
1-30pm	Real Behaviour & Realist Experiments	
	‘The role of experimentation in empirically-grounded realist political theory’	Janosch Prinz (Maastricht)
	‘Does harm or disrespect make discrimination wrong? An experimental approach’	Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (Aarhus)
3pm	Coffee	
3-30pm	Closing Remarks	Sune Lægaard & Jonathan Floyd

Ilaria Cozzaglio:

Normative behaviourism: three problems and an experimental solution

The recent development of normative behaviourism has opened the way for a genuinely bottom-up approach in political theory: it moves beyond the division of labour between philosophy and empirical analysis, vindicates the importance of contextualism, and highlights that the people's perspective must be central when elaborating normative principles.

Nonetheless, normative behaviourism suffers from three weaknesses that, I will argue, can be adjusted by integrating it with an experiment. First, it overlooks the role of beliefs in understanding behaviours, thereby losing analytical capacity. Call this the tip of the iceberg problem. Second, it suffers from an indeterminacy problem, as it glosses over the fact that the same behaviour might be the result of different beliefs and, vice versa, the same belief might generate different behaviours. This problem might diminish the action-guiding capacity of the theory, when it comes to prescribing institutional reforms that are compatible with the people's attitudes. Finally, without a critical analysis of the motivations leading to behaviours, every instance of protest or crime could in principle work as a justificatory ground for a revision of principles and institutions. Call this the over-inclusive justification problem.

I argue further that normative behaviourism can overcome these problems by integrating the use of focus groups within its methods. In this experiment, participants are invited to challenge the desirability, fact-sensitivity, and coherence of other participants' standpoints on a given topic (e.g., a specific protest or crime committed). The upshot is to raise awareness of the beliefs behind the behaviour analyzed and, by challenging the acceptability of the views expressed, to filter out behaviours that cannot offer justificatory grounds for the revisions of principles or institutions.

Greta Favara

Normative Behaviourism and the Political Theory of Climate Change

Normative behaviourism can be described as a bottom-up approach to political theorising: according to its proponents, normative political theory should be conducted by looking at, and making normatively relevant, patterns of behaviour, instead of patterns of thought (i.e. mentalism). Following NB, we should regard as normatively authoritative those political arrangements and reforms that have historically acquired real acceptance by large numbers of people. For this reason, NB attributes a key normative relevance to insurrection and crime as kinds of behaviour able to signal which political arrangements should be avoided or reformed and, correspondingly, which political arrangements should be considered desirable to pursue.

Albeit appealing—as NB manages to bring politics back at the centre of normative political theory and avoids both the dangers of mentalist (top-down) methodological approaches in political theory and their normative impotence—I argue that NB (along with other bottom-up forms of political theorising) might turn out to be an inadequate method for political theory because unsuitable for addressing and examining the political theory of climate change (CC). I explain that the problem of CC—given its unique and exceptional

features—represents a stress test for the methods of political theory. NB seems challenged by CC for three reasons. First, as Stephen Gardiner (2006) points out, our ability to tackle the problem of CC is affected by ‘moral corruption’: given its urgency and the radical reforms that are required to tackle CC, people (and institutions) cope with CC by avoiding the problem, rather than enacting the necessary measures to contain it. So, when CC is considered, looking at the behaviour of actual people, as NB suggests, might not tell us much about what should be done, or might bring us in the wrong direction. Second, as shown by COP26 agreements, current liberal democracies, which NB advocates, given the short lifespan of their governments, are in many respects inadequate to enact the required reforms to tackle CC. Yet, NB lacks the theoretical tools to recognize or criticise such shortcomings. Third, since CC has not given rise to widespread bottom-up responses in the form of insurrections or crime yet, NB seems unable to tell us much about what should be done concerning the politics of CC. NB, I argue, is a methodological tool able to tell us something about the political reforms required and desirable to tackle CC when it is too late to address the problem. Overall, NB turns out to be a method for political theory that is too complacent with the status quo when assessed against the problem of CC.

Should, then, ‘mentalism’ be considered a better methodological approach to address the problem of CC in political theory? I explain that mentalism cannot be an adequate method for a political theory of CC given its failure to provide action guidance in political contexts and properly ‘political’ answers to normative dilemmas. Rather, I advocate for a methodological approach for a political theory of CC in which both mentalist and behaviourist tools play a role. As I show, both mentalist and behaviourist techniques are required to come up with political judgments for addressing CC that are at one time progressivist and responsible.

Søren Flinch Midtgaard:

The Relevance of Empirical Experiments for Theory Acceptance in Moral and Political Philosophy

Exactly how (if at all) are the kind of experiments undertaken in the research program of experimental philosophy (x-phi) of relevance to theory acceptance in moral and political philosophy? To answer this question the paper distinguishes initially between the following three views: (i) x-phi as a systematic method to reduce noise in our moral intuitions (The Noise Reduction View); (ii) x-phi as a tools for assessing the fruitfulness or consequences of various concepts (The Fruitfulness View); and (iii) x-phi as the best way to unearth the kind of moral principles we are interested in as moral and political philosopher (The Unearthing Principles View). The paper argues that views (i) and (ii), appropriately understood, are important contributions to theory acceptance in moral and political philosophy and a view that everyone in the field should embrace. Regarding (iii) the paper argues that there are reasons to doubt that it can completely supplant more traditional philosophical methods, including thought experiments and expertise philosophical reflection and analysis. Accordingly, the paper proposes a forth pluralist view combining views (i)-(iii) while denying the self-sufficiency of view (iii) (The Pluralist View).

Tereza Křepelová

Higher-Order Evidence and the Possibility of Objective Political Philosophy

Using experimental logic in political philosophy inevitably bears the difficulty following the is-ought dilemma. By nature, experiments (both empirical and hypothetical/mentalistic) aim at establishing the relationship between a set of variables (e. g. variable X affects the agent's stances on Y). However, since the normative inferences cannot be derived from a factual set of propositions alone, the role of experiments in political philosophy remains spurious. To this end, I argue that experiments may have two significant parts in political philosophy: explorative and justificatory. The former perceives experiments as tools (intuition pumps) for exploring the apriori existing realm of morality and outlines hypothetical models to formulate new hypotheses, the later, on the other hand, uses experimental logic to test and justify consensually acceptable norms already prevailing in the society, and subsequently allows for empirical models of testing. Therefore, both experimental accounts play a crucial role in securing the internal and external validity of normative theories.

Jonathan Leader-Maynard

Historical 'Experiments' and a Public Political Theory of Extremism

While the last volume of Eric Hobsbawm's history of the modern world was titled *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, extremism did not die at the Cold War's end. Instead, extremism has proved to be central in the 21st Century: as an element of modern terrorism, war, and domestic threats to established democratic societies. It is therefore problematic that politicians, scholars, the media, and the public seem to possess no clear, compelling answers to the question: What is Extremism? That question has two aspects: a conceptual question as to 'what counts' as extremism, and a more ontological question as to what kind of phenomenon extremism typically is. I take 'extremism' to be a political term – not simply a technical term of scholarly art. As such, these two aspects imbricate normative and empirical issues. We are asking: what can we legitimately call extremism? And: What are the typical features of the things we call extremism that warrant this label.

In this paper, I consider the methodology of answering these questions. Two influential existing approaches prove insufficient: analytical specification (common in philosophy) and contemporary observation (common in both current popular commentary on terrorism and radical populism, but also a more important early literature on totalitarianism by thinkers like Arendt, Berlin and Popper). Both approaches, I shall argue, have allowed specious prior assumptions and biases to distort our understanding of extremism.

In their place, I argue for comparative historical analysis, with a detailed reconstruction of the behaviour and discourses of different putatively extremism movements across history. Historical comparisons permit a kind of 'experiment' – though I shall problematise that term – that offers a stronger basis for foundational normative and empirical claims about extremism. Comparative historical analysis should be combined with analytical specification and contemporary observation – but it is, in my account, the dominant element of this triad. By discussing how comparative historical

analysis allows a more experimental focus on human behaviour to inform a political theory of extremism, I shall also consider the broader implications of this approach for public political philosophy as a discipline.

Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen Does harm or disrespect make discrimination wrong? An experimental approach (Co-authored with Simone Degn, Andreas Albertsen and Bjørn Hallson)

While almost all philosophers agree that standard forms of discrimination are morally wrong, they disagree about what makes it so. Appealing to carefully constructed thought experiments, many philosophers point to how wrongful discrimination disrespects the discriminatees, while, using a similar approach, others argue that it is the harms involved in discrimination that make it wrong. Generally, philosophers from both sides see their positions as articulating and, in part, supported by the folk theory of the moral wrongness of discrimination. This article uses a vignette-based experiment to test empirically what, in the eyes of the folks, makes discrimination wrong. Interestingly, we find that, according to folks, both disrespect and harm makes discrimination wrong. Assuming this result bears on the philosophical debate about the wrongness of discrimination, our findings support a pluralistic account of the wrongness of discrimination over both a monist, respect- and a monist, harm-based account of the wrongness of discrimination.

Janosch Prinz The role of experimentation in empirically-grounded realist political theory

In this paper, I will explore the role of experiments in realist political theory. Realists have thus far left the role of experimentation comparatively undertheorized, implicitly connecting it to utopian and idealist approaches. This connection, I shall show, is unhelpful for moving realism from meta-theoretical and mythological concerns to more practical ones. More specifically, I will discuss the role of experiments in a realist approach to democratic theory. I will consider democratic innovations in their relationship to experimentation in particular. Such innovations Kingman themselves be viewed as experiments and can be viewed as being purposed with enabling experimentation.

This discussion will seek to shed light on when in the political process experiments should be introduced and by whom. I will compare different sources of experimentation, ranging from scientific bodies authorized by existing institutional structures to bottom up initiatives from civil society. Finally, I will reflect on the contribution of institutional experimentation to normative behaviorism.

Hwa Young Kim What should we say to Denmark? Mentalism as an Essential Complement to Behaviourism

Normative Behaviourism infers and justifies principles, not through thought, but through action. We should look to people's actions, then, to determine whether certain institutions are worth aspiring to. Historical facts provide us with reasons for supporting a liberal-

egalitarian democratic society like Denmark, as they tend to have lower insurrectionist and criminal behaviour. However, political philosophers should also ask the question, what should we say to Denmark? Institutions that reduce insurrectionist and criminal behaviour did not emerge spontaneously, but through people who have demanded change and engaged in costly disruptive behaviours that led to the changes we now benefit from. These movements were often motivated and inspired by fundamental principles, like equality, liberty, and democratic representation, to mobilise against the status quo. We can study the direction these principles push us to make the world a more just place, a direction of change that can and should also apply to us all, including Denmark.

Manon Westphal

Two Types of Behaviour as Guides for Improving the Status Quo

The paper contrasts the particular way of addressing the (past) behaviour of people that characterises Jonathan Floyd's normative behaviourism with an alternative. While normative behaviourism looks to how people behave towards and in response to institutions, political theorists may also look to past forms of institutionalised behaviour. One example for the latter approach is the engagement with the Roman plebeian tribunate in recent work in republican and realist political theory. The paper has two objectives. First, it compares the two approaches and shows that the decision to address a certain type of behaviour is related to a certain understanding of what it means to put the status quo to the test. Second, it discusses to what extent the differences between the approaches amount to different understandings of what it means to experiment with institutional forms to improve the status quo.