Evidence-Based Policy: One-Day Workshop

*Workshop organized by the Research Group in Theoretical Philosophy*

Date and Time: May 11, 2017, 10:30-17:00
Location: KUA 1, Njalsgade 136, 2300 København S.
Room: 27.0.47

Attendance is free, but please contact Sune Holm (suneh@hum.ku.dk) or Thor Grünbaum (tgr@hum.ku.dk) if you plan to attend.

**Theme**

The aim of the workshop is to discuss the roles of various forms of evidence in justification of policies. How do policy makers justify that a proposed policy will be efficacious? What is the role of randomized controlled trials, scientific results, field experience, etc.? The speakers will address central issues in recent discussion of the role of evidence in Evidence-Based Policy. This workshop should be of interest to researchers and students with an interest in philosophy of science, epistemology, and political philosophy.

**Program**

10:30 -11:00 Arrival and coffee
11:00 -12:15 **The emerging discipline of empirical philosophy and why it is needed to inform evidence-based policy** (Jeremy Howick, University of Oxford)
12:15 -13:15 Lunch
13:15 -14:30 **Bayesian Mechanista** (Jacob Stegenga, University of Cambridge)
14:30 -14:45 Pause
14:45 -16.00 **Back to Basics: What does Evidence do (and/or does it not do) in EBPP?** (Eleonora Montuschi, University of Venice Ca' Foscari/London School of Economics)
16:00 -16:15 Pause
16.15 -17.00 **General Discussion**
Abstracts

The emerging discipline of empirical philosophy and why it is needed to inform evidence-based policy (Jeremy Howick, University of Oxford)

Many—if not most—philosophers of medicine claim that their work is relevant to the actual practice of medicine. Many, for example, are highly critical of Evidence-Based Medicine. In this talk I argue that in order to have an influence, philosophers must not shy away from ‘getting their hands dirty with data’. To support my case I use two examples where the combination of philosophy and epidemiology was fruitful:

1. The ethics of placebos in clinical practice.
2. The use of ‘mechanistic evidence’ for generating hypotheses that should be tested in randomized trials.

Bayesian Mechanista (Jacob Stegenga, University of Cambridge)

There are two radical views regarding the role of mechanisms in causal inference. One holds that causal inference, at least in medicine and the social sciences, should be based only on data from population-level studies (statistical evidence). The other holds that causal inference must be based in part on mechanistic evidence. Philosophers of medicine, thinkers in evidence-based medicine, and regulatory agencies in medicine have adopted one or another of these views. This paper appeals to Bayesian confirmation theory to defend a middle view, and explains why the arguments for both sides can seem compelling. The competing views are local principles of inference, the plausibility of which can be assessed by a general normative principle of inference. The Bayesian tells us to base inferences on both the likelihood and the prior. The likelihood represents statistical evidence. One influence on the prior probability of a hypothesis like 'd does x' is knowledge of how d does x. Thus, reasoning about causal relations in medical research by appealing to both statistical and mechanistic evidence is vindicated by our best general theory of inference. This amounts to a criticism of the standard evidence-based medicine epistemology, which denigrates mechanistic evidence.

Back to Basics: What does Evidence do (and/or does it not do) in EBPP? (Eleonora Montuschi, University of Venice Ca' Foscari/London School of Economics)

The appeal to facts has become more and more of a trend in policy making and the field of governance. In the last couple of decades more and more governments have been issuing policies
and interventions supported by what are said to be the best-established facts. As a consequence, more and more a need has emerged to assess and evaluate facts for quality and robustness. The model of reference for obtaining reliable facts is scientific inquiry. To say that a result is acceptable in science is to say that it is supported by adequate evidence, namely that it is justified by facts that are at the same time true and relevant. Evidence is a guide, the best guide we have, to access the truth of our claims or hypotheses – given that the way for us to gain that access can only count on this detour of assembling facts and making them relevant to each other and to the goal we want to use them for. The important, basic aspect in this model is that facts, at least by definition, transcend individual idiosyncrasies and can pave a path that is as ‘objective’ as possible. Indeed, in our age of science scientific evidence is assumed to be the benchmark of objectivity. And it is precisely on this assumption that science creates an expectation of trust, accountability, consensus. How does this expectation transfer to the field of governance and policy making? EBPP takes this expectation on board – for better and for worse. In this talk, with the help of some case studies, I will address some of the pros and cons of EBPP, paying particular attention to whether (and how much) evidence has a role to play in claiming objectivity for the policy-making process.