

# Workshop

Philosophy of the Precautionary Principle



Tilburg, 3 May 2016

**Organizers:** Thomas Boyer-Kassem and Jan Sprenger

## Speakers

- Martin Peterson (Texas A&M University, USA)
- Thomas Boyer-Kassem (Tilburg University, The Netherlands)
- Neelke Doorn (Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands)

## Program

14:00-15:00 - Martin Peterson (Texas A&M University, USA)

### **'When To Use the Precautionary Principle and When Not To Use It. A Geometric Analysis.'**

Abstract: In this talk I argue that geometric concepts such as points, distances, and lines can be used for construing the precautionary principle and other moral principles as abstract regions in a multidimensional space, as well as for balancing conflicting principles against each other. The main advantage of the geometric method is that it enables ethicists to sharpen discussions of the precautionary principle and other moral principles in ways that have previously been beyond the limits of the discipline. This adds a missing perspective to the ethics of risk and technology, and to methodological discussions of applied ethics in general. The talk is based on Ch. 2 and 5 of my book *The Ethics of Technology: A Geometric Analysis of Five Moral Principles*, forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

15:00-16:00 - Thomas Boyer-Kassem (Tilburg University, The Netherlands)

### **'On the coherence of the Precautionary Principle as a decision rule'**

Abstract: What should exactly be the role of the Precautionary Principle (PP)? In the literature, the PP is traditionally envisaged either as a meta-principle, as a decision rule, or as an epistemic principle. Martin Peterson (2006) has argued that the PP as a decision rule is incoherent: when conjoined with some other (standard) decision theory principles, a contradiction obtains. In this talk, I want to challenge this incoherence result. First, I argue that one of the other decision theory principles, namely an Archimedean principle, is not sensible in a precautionary context. Second, I argue that Peterson's explication of the PP does not correspond to our intuition of what the PP is. The road is then free for the PP to be considered as a decision rule.

16:00-16:30 - Break

16:30-17:30 - Neelke Doorn (Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands)

**'How safe is safe enough: The place of irreversibility in decision making about risks'**

Abstract: Irreversibility is one of the central notions in most formulations of the precautionary principle. Yet, the notion is poorly defined. Based on an analysis of different interpretations of irreversibility in physics, medicine, and economics respectively, I develop an account of irreversibility that takes into account the qualitatively distinct and unique nature of certain losses. My claim is that not only probabilities and the disvalue of consequences, but also the irreversible nature of these consequences should be taken into account when deciding about acceptable risk levels.

## Program

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| 9:30 - 10:10  | Jason MacKenzie Alexander (LSE):<br>The Evolution of Social Norms                            |
| 10:10 - 10:50 | Chiara Lisciandra (Helsinki):<br>Why are there Descriptive Norms?                            |
| 10:50 - 11:10 | Coffee Break   |
| 11:10 - 11:50 | Dominik Klein and Jan Sprenger (TiLPS):<br>Modeling Individual Expertise in Group Judgements |
| 11:50 - 12:30 | Jan-Willem Romeijn (RU Groningen):<br>All Agreed. Aumann meets De Groot                      |