Seminar

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Linguistics and Normativity

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SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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ABOUT JOHN BROOME

John Broome holds a BA in Mathematics and Economics from the University of Cambridge, an MA in Philosophy from the University of London and a Ph.D. in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was Lecturer in Economics at Birkbeck College of the University of London, Reader and then Professor of Economics at the University of Bristol and Professor of Philosophy at the University of St Andrews. He has been a SCAS Fellow on four previous occasions. He has also held visiting posts at All Souls College, University of Oxford; the Australian National University, Canberra; the University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Princeton University; the University of Washington, Seattle; the University of British Columbia, Vancouver; and the University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Broome's books are *The Microeconomics of Capitalism* (1983), *Weighing Goods: Equality, Uncertainty and Time* (1991), *Counting the Cost of Global Warming* (1992), *Ethics Out of Economics* (1999), *Weighing Lives* (2004), *Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World* (2012) and *Rationality Through Reasoning* (2013).

Broome is a Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. He holds an honorary doctorate from Lund University.

At SCAS, Broome will be continuing his work on normativity, rationality and reasoning.

ABSTRACT

The philosophers' term 'normative' can be defined as 'involving reasons or ought'. Philosophers are intensely interested in normativity, which makes them intensely interested in the meaning of 'ought'. This word denotes one of the key concepts in the philosophy of normativity. Linguists are also interested in the meaning of 'ought'. For them, it is one among several verbs that they call 'modal'. They have a well-established account of the meaning of modal verbs that derives largely from the work of Angelika Kratzer.

The linguists' account of modal verbs has philosophical roots; it is based on a discipline known as 'modal logic', which was originally developed by philosophers. By contrast, for a long time philosophers of normativity generally ignored linguistic theory. However, in the last few years they have begun to pay much more attention to what linguistics has to say about the meaning of 'ought'. I shall consider how deeply linguistics should influence the philosophy of normativity. I shall argue that its influence should be minor. I shall also argue that discoveries from the philosophy of normativity cast doubt on the linguistic theory of modality itself.

What does 'modal' mean? Some sentences only describe features of the actual world. For example:

> Julia ate lunch today.

Other sentences make reference to other possibilities besides the actual:

> Julia may not have eaten lunch today.
> Julia ought to have eaten lunch today.

Modality is reference of this sort, to other possibilities besides the actual. Verbs such as 'may' and 'ought' have the particular function of making this sort of reference. For that reason, they are called 'modal verbs'.

Linguists distinguish various 'flavours' of modality – among them the 'epistemic' flavour, concerned with what is known, and the 'deontic' flavour, concerned with what is required by some rule. 'Ought' can have either flavour:

> Julia ought to have eaten lunch today.
> The sky ought to clear before sunset.

The meaning of modal verbs is also very much affected by the context. The upshot is that, according to linguists, 'ought' has a very variable meaning, and is not particularly a normative verb. This view contrasts with the philosophers' treatment of 'ought' as marking out the core of normativity.

I shall argue that there is indeed a meaning for 'ought' that philosophers can rightly identify as the core of normativity. It is the meaning that makes this a true claim:

> *Enkrasia*: Rationality requires you to intend to do what you believe you ought to do.

Other contextual and non-normative meanings of 'ought' are less important in the philosophy of normativity.

I shall also argue that linguistics has been led astray by adopting one particular version of modal logic.