



Seminar

# TORBJÖRN TÄNNSJÖ

Fellow, SCAS.

Kristian Claëson Professor of Practical Philosophy, Stockholm University

## *Utilitarianism or Prioritarianism?*

Thursday, 5 November, 4:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT TORBJÖRN TÄNNSJÖ

Torbjörn Tännsjö is Professor of Practical Philosophy at Stockholm University and will retire in 2016. He has also been Affiliated Professor of Medical Ethics at Karolinska Institutet.

Tännsjö has published extensively on moral philosophy, both normative ethics and metaethics, political philosophy and bio-ethics. His most recent book is *Taking Life: Three Theories on the Ethics of Killing* (Oxford University Press, 2015). In normative ethics, he has also published *Hedonistic Utilitarianism* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), defending classical hedonistic utilitarianism, and the textbook *Understanding Ethics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Edinburgh University Press, 2008/2013). In metaethics, his most important book is *From Reasons to Norms: On the Basic Question in Ethics* (Springer, 2010), defending moral realism. His most important books on political philosophy are *Conservatism for Our Time* (Routledge, 1990), *Populist Democracy: A Defence* (Routledge, 1993) and *Global Democracy: The Case for a World Government* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008/2014). His most important book on bioethics is *Coercive Care: Ethics of Choice in Health and Medicine* (Routledge, 1999). He has also published extensively in Swedish. A book on death entitled *Filosofisk tröst: En bok om döden* (Philosophical Consolation: A Book on Death) was published in September 2015.

During his stay at SCAS, he will be working on a book provisionally entitled 'Health Care Priorities: Theory and Practice'.

## ABSTRACT

A simple hedonistic theory allowing for interpersonal comparisons of happiness and catering for some standard objections (such as the heterogeneity objection) will be put forward. The hedonistic theory is used to compare utilitarianism, urging us to maximize the sum total of happiness, with prioritarianism, urging us to maximize a sum total of weighed happiness. It is argued with reference to a few thought experiments that utilitarianism is, intuitively speaking, more plausible than prioritarianism. The problem with prioritarianism surfaces when prudence and morality come apart.