MARTIN-LUTHER-UNIVERSITY
HALLE-WITTENBERG

Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences
Chair of Economic Ethics
Prof. Dr. Ingo Pies

Ethics and Economics of Institutional Governance

Lecture 1
Winter Term 2025/26

Chair of Economic Ethics: Contact Persons

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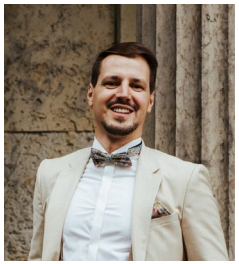

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An Open Letter

On 16 July 2020, Luisa Neubauer, Greta Thunberg, Anuna de Wever van der Heyden and Adélaéde Charlier published an open letter addressed to EU and world leaders, signed by numerous celebrities and academics. Source: https://climateemergencyeu.org/#letter

https://www.zeit.de/2020/19/luisa-neubauer-fridays-for-future-coronakrise

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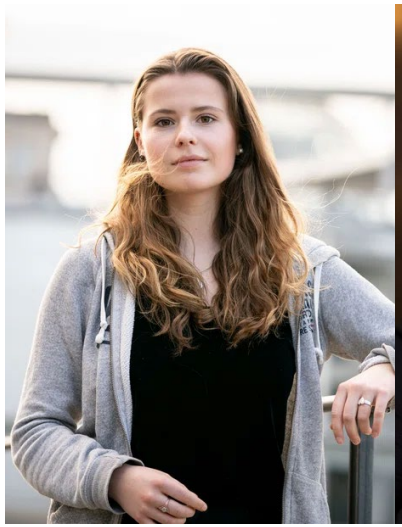
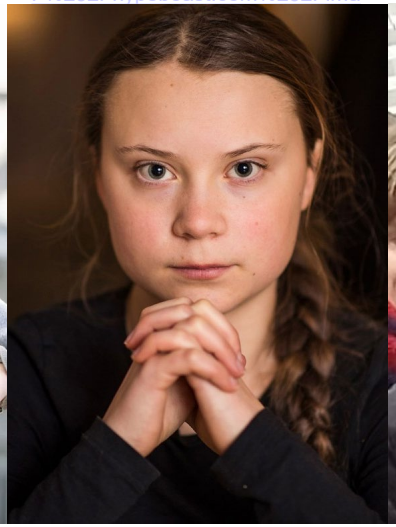

Open Letter: Claims

The Open Letter contains, among other things, the following claims:

- Immediately and completely divest from fossil fuels
- Advocate to make ecocide an international crime at the International Criminal Court
- Safeguard and protect democracy
- Design climate policies that protect workers and the most vulnerable and reduce all forms of inequality: economic, racial and gender
- Treat the climate- and ecological emergency like an emergency

Open Letter: Argumentation (I)

The Open Letter contains the following arguments:
(1) The modern world is based on injustices and oppression.

„Climate and environmental justice can not be achieved as long as we continue to ignore and look away from the **social and racial injustices and oppression** that **have laid the foundations of our modern world**. The fight for justice and equity is universal. Whether it is the fight for social, racial, climate or environmental justice, gender equality, democracy, human-, indigenous peoples'- LGBTQ- and animal rights, freedom of speech and press, or the fight for a balanced, wellbeing, functioning life supporting system. **If we don't have equality, we have nothing.** We don't have to choose, and divide ourselves over which crisis or issue we should prioritize, because it is all interconnected."

Open Letter: Argumentation (II)

The Open Letter contains the following arguments:
(2) The EU should lead by example.

„**When you signed the Paris Agreement the EU nations committed to leading the way.** The EU has the economic and political possibility to do so, therefore it is our moral responsibility.
And now you need to actually deliver on your promises.“

Open Letter: Argumentation (III)

The Open Letter contains the following arguments:
(3) The problems cannot be solved within the market economy system – through reform – but only through a radical system change.

„We are facing an existential crisis, and this is a crisis that we can not buy, build, or invest our way out of. **Aiming to 'recover' an economic system that inherently fuels the climate crisis in order to finance climate action is just as absurd as it sounds.** Our current system is not 'broken' – the system is doing exactly what it's supposed and designed to be doing. It can no longer be 'fixed'. **We need a new system.**"

Open Letter: Argumentation (IV)

The Open Letter contains the following arguments:
(4) We must act immediately, even if this is politically, economically and legally not possible within the current system.

„**[E]ven a child can see that the climate and ecological crisis cannot be solved within today's system.** …

[I]f we are to avoid a climate catastrophe we have to make it possible to **tear up contracts** and abandon existing deals and agreements, on a scale we can't even begin to imagine today. And **those types of actions are not politically, economically or legally possible within today's system**.

In order to limit global heating to 1,5 degrees, the upcoming months and years are crucial. The clock is ticking. Doing your best is no longer good enough. You must now do the seemingly impossible.“

Open Letter Refers to Science

The Open Letter contains the following statement:

„Science doesn't tell us exactly what to do. But it provides us with information for us to study and evaluate. It's up to us to connect the dots.“

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The Open Letter refers to science.

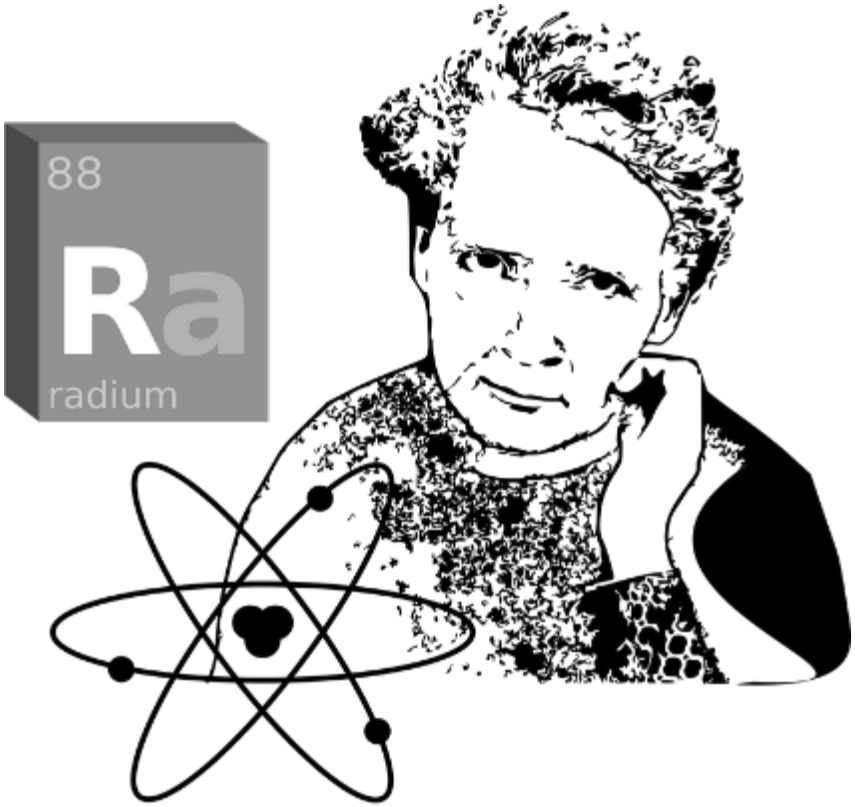
- But how can science comment on this open letter?
- And above all: What exactly is science?

Structure of Today‘s Lecture

1. An Open Letter
2. Science as a Social Process
3. Formalia
4. Tasks of Science: Normative and Positive
5. Opportunities in Science: Ethics and Economics

What is Science?

When we think of science, we often have famous individuals in mind, such as Marie Curie or Albert Einstein – scientific geniuses. In reality, however, science is a social process in which certain rules that aim to make criticism productive are the most important.



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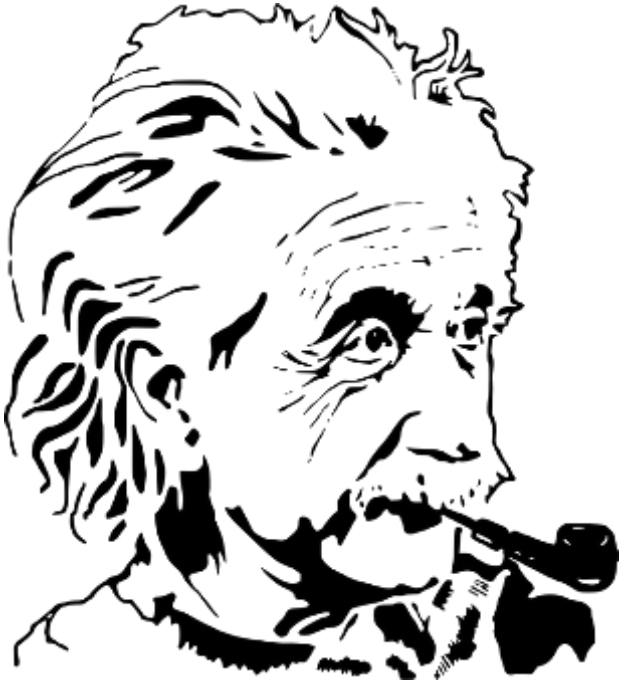

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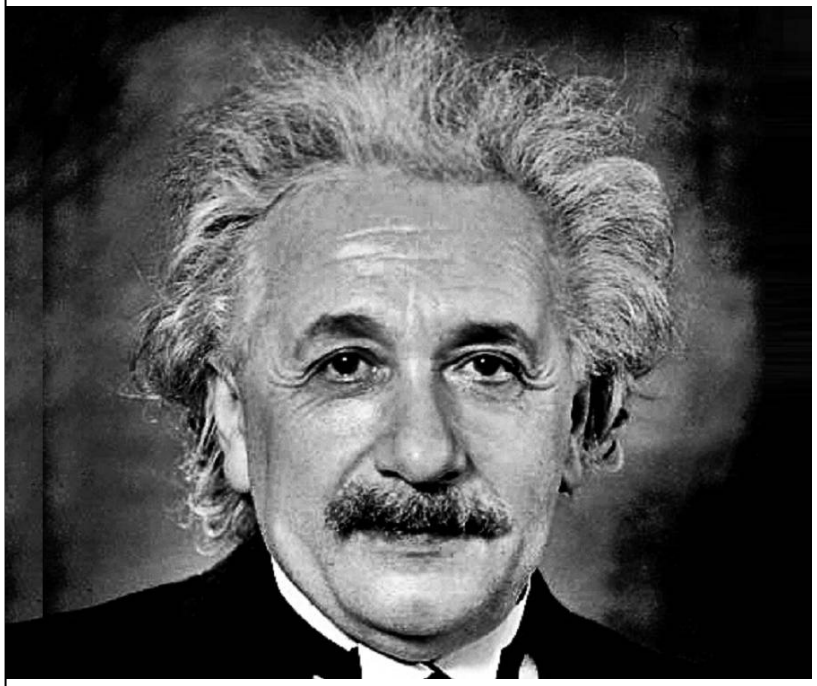
Albert Einstein: What is Science?

Science is not dependent on genius, but on method!

Albert Einstein
(* 1879; † 1955)



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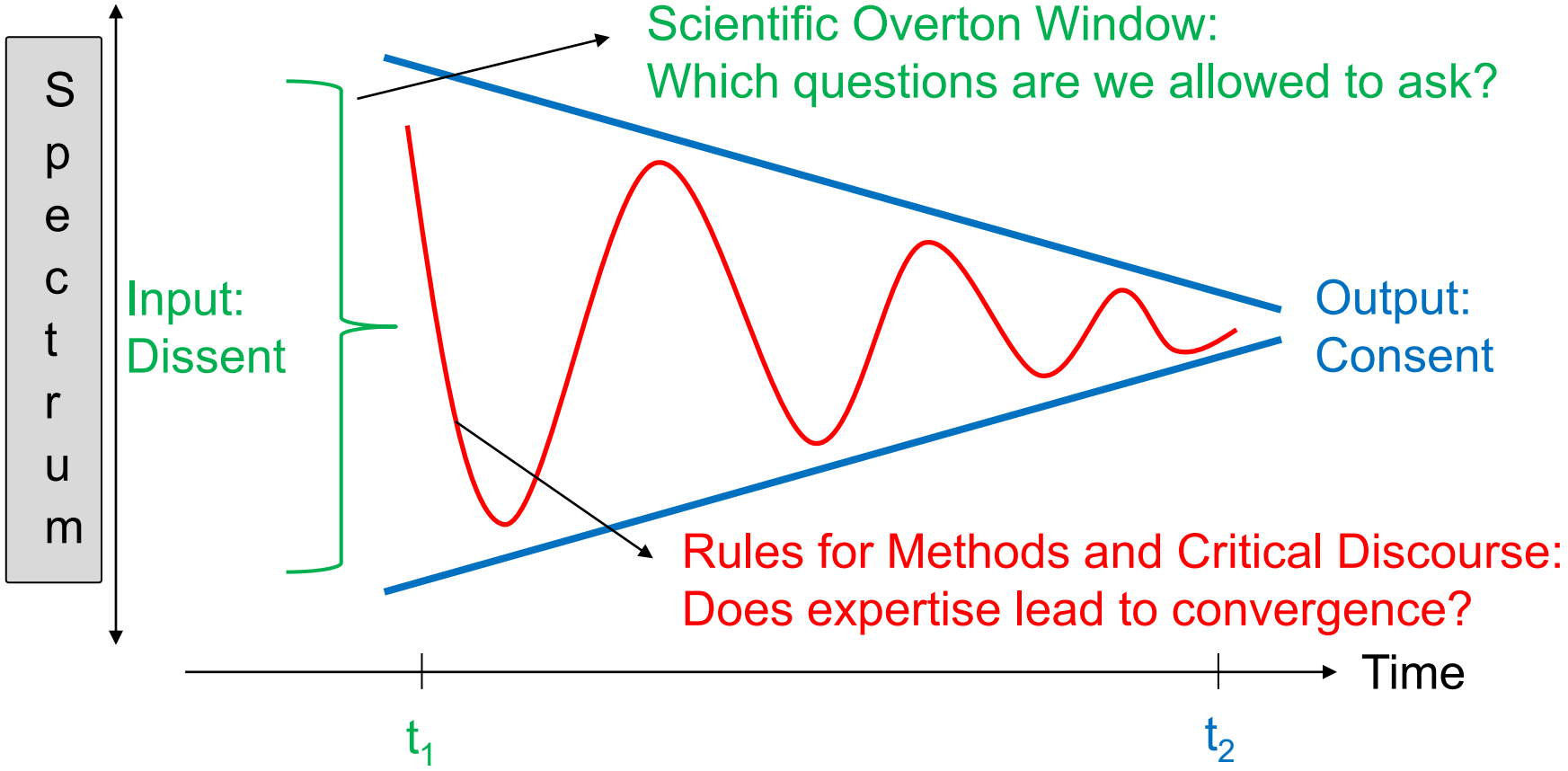
„The whole of science is nothing more than a refinement of every day thinking.“

Albert Einstein (1936; p. 349)

Einstein, Albert (1936): Physics and reality, in: Journal of the Franklin Institute 221(3); pp. 349-382.

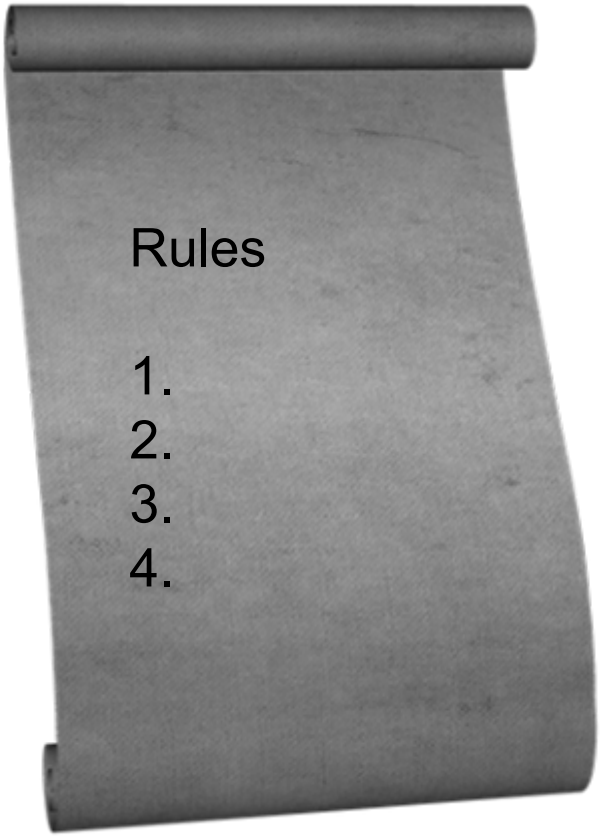
Science as a Social Process

Science is the process of transforming heterodox ideas into a robust body of orthodox (but still fallible) knowledge. This transformation rests on the procedural integrity of rules, such that exchange of criticism and counter-criticism allows expert judgments to converge.



Science as a Social Process: Rules Matter!

Science is a process of ideas competition. For it to work, it needs a competitive order. The following rules aim at making the instrument of criticism scientifically productive.



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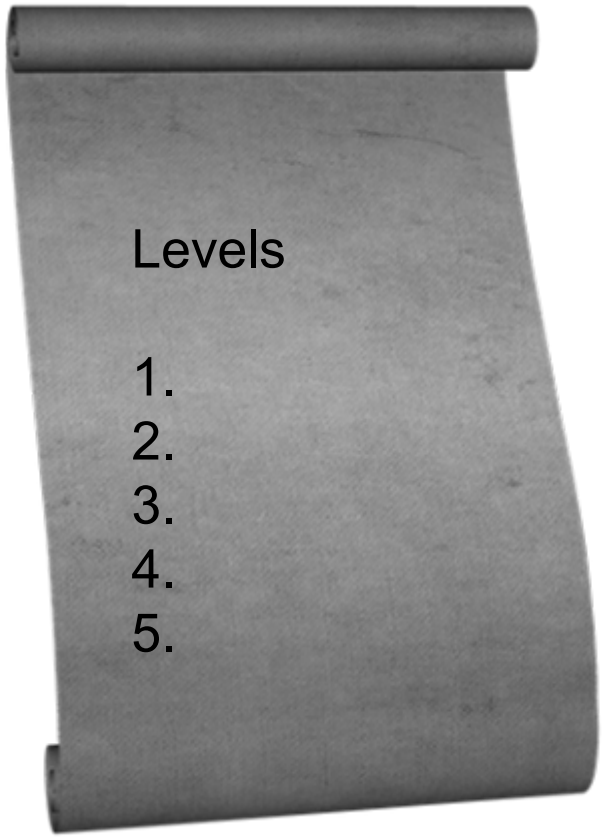
Four rules for the process of science

1. Formulate theories and hypotheses as clearly as possible so that they can be examined inter-subjectively. Expose your ideas to criticism so that we can learn from mistakes.
2. When you criticize the ideas of others, always focus your criticism only on the matter and never on the person.
3. Strive to make your criticism inter-subjectively comprehensible. Attempt to argue convincingly. Put your cards on the table.
4. Pay attention to the integrity of the ideas competition so that science can become productive as a social process of collective learning.

Five Levels of Scientific Learning

Progress of knowledge can take place at different levels: facts, hypotheses, theories, research programs, consilience.



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Five Levels of Scientific Learning

1. Facts (Caution: There is no "factum brutum". Facts are theory-driven.)
2. Hypotheses = theoretically derived conjectures about facts that can be empirically tested (and allow conclusions to be drawn)
3. Theories = suspected interactions between facts; they are driven by informed imagination and disciplined (and corrected) by hypothesis tests
4. Research Programs = theoretical core and vision for development of hypothesis
5. Consilience: How do the various research programs of different scientific disciplines fit into a consistent world view?

Science Serves the Dynamic Maintenance of Our Stock of Knowledge

The most important function of science is to create proven knowledge: to weed out false knowledge components ("mistakes") and to generate new insights that enrich the social knowledge stock. (This applies to research and teaching!)

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David Deutsch: The Reach of Explanations (I)

In his book "The Beginning of Infinity", David Deutsch (2011) explains how science works and that the invention of science marks an epochal break in human history.

David Deutsch

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It is only since the Enlightenment that systematic science has been in place.

„Appearances are deceptive. Yet we have a great deal of knowledge about the vast and unfamiliar reality that causes them, and of the elegant, universal laws that govern that reality. This knowledge consists of explanations: assertions about what is out there beyond the appearances, and how it behaves. For most of the history of our species, we had almost no success in creating such knowledge.“ (p. 32)

David Deutsch: The Reach of Explanations (II)

In his book "The Beginning of Infinity", David Deutsch (2011) explains how science works and that the invention of science marks an epochal break in human history.

David Deutsch rejects empiricism as a source of knowledge.

David Deutsch

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„Where does it come from? Empiricism said that we derive it from sensory experience. This is false. The real source of our theories is conjecture, and the real source of our knowledge is conjecture alternating with criticism. We create theories by rearranging, combining, altering and adding to existing ideas with the intention of improving upon them. The role of experiment and observation is to choose between existing theories, not to be the source of new ones. We interpret experiences through explanatory theories, but true explanations are not obvious. Fallibilism entails not looking to authorities but instead acknowledging that we may always be mistaken, and trying to correct errors. We do so by seeking good explanations – explanations that are hard to vary in the sense that changing the details would ruin the explanation.“ (p. 32)

Based on Karl Popper, David Deutsch emphasizes the scientific interplay of "Conjectures and Refutations".

David Deutsch: The Reach of Explanations (III)

In his book "The Beginning of Infinity", David Deutsch (2011) explains how science works and that the invention of science marks an epochal break in human history.

Science is anti-authoritarian – and consistently fallibilist.

David Deutsch

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„This, not experimental testing, was the decisive factor in the scientific revolution, and also in the unique, rapid, sustained progress in other fields that have participated in the Enlightenment. That was a rebellion against authority which, unlike most such rebellions, tried not to seek authoritative justifications for theories, but instead set up a tradition of criticism. Some of the resulting ideas have enormous reach: they explain more than what they were originally designed to. The reach of an explanation is an intrinsic attribute of it, not an assumption that we make about it as empiricism and inductivism claim.“ (p. 32 f.)

Structure of Today‘s Lecture

1. An Open Letter
2. Science as a Social Process
3. Formalia
4. Tasks of Science: Normative and Positive
5. Opportunities in Science: Ethics and Economics

Overview

Ethics and Economics of Institutional Governance: 14 Lectures (L)

Introduction (L 1)

1. The Ordonomic Approach (L 2 + 3)
2. The Social Structure of Modern Society (L 4 + 5)
3. The Semantics of Modern Society (L 6)
4. Social Learning Processes for the Reciprocal Adaptation of Social Structure and Semantics (L 7 + 8 + 9)
5. Case Study on Climate Policy (L 10 + 11)
6. Applications: The Ordonomic Line of Argumentation (L 12 + 13)

Summary and Outlook (L 14)

Rules for Interaction in Class

In order to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas, the following principles will guide interactions in this class:

- Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion;
- Treat every opinion as open to examination, even if it comes from someone with more experience or expertise than you;
- Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- Some perspectives, opinions, and conclusions are unreasonable or based on falsehoods and should be identified as such;
- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking and deepens understanding, you are encouraged to ask critical questions and engage in pro and con discussions;
- All viewpoints are welcome;
- No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
- You will not be graded on whether your professor or peers agree with your opinions;
- You will be graded on the evidence and reasoning that leads to those opinions.

In a nutshell, quality of thought and mode of engagement matter!

Components of the module and ECTS credits

The module „Ethics and Economics of Institutional Governance“ comprises 5 ECTS and consists of the following components, which require a lot of reading:

• Lecture „Ethics and Economics of Institutional Governance“ (incl. active participation)	30 h
• Preparation and follow-up of the lecture	30 h
• Self-study (read and prepare texts!)	45 h
• Preparation of the written exam	45 h
	150 h

The exam will assess the literature studied (50%). The second focus of the exam is to demonstrate argumentative skills by discussing a given problem (50%).

Learning Objectives

During this Master course on the „Ethics and Economics of Institutional Governance“ you will acquire the following competencies:

1. You are introduced to the ordonomic research program
2. You get an in-depth comprehension of economics as an analytical perspective on societal topics
3. You get an in-depth comprehension of ethics as an analytical perspective on moral judgments.

4. More specifically, you will learn
   a) about the basic properties of modern society
   b) to identify social dilemmas (= situations of rational inefficiencies) and their inherent win-win potentials
   c) to use the practical syllogism for generating downstream and upstream arguments
   d) about the basic ideas of scientific knowledge generation via conjectures and refutations as well as about the consilience potential of interdisciplinary research

There will be a written test at the end of this semester. For details watch out for relevant mails via StudIP.

This is a hands-on event!

This lecture is not about taking notes, but about thinking along. In doing so, you must take an active role in a social process. What does that mean in concrete terms?

The philosopher of science Karl Popper prominently advocated the thesis that we (can and should) learn from mistakes.

For didactics, this means that we have to overcome the psychological tendency to avoid mistakes (and to avoid criticism): The mistakes required for learning should be made and identified as quickly as possible and then criticized and corrected as clearly as possible.

That's why I'm asking a lot of questions for public voting in this lecture. Please always give an answer on this occasion. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, you will notice for yourself whether you are right or wrong. Secondly, you signal to me where I, as a lecturer, should sharpen an argument again so that it becomes easier to understand.

Procedure

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1. The exam will be a (hand-)written exam in person.

2. You will have 60 minutes to answer the questions (max. 60 points in total).

3. The examination office will publish the date of the exam in the next weeks.

4. The examination office will inform you about the technical implementation as well as the legal requirements in the next few weeks. We recommend that you check the website of the examination office regularly for news: https://pruefungsamt.wiwi.uni-halle.de/?lang=en

Structure

The exam will consist of two blocks. Each block contributes 50% of points.

1. *Literature: You will be asked open-ended questions about the provided literature. (max. 30 points)*

2. *Lecture content:* You have to reconstruct specific situations from an ordonomic point of view (i.e., reconstructing problems and developing solutions with the help of market diagrams, social dilemmas, practical syllogism, orthogonal position, and the three-level scheme). *(max. 30 points)*

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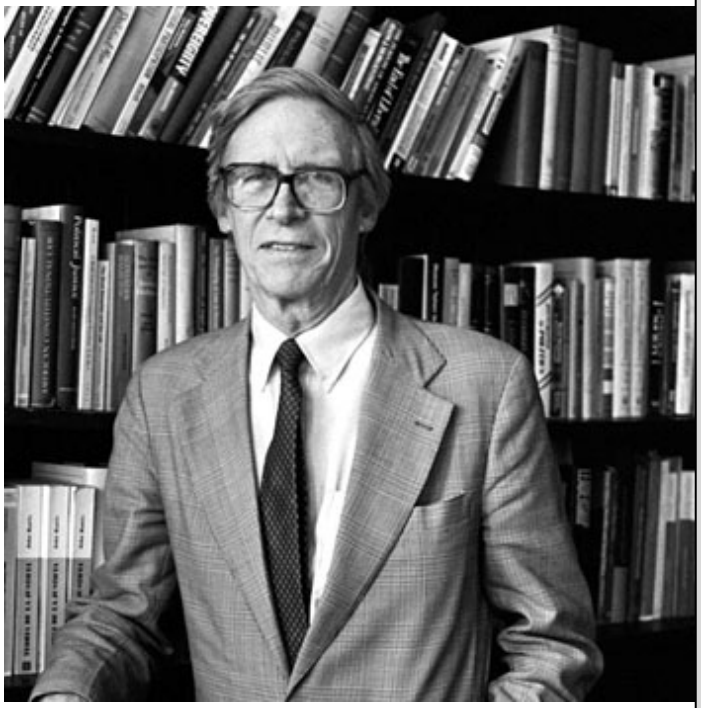
Normative Tasks of Science

Science is primarily positive research. However, it can also make normative contributions. John Rawls attributes the following tasks to political philosophy.

John Rawls (* 1921; † 2002)



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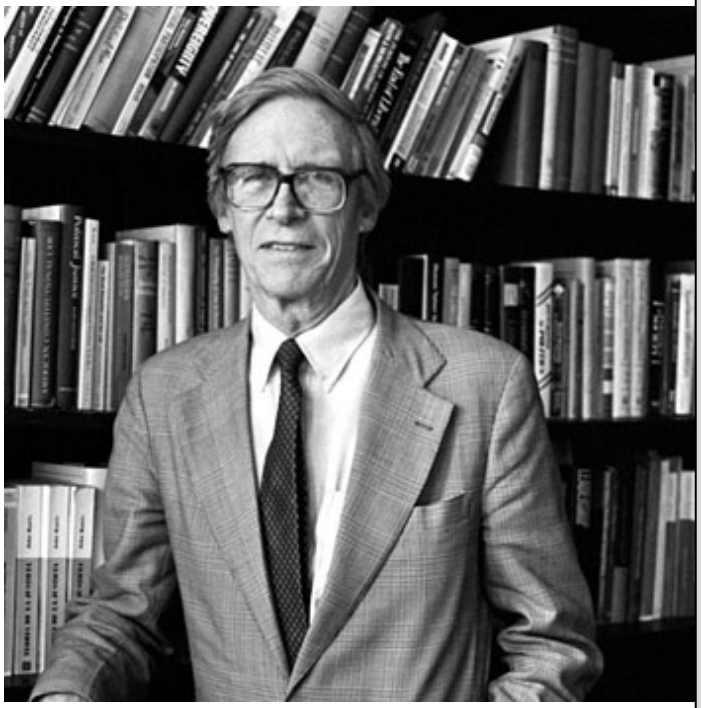
Four Normative Tasks

1. Find or invent a common basis for understanding to solve profound societal conflicts
2. Work on the narrative (analogous to consilience as a world view, people need collective orientations with which they can identify as citizens)
3. Reconciliation with the societal system by explaining the appropriateness of institutional arrangements
4. Realistic vision for societal development

Normative Tasks of Science (I): Promote understanding

For example, freedom and equality are different ideals. How do they hang together? How can they be reconciled?
(Basic idea: Justice combines freedom and equality.)

John Rawls (* 1921; † 2002)



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Task 1

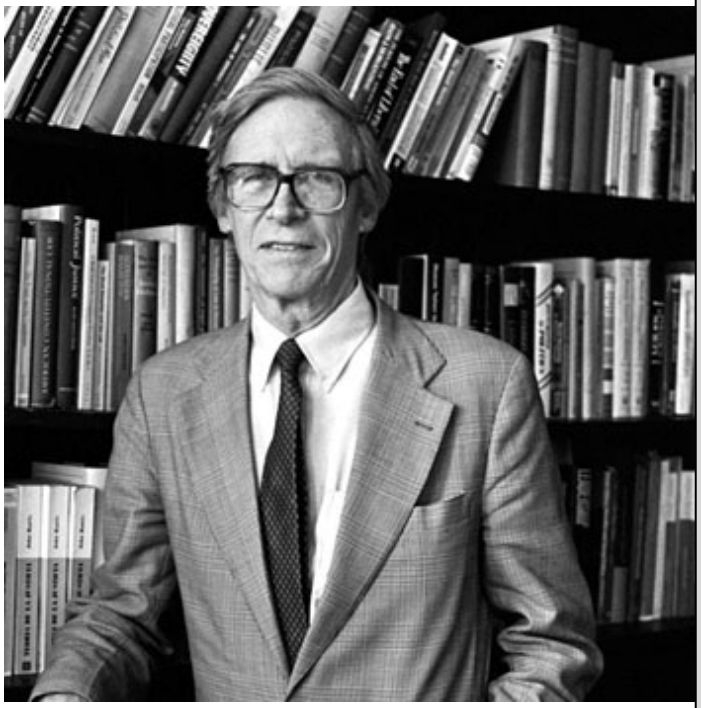
„[O]ne task of political philosophy is to focus on deeply disputed questions and to see whether, despite appearances, some underlying basis of … agreement can be uncovered. … if such a basis of agreement cannot be found, perhaps the divergence of … opinion at the root of divisive political differences can at least be narrowed.“

(Rawls 2001; p. 2)

Normative Tasks of Science (II): Work on the Narrative

People need a collective orientation for an enlightened self-image as citizens of their society. Example: reasonably reflected principles that enable progress through societal learning.

John Rawls (* 1921; † 2002)



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Task 2

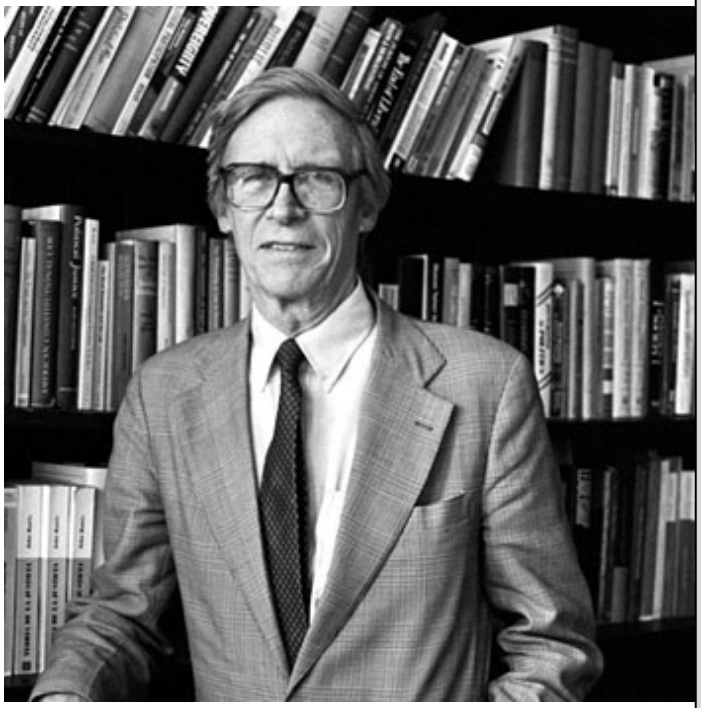
„[P]olitical philosophy may contribute to how a people think of their political and social institutions as a whole, and their basic aims and purposes as a society with a history – a nation – as opposed to their aims and purposes as individuals, or as members of families and associations."

(Rawls 2001; p. 2)

Normative Tasks of Science (III): Reconciliation

*Citizens are not fatefully at the mercy of society. But one must understand the functioning of society in order to be able to reconcile with the system – and to be able to feel free. Example: The fact of reasonable pluralism.**

John Rawls (* 1921; † 2002)



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Task 3

„[P]olitical philosophy may try to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions, when properly understood …, are rational, and developed over time as they did to attain their present, rational form."

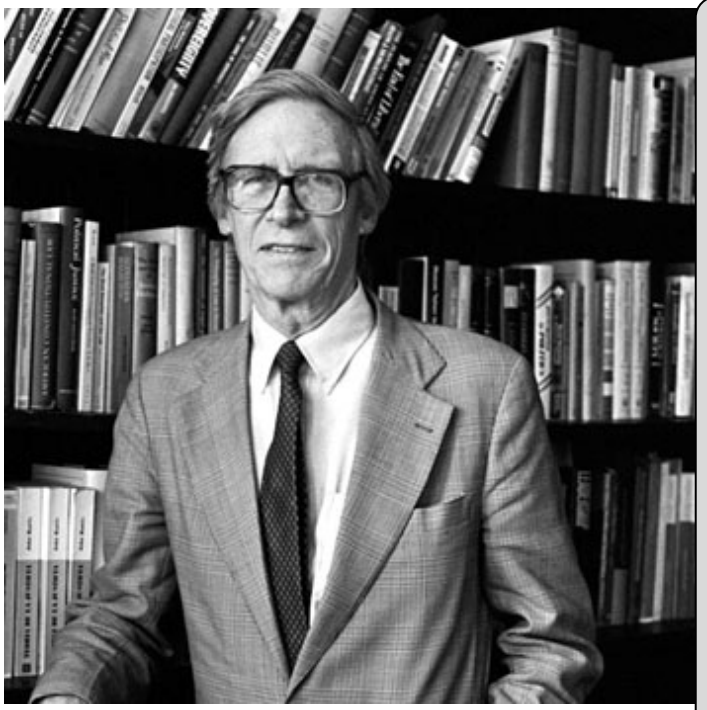
(Rawls 2001; p. 3)

* Rawls (2001, p. 3 f.): „[T]his fact is not always easy to accept, and political philosophy may try to reconcile us to it by showing us the reason and indeed the political good and benefits of it."

Normative Tasks of Science (IV): Realistic Vision

Democratic societies need ideals that are supposed to be visionary in a realistic way: "probing the limits of practical political possibility" (p. 4). It is a question of exploring the societal possibilities with as open an eye as possible.

John Rawls (* 1921; † 2002)



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Task 4

„What would a just democratic society be like under reasonably favorable but still possible historical conditions, conditions allowed by the laws and tendencies of the social world? What ideals and principles would such a society try to realize given the circumstances of justice in a democratic culture as we know them? These circumstances include the fact of reasonable pluralism. This condition is permanent as it persists indefinetely under free democratic institutions.“

(Rawls 2001; p. 4)

Normative Science at Work

https://www.aaa-werbung.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/fragezeichen.jpg

Economics as a Positive and Normative Science

Since Max Weber, it has been known (and acknowledged) that science cannot and should not make value judgments. Yet economics can help explain – and change – societal phenomena.

Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/images/image_friedman.gif

„The founder of our discipline as we view it today was Adam Smith. His book *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, is both the first scientific treatise in economics and one of the most effective tracts intended to influence public policy that has ever been published.

From that time to this, economists have followed the same dual goal: to improve our understanding of how the economy works and to influence public policy.“

Friedman (1986; p. 1, H.i.O.).

Assumption Symmetry

Since James Buchanan, it has been known (and acknowledged) that if we want to explain economics, politics, and civil society, we need to pay attention to assumption symmetry. Friedman agrees (with some delay).

Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

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„[T]he public-interest characterization of government is basically flawed.

Why should we regard government officials differently? They too aim to serve their own interest, and in government as in business we must try to set up institutions under which individuals who intend only their own gain are led by an invisible hand to serve the public interest, instead of, as so often happens, by an "invisible foot" to serve private interests that it was no part of their intention to serve. … The great contribution of what has become known as the theory of public choice … has been to … force all of us to recognize that we should analyze governmental officials in the same way that we analyze businessmen, as promoting their own self-interest."

Friedman (1986; p. 1, H.i.O.).

Examples (p. 3, p. 4): (a) Fed bureaucrats have no interest in reliable monetary rules. (b) „From 1971 on, the IMF was an institution in search of a purpose instead of a purpose in search of an institution."

Economics and Self-Interest

Since Adam Smith, it has been known (and acknowledged) that self-interest can be institutionally channeled and oriented towards the common good.

Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

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„To avoid misunderstanding, let me stress that I'm not criticizing the people in the Federal Reserve System just as I'm not criticizing businessmen when I say that they pursue their self-interest. On the contrary, as already emphasized, I and most of us as economists have learned from Adam Smith that the world will run best if there is a fundamental framework under which people who pursue their self-interest are led by an invisible hand also to serve the public interest. I'm not criticizing anybody except those who were responsible for setting up institutions that are not consistent with such a framework.“

Friedman (1986; p. 3).

Economics has Three Options of Public Influence (I)

Milton Friedman shows the following three possibilities:

Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

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1. „try to inform the public, to give the public a better idea of what is in the public's own interest“ (p. 4)
2. „to influence public policy … by analyzing the changes in institutional arrangements that would bring about the desired results and trying to persuade the public to introduce those institutional changes rather than trying to influence policy makers directly.“ (p. 5)
3. „[E]conomists can and do influence public policy by keeping options open for times of crisis.“ (p. 6)

Friedman (1986; p. 4, 5, 6).

Examples: (a) Free Trade, (b) Constitutional Reform, (c) Transition to the Free Exchange Rate Regime

Excursus: Milton Friedman and the Euro

Friedman was one of the early and radical critics of the European Monetary Union.

Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/images/image_friedman.gif

„The drive for the Euro has been motivated by politics not economics. The aim has been to link Germany and France so closely as to make a future European war impossible, and to set the stage for a federal United States of Europe. I believe that adoption of the Euro would have the opposite effect. It would exacerbate political tensions by converting divergent shocks that could have been readily accommodated by exchange rate changes into divisive political issues. Political unity can pave the way for monetary unity. Monetary unity imposed under unfavorable conditions will prove a barrier to the achievement of political unity.“

Friedman (1997; p. 3.).

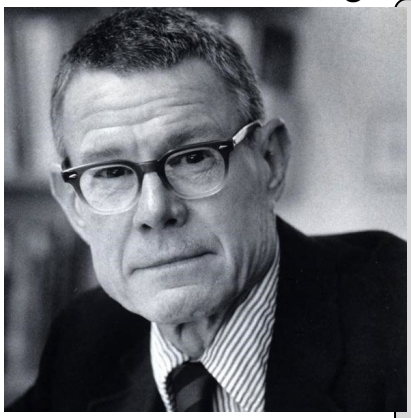
Structure of Today‘s Lecture

1. An Open Letter
2. Science as a Social Process
3. Formalia
4. Tasks of Science: Normative and Positive
5. Opportunities in Science: Ethics and Economics

An Economic Contribution to Ethics

Ethics is the theory of morality. Economics is a rational-choice-based social science. It can inform (re)conceptualizations of thought frameworks, thus helping us to ask the right questions. Thomas Schelling provides an instructive example:

Thomas Schelling



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„The problem: there are two (or several) groups of people who are simultaneously and equally mortally endangered: rescue is available but can serve only one group, but a group of any size. Someone must decide which group to save, letting the rest perish. … [S]hould the larger group be saved?“

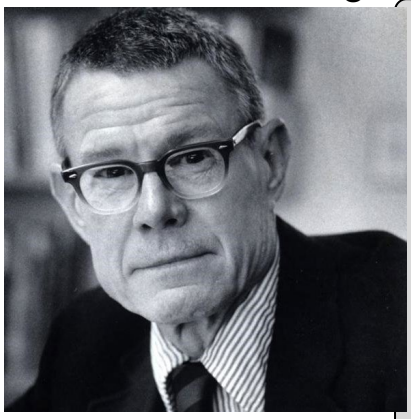
Schelling (2006; p. 140).

Alternative question: May you play God?

Should Numbers Determine Whom To Save?

Schelling reflects on the frame of thought:

Thomas Schelling



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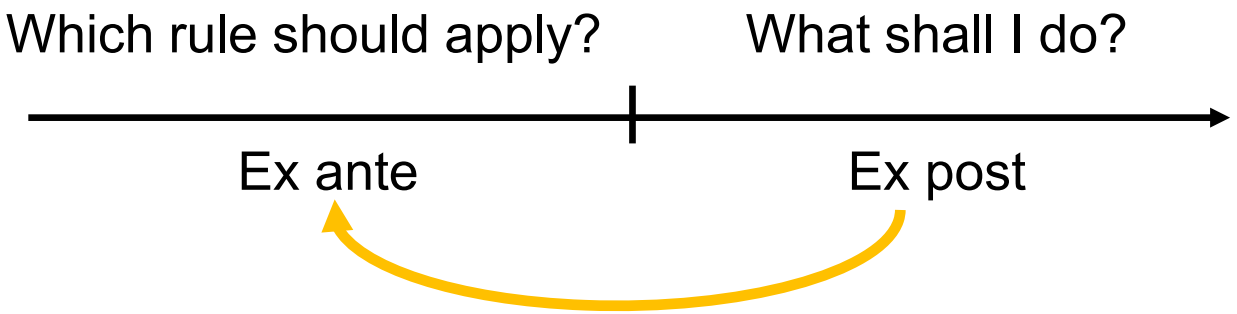
„The question has been posed ex post. … I propose that there is a more useful way to formulate the issue. Namely, ex ante. We ask, not whom should we save when the emergency is on us, but what rule should we adopt in anticipation of such emergencies?“

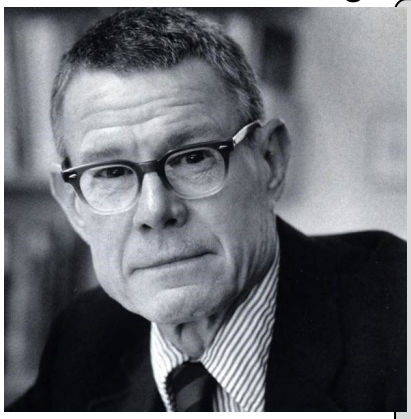
Schelling (2006; p. 140).



Numbers Should Determine Whom To Save!

Schelling argues that to answer the right question is easy and even consensual. The trick is to transform the objects of treatment (ex post) into decision-makers (ex ante), so that they choose for themselves which rule(s) should apply.

Thomas Schelling



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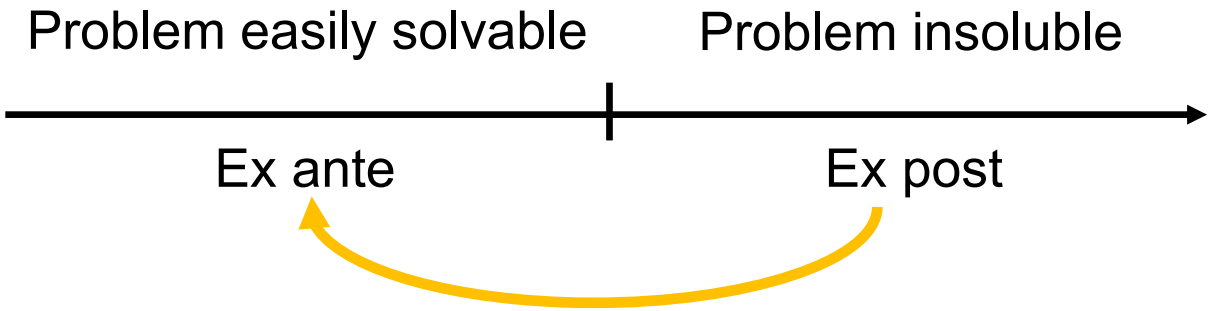
„My proposal is that it should be easy to adopt a rule. And the rule that would be adopted is to save the more, not the fewer. And I propose that this rule can be expected to be universally desired, unanimously adopted."

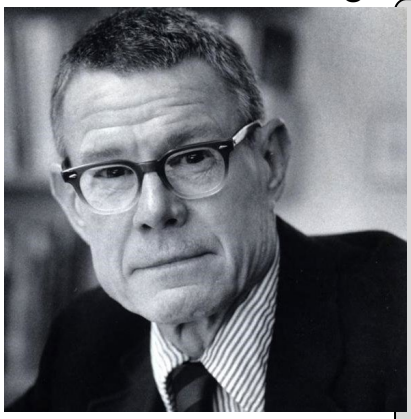
Schelling (2006; p. 140).



Schelling Formulates Three Arguments

Schelling argues that self-interest and probability thinking point in the same direction. As a third criterion, he discusses incentive effects. They, too, speak for the rule of saving the larger group.

Thomas Schelling



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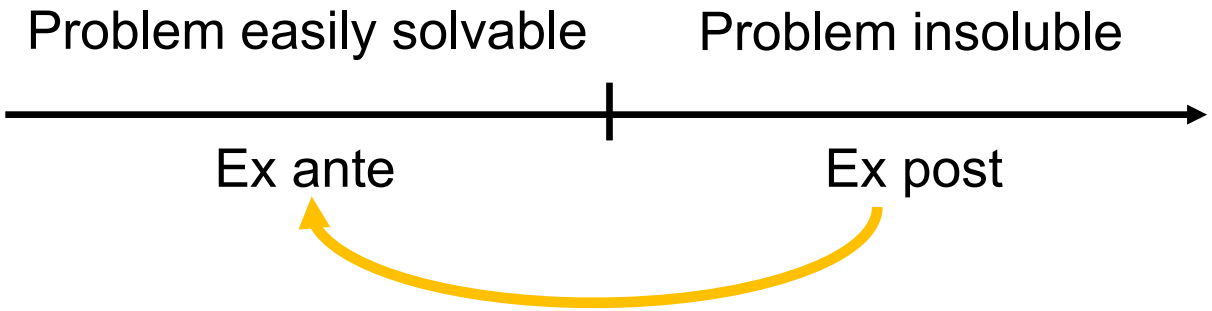
„This is a case in which both criteria – (1) which decision rule would be adopted unanimously in order to maximize the likelihood of survival of whomever people most want to survive, and (2) which decision rule would induce behavior that optimizes the choices between staying together and splitting off into smaller groups – favor the same solution."

Schelling (2006; p. 143).



Georg Christoph Lichtenberg: Plea for Ethical Polyperspectivity

Writer, mathematician and experimental physicist; 1742-1799. His quotation combines philosophy of reason (Kant), theology, virtue ethics (Aristotle) and utilitarianism.

http://www.rhetorik-netz.de/rhetorik/bild/lichtenb.jpg

„We now have four principles of morality:

A *philosophical*: Do good for its own sake, out of respect for the law.
A *religious* one: do it because it is God's will, out of love for God.
A *human* one: Do it because it promotes your bliss, out of self-love.
A *political* one: do it because it promotes the welfare of the great society of which you are a part, out of love for society, with consideration for you …

Maybe this is all the same principle, only looked at by other sides?“

Lichtenberg (o.J., 1996; S. 259, H.i.O.)