Models and Empirical Philosophy: A Session in Honor of Patrick Suppes

This session pays homage to the memory of Patrick Suppes (March 17, 1922 - November 17, 2014) who made substantial contributions not only to logic and philosophy of science, but to many other fields including physics, psychology, the social sciences, linguistics, probability and statistics. Thanks to his dual militancy as philosopher and applied scientist working in meteorology, learning theory and neuroscience, Suppes forged a novel way of doing philosophy of science that combines sophisticated formalism and careful attention to the details characterizing research within specific disciplines. A pioneer of the semantic view of theories, Suppes embraced a model-centred approach which is a unique blend of empiricism and pragmatism, revolving around the idea that scientific knowledge has an irreducibly tentative and local character, and is to be analysed from a genuinely pluralistic perspective.

Abstract

Pat Suppes: from logic to probabilistic metaphysics
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Patrick Suppes used to minimize his own philosophical import: «It may be thought that what I am advancing ... is radical and new, but nothing could be further from the truth ... what I have to say here is very much in the spirit of Aristotle» (Paris, CDF conference, 2005). In the same talk, however, taking for granted that «the Kantian program is a dead one», he proposed another program. Three aspects of his philosophical stance will be investigated.

1. Logic is required for the correction of scientific language, but analyzing the course of events requires probability. «Logic is relevant even to empirical sciences like psychology» (1957, Introd.). «In restricting himself to the concept of constant conjunction, Hume was not fair to the use of causal notions in ordinary language and experience. Roughly speaking, the modification of Hume’s analysis I propose is to say that one event is the cause of another if the appearance of the first event is followed with a high probability by the appearance of the second, and there is no third event that we can use to factor out the probability relationship between the first and second event» (1970, p. 10).

2. Probability is not entirely a subjective matter, as de Finetti wrote - it is objective: «Randomness is in nature, and not simply in our ignorance of true causes» (1984, p. 23, 93). Probability and causality are tied up.

3. As there is a burgeoning of the research in neurosciences, we will need a new Kant to build a constructive Kritik and take us beyond the mind-body problem. «The slow but steady accretion of the case for an empirical view of all human phenomena calls for a revision of much thinking in philosophy that still retains unfortunate remnants needing the kind of critique that Kant gave earlier, but now applied to a wider circle of philosophical ideas». Finally the intellectual generosity and open-mindedness of Patrick Suppes will be underlined.