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This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Social Theory and Practice*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Grill, K., Scoccia, D. (2015)

Introduction.

Social Theory and Practice, 41(4): 577-578

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract201541431>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

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Introduction: Preference, Choice and (Libertarian) Paternalism

Kalle Grill & Danny Scoccia

This special issue originated in a workshop organized by one of the editors, Kalle Grill, at Umeå University in March 2014, with funding from The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences. The theme of the workshop was Respecting Context-Dependent Preferences. Contributors to this issue who were also speakers at the Umeå workshop are Richard Arneson, Kalle Grill, Jason Hanna, Sven Ove Hansson, Robert Sugden, and Torbjörn Tännsjö. The other speakers at the workshop were Luc Bovens, Sarah Conly, Fabienne Peter and Danny Scoccia.

Preferences are context-dependent when they are determined by circumstances other than the contents of the alternatives that preferences range over, such as the way alternatives are presented. As behavioral research increasingly indicates, many of our preferences are context-dependent in this sense. Context-dependence raises difficult issues for many areas of moral and political philosophy. Importantly, the fact that preferences are not in any obvious way based on settled values or considered judgments may cast doubt on liberalism's stance on when paternalism is morally objectionable: What exactly is liberal antipaternalism supposed to protect, if not settled preferences? What about paternalism that operates by influencing the formation of preferences? Should we, as proposed by so called "libertarian paternalists", shape the choice environment so as to promote choices that are conducive to health, wealth and happiness over the long run? More generally, we may inquire what respect for persons should mean given the context-dependence of their preferences.

Several articles in this issue deal with the plausibility of libertarian paternalism and the nudging it endorses. Sugden argues that those who take context-dependence to justify paternalism often rely on ideas of latent preferences that lack a convincing psychological explanation. William Glod argues that, because of informational constraints, nudging often fails to track people's actual preferences. Hanna, in contrast, defends nudging against the objection that it is

manipulative. Andres Moles surveys some legitimate aims for which nudging can be justified.

The remaining articles either take a more general view of context-dependence, or investigate it in some specific context: Arneson considers, in light of the debate on libertarian paternalism, the general concept of paternalism, and proposes a new theory for when paternalism is justified, in terms of a limited prerogative to be imprudent. Grill argues that respect for persons should be pluralist and include respect for their choices as well as their preferences, even when these two come apart. Tännsjö re-considers, in the light of context-dependence, his earlier rejection of any form of coercive care. Hansson contributes a historical perspective with a discussion of John Stuart Mill's three principles regulating the extent of individual liberty.

The guest editors wish to thank the journal editors for giving us the opportunity to produce this special issue. We are grateful also to the reviewers who have helped in the editorial process, and to Margaret Dancy, the Managing Editor, for her friendly support throughout.