Foundations of the Formal Sciences
Speaker : Claus Beisbart
May 8th, 14:00

Moral dilemmas and problems of deontic logic

Except for theoretical paradoxes (*e.g.* the liar's paradox) moral dilemmas don't seem to be taken seriously and further investigated until the twentieth century. Moral dilemmas arise if two duties or obligations of a person expressed by moral principles contradict each other in a certain situation. B. Williams was the first who claimed that moral dilemmas may not only be difficult to handle but that they are in contradiction to well–established principles of deontic logic and may be an argument in favour of certain metaethical theories. In my talk I won't review in detail the discussion whether there really are moral dilemmas but will focus on the logical reconstruction of moral dilemmas and its consequences. I will discuss further two concepts to limit the consequences of moral dilemmas: firstly one could introduce the distinction between *prima facie*–obligations and all–things–considered obligations. On the other hand one could claim that a contradiction in ethics is fundamentally different from that in a theory. I suggest that the niveau of generality is crucial for the notion of a contradiction in ethics. I conclude with a detailed comparison of what dilemmas mean to moral systems, theoretical concepts and metatheoretical reasoning.