

Yet another argument against anti-aggregation

(abstract)

Consider Scanlon's (1998) classic case

Transmitter Room. One person falls on the cables in the transmitter room as the World Cup final is going on. If you let her be, she will be painfully electrocuted for the rest of the match. If you help her, the transmission will be cut off for billions of viewers worldwide. What should you do?

Anti-aggregationists think you should help the one person, regardless of the number of the viewers watching the match. This is because the one's complaint will be much greater than the complaints of the many, and in this kind of case you should let the person with the greatest complaint decide. Cf. Voorhoeve (2014). Aggregationists disagree.

I will provide new arguments against anti-aggregationism. I show that anti-aggregationism is incompatible with the following principles

Individual Continuity. Let x, y, z be wellbeing levels with x higher than y higher than z . Then there is some probability π strictly between zero and one such that getting z with probability π and x with probability $(1 - \pi)$ is better for a given individual than getting y for sure.

Ex Ante Pareto: If everyone's prospects are better in X than in Y , you should choose X rather than Y .

Statewise Dominance: If in each state of nature you should choose X rather than Y , then you should choose X rather than Y .

It is well-known that a structurally similar problem arises for egalitarianism, as described in Otsuka & Voorhoeve (2009), for example. Indeed, this problem is closely related to Harsanyi's aggregation theorem, as detailed in Thomas (2016: ch. 3). Nonetheless, I show that anti-aggregationism and egalitarianism are distinct doctrines, with different theoretical commitments. I also spell out the character of their formal similarity.

I then argue that anti-aggregationists have good grounds to accept the principles which turn out to be incompatible with their view, in particular, Ex Ante Pareto and Statewise Dominance. In showing this, I generalize and develop previous arguments due to Norcross (1997, 1998), Dougherty (2013), Hare (2016), Frick (2015) and Horton (2017). The problem with their arguments is that they rely, implicitly or explicitly, on principles at least as strong as

Transitivity. If you should choose X rather than Y in a direct choice between them and Y rather than Z , in a direct choice between them, then you should choose X rather than Z in a direct choice between them.

I spell out the structure of their arguments, which hasn't been done with enough precision in the literature. (Some of their arguments can be fruitfully understood as *dynamic arguments*, related to money-pump arguments.) I show how and why anti-aggregationists are committed to rejecting principles like Transitivity. This means that previous arguments in the literature risk begging the question against anti-aggregationists. I fix this defect by providing new arguments for Ex Ante Pareto and Statewise Dominance and I argue that many anti-aggregationists should accept these arguments (in particular, those inspired by Scanlon's contractualism). This means that anti-aggregationism carries incompatible commitments, and so should be rejected.

- Dougherty, T. (2013) 'Aggregation, Beneficence, and Chance', *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, 7(2), pp. 1-19.
- Frick, J. (2015) 'Contractualism and Social Risk', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 43(3), pp. 175-223. doi: 10.1111/papa.12058.
- Hare, C. (2016) 'Should We Wish Well to All?', *Philosophical Review*, 125(4), pp. 451-472. doi: 10.1215/00318108-3624764.
- Horton, J. (2017) 'Aggregation, Complaints, and Risk', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 45(1), pp. 54-81. doi: 10.1111/papa.12084.
- Norcross, A. (1997) 'Comparing Harms: Headaches and Human Lives', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 26(2), pp. 135-167. doi: 10.1111/j.1088-4963.1997.tb00079.x.
- Norcross, A. (1998) 'Great harms from small benefits grow: how death can be outweighed by headaches', *Analysis*, 58(2), pp. 152-158. doi: 10.1093/analys/58.2.152.
- Otsuka, M. and Voorhoeve, A. (2009) 'Why It Matters That Some Are Worse Off Than Others: An Argument against the Priority View', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 37(2), pp. 171-199. doi: 10.1111/j.1088-4963.2009.01154.x.
- Scanlon, T. (1998) *What We Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Thomas, Teruji. 2016. 'Topics in Population Ethics'. DPhil thesis. University of Oxford.
- Voorhoeve, A. (2014) 'How Should We Aggregate Competing Claims?', *Ethics*, 125(1), pp. 64-87. doi: 10.1086/677022.