The Romanell-Phi Beta Kappa Professorship is awarded annually to scholars in the field of philosophy, without restriction to any one school of philosophical thought. The professorship is intended to recognize not only distinguished achievement but also the recipient’s contribution or potential contribution to public understanding of philosophy.

Daniel M. Hausman is the Herbert A. Simon Professor of Philosophy here at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research has centered on epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical issues lying at the boundaries between economics and philosophy.

02/18/2011 - Lecture 1: Preferences: Clearing the Ground
What are preferences, as understood in everyday language and especially in economics? After criticizing some common views, this lecture argues that preferences are overall or total subjective comparative evaluations – that is, assessments of alternatives in terms of every consideration that the agent takes to be relevant. This conclusion leads to the topics of the second and third lectures: How can such total evaluations be made? What does this understanding of preferences imply concerning the explanation and prediction of behavior and concerning welfare?

02/21/2011 - Lecture 2: Preferences, Evaluation, and Explanatory Strategy
How can people make total comparative evaluations and how can they be used to explain and predict behavior? This lecture tackles these questions and defends the explanatory strategy economists employ. This defense of economic modeling is qualified, because without a theory of preference formation and modification, explanations in terms of preferences are trivial.

As total comparative evaluations, preferences are the result of a process of assessment rather than a basis for evaluation. So the fact that some state of affairs satisfies an agent’s preferences does not make that state of affairs good for that agent – even if the agent’s preferences are well-informed, rational, and directed toward the agent himself or herself. This lecture addresses the connections between preferences and welfare and offers a limited defense of standard welfare economics.

The professorship is made possible by an endowment from Patrick and Edna Romanell. Patrick Romanell, a Phi Beta Kappa member from Brooklyn College, was H.Y. Benedict Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas, El Paso. The first award was given for the academic year 1983-1984.

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