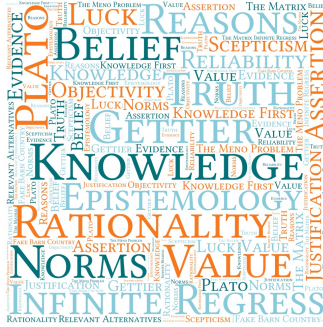




Knowledge, Individuals & Society

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Experimental Epistemology: Introduction



Analyses and intuitions

- We saw in weeks 1–3 how debates over philosophical analysis have been conducted:
 - (1) *A* offers initial analysis of the form ‘*X* iff *Y*’
 - (2) *B* offers hypothetical situation wrt which she claims that people’s intuitions are that *X* but not *Y*, or vice versa
 - (3) (i) *A* revises initial analysis or
(ii) *A* dismisses *B*’s objection
- Regarding (3)(ii), we have seen some options:
 - (a) *A* suggests that **the intuitions that *B* appeals to have no probative force** (e.g. offers a WAM or claims that the case is too complicated)
 - (b) *A* suggests that **people’s intuitions are not as *B* claims**

The wisdom of the crowds

- There is a good reason why *B* and *A* worry about what “people’s intuitions” are
- A plausible principle (Sytsma & Livengood 2014)

PRINCIPLE OF AGREEMENT ‘Widespread agreements of reports about a philosophical case provide *prima facie* reason to endorse the conclusion of the consensus report, while lack of widespread agreement provides *prima facie* reason to refrain from endorsing any claim about this case.’
- Tentative support: **Condorcet Jury Theorem (CJT)** & extensions

The Condorcet Jury Theorem

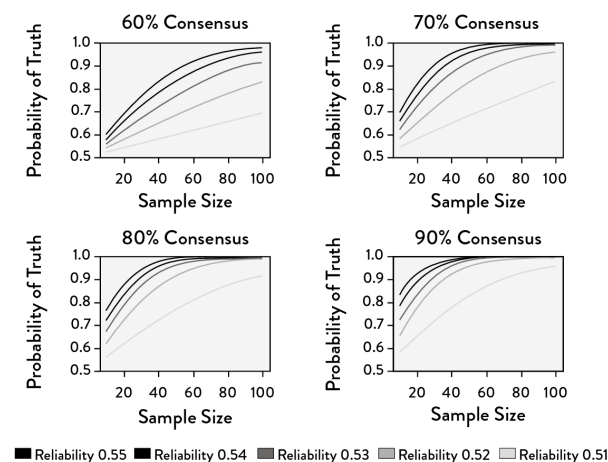
- Assume *n* people vote **honestly** on which of 2 alternatives is correct (e.g. which of 2 policies is best or which of 2 claims is true or closest to true)
- Assume that their votes are **statistically independent**
- Assume that they have **identical minimal competences**, i.e. identical better than random chances of getting things right
- Then the probability that the majority verdict is correct (the **majority competence**)
 - (a) **increases strictly monotonically** with *n* (hence is **greater than each individual competence**)
 - (b) **converges to 1** as *n* tends towards ∞ (converging faster the higher the competence and greater the majority)

The Condorcet Jury Theorem (ctd.)

- The general outcome is robust under some relaxations of the conditions (see Goodin & Spiekermann 2018 Ch 3; more on this later)

Speed of convergence (from Sytsma & Livengood)

- But *how fast* does majority competence converge to 1? **Pretty fast!**



Doubts about reliability

- Our authorised confidence in the majority view notably depends on our assuming the competence condition
- But there are certain circumstances in which patterns of voting can cast doubts on voter reliability:

PRINCIPLE OF RELIABILITY 'If reports about a philosophical case are sensitive to philosophically irrelevant details, such as culture, socio-economic status, gender, personality and so on, then one has prima facie reason to refrain from using one's own report about that case as a premise in a philosophical argument'

Polling the folk

- But, returning to *A* and *B*'s moves:
Neither typically bothers to find out how widespread the intuitions or lack of intuitions *actually are*!
- Recently: emergence of attempts to systematically poll the 'folk' using methods from social psychology, e.g. surveys & 'classical' statistical analysis ('X-Phi')
- X-Phi has considered scenarios pertaining to most philosophical sub-disciplines: ethics, phil. of language, phil. of mind,...
- Our focus-X-Phi approaches to epistemology-happens to be one of the longest established

Polling the folk (ctd)

- Some of the data has been argued to support or undermine popular philosophical claims (see reading):
 - A survey reporting agreement on the failure of the equation of knowledge how and ability (Bengson *et al* 2009)
 - Surveys finding:
 - divided opinion as to whether subjects know when a sceptical alternative has been made salient (Weinberg *et al* 2001), or
 - no clear association between conversational salience of sceptical alternatives and knowledge attributions (e.g. May *et al* 2010; but see Schaffer & Knobe 2012)

Note on statistical methodology

- The studies considered share a common form of statistical inference: **classical hypothesis testing**
- The method:
 - Formulate a **null hypothesis** to be tested (e.g. there is no association between cultural background and Gettier judgments)
 - Collect some data
 - Consider how likely it would be, given the truth of that hypothesis that a particular numerical attribute of the data (e.g. frequencies of judgments by cultural group) would have a value at least as extreme as the one observed (the **p-value**)
 - If $p\text{-value} < \text{some threshold}$ (e.g. 5%), reject the hypothesis

Data and inferences therefrom

- I'll focus here on the most controversial work, which
 - (1) Reports a sample of intuitions apparently divided on the basis on factors apparently uncorrelated with competence (e.g. culture, gender, etc.)
 - (2) Concludes from the data that intuitions wrt the relevant scenarios ought not be trusted

References

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