SOURCES OF PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITIONS: TOWARDS A MODEL OF INTUITION GENERATION

It is an assumption widely held in the methodology of philosophy that philosophers use intuition to justify many of their claims. In this methodological approach, a philosopher, who wants to examine the theory of a philosophical term, devises a thought experiment and uses the experiment to elicit an intuitive claim in her audience or readers. Then, the philosopher compares this intuitive claim with what the theory under consideration predicts: if the prediction and the intuition agree, the theory is bolstered, whereas if the intuition contradicts the prediction, the philosopher takes the intuition to constitute evidence against the theory. The capacity to form intuition is central to both current philosophical practice and the most impressive of human abilities: theoretical reasoning, justifying, forming beliefs, attribution of concepts, inference, moral reasoning, etc. Advances in capturing the role and nature of intuition contribute, therefore, directly to a better understanding of philosophical practice, and modeling of intuition formation processes is a necessary step towards explaining some of the peculiarities of human cognitive activity.

The research proposal revolves around the notion of intuition generation. The term “intuition generation” is used specifically, to refer to the idea that, as a result of certain psychological processes, a set of intuitive claims is sampled and then stored in the memory. Synthesizing recent insights from cognitive psychology, the proposal assumes that intuitions are sampled from a heterogeneous and partitioned structure of beliefs. Secondly, only a small number of intuitive claims can be sampled due to human cognitive limitations. Therefore, the model proposes that the sampling strategy people employ has a distinct, computationally efficient default marking the intuitive; that is, sampled claims are probable and valuable. Thirdly, the very fact that sampled claims are perceived as probable and valuable makes them such that they seem credible (independently of any prior justification). However, their credibility might be altered: if the sampled intuitions fit a pattern, their credibility is usually bolstered; conversely, intuitions that do not fit the pattern might be disregarded as aberrations and ignored.

In particular, the proposal addresses the following questions.

(1) Does intuiting a response to a particular philosophical thought experiment principally rely on an incremental update of beliefs, which involve replacement of old beliefs with new ones, and thus require additional learning, or does it rely on changes in the application of existing beliefs, and thus does not need to involve additional learning?

(2) Are there correlations between probability assessments and responses to thought experiments, and evaluations and responses? That is, is it the case that the better and more probable a potential response is judged, the higher the probability of choosing this response is?

(3) Is the relationship between probability assessments and responses to thought experiments of causal dependence, or are the two variables merely correlated? Analogously, is there a causal link between evaluations and responses to thought experiments?

(4) Does the number of sampled intuitions increase when people are given more time to respond? Do people sample diverse and conflicting intuitions more often with more time to respond?

(5) Is responding to thought experiments principally guided by stochastic and autocorrelated processes?

One of the main goals of the project is to explore the impact of the model on selected philosophical issues in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and metaphilosophy concerned with such themes as the sources and nature of intuitions, their evidential role, and the diversity of intuitions.