

Epistemic utility theory and the epistemology of degrees of beliefs
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Beliefs come in different strengths. What are the norms that govern these strengths of belief? Let an agent's belief function at a particular time be the function that assigns, to each of the propositions about which she has an opinion, the strength of her belief in that proposition at that time. Traditionally, philosophers have claimed that an agent's belief function at any time ought to be a probability function (Probabilism), and that she ought to update her belief function upon obtaining new evidence by conditionalizing on that evidence (Conditionalization). Until recently, the central arguments for these claims have been pragmatic. They have tried to show that an agent who violates these norms would lose money if she were to bet in accordance with her strengths of beliefs; or that her strengths of belief will give rise to an irrational preference ordering over the set of all bets. These putative justifications fail to identify what is epistemically irrational about violating Probabilism or Conditionalization. A new approach, which I will call epistemic utility theory, attempts to remedy this. It treats beliefs as epistemic acts; and it appeals to the notion of an epistemic utility function, which measures of how epistemically valuable a particular belief function is for a particular way the world might be. It then formulates fundamental epistemic norms that are analogous to the fundamental practical norms that underlie decision theory. I will survey the results obtained so far in this young research project, and I will present some new results that arose in joint work with Hannes Leitgeb.