Group Epistemology Essay

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1 Group Epistemology

Epistemology is the study and philosophy of learning, belief and knowledge. Traditionally, epistemology is centered around the individual — how one person should learn about the world around them, what knowledge a person has, and what justifies a certain level of belief in a proposition. Group epistemology asks these questions not of individual agents, but *group* agents.

It often makes sense to ask what a group believes. For example, does a board of investors anticipate their company becoming profitable? Does a jury believe a defendent is innocent? What is the consensus opinion of a panel of climate scientists? What does a team of pundits jointly anticipate the Liberal Party's primary vote percentage to be? In each of these cases, we're not interested in the opinions of any individuals in the group. We're interested in the group's overall opinion, because the group itself has some sort of authority over and above the individuals who comprise it.

Although group and individual epistemology share the goals and concerns, group epistemology involves several problems which individual epistemology does not face. For example, how do we aggregate the beliefs of many individuals into one group belief? How many individuals in a group are required to possess some piece of evidence before we can safely say the group as a whole possesses it? How do we resolve contradictions between the beliefs of different group members? These issues simply don't present themselves when considering the beliefs, knowledge and reasoning of individuals. This paper aims examines the specific question of *group credence*: how do we determine the credence[1] a group has in a given proposition?

[1] In this paper I will use 'belief' to designate a binary propositional attitude (agents do or don't believe a certain proposition) and credences as probability assignments (an agent may assign probability 0.3 to a proposition being true).

One intuitive solution to the group credence problem is known as *unweighted linear pooling*. In this scheme, groups should just average every individual's credence in a proposition to get the overall group credence. Unfortunately this approach yields poor results in a number of cases, which I shall examine below. A variety of more complicated procedures have been proposed which aim to succeed where unweighted linear pooling (or other approaches) fail. In this paper, I will examine a recently-published theory, **?**'s *Probabilistic Opinion Pooling* (hereafter POP) and evaluate its success as a solution to the group credence problem.

References

Dietrich, F., & List, C. (2013). Probabilistic opinion pooling generalized Part two: The premise-based approach.