Epistemic Compromise between Difference Splitting and Scoring Rules: A Response to Moss

Armin Schulz

University of Wisconsin – Madison

Formal Epistemology Workshop 2008

Epistemic Disagreement and Epistemic Compromise

Main concern: what is the perfect compromise credence?

Traditional Answer: splitting the difference – if my credence in p is x, and yours is y, the perfect compromise is (x+y)/2

Sarah's Aims:

> (1) Show that using SR's makes for a coherent account of epistemic compromise

> (2) Show that we *ought* to adopt the SR account

Here: consider to what extent has fulfilled the aims she has set herself

The SR Account of Epistemic Compromise

Epistemic value of credence x in p: $EV(x) = \alpha\, f_1(x) + (1-\alpha)\, f_0(x)$

(where f_1 and f_0 together are the agent's SR)

▶ Extend to an *algebra* of propositions by adding the EV's of the atomic propositions

▶ *Key distinction*: credence-eliciting vs. non-credence eliciting SR's

▶ Important: the latter are (plausibly) irrational

The Perfect Epistemic Compromise: maximise the average of the expected epistemic values of the agents

Aim (1): The Coherence of the SR Account

Key Problem: Preference aggregation and impossibility results

▶ Seidenfeld et al. (1989), List & Pettit (2002): the kind of linear aggregation rule Sarah proposes is not consistent with some reasonable-looking assumptions

▶ E.g.: a unanimity principle – if we both value x more than y, then the compromise should reflect this

So: is Sarah's approach *incoherent?*

Possible Replies:

(1) Reject the assumptions – e.g.: epistemic compromises are not subject to the same kind of rationality constraints that agents are

(2) Reformulate her argument in conditional form – this is still interesting

Aim (2): The Justification of the SR Account (I)

A case-by-case approach: the two SR's can be the same or different

(a) Same SR

    (a_1) SR is credence eliciting:

        ▶The compromise elicited is the same as that of difference-splitting

        ▶Difference-splitting does at least as well as the SR-approach

    (a_2) SR is non-credence eliciting:

        ▶ Odd – rests an epistemological theory on what is epistemically defective

        ▶ No reason to move away from difference-splitting

Aim (2): The Justification of the SR Account (II)

(b) Different SR's (assume they are credence-eliciting)

▶For the formal apparatus to work, this requires unit comparability of SR's

▶BUT: it is not clear that this can be justified (illustrative analogy – expected utilities)

▶So: no reason to prefer the SR approach to difference splitting

Overall: no compelling reason has been provided to switch to the SR approach towards epistemic compromise

However: there may be a different way of reading Sarah's argument that lets it retain more plausibility

▶ Use it to *support* difference splitting!

SR's as Supporting Difference-Splitting

To make this argument: take the same, credence-eliciting SR case to be central

  (i) No worries about irrationality or comparability

  (ii) The fact that the two approaches yield the same compromise is
no longer problematic

In this way: Sarah shows why difference-splitting

  (i) is (at least sometimes) theoretically well-supported

  (ii) yields compromises with many desirable features

  (iii) has many other features that were not visible beforehand (e.g.
  with regard to imprecise credences, etc.)

Limitation: relies on the two agents having the same credence-eliciting SR

BUT: this may be widespread and retains relevance even if not

Conclusion

Three Results:

(1) Sarah *may* not have fulfilled her aim of making clear that the SR-approach is coherent

(2) Sarah has not fully fulfilled her aim of making clear that we ought to adopt the SR's over difference-splitting to determine the perfect epistemic compromise

(3) Sarah's arguments, though, could be used to show that the traditional approach is on the right track, and why that is so

Overall: Although Sarah has fallen short of her aims, she has made a useful contribution to the literature on epistemic compromise.