

The Strength of Evidence

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The rational believer should form beliefs in accordance with the evidence. What exactly this demand amounts to depends on the nature of evidence. In my talk, I will develop an informal account of the strength of evidence.

The central idea of my account is to conceive of the strength of evidence as the potential to settle a question in an ongoing inquiry. Examples suggest situation-sensitivity of the strength of evidence. A single piece of evidence can settle a question in one situation, but not in another. I suggest that we model inquiry about p as trying to answer the question whether p . In line with the standard account of whether-questions in formal semantics, the question whether p is conceived as the set of possible answers, p and not- p , which can itself be modeled as the set of possible p and possible not- p worlds. I suggest that it depends on our situation which not- p alternatives are in play when we are concerned with the question whether p . It is this situational change in not- p alternatives that explains why a single piece of evidence can settle a question in one situation, but not in another. Because it varies from situation to situation which not- p alternatives are relevant, the strength of our evidence for p varies.

Finally, I will demonstrate how my account explains the bank cases discussed in traditional epistemology (Stanley 2005), otherwise puzzling changes in degrees of belief (Norby (2015), as well as the alleged context-sensitivity of outright-belief (Leitgeb 2014).