

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This issue comprises four articles and is an eclectic mix. I hope there is something of interest for all.

Men in pubs (less often women) commonly debate who is the all-time greatest boxer, footballer or tennis player, say (the answers of course are Joe Louis, Pele and Bill Tilden). On confessing an interest in philosophy, I am sometimes asked who I think is the all-time greatest philosopher. In the first article, I argue for my choice of Aristotle.

Nicholas Anakwue follows with his article on Popper's verisimilitude. In choosing between rival scientific theories, a common approach is to go for the most probable one, given the evidence. And Bayesian analysis allows iterative updating of the probability (from prior to posterior) as new evidence appears. But Popper thought otherwise. He was a fan of bold, improbable, high-content, easily falsifiable conjectures. He even suggested changing the laws of probability, but had no takers, then or since. Next, he tried to discredit the Bayesian approach by arguing that since there is strictly an infinite number of theories consistent with any body of evidence, the total probability of all the theories will exceed one unless the probability assigned to each theory is exactly zero. And if the prior probability of a theory be zero, so must any posterior probability, no matter what the multiplicative factor. So a Bayesian analysis can't begin. Nice try. But wrong. It is trivially easy to assign a positive probability to each of a (countable) infinity of theories without the total probability exceeding one: for instance, assign prob.  $1/2$  to T1,  $1/4$  to T2,  $1/8$  to T3,  $1/16$  to T4 etc. But Popper still rejected a probability-based approach. Theory choice still had to be made though, and so he suggested an alternative to probability, namely truth-likeness or verisimilitude. An appealing idea because one likes to think that scientific progress, whilst maybe never reaching the truth, gets closer to it. For example we feel that Newton's theory of motion, although not actually true, is closer to the truth than Aristotle's, but not as close as Einstein's.

But how exactly does verisimilitude differ from probability? A toy example clarifies:

Let us assume the number of planets (in the solar system) is 8. Consider two hypotheses:

- H1. There are some planets
- H2. There are 9 planets.

H1 is the more probable, indeed it is true. H2 by contrast is less probable, indeed it is false. But, although false, H2 (9 planets) is closer to the truth (8 planets) than the true hypothesis (some planets) and should be favoured.

Can this notion of verisimilitude be made rigorous and quantifiable, as with probability? Anakwue gives us a critical examination of the notion, including some quantitative aspects, and concludes that Popper has reasoned out an objective goal for science, namely truth, gained through verisimilitude.

In formulating his utilitarianism, JS Mill might have chosen welfare or preference as the good to be maximized, but chose pleasure, perhaps in deference to his father's friend Jeremy Bentham. This landed him with the accusation that his was a "doctrine worthy only of swine": since total quantity of pleasure was what mattered, any pleasure, however simple or slight, if there were enough of it, would outweigh more sophisticated pleasures. A stock example is Haydn and the oyster: if an oyster were to enjoy a tiny bit of pleasure for millions of years, this would outweigh the pleasure in Haydn's 77-year life, and we would have to say that the oyster's life is more worthwhile than that of the great composer. To counter this Mill introduced the notion of higher and lower pleasures. A small amount of a higher one was worth more than any amount of a lower one, thereby avoiding the eternal oyster and myriad contented pigs problems. But many now complained that his higher pleasures are too intellectual or merely what Mill and his friends like, and also neglect the physical. In her article reappraising Mill's notion of qualitative superiority of some pleasures, Madhumita Mitra argues that there is textual support for the notion that higher pleasures are those which are distinctively human (cannot be experienced by animals), and since reflective consciousness is a key distinctively human trait, the higher pleasures are reflective, rather than passive, ones. This seems about right. The traditional pleasures of the arts are admitted, and the criterion seems wide enough to admit some popular contemporary pleasures to the higher category – shopping and cooking perhaps, whilst others might be thought too passive – watching film footage of others cooking, baking, dancing or house hunting maybe.

The final article is a short piece by Ruel Pepa suggesting that we need the term *antitheist* as well as *atheist*. The tireless battling against god talk by the "new atheists" (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, Hitchens), the four musketeers of atheism, as he terms them, makes them antitheists. Atheists, by contrast, believing that no god exists, have nothing to talk about or battle against. But maybe this is not quite right. Atheists (and theists for that matter) can deplore the ills caused by some actions arising out of religious belief, and might see themselves, for instance, as anti-fanaticism or anti-fundamentalism, rather than antitheistic. On the other hand, on reading Dawkins I sometimes get the feeling that he is angry with God for not existing and wants him to come out from under that veil of nonexistence to face the music about all the evils in the world for which he is ultimately accountable.

Maybe we should think of theism/ atheism and protheism/ antitheism as two orthogonal axes so that we get four quadrants: the protheist theists such as Christians and Muslims; the antitheist theists such as Satanists; the antitheist atheists such as Dawkins; and the protheist atheists who think religion gives more solace than it does harm.

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