

How to Change Your Mind

Elise Woodard
elise.woodard@kcl.ac.uk

1 CASES

Choosing Countries: Asymmetric mass migration. Of people who move, 95% move from A to B. Where should you move?

Choosing Pleasures: Of people who have experienced both, 95% end prefer B to A. Which should you choose?

Choosing Sides: Of people who have tried both views, 95% ultimately prefer B to A. What should you believe?

Consider two theories about about morality: Realism & Anti-Realism.

Of those who have tried both, 95% ultimately endorse Anti-Realism.

Intuition: In each case, you should bet on B. But why?

⇒ **Aim:** Specify and defend the underlying principle

2 TWO PHENOMENA?

Focus on *informed choice* vs. *migration*

Two versions of Choosing Sides:

1. Most people who have seriously considered both Realism and Anti-realism endorse Anti-Realism. (Cf. PLEASURES)
2. Most people who have *changed their minds* moved from Realism to Anti-Realism (& few moved back). (Cf. COUNTRIES)

Both are probative. What's the focus here?

3 A MILLIAN PRINCIPLE FOR BELIEF?

3.1 Informed Choice of Pleasures

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. – J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Majority rules in cases of disagreement.

Competent Judge Principle: If most competent judges who have tried both pleasures A and B agree that B is more valuable than A, that is evidence that B is in fact more valuable than A.

Who counts?

- Enjoyed both, not just experienced both.
- Still *capable* of enjoying both – can lose this ability!
- *Who will judge the judges?*

3.2 Informed Choice of Views

We might defend something like:

Epistemic Judge Principle: If most competent judges who have seriously considered both views A and B ultimately endorse B, that is (defeasible) evidence that B is more likely correct than A.

Problems: Maybe true, but not particularly useful or new.

1. Bootless
 - (a) Novice–Expert Problem
 - (b) Motivated Reasoning: Is the test rigged?
 - (c) Disagreement
2. Redundant (cf. expert consensus)

4 ASYMMETRIC MIGRATION

Migration-as-Evidence: If there is significant asymmetric migration from A to B, that is (defeasible) evidence that B is more likely correct than A.

(Potential) Examples of Asymmetric Migration: Pragmatism • Conservatism • Atheism

Defeasible Evidence:

- Treat as evidence absent countervailing considerations, e.g.:
 1. **Non-epistemic explanations of change:**
Ex: Motivated Reasoning; Brainwashed
 2. **Change merely apparent** (e.g. Conversion/Threat)
- **Relevance of Costs:**
 - **Re-Entry Costs:** If the costs of returning to A are high, staying at B is less probative. (Ex: Flip-Flopping)
 - **Migration Costs:** If the costs of migration are high, even more probative that changed.
 - Belief Because Benefit vs. Belief Despite Cost
Ex: Conservatism vs. Pragmatism
- Weigh against other sources of evidence
Ex: Independent Evidence; Expert Consensus
- *Evidence* about force or quality of first-order evidence

Recipe:

1. Identify asymmetric migration patterns.
2. Ask whether there's a non-epistemic explanation for them.
3. Absent alternative explanations, you have second-order evidence for adopting the view immigrated to.

4.1 Argument Seeds

1. **Abduction / Charity:** Often, the best explanation for mass migration is that B's more likely to be true.
2. **Induction:** They were happy with the change; I will be too.
3. **Improvement:** When you change your mind, you often take into account all the earlier considerations *and then some*.
4. **Epistemic Empathy:** Cf. enjoying vs. experiencing a view.

What about Parity? Disanalogies Between Countries & Beliefs.

- Inhabiting a country is on/off, but we can take different attitudes towards our beliefs.
- **Response:** The opinions of tourists, life-long locals, and ex-pats all count. But ex-pats offer a unique perspective.

5 OBJECTIONS

Objection 1: Not True!

- (1a) **Psychology, Not Epistemology:** Information about what others think is entirely irrelevant to what you should think.
 - **Response:** We're already committed to its relevance!
- (1b) **Bootstrapping:** G1 migrates based on first-order evidence. G2 migrates based on principle. → Unfair advantage for B.
 - **Response:** Restrict principle? Sometimes #'s count!
- (1c) **Double-Counting:** G1 becomes even more confident.
 - **Response:** Corroboration *should* increase confidence.

Objection 2: Useless! Ignorance • Noise • Frequency

Response: Revise our practices & take whatever help we can get!

- The principle provides doxastic guidance on *highly controversial* cases.
- **Upshot:** Improving our social practices.