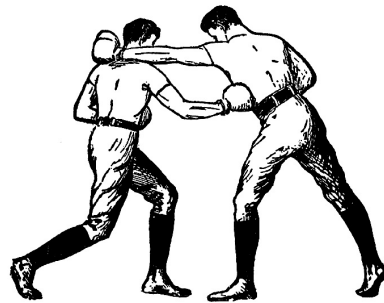


Philosophy 427
Intuitions and Philosophy

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Hamilton College
Fall 2009

Class 26 - DePaul and Reflective Equilibrium

But first... a few final words on the
naturalism/anti-naturalism smackdown



But first... Gnome Chomsky



Disagreement about philosophy

- Bealer and Kornblith disagreed about whether philosophy is an a priori discipline, studying applications of concepts, or an empirical discipline, studying the world.
- “Typically, the central questions of philosophy - and their answers -are phrased in quite general terms without mention of particular individuals, species, and so forth. These questions are necessary in the sense that they call for answers that hold necessarily. In being interested in such things as the nature of mind, intelligence, the virtues, and life, philosophers do not want to know what those things just happen to be, but rather what those things *must* be, what they *are*, in a strong sense. It is not enough that the virtue of piety happened to be what Euthyphro exhibited: a philosopher wants to know what piety must be” (B, 203-4).
- “Epistemologists ought to be concerned with the nature of knowledge, not the concept of knowledge; the proper subject matter of ethics is the right and the good, not the concepts of the right and the good; and so on” (K, 133).

Agreement on the role of intuition

- “The typical philosophical counterexample requires a possibility intuition (that such and such condition is possible) as well as an ordinary concept-applicability intuition (that in such and such situation a relevant item would, or would not, count as an F). Without such possibility intuitions, philosophy would be fatally crippled” (B, 212).
- “The method of appeal to intuitions not only plays an important role in actual philosophical practice, but...the method has been used to achieve some substantial insights in a wide range of fields” (K, 131).
- “The intuitions to which philosophers appeal... are not idiosyncratic; they are widely shared, and -to a first approximation - must be so, if they are to do any philosophical work” (K, 132).
- “What we are doing, as I see it, is much like the rock collector who gathers samples of some interesting kind of stone for the purpose of figuring out what it is that the samples have in common. We begin, often enough, with obvious cases, even if we do not yet understand what it is that provides the theoretical unity to the kind we wish to examine. Understanding what that theoretical unity is is the object of our study, and it is to be found by careful examination of the phenomenon, that is, something outside of us, not our concept of the phenomenon, something inside of us” (K, 133-4).

Bealer's argument from evidence

- Radical interpretations of empiricism (all evidence is sense evidence) are self-refuting.
- Any weaker interpretation will allow intuitive evidence.
- We need a criterion for calling something evidence.
 - ▶ The claims of purported psychics are not evidence for scientific theory.
 - ▶ The scientific claims of good scientists are evidence.
- An intuition is evidence if it has a modal-reliable connection to the truth.
- A modal-reliable connection to the truth is one that is not merely accidental, but which is explicable in terms of necessary features of the world.



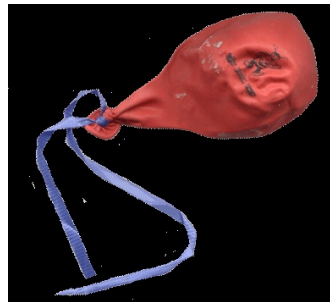
Reliabilism in epistemology

- JTB
- Gettier
 - We can have JTBs without having knowledge
- The causal theory (CTK)
 - The justification has to include appropriate causal connections between the knower and the proposition known.
 - Smith does not have an appropriate causal connection to the object of his knowledge, which in this case is Smith himself, rather than Jones.
 - Causation is weird
 - Fake barns and poodle-sheep
 - You have seen a barn, and you are appropriately causally connected to a barn
 - But, you do not know that you have seen a barn.
- Reliabilism
 - One knows that p iff, one believes that p , p is true, and one has arrived at the belief that p through some reliable process.
 - The process of my coming to believe that there is a barn over there is, given the circumstances, not reliable.
 - Note that reliabilism is naturally compatible with externalist theories of knowledge.



Intuitions as evidence

- Reliabilism is a deflationary theory of evidence: there is no single source for all evidence.
- Sources of evidence may be sensory, intuitive, or rational.
- Intuitions, are legitimate if reliable.
- Take intuitions as basic, rather than derived.
- “Something counts as a basic source [of evidence] iff there is an appropriate kind of strong modal tie between its deliverances and the truth” (B, 216).



Modal and contingent reliabilism



- Contingent reliabilism allows that an experience can serve as evidence if it has a contingent tie to the truth.
 - ▶ The accidentally-reliable guesser
 - ▶ The guesses are indistinguishable, for the guesser, from other experiences that have no reliable connection to the truth.
 - ▶ Even if a certain class of guesses accidentally is reliably connected to the truth, we should not count them as evidence.
- We want to count as evidence only the guesses that have a modal connection, perhaps a necessary connection, to the truth.
- We can not require that the connection be infallible
 - ▶ We are sometimes deceived by both our senses and our rational intuition.
- “A candidate source [of evidence] is basic iff for cognitive conditions of some suitably high quality, necessarily, if someone in those cognitive conditions were to process theoretically the deliverances of the candidate source, the resulting theory would provide a correct assessment as to the truth or falsity of most of those deliverances” (B, 219).

Outline of the argument from evidence

- A defense of a modal-reliabilist theory of evidence.
- Intuitions are modal-reliable.
 - ▶ The details of the argument depend on the particular case.
 - ▶ Linguistic intuitions
 - ▶ Twin-Earth intuitions
 - ▶ Internalist/externalist intuitions
- Philosophy is autonomous and authoritative because intuitions are modal-reliable.
- Big question: How do we reconcile the modal-reliability of intuitions with their diversity?
 - ▶ Bealer gives little help, here.
 - ▶ “Human beings only approximate the relevant cognitive conditions [to support theoretical systematizations of our intuitions sufficient for philosophy], and they do this only by working collectively over historical time. This quest is something we are living through as an intellectual culture. Our efforts have never even reached equilibrium and perhaps never will... Nevertheless, I believe that, *collectively, over historical time, undertaking philosophy as a civilization-wide project*, we can obtain authoritative answers to a wide variety of central philosophical questions” (B, 203).

Kornblith proposes that naturalism has alternative, and better, methods.

- “Naturalistic methodology is now importantly different from that of other philosophers, even if not very long ago it would have been difficult to separate the naturalists from the nonnaturalists by looking at their methods... The approach of examining our intuitions clearly robs us of the best available source of correctives for current mistake. Moreover, the appeal to imaginable cases and what we are inclined to say about them is both overly narrow and overly broad in its focus. It is overly narrow because serious empirical investigation of a phenomenon will often reveal possibilities that we would not, and sometimes could not, have imagined before. It is overly broad because many imaginable cases are not genuine possibilities and need not be accounted for by our theories” (K, 136).
- Two arguments:
 - ▶ Intuitions are too narrow
 - ▶ Intuitions are too broad

Bealer against too-narrow

- The apriorist need not give up empirical research as a heuristic device to stimulate our intuitions.
- The defender of intuition need not demand that the armchair philosopher seclude herself from all empirical data.
- Such data might well be useful to trigger our imaginations.
- But, the theory we construct needs only the modalized version of the data.

Bealer against too-broad

- It is highly unlikely that we ever find ourselves in fake barn country.
- Still, we don't want to say that our best theories of knowledge shouldn't be wary of the causal theory of knowledge.
- Similarly, we are highly unlikely to find ourselves traveling near the speed of light, but we do not want to claim that Newtonian mechanics is true.
- We can use Newtonian mechanics, and we can use JTB, or JTB+CTK, for practical purposes.
- But, when we want the truth, we have to consider even the most abstruse possibilities.

Questions and observations for Bealer

- Bealer is on the right track with the claim that our intuitions in philosophical cases are no different in kind from our intuitions more generally.
- The opportunity to modalize-away appeals to actual cases, seems compelling.
- The ubiquity of rational intuition is under-appreciated.
- Is our ability to grasp concepts as fecund as Bealer needs?
- Does seeming have concurrent phenomenal character?

Questions and observations for Kornblith

- If the point of a philosophical theory is to provide an account of the natural kind, it has to be universal.
- It is difficult to see how knowledge or the good (or whatever) can be a natural kind and not be a concept.
- It can't be a thought or a belief; those are particulars.
- Kornblith seems to be confusing concepts with thoughts.
- “Understanding what that theoretical unity is is the object of our study, and it is to be found by careful examination of the phenomenon, that is, something outside of us, not our concept of the phenomenon, something inside of us” (K, 133-4).

DePaul

The method of seeking reflective equilibrium is a requirement of rationality.

“The method directs the inquirer to do two things as she attempts to construct a philosophical theory:

(I) Reflect upon the logical and evidential relations that hold between her initial intuitive judgments and the other beliefs and theories she accepts, between these judgments and the emerging theory she is constructing to account for them, between this emerging theory and any relevant background beliefs or theories she accepts, and so on.

(II) Whenever these reflections uncover some sort of conflict or incoherence among beliefs, resolve the conflict by revising beliefs in the way that comes to seem most likely to be correct upon thorough reflection, that is, after taking into account everything she believes that might be relevant” (301).

An equivocation in 'reflective equilibrium'

- Is it a methodology, or an epistemological theory of justification?
- I'll call reflective equilibrium, when taken as an epistemology, RE_e .
- I'll call reflective equilibrium, when taken as an methodology, RE_m .



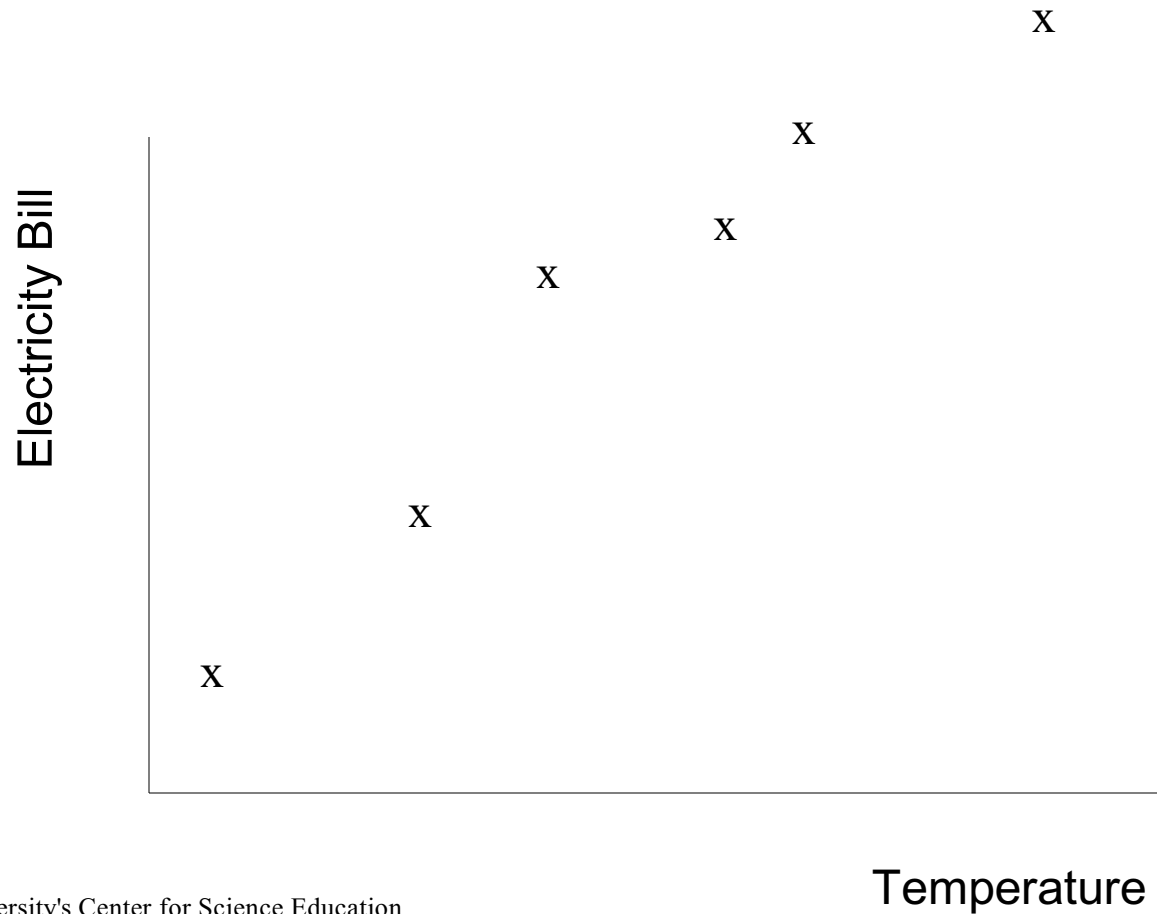
Justification

- There are two main types of justification: foundationalist and coherentist.
- The foundationalist seeks to justify all beliefs on the basis of some immediately given, privileged set of beliefs
 - Sense data (empiricism, generally, and positivism, specifically)
 - Intuitions (rationalism, generally, and Descartes in particular)
 - But: the myth of the given
- The coherentist seeks to justify all beliefs by appealing to their consistency.
 - But: the coherentist seems unable to provide assurance that her belief set is true, grounded in the world.

RE_e is a type of coherentism.

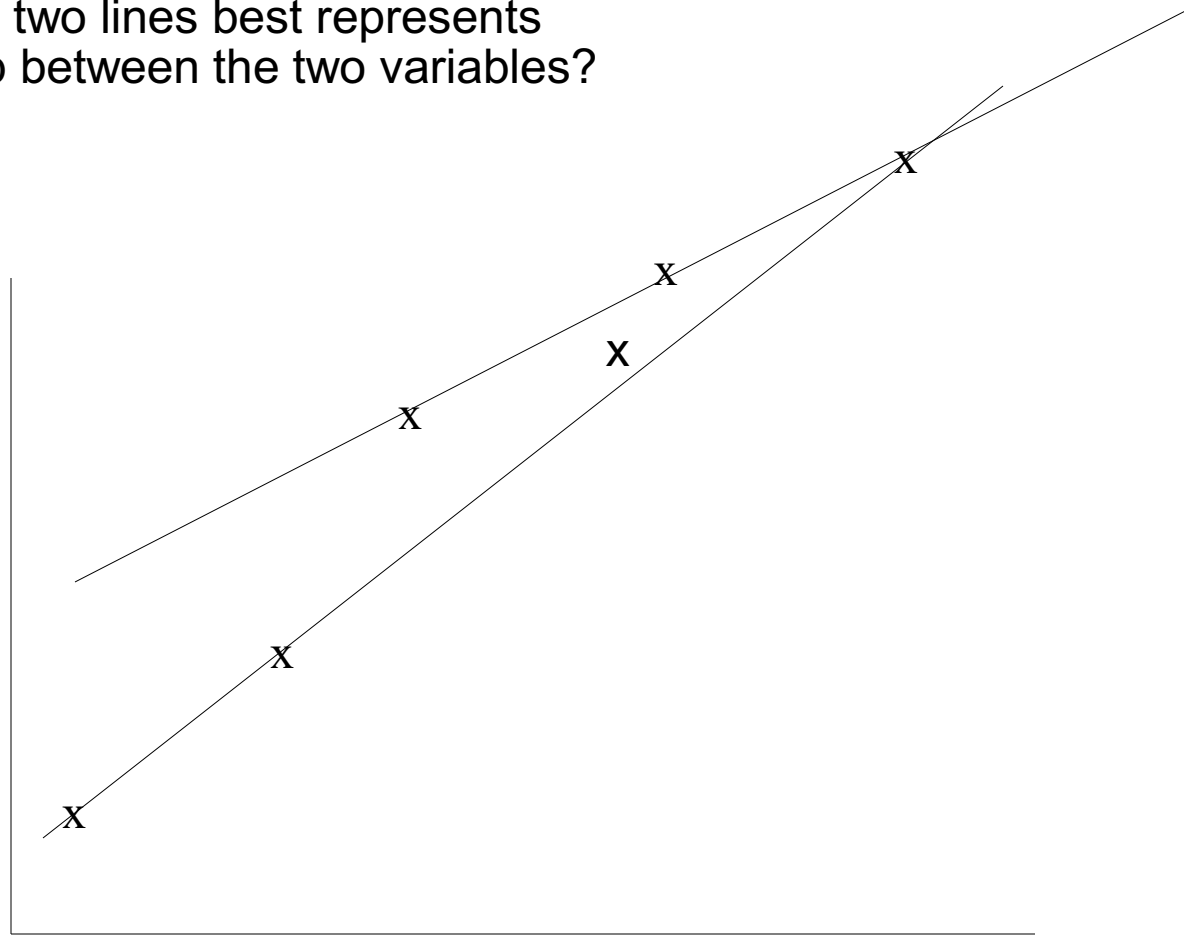
- Our beliefs are justified when we bring our various beliefs into a coherent whole.
- We are looking for a line of best fit through all the data:
 - ▶ intuitions
 - ▶ experiences
 - ▶ theories
 - ▶ background beliefs

Scatter Plot of an Electricity Bill as a function of temperature

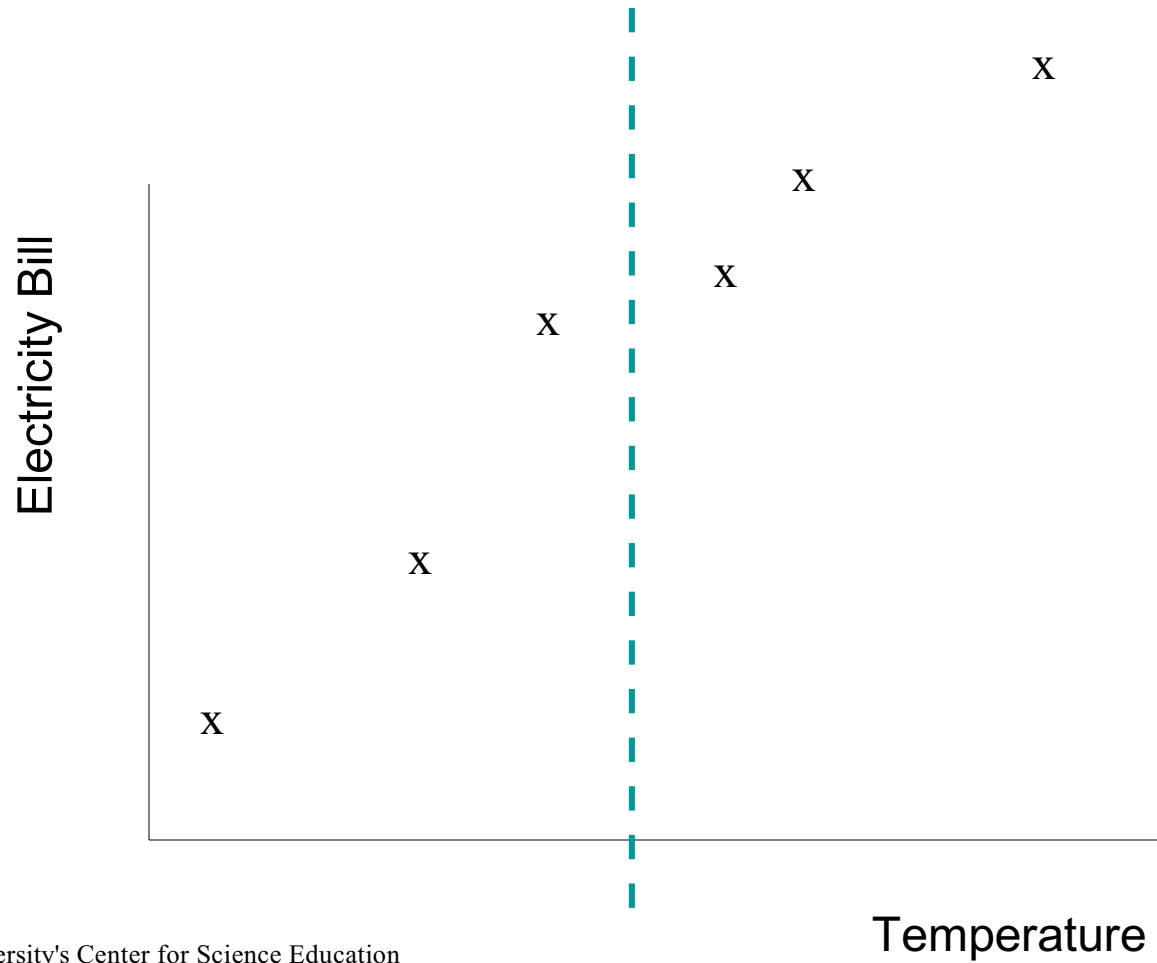


Scatter Plot

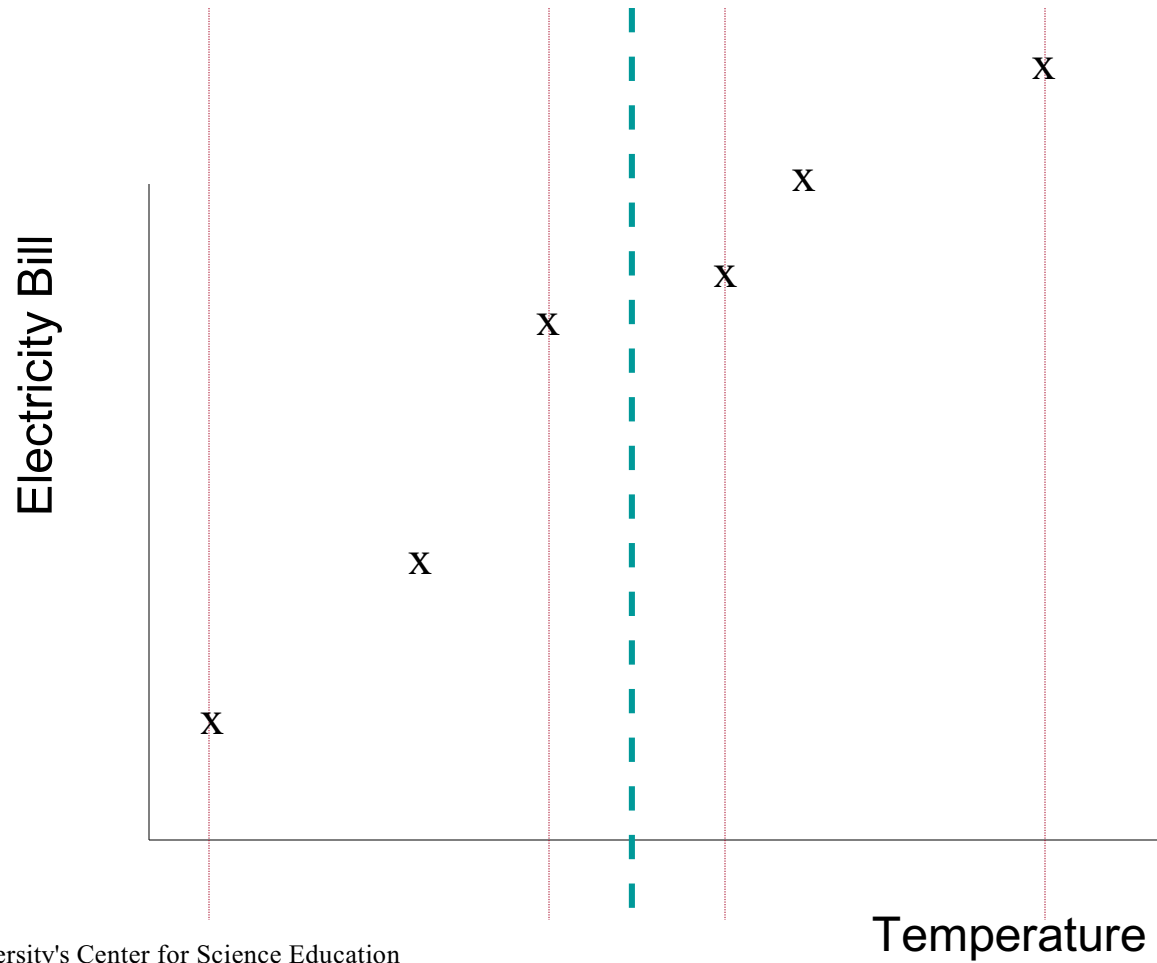
Which of these two lines best represents the relationship between the two variables?



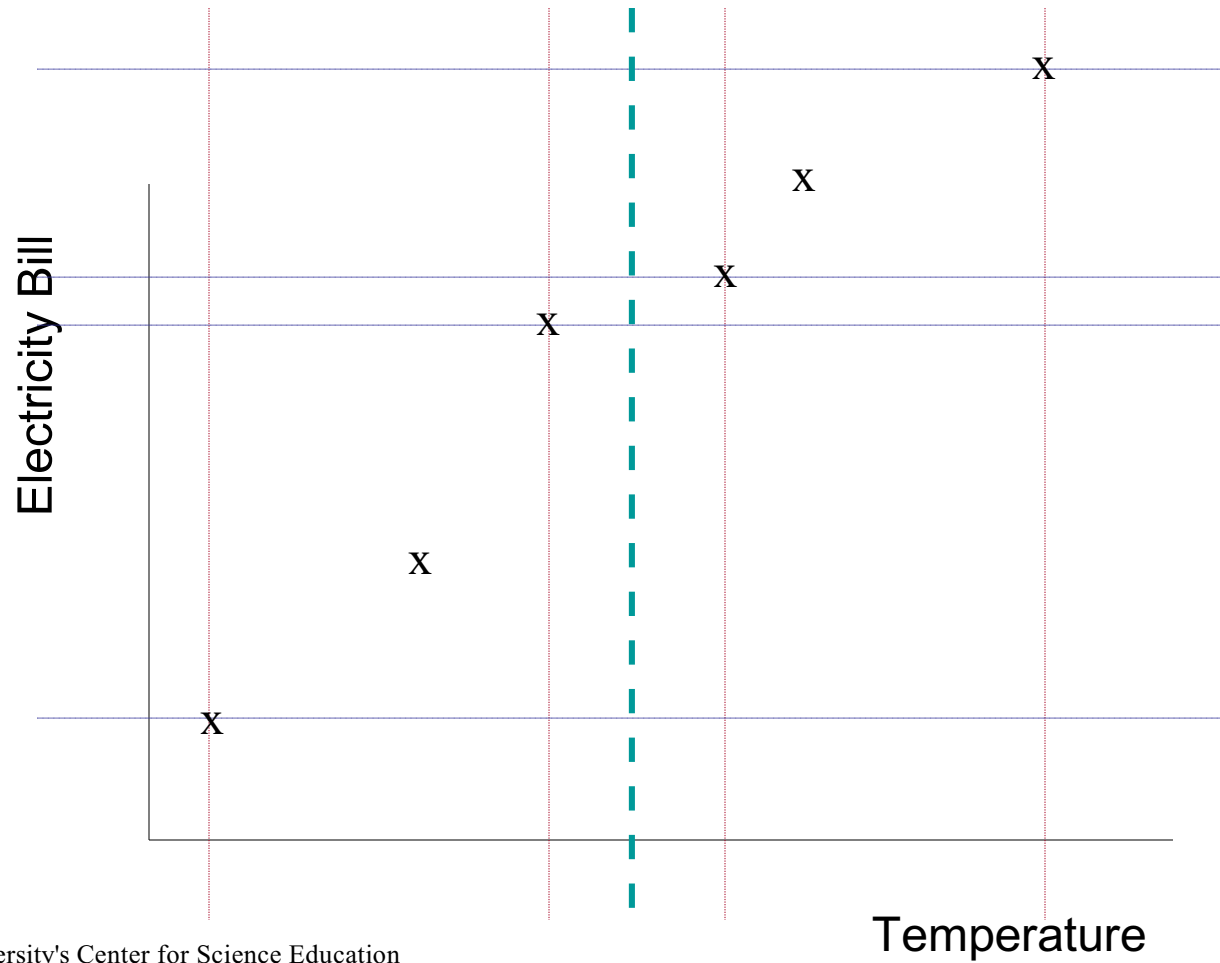
Approximate trend line of the electric bill as a function of temperature



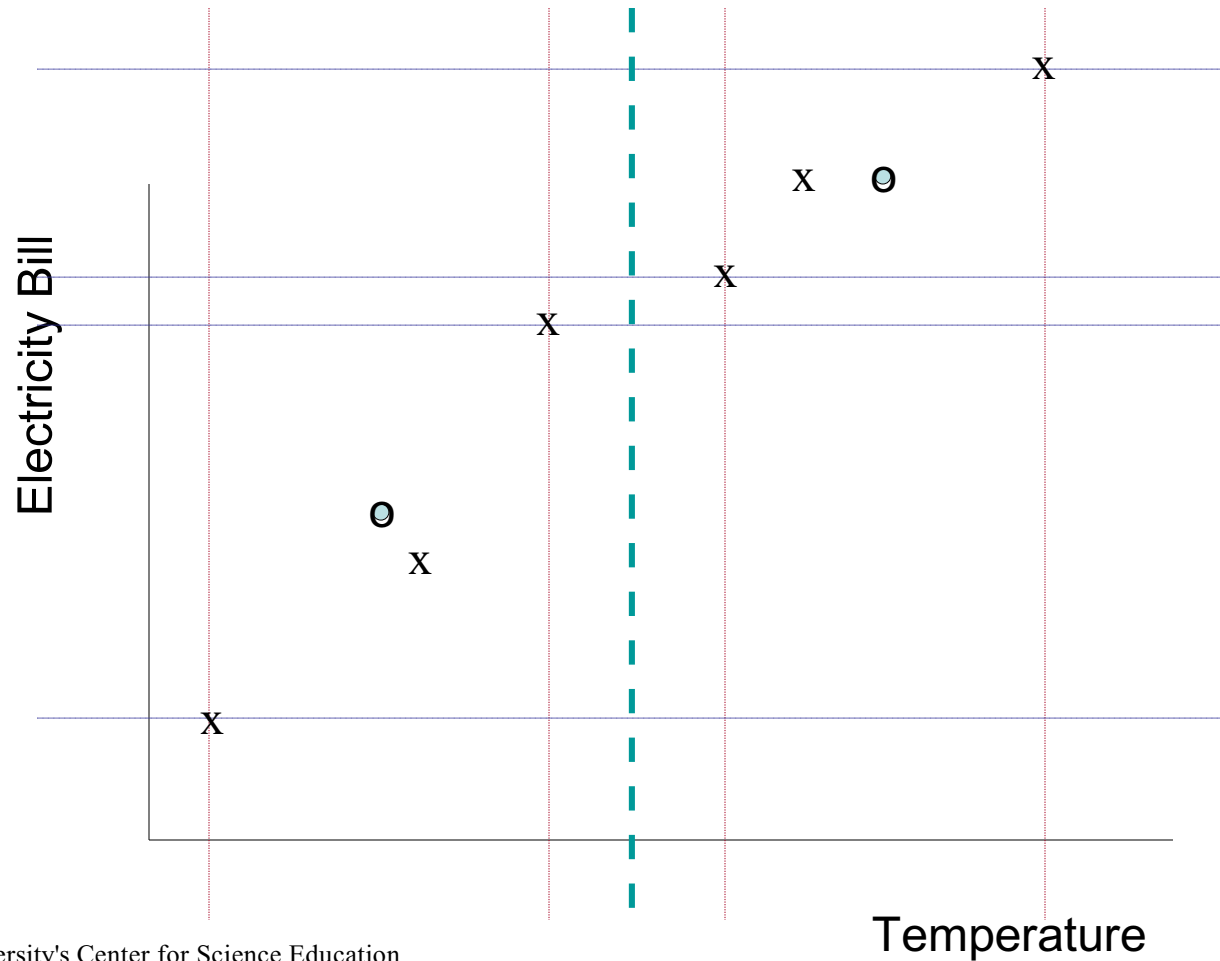
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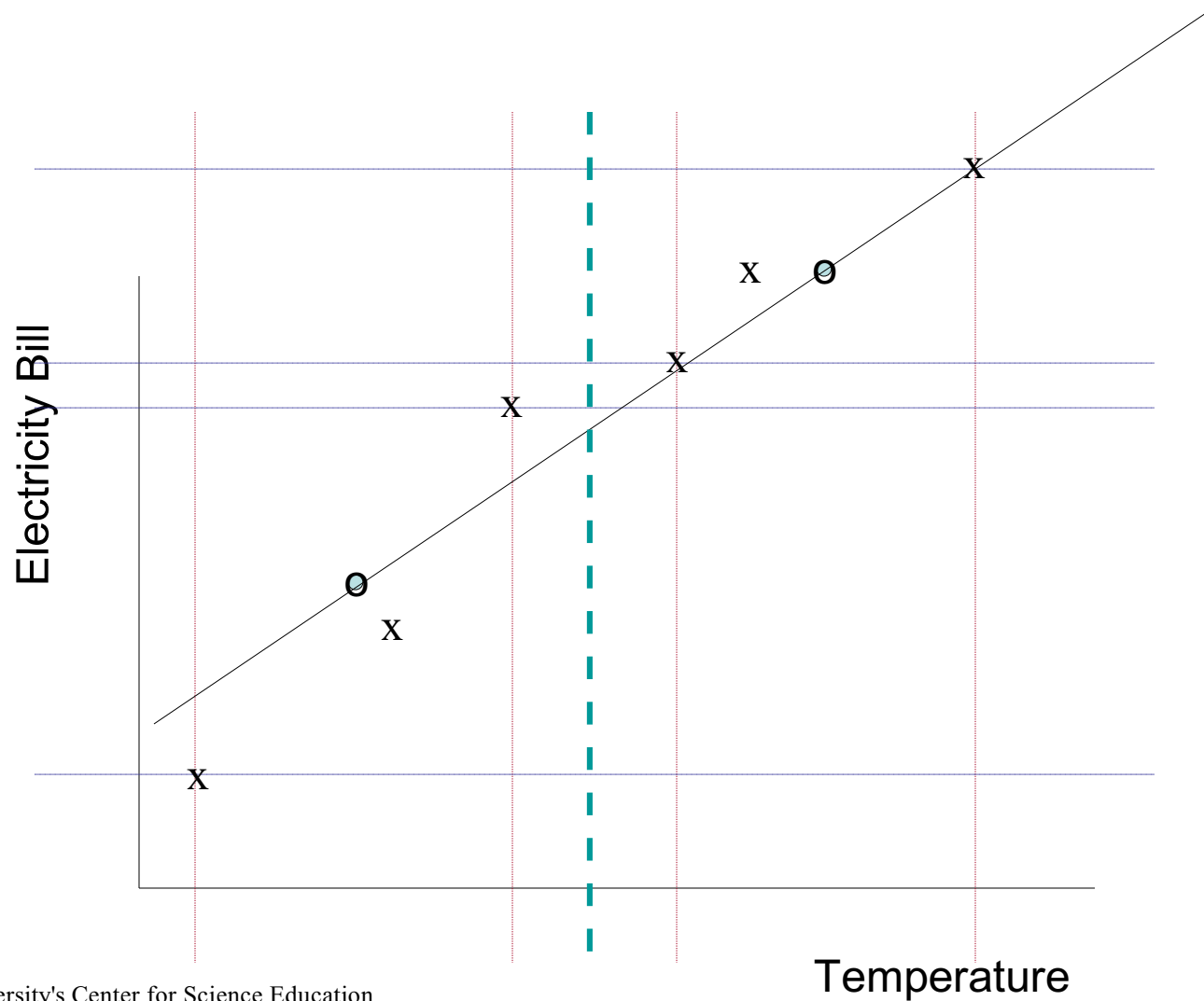
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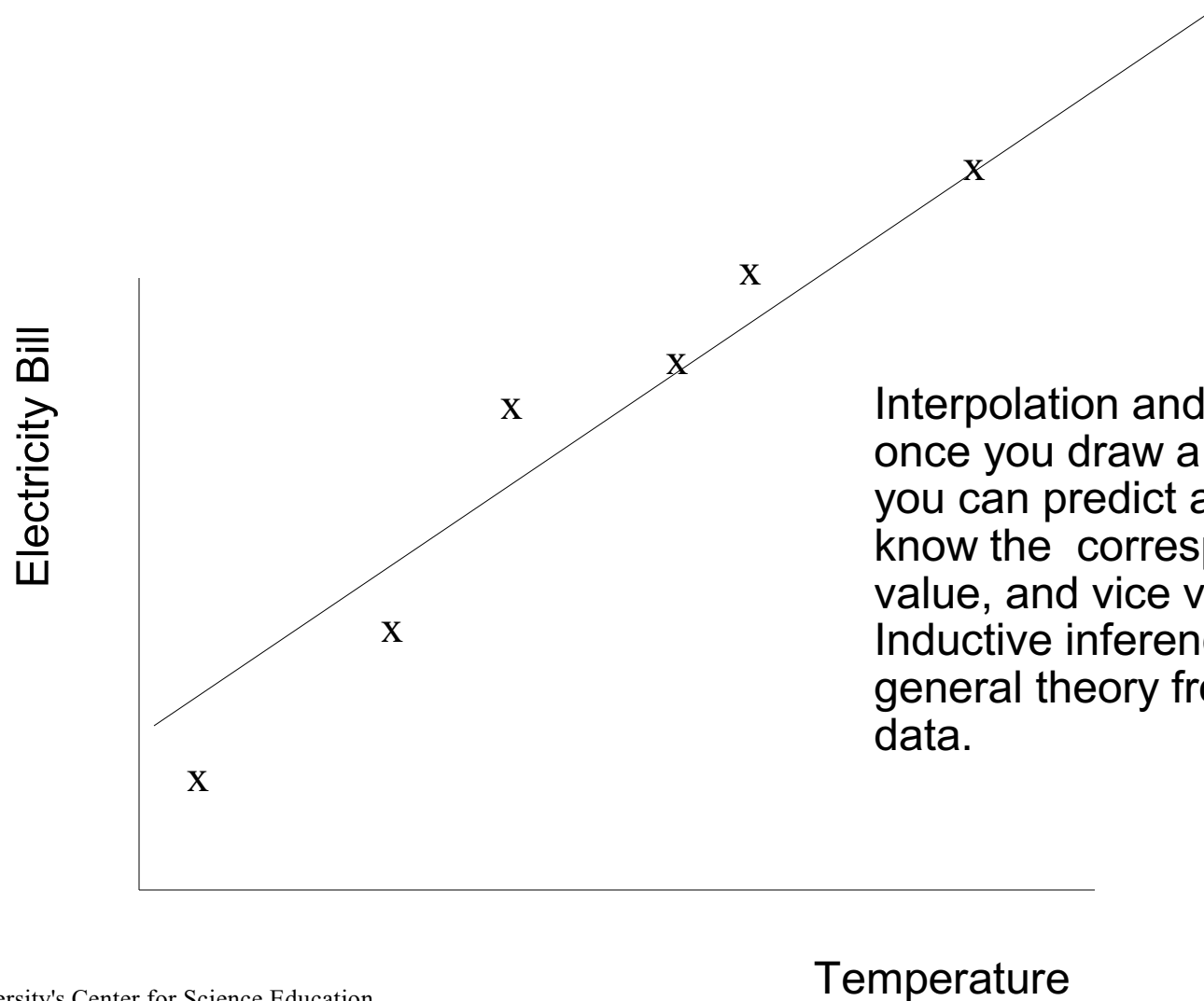
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Interpolation and Extrapolation: once you draw a best-fit line, you can predict a y value if you know the corresponding x value, and vice versa. Inductive inference leads to a general theory from specific data.

RE_e and coherentism

- RE_e is liable to the same criticism that befalls all coherence theories of epistemology.
- “It is no news that since...the entire process is guided by nothing more than the inquirer’s own beliefs, judgments, and what seems to the inquirer to be correct upon reflection, given enough screwy initial beliefs and unusual judgments about how to resolve conflicts, an inquirer could end up accepting just about anything in reflective equilibrium” (297).
- It would be natural to take the work of Stich and Nisbett, and Shafir, and other critics of reflective equilibrium as attacking RE_e on just this basis.
- But, if all theories of epistemology have to be either coherentist or foundationalist, then we seem to be led inexorably to skepticism.

Recall this slide from our first class.

An Epistemological Paradox

1. Beliefs must be justified either foundationally or coherently.
 2. No beliefs can be justified foundationally.
 3. No beliefs can be justified coherently.
 4. Some of our beliefs are justified.
- Uh-oh.



Let's reflect.

- We started with a general presupposition, call it a theory, that epistemology must be foundationalist or coherentist.
- We appealed to some intuitions and background beliefs concerning foundationalist theories, including analogies about givens, circularity, and possible belief sets.
- We found that taking all of these beliefs together led us to a contradiction, which we believe to be impossible.
 1. Beliefs must be justified either foundationally or coherently.
 2. No beliefs can be justified foundationally.
 3. No beliefs can be justified coherently.
 4. Some of our beliefs are justified.
- So, we have to cede some belief in order to restore consistency.
 - ▶ We can give up some of the criticisms of foundationalism, and deny claim 2.
Perhaps a fallibilist theory of the given will avoid Descartes's problems.
 - ▶ We can give up the worries about screwy belief sets, and deny claim 3.
Perhaps we can denigrate our possibility intuitions, and hold on to coherentism.
 - ▶ We can give up the more general theory, claim #1, that all epistemology must be either foundationalist or coherentist.
 - ▶ Or, we can give up claim #4, and become skeptics.

Restoring consistency to our belief set

- We are guided by scientific (or nearly so) principles
 - Conservatism
 - Modesty
 - Simplicity
 - Generality
 - Refutability
- These are guidelines for drawing the line of best fit.



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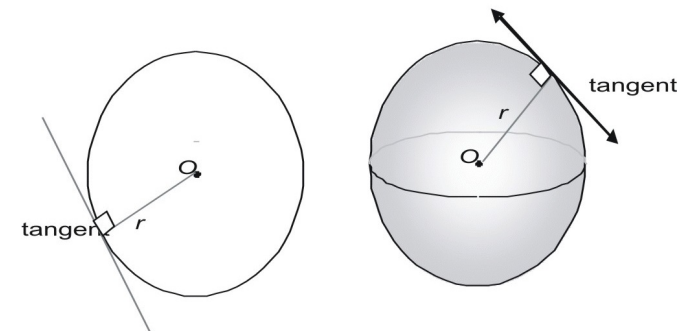


Now look at what we have done!

- We are using RE_m to determine whether RE_e is an acceptable epistemic theory.
- RE_m is thus quite a different claim from RE_e .
- It is just a tool we use to proceed in philosophy, and not a method of justifying any particular beliefs.

More analogies

- The context of discovery and the context of justification
- Description and prescription
- Consider mathematical beliefs.
 - ▶ We are often first exposed to a mathematical belief by testimony.
 - ▶ Maybe some time later we see a proof of the theorem.
 - ▶ How we came to discover the claim is independent of how we came to justify the claim.
 - ▶ How we learned about something might explain why we believe that claim, but it will not explain how we know about the claim.
 - ▶ To justify a mathematical belief, we have to provide a proof.





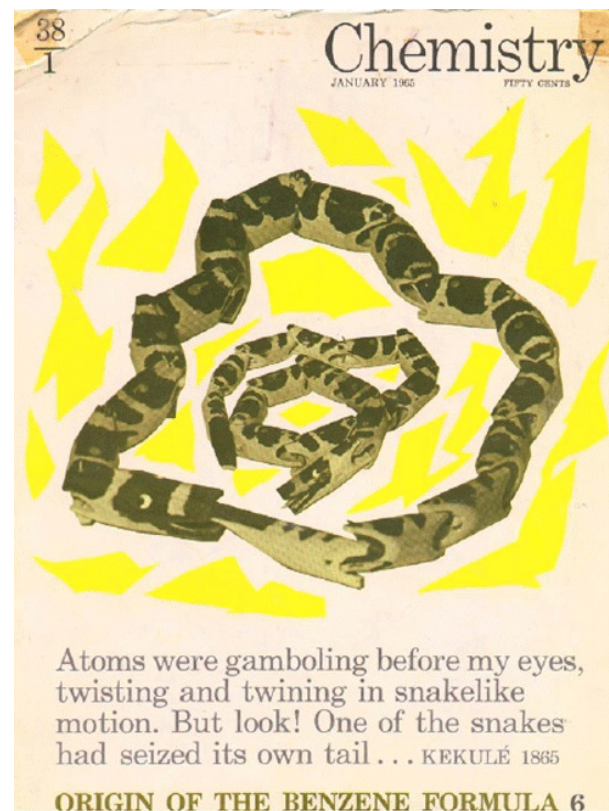
The genetic fallacy

■ Kekulé's dream

- ▶ “Kekulé wrote that he discovered the ring shape of the benzene molecule after dreaming of a snake seizing its own tail.
- ▶ This dream came to him after years of studying the nature of carbon-carbon bonds. Kekulé claimed to solve the problem of how carbon atoms could bond to up to four other atoms at the same time. While his claims were well publicized and accepted, by the early 1920s Kekulé's own biographer came to the conclusion that Kekulé's understanding of the tetravalent nature of carbon bonding depended on the previous research of Archibald Scott Couper (1831-1892); further, the German Chemist Josef Loschmidt (1821-1895) had earlier posited a cyclic structure for benzene as early as 1862, although he had not actually proved this structure to be correct”.

■ RE_m guides discovery.

■ RE_e, guides justification.



RE_m is benign

- It is just a counsel of prudence, a suggestion for how to work.
- It lacks any normative, justificatory role.
- Is this course an epistemology course or a methods course?
 - ▶ The right answer: it is an epistemology course!

DePaul defends reflective equilibrium, as an inevitable component of rationality.

Is he defending RE_e or Re_m ?

- “When one really focuses upon [(I) and (II)], it becomes...difficult to conceive of an alternative to reflective equilibrium, or more specifically, to conceive of a *rational* alternative to this method. In order to constitute a real alternative to reflective equilibrium... a method must either
 - ▶ (A) abandon reflection altogether, or
 - ▶ (B) direct the inquirer to reflect, but to do so incompletely, that is, to leave certain beliefs, principles, theories, or what have you out of account, or
 - ▶ (C) not allow the results of the inquirer’s reflections to determine what the inquirer goes on to believe.
- I maintain that a method of philosophical inquiry having feature (A), (B), or (C) would be irrational” (301).

The irrationality of abandoning RE?

- Option A (abandon reflection altogether) entails subordinating one's own beliefs to those of authorities.
 - ▶ Blind submission to external authority in order to give one's intuitions precisely no weight
 - ▶ Unless one's own beliefs are completely consistent with those of the authorities, one will be forced to accept (because emitted from authority) something that one does not accept.
 - ▶ That seems irrational.
- Option B (direct the inquirer to reflect, but to do so incompletely) entails some blind submission, which would lead to the irrationality mentioned in the argument against A.
 - ▶ It also includes cases in which reflection is acceptable.
 - ▶ In those latter cases, we don't have an alternative to reflective equilibrium.
- Option C (not allow the results of the inquirer's reflections to determine what the inquirer goes on to believe) violates the principles of doxastic involuntarism that I hold dear.
 - ▶ That aside, C entails reflecting, but not believing what one learns.
 - ▶ DePaul calls this the most obviously irrational option.

How to proceed

- DePaul's interlocutor raises worries about what to do with people whose intuitions, or prior beliefs, are wrong.
 - These are reminiscent of those raised by Cummins.
- DePaul dismisses the question.
 - Fats Waller on rhythm: "Lady, if you got to ask, you ain't got it."
- The question is what to do in cases in which I believe, or intuit, in contradiction to empirical results.
 - Do I humbly subordinate my beliefs?
 - Do I stubbornly maintain rationality?
- These look like squarely methodological questions.