

Exemplary Examples

The London Cooperative*

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*The London Cooperative is a philosophy writing collaborative made up of Kai Spiekermann, LSE; Holly Lawford-Smith, University of Melbourne; David V. Axelsen, Aarhus/LSE; and Adam Slavny, Warwick. This presentation is a product of that collaboration.

Two Kinds of Cases

Trolley Problem	The Original Position
Thought Experiment	Thought Experiment
Radically simplified choice situation	Radically simplified choice situation
Elicit intuitive judgements	Pick principles of distributive justice
Intuit response	Reason towards response
Case is representative of wider class of cases	Case is not representative of other cases

The Elicitation Dimension

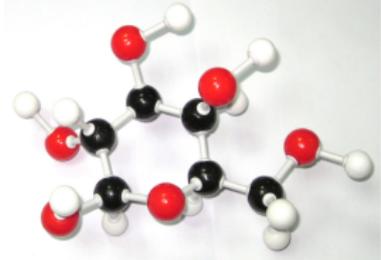
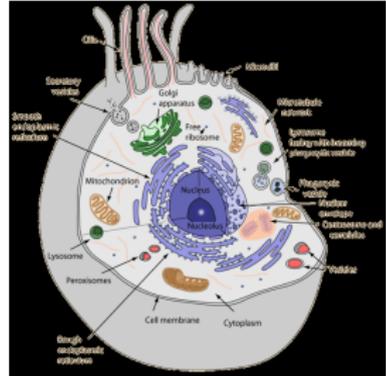
Cases are used to elicit different responses:

Intuitions. Confront readers with a moral choice and appeal to intuitions about the right choice

Reasons. Confront readers with a choice situation that facilitates systematic reasoning about principles / demonstrate an argument / support an argument

The Real-World Representation Dimension

- Taking a cue from philosophy of science: Giere, Godfrey-Smith, Weisberg, and others
- Models as structures that are relevantly similar to their respective target systems in terms of structural features
- Mostly word models, though some formal models exist in political theory



The Real-World Representation Dimension

Hub-and-Spoke Models

“In these cases, what scientists do is give an exact description of one case of the target phenomenon, which acts as a “hub” that anchors a large number of other cases. The “other” cases include all the actual-world ones; the hub is a fiction. The central models of both evolutionary change and population growth within modern biology work like this, for example” (Godfrey-Smith 2009, p. 107).

- Singer's pond
- Trolley problems
- Ticking bomb cases
- etc.

A Taxonomy of Case Use

		Real-World Representation Dimension	
		representative	non-representative
Elicitation Dimension	Intuitions	Intuition-generating case model	The singular case
	Reasons	Reason-demonstrating case model	The method of construction case

A Taxonomy of Case Use

The singular case. A unique real or fictional event of independent interest, e.g. killing Hitler. But also: counterexamples

Intuition-generating case model. E.g., trolley cases, (intuition pumps)

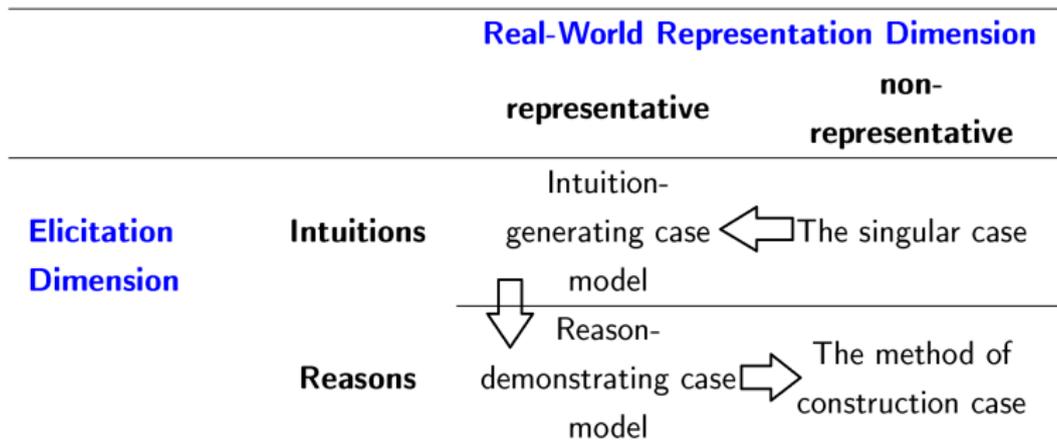
Reason-demonstrating case model. E.g., Parfit's 14 year old girl

The method of construction case. E.g., the original position

The Original Position as a Device of Representation

- Rawls calls the original position a “device of representation”
- But he does not mean representative of real-world cases
- The OP is “modeling the way in which the citizens in a well-ordered society, viewed as moral persons, would ideally select first principles of justice for their society” (Rawls 1980, 520)
- The OP is a model in the sense that a “model athlete” is a model: in a normative sense

Case Use in Temporal Sequence



Some Implications for Good Case Use

- Abstract, “outlandish” cases are often criticized for being too remote
- We think that this critique is not on target
- The criteria for good case use should depend on the function of the case
- Some outlandish cases are successful representations of real-world cases
- Others do not elicit intuitions at all and are therefore less vulnerable to the critique of bias