



ANALYSIS OF CONCEPTS OF WEAK CONFIRMATION

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SUMMARY

The study of confirmation is viewed in this dissertation as concerned with the evidential grounds for rationally believing a hypothesis to be true. A fundamental distinction underlying the study of confirmation generally is the distinction between two senses of 'to confirm', viz., the senses of 'to make firm' and 'to make firmer'. The former sense is spoken of here as the strong sense of 'to confirm'; the latter sense is spoken of as a weak sense of 'to confirm' and is referred to as 'to confirm_F'. Several confirmation theorists have recently noted that 'to confirm' and its cognates and synonyms have been understood in more than one non-strong or weak sense. These weak senses of 'to confirm' form a cluster of related concepts which are referred to as concepts of weak confirmation. Attention is restricted to the qualitative form, rather than to the comparative form or the quantitative form, of these concepts.

After distinguishing four concepts of weak confirmation from one another, attention is drawn to the fact that the concept of confirmation_F includes an essential reference to prior evidence whereas the other concepts of weak confirmation explicitly avoid any reference to prior or background evidence. The significance of the distinction between prior-evidence-dependent and prior-evidence-independent concepts of confirmation is

demonstrated with reference to Hempel's influential study of confirmation. After reviewing his definition of confirmation and noting some interesting features of his study of confirmation in relation to Nicod's study of confirmation, the problem of identifying the concept which Hempel is concerned to explicate is considered. After the identifications suggested by Scheffler and Carnap are canvassed and rejected, Hempel's explicandum is identified as being a prior-evidence-independent concept.

It is argued that the concept of confirmation_F is the concept of weak confirmation which is most central to and most important for the study of weak confirmation. The significance of the prior-evidence-dependent concepts is evaluated in the light of this contention, and a role which these concepts might play in relation to the study of confirmation_F is suggested.

In the last two chapters the problem of explicating concepts of weak confirmation is discussed. Two approaches to the matter of explication are considered: one approach consists of assigning a formal probabilistic measure to a concept, thereby determining the characteristics of that concept; the other approach consists of imposing upon a concept various logical conditions of adequacy, based upon an intuitive understanding of that concept, and requiring any proposed explicatum to fulfill the conditions of adequacy. The latter approach is found to be rather indecisive, and is consequently unsatisfactory. The former approach

is discussed in some detail in connection with the concept of confirmation_F. A certain probabilistic measure often construed as a necessary and sufficient condition of confirmation_F is evaluated. In conclusion, suggestions are made for further study of the concept of confirmation_F.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, nor, to the best of my knowledge and belief, any material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed,

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