

PHILOSOPHY

THE LIMITS OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

15.06.2020

90% of twitter messages of newly appointed corona “epidemiologists” are arguing by conventional wisdom. Maybe we should have a quick look at the [literature](#) of cognitive psychology?

Using distinctive and equivocal data in scenarios, [Golding] found that distinctive data tended to evoke the same decision frame in all subjects, whereas equivocal data led to different decision frames among subjects. In other words, in the absence of a particular stimulus (i.e., a scenario is equivocal in nature), individuals tend to resort to a chronic frame of reference when interpreting those data.

A distinctive subject is easy to recognize because it is different from other things, while equivocal is a subject to two or more interpretations and usually used to mislead or confuse.

Is covid-19 distinctive from other epidemics? Given the recent (but not very [representative interview of epidemiologists](#)) I would argue yes, most qualified researchers say this is a distinctive situation, even having not all relevant data at hand.

The twitterverse is experiencing a more equivocal situation. [Simon Bridge](#) says that we are falling back on ‘comfortable myths and shared presumptions’ that constitute conventional wisdom – a term which was highlighted by John Kenneth Galbraith in his 1958 book The Affluent Society:

“To a very large extent, of course, we associate truth with convenience — with what most closely accords with self-interest and personal well-being or promises best to avoid awkward effort or unwelcome dislocation of life. ... Economic and social behavior are complex, and to comprehend their character is mentally tiring. Therefore we adhere, as though to a raft, to those ideas which represent our understanding. ... I shall refer to these ideas henceforth as the conventional wisdom.”

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