Can you keep a secret?

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Abstract: This paper explores the nature of truth and its relationship with indirect questioning. It examines the possibility of hiding the truth through evasive or indirect responses to direct questions. Drawing from perspectives such as Hestir's argument and Freud's observations, the paper discusses how truth can manifest through non-verbal cues and the concept of truth as a process of concealing and revealing according to Heidegger. The study on secrets by Slepian et al. provides insights into the concealment of truth through indirect questioning. However, not all truths can be easily uncovered through this method, as some respondents may resort to lying or providing misleading information. Persistent inquiry can gradually unveil secrets, but intentional deception remains a possibility. The nature of truth is complex and subject to interpretation. The paper concludes with an overview of various theories on truth.

Keywords: truth, indirect questioning, concealment, secrets, philosophy, deception, inquiry.

Exploring the Nature of Truth

In philosophical discourse, the concept of truth has long been a subject of inquiry and debate.

One intriguing aspect that arises in this discussion is the possibility of hiding the truth through indirect questioning.

According to one perspective, presented by Hestir, individuals may possess a certain amount of truth that they choose to keep hidden [1]. Hestir argues that individuals have the capacity to withhold truth, either consciously or unconsciously, by responding evasively or indirectly to direct questions. [2]

This notion aligns with the observations made by Sigmund Freud, who emphasized that individuals may communicate hidden meanings through actions and non-verbal cues when their words do not confess their true intentions. Freud's case study of Dora, for instance, demonstrated that the truth can manifest itself through an individual's fingertips even when their words fail to reveal it. [3]Additionally, Freud delves into the complexity of truth in his book on jokes, raising the question of whether describing things as they are without considering how the [4] listener will interpret them can ever capture the full truth. Heidegger's concept of truth as a process of concealing and revealing provides further insight into the possibility of hiding truth through indirect questioning. [5]

According to Heidegger, truth is not merely the correspondence between a proposition and reality but rather a process that involves both concealment and revelation. [6] This perspective suggests that asking indirect questions can be a means of concealing truth. [7]By using indirect questions, the respondent may feel less obligated to reveal the truth directly. Through a hermeneutic lens, Heidegger posits that technology plays a role in this concealed-revealed dialectic. [8] For Heidegger, technology can articulate the hermeneutic structure of this dialectic and contribute to the concealment or revelation of truth.

[9]

Hidden Truths and Indirect Questions

Given the possibility of hiding truth through indirect questioning, it becomes pertinent to explore whether truth can indeed remain hidden despite attempts to uncover it. Drawing from various disciplines, it is evident that truth can be concealed through indirect questions, even if the respondent does not want to reveal it. The study conducted by Slepian et al on the definition of secrets provides valuable insights into this phenomenon. [10]

They argue that secrets can be defined as an intention to conceal information from others, even in the absence of physical presence. This implies that individuals may utilize various strategies, such as responding evasively or indirectly, to keep the truth hidden.

Furthermore, the use of indirect sampling techniques in research adds another layer of complexity to the concealment of truth. [11] These techniques enhance anonymity and create a sense of privacy for respondents, increasing their willingness to answer truthfully. The present study used an interview style to mitigate the loss of data through missed questions, although participants answered on an answer sheet rather than aloud. By allowing participants to respond non-verbally and indirectly, the researchers aimed to minimize social desirability bias and elicit more truthful responses.

"Can truth remain hidden with a sufficiently large number of questions asked, even if the respondent doesn't want to reveal it? This question delves deep into the concept because often what we consider as a secret may indirectly or directly be conveyed to someone else through our statements or interactions. Now, there are two types of questions: direct questions and indirect questions. Direct questions explicitly seek the truth or the answer to an entire event. For example, let us say the number is 9, and you can ask a question like 'What is the number?' or 'What is the factorial of that number?' These questions provide enough information to deduce the truth without the need for further questions.

On the other hand, indirect questions require additional questions to piece together specific facts or information. They do not provide a one-step decomposition of the truth. For instance, you can ask 'Is the number odd?' and 'Is it between 8 and 11?' These separate questions, when considered together, reveal the unique property of the number, and indicate that it is 9. However, questions that involve multiple operations in a single question do not have multiple branches at the junction. For example, asking the respondent to first add 3 to the number and then multiply the result by 5 only requires one question to be asked” what is the final number?" and one step decomposition.

It is important to note that not all truths can be easily uncovered through indirect questioning. In subjective or abstract contexts, indirect questioning may not be as effective. The respondent who wants to hide the truth may also resort to lying, which can lead to a different branch of information and prevent the person from reaching the branch that contains the truth. [12]

Now, let us consider the scenario where a respondent can only provide accurate answers and the number of questions asked eventually forces them to reveal the truth. The question then arises whether the sequence of indirect questions becomes a direct one. For example, after going through a series of questions, we might still need to ask directly, 'Is the number 9?' This question serves as a final confirmation even though we were quite certain about the number being 9 based

on the previous information. There are cases where distinguishing between similar things becomes challenging. Can we differentiate between a cap and a hat, especially when they closely resemble each other? In such situations, it may not be possible to uniquely distinguish between them through indirect questioning alone.

To illustrate this further, let us consider a coin toss. The respondent is indirectly questioned about whether it landed on heads or tails. However, if we have a perfectly fair coin without any biases and we have not seen, touched, or felt the coin in any sensory way, it becomes impossible to determine the outcome without directly asking, 'Is it heads or tails?' Here, the state of the coin (heads or tails) remains unknown unless explicitly revealed by the respondent. How can we differentiate between heads and tails without knowing the symbols representing them? Even if someone accesses the symbols, we cannot guarantee that the image we think represents heads is universally accepted as such. It is possible that it is assigned to represent tails, and that interpretation is equally valid since the coin toss is fair.

It can be argued that heads and tails exist as two possible states of a coin simultaneously, coexisting at the same time. It is possible to argue that heads and tails can exist simultaneously as states of a coin. This concept suggests that both outcomes coexist at the same time, with the potential for either outcome when the coin is flipped.

Therefore, it can be concluded that in certain cases, even with enough indirect questions, the truth may not be disclosed by the respondent.

In another scenario, let us explore a more realistic situation where the truth needs to be revealed by the respondent after a certain number of questions, and they eventually succumb to telling the truth. For example, in a police station, multiple suspects are brought in for questioning regarding a crime scene. The respondent, who does not want to reveal their identity or make any direct statements, agrees to answer questions with 'yes' or 'no.' The police need to ask interconnected questions that require two or more steps of decomposition to correctly identify the suspect. For instance, they can ask, 'Is the suspect bald?'" and other relevant questions and so on...

The Analogy

Each branch represents a different path or line of questioning, leading to various possibilities. However, only a very specific branch will lead to the desired "fruit of truth." Here is a description of such a node system:

Imagine a tree with a sturdy trunk representing the main question or topic at hand. From this trunk, several branches extend outward, symbolizing different lines of inquiry or paths to explore. Each branch represents a specific question or line of questioning.

As you navigate through the tree, moving from the trunk to various branches, each junction presents a choice to make. At each junction, you need to ask a question to follow a particular branch and continue your quest for truth. This branching system resembles a decision tree, where you make choices based on the information available.

However, among all the branches, only one very particular branch holds the desired "fruit of truth." This special branch represents the specific sequence of questions or line of inquiry that leads directly to the truth you seek. It is like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack, where most branches deviate from the truth, but one stands out as the correct path.

To successfully reach the fruit of truth, you must ask the right questions, follow the relevant branches, and obtain the necessary approvals or specifications from the respondent. This node system requires careful navigation, choosing the correct branches at each junction to make progress toward the desired outcome. In summary, the node system with a particular branch holding the fruit of truth illustrates the process of asking questions, following paths, and making choices to uncover the specific information you seek. It emphasizes the importance of precision, effective questioning, and a strategic approach to arrive at the truth. It is important to note that this process does not involve asking direct questions such as "Where is the fruit located?" or "What is the truth?" Instead, through indirect questioning, careful consideration of gathered information, and logical inference to gradually unveil the truth.

Unveiling Secrets through Persistent Inquiry

Despite the potential for the truth to be hidden through indirect questions, it is important to acknowledge that persistent inquiry can often unveil secrets. By asking probing questions from different angles and perspectives, researchers can chip away at the layers of concealment and gradually reveal the truth. In the context of case studies, interviews with open questions provide a valuable opportunity for the extended development of ideas and exploration of material that was initially not in the research plan. Furthermore, the use of projective techniques, such as indirect questioning, can offer insights into the motivations and perceptions behind a respondent's actions or decisions. The person thought a personal need to hide the truth might also influence the idea of hiding the truth through indirect questioning methods.

Resistance in Revealing Truths: An Analysis

While indirect questioning can provide valuable insights into someone's motivations and perceptions, it is not sufficient in uncovering the truth. Maybe the respondent wants to lie at some point to deliberately divert the scene, ensuring that the person never reaches the truth. This introduces the possibility of intentional deception, where the respondent intentionally provides misleading information or attempts to steer the questioning process away from the truth.

Does every sequence of indirect questioning turn into a direct one?

Yes, sometimes! In certain cases, a sequence of indirect questioning may eventually lead to a direct question that elicits the truth from the respondent. However, it is important to note that reaching a final node does not guarantee a unique distinction between two branches that appear identical but may have different outcomes.

In some situations, even after reaching a point where a direct question seems necessary, there could be multiple branches that cannot be uniquely distinguished from one another. This means that despite the progression through the node system, there may still be uncertainty in determining the truth or differentiating between similar options. This could be due to limitations in the available information, inherent ambiguity, or lack of distinct features that allow for a definitive choice.

In such cases, it becomes challenging to ensure that everything can be uniquely distinguished from everything else in the universe. It highlights the complexities involved in seeking the truth, especially when faced with scenarios where multiple options resemble each other closely and no clear criteria exist to differentiate them.

While indirect questioning can provide valuable insights, the truth can remain hidden even with enough indirect questions.

Indirect Questioning as a Tool for Truth Extraction

Indirect questioning has been found to be a valuable tool in extracting truth from individuals who may be reluctant to reveal it directly. [2]The indirect approach explores possible differences in how individuals relate difficult situations and the decision to handle them by being less than truthful. The true nature of truth is a philosophical and complex concept that has been debated by scholars, philosophers, and thinkers throughout history. There are various perspectives and theories regarding the nature of truth, and no definitive consensus has been reached.

One traditional perspective is the correspondence theory of truth, which suggests that truth corresponds to the objective reality or facts of the world. According to this view, a statement or proposition is considered true if it accurately aligns with the state of affairs in the external world. [13]

Another perspective is the coherence theory of truth, which emphasizes the internal consistency and logical coherence of a set of beliefs or propositions. In this view, truth is determined by the coherence and logical relationships among ideas within a system of thought.

Furthermore, there is the pragmatic theory of truth, which focuses on the practical consequences and usefulness of a belief or statement. [14]According to this perspective, truth is based on the practical outcomes or effectiveness of a particular belief or statement in achieving desired goals or solving problems.

Additionally, some philosophical traditions explore the notion of subjective truth, where truth is seen as a personal and subjective experience that varies from individual to individual. This perspective suggests that truth is shaped by personal perspectives, experiences, and cultural influences. [15]

It is important to note that truth can also be contextual and subject to change based on new evidence or evolving perspectives. Different fields of study, such as science, mathematics, ethics, and art, may have their own frameworks for establishing truth within their respective domains.

In essence, the true nature of truth remains a complex and multifaceted concept, open to interpretation and philosophical exploration. It is an ongoing topic of discussion and inquiry, inviting diverse perspectives and theories.

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