

# What is Quality?

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# Thanks

- This research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of the National Centre for Research Methods.
- The usual disclaimer applies.

# A normative phenomenon?

- Hypothesis: Talk about quality is normative.
- If so, then considerations raised by philosophy (and particularly moral philosophy) apply.
- In the particular context of simulation, I think modelling Quality Commons should avoid the “data shyness” which, IMO, affects simulation of normative systems at present. [In retrospect. I was delighted to be proved wrong about this repeatedly at the workshop!]

# Half remembered J. L. Austin

- A good song, a good axe, a good journal article, a good sociologist.
- In some cases (axe), goals appear to be understood and agreed, in others not (journal article).
- This “interplay” is significant: It allows “good by its own lights”, “If you like this, you’ll like that” and “You have to like this to be a proper hippie/Goth/rocker”.
- Be wary of “good” = “I like this”.
- Also be aware of non-normative dimensions to data from evaluation systems: “This is the only lawnmower with a gas powered engine”. Don’t treat *everything* as normative.

# A proposal

- Since we have so little to go on, why not start where the data is?
- All 89 reviews of “Reality Killed the Video Star” (Robbie Williams) on <http://www.amazon.co.uk> as of 05.01.2010 saved to PDF.
- Inductive coding: Go through each text, breaking it into “theoretically significant” pieces (what people are “doing” or “talking about” in that piece). Also record all hypotheses that arise from reading the data.
- By a sequential process, codes, key themes, patterns and supported hypotheses emerge.

# What do we find? (Examples)

- Discovered category: Calibration information. Rather than use uncalibrated evaluations (“It’s great”), use behavioural ones (“I play it all the time”.) I doubt a category like this would have been discovered by theoretical reflection.
- Discovered category: Use information. (“These songs are great to sing along to.”) How to increase your pleasure as the condom adverts say.
- Others listed in the position paper.

# Other tentative findings

- Normative quality categories from real (dirty) data are often quite ambiguous.
- There is more than one thing in done in reviews that appears to be irrelevant to quality (talking to the artist, grinding axes, complaining to the company indirectly). We mustn't forget simple incapacity or "missing the point" in studying real QC systems. (Ayer's review of Wittgenstein.)
- Are ratings polarised? (Yes, I know, N=1, it's a hypothesis OK?) "All publicity is good publicity" revisited?

# Provisional conclusions

- This can be done and produces interesting results.
- Even with this “toy” data, there were several more things I could have done (analysis of comments on reviews and usefulness ratings, examination of sequences and path dependence/experiments).
- What we discover may give us leverage for studies where data is harder to get (peer review, job evaluation). It may also give us enough to build grounded basic simulations that order our thoughts.
- Worry: Half these reviews could have been written by people working for EMI. (But we want to understand quality talk not measure “real” quality.)