Round Table on Coherence (Part I)

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[1]These slides include joint work with Daniel Berntson (Princeton), Rachael Briggs (ANU), Fabrizio Cariani (NU), Kenny Easwaran (USC), and David McCarthy (HKU). Please do not cite or quote without permission.

- Today's Round Table is about a new way of thinking about formal, epistemic coherence requirements, which was inspired by Jim Joyce's [10, 9] arguments for *probabilism*.
  - Richard will tell us about such arguments for probabilism.
- I'm going to explain how to generalize Joyce's idea to *any* type of judgment that can be assessed in terms of *accuracy*.
- Then, I will describe how this framework applies to *full belief* (this is joint work with Kenny Easwaran [1, 2]).
- The framework has also been applied to *comparative confidence* (that is joint work with David McCarthy [7]).
  - All three of these applications of the general framework are described in detail in the notes from my recent seminar here at MCMP. See: `http://fitelson.org/coherence`.
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- Notation: $B(p)$ [S believes that p], $D(p)$ [S disbelieves that p], and $\mathfrak{B}$ [the set of *all* of S's beliefs and disbeliefs]. For simplicity, we assume that S is *finite and opinionated*.
- Here, I will use the word "reasonable" to mean "supported by one's evidence" (for now, in an informal, intuitive sense).
- Unfortunately, deductive consistency is implicated in some infamous *paradoxes* — *e.g.*, the Lottery and the Preface.
  - **Lottery Paradox** ([12],[6]). For each ticket i, it is highly probable that i is a loser (L_i). So, it would seem reasonable to be such that $B(L_i)$, for each i. However, this inevitably renders our set $\mathfrak{B}$ *inconsistent*, since we *know* that $(\exists i)(\neg L_i)$.
  - **Preface Paradox** ([14],[4]). Let $\mathbf{B} \subset \mathfrak{B}$ be the set containing *all* of your *reasonable* (1^{st}–order) beliefs. This $\mathbf{B}$ is an incredibly rich and complex set of judgments. You're fallible (*i.e.*, your 1^{st}–order evidence is *sometimes misleading*). So, it seems reasonable to believe that *some* B's in $\mathbf{B}$ are false. However, adding *this* (2^{nd}–order) belief to $\mathbf{B}$ renders $\mathfrak{B}$ *inconsistent*.

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- Typically, such "paradoxes" involve a *conflict* between a *consistency* requirement and an *evidential* requirement, which requires *believing what is evidentially supported*.
- There are various responses to such paradoxes.
- Some ([15], [13]) try to *maintain* consistency as a CR.
  - Such approaches tend to have implausible consequences about the nature of evidential support/reasonable belief.
- Some ([11], [4]) say there *are no CRs* (*per se*) for full belief.
  - These approaches have more plausible things to say about evidential support/reasonable belief, but they *give up* on trying to articulate coherence requirements for full belief.
- I (we) would suggest that such paradoxes indicate that the classical CR for full belief is *too strong*. What we need is an *alternative story* about coherence requirements.

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  - To make things *really* simple, we'll assume $D(p) \equiv B(\neg p)$.
  - Finally, we'll use $\mathfrak{B}$ to denote the *entire* set of judgments (beliefs and disbeliefs) made by S over the *full* algebra $\mathcal{B}$.
- With this background in place, applying our new framework to full belief involves going through the following *3 steps*.
- **Step 1**: Define the *vindicated (viz., perfectly accurate) judgment set*, at w. ["Judgments of the omniscient S at w."]
  - $\mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w$ contains $B(p)$ [$D(p)$] iff p is true (false) at w.
- **Step 2**: Define a notion of "distance between $\mathfrak{B}$ and $\mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w$". That is, a measure of *distance from vindication* $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w)$.
  - $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=}$ the number of inaccurate judgments in $\mathfrak{B}$ at w.
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  - Finally, we'll use $\mathfrak{B}$ to denote the *entire* set of judgments (beliefs and disbeliefs) made by S over the *full* algebra $\mathcal{B}$.
- With this background in place, applying our new framework to full belief involves going through the following *3 steps*.
- **Step 1**: Define the *vindicated (viz., perfectly accurate) judgment set*, at w. ["Judgments of the omniscient S at w."]
  - $\mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w$ contains $B(p)$ [$D(p)$] iff p is true (false) at w.
- **Step 2**: Define a notion of "distance between $\mathfrak{B}$ and $\mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w$". That is, a measure of *distance from vindication* $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w)$.
  - $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=}$ the number of inaccurate judgments in $\mathfrak{B}$ at w.
- **Step 3**: Adopt a *fundamental principle* (of *epistemic decision theory*) that *uses* $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w)$ to ground a CR for $\mathfrak{B}$.

- For simplicity, we'll adopt a *very elementary formal model*.
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- Given our choices at Steps 1 and 2, there is *a* choice we can make at Step 3 that will yield *consistency* as a CR for $\mathfrak{B}$.

  Possible Vindication (PV). There exists *some* possible world w at which *all* of the judgments in $\mathfrak{B}$ are accurate. Or, to put this more formally in terms of d: $(\exists w)[d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w) = 0]$.

- Possible vindication is *one way* we could go here. But, our framework is *much more general* than the classical one. It allows for *many other* choices of fundamental principle.
- Inspired by the work of de Finetti [5] and Joyce [10], we can *back away* from (PV) to something weaker, but still probative — *the avoidance of (weak) dominance in* $d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w)$.

  Weak Accuracy-Dominance Avoidance (WADA).

  There does *not* exist an alternative belief set $\mathfrak{B}'$ such that:

  (i) $(\forall w)[d(\mathfrak{B}', \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w) \leq d(\mathfrak{B}, \mathring{\mathfrak{B}}_w)]$, and

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- The new coherence requirement implied by this application of our framework has just the sort of properties we wanted.
- We wanted a coherence requirement that (like consistency) was motivated by considerations of accuracy (ideally, *entailed by* alethic requirements such as consistency/PV).
- But, we also wanted a coherence requirement that was *strictly weaker* than deductive consistency — in such a way that it is *also entailed by our evidential requirements*.
- Happily, it can be shown that we have met both of these *desiderata*, provided that we accept the following weak assumption about our evidential requirements.
    - **Evidential Requirement for Belief** (EB). An agent S (with total evidence E_S) meets her evidential requirements *only if* there exists *some* Pr-function [$\Pr(\cdot \mid E_S)$] which *probabilifies each of her beliefs and dis-probabilifies each of her disbeliefs.*
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- Here are the logical relationships between key norms:

	The Truth Norm for Belief:	(TB)
		$\Downarrow$ $\not\Uparrow$
	Possible Vindication (*viz*., consistency):	(PV)
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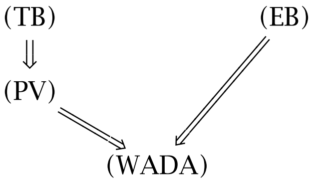

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