Roundtable on Coherence
The evidentialist challenge

Richard Pettigrew

Department of Philosophy
University of Bristol

Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy

20\textsuperscript{th} July 2012
The evidentialist objection

If it works, Easwaran and Fitelson’s objection establishes that the accuracy-dominance argument does not establish Probabilism in full generality.

- Consider the following agent:
  - $c(A_1) = c(A_2) = c(A_3) = 0.1$.
  - Evidential constraints $\mathcal{E} = \{c : c(A_1) \leq 0.1\}$.
- She must choose:
  - Be accuracy-dominated;
  - Ignore evidence.
- Joyce’s argument only works if such agents must always ignore evidence.
- This is implausible.
Evidence cannot impose the sort of constraint required by the argument:

- **Lewis/Williamson:**
  - All evidence comes in the form of a proposition learned with certainty.
  - Any other constraints are imposed by synchronic requirements.
  - **But:** is this realistic?

- **Joyce(?)**:
  - If $\mathcal{E}$ is the set of credence functions that satisfy the evidential constraint, $\mathcal{E} \subseteq \mathcal{P}$.
  - Evidential constraints can never be *local*; they can never apply to individual credences.
  - They must always be global.
  - **But:** compare the case of full belief.
The alethic response

Accuracy-dominance considerations constitute one part of a larger justification of Probabilism.

Here is a sketch of the larger justification:

(i) Initial credences ought to satisfy Probabilism.
(ii) Credences ought to be updated by conditionalization on evidence.
(iii) An agent justifies her current credences \( c \) by giving a probabilistic argument in its favour:
   (a) She proposes plausible initial credences \( c_0 \);
   (b) She cites evidence that she has acquired \( E \);
   (c) She updates \( c_0 \) to incorporate \( E \);
   (d) The result is \( c \).
(iv) By (i), (ii), and (iii), it follows that an agent cannot justify her current credences if they violate Probabilism.
The alethic response

(i) Initial credences ought to satisfy Probabilism.
   ▶ This is established by an accuracy-dominance argument.
   ▶ The evidentialist objection does not defeat this weaker claim.

(ii) Credences ought to be updated by conditionalization on evidence.
    ▶ Updating by conditionalization minimizes expected distance from vindication (Greaves and Wallace 2006).
References