Religious Mind Identified as Collective Mind

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Project Information

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Talk(s):

- Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christian J. (2012b-06-06/2012-06-06). *Reconstructing Religious Mind*. Conference. Presentation (contributed). Me, myself, and I; Constructing and Reconstructing Identity. University of Leeds: Classics Department.

- Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christian J. (2012c-05-02/2012-05-02). *Religiös beeinflußter Glaube, modelliert als Gruppenglauben*. Conference. Presentation (contributed). Research Seminar. University of Salzburg: Pro Scientia.

Workshop(s):

- Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christian J. (2012a-09-13/2012-09-13). *Analytic Philosophy of Religion II*. Workshop. Organization. Facts: est. 25 participants; 3 invited: Adam Green, Patrick Todd, and Paul Weingartner. University of Salzburg.

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Introduction

Starting problem:
Someone believes *A* from a religious point of view, but disbelieves it from a scientific resp. profane point of view.

Is such a "net of beliefs" (or: religious mind) rational according to modern standards of rationality?

Answer: Yes, probably.

Contents

The modelling

Bocheński's approach:

1. Describe $\mathcal{L}_R$ (e.g., 'God'$\in \{x : x \text{ is a term}\}$)!

2. Check, whether principles of classical logic hold in $\mathcal{L}_R$!

3. Try to construct a logic for $\mathcal{L}_R$!

4. Try to combine such a logic with classical logic!

Joseph M. Bocheński's project in (cf. Bocheński 1965):

- Proposal 1   (unsolved)   ☐
- Proposal 2   (very specific)   ⊠

  Example: 'is' in claims of trinity is neither $\in$ nor $=$.
- Proposal 3   (unsolved)   ☐
- Proposal 4   (very general)   ⊠

  Example: $\pi \cap \rho \neq \emptyset$ and $\pi \cup \rho \neq \grave{}$.

We try to generalize 2 and 3 and discuss 4 in more detail.

Rationality

$\mathcal{L}$ is an artificial language containing atomic and by negation ($\neg$), adjunction ($\vee$) and conjunction (&) built up complex propositions.

Example: A, $\neg A$, $A \& B$ etc.

Axioms of probability theory:

- (Non-negativity) $\pi(A) \geq 0$
- (Normalisation) If A is logically true, then $\pi(A) = 1$
- (Additivity) If A and B are incompatible (that is: $A \& B$ is logically false), then $\pi(A \vee B) = \pi(A) + \pi(B)$.

Thesis ("Classicism" in philosophy of science)

If an agent i is rational, then π_i is a probability function.

Other conditions for rationality: empirical adequacy of one's beliefs etc.

A simple model of religious belief

Ingredients:

- A probability function π
- A probability function ρ
- A set of aggregation functions *Aggr*

Probability functions are used to model the credence of people. Example:

- $\pi(A) = 1$: Absolutely sure that A.
- $\pi(A) = 0$: Absolutely sure that $\neg A$.
- $\pi(A) = 0.5$: To the same degree unsure about A as about $\neg A$.

Aggregation functions pool them. Example:

- $aggr(\pi, \rho)(A) = \pi(A)$: A contradiction between π and ρ w.r.t A is avoided in favour of π.

Thesis

The belief system of a religious person i is $aggr_i(\pi_i, \rho_i)$.

Examples

First simplified example:

- Galilei believed because of scientific reasons: 'The earth circles the sun.' ($\pi(A) = 1.0$).
- Galilei believed because of religious reasons: 'The sun circles the earth.' ($\rho(\neg A) = 1.0$).
- Galilei pooled these opinions to: 'The earth circles the sun.' ($aggr(\pi, \rho)(A) = \pi(A) = 1.0$).

Second simplified example:

- Einstein believed because of scientific reasons: 'Natural phenomena are ruled by statistical (and not dynamical) laws.' ($\pi(A) = 1.0$).
- Einstein believed because of religious reasons: 'Natural phenomena are ruled by dynamical (and not statistical) laws.' ('God doesn't play dice.': $\rho(\neg A) = 1.0$).
- Einstein pooled these opinions to: $aggr(\pi, \rho)(A) = \rho(A) = 0.0$.

Context of our model

agent	belief	investigation
single-agent	single-belief	classical epistemology
multi-agent	single-belief	social epistemology: group agency
multi-agent	multi-belief	social epistemology: peer disagreement etc.
single-agent	multi-belief	belief revision resp. update, our investigation

Our investigation is a single-agent, multi-belief case

Adequacy of the model

Two adequacy results needed

Recall: $aggr(\pi, \rho)$ is intended for modelling the religious mind.

π is well discussed in philosophy of science.

But what about ρ and $aggr$?

Whether the modelling is adequate seem to depend highly on these two ingredients.

So, for a discussion of the adequacy of the model, one should discuss whether:

- ρ can (idealistically) be established as probability function?
- the aggregation of π and ρ by some $aggr$ is rational?

Dutch book conditions

First, some idealizations:

- **D1** i assigns credences to the non-empty set of sentences $\mathcal{L}$ which is assumed to be closed under negation, disjunction and conjunction building rules.

- **D2** i's credence is sharp (that is: π_i is a function into $\mathbb{R}$ and not, e.g., into intervals of $\mathbb{R}$).

- **D3** $0 \leq \pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A) \leq stake(A)$ and $stake(A) > 0$

- D1 states "completeness"
- D2 states "sharpness"
- D3 states that there is something at stake

Dutch book conditions

Second, some conditions for accepting bets:

- **D4** i is principally willing to bet on A (that is: to buy a bet) for $\leq \pi_i(A) \cdot$ $stake(A)$£ for any stake satisfying D3.

- **D5** i is principally willing to bet against A (that is: to sell a bet) for $\geq \pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A)$£ for any stake satisfying D3.

- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 0.0$, $stake(A) = 10$£
      b buys no bet, but sells one for ≥ 0£;
- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 1.0$, $stake(A) = 10$£
      b buys a bet for ≤ 10£, but sells no bet;
- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 0.5$, $stake(A) = 10$£
      b buys a bet for ≤ 5£ and sells a bet for ≥ 5;

Dutch book conditions

Third, the payoff tables:

D6 If i bets on A, then i's payoff, depending on the outcome of A, is:

outcome	payoff
A is true	$stake(A) - \pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A)\pounds$
A is false	$-\pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A)\pounds$

D7 If i bets against A, then i's payoff, depending on the outcome of A, is:

outcome	payoff
A is true	$-stake(A) + \pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A)\pounds$
A is false	$\pi_i(A) \cdot stake(A)\pounds$

- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 0.0$, $stake(A) = 10\pounds$
  $\pi_c(A) = 0.3$
  b sells a bet for $3\pounds$ to c
  A is true: b pays and c earns $7\pounds$;

Dutch book conditions

The final condition:

D8 An agent i is rational only if i's principally willingness to bet on or against A provides her from being ever dutch booked, that is: there is no set of bets on or against A (or sentential components of A) that i is principally willing to accept, but that generates a net loss for i, regardless of the possible outcomes of A (or sentential components of A).

- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 1.1$ (b is "more than sure, that A"), $stake(A) = 10£$
    b buys a bet on A for $11£$.
    So b pays $11£$ (in case that A is false) or $1£$ (otherwise).
    So b loses, regardless of the outcome of A.

The Dutch Book argument

The result of the Dutch Book argument:

Thesis

> *D1–D8 entail Pr1–Pr3*

Respectively, more common:

Thesis

> *If you violate one of the conditions Pr1–Pr3, then a bookie can construct a Dutch Book against you.*

- Example: $\pi_b(A) = 1.1$ (b is "more than sure, that A"), $stake(A) = 10£$
    I'll sell b a bet on A for $11£$.
    So, I'll earn $11£$ (in case that A is false) or $1£$ (otherwise).
    So, I'll win, regardless of the outcome of A.

The Dutch Book argument

But what about religious credences?

- Is there a similar adequate reasoning too?
- Is someone who beliefs absolutely in God ($\rho_b(G) = 1.0$), as D5 suggests, liable for taking a bet against the God hypothesis for $\geq$ $stake(A)$£, whereby $stake$ is arbitrarily?
- Etc.

I think: at first glance: no!

But at a second glance: yes!

A re-interpretation of the argument

⓫ '£' re-interpreted as: 'units of religious values'

⓬ '$stake(A)$' re-interpreted as:
'religious value to which belief in A leads' (negative: 'religious value from which non-belief in A alienates')

⓭ 'i is principally willing to bet on A for $\leq p_i(A) \cdot stake(A)$£' re-interpreted as:
'i is principally willing to suffer for her belief in A by $\leq p_i(A) \cdot stake(A)$£ to achieve $stake(A)$'

⓮ 'i is principally willing to bet against A for $\geq p_i(A) \cdot stake(A)$£' re-interpreted as:
'i is principally willing to expose herself to $-stake(A)$£ for her belief in A by getting $\geq p_i(A) \cdot stake(A)$£'

A re-interpretation of the argument

- D1 and D2: religious belief (ρ) is "complete" and "sharp", e.g.: $\rho_i(G) = 1.0$ and not $\rho_i(G) \in [0.5, 1.0]$ etc.

- First part of D3: no one should suffer more than is necessary for achieving religious values   (cf. the problem of evil: is there a morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering)

- Second part of D3: religious values are positive on a scale of positive and negative values   (cf. Aquinean scale of values)

A re-interpretation of the argument

Ad D4:

- Sometimes (e.g., sanctification) believing is operationalized with the help of suffering:
  the more one is willing to suffer for claiming or believing A, the more she is seen as a believer in A.

- So, e.g., take the story of Abraham. He is called 'the father of faith' because of the extraordinary suffering he is willing to undergo for his belief in God:

  "Abraham [. . .] is traditionally considered the father of faith, and on that view he becomes the father of faith because of his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son [. . .]." (cf. Stump 2010, p.259)

A re-interpretation of the argument

Ad D4:

- There is also empirical data in favour of such a re-interpretation:
  Kurt Gray and Daniel M. Wegner (psychologists, Harvard University):
  residents of American states that suffer the most disease and harm as
  measured by the United Health Foundation *health index* are also the
  states with the strongest belief in God (cf. Gray and Wegner 2010,
  pp.6f).

- In a slogan: *Suffering correlates with belief in God* (cf. Gray and Wegner
  2010, p.11).

A re-interpretation of the argument

Ad D5 (like D4, but the other way round):

- One seem to disbelieve religious statements the more, the more he is willing to accept alienation of religious values.
- Example: one may be alienated from the religious value of charity by exploiting people and thereby indicating that she has not high credence in the validity of the commandment to love one's neighbor.

A re-interpretation of the argument

Ad D6 and D7:

D6 Let A be a religious statement which to belief leads to an ultimate religious good:

outcome	payoff
A is true	heaven − costs: earthly disadv. of a religious life
A is false	earthly disadvantages of a religious life

D7 Let A be a statement which to belief leads to ultimate alienation of religious goods:

outcome	payoff
A is true	−heaven (=hell) + earthly adv. of a non-religious life
A is false	earthly advantages of a non-religious life

At least Pascal would agree with a re-interpretation in the sense of D6'...

A re-interpretation of the argument

The final condition D8 has to be restated in the following way:

D8 An agent i is rational only if i's principally willing to suffer or expose herself for her belief in A provides her from being ever dutch booked in the sense that there is no set of agreements for suffering or exposing for A that i is principally willing to accept, but that generates a net loss (that is: needless suffering) for i, regardless of the possible outcomes of A.

Criticism: Net losses are rational insofar an agent i may suffer needlessly for her, but necessarily for some other agent j.

But this is not traditional:

"[...] God would allow a human person to suffer only if through that suffering alone God can provide an outweighing benefit that goes [...] to the sufferer." (cf. Aquinas' position discussed in Stump 2010, p.384)

A re-interpretation of the argument

So, let's assume that:

- There are sharp distinguishable units of religious values
- Believing is operationalizable by willingness for suffering
- Disbelieving is operationalizable by non-willingness for suffering (exploitation etc.)
- One's suffering is never needless for her (premise of the problem of evil)

Then the result of the re-interpreted Dutch Book argument is:

Thesis

D1'–D8' entail Pr1–Pr3 (for ρ)

Respectively:

Thesis

Violation of one of Pr1–Pr3 is incompatible with the fundamental premise of the problem of evil (and some suppositions about suffering).

Opinion pooling

So, we have argued for the thesis that ρ is a probability function.

But now the question arises: how to pool π and ρ?

Main complaint: religious opinion pooling is cherry picking:

Example: $aggr(\pi, \rho)(A) = \pi(A)$ and $aggr(\pi, \rho)(B) = \rho(B)$

Is there a straightforward rule for opinion pooling in religious belief?

We don't know (problem of exegesis etc.). . . But what about opinion pooling in social epistemology?

Opinion pooling: the discursive dilemma

An instance of the discursive dilemma (where *aggr* is the majority voting method and $\{A, B\} \vDash C$):

#	C1	C2	C3
R1	$p_i(A) = 0$	$p_i(B) = 1$	$p_i(C) = 0$
R2	$p_j(A) = 1$	$p_j(B) = 0$	$p_j(C) = 0$
R3	$p_k(A) = 1$	$p_k(B) = 1$	$p_k(C) = 1$
R4	$aggr(p_i, p_j, p_k)(A) = 1$	$aggr(p_i, p_j, p_k)(B) = 1$	$aggr(p_i, p_j, p_k)(C) = 0$

Problem: although i, j and k are rational, the group's opinion is not.

Thesis

There is no straightforward rule for opinion pooling.

But: opinion pooling can be justified w.r.t. different purposes:

- Legal system (minimize false positives): unanimity rule
- Medical diagnosis (minimize false negatives): inverse unanimity rule

Opinion pooling & cherry picking

Whether *aggr* of the religious mind is cherry picking or not depends on a detailed discussion of the purposes for picking sometimes π and sometimes ρ.

I think that this discussion should be along the line of the opinion pooling discussion in social epistemology.

Of course other topics, as, e.g., empirical/ethical adequacy etc. are still not touched by such an investigation.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Advantages:

- There are lots of possibility- and impossibility results about *aggr* available in social epistemology.
- The model is a natural extension of Bocheński's approach.

To do:

- Does this model also apply to more specific discussions of paradigmatic examples?
- Is this modelling (by *aggr*) aequivalent to a modelling by conditional probability ($p(A, B)$, where B contains information about the religious or profane point of view)?
- How to expand the discussion about the adequacy of the model?
- How to deal with normative statements?

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