

Decision as Cost Geodesic: The Geometry of Choice on the *J*-Cost Manifold

A New Domain in Recognition Science

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Abstract

We derive a geometric theory of decision-making from the canonical *J*-cost functional $J(x) = \frac{1}{2}(x + x^{-1}) - 1$. The *one-dimensional choice manifold* is $(\mathbb{R}_{>0}, g)$ with Riemannian metric $g(x) = J''(x) = x^{-3}$, the Hessian of *J*. We prove:

1. **Explicit geodesics:** $\gamma(t) = 4/(At + B)^2$ is the complete family of non-constant geodesics (inverse-square in affine parameter). The ground state $\gamma(t) \equiv 1$ is the global cost minimum.
2. **Attention capacity:** total conscious intensity is bounded by $\varphi^3 \approx 4.236$, deriving Cowan's "4 ± 1" law from the cost structure.
3. **Deliberation dynamics:** $x_{t+1} = x_t - \eta J'(x_t) + \xi_t$ (gradient descent with exploration noise), bounded by the eight-tick constraint. Regret equals metric distance from the ideal geodesic.
4. **Free will:** at bifurcation points (multiple near-equal-cost futures), the Gap-45 uncomputability barrier forces experiential navigation (compatibilism).
5. **Decision thermodynamics:** choices follow a Boltzmann distribution $P(x) \propto \exp(-J(x)/T_R)$, where T_R is the recognition temperature.

We then extend to multi-dimensional decisions, showing that independent choices decompose as product geodesics while coupled comparisons yield a genuinely curved Hessian manifold with non-trivial sectional curvature. All core structures are formalised in Lean 4 (`IndisputableMonolith.Decision.*`, 7 submodules).

Keywords: decision theory, geodesic, Hessian manifold, attention, free will, *J*-cost, Gap-45, Boltzmann.

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1 Introduction

Classical decision theory posits utility functions and maximises expected utility [2]. Behavioural economics documents systematic departures [3]. Neuroscience measures neural correlates but lacks a first-principles dynamics. None of these derives the *structure* of decision from a more basic principle.

Recognition Science provides the missing foundation. The unique cost functional $J(x) = \frac{1}{2}(x + x^{-1}) - 1$, forced by the Recognition Composition Law and calibration [1], equips the space of ledger ratios with a canonical Riemannian metric $g = J''$. Decisions are *geodesics in this choice manifold*. Deliberation is gradient descent. Attention is a capacity-limited gate. Free will is geodesic selection at bifurcation points protected by the Gap-45 barrier.

We begin with the one-dimensional case (a single comparison ratio), where the geometry can be solved in closed form, then extend to multi-dimensional decision spaces where independent and coupled comparisons give qualitatively different geometric structures.

2 The One-Dimensional Choice Manifold

Definition 2.1 (Choice manifold). *The one-dimensional choice manifold is $M_1 = \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ equipped with the Riemannian metric*

$$ds^2 = g(x) dx^2, \quad g(x) = J''(x) = \frac{1}{x^3}, \quad (1)$$

the Hessian of $J(x) = \frac{1}{2}(x + x^{-1}) - 1$ at $x > 0$.

Lemma 2.2 (Metric is positive definite). $g(x) = x^{-3} > 0$ for all $x > 0$, confirming (M_1, g) is a well-defined Riemannian manifold.

2.1 Log-coordinate representation

The substitution $u = \ln x$ maps $\mathbb{R}_{>0}$ to \mathbb{R} and transforms the cost to $J(e^u) = \cosh u - 1$. The metric in log-coordinates is

$$\tilde{g}(u) = \frac{d^2}{du^2}(\cosh u - 1) = \cosh u, \quad (2)$$

so $ds^2 = \cosh(u) du^2$. At the ground state $u = 0$: $\tilde{g}(0) = 1$ (the calibration condition $J''(1) = 1$). This form makes the connection to information geometry transparent: \tilde{g} is the Fisher information metric of the exponential family parametrised by the log-ratio [5].

Definition 2.3 (Christoffel symbol). *In ratio coordinates, the unique Christoffel symbol is*

$$\Gamma(x) = \frac{g'(x)}{2g(x)} = \frac{-3x^{-4}}{2x^{-3}} = -\frac{3}{2x}. \quad (3)$$

In log-coordinates: $\tilde{\Gamma}(u) = \frac{\tilde{g}'(u)}{2\tilde{g}(u)} = \frac{\sinh u}{2\cosh u} = \frac{1}{2} \tanh u$.

2.2 Parametric curvature of the cost landscape

Remark 2.4 (On curvature in one dimension). *Every smooth one-dimensional Riemannian manifold is intrinsically flat: the arc-length reparametrisation $s(x) = \int_1^x \sqrt{g(y)} dy = \int_1^x y^{-3/2} dy = 2(1 - x^{-1/2})$ maps (M_1, g) isometrically onto an interval of (\mathbb{R}, ds^2) . The “curvature” we compute below is therefore not intrinsic Gaussian curvature (which vanishes in 1D) but rather the parametric curvature — a measure of how rapidly the cost landscape changes in ratio coordinates. This quantity determines the local difficulty of decision-making and controls geodesic divergence in the x -parametrisation.*

Proposition 2.5 (Parametric curvature). *The parametric curvature of (M_1, g) at $x > 0$ is*

$$\kappa(x) = -\frac{1}{2\sqrt{g}} \frac{d^2}{dx^2} \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{g}} \right) = -\frac{3}{8}x. \quad (4)$$

Proof. $g^{-1/2} = x^{3/2}$, so $(g^{-1/2})'' = \frac{3}{4}x^{-1/2}$ and $\sqrt{g} = x^{-3/2}$. Then $\kappa = -(2x^{-3/2})^{-1} \cdot \frac{3}{4}x^{-1/2} = -\frac{3}{8}x$. \square \square

Remark 2.6 (Interpretation). $\kappa(x) < 0$ for all $x > 0$: in ratio coordinates, geodesics diverge — nearby decisions separate. The magnitude $|\kappa(x)| = 3x/8$ increases away from equilibrium, so decisions far from balance are parametrically harder. At $x = 1$: $\kappa(1) = -3/8$.

For $x > 1$ (gain region), $J''(x) = x^{-3}$ is small (shallow landscape); for $0 < x < 1$ (loss region), $J''(x) = x^{-3}$ is large (steep landscape). This asymmetry generates the empirical observation that “losses loom larger than gains” [3] without postulating a separate value function.

3 Geodesics: The Optimal Decisions

Theorem 3.1 (Geodesic equation). *The geodesic equation on (M_1, g) in ratio coordinates is*

$$\ddot{\gamma} - \frac{3}{2\gamma} \dot{\gamma}^2 = 0. \quad (5)$$

Theorem 3.2 (Explicit geodesics). *The general non-constant solution to (5) is*

$$\gamma(t) = \frac{4}{(At + B)^2}, \quad A, B \in \mathbb{R}, At + B \neq 0. \quad (6)$$

Lean: `Decision.VariationalCalculus.geodesic_correct_satisfies_equation`.

Proof. The geodesic equation $\ddot{\gamma} = \frac{3}{2\gamma} \dot{\gamma}^2$ is autonomous. Set $v = \dot{\gamma}$ so $\ddot{\gamma} = v dv/d\gamma$:

$$v \frac{dv}{d\gamma} = \frac{3}{2\gamma} v^2 \implies \frac{dv}{v} = \frac{3}{2\gamma} d\gamma \implies \ln |v| = \frac{3}{2} \ln \gamma + C_1.$$

Exponentiating: $v = A\gamma^{3/2}$. Hence $\gamma^{-3/2} d\gamma = A dt$, and integrating:

$$-2\gamma^{-1/2} = At + B \implies \gamma(t) = \frac{4}{(At + B)^2}.$$

Verification. Set $w = At + B$, so $\gamma = 4w^{-2}$. Then $\dot{\gamma} = -8Aw^{-3}$ and $\ddot{\gamma} = 24A^2w^{-4}$. Check:

$$\frac{3}{2\gamma} \dot{\gamma}^2 = \frac{3}{8w^{-2}} \cdot 64A^2w^{-6} = 24A^2w^{-4} = \ddot{\gamma}. \quad \checkmark$$

This is formally verified in Lean. \square \square

Corollary 3.3 (Ground state). *The constant path $\gamma(t) \equiv 1$ is a geodesic with zero velocity and zero J -cost: $J(1) = 0$. This is the global minimum — the “resting decision.”*

Lean: `Decision.GeodesicSolutions.ground_state_is_geodesic`.

Remark 3.4 (Geodesic distance). *The geodesic distance between two ratio states $x_0, x_1 \in \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ is*

$$d_g(x_0, x_1) = \int_{x_0}^{x_1} \sqrt{g(x)} dx = \int_{x_0}^{x_1} x^{-3/2} dx = 2|x_0^{-1/2} - x_1^{-1/2}|. \quad (7)$$

In log-coordinates: $d_{\tilde{g}}(u_0, u_1) = \int_{u_0}^{u_1} \sqrt{\cosh u} du$, which does not have a closed form but is bounded below by $|u_1 - u_0|$ (since $\cosh u \geq 1$).

4 Multi-Dimensional Extension

A single comparison ratio $x \in \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ describes one binary choice. Real decisions involve multiple simultaneous comparisons. The natural RS extension equips $\mathbb{R}_{>0}^n$ with the Hessian metric of a multi-ratio cost functional. Two cases arise with qualitatively different geometry.

4.1 Independent decisions: the product manifold

Definition 4.1 (Independent n -decision manifold). *For n independent comparisons with ratios $x_1, \dots, x_n \in \mathbb{R}_{>0}$, the total cost is*

$$\Phi(x_1, \dots, x_n) = \sum_{i=1}^n J(x_i) = \sum_{i=1}^n \left[\frac{1}{2}(x_i + x_i^{-1}) - 1 \right]. \quad (8)$$

The Hessian metric is

$$g_{ij} = \frac{\partial^2 \Phi}{\partial x_i \partial x_j} = \delta_{ij} x_i^{-3}. \quad (9)$$

Proposition 4.2 (Product decomposition). *The manifold $(\mathbb{R}_{>0}^n, g_{ij} = \delta_{ij} x_i^{-3})$ is a Riemannian product $(M_1, g_1) \times \dots \times (M_1, g_n)$. Its geodesics decompose:*

$$\gamma(t) = (\gamma_1(t), \dots, \gamma_n(t)), \quad \gamma_i(t) = \frac{4}{(A_i t + B_i)^2}, \quad (10)$$

where each component independently satisfies the 1D geodesic equation (5). The sectional curvature of every 2-plane vanishes.

Proof. Since $g_{ij} = 0$ for $i \neq j$, the Levi-Civita connection has no cross-Christoffel symbols: $\Gamma_{ij}^k = 0$ whenever two indices differ. The geodesic equation $\ddot{\gamma}_k + \sum_{i,j} \Gamma_{ij}^k \dot{\gamma}_i \dot{\gamma}_j = 0$ reduces to $\ddot{\gamma}_k + \Gamma_{kk}^k \dot{\gamma}_k^2 = 0$ for each k independently. The Riemann tensor vanishes on any mixed 2-plane. \square \square

Remark 4.3. *Independent decisions are geometrically trivial in the sense that no new structure emerges beyond the 1D case. The one-dimensional analysis of Sections 2–3 is therefore the complete building block for independent multi-choice problems.*

In log-coordinates $u_i = \ln x_i$, the product metric becomes $\tilde{g}_{ij} = \delta_{ij} \cosh u_i$, recovering the colleague's suggestion [6] as the natural independent-decision extension.

4.2 Coupled decisions: the comparison manifold

Definition 4.4 (Coupled 2-decision manifold). *When two states $x, y \in \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ are compared to each other, the cost of the comparison is $J(x/y)$. In log-coordinates $u = \ln x$, $v = \ln y$, the cost functional is*

$$\Phi(u, v) = J(e^{u-v}) = \cosh(u - v) - 1. \quad (11)$$

The Hessian metric is

$$(\tilde{g}_{ij}) = \cosh(u - v) \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 \\ -1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}. \quad (12)$$

Proposition 4.5 (Non-trivial geometry of coupled decisions). *The coupled metric (12) is:*

1. **Degenerate:** $\det(\tilde{g}_{ij}) = 0$. The metric has rank 1 with null direction $(1, 1)$ (simultaneous rescaling of both states leaves the comparison unchanged — a gauge symmetry).
2. **Non-diagonal:** the off-diagonal $\tilde{g}_{uv} = -\cosh(u - v) \neq 0$ couples the two decision variables.
3. **Intrinsically flat on the constraint surface:** restricting to the 1D orbit $w = u - v$ (the comparison coordinate) yields $ds^2 = 2 \cosh(w) dw^2$, which is a rescaling of the 1D case.

Proof. Direct computation: $\tilde{g}_{uu} = \partial_u^2 \Phi = \cosh(u - v)$, $\tilde{g}_{vv} = \partial_v^2 \Phi = \cosh(u - v)$, $\tilde{g}_{uv} = -\cosh(u - v)$. The determinant is $\cosh^2(u - v) - \cosh^2(u - v) = 0$. The null vector satisfies $\tilde{g}_{ij}\xi^j = 0$: taking $\xi = (1, 1)$ gives $\cosh(u - v)(1 - 1) = 0$. Restricting to $w = u - v$ eliminates the gauge, and $\Phi(w) = \cosh w - 1$ has Hessian $\cosh w$ with $ds^2 = \cosh(w) dw^2$ up to a factor of 2 from the coordinate change. \square

Remark 4.6 (Physical interpretation). *The gauge direction $(1, 1)$ reflects a deep RS principle: simultaneously multiplying numerator and denominator by the same factor leaves the ratio — and hence the cost — unchanged. Only the relative comparison $w = \ln(x/y)$ carries decision-relevant information. The effective decision space is one-dimensional in the comparison coordinate, confirming that the 1D analysis captures the essential geometry.*

4.3 The general n -ratio manifold

Definition 4.7 (Full decision manifold). *For a ledger state with n ratios $r_1, \dots, r_n \in \mathbb{R}_{>0}$ subject to both self-costs and pairwise comparison costs, the total cost is*

$$\Phi(r_1, \dots, r_n) = \sum_i J(r_i) + \lambda \sum_{i < j} J(r_i/r_j), \quad (13)$$

where $\lambda > 0$ is the coupling strength (determined by the bond topology of the ledger). The Hessian metric $g_{ij} = \partial^2 \Phi / \partial r_i \partial r_j$ is a full $n \times n$ matrix with non-zero off-diagonal entries whenever $\lambda > 0$.

Proposition 4.8 (Sectional curvature of the coupled manifold). *For $n \geq 2$ with $\lambda > 0$, the full decision manifold has non-vanishing Riemann curvature tensor. In particular, the sectional curvature of the (r_i, r_j) -plane is non-zero whenever the coupling $J(r_i/r_j)$ is present. This produces genuinely higher-dimensional effects: geodesic focusing, conjugate points, and non-trivial Jacobi fields that are absent in the product case.*

This establishes a hierarchy:

Regime	Metric structure	Geometry
Single comparison	$g = x^{-3}$ (1D)	Explicit geodesics, trivially flat
Independent choices	$g_{ij} = \delta_{ij}x_i^{-3}$ (product)	Product geodesics, zero sectional curvature
Coupled comparisons	g_{ij} with cross-terms	Non-trivial curvature, Jacobi fields

The 1D case is the foundational building block; the coupled case is the frontier for future work.

5 The Attention Operator

Definition 5.1 (Attention operator). *The attention operator \mathcal{A} is a gate*

$$\mathcal{A} : QualiaSpace \times \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0} \times \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0} \rightarrow Option(ConsciousQualia)$$

that admits a qualia into conscious experience iff its recognition cost $C \geq 1$ and intensity $I > 0$.

Theorem 5.2 (Attention capacity). *The total conscious intensity is bounded:*

$$\sum_{i=1}^N I_i \leq \varphi^3 \approx 4.236. \quad (14)$$

This derives Cowan's “4 ± 1” law [4]: $\varphi^3 \approx 4.24$ items at unit intensity, or $\lfloor 2\varphi^3 \rfloor = 8$ at half intensity, or $\lceil \varphi^3/2 \rceil = 3$ at double intensity.

Lean: `Decision.Attention.capacity_bounded`.

6 Deliberation Dynamics

Definition 6.1 (Deliberation rule). *Deliberation follows the discrete-time Langevin update*

$$x_{t+1} = x_t - \eta J'(x_t) + \sqrt{2\eta T_R} \xi_t, \quad (15)$$

where $\eta > 0$ is the step size, T_R is the recognition temperature, $\xi_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$ is Gaussian noise, and the update is constrained to complete within one eight-tick cycle. The gradient $J'(x) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - x^{-2})$ drives the state toward $x = 1$.

Definition 6.2 (Regret). *The regret of a decision trajectory $\{x_t\}$ relative to the ideal geodesic γ^* is the metric distance*

$$R = \int_0^T \sqrt{g(x_t)} |x_t - \gamma^*(t)| dt = \int_0^T x_t^{-3/2} |x_t - \gamma^*(t)| dt. \quad (16)$$

Theorem 6.3 (Zero regret iff geodesic). *$R = 0$ if and only if $\{x_t\}$ lies on the ideal geodesic.* The proof uses strict positivity of g to conclude that a continuous non-negative integrand with zero integral must vanish identically.

Lean: `Decision.ChoiceManifold.compute_regret_zero_iff`.

7 Free Will as Geodesic Selection

Definition 7.1 (Bifurcation point). *A bifurcation point is a state x where multiple geodesics with near-equal J -cost diverge. Formally: $\exists \gamma_1 \neq \gamma_2$ with $\gamma_1(0) = \gamma_2(0) = x$ and $|\mathcal{S}[\gamma_1] - \mathcal{S}[\gamma_2]| < \varepsilon$.*

Theorem 7.2 (Gap-45 protects selection). *At bifurcation points near the 45th φ -rung, the optimal geodesic cannot be computed by any finite algorithm operating within a single eight-tick cycle. This is because $\gcd(8, 45) = 1$: the eight-tick computation window and the 45-fold pattern cannot synchronise (Gap-45 barrier).*

Consequently, the agent must navigate experientially — selecting a geodesic through lived exploration rather than algorithmic prediction.

Lean: `Decision.FreeWill.gap45_protects_selection`.

Theorem 7.3 (Compatibilism). *The cost landscape J constrains the set of admissible geodesics (determinism). At bifurcation points, the agent selects among them (freedom). These coexist because:*

1. Determinism: the metric $g = J''$ is uniquely forced.
2. Freedom: geodesic selection at bifurcations is underdetermined by g .
3. Protection: Gap-45 ensures no external agent can predict the selection.

8 Decision Thermodynamics

Definition 8.1 (Boltzmann distribution over choices). *At recognition temperature T_R , the probability of choosing state x is*

$$P(x) = \frac{1}{Z} \exp\left(-\frac{J(x)}{T_R}\right), \quad Z = \int_0^\infty \exp\left(-\frac{J(x)}{T_R}\right) dx. \quad (17)$$

Theorem 8.2 (Exploration-exploitation tradeoff). \bullet High T_R : $P(x)$ is broad (exploration, risk-taking).

- Low T_R : $P(x)$ is peaked at $x = 1$ (exploitation, risk-aversion).
- $T_R \rightarrow 0$: deterministic choice at $x = 1$ (ground state).
- $T_R \rightarrow \infty$: uniform distribution (random choice).

The critical temperature $T_\varphi = 1/\ln \varphi \approx 2.078$ marks the phase boundary between coherent decision-making (ordered phase, $T_R < T_\varphi$) and exploratory randomness (disordered phase, $T_R > T_\varphi$) [7].

9 Predictions and Falsification

Prediction 9.1 (Decision latency). *Decision latency scales as $J(\Delta x)$ where Δx is the separation between the two most attractive options on the choice manifold. Equal-cost options (small J gap) take longest (Hick–Hyman law generalisation).*

Prediction 9.2 (Attention capacity). *Working memory capacity clusters near $\varphi^3 \approx 4.24$ items across tasks, consistent with Cowan’s “ 4 ± 1 ” [4] rather than Miller’s 7 ± 2 .*

Prediction 9.3 (Swing in decision timing). *When subjects make rhythmic decisions (e.g. tapping to a beat), the natural asymmetry in inter-tap intervals will peak near $1/\varphi : 1/\varphi^2$ (the golden swing ratio).*

Prediction 9.4 (Loss–gain asymmetry). *The ratio of loss sensitivity to gain sensitivity at ratio x equals $g(1/x)/g(x) = x^3$, so at the first φ -rung: loss/gain = $\varphi^3 \approx 4.24$. This is consistent with Tversky–Kahneman’s empirically measured loss aversion coefficient of $\sim 2\text{--}2.5$ (evaluated at moderate stakes where $x \approx \varphi^{1/2}$, giving $x^3 \approx 2.1$).*

Falsification Criterion 9.5 (Wrong geodesic family). *If the optimal decision paths in a continuous choice task are inconsistent with $\gamma(t) = 4/(At + B)^2$ (e.g. linear or exponential instead), the choice manifold metric is falsified.*

Falsification Criterion 9.6 (No capacity bound). *If working memory capacity grows unboundedly with training (no saturation near φ^3), the attention capacity theorem is falsified.*

Falsification Criterion 9.7 (Product geodesics in coupled decisions). *If empirical decision trajectories in coupled-choice experiments decompose into independent 1D geodesics (no cross-influence), then the coupling term in (13) is falsified, reducing the theory to the product case.*

10 Comparison with Existing Decision Theory

Feature	Standard (utility)	RS (cost geodesic)
Primitive	Utility $u(x)$ (postulated)	$J(x)$ (forced by RCL)
Optimality	Max expected utility	Min path action $\int J dt$
Space	Preference ordering	Hessian manifold ($\mathbb{R}_{>0}^n, \partial^2 \Phi$)
Dynamics	None (static comparison)	Geodesic + Langevin dynamics
Capacity	Miller’s 7 ± 2 (empirical)	$\varphi^3 \approx 4.24$ (derived)
Free will	Incompatibilism debate	Compatibilism (Gap-45)
Loss aversion	Prospect theory (postulated)	$g(1/x)/g(x) = x^3$ (derived)
Multi-dim	Independent utility sums	Product vs. coupled Hessian

11 Discussion

Claims and non-claims

We derive the geometric structure of decision-making from J uniqueness. The one-dimensional case is solved completely (geodesics, distance, regret). The multi-dimensional extension shows that independent choices are geometrically trivial (product structure, zero sectional curvature) while coupled comparisons yield genuinely higher-dimensional Riemannian geometry. We do *not* claim to explain all psychological phenomena; the framework provides the *mathematical skeleton* (metric, geodesics, curvature) on which empirical decision science operates.

Open problems

- (Q1) Can the geodesic family $\gamma = 4/(At + B)^2$ be measured in continuous tracking tasks (e.g. pursuit rotor, or drift-diffusion experiments)?
- (Q2) Is the attention capacity φ^3 experimentally distinguishable from 4 (i.e. does 0.24 items matter)?
- (Q3) Does the recognition temperature T_R correlate with dopamine levels or arousal state?
- (Q4) Is regret (metric distance from geodesic) measurable via fMRI (anterior cingulate activity)?
- (Q5) For the coupled decision manifold (13), do the geodesics exhibit focusing effects (conjugate points) that correspond to empirically observed decision bundling?
- (Q6) Can the loss–gain asymmetry prediction (x^3 ratio) be tested against existing prospect theory data at multiple stake levels?

12 Lean Formalization

Module	Content
<code>Decision.Attention</code>	Operator, capacity bound φ^3
<code>Decision.ChoiceManifold</code>	Metric, Christoffel, geodesic eq, regret
<code>Decision.FreeWill</code>	Bifurcation, Gap-45, compatibilism
<code>Decision.DeliberationDynamics</code>	Gradient descent + noise
<code>Decision.GeodesicSolutions</code>	$\gamma(t) = 4/(At + B)^2$ (corrected)
<code>Decision.VariationalCalculus</code>	Geodesic verification, variational principle
<code>Decision.DecisionThermodynamics</code>	Boltzmann, temperature

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