

THE OPEN HANDBOOK OF FORMAL
EPISTEMOLOGY

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An epigraph: something pithy, and surprisingly apt to the context if you
just stop and think about it a moment. — *Someone Famous*

For whosits

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Suppose I am deliberating whether I should live on a boat and sail the Caribbean for a year. This is a decision not to be taken lightly. Many factors will matter for my decision. Several of these depend on uncertain states of the world. Will I be able to make a living? Is my boat really seaworthy? Will I miss my friends? How bad will the next winter be in my home town?

1 DECISION PROBLEMS AND THE USES OF DECISION THEORY

Giving a decision problem like this some formal structure may be helpful for a number of interrelated purposes. As an agent, it might help me come to a better decision. But giving formal structure to a decision problem may also help a third party: prior to an action, it may help them predict my behaviour. And after the action, it may help them both understand my action, and judge whether I was rational. Moreover, giving formal structure to a decision problem is a pre-requisite for applying formal decision theories. And formal decision theories are used for all the aforementioned purposes.

In the case of the decision whether to live on a boat, we could perhaps represent the decision problem as shown in Table 1. In this matrix, the rows represent the actions I might take. In our case, these are to either live on a boat, or not to live on a boat. The columns represent the relevant states of the world. These are conditions that are out of my control, but matter for what I should do. Suppose these involve my boat either being seaworthy, or not being seaworthy. I am uncertain which of these states of affairs will come about. Finally, the entries in the matrix describe the possible outcomes I care about that would result from my action combined with a state of the world.

	Boat seaworthy	Boat not seaworthy
LIVE ON A BOAT	Life on a boat, no storm damage	Life on a boat, storm damage
STAY IN HOME TOWN	Life as usual	Life as usual

Table 1: Should I live on a boat?

Since Savage's (1954) decision theory, it has become standard to characterise decision problems with state-outcome matrices like the one I just introduced. More generally, let $A_1 \dots A_n$ be a set of n actions that are open to the agent, and let $S_1 \dots S_m$ be m mutually exclusive and exhaustive states of the world. These actions and states of the world combine to yield a set of $n \cdot m$ outcomes $O_{11} \dots O_{nm}$. Table 2 shows this more general state-outcome matrix.

	S_1	\dots	S_m
A_1	O_{11}	\dots	O_{1m}
\vdots	\vdots	\ddots	\vdots
A_n	O_{n1}	\dots	O_{nm}

Table 2: State-outcome matrix

Given such a representation of a decision problem, formal decision theories assume that agents have various attitudes to the elements of the state-outcome matrix. Agents are assumed to have preferences over the outcomes their actions might lead to. Depending on our interpretation of decision theory, we may also assume that agents can assign a utility value to the outcomes, and a probability value to the states of the world. Decision theories then require the preferences the agent has over actions, which are assumed to guide her choice behaviour, to relate to those other attitudes in a particular way.

1.1 Expected utility maximisation

Traditionally, the requirement that decision theories place on agents under conditions of uncertainty has been that agents should maximise their expected utility, or act as if they did. Decision theories which incorporate this requirement are known under the heading of 'expected utility theory'. In the special case where an agent is certain about the consequences of each of her actions, this requirement reduces to the requirement to maximise utility. Since we are always to some extent uncertain about the consequences of our actions, I will focus on the uncertain case here.¹ However, much of the following discussion will also apply to decision-

¹ I understand decision-making under 'uncertainty' here to refer to any case where an agent is not certain what the consequences of her actions will be, or what state will come about. A distinction is sometimes made between risk, uncertainty, ignorance and ambiguity, where 'risk' refers to the case where objective probabilities are known, 'uncertainty' refers to the case where an agent can make a subjective judgement about probabilities, an agent is in a state of 'ignorance' if she cannot make such probability assignments, and 'ambiguity' occurs when an agent can make probability assignments for some states, but not others.

making under certainty. Moreover, most of this entry will focus on expected utility theory. Some alternative decision theories are discussed in Section 6.

As we will see, the requirement to maximise expected utility takes different forms under different interpretations of expected utility theory. For now, let us assume that agents can assign utility values $u(O)$ to outcomes, and probability values $p(S)$ to states of the world. The expected utility is then calculated by weighting the utility of each possible outcome of the action by the probability that it occurs, and summing them together. Expected utility theory instructs us to prefer acts with higher expected utility to acts with lower expected utility, and to choose one of the acts with the highest expected utility.

In our example, suppose that I think that the chances that my boat is seaworthy are 50%, and that the relevant utilities are the ones given in Table 3. In that case, the expected utility of living on a boat will be $0.5 \cdot 200 + 0.5 \cdot 20 = 110$, while the expected utility of staying in my home town is 100. I conclude I should live on a boat.

	Boat seaworthy	Boat not seaworthy	EU
LIVE ON A BOAT	200	20	110
STAY IN HOME TOWN	100	100	100

Table 3: Decision problem with utilities

Formally, the expected utility $EU(A)$ of an action can be expressed as follows:

$$EU(A_i) = \sum_{j=1}^m p(S_j) \cdot u(O_{ij}).$$

Expected utility theory requires agents to prefer acts for which this weighted sum is higher to acts for which this weighted sum is lower, and to choose an action for which this weighted sum is maximised.

1.2 The uses of decision theory

Now we can see how expected utility theory could be put to each of the different uses mentioned above. The requirement to maximise expected utility (or to act as if one did), however it is understood, is considered as a requirement of practical rationality by proponents of expected utility theory. In particular, the requirements of expected utility theory are often interpreted to capture what it means to be instrumentally rational, that

While these differences will play a role later in this entry, it is not helpful to make these distinctions at this point.

is, what it means to take the appropriate means to one's ends, whatever those ends may be. We will see how this may be cashed out in more detail in Section 3, when we discuss different interpretations of expected utility theory. For now, note that if we take the utility function to express the agent's ends, then the requirement to maximise the expectation of utility sounds like a natural requirement of instrumental rationality.

Sometimes, the requirements of expected utility theory are also understood as expressing what it means to have coherent ends in the first place. Constructivists about utility (see Section 3.1) often understand expected utility theory as expressing requirements on the coherence of preferences. But on that understanding, too, expected utility theory does not make any prescriptions on the specific content of an agent's ends. It merely rules out certain combinations of preferences. And so for those who think that some ends are irrational in themselves, expected utility theory will at best be an incomplete theory of practical rationality.

If we understand the requirements of expected utility theory as requirements of practical rationality, it seems like expected utility theory could help me as an agent make better decisions. After I have formally represented my decision problem, expected utility theory could be understood as telling me to maximise my expected utility (or to act as if I did). In the above example, we employed expected utility theory in this way. Expected utility theory helped me decide that I should live on a boat. In this guise, expected utility theory is an *action-guiding* theory.

From a third party perspective, expected utility theory could also be used to judge whether an agent's action was rational. Having represented the agent's decision problem formally, we judge an action to be rational if it was an act with maximum expected utility. This understands expected utility theory as a *normative* theory: a theory about what makes it the case that somebody acted rationally.

It is important to note the difference between the action-guiding and the normative uses of expected utility theory.² An action can be rational according to normative expected utility theory even if the agent did not use expected utility theory as an action-guiding theory. One could even hold that expected utility theory is a good normative theory while being a bad action-guiding theory. This would be the case if most agents are bad at determining their expected utility, and do better by using simpler heuristics.³

² Herbert Simon famously drew attention to this difference when he distinguished between *procedural* and *substantive* rationality, drawing on a similar distinction made by Max Weber (1922/2005). See Simon (1976).

³ Starting with Tversky and Kahneman (1974), there has been a wealth of empirical literature studying what kind of heuristics decision-makers use when making decisions under uncertainty, and how well they perform. See, for instance, Payne, Bettman, and Johnson (1993) and Gigerenzer, Todd, and Gigerenzer (2000).

Expected utility theory is also often put to an explanatory or predictive use, especially within economics or psychology. If we assume that agents follow the requirements of expected utility theory, and we know enough of their preferences or utility and probability assignments, we can use the theory to predict their behaviour. In this context, philosophers have been interested more in whether decision theory can help us *understand* an agent's actions. Interpreting an agent as maximising her expected utility in a formal decision problem may reveal her motives in action, and thus explain her action.

In fact, there is a tradition in the philosophy of action that claims that explaining another's behaviour always involves rationalising her behaviour to some extent. Davidson (1973) introduced the label 'radical interpretation' for the attempt to infer an agent's attitudes, such as her beliefs and desires, from her actions. He believed that this was only possible if we assume certain rationality constraints on how these attitudes relate. Ramsey (1926/2010) had already used expected utility theory to infer an agent's probabilities, and thus, he argued, her beliefs from her behaviour. Lewis (1974) showed that expected utility theory captures Davidson's constraints on the relationship between beliefs and desires, and thus can be used to elicit beliefs and desires. Davidson himself later argued, in Davidson (1985), that expected utility theory can be extended to further elicit an agent's *meanings*, that is, her interpretation of sentences. This is sometimes known as the *interpretive* use of decision theory.

And so in the philosophical literature, expected utility theory has been used as an action-guiding theory, a normative theory, and an interpretive theory.⁴ Other decision theories have been put to the same uses. As we will see in Section 6, there are alternatives to expected utility theory that offer rival prescriptions of practical rationality. However, most alternatives to expected utility theory have been introduced as primarily descriptive theories, that are used to predict and explain behaviour that need not be rational.

Now that we have seen what kinds of uses expected utility theory can be put to, the next section will look at some influential applications of expected utility theory.

1.3 Some Applications

Expected utility theory has proven to be an enormously fruitful theory, that has been applied in various different fields and disciplines. Originally, it found application mostly in the theory of consumer choice. This field

⁴ Bermudez (2009) draws a similar tri-partite distinction between the normative, action-guiding and explanatory/predictive dimensions of decision theory. Similarly, Buchak (2016) distinguishes between the normative and interpretive uses of decision theory.

of economics studies why consumers choose some goods rather than others, and helps to predict market outcomes. Expected utility theory has been used to explain the shape of demand curves for goods. The demand for insurance, in particular, is difficult to understand without a formal theory of choice under uncertainty. Expected utility theory has also helped to explain some phenomena that had previously seemed surprising. A classic example here is adverse selection, which occurs when there is an information asymmetry between buyers and sellers in the market. In these kinds of situations, sellers of high quality goods may be driven out of the market. Akerlof (1970) first explained this phenomenon, and a rich literature has developed since. Einav and Finkelstein (2011) provide a helpful overview of work on adverse selection in insurance markets.

Decision theory has also found application in many fields outside of economics. For instance, in politics, it has been used to study voting and voter turn-out,⁵ in law it has been used to study judicial decisions,⁶ and in sociology it has been used to explain class and gender differences in levels of education.⁷

Expected utility theory has also been influential in philosophy. Apart from it being an important contender as a theory of practical rationality, expected utility theory plays an important role in ethics, in particular in consequentialist ethics. Along with Jackson (1991), many consequentialists believe that agents ought to maximise expected moral goodness. Moreover, expected utility theory has been applied to the question of what agents ought to do in the face of moral uncertainty—uncertainty about what one ought to do, or even about which moral theory is the right one.⁸

Recently, expected utility theory has found application in epistemology in the form of *epistemic decision theory*. Here, agents are modeled as receiving epistemic utility from being in various epistemic states, such as being certain of the proposition that my boat is sea-worthy. I will receive a high epistemic utility from being in that state in the case where my boat in fact turns out to be seaworthy, and low epistemic utility when my boat turns out not to be seaworthy. Agents are then modeled as maximising their expected epistemic utility. Epistemic utility theory has been used to justify various epistemic norms, such as probabilism (the norm that an agent's credences should obey the probability calculus), and conditionalisation (the norm that agents should update their credences by conditionalizing their old credence on the new evidence they received). For an overview of these arguments, see Pettigrew (2011).

5 Downs (1957) counts as the first systematic application of decision theoretic models from economics to politics. For recent work on voting specifically, see Feddersen (2004).

6 See, for instance, Epstein, Landes, and Posner (2013).

7 See, for instance, Breen and Goldthorpe (1997).

8 See, for instance, Lockhart (2000), and Sepielli (2013) for a criticism of Lockhart's approach.

1.4 *Formulating decision problems*

How should the decision problems that formal decision theories deal with be formulated in the first place? In order to apply a formal decision theory, the choices an agent faces need to already be represented as a formal decision problem. Table 1 offered one representation of my choice of whether to live on a boat. But how can we be sure it was the right one?

For his decision theory, Savage (1954) assumed that states are descriptions of the world that include everything that might be relevant to the agent. Similarly, he thought that descriptions of outcomes are descriptions of “everything that might happen to the person” (p. 13). Joyce (1999, p. 52) cashes out a rule for specifying outcomes that also appeals to relevance. He claims that a description of an outcome should include everything that might be relevant to the agent, in the following sense: whenever there is some circumstance such that an agent would strictly prefer an outcome in the presence of that circumstance to the same outcome in the absence of that circumstance, the outcome has been underspecified. Importantly, this implies that an agent’s evaluation of an outcome should be independent of the state it occurs in, and the act that brought it about. All of this means that the sets of states and outcomes will end up being very fine-grained. Moreover, Savage also thinks of actions as functions from states to outcomes. This means that in each state, each action leads to a unique outcome. To ensure this, the set of actions, too, will have to be very fine-grained.

Note that this means that the decision problem I presented in Table 1 was hopelessly underspecified. When it comes to the decision of whether to live on a boat for a year or not, I do not only care about whether my boat will have storm damage or not. I also care, for instance, about whether I will have enough money for the year. I will evaluate the outcome “Life on a boat, no storm damage” differently depending on whether I will have enough money for the year or not. In fact, the exact amount of money I will have is going to matter for my decision. And so my decision problem should really distinguish between many different states of affairs involving me having more or less money, and the many different outcomes that occur in these states of affairs.

Jeffrey (1965/1983), who offered a famous alternative to Savage’s decision theory (see Section 2.4), and treated states, acts, and outcomes all as propositions, went so far as to define outcomes such that they entail an act and a state. An act and a state are also supposed to entail the outcome, and so we can simply replace outcomes with the conjunction of an act and a state in the decision matrix.

These ways of individuating outcomes will obviously lead to very large decision matrices for any real life decision. There are two reasons why we

might find this problematic. The first reason has to do with the efficiency of the decision-making process. If we want our decision theory to be an action-guiding theory, then decision problems can't be so complex that ordinary agents cannot solve them. An action-guiding theory should be efficient in its application. Efficiency may also be a concern for the interpretive project. After all, this project wants to enable us to interpret each other's actions. And so doing so should not be overly complicated.

Savage called decision problems that specify every eventuality that might be relevant to an agent's choice "grand world" decision problems. Joyce (1999) holds that we should really be trying to solve such a grand-world problem, but acknowledges that real agents will always fall short of this. Instead, he claims, they solve "small world" decision problems, which are coarsenings of grand-world decision problems. If we treat acts, states and outcomes as propositions, this means that the acts, states and outcomes of the small world decision problems are disjunctions of the acts, states, and outcomes of the grand-world decision problem. The decision problem described in Table 1 is such a small-world decision problem.

Joyce (1999, p. 74) holds that an agent is rational in using such small-world decision problems to the extent that she is justified in believing that her solution to the small-world decision problem will be the same as her solution to the grand-world decision problem would be. This permits the use of small world decision problems both for the action-guiding and normative purposes of decision theory whenever the agent is justified in believing that they are good enough models of the grand-world decision problem.

Joyce argues that this condition is met in Jeffrey's decision theory *if* an agent correctly evaluates all coarse outcomes and actions, while it is not generally met in Savage's decision theory. As will be explained in Section 2.4, this is due to the feature of *partition invariance*, which Jeffrey's theory has and Savage's theory does not. Despite these arguments, if efficiency in decision-making is an important concern, as it is for an action-guiding theory, one might think that an agent should sometimes base her decision on a small-world decision problem even if she is fairly certain that her decision based on the grand-world decision problem will be different. She might think that her solution to a small-world decision problem will be close enough to that of the grand-world decision problem, while solving the small-world decision problem will save her costs of deliberation.

The second argument against having too fine-grained a decision problem is that this makes expected utility theory not restrictive enough. As will be explained in more detail in Section 2, the axioms used in the representation theorems of expected utility theory concern what combination of preferences are permissible. If preferences attach to outcomes, and outcomes can be individuated as finely as we like, then the danger is that

the norm to abide by the axioms of decision theory does not constrain our actions much.

For instance, consider the following preference cycle, where a , b and c are outcomes, and \prec expresses strict preference:

$$a \prec b \prec c \prec a.$$

Preference cycles such as this are ruled out by the transitivity axiom, which all representation theorems we shall look at in Section 2 share. When outcomes can be individuated very finely, the following two problems may arise. Firstly, a number of authors have worried that any potential circularity in an agent's preferences can be removed by individuating outcomes more finely, such that there is no circularity anymore. Secondly, and relatedly, fine individuation may mean that no outcome can ever be repeated. In that case, an agent cannot reveal a preference cycle in her actions, and so we cannot interpret her as being irrational.

To see this, note that if we treat the first and the second occurrence of outcome a above as two different outcomes, say a_1 and a_2 , the circularity is removed:

$$a_1 \prec b \prec c \prec a_2.$$

The worry is that this can always be done, for instance by distinguishing “option a if it is compared to b ” from “option a if it is compared to c ”. If this strategy is always available, in what sense is the transitivity axiom a true restriction of the agent's preferences and actions? If we can't show that decision theory puts real restrictions on an agent's choices, then this is a problem especially for the action-guiding and normative projects.

A number of authors⁹ have held that this problem shows that the axioms of decision theory on their own cannot serve as a theory of practical rationality (even a partial one), but have to be supplemented with a further principle in order to serve their function. Broome (1991, chapter 5) notes that the problem can be dealt with by introducing rational requirements of indifference. Rational requirements of indifference hold between outcomes that are modeled as different, but that it would be irrational for the agent to have a strict preference between. If there was a rational requirement of indifference between a_1 and a_2 , for instance, the preference cycle would be preserved.

However, we may also restrict how finely outcomes can be individuated to solve the problem, by not allowing a distinction between a_1 and a_2 . Broome (1991, chapter 5) advocates a rule of individuation by justifiers that serves the same role as the rational requirements of indifference. According to this rule, two outcomes can only be modeled as distinct if it is not irrational to have a strict preference between them.

⁹ See, especially, Broome (1991), Pettit (1991) and Dreier (1996).

Pettit (1991) proposes an alternative rule for individuation: two outcomes should be modeled as distinct just in case they differ in some quality the agent cares about, where caring about a quality cannot itself be cashed out in terms of preferences over outcomes. And Dreier (1996) argues that two outcomes should be distinguished just in case there are circumstances where an agent has an actual strict preference between them. Note that this rule for individuation is equivalent to the one proposed by Joyce, but Pettit's and Broome's rules may lead to coarser grained individuations of decision problems. The coarser grained the individuations, the more restrictive the axioms of expected utility theory end up being.

2 REPRESENTATION THEOREMS

2.1 *The preference relation*

In decision theory, representation theorems are proofs that an agent's preferences are representable by a function that is maximised by the agent. In the case of expected utility theory, they are proofs that an agent's preferences are such that we can represent her as maximising an expected utility function. As we will see in Section 3, many decision theorists believe that utility is nothing more than a convenient way to represent preferences. Representation theorems are crucial for this interpretation of utility. The significance of the representation theorems will be further discussed in Section 3.2.

A weak preference relation is a binary relation \succsim , which is usually interpreted either as an agent's disposition to choose, or her judgements of greater choiceworthiness.¹⁰ An agent weakly prefers x to y if she finds x at least as choiceworthy as y , or if she is disposed to choose x when x and y are available.

We can also define an indifference relation \sim and a strict preference relation \succ in terms of the weak preference relation \succsim :

1. $x \sim y$ if and only if $x \succsim y$ and $y \succsim x$.
2. $x \succ y$ if and only if $x \succsim y$ and not $y \succsim x$.

Representation theorems take such preference relations as their starting point. They then proceed by formulating various axioms that pose restrictions on the preference relation, some of which are interpreted as

¹⁰ Many economists interpret preference as 'revealed preference', and claim that an agent counts as preferring x to y just in case she actually chose x when y was also available. Such pure behaviourism is usually rejected in the philosophical literature because it takes away from the explanatory power of preferences, and does not allow for counter-preferential choice. For a critique of the notion of revealed preference, see Hausman (2000).

conditions of rationality. Let X be the domain of the preference relation. What representation theorems prove is the following. If an agent's preferences conform to the axioms, there will be a probability function and a utility function such that:

For all x and $y \in X$, $EU(x) \geq EU(y)$ if and only if $x \succsim y$.

All the representation theorems described in the following assume that the preference relation is a *weak ordering* of the elements in its domain. That means that the preference relation is transitive and complete:

TRANSITIVITY: For all x, y and $z \in X$, $x \succsim y$ and $y \succsim z$ implies that $x \succsim z$.

COMPLETENESS: For all x and $y \in X$, $x \succsim y$ or $y \succsim x$.

Section 4 will discuss potential problems with both completeness and transitivity.

Different representation theorems differ both in terms of the domain over which the preference relation is defined, and in terms of the other axioms needed for the representation theorem. They also differ in how many of the agent's attitudes other than preferences they take for granted. Consequently, they result in representation theorems of different strength.

2.2 Von Neumann and Morgenstern

One of the first representation theorems for expected utility is due to von Neumann and Morgenstern (1944) and takes probabilities for granted.¹¹ In this representation theorem, the objects of preference are *lotteries*, which are either probability distributions $L = (p_1, \dots, p_m)$ over the m outcomes, or probability distributions over these 'simple' lotteries. Probabilities are thus already part of the agent's object of preference.

While it helps to think of lotteries in the ordinary sense of monetary gambles where there is a known probability of winning some prize, von Neumann and Morgenstern intended for their representation theorem to have wider application. In our original example, if there is a 50% chance that my boat is seaworthy, then I face a 50/50 lottery over the outcomes described in Table 1. Note furthermore that, since we are dealing directly with probability distributions over outcomes, there is no need to speak of states of the world.

While von Neumann and Morgenstern's representation theorem is perhaps most naturally understood given an objective interpretation of probability, their representation theorem is in fact compatible with any interpretation of probability. All we need is to already have access to the relevant

¹¹ An earlier representation theorem is due to Ramsey (1926/2010) and derives probabilities as well as utilities. It is often considered as a precursor to Savage's and Bolker's representation theorems, discussed below. See R. Bradley (2004).

(precise) probabilities when applying the representation theorems. If we think of probability as the agent's subjective degrees of belief, we already need to know what those subjective degrees of belief are. If we think of it as objective chance, we need to already know what those objective chances are.

What von Neumann and Morgenstern go on to prove in their representation theorem is that, provided an agent's preferences over lotteries abide by certain axioms, there is a utility function over outcomes such that an agent prefers one lottery over another just in case its expected utility is higher. One crucial axiom needed for this representation theorem is the independence axiom, discussed in Section 5.1.

Note that the result is not that there is one unique utility function which represents the agent's preferences. In fact, there is a family of utility functions which describe the agent's preferences. According to von Neumann and Morgenstern's representation theorem, any utility function which forms part of an expected utility representation of an agent's preferences will only be unique up to positive, linear transformations. The different utility functions that represent an agent's preferences will thus not all share the same zero point. What outcome will yield twice as much utility will then also differ between different utility functions. It is therefore often claimed that these properties of utility functions represent nothing "real". What is invariant between all the different utility functions that represent the agent's preferences, however, are the ratios of utility differences, which can capture the curvature of the utility function. Such ratios are often used to measure an agent's level of risk aversion.¹²

2.3 *Savage*

While von Neumann and Morgenstern's representation theorem provides a representation of an agent's preferences where probabilities are already given, Savage (1954) infers both a utility function and probabilities from an agent's preferences.¹³ As we have already seen, the standard tripartite distinction of actions, outcomes and states of the world goes back to Savage. Instead of assuming, like von Neumann and Morgenstern did, that we can assign probabilities to outcomes directly, we introduce a set

¹² Risk aversion is further discussed in Section 5.3. Also see Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green (1995), chapter 6 for more detail on expected utility theory's treatment of risk aversion.

¹³ This is why von Neumann and Morgenstern's theory is sometimes referred to as a theory of decision-making under risk, and Savage's is referred to as a theory of decision-making under uncertainty. In the former, probabilities are already known, in the latter, subjective probabilities can be assigned by the agent. However, note that, as we pointed out above, von Neumann and Morgenstern's theory can also be applied when probabilities are subjective.

of states of the world, which determine what outcome an act will lead to. The agent does not know which of the states of the world will come about.

Savage takes the agent's preferences over acts as input, and introduces a number of axioms on these preferences. He derives both a probability function over states, which abides by the standard axioms of probability, and a utility function over outcomes which, like the one von Neumann and Morgenstern derived, is unique up to positive linear transformations. Together, they describe an expected utility function such that an act is preferred to another just in case it has a higher expected utility. Importantly, the agents in Savage's decision theory abide by the sure-thing principle, which serves a role similar to the independence axiom in von Neumann and Morgenstern's representation theorem, and will also be discussed in Section 5.1.

Acts, states and outcomes are all treated as theoretical primitives in Savage's framework. But Savage's representation theorem relies on a number of controversial assumptions about the act, state and outcome spaces and their relation. For one, probabilities apply only to states of the world, and utilities apply only to outcomes. Preferences range over both acts and outcomes. Savage assumed that an act and a state together determine an outcome. Most controversially, Savage assumes that there are what he calls *constant acts* for each possible outcome, that is, acts which bring about that outcome in any state of the world. For instance, there must be an act which causes me great happiness even in the event that the apocalypse happens tomorrow. What makes things worse, by completeness, agents are required to have preferences over all these acts. Luce and Suppes (1965) take issue with Savage's theory for this reason.

While the results of Savage's representation theorem are strong, they rely on these strong assumptions about the structure of the act space. This is one reason why many decision theorists prefer Jeffrey's decision theory and Joyce's modification thereof.

2.4 Jeffrey, Bolker and Joyce

Jeffrey's decision theory, developed in Jeffrey (1965/1983), uses an axiomatisation by Bolker (1966). While he does not rely on an act space as rich as Savage's, Jeffrey preserves the tripartite distinction of acts, states and outcomes. However, for him, all of these are propositions, which means he can employ the tools of propositional logic. Moreover, preferences, utility and probability all range over all three. Agents end up assigning

probabilities to their own acts,¹⁴ and assigning utilities to states of the world.

Jeffrey's theory is sometimes known as conditional expected utility theory, because agents who follow the axioms of his decision theory are represented as maximisers of a conditional expected utility. In Savage's decision theory, the utilities of outcomes are weighted by the unconditional probability of the states in which they occur. This is also the formulation we presented in Section 1.1. In the example there, we weighted the possible outcomes by the probability of the state they occur in. For instance, we weighted the outcome of enjoying a year on a boat without damages by the probability of my boat being seaworthy.

Jeffrey noted that the unconditional nature of Savage's decision theory may produce the wrong results in cases where states are made more or less likely by performing an action. In our example, suppose that, for whatever reason, my choosing to live on a boat for a year makes it more likely that my boat is seaworthy. The unconditional probability of the boat being seaworthy is lower than the probability of it being seaworthy given I decide to live on the boat. And thus using the unconditional probability may lead to the judgement that I shouldn't spend the year on the boat, because the probability of it not being seaworthy is too high—even if the boat will be very likely to be seaworthy if I choose to do so. To avoid this problem, Jeffrey argued, it is better to use probabilities that are in some sense conditional on the action whose expected utility we are evaluating. We should weight the outcome of spending a year on a boat without damage by the probability of the boat being seaworthy given that I choose to live on the boat for a year.¹⁵

Let the probability of a state given an act be $p_A(S)$. There is much disagreement on how this probability is to be interpreted. The main disagreement is whether it should be given a causal or an evidential interpretation. I postpone this discussion to Section 3.3. But let me note here that Jeffrey himself falls on the evidential side. Conditional expected utility theory advises us to maximise the following:

$$EU(A_i) = \sum_{j=1}^m p_{A_i}(S_j) \cdot u(O_{ij})$$

Jeffrey interprets this conditional expected utility as an act's 'news value', that is, as measuring how much an agent would appreciate the news that the act is performed.

¹⁴ This is a controversial feature of the theory. See Spohn (1977) for criticism of this assumption.

¹⁵ Savage's own solution to the problem is that, for his formalism to apply, states and acts need to be specified such that there is no dependence between an action being performed and the likelihood of a state. Jeffrey's response is more elegant in that it requires no such restriction on what kinds of decision problems it can be applied to.

The conditional nature of Jeffrey's decision theory is also what leads to its partition invariance.¹⁶ In Jeffrey's theory, the value of a disjunction is always a function of the value of its disjuncts. For instance, the value of a coarse outcome O_{1-10} which is a disjunction of outcomes O_1, \dots, O_{10} is a function of the values of the outcomes O_1, \dots, O_{10} . But we could also subdivide the coarse outcome O_{1-10} differently. O_{1-10} is also a disjunction of the coarse outcomes O_{1-5} and O_{6-10} , which are themselves disjunctions of O_1, \dots, O_5 and O_6, \dots, O_{10} respectively. And so we can also calculate the value of O_{1-10} from the values of O_{1-5} and O_{6-10} . Partition invariance means that we get the same value in either case. The value of O_{1-10} can be represented as a function of the values of any of its subdivisions. This means that, as long as utilities are assigned correctly to disjunctions, Jeffrey's decision theory gives equivalent recommendations no matter how finely we individuate outcomes, states and actions. Joyce argues that for this reason, the use of small-world decision problems is legitimate in Jeffrey's decision theory (see Section 1.4), and that that is a major advantage over Savage's unconditional, and partition variant decision theory.

Jeffrey's and Bolker's representation theorem is less strong than Savage's. It does not pin down a unique probability function. Nor does it result in a utility function that is unique up to positive linear transformations. Instead, it only ensures that probability and utility pairs are unique up to fractional linear transformations.¹⁷

Joyce (1999) argues that this shows that we need to augment Jeffrey's and Bolker's representation theorem with assumptions about belief, and not merely preference. Unlike von Neumann and Morgenstern, however, he does not propose to simply assume probabilities. Instead, he introduces a 'more likely than' relation, on which we can formulate a number of axioms, just as we did for the preference relation. The resulting representation theorem results in a unique probability function and a utility function which is unique up to positive linear transformations.¹⁸

We have introduced the most prominent representation theorems for expected utility theory.¹⁹ What do these representation theorems show? Each of them shows that if an agent's preferences abide by certain axioms, and certain structural conditions are met, her preferences can be represented by a utility (and probability) function (or families thereof) such that she prefers an act to another just in case its expected utility is higher.

¹⁶ See Joyce (1999), pp. 121-122.

¹⁷ A fractional linear transformation transforms u to $\frac{a \cdot u + b}{c \cdot u + d}$, with $a \cdot d - b \cdot c > 0$.

¹⁸ Also see R. Bradley (1998), for an alternative way to secure uniqueness.

¹⁹ A helpful, more technical and more detailed overview of representation theorems can be found in Fishburn (1981).

Agents who abide by the axioms can thus be represented as expected utility maximisers.

What these kinds of results show depends to some extent on the purpose we want to put our theory to. But it also depends on how we interpret the utilities and probabilities expected utility theory deals with. Section 3 gives an overview of these interpretations and then returns to the question of what the representation theorems can show.

3 INTERPRETATIONS OF EXPECTED UTILITY THEORY

3.1 *Interpretations of utility*

Some of the earliest discussions of choice under uncertainty took place in the context of gambling. The idea that gamblers maximise some expected value first came up in correspondence between Fermat and Pascal (1654/1929). Pascal, who formulated the expected value function in this context, thought of the value whose expectation should be maximised as money. This is natural enough in the context of gambling. Similarly, in this context it is natural to think of the probabilities involved as objective, and fixed by the parameters of the game.

However, money was soon replaced by the notion of utility as the value whose expectation is to be maximised. This happened for two interrelated reasons. First, the same amount of money may be worth more or less to us depending on our circumstances. In particular, we seem to get less satisfaction from some fixed amount of money the more money we already have. Secondly, the norm to maximise expected monetary value has some counterintuitive consequences. In particular, we can imagine gambles that have infinite monetary value, that we would nevertheless only pay a finite price for. Nicolas Bernouilli first demonstrated this with his famous St. Petersburg Paradox.²⁰

In response to these problems, Daniel Bernouilli (1738/1954) and Gabriel Cramer independently proposed a norm to maximise expected utility rather than expected monetary value. However, this raises the problem of how to interpret the notion of utility. One strand of interpretations takes utility to be a real psychological quantity that we could measure. Let us call such interpretations of utility ‘realist’. Early utilitarians adopted a realist interpretation of utility. For instance, Bentham (1789/2007) and Mill (1861/1998) thought of it as pleasure and the absence of pain.

²⁰ Bernouilli proposed a gamble in which a coin is thrown repeatedly. If it lands heads the first time, the player gets \$2. If it lands tails, the prize is doubled, and the coin thrown again. This procedure is repeated indefinitely. The expected value of the resulting gamble is thus $\$2 \cdot \frac{1}{2} + \$4 \cdot \frac{1}{4} + \$8 \cdot \frac{1}{8} + \dots$, which is infinite. However, most people would only pay a (low) finite amount for it.

Note, however, that these utilitarians were interested in defining utility for the purpose of an ethical theory rather than a theory of rationality. One problem with interpreting utility as pleasure in the context of expected utility theory is that the theory then seems to imply that true altruism can never be rational. If rationality requires me to maximise my own expected pleasure, then I can never rationally act so as to increase somebody else's happiness at my own expense.

For this and other reasons modern realists typically think of utility as a measure of the strength of an agent's desire or preference, or her level of satisfaction of these desires or preferences. I may strongly desire somebody else's happiness, or be satisfied if they achieve it, even if that does not directly make me happy.²¹ Jeffrey (1965/1983), for instance, speaks of desirabilities instead of utilities, and interprets them as degrees of desire (p. 63). The corresponding realist interpretation of the probabilities in expected utility theories is usually that of subjective degrees of belief.

The representation theorems described in Section 2 have, however, made a different kind of interpretation of utility (and probability) possible, and popular. These representation theorems show that preferences, if they conform to certain axioms, can be represented with a probability and utility function, or families thereof. And so, encouraged by these results, many decision theorists think of utility and probability functions as mere theoretical constructs that provide a convenient way to represent binary preferences. For instance, Savage (1954) presents his theory in this way. Importantly, on this interpretation, we cannot even speak of probabilities and utilities in the case where an agent's preferences do not conform with the axioms of expected utility theory. Let us call these interpretations of utility and probability 'constructivist'.²²

3.2 *The significance of the representation theorems*

Whether we adopt a realist or a constructivist interpretation of utility matters for how expected utility theory can serve the three purposes of decision theory described in Section 1.2, and for what the representation theorems presented in Section 2 really establish. Let us first look at the interpretive project. As already mentioned, those interested in the interpretive project have mostly been interested in inferring an agent's beliefs and

²¹ This is also the interpretation adopted by several later utilitarians, such as Hare (1981) and Singer (1993).

²² See Dreier (1996) and Velleman (1993/2000) for defenses of constructivism. Buchak (2013) draws slightly different distinctions. For her, any view on which utility is at least partially defined with respect to preferences counts as constructivist. Since this is compatible with holding that utility is a psychologically real quantity, she allows for constructivist realist positions. The position that utility expresses strength of desire, for her, is such a position. I will count this position as realist, and not constructivist.

desires from her choice behaviour. If that is the goal, then the probabilities and utilities involved in decision theory should at least be closely related to desires and beliefs. Under the assumption that agents maximise their utility and probability functions, thus understood, we can hypothesise, perhaps even derive, probability and utility functions that motivate an agent's actions.

How could the representation theorems we described in Section 2 help with this project? They go some way towards showing that beliefs and desires can be inferred from an agent's choice behaviour. But the following assumptions are also needed for this project to succeed:

1. The agent's choice behaviour must reflect her preferences, at least most of the time. This assumption is more likely to be met if we think of preferences as a dispositions to choose, rather than as judgements of choiceworthiness.
2. The axioms of the representation theorems must be followed by the agent, at least most of the time. If we want to use expected utility theory to deduce an agent's beliefs and desires, then the agent's preferences have to be representable by an expected utility function. While we can interpret the axioms as rationality constraints, these cannot be the kinds of constraints that people fail to meet most of the time. In particular, if we want to employ expected utility theory for Davidson's 'radical interpretation', then the choice behaviour of agents who fail to abide by the axioms will turn out to be unintelligible.
3. The probabilities and utilities furnished by the representation theorem must correspond to the agent's actual beliefs and desires.

Assumption 2 is controversial for the reasons described in Sections 4 and 5. But assumption 3 is also problematic. The representation theorems only show that an agent who abides by the axioms of the various representation theorems can be represented as an expected utility maximiser. But this is compatible with the claim that the agent can be represented in some other way. It is not clear why the expected utility representation should be the one which furnishes the agent's beliefs and desires.²³

To answer this challenge, the best strategy seems to be to provide further arguments in favour of expected utility maximisation, and in favour of probabilistic beliefs, apart from the plausibility of the axioms

²³ This question was raised, for instance, by Zynda (2000), Hajek (2008) and Meacham and Weisberg (2011). Zynda (2000) argues that the representation theorems alone cannot show that agents do or should have probabilistic degrees of belief. Meacham and Weisberg (2011) provide a number of arguments why the representation theorems alone cannot serve as the basis of decision theory.

of the representation theorems. Suppose we think it is plausible that agents should have probabilistic degrees of belief, and should maximise the expected degree of satisfaction of their desires. And suppose we also think that our preferences are closely related to our desires. Then if, given some plausible axioms, these preferences can be given an expected utility representation, we seem to have good reason to think that the utilities and probabilities furnished by the representation theorem correspond to our degrees of belief and strength of desire.

Setting aside the question of why we might want to have probabilistic degrees of belief, what could such realist arguments for expected utility maximisation be? Note that, for the purposes of the interpretive project, these arguments have to not only be normatively compelling, but also convince us that ordinary agents would be expected utility maximisers. One type of argument appeals to the advantages of being an expected utility maximiser when making decisions in a dynamic context. These will be covered in Section 7. Pettigrew (2014) makes another argument: for most realists, utility is supposed to capture everything an agent cares about. If that is true, then it seems plausible to say that in uncertain situations, I should be guided by my best estimate of how much utility I will get. We can appeal to results in de Finetti (1974) to argue that an agent's best estimate of a quantity is her subjective expectation. This is so because any estimate of the quantity that is a weighted sum different from the expectation will be accuracy dominated by an expectational estimate: the expectational estimate will be closer to the true value no matter what happens. Thus, I should maximise my expected utility.

So far, we have assumed a realist interpretation of utility and probability. Note, however, that expected utility theory could still be explanatorily useful even if a constructivist interpretation of utility and probability are adopted. It is often argued that the representation theorems show that the utility and probability functions allow for a simpler and more unified representation of an agent's preferences: all the agent's preferences can be described with one utility and probability function. This could be seen to make them more intelligible. In fact, Velleman (1993/2000) argues that being an expected utility maximiser makes an agent more intelligible to herself and others, and that this gives her a reason to be an expected utility maximiser.

Let us now turn to the action-guiding and normative projects. These projects will lead to quite different prescriptions depending on whether utility is interpreted in a realist or in a constructivist sense. Suppose that we are constructivists about utility. In that case, there is a sense in which the prescription to maximise expected utility does not make any sense. If one abides by the axioms of one's favourite representation theorem, one's preferences are representable as expected utility maximising. To

maximise expected utility, there is nothing more one needs to do, apart from act according to the preferences over acts one already has. But if one's preferences do not abide by the axioms, on the other hand, one simply does not have a utility function whose expectation one could maximise.

Consequently, constructivists often interpret the prescription of expected utility theory as a prescription to have preferences such that one can be represented as an expected utility maximiser. That is, one should abide by the axioms of expected utility theory. For the action-guiding project, this means that, as an agent, I should have preferences such that they abide by the axioms of expected utility theory. For the normative project, it means that we judge an agent to be irrational if she has preferences that violate the axioms. This is why constructivists often interpret expected utility theory as a theory about what it means to have coherent preferences or ends, rather than as a theory of means-ends rationality.

For realists, however, the prescription to maximise expected utility makes sense even independently of the representation theorems canvassed in Section 2. Consider first the action-guiding project, which aims to interpret expected utility theory as a theory that can guide an agent in deciding what to do. If utility is just my strength of desire, and probability is my degree of belief, and I have introspective access to these, then I can determine the expected utility of the various acts open to me. I can do so without considering the structure of my preferences, and whether they abide by the axioms of expected utility theory. Expected utility theory is then action-guiding without appeal to representation theorems. But note that the advice to maximise expected utility is only useful to agents if they really have such intuitive access to their own degrees of belief and strength of desire.²⁴

Similarly, if we are realists and our interests are normative, we can judge an agent to be irrational by considering her utilities and degrees of belief, and determining whether she failed to maximise expected utility. This is because there will be facts about the agent's utilities and probabilities even if she fails to maximise expected utility. Realists about utility and probability can also help themselves to the realist arguments for expected utility maximisation just mentioned. For them, the normative force of expected utility theory does not depend solely on the plausibility of the axioms of expected utility theory. If we adopt a realist interpretation of utility and probability, it is also easier to argue that expected utility theory provides us with a theory of instrumental rationality. Maximising expected utility could be seen as taking the means towards the end of achieving maximum utility. However, realists will also have to provide an argument that this is a goal rational agents ought to have.

²⁴ Also see Bermudez (2009) on this claim.

3.3 *Causal and evidential interpretations of expected utility theory*

We have said that the probabilities involved in expected utility theory are usually interpreted as subjective degrees of belief, at least by realists. As we have seen, Jeffrey, Joyce, and others have advocated a conditional expected utility theory. In conditional expected utility theory, agents determine an act's expected utility by weighting utilities by the different states' probabilities conditional on the act in question being performed. Above, we called this probability $p_A(S)$. How this probability is to be interpreted is a further important interpretive question. The main disagreement is about whether it should be given a causal or an evidential interpretation. Jeffrey himself had worked with an evidential interpretation, while causal decision theorists, such as Gibbard and Harper (1978/1981), Armendt (1986), or Joyce (1999)²⁵ have given it a causal interpretation.

The difference between these two interpretations is brought out by the famous Newcomb Problem, first introduced by Nozick (1969). In this problem, we imagine a being who is very reliable at predicting your decisions, and who has already predicted your choice in the following choice scenario. You are being offered two boxes. One is opaque and either has no money in it, or \$1,000,000. The other box is clear, and you can see that it contains \$1,000. You can choose to either take only the opaque box, or to take both boxes. Under normal circumstances, it would seem clear that you should take both boxes. Taking the clear box gives you \$1,000 more no matter what.

The complication, however, is that the being's prediction about your action determines whether there is money in the opaque box or not. If the being predicted that you will take two boxes, then there is no money in the opaque box. If the prediction was that you will take only the opaque box, there will be money in it. Since the being's prediction is reliable, those who take only one box tend to end up with more money than those who take two boxes.

Note that while this case is unrealistic, there are arguably real-life cases that resemble the Newcomb Problem in its crucial features. In these cases, the acts available to an agent are correlated with good or bad outcomes even though these are not causally promoted by the act. This happens in medical cases, for instance, if a behavioural symptom is correlated with a disease due to a common cause. Before the causal link between smoking and lung cancer was firmly established, interested parties hypothesised that there may be a common cause which causes both lung cancer, and the disposition to smoke. If that were right, smoking would not cause lung

²⁵ Joyce also first showed that the two interpretations can be given a unified treatment in a more general conditional expected utility theory.

cancer, but merely give you evidence that you are more likely to develop it.²⁶

Evidential and causal decision theory come apart in their treatment of these cases. Evidential decision theory traditionally interprets $p_A(S)$ as a standard conditional probability:

$$p_A(S) = \frac{p(A \& S)}{p(A)}.$$

According to this interpretation, the probability of the state where there is \$1,000,000 in the opaque box conditional on taking only one box is much higher than the probability of the state where there is \$1,000,000 in the opaque box conditional on taking two boxes. This is because the act of taking only one box provides us with evidence that the prediction was that you would take only one box, in which case there is money in the opaque box. And so expected utility maximisation would tell you to take only one box.

Causal decision theorists take issue with this, because at the time of decision, the agent's actions have no more influence on whether there is money in the opaque box or not. Either there is or there isn't already money in the box. In either case, it is better for you to take two boxes, as Table 4 illustrates. This kind of dominance reasoning speaks in favour of taking both boxes.

	Prediction: one box	Prediction: two boxes
TAKE ONE BOX	\$1,000,000	\$0
TAKE TWO BOXES	\$1,001,000	\$1,000

Table 4: The Newcomb Problem

Causal decision theory allows for this by giving $p_A(S)$ a causal interpretation. It measures the causal contribution of act A to whether state S obtains. Following a proposal by Stalnaker (1972/1981), Gibbard and Harper (1978/1981) use the probability of a conditional in their causal decision theory, instead of a conditional probability. In particular, they use the probability of the conditional that an outcome would occur if an action was performed.²⁷

In the Newcomb Problem, neither the act of taking nor the act of not taking the clear box make any causal contribution to whether there is money in the opaque box. And so, on the causal interpretation, $p_A(S)$

²⁶ See Price (1991) for more examples.

²⁷ Lewis (1981) shows that if the right partition of acts, states and outcomes is used, Savage's decision theory will give the same recommendations as Gibbard and Harper's, and is thus a type of causal decision theory.

just equals the unconditional probability $p(S)$ in both cases. And then dominance reasoning becomes relevant.

Note, however, that it is controversial whether taking both boxes really is the rational course of action in the Newcomb Problem. Those who advocate ‘one-boxing’, such as Horgan (1981/1985) and Horwich (1987), point out that one-boxers end up faring better than two-boxers. It is also controversial whether evidential decision theory really does yield the recommendation to one-box if the problem is represented in the right way: Eells (1981) argues that evidential decision theory, too, recommends two-boxing.

Jeffrey (1965/1983) himself supplements evidential decision theory with a ratifiability condition, which allows him to advocate two-boxing. The condition claims that an agent should maximise expected utility relative to the probability function she will have once she finally decides to perform the action. In the Newcomb Problem, only two-boxing is ratifiable. If the agent decided to one-box, she would then be fairly certain that there is money in the opaque box, and then she will wish she had also taken the second box. If she decides to two-box, she will be fairly certain that there is no money in the opaque box, and she will be glad that she at least got the \$1,000.²⁸

4 INCOMPLETENESS AND IMPRECISION

Several important challenges to expected utility theory have to do with the fact that expected utility theory asks us to have attitudes that are more extensive and precise than the preferences ordinary decision makers have. In fact, in many cases it does not seem irrational to have attitudes that are in some way imprecise or incomplete. And so the problems discussed in the following arise both for the interpretive as well as for the action-guiding and normative uses of decision theory.

The challenge takes different forms for constructivists and realists. For constructivists, imprecision and incompleteness will manifest as violations of the axioms of the representation theorems presented in Section 2. As we have seen, all of these representation theorems assume that the agent’s preference relation forms a weak ordering of the elements in its domain. This means that the preference relation must be transitive and complete.

²⁸ The status of the ratifiability condition is still a part of the contemporary debate on causal decision theory. One open question is what decision should be favoured in cases of decision instability, where no action is ratifiable, like in Gibbard and Harper’s Death in Damascus case (see Gibbard and Harper (1978/1981), and Egan (2007) for further, similar cases). Arntzenius (2008) and Joyce (2012) argue for ways of dealing with this problem. The ratifiability condition also helps to illuminate certain equilibrium concepts in game theory (see Joyce and Gibbard (1998)).

Both assumptions are controversial for related reasons. Completeness is controversial because it asks agents to have a more extensive set of preferences than they actually have. Transitivity is controversial in cases where an agent's desires are coarse-grained, as will be explained below. For realists, a related challenge is that both our degrees of belief and our strength of desire are not precise enough to allow for representation in terms of a precise probability and utility function.

4.1 *Incompleteness*

To start with the completeness condition, the worry here is that agents simply do not have preferences over all the elements of the set the decision theory asks them to have preferences over. For instance, if I have lived in Germany all my life, I might simply have no preference between living in Nebraska and living in Wyoming. It's not that I have never heard of these places. The question would just never occur to me. It might then neither be the case that I prefer Nebraska to Wyoming nor that I prefer Wyoming to Nebraska. I am also not indifferent between the two. I might simply have no preference. But if these outcomes are part of the set of outcomes the decision theory asks me to have preferences over, then this means that I am violating the completeness condition.

Similar claims are often made about cases of incommensurable values. In a famous example due to Sartre (1945/2007), a young man has to choose between caring for his sick mother and joining the French Resistance. The two options here are often said to involve incommensurable values: on the one hand, responsibility to one's family, and on the other hand, fighting for a just cause. In these kinds of cases, too, we might want to say that the young man is neither indifferent, nor does he prefer one option to the other. And here, this is not because the question of what he prefers has never occurred to the man. He may in fact think long and hard about the choice. Rather, he has no preference because the values involved are incommensurable.

These kinds of examples are more convincing if our notion of preference is that of a judgement of choiceworthiness. In these examples, agents have not made, or are unable to make judgements of choiceworthiness about some of the elements of the relevant set. If one thinks of preference as disposition to choose instead, one might think that even if an agent never thought about a particular comparison of outcomes, there can still be a fact of the matter what she would be disposed to choose if she faced the

choice. Moreover, if this is our notion of preference, we simply draw no distinction between indifference and incommensurability.²⁹

However, this alternative notion of preference may get into trouble when some of the acts in the relevant set are ones that the agent could not possibly choose between. The completeness condition in standard expected utility theory may require the agent to have what Broome (1991) calls ‘impractical preferences’. For instance, it might require an agent to have a preference between

O_1 : an orange, and

O_2 : an apple when the alternative is a banana

Choosing between these alternatives is impossible in the sense that O_2 will not come about unless the alternative is a banana, not an orange. And so it seems like we cannot determine the agent’s choice disposition between them.

Incompleteness in preference is often dealt with by replacing the completeness axiom in the various representation theorems with a condition of *coherent extendibility*.³⁰ That is, we only require that an agent’s preferences are such that we could extend her set of preferences in a way that is consistent with the other axioms of the representation theorem. The problem with this strategy is that any representation in terms of probability or utility that the representation theorem furnishes us with will only be a representation relative to an extension. There will usually be several extensions that are consistent with an agent’s incomplete preferences and the axioms of the theorem. And thus, there will be several possible representations of the agent’s preferences. The representation theorem will no longer furnish us with a unique probability function, and a utility function that is unique up to positive linear transformations. For this reason, incompleteness of preference is often associated with imprecise probabilities.

4.2 *Imprecise probabilities*

There is an active field of research investigating imprecise probabilities.³¹ These imprecise probabilities are usually represented by families of probability functions. And families of probability functions is exactly what the representation theorems furnish us with if the completeness condition is

²⁹ In fact, Joyce (1999) considers this an important argument against more behaviourist interpretations of preference.

³⁰ This is the strategy taken by Kaplan (1983), Jeffrey (1965/1983), and Joyce (1999).

³¹ See S. Bradley (2015) and Mahtani (2019) for helpful overviews of the literature. For an introduction to the theory of imprecise probabilities, see Augustin, Coolen, de Cooman, and Troffaes (2014).

replaced by a coherent extendibility condition. While this gives even a constructivist reason to engage with imprecise probabilities, there are also various realist arguments for doing so. Many formal epistemologists agree that sharp degrees of belief that can be expressed with a sharp probability function are both psychologically unrealistic, and cannot be justified in situations where there is insufficient evidence.³² If we believe that the probabilities in decision theory should accurately describe our belief states, the probabilities in decision theory should then be imprecise.

Another motivation for engaging with imprecise probabilities is that this allows us to treat states or outcomes to which the agent can assign precise probabilities differently from states or outcomes to which the agent cannot assign precise probabilities. This may allow us to make sense of the phenomenon of *ambiguity aversion*. Ambiguity aversion occurs in situations where the probabilities of some states are known, but the agent has no basis for assigning probabilities to some other states. In such situations, many agents are biased in favour of lotteries where the probabilities are known. For instance, take the following example from Camerer and Weber (1992):³³

Suppose you must choose between bets on two coins. After flipping the first coin thousands of times you conclude it is fair. You throw the second coin twice; the result is one head and one tail. Many people believe both coins are probably fair ($p(\text{head}) = p(\text{tail}) = .5$) but prefer to bet on the first coin, because they are more confident or certain that the first coin is fair. (p. 326)

Standard expected utility theory cannot make sense of this, since it does not allow us to distinguish between different degrees of uncertainty. In standard expected utility theory, every state is assigned a precise probability. As a result, ambiguity aversion can lead an agent to violate the axioms of the different representation theorems. In particular, ambiguity aversion can result in violations of separability (see Section 5) as in the famous Ellsberg Paradox.³⁴ Nevertheless, ambiguity aversion is common and does

³² For examples of these claims, see, for instance, Levi (1980) and Kaplan (1996). When an agent cannot assign a sharp probability to states, we sometimes speak of decision-making under indeterminacy or ignorance, as opposed to merely uncertainty.

³³ Camerer and Weber (1992) also provide an overview of the empirical evidence of this phenomenon.

³⁴ See Ellsberg (1961). The Ellsberg Paradox runs as follows: you are given an urn that you know contains 90 balls. 30 of them are red. The remaining 60 are either black or yellow, but you don't know what the distribution is. Now first, you are offered the choice between receiving \$100 if a red ball is drawn, and receiving \$100 if a black ball is drawn. Most people choose the former. Then, you are offered the choice between receiving \$100 if a red or yellow ball is drawn, and receiving \$100 if a black or yellow ball is drawn. Here,

not seem irrational. Imprecise probabilities may help us to better model ambiguity, and thus hold the promise to help us rationalise ambiguity averse preferences.

There are epistemological objections to using sets of probabilities to represent beliefs.³⁵ But another common objection to using imprecise probabilities is that they lead to bad decision-making.³⁶ How could decision-making with imprecise probabilities proceed? We can use each probability function in the family in order to calculate an expected utility for each act open to the agent. But then each act will be associated with a family of expected utilities, one for each member of the family of probability functions. And so the agent cannot simply maximise expected utility anymore. The question then becomes how we should make decisions with these sets of probabilities and expected utilities.

One type of simple proposal that appears in the literature is the following principle, sometimes called *Liberal*: an act which maximises expected utility for every probability function in the family is obligatory. And any act which maximises expected utility for some probability function in the family is permitted.³⁷ For an overview of other choice rules, see Troffaes (2007).

Elga (2010) raises an important challenge for all such choice rules. If they are permissive, as *Liberal* is, then they will allow us to make choices in a series of bets that leave us definitely worse off. But if they are not permissive, and always recommend a single action, they undercut one main motivation for using imprecise probabilities in the first place. In that case, they will pin down precise betting odds for an agent. But, Elga argues, if we think that the evidence does not license us to use a precise probability, it would be strange if it determined precise betting odds. Moreover, these betting odds, if they abide by the axioms of expected utility theory, could be used to infer a precise probability using the representation theorems discussed above.³⁸

Elga's argument bears resemblance to other dynamic arguments against violations of standard expected utility theory, which will be discussed in

most people choose the latter. These preferences display ambiguity aversion. They are not consistent with a stable assignment of precise subjective probabilities to the drawing of a yellow or black ball, combined with the assumption of expected utility maximisation.

35 See, for instance, the problem of *dilation*. Dilation occurs when an agent's beliefs become less precise when she updates on a piece of evidence. The phenomenon was first introduced by Seidenfeld and Wasserman (1993) and is argued to be problematic for imprecise probability theory in White (2010). See Joyce (2011), S. Bradley and Steele (2014b) and Pedersen and Wheeler (2014) for critical discussion.

36 See, for instance, Williamson (2010).

37 See White (2010), Williams (2014), Moss (2015).

38 However, note that there are choice rules that determine precise betting odds that do not reduce to expected utility maximisation, such as the one introduced by Sahlin and Weirich (2014).

Section 7. It may be challenged on similar grounds. There may be dynamic choice strategies available to agents that guard them against making sure losses in dynamic choice problems. In fact, Williams (2014) claims that agents using his choice rule can make their choices ‘dynamically permissible’ by only considering some of the probability functions in the family to be ‘live’ at any one point. S. Bradley and Steele (2014a), too, argue that agents with imprecise credences can make reasonable choices in dynamic settings.

4.3 *Imprecise utility and intransitivity*

One might expect there to be a literature on imprecision with regard to utilities similar to the one on imprecise probabilities. For one, replacing the completeness condition with a condition of coherent extendibility will not only lead to a family of probability representations, it will also result in a corresponding family of utility representations. Moreover, there might be similar realist arguments that could be made in favour of imprecise strength of desire or degree of preference. Some of the examples of incompleteness, such as the cases involving incommensurable values, could be described as examples where it is unclear to what degree an agent desires the goods in question, or how they compare. Such cases are also often described as cases of ‘vague preference’. However, imprecise utilities and vague preferences are so far mostly discussed in the mathematical and economic literature. Fishburn (1998) suggests a probabilistic approach to studying vague preferences, while most of the literature uses fuzzy set theory. Salles (1998) provides an introduction to that approach.

There is a certain kind of lack of precision in our attitudes that does not result in vague preferences or incompleteness of preference. Instead, this lack of precision leads to a failure of transitivity, and is thus nevertheless problematic for expected utility theory. Intransitivity arises for outcomes that the agent finds indistinguishable with regard to some of the things she values. The problem is brought out most clearly by the Self-Torturer Problem, introduced by Quinn (1990). It runs as follows: a person has an electric device attached to her body that emits electric current which causes her pain. The device has a large number of settings, such that the person is unable to tell the difference in pain between any two adjacent settings. However, she can tell the difference between settings that are sufficiently far apart. In fact, at the highest settings, the person is in excruciating pain, while at the lowest setting, she is painless. Each week, the person can turn the dial of the device up by one setting, in exchange for \$10,000.

Let us call the settings of the dial $D_0, D_1, D_2, \dots, D_{1000}$. In this problem, the following set of intransitive preferences seems to be reasonable for a person who prefers less pain to more pain, and more money to less:

$$D_0 \prec D_1 \prec D_2 \prec \dots \prec D_{1000} \prec D_0.$$

At the highest settings, the person is in such excruciating pain that she would prefer being at the lowest setting again to having her fortune. At the same time, if turning the dial up by one setting results in a level of pain that is indistinguishable from the previous, it seems that taking the \$10,000 is always worth it, no matter how much pain the agent is already in.

An agent who has the self-torturer's preferences is clearly in trouble. In the original example, she can never turn the dial down again once she has turned it up. If she always follows her pairwise preferences, she will end up at the highest setting. This is obviously bad for her, by her own lights: there are many settings she would prefer to the one she ends up at. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the agent can go back to the first setting in the end, the problem is that she could be 'money-pumped'.³⁹ If the agent has a strict preference for the lowest setting over the highest setting, she should be willing to pay some positive amount of money on top of giving up all her gained wealth for going back to the first setting. She will end up having paid money for ending up where she started.

Advocates of standard expected utility theory may point out that these observations just show why it is bad to have intransitive preferences. However, critics, such as Andreou (2006) and Tenenbaum and Raffman (2012), point out that while these are problematic consequences of having the self-torturer's preferences, there seems to be nothing wrong with the self-torturer's preferences per se. If the agent's relevant underlying desires are those for money and the absence of pain, but the agent cannot distinguish between the levels of pain of two adjacent settings, then there is nothing in the agent's desires concerning the individual outcomes that could speak against going up by one setting. If we think that preferences should accurately reflect our underlying desires concerning the outcomes, the self-torturer's preferences seem reasonable.

Indeed, proponents of expected utility theory acknowledge that it is somewhat unsatisfactory to simply declare the self-torturer's preferences irrational. They have hence felt pressed to give an explanation of why the self-torturer's preferences are unreasonable, despite appearances. Arntzenius and McCarthy (1997), and Voorhoeve and Binmore (2006) have made different arguments to show that rational agents would hold that there

³⁹ Money pumps were first introduced as an argument for transitivity by Davidson, McKinsey, and Suppes (1955).

is an expected difference in pain between two adjacent settings at least somewhere in the chain.

Critics note that it is only in the context of the series of choices she is being offered that the self-torturer's preferences become problematic. And so instead of declaring the self-torturer's preferences irrational, we may instead want to say that in some cases, it is rational for the agent to act against her punctate preferences. Andreou (2006) argues that the intransitive preferences of the self-torturer ought to be revised to be transitive for the purpose of choice only. Tenenbaum and Raffman (2012) note that the underlying problem in the self-torturer's case is that the agent's end of avoiding pain is *vague*. It is not precise enough to distinguish between all the different outcomes the decision theory may ask her to evaluate, and that she in fact may have to choose between. They claim that vague goals that are realised over time may ground permissions for agents to act against their punctate preferences. And so this is another type of imprecision in our attitudes which may call for a revision of standard expected utility theory.

5 SEPARABILITY

5.1 *The separability assumption*

The imprecision and incompleteness of our attitudes discussed in Section 4 may be a problem for expected utility theory even in the context of certainty. But another important type of criticism of expected utility theory has to do with the assumptions it makes about choice under uncertainty specifically. All the representation theorems canvassed in Section 2 make use of a similar kind of axiom about choice under uncertainty. These axioms are versions of what Broome (1991) calls *separability*. The idea here is that what an agent expects to happen in one state of the world should not affect how much she values what happens in another, incompatible state of the world. There is a kind of independence in value of outcomes that occur in incompatible states of the world. Separability is largely responsible for the possibility of an expected utility representation. Separability is a controversial assumption, for the reasons explained in Sections 5.2 and 5.3. Here, I present the versions of the separability assumption used in the representation theorems introduced in Section 2.

In von Neumann and Morgenstern's representation theorem (see Section 2.2), separability is expressed by the independence axiom. Let \mathcal{L} be the space of lotteries over all possible outcomes. Then independence requires the following:

INDEPENDENCE: For all $L_x, L_y, L_z \in \mathcal{L}$ and all $p \in (0, 1)$, $L_x \succsim L_y$ if and only if $p \cdot L_x + (1 - p) \cdot L_z \succsim p \cdot L_y + (1 - p) \cdot L_z$.

Independence claims that my preference between two lotteries will not be changed when those lotteries become sub-lotteries in a lottery which mixes each with some probability of a third lottery. For instance, suppose I know I get to play a game tonight. I prefer to play a game that gives me a 10% chance of winning a pitcher of beer to a game that gives me a 20% chance of winning a pint of beer. The independence axiom says that this preference will not be affected when the chances of me getting to play at all today change. The possibility of not playing at all tonight should not affect how I evaluate my options in the case that I do get to play.

In Savage's framework (see Section 2.3), separability is expressed by his famous sure-thing principle. To state it, we need to define a set of events, which are disjunctions of states. Let $A_i(E)$ be the act A_i when event E occurs. The sure-thing principle then requires the following:

SURE-THING PRINCIPLE: For any two actions A_i and A_j , and any mutually exclusive and exhaustive events E and F , if $A_i(E) \succsim A_j(E)$ and $A_i(F) \succsim A_j(F)$, then $A_i \succsim A_j$.

The idea behind the sure-thing principle is that an agent can determine her overall preferences between acts through event-wise comparisons. She can partition the set of states into events, and compare the outcomes of each of her acts for each event separately. If an act is preferred given each of the events, it will be preferred overall. That is, if a particular act is preferred no matter which event occurs, then it is also preferred when the agent does not know which event occurs.

In Jeffrey's decision theory (see Section 2.4), separability is expressed by the averaging axiom. Remember that for him, acts, states and outcomes are all propositions, and all objects of preference. The averaging axiom claims the following:

AVERAGING: If A and B are mutually incompatible propositions, and $A \succsim B$, then $A \succsim (A \text{ or } B) \succsim B$.

The averaging axiom claims that how much an agent values a disjunction should depend on the value she assigns to the disjuncts in such a way that the disjunction cannot be more or less desirable than any of the disjuncts. When the propositions involved are outcomes that occur in different states of the world, this requirement, too, expresses the idea that there is an independence in value between what happens in separate states of the world. Knowing only that I will end up with one of two outcomes cannot be worse than ending up with any of the individual outcomes.

Assuming separability for preferences in the way that the independence axiom, the sure-thing principle and the averaging axiom do ensures that

the utility representation has an important separability feature as well. As we have seen, in expected utility theory, the overall value of an action can be represented as a probability-weighted sum of the utilities of the outcomes occurring in separate states. This means that the value contribution of an outcome in one state will be independent of the value contribution of an outcome of another state, holding the probabilities fixed. And so the separability of the value of outcomes in separate states is captured by equating the value of an action with its expected utility. If separability is problematic, it is thus problematic independently of any representation theorem. In particular, this means that it is also problematic for realists.

5.2 Violations of separability

To see how separability may fail, consider the following decision problem, known as the Machina Paradox.⁴⁰ Suppose you prefer actually going to Venice to staying at home and watching a movie about Venice. You also prefer watching a movie about Venice to doing nothing and being bored. You are now offered the lotteries described in Table 5. Suppose that each lottery ticket is equally likely to be drawn, so that, if we want to apply von Neumann and Morgenstern's framework, each lottery ticket has a probability of 1%.

	Tickets 1–99	Ticket 100
LOTTERY A	Go to Venice	Bored at home
LOTTERY B	Go to Venice	Movie about Venice

Table 5: Machina's Paradox

Many people would prefer lottery A to lottery B in this context. Clearly, if I am so unlucky as to draw ticket 100, I'd rather not have to watch a movie reminding me of my misfortune. However, my preferences, as stated, violate the independence axiom and sure-thing principle. It is also clear why this violation of separability occurs. What happens in alternative, incompatible states of the world, that is, what might have been, clearly matters for how I evaluate the outcome of watching a movie about Venice. If there was a big probability that I could have gone to Venice, I will evaluate that outcome differently from when there was no such possibility. In this case, the reason for an interdependence in value between outcomes in alternative states of the world is disappointment: the movie about Venice heightens my disappointment by reminding me of what I could have had.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Mas-Colell et al. (1995), chapter 6.

The natural response to this kind of problem is to say that the outcomes in the decision problem as I stated it were under-described. Clearly, the feeling of disappointment is a relevant part of the outcomes of lottery B. There is nothing irrational about wanting to avoid disappointment, and many agents do. Thus, according to all the rules for the individuation of outcomes discussed in Section 1.4, watching a movie about Venice with disappointment should be a different outcome from watching a movie about Venice without disappointment. And then, no violation of separability occurs.

This seems to be a valid response in the case of Machina's Paradox. However, there are other violations of separability that arguably cannot be given the same treatment. One famous case that seems to be more problematic is the Allais Paradox, introduced in Allais (1953). It runs as follows. First a subject is offered a choice between \$1 million for certain on the one hand, and an 89% chance of winning \$1 million, a 10% chance of winning \$5 million, and a 1% chance of winning nothing on the other. What she will get is decided by a random draw from 100 lottery tickets. Many people choose \$1 million for certain when offered this choice. Next, the subject is offered the choice of either a 10% chance of \$5 million, and nothing otherwise on the one hand, or an 11% chance of \$1 million, and nothing otherwise on the other. Again, this is decided by the draw of a lottery ticket. Here, most people pick the first lottery, that is, the lottery with the higher potential winnings.

While this combination of preferences seems sensible, it in fact violates independence and the sure-thing principle, given a natural specification of the outcomes involved. This becomes evident when we represent the two choices in decision matrices, as in Tables 6 and 7.

	Tickets 1–89	Tickets 90–99	Ticket 100
LOTTERY C	\$1 million	\$5 million	\$0
LOTTERY D	\$1 million	\$1 million	\$1 million

Table 6: Allais Paradox: First Choice

	Tickets 1–89	Tickets 90–99	Ticket 100
LOTTERY G	\$0	\$5 million	\$0
LOTTERY H	\$0	\$1 million	\$1 million

Table 7: Allais Paradox: Second Choice

Choosing lottery D in the first choice, and lottery G in the second choice violates independence and the sure-thing principle. To start with the sure-

thing principle, note that in both choices, the two lotteries to be chosen from are identical with regard to what happens if tickets 1–89 are drawn. And thus, according to the sure-thing principle, the only thing that matters for the overall assessment should be what happens if tickets 90–100 are drawn. But for these tickets, the first choice, between lottery C and lottery D, and the second choice, between lottery G and lottery H are identical. And so, the agent should choose lottery D in the first choice if and only if she chose lottery H in the second choice. Similar reasoning applies for independence, if we regard each lottery as a compound lottery of the sub-lotteries involving tickets 1–89 and 90–100 respectively.

Nevertheless, choosing lottery D in the first choice and lottery G in the second choice is both common⁴¹ and does not seem intuitively irrational. Unless some redescription strategy works to reconcile Allais preferences with expected utility theory, expected utility theory must declare these preferences irrational. Redescribing the outcomes to take account of disappointment (or regret) arguably cannot do away with the violation of separability in the Allais Paradox. Michael Weber (1998) provides an extensive argument to that effect. The Ellsberg Paradox (Section 4.2) is another case that cannot easily be dealt with by redescription. These examples suggest that there are more problematic types of interdependence in value between outcomes in different states of the world that cannot be as easily reconciled with expected utility theory as the Machina Paradox. They have consequently been an important motivation for alternatives to expected utility theory (see Section 6).

There might, however, be good arguments in favour of the verdict that violations of separability, like the Allais preferences, are genuinely irrational. Savage himself, as well as Broome (1991) argue that our reasons for choosing one act or another must depend on states of affairs where the two acts do not yield the same outcome. This seems to speak in favour of the sure-thing principle. However, as Broome acknowledges, this assumes that reasons for action themselves are separable. Somewhat more promisingly, he suggests that, if the kind of rationality we are interested in is instrumental rationality, then all our reasons for action must derive from what it would be like to have performed an action in the various states that might come about.

Buchak (2013), who, as we will see, defends an alternative to expected utility theory, argues that instrumental rationality does not require separability. In any case, note that, even if expected utility theory is right that separability is a requirement of rationality, examples like the Allais Paradox still show expected utility theory to be quite revisionary. Expected utility theory declares preferences that are common and seem intuitively

⁴¹ See, for instance Morrison (1967) for experimental evidence that many people choose this way.

reasonable as irrational. While this may not be troubling in the case of the normative and action-guiding projects, this at least seriously calls into question whether expected utility theory can serve the interpretive project.

5.3 *Separability and risk aversion*

Examples like the Allais Paradox seem to show that agents actually care about some values that are not separable. The Allais preferences, for instance, make sense for an agent who cares about certainty. Lottery D in the first choice seems attractive because it leads to a gain of \$1 million for certain. If the agent does not care merely about the feeling of being certain, but instead cares about it actually being certain that she gets \$1 million, then certainty is a value that is only realised by a combination of outcomes across different states.

Buchak (2013) calls agents who are sensitive to values that are only realised by a combination of outcomes across different states (other than expected utility itself) ‘globally sensitive’. Agents who are globally sensitive are sensitive to features other than the expected utility of an act. Next to certainty, Lopes (1981, 1996) argues that mean, mode, variance, skewness and probability of loss are further global features of gambles agents may care about. She argues that a normatively compelling theory of decision-making under risk would have subjects weigh off these various different criteria. Buchak (2013), too, argues that global sensitivity can be rational, under certain constraints.⁴²

It has been argued that expected utility theory has trouble more generally in accounting for our ordinary attitudes to risk. In expected utility theory, risk averse behaviour, such as preferring a sure amount of money to a risky gamble with a higher expected monetary gain, is always explained by the concavity of the utility function with regard to the good in question. When a utility function is concave, the marginal utility derived from a good is decreasing: any additional unit of the good is worth less the more of the good the agent already has. When the utility function in money is concave in this way, the expected utility of a monetary gamble will be less than the utility of the expected monetary value. And this can mean that the agent rejects gambles that have positive expected monetary value.

Figure 1 illustrates this for an agent with utility function $u(m) = \sqrt{m}$ and current wealth of \$100, who is offered a 50/50 chance of either losing \$100 or gaining \$125. For her, the expected utility of accepting this gamble

⁴² There is some debate whether global sensitivity can also be made compatible with expected utility theory. Weirich (1986) argues that globally sensitive aversion to risk can be represented with disutilities that are assigned to outcomes. In the context of Buchak’s theory, Pettigrew (2014) argues that the global sensitivity allowed for by her theory is compatible with expected utility theory if outcomes are appropriately redescribed.

is $0.5 \cdot \sqrt{0} + 0.5 \cdot \sqrt{225} = 7.5$. This is less than the agent's current utility level of $\sqrt{100} = 10$. The agent would reject the gamble even though it leads to an expected gain of \$12.50.⁴³

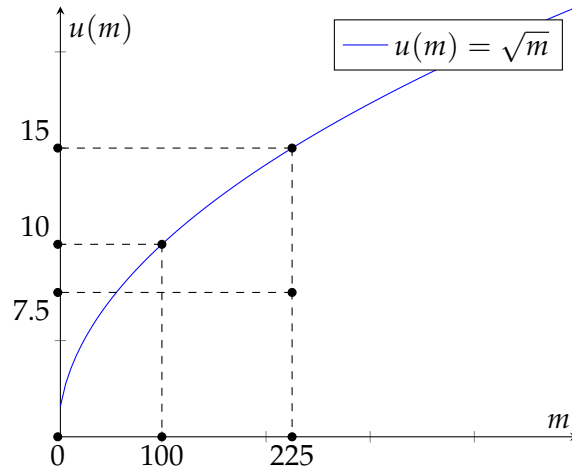


Figure 1: A concave utility function

However, there are results suggesting that decreasing marginal utility alone cannot adequately explain ordinary risk aversion. For monetary gambles, it can be shown that according to expected utility theory, any significant risk aversion on a small scale implies implausibly high levels of risk aversion on a large scale. For instance, Rabin and Thaler (2001) show that an expected utility maximiser with an increasing, concave utility function in wealth who turns down a 50/50 bet of losing \$10 and winning \$11 will turn down any 50/50 bet involving a loss of \$100, no matter how large the potential gain. Conversely, any normal level of risk aversion for high stakes gambles implies that the agent is virtually risk neutral for small stakes gambles.⁴⁴ These results are troubling because we are all risk averse for small stakes gambles, and we are all willing to take some risky gambles with larger stakes. Moreover, this does not seem to be intuitively irrational.

Another, more direct line of critique of the way expected utility theory deals with risk aversion is available to realists about utility. If we think of utility in the realist sense, for instance as measuring the strength of our desire, it seems like we can be risk averse with regard to goods for which our utility is not diminishing. But according to expected utility theory, we

⁴³ See Mas-Colell et al. (1995), chapter 6 for more detail on expected utility theory's treatment of risk aversion.

⁴⁴ See Samuelson (1963) and Rabin (2000) for similar results.

cannot be risk averse with regard to utility itself. For realists, depending on their interpretation of utility, this may be counterintuitive.⁴⁵

6 ALTERNATIVES TO EXPECTED UTILITY THEORY

Most alternatives to expected utility theory have been introduced as descriptive theories of choice under uncertainty, with no claim to capturing rational choice. The most well-known is prospect theory, introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (1979). Its most distinctive features are firstly, that it includes an editing phase, in which agents simplify their decision problems to make them more manageable, and secondly, that outcomes are evaluated as losses and gains relative to some reference point. In prospect theory, losses can be evaluated differently from gains. Since different ways of presenting a decision problem may elicit different reference points, this means that the agents described in prospect theory are sensitive to ‘framing’. While real agents are in fact subject to framing effects,⁴⁶ sensitivity to framing is commonly regarded as irrational.

Alternatives to expected utility theory in the economic literature, too, have given up the idea that agents maximise a utility function that is independent of some reference point. Generalised expected utility theory, as developed in Machina (1982), for instance, introduces local utility functions, one for each lottery the agent may face. The lack of a stable utility function makes it difficult to interpret these theories as theories of instrumental rationality.

Other non-expected utility theories, in particular rank-dependent utility theory, as introduced by Quiggin (1982), use a stable utility function. In contrast to expected utility theory, however, they introduce alternative weightings of the utilities of outcomes. While in expected utility theory, an outcome’s utility is weighted only by its probability, in rank-dependent utility theory, weights depend not only on the probability of an outcome, but also its rank amongst all the possible outcomes of the action. This allows the theory to model agents caring disproportionately about especially good and especially bad low probability outcomes.

Buchak (2013) introduces risk-weighted expected utility theory, in which a ‘risk function’ plays the role of the weighting function. In contrast to older rank-dependent utility theories, she argues that risk-weighted expected utility theory provides us with utilities and probabilities which can be interpreted as representing the agent’s ends and beliefs respectively,

⁴⁵ See Buchak (2013) for this line of critique, as well as more examples of risk aversion that expected utility has trouble making sense of.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, Tversky and Kahneman (1981).

and a risk function, which represents the agent's preferences over how to structure the attainment of her ends.⁴⁷

There is a research programme in the psychological literature that studies various heuristics that agents use when making decisions in the context of uncertainty. While these are usually not intended as normative theories of rational choice, they have plausibility as action-guiding theories—theories that cognitively limited agents may use in order to approximate a perfectly rational choice. Payne et al. (1993), for instance, introduce an adaptive approach to decision-making, which is driven by the tradeoff between cognitive effort and accuracy. Gigerenzer et al. (2000) introduce various “fast-and-frugal” heuristics to decision-making under uncertainty.

7 DYNAMIC CHOICE

So far, we have looked at individual decisions separately, as one-off choices. However, each of our choices is part of a long series of choices we make in our lives. Dynamic choice theory models this explicitly. In dynamic choice problems, choices, as well as the resolution of uncertainty happen sequentially. Dynamic choice problems are typically represented as decision trees, like the one in Figure 2. The round nodes in this tree are chance nodes, where we think of the agent as going ‘left’ or ‘right’ depending on what state of affairs comes about. The square nodes are decision nodes, where the agent can decide whether to go ‘left’ or ‘right’.

There are a number of interesting cases where an agent ends up making a series of seemingly individually rational choices that leave her worse off than she could be.⁴⁸ Dynamic choice theory helps us analyse such cases. Here I want to focus on dynamic choice problems involving agents who violate standard expected utility theory. These cases provide some of the most powerful arguments in favour of expected utility theory, and against the alternatives canvassed in Section 6. We already mentioned Elga's dynamic choice argument against imprecise probabilities in Section 4.2. Here, I turn to arguments involving violations of separability.

7.1 *Dynamic arguments in favour of separability*

Machina (1989) discusses the following dynamic version of the Allais Paradox. This dynamic version serves as an argument against Allais preferences, and violations of separability more generally. In this dynamic

⁴⁷ For an overview of other alternatives to expected utility theory in the economic literature, the two most comprehensive surveys are Schmidt (2004) and Sugden (2004).

⁴⁸ One example is the Self-Torturer Problem discussed in Section 4.3. Andreou (2012) is a helpful overview of more such cases.

version, agents only get to make a decision after some of the uncertainty has already been resolved. They make a choice after they have found out whether one of tickets 1–89 has been drawn, or one of tickets 90–100 has been drawn, as shown in Figure 2.

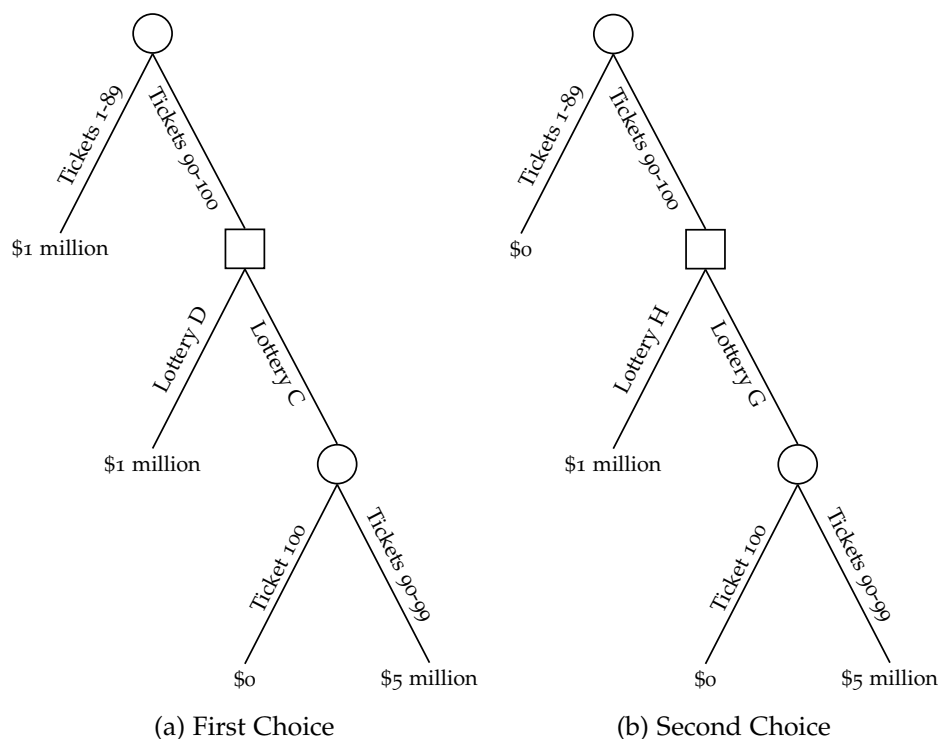


Figure 2: Dynamic Allais Problem

The interesting feature of the dynamic case is that at the time where the agent gets to make a decision, the rest of the tree, sometimes called the 'continuation tree', looks the same for the first and second choice. We might think that this means that the agent should decide the same in both cases. But then she will end up choosing in accordance either with lotteries C and G respectively, or with lotteries D and H respectively, but not according to the Allais preferences. That in turn means that for at least one of the choices, an agent with Allais preferences will end up choosing contrary to what she would have preferred at the beginning of the decision problem, before any uncertainty has been resolved.

This has been held to be problematic for a variety of reasons. Firstly, for the agent we are considering, the dynamic structure of the decision problem clearly makes a difference to what she will choose. It can make a difference whether the agent faces a one-off choice or a dynamic version of that choice involving the same possible outcomes. But, it is claimed, for instrumentally rational agents, who care only about the final outcomes, the temporal structure of a decision problem should not matter. Secondly,

suppose the agent anticipates that, after uncertainty has been removed, she will go against the preferences she has at the outset. Such an agent would presumably be willing to pay to either not have uncertainty removed, or to restrict her own future choices. Paying money for this looks like a pragmatic cost of having these kinds of preferences. Moreover, refusing free information has been argued to be irrational in its own right.⁴⁹ Thirdly, the agent does not seem to have a stable attitude towards the choice to be made in the dynamic decision problem, even though her underlying preferences over outcomes do not change. All of these considerations have been argued to count against the instrumental rationality of an agent with Allais preferences.

Similar dynamic choice problems can be formulated whenever there is a violation of separability. In Savage's framework, whenever the agent's attitudes are non-separable for two events, one can construct decision problems where the two events are de facto 'separated' by revealing which of the events occurs before the agent gets to decide. And then parallel problems will arise. In fact, if we find the previous argument against Allais preferences convincing, we can formulate a very general argument in favour of expected utility theory. Spelling out the argument from consequentialism in Hammond (1988) in more precise terms, McClennen (1990) shows that, given some technical assumptions, expected utility theory can be derived from versions of the following principles:

NEC (NORMAL-FORM/EXTENSIVE-FORM COINCIDENCE): In any dynamic decision problem, the agent should choose the same as she would, were she to simply choose one course of action at the beginning of the decision problem.

SEP (DYNAMIC SEPARABILITY): Within dynamic decision problems, the agent treats continuation trees as if they were new trees.

DS (DYNAMIC CONSISTENCY): The agent does not make plans she foreseeably will not execute.

A similar argument is made by Seidenfeld (1988). The third condition in McClennen's formulation is fairly uncontroversial. However, those defending alternatives to expected utility theory have called into question both NEC and SEP. Buchak (2013) discusses both the strategy of abandoning SEP and that of abandoning NEC, and argues that at least one of them works.

SEP is characteristic of a choice strategy that was first described by Strotz (1956), and is now known in the literature as 'sophisticated choice'.⁵⁰ Sophisticated agents treat continuation trees within dynamic choice problems

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Wakker (1988).

⁵⁰ See McClennen (1990) for a characterisation of different dynamic choice rules.

as if they were new tress. Moreover, they anticipate, at the beginning of the dynamic choice problem, that they will do so. Given this prediction of their own future choice, they choose the action that will lead to their most preferred prospect. They thus follow a kind of ‘backward induction’ reasoning. Sophisticated agents fail to abide by NEC: they can end up choosing courses of action that are dispreferred at the beginning of the choice problem. This can be seen in our example of the dynamic Allais Paradox. Sophisticated agents behave in the way we assumed above. They thus suffer the pragmatic disadvantages we described.⁵¹

Those who question NEC allow that the dynamic structure of a decision problem can sometimes make a difference, even if that may have tragic consequences. But note that one can question NEC as a general principle and still think that in the particular dynamic choice problems we are considering, the pragmatic disadvantages count against having preferences that violate separability.

Because of the difficulties associated with sophistication described above, many advocates of alternatives to expected utility theory have rejected SEP instead. For instance, Machina (1989) argues that SEP is close enough to separability that accepting SEP begs the question against separability. If SEP is given up, it can make a difference to an agent if she finds herself in the middle of a dynamic choice problem rather than at the beginning of a new one. One choice rule that then becomes open to her is ‘resolution’, where the agent simply goes through with a plan she made at the beginning of a decision problem. Resolute agents obviously abide by NEC and avoid any pragmatic disadvantages. A restricted version of this dynamic choice rule is advocated by McClennen (1990).⁵² Rabinowicz (1995) argues that sophistication and resolution can be reconciled.

7.2 *Time preferences and discounting*

While dynamic choice theory is concerned with the temporal sequence of our decisions, there is another branch of decision theory that is concerned with the timing of the costs and benefits that are caused by our actions. This literature studies the nature of our time preferences: do we prefer for an outcome to occur earlier or later? How much would we give up in order to receive it earlier or later?

Since most agents prefer for good outcomes to occur earlier, and bad outcomes to occur later, Samuelson (1937) proposed the discounted utility

⁵¹ In fact, Seidenfeld discusses cases where sophisticated agents end up making a sure loss.

⁵² Note that related notions of resolution are also discussed in the non-formal literature in order to deal with problems of diachronic choice, such as the Toxin Puzzle, described in Kavka (1983). See, for instance, Holton (2009) and Bratman (1998), as well as the discussion on the Self-Torturer Problem in Section 4.3 above.

model. According to this model, agents assign the same utility to an outcome (in Samuelson's model these are consumption profiles) no matter when it occurs, but discount that utility with a fixed exponential discount rate. They can then calculate how much a future outcome is worth to them at the time of decision, and maximise their discounted utility. In the case where decisions are made under certainty, let the outcomes occurring at different points in time, up until period t , be O_1, \dots, O_t . The agent assigns utility $u(O)$ to each of these outcomes. This is an 'instantaneous' utility function, where the timing of the outcome does not matter for the utility assignment. Moreover, let d be the discount factor. The agent's discounted utility $DU(O_1, \dots, O_t)$ is then given by:

$$DU(O_1, \dots, O_t) = \sum_{i=1}^t d^i \cdot u(O_i)$$

This discounted utility describes the current value of the stream of outcomes O_1, \dots, O_t to the agent. According to the discounted utility model, agents maximise this discounted utility. When we have $0 < d < 1$, the agent prefers good outcomes to occur sooner rather than later. In that case, it is also true that the value of an infinite, constant stream of benefits will be finite. Koopmans (1960) presents a number of axioms on time preferences, and provides a representation theorem for the discounted utility model.

One main advantage of being the type of agent who abides by the discounted utility model is that for such an agent, there will be no preference reversals as time moves on (this feature is sometimes referred to as 'time consistency'). That is, an agent will never suddenly reverse her preference between two actions as she gets closer in time to a choice. Yet, such preference reversals are common.⁵³ It has been argued that the hyperbolic discounting model advocated by Ainslie (1992), which allows for such reversals, models the ordinary decision-maker better. Whether the discounted utility model is normatively adequate is controversial, and depends in part on whether we think that time inconsistency is necessarily irrational.⁵⁴ In fact, time inconsistent preferences, just like preferences that violate expected utility theory, may lead to problematic patterns of choice in dynamic choice problems, unless the agent adopts the right dynamic choice rule.

The discounted utility model underlies much public decision-making. Discount rates are standardly applied in cost-benefit analyses. This has received special philosophical attention in the case of cost-benefit analyses of the effects of climate change. Ethicists and economists have debated

⁵³ For empirical evidence of this phenomenon, see, for instance, Thaler (1981).

⁵⁴ Frederick, Loewenstein, and O'Donoghue (2002) provide a helpful overview of this debate, and the literature on time preferences more generally.

whether a strictly positive discount rate is justified when evaluating the costs of climate change.⁵⁵ Much recent work on time preference and discounting has focused on how to discount in the context of uncertainty. Again, this question is especially important for evaluating the costs of climate change, since these evaluations are carried out in the context of great uncertainty. Gollier (2002) provides an expected utility based model of discounting under uncertainty that much of this literature appeals to. Weitzman (2009) discusses discounting in a context where our estimates of future climate have ‘fat tails’, and argues that fat tails make a big difference to our evaluations of the costs of climate change.

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This entry started out by introducing decision theories that can be classified under the heading of ‘expected utility theory’. Expected utility theory is an enormously influential theory about how we do and should make choices. It has been fruitfully applied in many different fields, not least philosophy. This entry has described expected utility theory, discussed how it can be applied to the choices real agents face, and introduced debates about its foundations and interpretation.

Much recent discussion in decision theory concerns the two main types of challenge to traditional expected utility theory that the latter half of this entry focused on. The first type of challenge claims that traditional expected utility theory requires agents to have attitudes that are too fine-grained and too extensive. According to this challenge, agents have attitudes, and are rationally permitted to have attitudes that are imprecise, or vague, or incomplete. The important question arising for expected utility theory is whether it can incorporate imprecision, vagueness, and incompleteness, or whether it can instead offer a convincing argument that these attitudes are indeed irrational.

The second type of challenge questions the assumption of separability that underlies expected utility theory—that is, the assumption that the value of an outcome in one state of the world is independent of what happens in other, incompatible states of the world. According to this challenge, agents have attitudes to risky prospects that violate this assumption, and are rationally permitted to do so. This challenge, in particular, has inspired alternatives to expected utility theory. Alternatives to expected utility theory face challenges of their own, however, not least the question of whether they can make sense of dynamic choice.

⁵⁵ See, in particular, the debate between Stern (2007) and Nordhaus (2007). For a philosopher who holds that there is no justification for time preference in public decision-making, see Broome (1994).

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Suppose we take a standard, randomly shuffled pack of cards with no jokers, and ask what the probability is that the top card is a red picture card. We can calculate the probability of this to be $6/52 = 3/26$. And of course if, as many think, people have degrees of belief, or credences, then you—knowing only that the pack is normal and has been randomly shuffled—should have a credence of $3/26$ that the top card is a red picture card.

But many think that you can have credences in all sorts of claims, and not just claims about random events involving cards, dice or coins. In particular, classical Bayesian epistemologists think that you have a credence in every proposition that you can entertain. Thus for example, there is some number between 0 and 1 that is your credence that it will snow in London on New Year's Day 2026; and there is some number between 0 and 1 that is your credence that I have a cup of tea beside my computer as I type. But what exactly are your credences in these claims? Perhaps no particular number springs to mind. Unlike in the playing card scenario above, here there does not seem to be any obvious way to 'work out' what the probability of these events is and so arrive at the precise credence that you ought to have. Cases like these have led some to reject the classical Bayesian epistemologist's claim that people must have precise credences in every proposition that they can entertain. Instead it is claimed people—even rational people—can have imprecise credences in at least some propositions. Hereafter I will use 'imprecise probabilism' as the name for the view that rational people can have imprecise credences.

Imprecise probabilism has some intuitive appeal. Take again the claim (which we can call 'NYD') that it will snow in London on New Year's Day 2026. It is hard to put a precise number on your credence—but there may still be something we can say about your attitude towards this proposition. For example, perhaps you think the claim is not very likely, but far from impossible, and certainly more likely than the claim (which we can call 'MIDSUMMER') that it will snow on Midsummer's day in London in 2026. We might think that your credences in these claims can be represented with ranges, rather than points. For example, perhaps your credence in NYD is the range (0.1, 0.4), and your credence in MIDSUMMER is the range (0.01, 0.05). Versions of this idea—of representing credences by ranges rather than points—can be found in numerous sources, including R. Bradley (2009), Gärdenfors and Sahlin (1982), Jeffrey (1983), Joyce (2005),

Kaplan (1996), Keynes (1921), Kyburg (1983), Levi (1974), Sturgeon (2008), van Fraassen (2006), and Walley (1991).

To explain imprecise probabilism in more depth, I must first set out the classical Bayesian view more precisely. We begin with a set (an *event space*) $\Omega = \{w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n\}$. Each w_i in Ω is a state of affairs, or possible world. We can then see a proposition (or event) A as a subset of set Ω . For example, suppose we take the proposition that a particular dice throw landed on an even number. This proposition obtains at all those possible worlds where the dice lands on 2, 4, or 6. Thus there will be a set of possible worlds where the proposition obtains. For the purposes of this topic, we assume that the proposition can be identified with that set of possible worlds at which it is true.

Now consider a set $\mathcal{F} = \{A_1, A_2, \dots, A_m\}$ of these propositions (which are themselves each sets of possible worlds). To make this set a sigma algebra (σ -algebra), the set must be closed under union, intersection, and complementation. For the set to be closed under union, it must be the case that for two propositions A_i and A_j in the set, the union ($A_i \cup A_j$) is also in the set; similarly, for the set to be closed under intersection, it must be the case that for any two propositions A_i and A_j in the set, the intersection ($A_i \cap A_j$) must also be in the set; and for the set to be closed under complementation it must be the case that for any proposition A_i in the set, the proposition $\Omega - A_i$ must also be in the set.

Finally we introduce a function p mapping \mathcal{F} to $[0, 1]$. Thus for example, if \mathcal{F} contains some proposition A , then our function p will map that proposition A to some number between 0 and 1. If the function is a probability function, then it will meet these three conditions (the probability axioms):

1. $p(A) \geq 0$, for all A in \mathcal{F} ,
2. $p(\Omega) = 1$,
3. If $A_i \cap A_j = \emptyset$ then $p(A_i \cup A_j) = p(A_i) + p(A_j)$.

In contrast according to the imprecise probabilist, a rational agent may have an epistemic state that cannot be represented by a single probability function. Instead, the imprecise probabilist typically claims that a rational agent's epistemic state can be represented by a set of probability functions $P = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_k\}$. Thus rather than assigning each proposition in \mathcal{F} some unique number, for each proposition A in \mathcal{F} there will be some least number assigned to it by the probabilities in P (the agent's *lower envelope* of A), and some greatest number assigned to A by the probabilities P (the agent's *upper envelope* of A).

Thus the imprecise probabilist moves away from the classical Bayesian view by claiming that an agent's epistemic state is given not by a single function from propositions to numbers, but by a set of such functions. And

if the agent is rational, then each of the functions in the set that represents the agent's epistemic state will be a probability function. In van Fraassen's terminology, this set of functions is the agent's *representor* (van Fraassen, 1990). On another vivid version of this account, we can see the set as a group of *avatars* (R. Bradley, 2009), each of whom has a precise credence function: these avatars collectively represent the agent's epistemic state.

This view raises some interesting problems, but before I turn to these, I will first explore in more depth the central claims of the view.

1 EXPLORING THE VIEW

How can a set of credence functions represent an agent's epistemic state? Or, to put the point another way, what must be true of a given agent for her epistemic state to be correctly represented by some specific set of credence functions?¹

The idea is that what holds across all the credence functions in the set, holds for the agent's epistemic state.² Thus for example, suppose that every credence function in the set assigns the number 0.5 to the claim that the next fair coin tossed will land heads: then it follows that the agent has a credence of precisely 0.5 in this claim. Or suppose that every credence function in the set assigns a credence of no more than 0.4 to the claim *NYD*: then it follows that the agent has a credence of no more than 0.4 in this claim. Or suppose that every credence function in the set assigns a higher credence to *NYD* than it does to *MIDSUMMER*: then it follows that the agent has a higher credence in the claim *NYD* than she does in *MIDSUMMER*.

On this picture, there may be some questions we can ask about the agent's epistemic state which have no answer. For example, we might wonder which of a pair of claims is given the highest credence, or whether they are given equal credence—but there may be no answer to this question if the credence functions that represent the agent's epistemic state conflict over this. Similarly, on learning that an agent has a credence of no more than 0.4 in *NYD*, we might ask what exactly the agent's credence is in this claim. But there is no answer to this question if the different credence functions that represent the agent's epistemic state assign different values to this claim. In such cases, it is natural to say that the agent's credence in a claim is a range rather than a single unique number—where the range contains all and only those numbers that are assigned to the relevant proposition by some credence function from the set that represents the agent's epistemic state.

¹ Richard Bradley argues that for any given epistemic state, there is a *unique* maximal set of such functions that represents that epistemic state (R. Bradley, 2009, p. 242).

² Or perhaps, is *determinately* true of the agent's epistemic state (Rinard, 2015).

I turn now to consider some variations on this view, and some initial objections and clarifications.

1.1 *Variations on the view*

Here I contrast two different sorts of imprecise probabilist. All proponents of imprecise probabilism agree that agents are sometimes permitted to have imprecise credences in some propositions. They thus stand in contrast to the classical Bayesian epistemologists, according to whom rational agents have precise credences in every proposition which they can entertain. But even amongst those who accept imprecise probabilism, there is disagreement over whether imprecise credences are ever *required* by rationality.

James Joyce, for example, argues that one's degrees of belief should be no sharper than the evidence requires (Joyce, 2005): Joyce requires an agent to have an imprecise credence in a claim where the evidence for that claim does not justify a more precise credence. Thus for example consider again the claim *NYD*, that it will snow in London on New Year's Day 2026. Given that the evidence for this is (as yet) slight, an agent who had a precise credence in this claim (e.g. a credence of exactly 0.35) would be irrational. In contrast, take the claim that the next fair coin tossed will land heads. Given that the chance of this event is known to be 0.5, it is rational to have a credence of exactly 0.5 in this claim.

To clarify this view, we need to explain what determines the correct imprecise credence for an agent to have in any given situation. One possible answer to this is the *chance grounding thesis*: "one's spread of credence should cover the range of chance hypotheses left open by the evidence" (White, 2009, p. 174).³ To see what this means, let us consider a few examples. First take an agent who knows that a coin is fair, and is contemplating the claim, *HEADS*, that on the next toss the coin will land heads. Given that (s)he knows that the chance of *HEADS* is 0.5, the chance grounding thesis requires that every credence function in the set that represents the agent's epistemic state must assign 0.5 to *HEADS*—and so the agent must herself have a credence of precisely 0.5 in *HEADS*. Now suppose instead that the agent has a coin that she does not know to be fair: the chance of its landing heads (*HEADS**) is anywhere within the range (0.2, 0.8), for all she knows. Then the chance grounding thesis requires that for each value v within the range (0.2, 0.8), there must be a credence function in the set that represents the agent's epistemic state that assigns v to *HEADS**. And furthermore there must be no credence function in the set that assigns to *HEADS** some value v that is outside the range (0.2, 0.8).

³ White defines this thesis, but does not endorse it.

This chance grounding thesis generates some counterintuitive results, and Joyce argues that it should be replaced with the less stringent demand that when your *only* relevant evidence is that the chance of some event is within some interval (a, b) , then your spread of credence ought to cover this range (Joyce, 2010, p. 289). So for example suppose that in the case above, you know not only that the chance of the coin's landing heads is within the range $(0.2, 0.8)$, but also that the coin was selected at random from a bag which contained a variety of coins with complementary biases: i.e. for each coin in the bag that has a chance v of landing heads, the bag also contained exactly one coin with a chance $1 - v$ of landing heads. In this case, because you have this extra piece of evidence, your "spread of credence" in HEADS is not required to cover the whole range $(0.2, 0.8)$, and a credence of precisely 0.5, say, is permitted. However if you know only that the chance of the coin's landing heads is within the range $(0.2, 0.8)$, then your spread of credence in HEADS is required to cover the whole range $(0.2, 0.8)$.

Now we turn to consider imprecise probabilists who permit, but never require agents to have imprecise credences. For these theorists, an agent is free to have a credence of precisely 0.35 in the claim NYD (that it will snow in London on New Year's Day 2026). To these theorists, we might ask whether there are any rational constraints on an agent's epistemic state, bar the requirement that their state should be represented by some maximal set of credence functions that obey the probability axioms. Such a theorist might require that any rational agent's epistemic state will conform to the *principal principle*—i.e. that the agent's credence in any claim P conditional on the chance of P being some value v , is v (Lewis, 1980). From this, it follows that in the case where an agent is contemplating the claim (HEADS) that on its next toss a coin known to be fair will land heads, the agent's credence in HEADS must be 0.5. But what constraint is placed on the agent in the case where (s)he is contemplating the claim (HEADS*) that on its next toss a coin known to have a chance within the range $(0.2, 0.8)$ will land heads? The principal principle here requires that the agent's credence should not exceed the range $(0.2, 0.8)$, but nothing seems to require that the agent's credence should occupy this entire range.

Having explored this variation in the views of imprecise probabilists, I turn now to contrast the account with an alternative view.

1.2 Dempster-Shafer Theory

An alternative approach to modelling our epistemic state involves *belief functions* (Dempster, 1967, 1968; Shafer, 1976). To illustrate this view, we can again take the proposition (NYD) that it will snow in London on New Year's Day in 2026, and suppose that my belief-function assigns a value of

0.6 to this claim: we represent this by writing $Bel(NYD) = 0.6$. If my belief function was a probability function, then it would follow that the value assigned to the negation of NYD (i.e. to $not-NYD$) would be 0.4. However a belief function need not be a probability function, and it might assign any value less than or equal to 0.4 to $not-NYD$. Thus for example, it might assign a value of 0 to $not-NYD$. This is despite the fact that the value assigned to the tautology (either NYD or $not-NYD$) must be 1.

More generally, on this view the value assigned to the disjunction of two disjoint propositions A and B , $Bel(A \cup B)$, need not equal the sum of $Bel(A)$ and $Bel(B)$. The requirement is only that the value assigned to the disjunction must be at least as great as the sum of the values assigned to the disjuncts. Thus the belief function is not a probability function, as the third probability axiom (countable additivity) does not apply.

One way to interpret the idea of a belief function, is as a measure of the weight of evidence for each proposition. Thus consider again my belief function that assigns a value of 0.6 to NYD . We can suppose that I have asked a friend whether it will snow in London on New Year's Day 2016, and (s)he assures me that it will. I consider this friend to be reliable in 60% of cases of this sort, and this explains why my belief function assigns a value of 0.6 to this claim. If we suppose that this is all the relevant evidence that I have, then my belief function assigns a value of 0 to $not-NYD$ simply because I have no evidence to support $not-NYD$. In cases where I have evidence from two different sources (e.g. in a case where I make another friend who also gives me his or her opinion on NYD), then the belief functions that result from these different bodies of evidence need to be combined, and Dempster and others have explored the question of how this combination should be carried out (Dempster, 1967).

In common with imprecise probabilism—and in apparent contrast with classical Bayesianism—this theory has resources designed to model severe uncertainty. To see this, suppose that a coin is about to be tossed, and that you have no information whatsoever about whether the coin is fair or how it might be biased. On the classical Bayesian view, in spite of your severe uncertainty, you will nevertheless have a precise probability that the coin will land head-side-up. This strikes many as counterintuitive. Advocates of both imprecise probabilism and Dempster-Shafer theory take their theories to improve on classical Bayesianism here. According to imprecise probabilism, in the case where you have no information about the bias of the coin, a rational agent may—and on some versions of the theory, must—have a credal range of $(0, 1)$ rather than a precise credence of 0.5. And according to Dempster-Shafer theory, in a case where you have no information about the bias of the coin, you have no evidence in favour of heads, and no evidence in favour of tails, and so your belief function will assign a value of 0 to both $HEADS$ and $TAILS$.

For more on the Dempster-Shafter theory, and how it differs from both classic Bayesianism and imprecise probabilism, see Halpern (2003) and Yager and Liu (2008).

1.3 Scoring Rules

I turn now to an issue for those theorists who want to apply the idea of accuracy *scoring rules* in the context of imprecise probabilism. I begin by outlining a standard proposal for measuring the (in)accuracy of a credence function, and I explain how this sort of scoring rule has been used to construct an argument for probabilism. I then gesture towards some of the challenges that arise when we consider these measures of accuracy in the context of imprecise probabilism.

Let's begin then with the classical Bayesian picture, according to which a rational agent's epistemic state is represented with a single precise credence function. In this context a variety of scoring rules have been proposed for measuring a credence function's (in)accuracy at a given world. One popular such rule is the *Brier score* (Brier, 1950) which I outline here. First we set the truth-value of a proposition at a world to 1 if the proposition is true there, and 0 if it is false. Now we can measure the "distance" between the truth-value of the proposition at a world and the credence assigned to it, by taking the difference between the two and squaring the result. To illustrate this, suppose that you have a credence of 0.8 in the proposition that the world's population is over 7 billion in 2016. In the actual world, this proposition is true, and so has a truth-value of 1. Thus we measure the distance between the credence assigned to this proposition and its truth-value in the actual world as follows: take the truth value of the proposition (1), deduct the value assigned to it by the credence function (0.8), and then square the result (giving 0.04). We get the inaccuracy score for an entire credence function at a world by calculating this distance for each proposition that is assigned a value by the credence function, and summing the lot.

The Brier score is just one suggestion for measuring inaccuracy, and others have been proposed, along with various claims about conditions that any scoring rule ought to fulfil. One such requirement is that a scoring rule ought to be *proper*, which can be defined as follows: any agent with a rationally permissible credence function (i.e. one that obeys the probability axioms), will score her own credence function to be no more inaccurate than every other credence function, if the scoring rule that she uses is proper. The Brier score is one example of a scoring rule that meets this requirement.

Scoring rules of this sort have been used to argue for probabilism—i.e. for the claim that a rational agent's credence function obeys the probability

axioms. The argument works by showing that for any credence function Cr that does not obey the probability axioms, there is an alternative credence function Cr^* which does obey the probability axioms and which dominates Cr in the following sense: the inaccuracy of Cr is at least as great as the inaccuracy of Cr^* at every world, and at some world the inaccuracy of Cr is greater than the inaccuracy of Cr^* . Thus, the argument goes, it would be irrational to have a credence function such as Cr which does not obey the probability axioms, when an alternative credence function Cr^* is available. Arguments of this sort can be constructed using any scoring rule provided that it meets certain requirements—including the requirement that it be proper (Joyce, 1998). Arguments from accuracy for a variety of other epistemic principles have also been proposed, including an argument for the principal principle (Pettigrew, 2013), and conditionalization (Greaves & Wallace, 2006).

We can now consider how these issues are affected by a switch from precise to imprecise probabilities. If an agent has an imprecise credence function, then how should the inaccuracy of her credence function be measured? We can see at once that the original measures of inaccuracy cannot be straightforwardly carried across—for where an agent's credence in some proposition is imprecise, we have no single number which measures that agent's credence, and so cannot make sense of the idea of deducting the agent's credence in a given proposition from its truth-value at some world. Thus a new way of measuring inaccuracy is needed.

There is not yet any consensus as to what this new way of measuring inaccuracy would be like. Some authors have proposed requirements that any way of measuring the inaccuracy of an imprecise credence function would need to meet, and some have uncovered difficulties for the project. Seidenfeld, Schervish, and Kadane argue that there is no strictly proper scoring rule for imprecise probabilities. See Seidenfeld, Schervish, and Kadane (2012) and Mayo-Wilson and Wheeler (2016) for further discussion on this issue. Schoenfield (2017) argues that if the new accuracy scoring rule meets certain conditions, then the claim that accuracy is all that matters is incompatible with the claim that imprecise probabilities are sometimes rationally required—or even permitted. Thus challenges await those who wish to endorse both imprecise probabilism and accuracy arguments.

Having explored the account of imprecise probabilities, I turn now to some of the most discussed objections and problems for the account. I divide these into two categories: learning and deciding.

2 LEARNING

On the classic Bayesian picture, an agent's epistemic state is represented by a single credence function. If the agent is rational, then she will update (only) by conditionalization. Thus for example suppose that an agent is about to run an experiment at the end of which she will have learnt (just) either E or not- E . At the start of the experiment (at t_0) let's suppose that the agent has a credence of 0.2 in E , and a credence of 0.5 in some hypothesis H . Furthermore, the agent has a conditional credence of 0.9 in H given E : in other words, if we let Cr_0 name the agent's credence at t_0 , then $Cr_0(H \mid E) = Cr_0(H \cap E) / Cr_0(E) = 0.9$. Now suppose that the experiment runs, and at t_1 the agent discovers E . The agent's new t_1 credence function (Cr_1) ought rationally to be her old t_0 credence function (Cr_0) conditionalized on the new evidence that she has gained, E . Thus her new credence in H ought to be her old conditional credence in H given E : $Cr_1(H) = Cr_0(H \mid E) = 0.9$.

For the proponent of imprecise probabilities, an agent's epistemic state is represented by a set of credence functions. How will a rational agent adjust her epistemic state in the light of evidence on this account? The idea standardly endorsed by imprecise probabilists is that each credence function in the set will be adjusted in the usual way by conditionalization, and the agent's new, post-evidence epistemic state can be represented by this adjusted set of credence functions. Thus for example, to return to our experiment case above, suppose that every credence function in the set that represents the agent's epistemic state at t_0 assigns a number within the range $(0.4, 0.6)$ to H —and every number within this range is assigned to H by some credence function in the set. And suppose furthermore that for each of these credence functions, the conditional credence assigned to H given E is within the range $(0.85, 0.95)$ —and every number within this range is the conditional credence assigned to H given E by some credence function within the set. Then at t_1 , when the agent has learnt (just) E , the agent's epistemic state will be represented by the original set of credence functions each conditionalized on E , and thus the agent's new credence in H will be given by the range $(0.85, 0.95)$. I will now turn to two problems—both related to learning—for the proponent of imprecise probabilities.

2.1 *Belief Inertia*

Let us consider a scenario in which you have just selected a coin from a bag, knowing only that the bag contains various coins some of which may be biased to various unspecified degrees. You are going to toss the coin 25 times, and before you begin tossing the coin (a time we can call t_0) you

contemplate claim HEADS25—the claim that the coin will land heads on its 25th toss. According to any proponent of imprecise probabilities, you are permitted to have an imprecise credence in this claim. Now we can consider what will happen to your credence in HEADS25 if you toss the coin a few times, and it lands heads each time. Let HEADS1 be the claim that the coin lands heads on the first toss, HEADS2 be the claim that the coin lands heads on its second toss, and so on. Intuitively, your credence in HEADS25 ought to increase on learning HEADS1, and increase even more on learning $(\text{HEADS1} \cap \text{HEADS2})$, and so on.

For a certain sort of proponent of imprecise probabilism, this scenario is problematic. In particular, consider the sort of imprecise probabilist who claims that an agent's epistemic state should conform to the chance grounding thesis.⁴ On this view, all and only those credence functions which are compatible with the known chances must be included in the set that represents the agent's epistemic state. In the scenario that we are considering, at t_0 you can rule out very few chance hypotheses: for all you know, the chance of HEADS25 may be any number strictly between 0 and 1. Thus at t_0 your credence in HEADS ought rationally to be the range $(0, 1)$. What happens if you toss the coin once and it lands heads—i.e. if you learn HEADS1? For any number n within the range $(0, 1)$, you have not learnt that the chance of HEADS25 is not n . For example, you have not learnt that the chance of HEADS25 is not 0.0001. Thus your new credence in HEADS25, after learning HEADS1, ought still to be the range $(0, 1)$. What happens if you toss the coin again, and it again lands heads—i.e. in addition to HEADS1, you also learn HEADS2? You cannot then rule out any additional chance hypotheses. For example, it may still be the case, for all you know, that the chance of HEADS25 is 0.0001. Thus your credence in HEADS25 after learning both HEADS1 and HEADS2 remains the range $(0, 1)$. This pattern continues: even if you toss the coin 24 times and it lands heads on each toss, your credence in HEADS25 should still remain fixed at $(0, 1)$. In this sense, your epistemic state exhibits inertia in the face of evidence. That your epistemic state should rationally exhibit this inertia is very counterintuitive: surely as you toss the coin and it lands heads repeatedly, your credence in HEADS25 ought to increase?

To put the point vividly, we can imagine the credence functions that represent your epistemic state as a group of avatars. The avatars at t_0 will assign various precise credences to HEADS25: for every number in the range $(0, 1)$, there will be some avatar who assigns that value to HEADS25. On learning HEADS1, each avatar ought to update accordingly by conditionalizing. Take an avatar who had a credence of 0.0001 in HEADS25.

⁴ A similar problem applies to Joyce's adjusted version of this principle mentioned earlier.

It may be⁵ that this avatar's conditional credence in HEADS25 given HEADS1 is higher than her unconditional credence in HEADS25, in which case this avatar will increase her credence in HEADS25 on learning HEADS1. But there will be some avatar (perhaps an avatar whose unconditional credence in HEADS25 was even lower than 0.0001) whose credence in HEADS25 conditional on HEADS1 is 0.0001. Thus even after learning HEADS1, there will still be, in the set representing your epistemic state, an avatar whose credence in HEADS25 is 0.0001. Similarly, even if you learn the conjunction of the claims HEADS1 through HEADS24, there will still be an avatar in the set representing your epistemic state whose credence in HEADS1 is 0.0001. Thus your credence in HEADS25 will not shift from the range (0, 1) no matter how much evidence you amass in favour of HEADS25.

This looks like a problem—at least for those imprecise probabilists who accept the chance grounding thesis, or something close to it. For some of the responses available, see R. Bradley (2017), Joyce (2010), Rinard (2013), and Vallinder (2018).

2.2 Dilation

Here we turn to another problem for the proponent of imprecise probabilism. The phenomenon I discuss here was first noted by early statisticians of imprecise probabilism Walley (1991) and Seidenfeld and Wasserman (1993), and has recently been prominently discussed by White (2009). Take some claim P , that you have no evidence whatsoever for or against, so that your credence at t_0 in P is the range $[0, 1]$. Suppose that I know whether P is true, and I take a fair coin and paint the heads side over. I write " P " on this heads side iff P is true, and "not P " on the heads side iff P is not true. I similarly paint over the tails side of the coin, and write on this side whichever claim (out of " P " and "not P ") is false. You know that I have done this. I then toss the coin before your eyes. Your credence before it lands (i.e. at t_0) that it will land head-side up (HEADS), is 0.5. Then at t_1 you see it land, with the " P "-side up. What then at t_1 is your credence in P and what is your credence in HEADS?

At t_1 you have learnt that the coin has landed " P "-side up. Thus if P is true, then HEADS is also true (i.e. it must have landed heads)—for if P is true then " P " has been painted onto the heads side of the coin, and so given that it has landed " P "-side up it has also landed heads. Furthermore, if HEADS is true, then P is also true—for if it has landed heads then given that it has landed " P "-side up, " P " must have been painted onto the heads side of the coin, which will have happened only if P is true. Thus at t_1 you

⁵ Though it need not be: perhaps some avatars will stubbornly refuse to adjust their credence in HEADS25 from 0.0001. We might try to avoid this problem by excluding such agents (Halpern, 2003), though this will not solve the problem discussed in the main text.

can be certain that P is true iff HEADS is true. Thus at t_1 you must have the same credence in P as you have in HEADS. Given that at t_0 your credence in HEADS is 0.5, and your credence in P is the range $[0, 1]$, how will your credence adjust between t_0 and t_1 ? Will your credence in HEADS become the range $[0, 1]$? Or will your credence in P become precisely 0.5? Both options seem counterintuitive.⁶ It seems implausible that your credence in HEADS should “dilate” to the range $[0, 1]$: surely (by the principal principle) your credence that a fair coin has landed heads ought to be 0.5, unless you have some evidence as to how it has landed. And knowing that it landed on the “ P ”-side does not seem to give you any evidence as to whether it has landed heads or tails. And it also seems implausible that your credence in P should sharpen to the number 0.5 (White, 2009), for after all you knew even at t_0 that the coin would either land “ P ”-side up, or “ P ”-side down, and we cannot say that learning either of these pieces of information would force your credence in P to become precisely 0.5 without violating van Fraassen’s reflection principle (van Fraassen, 1984).

One popular response made by the imprecise probabilist, is to accept that at t_1 your credence in HEADS ought to dilate to $[0, 1]$.⁷ Here are two things that might be said in defence of this position.

- It seems as though learning that the coin landing “ P ”-side up gives you no evidence as to whether it has landed head-side up. But this would not follow if P was a claim that you knew something about. Suppose as a contrast case, then, that P is the claim that you have just won the lottery—a claim in which you have a very low credence indeed. On hearing that I (who know the outcome) am painting the true claim (out of “ P ” and “not- P ”) on the heads side, and the false claim on the tails side, you will be almost certain that I am painting “not- P ” on the heads side, and “ P ” on the tails side. Your credence at t_0 in HEADS is 0.5, but when at t_1 you learn that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up, you will be almost certain that HEADS is false. Thus where you have some evidence concerning P , it is natural to suppose that learning that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up will alter your credence in HEADS (see Sturgeon, 2010, Joyce, 2010).

What about in the case where P is a claim about which you have no evidence? In this case, it is tempting to suppose that learning that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up gives you no reason to adjust your credence in HEADS. But the situation is more complicated than

⁶ A further option would be for both your credence in HEADS and your credence in P to adjust, but this is no more appealing than the alternatives.

⁷ As White acknowledges, some statisticians and philosophers (such as Walley, 1991, and Seidenfeld and Wasserman, 1993) had noted this result and “taken it in their stride” (White, 2009, p. 177).

this suggests. Consider again your epistemic state as a set of avatars. For every number in the range $[0, 1]$, there is some avatar in the set that represents your epistemic state that assigns this number to P . Each such avatar, on learning that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up, will adjust her credence in HEADS accordingly.⁸ For example, the avatar whose credence in P is 0.2 will adjust her credence in HEADS downwards; and the avatar whose credence in P is 0.8 will adjust her credence in HEADS upwards. More generally after conditionalizing on the claim that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up, for every number in the range $[0, 1]$, there will be an avatar who assigns that number to HEADS. We can see then that it is not that learning that the coin has landed “ P ”-side up gives you no evidence relevant to HEADS, but rather that you are just very uncertain as to in what direction the evidence you have received should pull you, and how far. Thus your credence in HEADS is infected with the imprecision that you assigned to P , and your credence in HEADS dilates to the range $[0, 1]$ (Joyce, 2010).

- It is tempting to object that it is counterintuitive for an increase in evidence to leave your credence function more imprecise than it was before. However it is not obvious that your credence function is more imprecise at t_1 than it was at t_0 . To see this, consider that at t_0 though your credence in HEADS was precise, your conditional credence in HEADS given that the coin lands “ P ”-side up was imprecise. Thus there was imprecision in your credence function even at t_1 : this just was not obvious when we focused only on your unconditional credence in HEADS (R. Bradley, 2017).

Further discussion of the problem of dilation can be found in R. Bradley (2017), S. Bradley and Steele (2014), Dodd (2013), Joyce (2010) and Pederson and Wheeler (2014).

3 DECISION-MAKING

On the classic Bayesian picture, a rational agent has a precise credence function assigning some number between 0 and 1 to each proposition, and also a precise utility function assigning some number to each possible outcome representing in some sense how much the agent values each outcome. When faced with a decision problem—i.e. a choice between different actions—on the classic picture the agent must choose an action that has maximum *expected utility*. We can calculate the expected utility of any given action for the agent as follows: for every possible outcome,

⁸ Those avatars whose credence at t_0 in P is 0.5 need make no adjustment.

	Milk at home (s_1)	No milk at home (s_2)
	$Cr(s_1) = 0.5$	$Cr(s_2) = 0.5$
STOP FOR MILK	9	9
DON'T STOP	10	5

Table 1: A decision problem

we multiply the agent's credence that the outcome will obtain should she perform the action under consideration, by the utility of that outcome—and then we sum the lot.⁹

Here is an example to illustrate this. Sometimes on the way home from work, I stop to buy a pint of milk, which means that I take a bit longer to get home, but it is certainly better than getting home and finding that there is no milk in the house. Suppose that on this occasion, my credence that there is milk in the house already is 0.5. Table 1 represents my assessment of the possible outcomes.

We can now calculate the expected utility of each available action. The expected utility of stopping to buy milk is $(0.5)(9) + (0.5)(9) = 9$, whereas the expected utility of not stopping to buy milk is $(0.5)(10) + (0.5)(5) = 7.5$. On the classic decision rule “maximise expected utility”, I ought to stop to buy milk, because this is the action with the highest expected utility.

The maximise expected utility rule works on the assumption that for every relevant state of the world, the rational agent has a precise credence that that state of the world obtains. But proponents of imprecise probabilities deny this, and so cannot accept this rule. What alternative rule should they put in its place? According to the proponent of imprecise probabilities, what requirements does rationality place on an agent's choice of action? Many different answers have been proposed, and I will briefly outline two of these answers.

PERMISSIVE CHOICE RULES Recall that we can see an agent's epistemic state as represented by a set of avatars, each with a precise credence function. Thus faced with any decision problem, each avatar will have a view as to which action—or actions—will maximise expected utility.¹⁰ According

⁹ This is a rough and ready sketch of Savage's account (Savage, 1954). Modifications have been made to that account (e.g. in Jeffrey, 1965) but here I will stick to straightforward examples so that the modifications should not be relevant.

¹⁰ Here I assume that the agent has a precise utility function which feeds into each avatar's calculation. This of course is also up for debate, and some argue that just as a rational agent can have an imprecise credence function, so (s)he can have an imprecise utility function. I do not discuss this further here however.

to the permissive choice rules,¹¹ the agent may rationally perform any action provided that at least one of her avatars recommends that action.

To illustrate this, suppose that an agent's credence that it will rain tomorrow is the range (0.4, 0.8). Thus for every number in this range, there is some avatar who assigns that number to the claim that it will rain tomorrow. Suppose then that the agent is offered the following bet: she is to pay out £5, and will get £10 back iff it rains tomorrow. The agent has to choose whether to accept the bet, or reject it. We can assume that the agent values only money, and values it linearly. Some of her avatars would recommend accepting the bet (those whose credence that it will rain is greater than 0.5), some recommend rejecting it (those whose credence that it will rain is less than 0.5), and some rate the expected utility of accepting it equal to the expected utility of rejecting it (those whose credence that it will rain is 0.5). Thus according to the permissive choice rules, the agent is free to either accept or reject the bet: both actions are permissible. This rule—together with some variations—is discussed under the name 'Caprice' by Weatherson (1998).

MAXIMIN The rule maximin works as follows. Where an agent has an imprecise probability function, we can see her epistemic state as represented by a set of precise functions, or avatars. When considering a possible action, there is an expected utility for that action relative to each precise probability function in the agent's set. Amongst these expected utilities for the action, one will be the lowest—and so each action has a minimum expected utility. According to maximin, when faced with a choice, a rational agent will carry out whichever action has the maximum minimum expected utility.

To illustrate this, take again our agent whose credence that it will rain tomorrow is the range (0.4, 0.8): for every number in this range, there is some avatar who assigns that number to the claim that it will rain tomorrow. Suppose then that the agent is offered the following bet: she is to pay out £5, and will get £10 back iff it rains tomorrow. Each avatar calculates the expected utility of each possible action—i.e. the action of accepting the bet and the action of rejecting the bet. The avatar who assigns the lowest expected utility to accepting the bet is the avatar whose credence that it will rain tomorrow is 0.4: assuming again that the agent values only money and that linearly, we can represent the expected utility of accepting the bet from the perspective of this avatar as $-5 + (0.4)(10) = -1$. Thus the minimum expected utility of accepting the bet is -1 . Now we can calculate the minimum utility of rejecting the bet. All avatars assign the same expected utility to this action—namely 0. Thus the minimum expected utility of rejecting the bet is 0. A rational agent will choose from amongst

¹¹ This is Elga's (2010) term.

those actions with the highest minimum expected utility—and as rejecting the bet has a higher minimum expected utility (0) than accepting the bet (-1), the agent if rational will reject the bet.

Variations on this rule have been developed by Gärdenfors and Sahlin (1982), Gilboa and Schmeidler (1989), and others. An analogous maximax rule has been developed by Satia and Lave (1973). Many further rules have been proposed, including those by Arrow and Hurwicz (1972) and Ellsberg (1961). See Troffaes (2007) for a discussion and comparison of some of these rules.

3.1 Applying these rules

In some scenarios, some of the alternative rules developed by imprecise probabilists seem to work better than the classical Bayesian's rule maximise expected utility. Here is a famous case—the Ellsberg paradox—in which this holds (Ellsberg, 1961).

You have an urn before you, which contains 150 balls. 50 are black, and the other 100 are some mixture of red and yellow—but you have no further information as to what the proportions of red and yellow balls are. For all you know, there may be 100 red balls and no yellow balls, or 100 yellow balls and no red balls, or any mixture between these two extremes. Now a ball will shortly be selected at random from the urn, and you have the chance to bet on what colour the ball will be. You can either say 'black', in which case you'll win £100 if it is black, and nothing otherwise; or you can say 'red', in which case you'll win £100 if it is red, and nothing otherwise (Table 2).

	Black (<i>B</i>)	Red (<i>R</i>)	Yellow (<i>Y</i>)
BET BLACK	£100	£0	£0
BET RED	£0	£100	£0

Table 2: The first scenario in the Ellsberg paradox

Now suppose instead that you have the option of saying 'black or yellow', in which case you'll win £100 if the ball is either black or yellow, and nothing otherwise; or you can say 'red or yellow', in which case you'll win £100 if the ball is either red or yellow, and nothing otherwise (Table 3).

Typically people choose to say 'black' in the first scenario, but 'red or yellow' in the second. Furthermore, many apparently rational people exhibit this betting pattern.¹² The problem is that if we assume that a

¹² See Voorhoeve, Binmore, Stefansson, and Stewart (2016) for an analysis and discussion of the prevalence of this betting pattern.

	Black (B)	Red (R)	Yellow (Y)
BET BLACK OR YELLOW	£100	£0	£100
BET RED OR YELLOW	£0	£100	£100

Table 3: The second scenario in the Ellsberg paradox

rational agent has precise probabilities and utilities, and chooses only between those actions that maximise expected utility, then a rational agent cannot exhibit this betting pattern. To see this, let's suppose that some agent who exhibits this betting pattern has precise probabilities, and is maximising expected utility. We let the agent's credence in B , R and Y be given by $Cr(B)$, $Cr(R)$ and $Cr(Y)$ respectively, and we let the utility of winning £100 be given by u_1 and the utility of winning £0 be given by u_2 . Then—given that our agent chooses 'black' over 'red' in the first scenario, it follows that

$$Cr(B) \cdot u_1 + Cr(R) \cdot u_2 + Cr(Y) \cdot u_2 > Cr(B) \cdot u_2 + Cr(R) \cdot u_1 + Cr(Y) \cdot u_2,$$

and so that

$$Cr(B) \cdot u_1 + Cr(R) \cdot u_2 > Cr(B) \cdot u_2 + Cr(R) \cdot u_1.$$

But then the agent chooses 'red or yellow' over 'black or yellow' in the second scenario, and so it follows that

$$Cr(B) \cdot u_1 + Cr(R) \cdot u_2 + Cr(Y) \cdot u_1 < Cr(B) \cdot u_2 + Cr(R) \cdot u_1 + Cr(Y) \cdot u_1,$$

and so that

$$Cr(B) \cdot u_1 + Cr(R) \cdot u_2 < Cr(B) \cdot u_2 + Cr(R) \cdot u_1.$$

This contradicts our earlier result. Thus no agent exhibiting this betting pattern can have only precise probabilities and utilities and be guided by the rule maximise expected utility.

What alternative rule might be guiding the agent's behaviour in Ellsberg's scenario? Several of the rules formulated by proponents of imprecise probabilities can explain the agent's behaviour, and so Ellsberg's scenario can be used to argue both for (some of) the alternative rules, and for the claim that rational agents can have imprecise probabilities. To illustrate how some of these rules might handle Ellsberg's scenario, I will run through Ellsberg's own solution to the problem.

In Ellsberg's terminology, a situation can be "ambiguous" for an agent. In an ambiguous situation, more than one probability distribution seems reasonable to the agent. We can gather these probability distributions into a set $P = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n\}$: these are the distributions that the agent's

information “does not permit him to rule out” (Ellsberg, 1961, p. 661). The agent assigns weights to each of these reasonable distributions, and arrives at a composite “estimated” distribution p_i where p_i is a member of P . The *estimated pay-off* A_{est} of a given action A is the expected utility of the action calculated using p_i (Ellsberg, 1961, p. 661). But when faced with a choice of actions, the rational agent may be guided not just by the expected pay-off of each action, calculated in terms of p_i . The agent may also take into account the lowest expected utility of each action as calculated using any member of P . We let A_{min} denote the minimum expected utility of action A as calculated using any member of P , and we let x denote the agent’s degree of confidence in p_i (the “estimated” distribution). Then the *index* of an action A is given by $x \cdot A_{est} + (1 - x) \cdot A_{min}$. Ellsberg’s rule for action, then, is as follows: choose the action with the highest index.

In Ellsberg’s scenario, the agent is in an ambiguous situation: the agent can be certain that the probability that a ball randomly drawn from the urn will be red is $1/3$, but the agent cannot be certain of the probability of the ball’s being yellow or black, because (s)he does not know the proportion of yellow and black balls in the urn. There are a range of probability distributions that seem reasonable to the agent: for every number n between 0 and $2/3$, there is a reasonable probability distribution under which the probability of R is r , the probability of Y is $2/3 - r$, and the probability of B is $1/3$. Let us assume for simplicity that the agent assigns weight evenly across these reasonable probability distributions. Thus on the composite “estimated” distribution, the probability of R is $1/3$, the probability of Y is $1/3$, and the probability of B is $1/3$. Thus the expected payoff of saying ‘black’ in the first scenario ($1/3 \cdot u_1 + 2/3 \cdot u_2$) is the same as the expected payoff of saying ‘red’ in that scenario, and the expected payoff of saying ‘black or yellow’ in the second scenario ($2/3 \cdot u_1 + 1/3 \cdot u_2$) is the same as the expected payoff of saying ‘red or yellow’ in that scenario.

However a rational agent need not be guided merely by the estimated payoff of each action, but also by the lowest expected utility of each action. For the action of saying ‘red’ in the first scenario, the lowest expected utility is that given by the probability distribution according to which the probability of R is 0, the probability of Y is $2/3$, and the probability of B is $1/3$: according to this distribution, the expected utility of saying ‘red’ is 0. In contrast, according to every distribution the expected utility of saying ‘black’ is $1/3$, and so of course the lowest expected utility of saying ‘black’ is $1/3$. The ‘index’ of some action A is given by $x \cdot A_{est} + (1 - x) \cdot A_{min}$, where x is the agent’s level of confidence in the ‘estimated distribution’. Thus the index of saying ‘red’ is $1/3 \cdot x + 0 \cdot (1 - x)$, and the index of saying ‘black’ is $1/3 \cdot x + 1/3 \cdot (1 - x)$. Thus whenever the agent is less than perfectly confident in the estimated distribution—which a rational agent may well be—the value x will be less than 1, and the index of saying ‘black’ will be

greater than the index of saying ‘red’. Thus any agent for whom x is less than 1 will say ‘black’ rather than ‘red’ in the first scenario. In the second scenario, however, the very same agents will choose to say ‘red or yellow’ rather than ‘black or yellow’. For it works out that the expected payoff of both of these actions is $2/3$, but the lowest expected utility of saying ‘black or yellow’ ($1/3$) is lower than the lowest expected utility of saying ‘red and yellow’ ($2/3$), and so saying ‘black or yellow’ has a lower index than saying ‘red or yellow’.

In short, an agent for whom x is less than 1 is *ambiguity averse*: all else being equal, the agent prefers actions where (s)he knows the chances of the relevant outcomes over actions where (s)he merely estimates those outcomes. In the first scenario, if the agent says ‘black’ then (s)he will know the chance of winning £100, whereas if she says ‘red’ then the chance of winning will be unknown. In contrast, in the second scenario, if the agent says ‘red or yellow’ then (s)he will know the chance of winning £100, whereas if she says ‘black or yellow’, the chance of winning will be unknown. Thus the betting pattern that is typically displayed in Ellsberg’s scenario is permissible.

Here the imprecise probabilist seems to have an advantage over the precise probabilist. The precise probabilist seems forced to claim—counterintuitively—that the typical betting pattern in Ellsberg’s scenario is irrational, whereas the imprecise probabilist can account for this betting pattern well.

I turn now to the problem of sequential decision problems, which seem to pose a problem for the imprecise probabilist.

3.2 Sequential decision problems

Here is a problem posed by Elga (2010).¹³ According to the imprecise probabilist, a rational agent may have a credence of, say, $[0.1, 0.8]$ in some claim H . Now consider the following two bets:

Bet A: If H is true, then you lose £10; otherwise you win £15.

Bet B: If H is false, then you lose £10; otherwise you win £15.

These bets are offered sequentially: first Bet A is offered to the agent, and then Bet B. The agent knows that she will be offered both bets, and has the option of taking both, rejecting both, or taking either one. Intuitively, it would be irrational for an agent to reject both bets, because rejecting both bets leaves the agent with nothing, whereas accepting both bets leaves the

¹³ The problems that the imprecise probabilist faces over sequential decision problems are widely discussed in the literature from economics, and a puzzle related to Elga’s can be found in Hammond (1988).

agent with a sure £5. Surely then a rational agent would not reject both? The challenge that Elga poses to the imprecise probabilist is to put forward a plausible decision rule that entails that a rational agent in this scenario will not reject both bets. Various attempts have been made to meet this challenge.

It seems at first as though the permissive choice rules will not do. To see why, consider that if the agent is presented with just Bet A, there will be avatars who recommend rejection, so it follows that the agent is rationally permitted to reject Bet A. But then when presented with Bet B, there will similarly be avatars (different avatars) who recommend that this bet is rejected. So it follows that the agent is rationally permitted to reject Bet B. Thus it seems that the permissive choice rules would permit the agent to reject both bets, and so this rule cannot be used to meet Elga's challenge. However defenders of this rule may claim either that a sequence of actions is permitted only when that sequence is recommended by a single avatar, or else challenge Elga on his assumption that accepting each bet is a separate action, rather than parts of a single action (Weatherson, 2003; Williams, 2014).

Similarly, it may seem that maximin, Ellsberg's rule, and others will be unable to handle Elga's scenario, for many of these rules would permit a rational agent to reject both bets if offered on separate occasions. However as several authors have pointed out, and as Elga (2012) acknowledges, once we call on the resources of game theory, we find that several of these rules do entail that a rational agent in Elga's scenario (in which the agent knows that (s)he will be offered both bets) will not reject both bets. See S. Bradley and Steele (2014), Chandler (2014), and Sahlin and Weirich (2014); see Mahtani (2018) for a response.

A further way of responding to Elga's challenge is to argue that when faced with a series of choices, a rational agent will make a plan and stick to it—and where an agent has an imprecise credence function, that plan will be endorsed as maximising expected utility by at least one of the agent's avatars. For further discussion of this sort of view, see Bratman (2012), Gauthier (1986), and McClenen (1990).

Finally, there are authors who reject the assumption that an agent in an Elga-style scenario who rejects both bets is thereby irrational. For example, Moss (2015) constructs an account of what it is for an agent with imprecise credences to "change his or her mind", and argues that it is permissible in at least some Elga-style scenarios for an agent to reject Bet A while identifying with one of her avatars, and then change her mind and reject Bet B, identifying with a different avatar. Others such as S. Bradley and Steele (2014) also maintain that a rational agent in an Elga-style scenario may reject both bets.

Thus there are a range of interesting ways that the imprecise probabilist might respond to the sort of sequential decision problem that Elga has raised, and the debate over which rule of rationality the imprecise probabilist should endorse is still ongoing.

4 SUMMARY

I began with a natural motivation for accepting imprecise probabilism. I then outlined the most widely discussed account of imprecise probabilities, and considered how the account should be interpreted. I then turned to two categories of objections to the account: objections concerning learning, and objections concerning decision making. Within learning, I discussed two different objections: firstly the problem of belief inertia, and secondly the problem of dilation. Within decision making, I focused on the problems that the imprecise probabilist faces in situations of sequential choice. There has been recent, lively debate about these objections, and while various responses have been put forward by the imprecise probabilists, we are currently far from a consensus.

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In epistemology ranking theory is a theory of belief and its revision. It studies how an ideal doxastic agent should organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time, and how she should revise her beliefs and conditional beliefs across time when she receives new information. In this entry I will first present some background, most notably the AGM theory of belief revision (Alchourrón, Gärdenfors, & Makinson, 1985). In order to motivate the introduction of ranking theory I will then focus on the problem of *iterated* belief revisions. After presenting the elements of ranking theory (Spohn, 1988, 2012) I will show how this theory solves the problem of iterated belief revisions. I will conclude by sketching two areas of future research and by mentioning applications of ranking theory outside epistemology. Along the way we will see how ranking theory, a theory of belief, compares to subjective probability theory or Bayesianism, which is a theory of partial beliefs or degrees of belief.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sophia believes many things, among others that it will rain on Tuesday, that it will be sunny on Wednesday, and that weather forecasts are always right. Belief revision theory tells Sophia how to revise her beliefs when she learns that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain. As we will see, this depends on the details of her beliefs, but under one way of filling in the details she should keep her belief that it will rain on Tuesday and give up her belief that it will be sunny on Wednesday. To state in full detail how Sophia should revise her beliefs when she learns new information we need a representation of her old beliefs and of the new information she receives.

In this entry I will focus on ideal doxastic agents who do not suffer from the computational and other physical limitations of ordinary doxastic agents such as people and computer programs. These ideal doxastic agents get to voluntarily decide what to believe (and to what degree of numerical precision); they never forget any of their (degrees of) beliefs; and they always believe all logical and conceptual truths (to a maximal degree). We may perhaps define a (doxastic or cognitive) agent to be *ideal* just in case any (cognitive) action that is physically possible is an action that is possible for her. Such ideal agents ought to do exactly that which they ought to do if they could, where the ‘can’ that is hidden in the ‘could’

expresses possibility for the agent, not metaphysical possibility. Hence the principle that *Ought Implies Can* does not put any constraints on what an ideal agent should do, and on what an ideal doxastic agent should believe.

Belief revision theory models belief as a qualitative attitude towards sentences or propositions: the ideal doxastic agent believes a proposition, or she disbelieves the proposition by believing its negation, or she suspends judgment with respect to the proposition and its negation. This is different from the theory of subjective probabilities, also known as *Bayesianism* (Easwaran 2011a, 2011b; Titelbaum, this volume; Weisberg 2011; Wenmackers, this volume), where belief is modeled as a quantitative attitude towards a proposition: the ideal doxastic agent believes a proposition to a specific degree, her degree of belief, or credence, for the proposition. However, we will see that, in order to adequately model conditional beliefs and iterated belief revisions, ranking theory also models the ideal agent's doxastic state with numbers, and thus more than just the set of propositions she believes. Genin (this volume) discusses the relation between belief and degree of belief.

2 BELIEF REVISION

Spohn (1988, 1990) develops ranking theory in order to fix a problem that besets the AGM theory of belief revision. In order to provide some background for ranking theory I will first present the AGM theory. Ranking theory will then arise naturally out of the AGM theory. The latter theory derives its name from the seminal paper by Alchourrón et al. (1985). Comprehensive overviews can be found in Gärdenfors (1988), Gärdenfors and Rott (1995), Rott (2001), and Lin (this volume).

One version of the AGM theory of belief revision represents the ideal doxastic agent's old beliefs, her doxastic state at a given moment in time, by a set of sentences from some formal language, her *belief set*, together with an *entrenchment ordering* over these sentences. The entrenchment ordering represents how firmly the ideal doxastic agent holds the beliefs in her belief set. It represents the details of the ideal agent's doxastic state. The new information is represented by a single sentence. The AGM theory distinguishes between the easy case, called *expansion*, and the general case, called *revision*. In expansion the new information does not contradict the ideal doxastic agent's old belief set and is simply added. In revision the new information may contradict the ideal doxastic agent's old belief set. The general case of revision is difficult, because the ideal doxastic agent has to turn her old belief set, which is assumed to be consistent, into a new belief set that contains the new information and is consistent. Usually the general case is dealt with in two steps. In a first step, called *contraction*, the old belief set is cleared of everything that contradicts the new information.

In a second step one simply expands by adding the new information. This means that the difficult doxastic task is handled by contraction, which turns the general case of revision into the easy case of expansion.

A formal language \mathcal{L} is defined inductively, or recursively, as follows. \mathcal{L} contains the contradictory sentence $\lceil \perp \rceil$ and all elements of a countable set of propositional variables $PV = \{\lceil P \rceil, \lceil Q \rceil, \lceil R \rceil, \dots\}$. Furthermore, whenever A and B are sentences of \mathcal{L} , then so are the negations of A and of B , $\lceil \neg A \rceil$ and $\lceil \neg B \rceil$, respectively, as well as the conjunction of A and B , $\lceil (A \wedge B) \rceil$. Finally, nothing else is a sentence of \mathcal{L} . The new information is represented by a single sentence A from \mathcal{L} . The ideal agent's doxastic state is represented by a set of sentences, her belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$, plus an entrenchment ordering \preceq for \mathcal{B} . The entrenchment ordering, which represents the details of the ideal doxastic agent's beliefs, orders the agent's beliefs according to how reluctant she is to give them up: the more entrenched a belief, the more reluctant she is to give it up.

The entrenchment ordering does most of the work in a revision of the agent's beliefs. Suppose the agent receives new information that contradicts her belief set. Since the new belief set that results from the revision has to be consistent, some of the old beliefs have to go. The entrenchment ordering determines which beliefs have to go first: the least entrenched beliefs are the beliefs that have to go first. If giving up those is not enough to restore consistency, the beliefs that are next in the entrenchment ordering have to go next. And so on. The beliefs that would be given up last are the most entrenched ones. According to Maximality, they are the tautological sentences, which are always believed and never given up, because doing so cannot restore consistency. On the other end of the spectrum are the least entrenched sentences. According to Minimality, they are the sentences the agent does not even believe to begin with. These sentences do not belong to the agent's belief set and so are gone before the revision process has even begun.

If one sentence logically implies another sentence, then, according to Dominance, the latter cannot be more entrenched than the former, as giving up the belief in the latter sentence is to also give up the belief in the former sentence. Dominance implies that the entrenchment ordering is *reflexive*: every sentence is at least as entrenched as itself. According to Conjunctivity, two sentences cannot both be more entrenched than their conjunction: one cannot give up one's belief in a conjunction without giving up one's belief in at least one of the conjuncts. In combination with Dominance, Conjunctivity implies that the entrenchment ordering is *connected*: any two sentences can be compared to each other in terms of their comparative entrenchment. That is, either the first sentence is at least as entrenched as the second sentence, or the second sentence is at least as entrenched as the first sentence, or both. Finally, to ensure that the

entrenchment ordering is a well-behaved ordering relation, it is assumed to be *transitive* by Transitivity.

More precisely, where \vdash is the logical consequence relationship on \mathcal{L} and $Cn(\mathcal{B}) = \{A \in \mathcal{L} : \mathcal{B} \vdash A\}$ is the set of logical consequences of \mathcal{B} (and \emptyset is the empty set $\{\}$), the entrenchment ordering has to satisfy the following postulates. For all sentences A , B , and C from \mathcal{L} :

- \preceq_1 . If $A \preceq B$ and $B \preceq C$, then $A \preceq C$. Transitivity
- \preceq_2 . If $\{A\} \vdash B$, then $A \preceq B$. Dominance
- \preceq_3 . $A \preceq A \wedge B$ or $B \preceq A \wedge B$. Conjunctivity
- \preceq_4 . Suppose $\mathcal{B} \not\vdash \perp$. Then $A \notin \mathcal{B}$ if, and only if,
for all $B \in \mathcal{L}$: $A \preceq B$. Minimality
- \preceq_5 . If $A \preceq B$ for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$, then $\emptyset \vdash B$. Maximality

The work that is done by the entrenchment ordering in a revision of the agent's beliefs can also be described differently in terms of expansion, revision, and contraction, which turn belief sets and new information into belief sets (see Caie, this volume). Formally they are functions from $\wp(\mathcal{L}) \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$.

Expansion $\dot{+}$ turns each old belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each sentence A from \mathcal{L} into a new belief set $\mathcal{B} \dot{+} A = Cn(\mathcal{B} \cup \{A\})$. This is the easy case described earlier about which there is little more to be said.

The difficult and more interesting case is revision $*$, which turns each old belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each sentence A from \mathcal{L} into a new belief set $\mathcal{B} * A$. The operator $*$ is required to satisfy a number of postulates.

Closure requires revised belief sets to be closed under the logical consequence relation: after the revision is completed, the agent ought to believe all (and only) the logical consequences of the revised belief set. Congruence is similar in spirit to Closure and requires that it is the content of the new information received, and not its particular formulation, that determines what is added, and what is removed, from the agent's belief set in a revision. Success requires that revising a belief set by new information succeeds in adding the new information to the agent's belief set—and, given Closure, all sentences it logically implies. Consistency requires the revised belief set to be consistent as long as the new information is consistent. The remaining postulates all formulate different aspects of the idea that, when revising her belief set by new information, the agent should add and remove as few beliefs as possible from her belief set, subject to the constraints that the resulting belief set is consistent and that the new information has been added successfully.

Inclusion requires that revising a belief set does not create any new beliefs that are not also created by simply adding the new information. In

a sense it says that expansion is a special case of revision. Preservation requires that revising a belief set by new information that does not contradict the agent's old belief set does not lead to the loss of any beliefs. Conjunction 1 requires that, when revising her belief set by a conjunction, the agent adds *only* beliefs that she also adds when first revising her belief set by one of the two conjuncts, and then adding the second conjunct. Conjunction 2 requires that, when revising her belief set by a conjunction, the agent adds *all* beliefs that she adds when first revising her belief set by one of the two conjuncts, and then adding the second conjunct—provided the second conjunct is consistent with the result of revising her belief set by the first conjunct. More precisely, a revision function has to satisfy the following postulates. For all sets of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and all sentences A and B from \mathcal{L} :

- *1. $\mathcal{B} * A = \text{Cn}(\mathcal{B} * A)$. Closure
- *2. $A \in \mathcal{B} * A$. Success
- *3. $\mathcal{B} * A \subseteq \text{Cn}(\mathcal{B} \cup \{A\})$. Inclusion
- *4. If $\mathcal{B} \not\vdash \neg A$, then $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{B} * A$. Preservation
- *5. If $\{A\} \vdash B$ and $\{B\} \vdash A$, then $\mathcal{B} * A = \mathcal{B} * B$. Congruence
- *6. If $\emptyset \not\vdash \neg A$, then $\perp \notin \mathcal{B} * A$. Consistency
- *7. $\mathcal{B} * (A \wedge B) \subseteq \text{Cn}((\mathcal{B} * A) \cup \{B\})$. Conjunction 1
- *8. If $\neg B \notin \mathcal{B} * A$, then
 $\text{Cn}((\mathcal{B} * A) \cup \{B\}) \subseteq \mathcal{B} * (A \wedge B)$. Conjunction 2

The two-step view of revision described previously is known as the *Levi identity* (Levi, 1977). It has the ideal doxastic agent first contract \div her old belief set \mathcal{B} by the negation of the new information, $\neg A$, thus making it consistent with the new information (as well as everything logically implied by the new information). Then it has her expand the result $\mathcal{B} \div \neg A$ by adding the new information A :

$$\mathcal{B} * A = \text{Cn}((\mathcal{B} \div \neg A) \cup \{A\}).$$

The Levi identity puts contraction center stage in the revision process. Contraction \div turns each old belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each sentence A from \mathcal{L} into a “reduced” belief set $\mathcal{B} \div A$ that is cleared of A as well as everything logically implying A . It is required to satisfy the following postulates. For all sets of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and all sentences A and B from \mathcal{L} :

- \div 1. $\mathcal{B} \div A = \text{Cn}(\mathcal{B} \div A)$. Closure

- $\div 2$. If $\emptyset \not\models A$, then $A \notin Cn(\mathcal{B} \div A)$. Success
- $\div 3$. $\mathcal{B} \div A \subseteq Cn(\mathcal{B})$. Inclusion
- $\div 4$. If $\mathcal{B} \not\models A$, then $\mathcal{B} \div A = \mathcal{B}$. Vacuity
- $\div 5$. If $\{A\} \vdash B$ and $\{B\} \vdash A$, then $\mathcal{B} \div A = \mathcal{B} \div B$. Congruence
- $\div 6$. $Cn(\mathcal{B}) \subseteq Cn((\mathcal{B} \div A) \cup \{A\})$. Recovery
- $\div 7$. $(\mathcal{B} \div A) \cap (\mathcal{B} \div B) \subseteq \mathcal{B} \div (A \wedge B)$. Conjunction 1
- $\div 8$. If $A \notin \mathcal{B} \div (A \wedge B)$, then $\mathcal{B} \div (A \wedge B) \subseteq \mathcal{B} \div A$. Conjunction 2

Closure requires contracted belief sets to be closed under the logical consequence relation: after the contraction is completed, the agent ought to believe all (and only) the logical consequences of the contracted belief set. Congruence is similar in spirit to Closure and requires that it is the content of the sentence to be removed, and not its particular formulation, that determines what is removed from the agent's belief set in a contraction. Success requires that contracting a belief set by a sentence that is not tautological succeeds in removing this sentence from a belief set—and, given Closure, all sentences logically implying it. Inclusion requires that contracting a belief set does not add any beliefs to the belief set. The remaining postulates all formulate different aspects of the idea that, when contracting her belief set by a sentence, the agent should remove as few beliefs as possible from her belief set, subject to the constraints that the resulting belief set is consistent and that the sentence to be removed, together with all sentences logically implying it, is removed successfully.

Vacuity requires that contracting a belief set by a sentence leaves the belief set unchanged if the sentence that was to be removed was not even part of the belief set to begin with. Recovery requires that contracting a belief set by a sentence removes as few beliefs as possible so that adding the removed sentence again afterwards allows the agent to recover all her previously removed beliefs. Conjunction 1 requires that, when contracting her belief set by a conjunction, the agent does not remove any beliefs that she does not also remove when contracting by one or the other of the two conjuncts alone. Finally, Conjunction 2 requires the following: if a conjunct is removed in contracting a belief set by a conjunction, then no belief gets removed in contracting the belief set by this conjunct that does not also get removed in contracting this belief set by the entire conjunction. The idea behind the last two postulates is that giving up one of its conjuncts is all the ideal doxastic agent needs to do in order to give up an entire conjunction.

The Levi identity turns each contraction operator \div satisfying $\div 1 - \div 8$ into a revision operator $*$ satisfying $*1 - *8$. The converse is true of the

Harper identity (Harper, 1976). The latter has the ideal doxastic agent first revise the old belief set \mathcal{B} by the negation of the new information, $\neg A$. Then it has her remove everything from the result $\mathcal{B} * \neg A$ that was not already also a logical consequence of the old belief set \mathcal{B} :

$$\mathcal{B} \dot{-} A = (\mathcal{B} * \neg A) \cap \text{Cn}(\mathcal{B}).$$

If we have a belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ we can use an entrenchment ordering \preceq for \mathcal{B} to define a revision operator $*$ for \mathcal{L} as follows. For every sentence A from \mathcal{L} :

$$\mathcal{B} * A = \text{Cn}(\{B \in \mathcal{L} : \neg A \prec B\} \cup \{A\}),$$

where $A \prec B$ holds if, and only if, $A \preceq B$ and $B \not\preceq A$.

The idea behind this equation is the following. When the ideal doxastic agent revises $*$ her old belief set \mathcal{B} by the new information A she first has to clear \mathcal{B} of $\neg A$ as well as everything else that is as entrenched as, or less entrenched than, $\neg A$. For instance, \mathcal{B} also has to be cleared of everything that logically implies $\neg A$. However, it follows from the definition of an entrenchment ordering that all sentences B from the ideal doxastic agent's old belief set \mathcal{B} that are more entrenched than $\neg A$ can be preserved. This gives us the "preserved" belief set $\{B \in \mathcal{L} : \neg A \prec B\}$. Then the ideal doxastic agent adds the new information A to obtain $\{B \in \mathcal{L} : \neg A \prec B\} \cup \{A\}$. Finally she adds all sentences that are logically implied by the preserved belief set together with the new information. As shown by Gärdenfors (1988) and Gärdenfors and Makinson (1988) one can then prove

Theorem 1 *Let \mathcal{L} be a formal language. For each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each entrenchment ordering \preceq for \mathcal{B} satisfying $\preceq 1 - \preceq 5$ there is a revision operator $*$ from $\{\mathcal{B}\} \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ satisfying $*1 - *8$ restricted to \mathcal{B} such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = \text{Cn}(\{B \in \mathcal{L} : \neg A \prec B\} \cup \{A\}).$$

For each revision operator $$ from $\wp(\mathcal{L}) \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ satisfying $*1 - *8$ and each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ there is an entrenchment ordering \preceq for \mathcal{B} satisfying $\preceq 1 - \preceq 5$ such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = \text{Cn}(\{B \in \mathcal{L} : \neg A \prec B\} \cup \{A\}).$$

This theorem states that the postulates for entrenchment orderings translate into the postulates for revision functions, and conversely. Caie (this volume, section 2.3) states the analogous theorem regarding the relationship between the postulates for entrenchment orderings and the postulates for contraction functions.

There is a different way of representing postulates *1 – *8 for revision operators $*$ due to Grove (1988). Similar to Lewis' (1973) theory of counterfactuals it uses systems of spheres defined on a set of possible worlds instead of entrenchment orderings defined on a formal language (for more on counterfactuals see Briggs, this volume). A set of possible worlds can be thought of as a set of complete, or maximally specific, descriptions of the way the world could be. One approach, used by Grove (1988), is to identify possible worlds with maximally consistent sets of sentences from \mathcal{L} , i.e. sets of sentences that are consistent, but that become inconsistent as soon as a single new sentence is added. Another approach is to take possible worlds as primitive. For present purposes we do not have to take a stance on this issue and can assume that we are given a set of possible worlds $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ relative to which we interpret the sentences from \mathcal{L} .

In order to state Grove's (1988) approach it will be useful to have the following notation. $\llbracket A \rrbracket = \{\omega \in w_{\mathcal{L}} : \omega \models A\}$ is the proposition expressed by the sentence A from \mathcal{L} , i.e. the set of possible worlds in which the sentence A is true. $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket = \{\omega \in w_{\mathcal{L}} : \omega \models A \text{ for all } A \in \mathcal{B}\}$ is the proposition expressed by the set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$. In addition we need to assume that our language \mathcal{L} is sufficiently rich in expressive power so that for each proposition $p \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$ there is a set of sentences from \mathcal{L} , a "theory," $T(p)$ that expresses or means p , i.e. $\llbracket T(p) \rrbracket = p$.

Let $p \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$ be a proposition and let $\mathbf{s} \subseteq \wp(w_{\mathcal{L}})$ be a set of propositions. The set \mathbf{s} is a *system of spheres* in $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ that is *centered on* p if, and only if, for all propositions $q, r \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$ and for all sentences A from \mathcal{L} :

- s1. If $q, r \in \mathbf{s}$, then $q \subseteq r$ or $r \subseteq q$. s is nested
- s2. $p \in \mathbf{s}$; and: if $q \in \mathbf{s}$, then $p \subseteq q$. s is centered on p
- s3. $w_{\mathcal{L}} \in \mathbf{s}$.
- s4. If $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap u \neq \emptyset$ for some $u \in \mathbf{s}$, then there is $u^* \in \mathbf{s}$ such that:
 $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap u^* \neq \emptyset$, and $u^* \subseteq v$ for all $v \in \mathbf{s}$ with $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap v \neq \emptyset$.

Requirement s1 says that systems of spheres are *nested*: any two spheres are such that one is contained in the other, or they are the same sphere. Requirement s2 says that the center of a system of spheres must itself be a sphere in this system, and that every other sphere in the system contains the center as a sub-sphere. Requirement s3 says that the set of all possible worlds must be a sphere in every system of spheres. This implies that the set of possible worlds contains every other sphere in any given system of spheres as a sub-sphere. Finally, in combination with s3 requirement s4 says that for each logically consistent sentence A there is a smallest sphere $u^* \in \mathbf{s}$ that properly overlaps (has a non-empty intersection) with the proposition expressed by A , $\llbracket A \rrbracket$.

Let $c_s(A) = \llbracket A \rrbracket \cap u^*$ and define $c_s(A) = \emptyset$ if A is logically inconsistent. Then $c_s(A)$ is the set of possible worlds in $\llbracket A \rrbracket$ that are “closest” to the center p , where the meaning of ‘closeness’ is determined by the system of spheres \mathbf{s} . If A is logically consistent with (a set of sentences expressing) the center p , then $c_s(A)$ is just the intersection of the center p with the set of possible worlds $\llbracket A \rrbracket$, $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap p$. This is the easy case of expansion. The difficult case of revision arises when A is not logically consistent with (a set of sentences expressing) the center p . In this case the ideal doxastic agent has to leave the center and move to the first sphere u^* that properly overlaps with the proposition expressed by A and adopt their intersection, $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap u^*$, as $c_s(A)$. Figure 1 represents this situation.

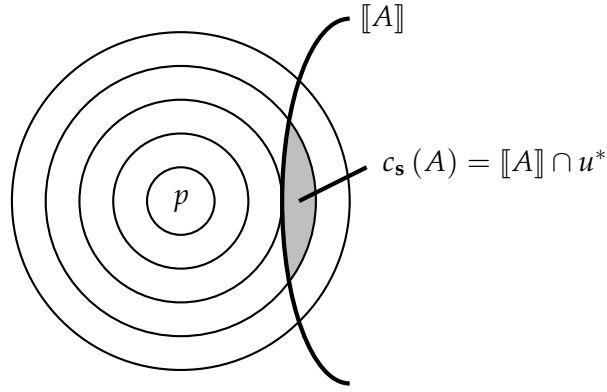


Figure 1: The possible worlds “closest” to the center p

If we have a belief set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ we can use a system of spheres \mathbf{s} in $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ that is centered on $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$ to define a revision operator $*$ restricted to \mathcal{B} as follows. For every sentence A from \mathcal{L} :

$$\mathcal{B} * A = T(c_s(A)).$$

The idea is that what the ideal doxastic agent ends up believing after revising $*$ her old belief set \mathcal{B} with the new information A is (a set of sentences expressing) the proposition $c_s(A)$ that contains the possible worlds in $\llbracket A \rrbracket$ that are closest when the proposition expressed by her old belief set, $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$, is the center. Expansion is the special case where the proposition expressed by the new information properly overlaps with the proposition expressed by the old belief set, $\llbracket A \rrbracket \cap \llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket \neq \emptyset$. In this special case the ideal doxastic agent does not have to leave the old center $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ of her doxastic state; it suffices if she narrows it down to the possible worlds also contained in $\llbracket A \rrbracket$. However, in the general case of revision this intersection may be empty. In this general case the ideal doxastic agent

may have to leave the innermost sphere $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ and move to the smallest sphere u^* that properly overlaps with $\llbracket A \rrbracket$ and adopt their intersection, $u^* \cap \llbracket A \rrbracket$, as the new center of her doxastic state.

As before we can picture the system of spheres centered on $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ as an “onion” around $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$. The grey area $\llbracket \mathcal{B} * A \rrbracket = \llbracket T(c_s(A)) \rrbracket = u^* \cap \llbracket A \rrbracket$ is the logically strongest proposition the ideal doxastic agent believes after revising her old belief set \mathcal{B} by the new information A ; it is the new center of her doxastic state (Figure 2).

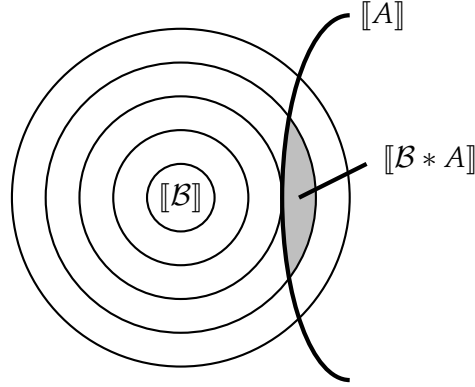


Figure 2: The strongest proposition believed after revising \mathcal{B} by A

Grove (1988) proves the following theorem which states that an ideal doxastic agent can be represented as revising her beliefs by relying on a system of spheres satisfying $s1 - s4$ if, and only if, she can be represented as revising her beliefs by employing a revision function satisfying postulates $*1 - *8$.

Theorem 2 *Let \mathcal{L} be a formal language, and let $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ be a set of possible worlds relative to which the sentences from \mathcal{L} are interpreted and relative to which \mathcal{L} is sufficiently rich. For each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each system of spheres s in $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ that is centered on $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ and satisfies $s1 - s4$ there is a revision operator $*$ from $\{\mathcal{B}\} \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ satisfying $*1 - *8$ restricted to \mathcal{B} such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = T(c_s(A)).$$

For each revision operator $$ from $\wp(\mathcal{L}) \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ satisfying $*1 - *8$ and each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ there is a system of spheres s in $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ that is centered on $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ and satisfies $s1 - s4$ such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = T(c_s(A)).$$

The two representations of belief revision in terms of systems of spheres and in terms of belief revision functions are thus equivalent. Combined with Theorem 1 this implies that the representation of belief revision in terms of systems of spheres and in terms of entrenchment orderings are also equivalent.

As an aside let me note that Grove's (1988) notion of a system of spheres is more general than Lewis's (1973) notion in the following respect. Grove (1988) allows s to be centered on arbitrary propositions $p \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$, whereas Lewis (1973, 14f) requires the center p to contain the actual world, and nothing but the actual world. These last two requirements are known as the principles of weak centering and of strong centering, respectively (see Briggs, this volume). In another respect Grove's (1988) notion is less general than Lewis's (1973). This is so, because requirement s_4 makes a doxastic version of the limit assumption, which Lewis (1973, 19f) famously rejects and which Herzberger (1979) shows to be equivalent to the condition that the set of counterfactual consequences $\{C \in \mathcal{L} : A \Box \rightarrow C\}$ of any consistent sentence A be consistent. Ranking theory also makes a doxastic version of the limit assumption.

In the AGM theory of belief revision the ideal agent's old doxastic state is represented by her belief set \mathcal{B} together with her entrenchment ordering \preceq for \mathcal{B} . The latter ordering guides the revision process in that it specifies which elements of the old belief set are given up, and which are kept, when new information D is received. The result of revising the old belief set by the new information D is a new belief set $\mathcal{B} * D$. Sophia's old belief set \mathcal{B} includes the beliefs that it will rain on Tuesday, that it will be sunny on Wednesday, and that weather forecasts are always right. Suppose her belief A that it will be sunny on Wednesday is less entrenched than her belief B that it will rain on Tuesday, which in turn is less entrenched than her belief C that weather forecasts are always right, $A \prec B \prec C$.

On Monday Sophia comes to believe that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain, D . Consequently she has to give up her belief A that it will be sunny on Wednesday or her belief C that weather forecasts are always right. The reason is that it follows from D that at least one of those two beliefs is false, i.e. $\{D\} \vdash \neg A \vee \neg C$. This implies that $A \wedge C \preceq \neg D$. Since A is less entrenched than C , i.e. $A \prec C$, A has to go. Furthermore, since $\{C, D\} \not\vdash \neg B$ Sophia need not give up her belief B that it will rain on Tuesday if she holds onto her belief C that weather forecasts are always right, and adds the belief D that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain. In addition let us assume that $\neg D \prec B$ so that Sophia's entrenchment ordering looks as follows: where $X \sim Y$ is short for $X \preceq Y$ and $Y \preceq X$,

$$\perp \sim \neg A \prec A \sim A \wedge C \preceq \neg D \prec B \prec C \prec A \vee \neg A.$$

Thus Sophia's new belief set is

$$\mathcal{B} * D = Cn(\{X : \neg D \prec X\} \cup \{D\}) = Cn(\{B, C, D, \neg A\}).$$

To Sophia's surprise it is sunny on Tuesday after all. Therefore Sophia wants to revise her newly acquired belief set $\mathcal{B} * D$ a second time by $\neg B$ to correct her belief B that it will rain on Tuesday. In addition, Sophia has to give up her belief D that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain (this might be because she has misheard the weather forecast) or her belief C that weather forecasts are always right (this might be because she has been too gullible). The reason is that it follows from $\neg B$ that at least one of those two beliefs is false, i.e. $\{\neg B\} \vdash \neg D \vee \neg C$. Unfortunately AGM belief revision theory is of no help here. While Sophia could use her entrenchment ordering to revise her old belief set \mathcal{B} to a new belief set $\mathcal{B} * D$, the entrenchment ordering itself has not been revised. Sophia's new doxastic state is silent as to whether D is now more entrenched than C (this might be because she was too gullible) or C is now more entrenched than D (this might be because she misheard the weather forecast) or C is now as entrenched as D (this might be because she was too gullible and misheard the weather forecast). However, the latter is exactly the kind of information that Sophia needs in order to revise her beliefs a second time.

3 ITERATED BELIEF REVISION

More generally, the problem is that Sophia's doxastic state is represented as a belief set plus an entrenchment ordering before the revision process, but as a belief set without an entrenchment ordering after the revision process. To handle *iterated* belief revisions the ideal agent's doxastic state has to be represented in the same way before and after the revision process. Gärdenfors and Rott (1995, p. 37) call this the "principle of categorical matching."

Nayak (1994), Boutilier (1996), Darwiche and Pearl (1997), Segerberg (1998), Fermé (2000), Rott (2003), Rott (2006), and others do exactly this (see also Caie, this volume, section 2.4). They augment the AGM postulates by additional postulates specifying how the ideal doxastic agent should revise her entrenchment ordering in addition to her belief set when she receives new information. On their accounts the ideal agent's doxastic state is represented as a belief set plus an entrenchment ordering both before and after the revision process, and both of these two elements are revised when new information is received.

Let us have a closer look at the proposal by Darwiche and Pearl (1997) (Caie, this volume, section 2.4 also discusses Boutilier 1996's proposal). In addition to postulates *1 – *8 they propose four more postulates for

iterated belief revision. The first of these, *9, says that revising an old belief set by new information (say, a conjunction) should result in the same new belief set as first revising the old belief set by a logical consequence of the new information (say, one of the two conjuncts) and then revising the resulting belief set by the new information in its entirety. That is, revision by a more specific piece of information such as that Sophia had red wine should override all changes that result from first revising the old belief set by a less specific piece of information such as that Sophia had wine.

The second of these new postulates, *10, says that revising an old belief set consecutively by two pieces of information that are logically inconsistent should result in the same new belief set as revising the old belief set by the second piece of information alone. That is, revision by the second piece of information—say, that Sophia had red wine—should override all changes that result from first revising the old belief by the first piece of information that is logically incompatible with the second piece of information—say, that Sophia had no wine.

Next suppose the ideal doxastic agent holds a belief after revising her old belief set by a piece of information. This may, but need not be a new belief, i.e. a belief not held previously. The third new postulate, *11, says that the ideal doxastic agent should also hold this belief if she first revises her old belief set by this very belief and then revises the resulting belief set by said piece of information.

Finally, suppose there is a sentence that is logically compatible with the result of revising the ideal doxastic agent's old belief set by a piece of information. The fourth new postulate, *12, says that this sentence should also be logically compatible with what the ideal doxastic agent ends up believing if she first revises her old belief set by this very sentence and then revises the resulting belief set by said piece of information.

More precisely, Darwiche and Pearl (1997) require the following of all sets of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and all sentences A and B from \mathcal{L} :

*9. If $\{A\} \vdash B$, then $(\mathcal{B} * B) * A = \mathcal{B} * A$.

*10. If $\{A\} \vdash \neg B$, then $(\mathcal{B} * B) * A = \mathcal{B} * A$.

*11. If $B \in \mathcal{B} * A$, then $B \in (\mathcal{B} * B) * A$.

*12. If $\neg B \notin \mathcal{B} * A$, then $\neg B \notin (\mathcal{B} * B) * A$.

In order to represent these four new postulates more perspicuously it will be helpful to consider the following reformulation of a system of spheres \mathbf{s} in $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ centered on some proposition p .

Let $p \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$ be a proposition and let \leq be a binary relation on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$. The relation \leq is an *implausibility ordering* on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ with center p just in case the following holds for all possible worlds ω , ω' , and ω'' from $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ and all propositions $q \subseteq w_{\mathcal{L}}$:

- \leq_1 . $\omega \leq \omega'$ or $\omega' \leq \omega$. \leq is connected
- \leq_2 . If $\omega \leq \omega'$ and $\omega' \leq \omega''$, then $\omega \leq \omega''$. \leq is transitive
- \leq_3 . $\omega \in p$ if, and only if, for all $\omega^* \in w_{\mathcal{L}} : \omega \leq \omega^*$.
- \leq_4 . If $q \neq \emptyset$, then $\{\omega \in q : \omega \leq \omega^* \text{ for all } \omega^* \in q\} \neq \emptyset$.

As suggested by its name, an implausibility ordering on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ with center p orders the possible worlds from $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ according to their implausibility. Among other things, it is required that any two possible worlds can be compared with respect to their implausibility: either the first possible world is at least implausible as the second possible world, or the second possible world is at least as implausible as the first possible world, or both. It is also required that the ordering is transitive: if one possible world is at least as implausible as a second possible world, and the second possible world is at least as implausible as a third possible world, then the first possible world is at least as implausible as the third possible world.

Furthermore it is required that the possible worlds in the center are no more implausible than all possible worlds. That is, the center is the proposition that contains all and only the least implausible possible worlds. Finally it is required that each proposition that contains a possible world also contains a possible world that is no more implausible than all possible worlds in this proposition. The latter feature allows us to identify the implausibility of a non-empty or logically consistent proposition with the implausibility of the least implausible possible world(s) comprised by this proposition.

A system of spheres centered on p can be understood as an implausibility ordering with the center p containing the least implausible possible worlds. In terms of such an implausibility ordering the problem with the original AGM approach is the following. Before the revision process the ideal agent's doxastic state is represented as a belief set \mathcal{B} plus an implausibility ordering $\leq_{\mathcal{B}}$ with center $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$. After revision by the new information A the ideal agent's doxastic state is represented as a belief set $\mathcal{B} * A$, but without a corresponding implausibility ordering $\leq_{\mathcal{B} * A}$. Gärdenfors and Rott's (1995) principal of categorical matching urges us to represent the ideal agent's doxastic state as a belief set plus an implausibility ordering both before and after the revision process. In these terms Darwiche and Pearl's (1997) postulates *9–*12 become the following simple requirements.

First, the implausibility ordering among the possible worlds within the proposition expressed by the new information should be the same before and after a revision by the new information. Second, the implausibility ordering among the possible worlds outside of the proposition expressed by the new information should also be the same before and after a revision

by the new information. Third, if a possible world within the proposition expressed by the new information is less implausible than a possible world outside of this proposition before revision by the new information, then this should remain so after a revision by the new information. Fourth, if a possible world within the proposition expressed by the new information is at least as implausible as a possible world outside of this proposition before revision by the new information, then this should also remain so after a revision by the new information. That is, where $\omega < \omega'$ holds for arbitrary possible worlds ω and ω' from $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ if, and only if, $\omega \leq \omega'$ and $\omega' \not\leq \omega$, the following is required of all possible worlds ω and ω' from $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ and all sentences A from \mathcal{L} :

- ≤ 5 . If $\omega, \omega' \in \llbracket A \rrbracket$, then: $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B}} \omega'$ just in case $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B} * A} \omega'$.
- ≤ 6 . If $\omega, \omega' \notin \llbracket A \rrbracket$, then: $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B}} \omega'$ just in case $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B} * A} \omega'$.
- ≤ 7 . If $\omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket$ and $\omega' \notin \llbracket A \rrbracket$ and if $\omega <_{\mathcal{B}} \omega'$, then $\omega <_{\mathcal{B} * A} \omega'$.
- ≤ 8 . If $\omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket$ and $\omega' \notin \llbracket A \rrbracket$ and $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B}} \omega'$, then $\omega \leq_{\mathcal{B} * A} \omega'$.

Before we turn to a representation theorem for iterated belief revision let us consider a third representation theorem for belief revision. Theorems 1 and 2 tell us that the representation of belief revision in terms of entrenchment orderings, in terms of belief revision functions, and in terms of systems of spheres are all equivalent. According to the following theorem due to Grove (1988) this equivalence extends to the representation of belief revision in terms of implausibility orderings.

Theorem 3 *Let \mathcal{L} be a formal language, and let $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ be a set of possible worlds relative to which the sentences from \mathcal{L} are interpreted and relative to which \mathcal{L} is sufficiently rich. For each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ and each implausibility ordering \leq on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ with center $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ that satisfies $\leq 1 - \leq 4$ there is a revision operator $*$ from $\{\mathcal{B}\} \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ satisfying $*1 - *8$ restricted to \mathcal{B} such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = T \left(\{ \omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket : \omega \leq \omega^* \text{ for all } \omega^* \in \llbracket A \rrbracket \} \right).$$

For each revision operator $$ from $\wp(\mathcal{L}) \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ that satisfies $*1 - *8$ and each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$ there is an implausibility ordering \leq on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ with center $\llbracket \mathcal{B} \rrbracket$ satisfying $\leq 1 - \leq 4$ such that for all $A \in \mathcal{L}$:*

$$\mathcal{B} * A = T \left(\{ \omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket : \omega \leq \omega^* \text{ for all } \omega^* \in \llbracket A \rrbracket \} \right).$$

The complicated looking proposition $\{ \omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket : \omega \leq \omega^* \text{ for all } \omega^* \in \llbracket A \rrbracket \}$ is simply the set of the least implausible possible worlds in which the new information A is true. This means that the belief set $\mathcal{B} * A$ that results from revising $*$ the ideal doxastic agent's old belief set \mathcal{B} by new information

A expresses the proposition that is comprised by the least implausible A -worlds.

Against this background we can now state the following representation theorem for iterated belief revision due to Darwiche and Pearl (1997). According to it the representation of iterated belief revision in terms of belief revision functions à la postulates *9–*12 is equivalent to the simple representation of iterated belief revision in terms of implausibility orderings à la \leq_5 – \leq_8 .

Theorem 4 *Let \mathcal{L} and $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ be as in Theorem 3. Suppose $*$ is a revision operator from $\wp(\mathcal{L}) \times \mathcal{L}$ into $\wp(\mathcal{L})$ that satisfies *1–*8. According to Theorem 3, there exists a family of implausibility orderings $(\leq_{\mathcal{B}})_{\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}}$ on $w_{\mathcal{L}}$ such that for each set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$: $\leq_{\mathcal{B}}$ satisfies \leq_1 – \leq_4 and is such that, for all sentences $A \in \mathcal{L}$, $\mathcal{B} * A = T\left(\left\{\omega \in \llbracket A \rrbracket : \omega \leq_{\mathcal{B}} \omega^* \text{ for all } \omega^* \in \llbracket A \rrbracket\right\}\right)$. For this $*$ and any one of these families $(\leq_{\mathcal{B}})_{\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}}$: $*$ satisfies *9–*12 if, and only if, for every set of sentences $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$, $\leq_{\mathcal{B}}$ satisfies \leq_5 – \leq_8 .*

The approaches to iterated belief revision mentioned above all have in common that the ideal agent’s doxastic state is represented as a belief set plus an entrenchment ordering/system of spheres/implausibility ordering both before and after the revision process. Furthermore these approaches have in common that the new information is represented as a single sentence (or a single proposition). The latter is also true for the approach by Jin and Thielscher (2007) discussed below, but not for what Rott (2009) calls “two-dimensional” belief revision operators (see also Cantwell 1997, Fermé and Rott 2004, and Rott 2007).

In one-dimensional belief revision, as we may call it, the new information comes as a “naked” (Rott, 2007) sentence or proposition. It is the job of the various belief revision methods, as opposed to the new information itself, to say exactly where in the new entrenchment ordering/system of spheres/implausibility ordering the new sentence or proposition should be placed. These belief revision methods include lexicographic revision (Nayak, 1994), natural revision (Boutilier, 1996), irrevocable revision (Seegerberg, 1998; Fermé, 2000), irrefutable revision (Rott, 2006), and still others. In two-dimensional belief revision it is the new information itself that carries at least part of this information. Here the new information does not say *that* the input sentence A is *true* (so should be accepted according to the Success postulate). Instead it specifies, at least to some extent, *how firmly* A is *accepted* or *believed* by specifying that, in the new entrenchment ordering \preceq^* , A is at least as entrenched as some “reference sentence” B . Thus the new information is now of the form: $A \preceq^* B$. (For the purposes of this entry we may ignore “non-prioritized” belief revision, where the new information need not be accepted. See Hansson, Fermé, Cantwell, and Falappa, 2001.)

Let us return to our example. On Monday Sophia comes to believe that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain, D . In one-dimensional belief revision she picks one of the iterated belief revision methods mentioned above. Then she revises her old belief set \mathcal{B} and entrenchment ordering $\preceq_{\mathcal{B}}$ to obtain a new belief set $\mathcal{B} * D$ and a new entrenchment ordering $\preceq_{\mathcal{B}*D}$. Different methods return different outputs, but on all of them Sophia ends up believing that it will rain on Tuesday, B . On Tuesday Sophia sees that it is sunny and so receives the new information that it does not rain after all, $\neg B$. In one-dimensional belief revision Sophia proceeds as before.

In two-dimensional belief revision Sophia does not receive the qualitative information $\neg B$ about Tuesday's weather. Instead she receives the comparative information $C \preceq^* \neg B$ about her new doxastic state. This piece of new information says that, in her new entrenchment ordering \preceq^* , the claim that it does not rain on Tuesday is at least as entrenched as the claim that weather forecasts are always right, indicating that she trusts her sight at least as much as the weatherperson (we could take a reference sentence other than C).

Now, there still are several belief revision methods to choose from (see Rott 2009). Among others, this reflects the fact that Sophia can respect the constraint $C \preceq^* \neg B$ by lowering the doxastic status of C , or by raising the doxastic status of $\neg B$. However, the new information now is more specific and leaves less room to be filled by the revision method. It is then only a small, but crucial step to equip Sophia with the quantitative, numerical information that $\neg B$ is entrenched to a specific degree. In this case the new information completely determines exactly where $\neg B$ is located in the new entrenchment ordering on its own, without the help of the revision method. The latter merely has to incorporate this new information into Sophia's old doxastic state in a consistent way. Ranking theory does exactly this.

Before presenting ranking theory let us return to the qualitative approaches to iterated belief revision. Postulates *1 – *12 are still compatible with many conflicting belief revision methods. Jin and Thielscher (2007) attempt to remedy this situation by additionally requiring the ideal doxastic agent to consider the new information B to be *independent* of a sentence A after revision by B if she considered B to be independent of A before revision by B . In other words, revision should preserve independencies. While the idea behind Jin and Thielscher (2007)'s proposal seems to be correct, their actual requirement turns out to be too strong. The reason is that their notion of dependence is too strong in the sense that too many sentences are rendered independent of other sentences.

According to Jin and Thielscher (2007) a believed sentence A is independent of another sentence B if the believed sentence A is still believed

after revision by the negation of the other sentence, $\neg B$. However, I can receive new information $\neg B$ —say, that the captain of my favorite soccer team will not be fit for the match—whose negation $\neg\neg B$ is positively relevant to, and so *not* independent of, a belief of mine A —say, that my favorite soccer team will win the match—without making me give up this belief of mine altogether. More generally, the ways two sentences can depend on each other are many and varied, and the qualitative and comparative notions of AGM belief revision theory and its refinements seem to be too coarse-grained to capture these dependencies. Hild and Spohn (2008) argue axiomatically, and we will see in the next section, that, in order to adequately represent all dependencies, and to handle iterated belief revisions, one has to go all the way from qualitative belief sets and comparative entrenchment orderings/systems of spheres/implausibility orderings to quantitative, numerical ranking functions.

4 RANKING THEORY

Ranking functions are introduced by Spohn (1988, 1990) to represent qualitative conditional belief. A comprehensive overview can be found in Spohn (2012). The theory is quantitative or numerical in the sense that ranking functions assign numbers, so-called *ranks*, to sentences or propositions. These numbers are needed for the definition of conditional ranking functions which represent conditional beliefs. As we will see, once conditional ranking functions are defined we can interpret everything in purely qualitative, albeit conditional terms. The numbers assigned by conditional ranking functions are called *conditional ranks*. They are defined as differences of non-conditional ranks.

Instead of taking the objects of belief to be sentences of a formal language it is both more general and more convenient to take them to be propositions of some field or algebra over a set of possible worlds W . Here is the relevant definition. A set of subsets of W , $\mathcal{A} \subseteq \wp(W)$, is an *algebra over W* if, and only if,

- (i) the empty or contradictory set \emptyset is a proposition in \mathcal{A} ,
- (ii) if A is a proposition in \mathcal{A} , then the complement or negation of A , $W \setminus A = \overline{A}$, is also a proposition in \mathcal{A} , and
- (iii) if both A and B are propositions in \mathcal{A} , then the union or disjunction of A and B , $A \cup B$, is also a proposition in \mathcal{A} .

An algebra \mathcal{A} over W is a σ -*algebra* if, and only if, the following holds for every countable set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \wp(W)$: if all the members or elements of \mathcal{B} are propositions in \mathcal{A} , i.e. if $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{A}$, then the union or disjunction of the elements of \mathcal{B} , $\bigcup \mathcal{B}$, is also a proposition in \mathcal{A} . Finally, an algebra \mathcal{A}

over W is *complete* if, and only if, the following holds for every (countable or uncountable) set $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{P}(W)$: if all the members or elements of \mathcal{B} are propositions in \mathcal{A} , i.e. if $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{A}$, then the union or disjunction of the elements of \mathcal{B} , $\bigcup \mathcal{B}$, is also a proposition in \mathcal{A} . The power-set of a set of possible worlds W , $\mathcal{P}(W)$, is a complete algebra over W .

A function $q : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ from an algebra of propositions \mathcal{A} over a non-empty set of possible worlds W into the set of natural numbers \mathbb{N} extended by infinity ∞ , $\mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$, is a *ranking function* on \mathcal{A} just in case for all propositions A and B from \mathcal{A} :

$$q(W) = 0, \quad (1)$$

$$q(\emptyset) = \infty, \quad (2)$$

$$q(A \cup B) = \min \{q(A), q(B)\}. \quad (3)$$

As in probability theory, if \mathcal{A} is a σ -algebra, axiom (3) can be strengthened to countable unions. The resulting ranking function is called “countably minimitive.” In contrast to probability theory, if \mathcal{A} is a complete algebra, axiom (3) can even be strengthened to arbitrary unions. The resulting ranking function is called “completely minimitive.”

For a non-empty or consistent proposition $A \neq \emptyset$ from \mathcal{A} the conditional ranking function $q(\cdot | A) : \mathcal{A} \setminus \{\emptyset\} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ based on the (non-conditional) ranking function $q(\cdot) : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ is defined as

$$q(\cdot | A) = \begin{cases} q(\cdot \cap A) - q(A), & \text{if } q(A) < \infty, \\ \infty \text{ or } 0, & \text{if } q(A) = \infty. \end{cases}$$

For the case where $q(A) = \infty$ Goldszmidt and Pearl (1996, p. 63) suggest ∞ as the value for $q(B | A)$ for all propositions B from \mathcal{A} . For this case Huber (2006, p. 464) suggests 0 as the value for $q(B | A)$ for all non-empty or consistent propositions B from \mathcal{A} and additionally stipulates $q(\emptyset | A) = \infty$ to ensure that every conditional ranking function on \mathcal{A} is a ranking function on \mathcal{A} .

A ranking function q is *regular* if, and only if,

$$q(A) < q(\emptyset) = \infty,$$

for all non-empty or consistent propositions A from \mathcal{A} . In contrast to probability theory it is always possible to define a regular ranking function, no matter how rich or fine-grained the underlying algebra of propositions (see Hájek, ms).

Ranks are interpreted doxastically as grades of disbelief. A proposition A is disbelieved just in case A is assigned a positive rank, $q(A) > 0$. A proposition that is not disbelieved is assigned rank 0, but this does not mean that it is believed. Instead, belief in a proposition is characterized

as disbelief in its negation: a proposition A is believed just in case the negation of A , \bar{A} , is disbelieved, $q(\bar{A}) > 0$. An agent suspends judgment with respect to a proposition (and its negation) if, and only if, both the proposition and its negation are assigned rank 0.

A proposition A is disbelieved conditional on a proposition C just in case A is assigned a positive rank conditional on C , $q(A | C) > 0$. A proposition A is believed conditional on a proposition C just in case the negation of A , \bar{A} , is disbelieved conditional on C , $q(\bar{A} | C) > 0$. It takes getting used to read positive numbers in this “negative” way, but mathematically this is the simplest way to axiomatize ranking functions.

Note that it follows from Huber’s (2006) definition of a conditional ranking function that the ideal doxastic agent should not disbelieve a proposition A conditional on itself, $q(A | A) = 0$, if, and only if, A is non-empty or consistent.

In doxastic terms the first axiom says that the ideal doxastic agent should not disbelieve the tautological proposition W . The second axiom says that she should disbelieve the empty or contradictory proposition \emptyset with maximal strength ∞ . Given the definition of conditional ranks, the second axiom can also be read in purely qualitative, albeit conditional terms: in these terms it says that the ideal doxastic agent should disbelieve the empty or contradictory proposition conditional on any non-empty or consistent proposition. It follows that the ideal doxastic agent should believe the tautological proposition with maximal strength, or conditional on any non-empty or consistent proposition.

Part of what the third axiom says is that the ideal doxastic agent should disbelieve a disjunction $A \cup B$ just in case she disbelieves both its disjuncts A and B . Given the definition of conditional ranks, the third axiom extends this requirement to conditional beliefs. As noted above, the ideal doxastic agent should not disbelieve a non-empty or consistent proposition conditional on itself. Given this consequence of the definition of a conditional ranking function, the third axiom says—in purely qualitative, albeit conditional terms—the following. For all non-empty or consistent propositions C , the ideal doxastic agent should disbelieve a disjunction $A \cup B$ conditional on C just in case she disbelieves A conditional on C and she disbelieves B conditional on C . Countably and completely minimitive ranking functions extend this “conditional consistency” requirement to countable and arbitrary unions, respectively. For any non-empty or consistent proposition C , the ideal doxastic agent should disbelieve $\bigcup \mathcal{B}$ conditional on C just in case she disbelieves each disjunct B from \mathcal{B} conditional on C . We thus see that all that axioms (1)–(3) of ranking theory ask of the ideal doxastic agent is that her beliefs be consistent, and that her conditional beliefs be conditionally consistent.

Ranks are numerical, but unlike probabilities, which are measured on an absolute scale, ranks do not utilize all the information carried by these numbers. Instead, ranks are at best measured on a ratio scale (Hild & Spohn, 2008)—at best, because even the choice of 0 as threshold for disbelief is somewhat arbitrary, as Spohn (2015, p. 9) notes (but see Raidl, 2018, for subtle differences for conditional belief). Some positive, but finite natural number would do just as well. This is perhaps most perspicuous by considering what Spohn (2012) calls the *two-sided* ranking function $\beta : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z} \cup \{\infty\} \cup \{-\infty\}$ whose range is the set of integers \mathbb{Z} extended by plus infinity ∞ and minus infinity $-\infty$, $\mathbb{Z} \cup \{\infty\} \cup \{-\infty\}$. β is defined in terms of q as follows: for all propositions A in \mathcal{A} , $\beta(A) = q(\overline{A}) - q(A)$. Ranking functions and two-sided ranking functions are interdefinable. The latter are more difficult to axiomatize, but they may be more intuitive, because they characterize belief in positive terms as follows.

A proposition A is believed if, and only if, its two-sided rank is positive, $\beta(A) > 0$. A proposition A is believed conditional on a proposition C if, and only if, its two-sided conditional rank is positive, $\beta(A | C) > 0$. Interestingly, any other finite threshold equally gives rise to a notion of belief (that is consistent and deductively closed as explained below): a proposition is believed if, and only if, its rank is greater than some finite, non-negative threshold n , $\beta(A) > n$. Hence ranking theory validates the Lockean thesis (Foley, 2009; Hawthorne, 2009). Furthermore, while it may appear unfair to reserve infinitely many numbers for belief and for disbelief, and only the number 0 for suspension of judgment, we now see that this is not essential to the theory and can be fixed by adopting a threshold other than 0 (there are still only finitely many levels for suspension of judgment, though).

Doxastically interpreted, axioms (1)–(3) are synchronic norms for how an ideal doxastic agent should organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time. These axioms are supplemented by diachronic norms for how she should update her beliefs and conditional beliefs over time if new information of various formats is received. The first update rule is defined for the case where the new information comes in the form a certainty. It mirrors the update rule of strict conditionalization from probability theory (Vineberg, 2000).

Update Rule 1 (Plain Conditionalization, Spohn 1988) *If $q(\cdot) : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ is the ideal doxastic agent's ranking function at time t , and between t and the later time t' her ranks for E and \overline{E} from \mathcal{A} are directly affected and she becomes certain of E , but no logically stronger proposition (i.e. her rank for E at t is finite, and E is the logically strongest proposition for whose negation \overline{E} her rank at t' is ∞), and her ranks are not directly affected in any other way such as forgetting etc., then her ranking function at t' should be $q_E(\cdot) = q(\cdot | E)$.*

Plain conditionalization asks the ideal doxastic agent to revise her beliefs and conditional beliefs by holding onto those conditional beliefs whose condition is the most specific, i.e. logically strongest, proposition she became certain of, subject to the constraint that the beliefs and conditional beliefs in the resulting new belief set are consistent and conditionally consistent, respectively. In slightly different terminology we can say that plain conditionalization has the ideal agent revise her doxastic state by holding onto those inferential beliefs whose premise is the logically strongest proposition she became certain of as a result of some experiential event that is not under her doxastic control.

The second update rule is defined for the case where the new information comes in the form of new ranks for the elements of a partition. It mirrors the update rule of Jeffrey conditionalization from probability theory (Jeffrey, 1983).

Update Rule 2 (Spohn Conditionalization, Spohn 1988) *If $q(\cdot) : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ is the ideal doxastic agent's ranking function at time t , and between t and the later time t' her ranks on the experiential partition $\{E_i \in \mathcal{A} : i \in I\}$ are directly affected and change to $n_i \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ with $\min \{n_i : i \in I\} = 0$, and $n_i = \infty$ if $q(E_i) = \infty$, and her ranks are not directly affected on any finer partition or in any other way such as forgetting etc., then her ranking function at t' should be $q_{E_i \rightarrow n_i}(\cdot)$,*

$$q_{E_i \rightarrow n_i}(\cdot) = \min_{i \in I} \left\{ q(\cdot \mid E_i) + n_i \right\}.$$

Spohn conditionalization asks the ideal doxastic agent to revise her beliefs and conditional beliefs by holding onto those conditional beliefs whose conditions are the most specific propositions whose doxastic standing has changed as a result of some experiential event that is not under her doxastic control, subject to the constraint that the beliefs and conditional beliefs in the resulting new belief set are consistent and conditionally consistent, respectively. The restriction to hold fixed only those conditional beliefs whose conditions are the most specific propositions whose doxastic standing has been directly affected is important.

Suppose you hold the conditional beliefs that Sophia will have white wine tonight if there is wine left, and that she will have red wine tonight if there is red wine left, but no white wine—say, because you believe that Sophia prefers having white wine to having red wine to having no wine. Suppose further you subsequently come to believe, as a result of being told so by a source you deem reliable, that there is red wine left, but no white wine. Since your beliefs are deductively closed you also come to believe that there is wine left. In this case you should *not* hold onto your conditional belief that Sophia will have white wine tonight if there is wine left. Instead, you should only hold onto your conditional belief that Sophia

will have red wine tonight if there is red wine left, but no white wine. The same is true if you subsequently do not merely come to believe, but become certain in this way that there is red wine left, but no white wine. This is the reason for the restriction in plain conditionalization to hold fixed only those conditional beliefs whose condition is the logically strongest proposition the ideal doxastic agent becomes certain of. Furthermore, this illustrates that plain conditionalization is the special case of Spohn conditionalization where the experiential partition is $\{E, \bar{E}\}$ and where the new ranks are 0 and ∞ , respectively.

The third update rule is defined for the case where the new information reports the differences between the old and the new ranks for the elements of a partition. It mirrors the update rule of Field conditionalization from probability theory (Field, 1978) and is developed further in Bewersdorf (2013).

Update Rule 3 (Shenoy Conditionalization, Shenoy 1991) *If $q(\cdot) : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ is the ideal doxastic agent's ranking function at time t , and between t and the later time t' her ranks on the experiential partition $\{E_i \in \mathcal{A} : i \in I\}$ are directly affected and change by $z_i \in \mathbb{N}$, where $\min \{z_i : i \in I\} = 0$, and her ranks are not directly affected on any finer partition or in any other way such as forgetting etc., then her ranking function at t' should be $q_{E_i \uparrow z_i}(\cdot)$,*

$$q_{E_i \uparrow z_i}(\cdot) = \min_{i \in I} \{q(\cdot \cap E_i) + z_i - m\},$$

where $m = \min_{i \in I} \{z_i + q(E_i)\}$.

Spohn conditionalizing E and \bar{E} to 0 and n , respectively, keeps the relative positions of all possible worlds in E and all possible worlds in \bar{E} fixed. It improves the rank of E to 0 and changes the rank of \bar{E} to n . Shenoy conditionalizing E and \bar{E} by 0 and n , respectively, improves the possibilities within E by n , as compared to the possibilities in \bar{E} . The value m is a normalization parameter ensuring that at least one possible world is assigned rank zero so that the result is a ranking function.

Spohn and Shenoy conditionalization can be defined in terms of each other. Their difference lies in the interpretation of the input parameters. Spohn conditionalization is *result-oriented* in the sense that the numbers n_i characterize the result of the experiential event on the agent's ranks for the propositions E_i . The latter depend in part on the agent's initial ranks, which is why the numbers n_i do not characterize the impact of the experiential event as such, independently of the agent's initial beliefs. In contrast to this the numbers z_i in Shenoy conditionalization do characterize the impact of the experiential event as such, independently of the agent's initial beliefs. They do so in the sense that the rank of E_i is deteriorated by z_i relative to the rank of the "best" cell. Note that, when there are more than two cells, the latter need not be the cell with the lowest initial rank.

In the case of both Spohn and Shenoy conditionalization the new information consists of a (partition of) proposition(s) together with a (list of) number(s). This reflects the fact that the quality of new information varies with how reliable or trustworthy the agent deems its source: it makes a difference if the weatherperson who Sophia does not know predicts that it will rain, if a friend Sophia trusts tells her so, or if Sophia sees for herself that it is raining. In each case the proposition Sophia comes to believe is that it is raining, but the effect of the new information on her old beliefs will be a different one in each case. The difference in how reliable or trustworthy Sophia deems the sources of the new information is reflected in the numbers accompanying this proposition.

All that axioms (1)–(3) ask of the ideal doxastic agent is that her beliefs be consistent, and that her conditional beliefs be conditionally consistent. We will see below that all that update rules (1)–(3) ask of her is that her beliefs remain consistent, and that her conditional beliefs remain conditionally consistent.

Sophia's ranking function r will assign a positive rank to the proposition $\overline{[A]}$ that it will not be sunny on Wednesday. Her ranking function r will assign a greater rank to the proposition $\overline{[B]}$ that it will not rain on Tuesday. Her ranking function r will assign an even greater rank to the proposition $\overline{[C]}$ that weather forecasts are not always right so that

$$0 < r(\overline{[A]}) < r(\overline{[B]}) < r(\overline{[C]}).$$

More generally, for regular ranking functions r , the ordering $A \preceq_r B$ on \mathcal{L} just in case

$$r(\overline{[A]}) \leq r(\overline{[B]})$$

is an entrenchment ordering for

$$\mathcal{B} = \left\{ C \in \mathcal{L} : r(\overline{[C]}) > 0 \right\}.$$

In what follows I will assume that r is regular.

In other words, the set of propositions

$$\mathbf{s}_r = \left\{ r^{-1}(n) \subseteq W : n \in \mathbb{N} \right\}$$

is a system of spheres in W centered on $r^{-1}(0)$, where

$$r^{-1}(n) = \{ \omega \in W : r(\{\omega\}) = n \}$$

is the set of possible worlds that are assigned rank n . In still other words, the ordering $\omega \leq_r \omega'$ on W just in case $r(\{\omega\}) \leq r(\{\omega'\})$ is an implausibility ordering on W with the center being the conjunction or intersection of all beliefs,

$$\bigcap \left\{ \overline{[C]} \subseteq W : r(\overline{[C]}) > 0 \right\} = \{ \omega \in W : r(\{\omega\}) = 0 \}.$$

(I make the simplifying assumption that the algebra of propositions \mathcal{A} is the power set of W . If this assumption is not made, these definitions are slightly more complicated.) Therefore ranking theory satisfies the postulates of AGM belief revision theory. It also satisfies the four additional postulates *9–*12 for iterated belief revision proposed by Darwiche and Pearl (1997). This can easily be verified by checking that the four postulates $\leq_5 - \leq_8$ hold for \leq_r (see also Spohn 2012, chapter 5.6). In what follows I will suppress ‘ $\llbracket \rrbracket$ ’ and denote propositions by capital letters.

When Sophia comes to believe on Monday that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday predicts rain, she has to tell us how strongly she now disbelieves the proposition \overline{D} that the weather forecast for Tuesday and Wednesday does not predict rain in order for Spohn conditionalization to tell her how to revise her beliefs. As an approximation it suffices if she tells us how many information sources saying \overline{D} it would now take for her to give up her disbelief \overline{D} , as compared to how many information sources saying X it would then have taken for her to give up her disbelief that X for $X = A, B, C, D, \overline{A}, \overline{B}, \overline{C}, \overline{D}$. Suppose Sophia’s old ranks are $r(\overline{A}) = 1$, $r(D) = 2$, $r(\overline{B}) = 5$, and $r(\overline{C}) = 7$, and her new rank is $r^*(\overline{D}) = 13$. According to Spohn conditionalization Sophia’s new ranks are:

$$r^*(X) = \min \left\{ r(X | D) + 0, r(X | \overline{D}) + 13 \right\}.$$

In order to calculate Sophia’s new ranks $r^*(X)$ we thus need her old conditional ranks $r(X | D)$ and $r(X | \overline{D})$ as well as her new ranks for the conditions D and \overline{D} . This in turn requires us to determine her old ranks for various conjunctions. Suppose the numbers are as in Figure 3. Then Sophia’s new ranks are $r^*(\overline{C}) = 6$, $r^*(\overline{B}) = 7$, $r^*(A) = 7$, $r^*(\overline{D}) = 13$.

Note that C is a proposition Sophia believes both before and after revision by D , $r(\overline{C}) > 0$ and $r^*(\overline{C}) > 0$, although \overline{D} is positively relevant to, and so not independent of, C in the sense that $r(\overline{C} | \overline{D}) = 7 > 6 = r(\overline{C} | D)$. In other words, Sophia receives new information D whose negation is positively relevant to, and so not independent of, her belief that C without making her give up her belief that C . On the other hand, if Sophia considers \overline{D} independent of a proposition X before revision by D , then she also does so after revision by D . More generally, suppose two propositions A and B are independent according to a ranking function r , $r(A | B) = r(A | \overline{B})$ and $r(\overline{A} | B) = r(\overline{A} | \overline{B})$. In this case A and B are independent according to any ranking function r^* that results from r by what we may call a “Spohn shift” on the partition $\{B, \overline{B}\}$, i.e. the result of Spohn conditionalization on this partition for an arbitrary pair of natural numbers.

This feature, which is known as *rigidity*, vindicates the idea behind Jin and Thielscher (2007)’s proposal that revision should preserve independencies. It does so by fixing their notion of independence. For more on the

For r :

		B	\bar{B}	
		$A \cap B \cap C \cap D$	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap D$	
A	$A \cap B \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	∞	∞	\bar{C}
	$A \cap B \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	10	0	
\bar{A}	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	7	20	D
	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	9	5	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap C \cap D$	2	∞	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	8	1	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	20	20	
	$\bar{A} \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap D$	10	5	
	$\bar{A} \cap \bar{B} \cap \bar{C} \cap D$			\bar{D}

For r^* :

		B	\bar{B}	
		$A \cap B \cap C \cap D$	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap D$	
A	$A \cap B \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	∞	∞	\bar{C}
	$A \cap B \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	8	13	
\bar{A}	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	20	33	D
	$A \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	7	18	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap C \cap D$	0	∞	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap \bar{C} \cap D$	6	14	
	$\bar{A} \cap B \cap C \cap \bar{D}$	33	33	
	$\bar{A} \cap \bar{B} \cap C \cap D$	8	18	
	$\bar{A} \cap \bar{B} \cap \bar{C} \cap D$			\bar{D}

Figure 3: Sophia's old and new ranks for various conjunctions

definition of rank-theoretic independence see Spohn (1999). As an aside let me note that, while rigidity is generally considered to be a desirable feature of an update rule, Weisberg (2009, 2015) uses rigidity to argue that neither Bayesianism nor Dempster-Shafer theory (Haenni, 2009) nor ranking theory can handle a phenomenon he terms *perceptual undermining*. Huber (2014a) defends these theories against Weisberg's charge.

Spohn conditionalization gives Sophia a complete new ranking function r^* that she can use to revise her newly acquired belief set

$$\mathcal{B}^* = \left\{ X \in \mathcal{A} : r^*(\bar{X}) > 0 \right\}$$

a second time when she learns on Tuesday that it is sunny after all. All she has to do is tell us how strongly she then disbelieves the proposition B that it will rain on Tuesday. If $r^{**}(B) = 13$, her newer ranks are $r^{**}(\bar{A}) = 1$, $r^{**}(C) = 11$, $r^{**}(\bar{D}) = 11$. See Figure 4.

This means that Sophia did not mishear the weather forecast, but was too gullible (or so we assume for purposes of illustration), and so has to give up her belief C that weather forecasts are always right. In addition she also has to regain her belief A that it will be sunny on Wednesday.

At the end of this section Sophia's doxastic career is pictured as a sequence of "onions." The difference to the AGM theory is that, in ranking theory, the layers carry numbers which reflect how far apart they are from each other according to the ideal agent's doxastic state. A different way to

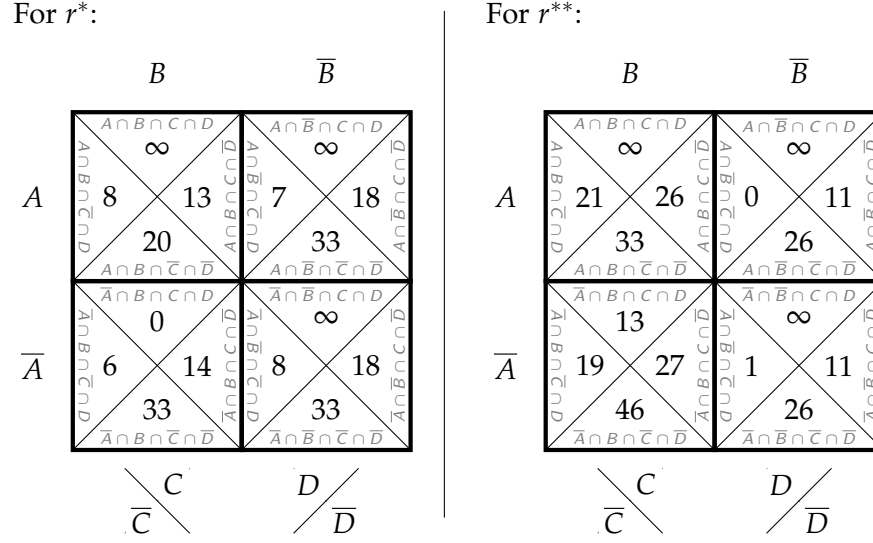


Figure 4: Sophia's new and newer ranks for various conjunctions

picture the situation is to allow for *empty* layers and to have one, possibly empty, layer for each natural number.

We see that ranking theory handles indefinitely iterated belief revisions. It does so in contrast to the AGM theory of belief revision. However, it does so also in contrast to probability theory. As yet another aside, let me briefly explain why. In probability theory the ideal doxastic agent is sometimes forced to assign probability 0 to some non-empty or consistent proposition. In order to enable her to learn such propositions the ideal doxastic agent is usually represented by a Popper-Rényi measure which is more general than a classical probability (Popper, 1955; Rényi, 1955; Stalnaker, 1970; Spohn, 1986; Easwaran, this volume). However, as already noted by Harper (1976), Popper-Rényi measures violate the principal of categorical matching and so cannot handle iterated revisions of degrees of belief: the result of conditionalizing a Popper-Rényi measure is not another Popper-Rényi measure, but a classical probability; and as Boutilier (1995) notes, there is no straightforward analogue of Jeffrey conditionalization for Popper-Rényi measures. Spohn (2006b) provides an even more general notion of probability, *ranked probability*, which results from making probabilities the objects of rank-theoretic belief. It handles iterated revisions of probabilistic degrees of belief and satisfies the principal of categorical matching: the result of conditionalizing a ranked probability is another ranked probability.

Ranking theory is a normative theory that addresses the question how an ideal doxastic agent should organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time, and how she should revise these beliefs across time if she receives new information of various formats. Why should an ideal doxastic agent obey the norms of ranking theory? That is, why should an ideal doxastic agent organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time according to axioms (1)–(3)? And why should she update her beliefs and conditional beliefs across time according to update rules (1)–(3) if she receives new information of the appropriate format? Who are we, Sophia asks, to tell her what—or rather: how—to believe? To answer these questions, and to respond to Sophia, we need a bit of terminology.

An ideal doxastic agent's *grade of entrenchment* for a proposition A is defined as the smallest number n such that she would give up her disbelief in A if she received the information A from n sources she deemed independent and minimally positively reliable, *mp-reliable*, about A , and this was all that directly affected her doxastic state. If the ideal doxastic agent does not disbelieve A to begin with, her grade of entrenchment for A is 0. Her grade of entrenchment for A is higher, the more information sources of the sort described it would take for her to give up her disbelief in A .

As mentioned previously, whereas probabilities are measured on an absolute scale, ranks are at best measured on a ratio scale. The same is true for grades of entrenchment. Therefore we need to fix a *unit* for these grades of entrenchment. We need to do the same when we want to report the amount of money in your bank account, which is measured on a ratio scale, or the temperature in Vienna on January 1, 2018, which is measured on an interval scale. To say that the amount of money in your bank account, or the temperature in Vienna on January 1, 2018, equals 17 is not saying anything if we do not also specify a unit such as Euros or degrees of Celsius. Information sources that are deemed mp-reliable are used to define the unit in which grades of entrenchment are reported. Furthermore, to guarantee that these units can be added and compared, just as we can add and compare sums of Euros and degrees of Celsius, we need to make sure that these information sources are not only deemed to be mp-reliable by the ideal doxastic agent, but also independent in the relevant sense.

We non-ideal doxastic agents generally do not deem our sources of information independent or mp-reliable. One expert's saying A will sometimes make us stop disbelieving A immediately, while the sermons of a dozen others won't. And the last-born's telling a parent that there is no red wine left after the first-born has already confessed to drinking it up won't make much of a difference to the parent's grade of disbelief that there is

red wine left. However, this is no argument against the usefulness of this notion. Information sources that are deemed independent and mp-reliable are a theoretical construct that are assumed or postulated to exist. They are the smallest units such that the reliability one deems any possible information source to possess can be expressed as a multiple of them.

Let q be the ideal doxastic agent's entrenchment function, i.e. the function that summarizes her grades of entrenchment for all propositions from \mathcal{A} . Her *belief set* \mathcal{B}_q is the set of propositions with a positive grade of entrenchment,

$$\mathcal{B}_q = \left\{ A \in \mathcal{A} : q(\overline{A}) > 0 \right\}.$$

Her belief set conditional on the consistent proposition C is the set of propositions with a positive grade of entrenchment conditional on C ,

$$\mathcal{B}_{q(\cdot|C)} = \left\{ A \in \mathcal{A} : q(\overline{A} | C) > 0 \right\}.$$

$\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{A}$ is *consistent in the finite/countable/complete sense* if, and only if, for every finite/countable/arbitrary $\mathcal{B}^- \subseteq \mathcal{B}$, $\bigcap \mathcal{B}^- \neq \emptyset$. It is *deductively closed in the finite/countable/complete sense* if, and only if, for every finite/-countable/arbitrary $\mathcal{B}^- \subseteq \mathcal{B}$ and all $A \in \mathcal{A}$: if $\bigcap \mathcal{B}^- \subseteq A$, then $A \in \mathcal{B}$. Similarly, for a proposition C from \mathcal{A} , $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{A}$ is *conditionally consistent given C in the finite/countable/complete sense* if, and only if, for every finite/-countable/arbitrary $\mathcal{B}^- \subseteq \mathcal{B}$: $C \cap \bigcap \mathcal{B}^- \neq \emptyset$. It is *conditionally deductively closed given C in the finite/countable/complete sense* if, and only if, for every finite/countable/arbitrary $\mathcal{B}^- \subseteq \mathcal{B}$ and all $A \in \mathcal{A}$: if $C \cap \bigcap \mathcal{B}^- \subseteq A$, then $A \in \mathcal{B}$.

Now we can respond to Sophia as well as answer the question why an ideal doxastic agent should organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time according to axioms (1)–(3), and why she should update her beliefs and conditional beliefs across time according to update rules (1)–(3) if she receives new information of the appropriate format. She should do so, because

Theorem 5 *An ideal doxastic agent's belief set \mathcal{B}_q and conditional belief sets $\mathcal{B}_{q(\cdot|C)}$ for consistent conditions C are (conditionally) consistent and deductively closed in the finite / countable / complete sense (given C)—and would remain so in response to any finite sequence of experiences—if, and only if, q is a finitely / countably / completely minimitive ranking function that would be revised according to update rules (1)–(3).*

This theorem from Huber (2007) rests on several unstated assumptions which are spelled out in Huber (ms).

The argument based on this theorem is supposed to establish the thesis that an ideal doxastic agent's beliefs and conditional beliefs should obey

the synchronic and diachronic rules of ranking theory. It provides a means-end justification for this thesis in the spirit of epistemic consequentialism (Percival, 2002; Stalnaker, 2002). The idea is that obeying the normative constraints of ranking theory is a (necessary and sufficient) means to attaining the end of being “eternally consistent and deductively closed.” The latter end in turn is a (necessary, but insufficient) means to attaining the end of always having only true beliefs, and, subject to the constraint that *all* of them are true, as many thereof as possible. To the extent that the ideal doxastic agent has this end, she should obey the norms of ranking theory. It is not that we are telling Sophia what and how to believe. *She* is the one who is assumed to have these ends. We merely point out the obtaining means-end relationship. Of course, if Sophia does not desire to always hold only true beliefs, and, subject to the constraint that all of them are true, as many thereof as possible, our response will cut no ice. But that is beside the point: it is mistaking a hypothetical imperative for a categorical imperative.

Brössel, Eder, and Huber (2013) discuss the implications of this result as well as its Bayesian role-model, Joyce’s (1998, 2009) “non-pragmatic vindication of probabilism” (see also Pettigrew 2011, 2013), for considering doxastic rationality a form of instrumental rationality, and for means-end epistemology in general. Alternatively one may use the representation result by Hild and Spohn (2008), or the rank-theoretic decision theory by Giang and Shenoy (2000), to obtain a justification of ranking theory that is deontological in spirit. For instance, the former result can be used to argue that all and only ranking functions obey the duties, or categorical imperatives, of iterated belief contraction, where these duties, or categorical imperatives, take the form of axioms for iterated contractions of beliefs.

Figure 5 depicts Sophia’s ranking functions r and r^* as “numbered onions.” Alternatively (Figure 6) Sophia’s ranking function r can be pictured as an onion with one, possibly empty, layer $r^{-1}(n)$ for each natural number n . Sophia’s old rank for D is 2, i.e. $r(D) = 2$, and her old rank for \bar{D} is 0, i.e. $r(\bar{D}) = 0$. Sophia’s new ranking function r^* results from her old ranking function r by first improving the possible worlds in which D is true by 2 ranks so that the new rank of D is 0, i.e. $r^*(D) = 0$. In a second step the possible worlds in which \bar{D} is true are deteriorated by 13 ranks so that the new rank of \bar{D} is 13, i.e. $r^*(\bar{D}) = 13$. The relative positions of the possible worlds in which D is true, and the possible worlds in which \bar{D} is true, are expressed in the conditional ranking functions $r(\cdot \mid D) = r^*(\cdot \mid D)$ and $r(\cdot \mid \bar{D}) = r^*(\cdot \mid \bar{D})$. These relative positions or conditional ranks are kept fixed.

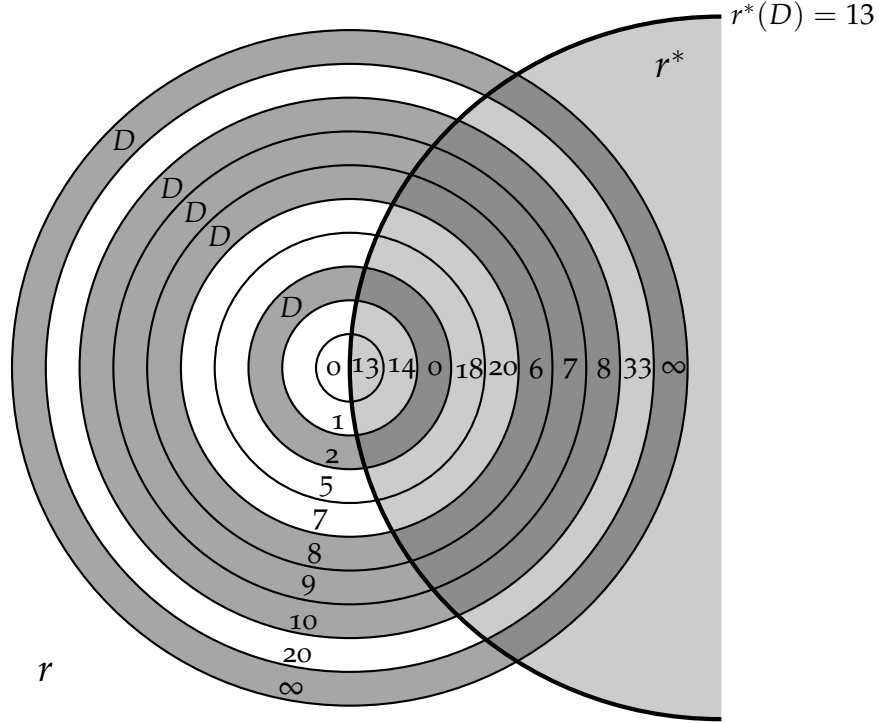


Figure 5: Sophia's ranking functions depicted as "numbered onions"

5 AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In epistemology ranking theory is a theory of belief and its revision. It studies how an ideal doxastic agent should organize her beliefs and conditional beliefs at a given moment in time, and how she should revise her beliefs and conditional beliefs across time when she receives new information.

In this entry we have distinguished between the following four cases of belief revision. The case where the new information comes in the qualitative form of a sentence or proposition of the agent's language or algebra, as in the AGM theory of belief revision. The case where the new information comes in the comparative form of the relative positions of an input sentence and a reference sentence, as in two-dimensional belief revision. The case where the new information comes in the quantitative form of new grades of disbelief for various propositions, as in the case of update rules 1 and 2 of ranking theory. And the case where the new information comes in the quantitative form of differences between the old and new grades of disbelief for such sentences or propositions, as in update rule 3 of ranking theory.

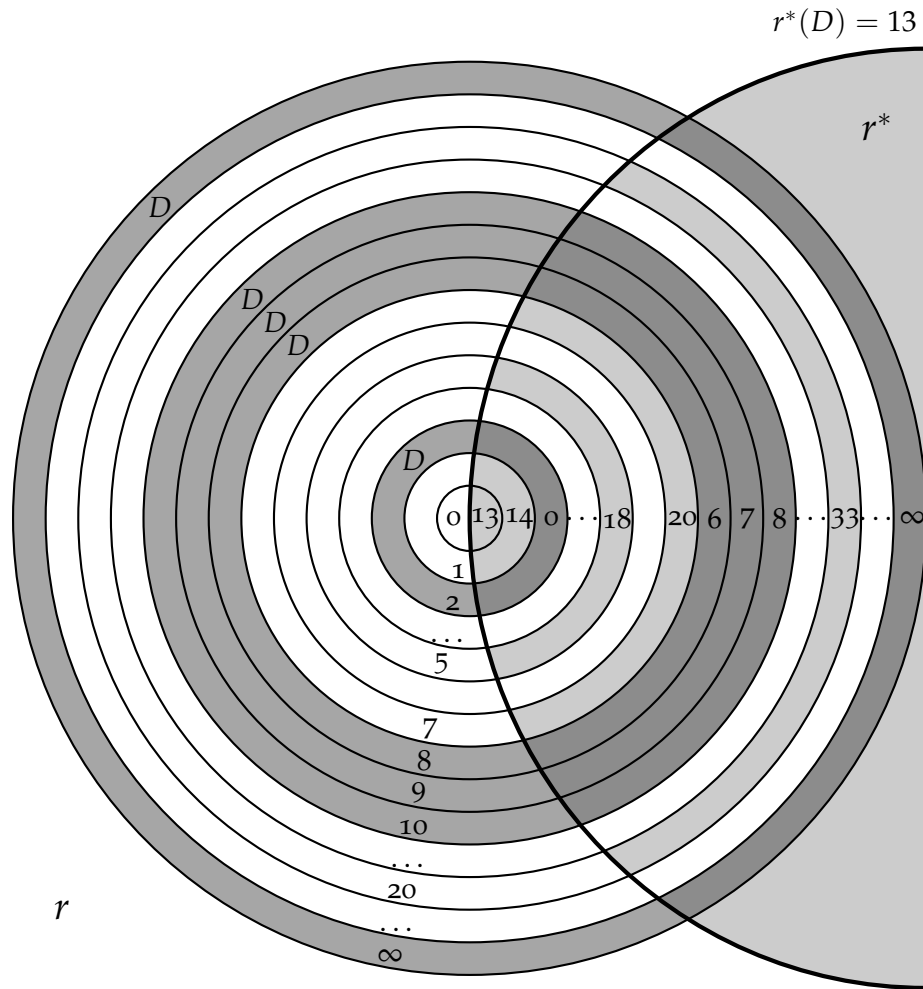


Figure 6: Sophia's ranking functions depicted as "numbered onions" with empty layers

Let us call information that concerns only individual sentences or propositions of the agent's language or algebra *factual information*, and the corresponding changes in belief *factual belief changes*. In this entry we have only discussed factual information and factual belief changes. Besides these there are at least two other forms of information an ideal doxastic agent can receive and, corresponding to these, at least two forms of non-factual belief change. I will briefly mention these and then I will conclude by mentioning applications of ranking theory outside epistemology, in the philosophy of science, in metaphysics, and in the philosophy of language.

The first of these non-factual belief changes takes place when the ideal doxastic agent learns that her language or algebra was too poor or coarse-grained. For instance, Sophia may start out with a language that allows her to distinguish between red wine and white wine, and then may acquire the concept of rosé. Or she may learn that among the red wines one can distinguish between barriques and non-barriques. When the ideal doxastic agent receives such *conceptual information* she should perform a *conceptual belief change*. A prominent conceptual change is that of *logical learning*. In the syntactic AGM framework logical learning is normally studied in terms of *belief bases* (Hansson, 1999). Belief bases differ from belief sets by not being required to be closed under the logical consequence relation. Huber (2015a) shows how logical learning, and conceptual belief changes in general, can be dealt with in the semantic framework of ranking theory.

Another form of non-factual information is *meta-information*, and an ideal doxastic agent receiving meta-information should perform a *meta-belief change* (Stalnaker, 2009). Information about her own doxastic state, as well as about (*in-*) *dependencies* among propositions, as reported by indicative conditionals, causal claims, and counterfactual conditionals, may be a form of meta-information. In the syntactic AGM framework one might be able to study meta-changes with the help of *dynamic doxastic logic*, DDL (Seegerberg 1995; Lindström and Rabinowicz 1999; Caie, this volume). DDL allows one to reason about one's own beliefs. In the semantic framework of ranking theory reasoning about one's own beliefs has been studied by Spohn (2012, chapter 9) based on Hild (1998). Huber (2015a) shows how indicative conditionals can be learned in ranking theory.

In the philosophy of language Spohn (2013, 2015) uses ranking theory to develop a unified theory of indicative, counterfactual, and many other conditionals. On this expressivist account most conditionals express conditional beliefs, but counterfactuals express propositions relative to the agent's conditional beliefs and a partition. Huber (2014b, 2017) introduces so-called alethic ranking functions and defines counterfactuals in terms of them. Raidl (forthcoming) proves completeness results for these and other semantics, and corrects mistakes in Huber (2014b, 2015b, 2017). Alethic ranking functions are related to subjective ranking functions by "the royal

rule.” This is a normative principle that constrains a priori subjective ranks by alethic ranks much like Lewis (1980)’s principal principle constrains a priori subjective credences by objective chances. Huber (2017) show the royal rule to be the necessary and sufficient means to attaining a cognitive end that relates true beliefs in purely factual, non-modal propositions and true beliefs in purely modal propositions. The philosophical background for this is an idealism about alethic or metaphysical modality that contrasts with the projectivist account of the metaphysical modalities of chance and necessity developed by Spohn (2010a).

In metaphysics Spohn (1983, 2006a) uses ranking theory to develop a theory of causation. This theory works with subjective ranking functions, and so results in a subjective notion of causation, although there are attempts at objectification (Spohn, 1993, 2012, chapter 15). Huber (2011) uses the above-mentioned alethic ranking functions to arrive at a counterfactual notion of causation. The conditional nature of ranking functions and a precisification of Lewis’ (1979, p. 472) “system of weights or priorities” allow Huber (2013c) to unify the two modalities of so-called “extended causal models” (Halpern 2008; Halpern and Hitchcock 2010) into the one modality of alethic ranking functions. Spohn (2010b) relates ranking theory and causal models in a very different way.

In the philosophy of science Spohn explicates *ceteris paribus* conditions (Spohn, 2002, 2014) and laws (Spohn, 2005) in terms of subjective ranking functions. Huber (2015b) shows how the statistical notion of modes can be used to empirically confirm the above-mentioned counterfactuals that are defined in terms of alethic ranking functions.

None of this compares to Spohn (2012), which is the most comprehensive treatment of ranking theory, and an invaluable resource for formal epistemology full of philosophical insights.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very much indebted to Wolfgang Spohn. This entry would not have been possible without him. I think this is true—even trivially so, as he has invented ranking theory. He thinks this is not true, at least not in any straightforward sense (Spohn, 2015, section 8), but merely expresses my conditional belief. Therefore let me put it in terms we understand in the same way, except that we do not, because he understands them better than anyone else. He has taught me everything in this entry that remains after iterated contractions by all falsehoods. I am very grateful to him for doing so.

I am also very grateful to the editors of *The Open Handbook of Formal Epistemology*, Richard Pettigrew and Jonathan Weisberg, for their extensive

and helpful feedback, and for putting so much time and energy into editing this wonderful volume.

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Lewis (1981) argues that Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Ut purus elit, vestibulum ut, placerat ac, adipiscing vitae, felis. Curabitur dictum gravida mauris. Nam arcu libero, nonummy eget, consectetur id, vulputate a, magna. Donec vehicula augue eu neque. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Mauris ut leo. Cras viverra metus rhoncus sem. Nulla et lectus vestibulum urna fringilla ultrices. Phasellus eu tellus sit amet tortor gravida placerat. Integer sapien est, iaculis in, pretium quis, viverra ac, nunc. Praesent eget sem vel leo ultrices bibendum. Aenean faucibus. Morbi dolor nulla, malesuada eu, pulvinar at, mollis ac, nulla. Curabitur auctor semper nulla. Donec varius orci eget risus. Duis nibh mi, congue eu, accumsan eleifend, sagittis quis, diam. Duis eget orci sit amet orci dignissim rutrum.

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Conditionals are sentences that propose a scenario (which may or may not be the actual scenario), then go on to say something about what would happen in that scenario.¹ In English, they are typically expressed by ‘if...then...’ statements. Examples of conditionals include:

1. If the Axiom of Choice is true, then every set can be well ordered.
2. You will probably get lung cancer if you smoke.
3. If the syrup forms a soft ball when you drop it into cold water, then it is between 112 and 115 degrees Celsius.
4. If kangaroos had no tails, they would topple over.
5. When I’m queen, you will be sorry.

In general, a conditional is formed from two smaller statements: an *antecedent* (the supposition that typically comes directly after ‘if’) and a *consequent* (the statement that typically comes later in the sentence, and is sometimes preceded by ‘then’). In the above examples, the antecedents are:

1. The Axiom of Choice is true.
2. You smoke.
3. The syrup forms a soft ball when you drop it into cold water.
4. Kangaroos had no tails. (Or perhaps: Kangaroos have no tails.)
5. I’m queen.

while the consequents are:

1. Every set can be well ordered.
2. You will probably get lung cancer. (Or perhaps: You will get lung cancer.)
3. The syrup is between 112 and 115 degrees Celsius.
4. Kangaroos would topple over. (Or perhaps: Kangaroos topple over.)
5. You will be sorry.

¹ I take this framing, which emphasizes the contents of conditionals rather than their grammatical form, from (Fintel, 2011).

1 WHY CARE ABOUT CONDITIONALS?

Conditionals are useful for a variety of everyday tasks, including decision-making, prediction, explanation, and imagination.

When making a decision, you should aim to choose an act such that, if you (were to) perform it, a good outcome is (or would be) likely to result. Decision theory codifies this intuition in formal terms, and often makes explicit use of conditionals (Gibbard & Harper, 1981; Vinci, 1988; Bradley, 2000; Cantwell, 2013).

Conditionals are also useful for deriving predictions and explanations from theoretical models. If I am not sure which model of climate change to accept, I can use conditionals to reason about how much the earth's temperature will increase if each of the models under consideration is true. To check whether a model explains the data I have already observed, I can use conditionals to check whether, if a given model is true, my data should be expected. (For a defense of conditionals in scientific explanation, see Woodward, 2004; for a defense of conditionals in historical explanation, see Reiss, 2009, and Nolan, 2013.)

Children's pretend play is both developmentally important, and closely related to reasoning with conditionals. Amsel and Smalley (2000), Dias and Harris (1990), Gopnik (2009), Harris (2000), Lillard (2001), and K. Walton (1990) argue that children's pretense (for example, pretending a banana is a telephone), involves constructing an alternative scenario to what is known or believed to be true, and then reasoning about what would happen in that scenario. While children can express their thoughts about pretend scenarios without the explicit use of conditionals, conditionals are particularly well suited to expressing these thoughts. Weisberg and Gopnik (2013) argue that the ability to reason about non-actual scenarios is crucial to learning from and planning for the actual world, since it enables children to generate and compare a range of alternative models of reality. Krzyzanowska (2013) argues that the mechanism that lets children evaluate conditionals is the same as the one that lets them attribute false beliefs to others.

In addition to playing a crucial role in everyday reasoning and cognitive development, conditionals do work in philosophical analyses of a variety of concepts. Any philosophical idea that relies on the notion of dependence is ripe for a conditional analysis: to say that one thing *e* depends on a second thing *c* is arguably to say that if *c* is one way, then *e* is some corresponding way, and if *c* is a different way, then *e* is a correspondingly different way. Conditionals famously appear in analyses of causation (see Menzies, 2014, and Collins, Hall, and Paul, 2004, for overviews), dispositions (Prior, Pargetter, & Jackson, 1982; Choi, 2006, 2009), knowledge (Nozick, 1981; Sosa, 1999), and freedom (Moore, 1912; Ayer, 1954).

Finally, conditionals figure in several common patterns of reasoning, to which we now turn.

2 COMMON PATTERNS OF REASONING

The following argument forms look compelling in ordinary, natural-language arguments (though we will see that all of them have putative counterexamples). Different formal theories of conditionals yield different verdicts about which are valid.

2.1 *Modus Ponens*

Modus ponens is the inference form:

1. If A , then C .
 2. A .
-
- ∴ C .

Modus ponens is one of the most central—arguably the most central—of the inference forms involving conditionals. Bobzien (2002) traces its roots back to Aristotle’s hypothetical syllogisms, and through the logic of the *Paripatetics* and antiquity. Gillon (2011) notes that modus ponens was a common inference pattern in Pre-Classical Indian philosophy, and quotes a representative argument in which the third-century Buddhist logician Moggalliputta Tissa explicitly notes the inconsistency of simultaneously believing ‘if A , then C ’, ‘ A ’, and ‘not C ’. Ryle (1950) even advances theory of conditionals based entirely on their ability to license modus ponens: an utterance of ‘if A then C ’ is an ‘inference ticket’ that allows one to move from the premise A to the conclusion C .

Despite its perennial popularity, there are apparent counterexamples to modus ponens. One sort (McGee, 1985) involves nested conditionals. Suppose you see a fisherman with something caught in his net. You are almost sure it is a fish, but the next likeliest option is that it is a frog. McGee argues that you should accept the premises of the following argument, but not the conclusion (since, if the animal has lungs, then it is not a fish but a frog).

1. If that is a fish, then if it has lungs, it’s a lungfish.
 2. That is a fish.
-
- ∴ If it has lungs, it’s a lungfish.

Another type of apparent counterexample (Kolodny & MacFarlane, 2010; Darwall, 1983) involves ‘ought’s or ‘should’s. Consider this variant of Darwall’s example.

1. If you want to hurt my feelings, you should make fun of the way my ears stick out.
 2. You want to hurt my feelings.
-
- ∴ Therefore, you should make fun of the way my ears stick out.

Even if you do want to hurt my feelings, you shouldn't make fun of the way my ears stick out, because it's wrong to hurt my feelings. Dowell (2011), and Lauer and Condoravdi (2014) object to the Darwall example (and other, related examples) on the grounds that they equivocate on different meanings of 'should'.

Yet another type of apparent counterexample to modus ponens, discussed by D. Walton (2001), involves defeasible inferences, like the famous Tweety Bird example from cognitive science (Brewka, 1991)

1. If Tweety is a bird, then Tweety flies.
 2. Tweety is a bird.
-
- ∴ Tweety flies.

The first premise of the Tweety bird argument says that there is a defeasible connection between being a bird and flying—one that can be overridden by extra information, e.g., that Tweety is a penguin. Thus, the premises are true, and the conclusion false, in the case where Tweety is a penguin.

2.2 *Modus Tollens*

Modus tollens is the inference form:

1. If A , then C .
 2. Not C .
-
- ∴ Not A .

Modus ponens and modus tollens seem to have originated together (see Bobzien, 2002, and Gillon, 2011), and are closely related. Both inferences posit a three-way inconsistency between 'if A , then C ', ' A ' and 'not C '. Affirm two of these inconsistent claims, and you'll have to deny the third.

Yalcin (2012a) presents a putative counterexample to modus tollens. Consider an urn that contains 100 marbles—some red, some blue, some big, and some small—in the following proportions.

	blue	red
big	10	30
small	50	10

A marble is chosen at random and placed under a cup; no other information about the situation is available.

In Yalcin's scenario, it is reasonable to accept the premises, but not the conclusion, of this instance of modus tollens.

1. If the marble is big then it's likely red.
 2. The marble is not likely red.
-
- ∴ The marble is not big.

2.3 Conditional Proof

Conditional proof (sometimes called the *deduction theorem* in formal logic) lets us establish conditional conclusions without relying on any conditional assumptions. Suppose that an argument from the premises X and A to the conclusion C is valid. Then conditional proof lets us conclude that the argument from X to 'if A , then C ' is valid. (Unlike modus ponens and modus tollens, which let us reason from the truth of some propositions to the truth of another proposition, conditional proof lets us reason from the validity of one argument to the validity of another.)

Stalnaker (1975) gives an argument that can easily be worked into a counterexample to conditional proof (though he does not present it that way). The following argument is valid, since in classical logic, anything follows from a contradiction:

1. The butler did it.
 2. The butler didn't do it.
-
- ∴ The gardener did it.

But the following argument is not valid:

1. The butler did it.
-
- ∴ If the butler didn't do it, then the gardener did it.

Although conditional proof in its full generality looks implausible, a restricted version is more appealing: if A all by itself entails C , then 'if A , then C ' is a truth of logic. (Koons (2014) makes a similar suggestion about conditional proof in nonmonotonic logic.)

2.4 Transitivity, Contraposition, and Strengthening the Antecedent

Transitivity is the inference form:

1. If A , then B .
 2. If B , then C .
-
- ∴ If A , then C .

Contraposition is:

1. If A , then C .
-
- ∴ If not C , then not A .

And strengthening the antecedent is:

1. If A , then C .
-
- ∴ If A and B , then C .

All three inference forms seem to fail for ordinary conditionals in English. For transitivity, we have the following counterexample (Stalnaker, 1968, p. 106):

1. If J. Edgar Hoover had been born a Russian, then he would have been a communist.
 2. If J. Edgar Hoover had been a communist, then he would have been a traitor.
-
- ∴ If J. Edgar Hoover had been born a Russian, then he would have been a traitor.

For contraposition, we have the following counterexample (adapted from Adams, 1988):

1. If it rains, then it does not rain hard.
-
- ∴ If it rains hard, then it does not rain.

And for strengthening the antecedent, we have the following counterexample (Stalnaker, 1968, p. 106):

1. If this match were struck, then it would light.
-
- ∴ Therefore, if this match had been soaked in water overnight and it were struck, then it would light.

Not everyone accepts these putative counterexamples as genuine. Brogaard and Salerno (2008) argue that the meaning of a conditional depends partly on a contextually determined set of relevant possible worlds. They claim that the putative counterexamples involve a context shift between the premises and the conclusion, but in any fixed context, the arguments are valid.

Fintel (2001), Gillies (2007), and Williams (2008) cite linguistic evidence in support of the context shift hypotheses: changing the order of the premises and conclusions in the counterexample arguments changes whether they seem true or false. Counterexamples to antecedent strengthening are closely related to so-called *Sobel sequences* (named for Sobel 1970). A Sobel sequence consists of two sentences of the following form (Gillies, 2007).

- (a) If Sophie had gone to the New York Mets Parade, she would have seen Pedro Martínez.

- (b) But if Sophie had gone to the New York Mets Parade and gotten stuck behind a tall person, she would not have seen Pedro Martínez.

It seems perfectly reasonable to assert (a) followed by (b). But once someone has asserted (b), an assertion of (a) seems inappropriate—after all, if Sophie had gone to the parade, who’s to say she would not have gotten stuck behind a tall person?

Fintel, Gillies, and Williams claim that Sobel sequences involve a context shift: once someone asserts (b), the context changes to make (a) false, but (a) and (b) are never true in the same context. Moss (2012) proposes an alternative explanation: once (b) has been asserted, (a) might be true, but is no longer known, since asserting (b) changes the standards a belief must meet in order to count as knowledge.

2.5 *Simplification of Disjunctive Antecedents*

Simplification of disjunctive antecedents (‘simplification’ for short; Nute, 1975) is the argument form:

1. If A or B , then C .
-
- ∴ If A , then C .

Simplification seems appealing on its face: surely, to say that the bus will be late if it rains or snows is to say that the bus will be late if it rains, and the bus will be late if it snows.

However, one can easily generate counterexamples by substituting the same sentence for B and C . Suppose I have enough money to visit either Disneyland or Graceland, but not enough to visit both. Then the premise of the following argument is true, while its conclusion is false.

1. If I visit Disneyland or I visit Graceland, then I’ll visit Graceland.
-
- ∴ If I visit Disneyland, then I’ll visit Graceland.

Counterexamples to strengthening the antecedent can be used to generate counterexamples to simplification (Fine, 1975). Suppose we have both of the following:

1. If A , then C .
2. Not: if A and B , then C .

A is logically equivalent to $[(A \text{ and } B) \text{ or } (A \text{ and not } B)]$, so by 1, we have:

3. If $[(A \text{ and } B) \text{ or } (A \text{ and not } B)]$, then C .

But by simplification, the truth of 3 would have to entail the falsity of 2.

So there is a three-way tension between the validity of simplification, the invalidity of strengthening the antecedent, and the substitution of

logical equivalents. All three ways out of the puzzle are represented in the literature: Loewer (1976) and McKay and Inwagen (1977) reject simplification; defenders of strict conditional accounts (Section 4.1) accept strengthening the antecedent; and Nute (1975) and Alonso-Ovalle (2009) reject substitution.

3 THE INDICATIVE/COUNTERFACTUAL DISTINCTION

Conditionals in English can be divided into two categories, exemplified by the following pair of sentences (Adams, 1970):

(DD) If Oswald did not shoot Kennedy, then someone else did.

(HW) If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, then someone else would have.

Although (DD) and (HW) are built up from the same antecedent and consequent, they mean different things. (DD) would be acceptable to most people familiar with US history: Kennedy was shot, so someone must have shot him—if not Oswald, then someone else. But (HW) is more controversial; it is accepted by conspiracy theorists, but rejected by those who believe that Oswald acted alone. Sentences like (DD) are called *indicative*; sentences like (HW) are called *counterfactual* (or sometimes *subjunctive*).

It's not clear how to classify conditionals whose antecedents concern the future. Consider the following sentence, as uttered by a conspirator before the Kennedy assassination.

(DW) If Oswald does not shoot Kennedy, then someone else will.

Dudman (1983, 1984) and Bennett (1988) argue that future-tensed conditionals like (DW) belong with counterfactuals like (HW); Bennett (2003, 2001; yes the same Bennett!) argues that they belong with indicatives like (DD); Edgington (1995) argues that there exist distinct categories of future-tensed indicatives and future-tensed counterfactuals.

Philosophers also disagree about the precise relationship between indicatives and counterfactuals. Some favor what Bennett (2003) calls 'Y-shaped analyses', which first explain what is common to indicatives and counterfactuals, and then bifurcate to explain how this common core can produce two different kinds of conditionals. Others (notably Gibbard, 1981, and Bennett, 2003) argue that we need completely separate theories of indicatives and counterfactuals—that there is no interesting core shared by both.

In what follows, I will write ' $A \Box \rightarrow C$ ' to indicate a counterfactual conditional; ' $A \rightarrow C$ ' to abbreviate an indicative conditional; and 'if A , then C ' where I wish to remain neutral. I turn now to a popular class of

theories, typically aimed at explaining counterfactual conditionals, but sometimes extended to cover indicatives.

4 SELECTION FUNCTIONS

One way to give a theory of conditionals is to spell out their *truth conditions*, i.e., the circumstances under which they are true. Formally, philosophers represent the truth conditions of a sentence as a function from possible worlds (i.e., ways the world might be) to truth values. Fully specifying the truth conditions for every conditional would be too tall an order: to understand the truth conditions for ‘if ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, then snakes develop vestigial legs’, we would have to understand the truth conditions of ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’ and ‘snakes develop vestigial legs’, and that job falls outside the scope of a theory of conditionals. So theories of conditionals adopt a more modest aim: to give a recipe for deriving the truth conditions for ‘if A , then C ’ from the truth conditions of (arbitrary) A and C .

The concept of a selection function (Stalnaker, 1968) provides a way of assigning truth conditions to a conditional based on the truth conditions of its antecedent and consequent. The basic idea is that, to evaluate ‘if A , then C ’, we should first consider a set of *selected* possible worlds where A is true. (Henceforth, I will use ‘ A -worlds’ as shorthand for ‘worlds where A is true’.) Intuitively, the selected worlds represent ways the actual world might be if A were true. We then check whether, at all the selected worlds, C is true. If so, then the counterfactual conditional ‘if A , then C ’ is true at the actual world; otherwise, it is false at the actual world.

More formally, we can model this process in terms of a selection function f that maps ordered pairs consisting of a possible world and a proposition onto sets of possible worlds. ‘If A , then C ’ is true at a possible world w if and only if C is true at every world in $f(A, w)$. Different ways of interpreting the selection function yield different theories of conditionals.

4.1 *Strict Conditionals*

One natural way to interpret the selection function is to check *all* possible A -worlds, and say that ‘if A , then C ’ is true at world w just in case C is true at all of them. (Since what is possible may depend on what is actual, the truth value of the conditional may vary from world to world.) This approach yields the *strict conditional* interpretation of the selection function, first developed by C. Lewis (1918). The strict conditional approach classifies transitivity, contraposition, and antecedent-strengthening as valid—which its opponents claim is a mistake (see D. Lewis, 1973a, pp. 4–12).

The strict conditional interpretation also gives questionable results about which counterfactuals are true. If I were to leap out of the second-story window of my office, I would hurt myself—but the strict conditional account says this is not so. There are possible worlds where I leap out the second-story window and remain unharmed: some where there is a safety net underneath the window, some where I am thoroughly ensconced in protective bubble wrap, some where my body is much less fragile than ordinary human bodies, some where the Earth's gravitational field is weak... but none of them is the sort of world that would result, if I were to leap out the second-story window. Hájek (ms) sums up the problem this way: on the strict conditional interpretation, most counterfactuals are false.²

4.2 *Closest Worlds*

An alternative to the strict conditional approach, typically used for counterfactuals, defines the selection function in terms of similarity among possible worlds. For every world w , we can rank worlds from most similar to w ('closest') to least similar ('farthest away'). D. Lewis (1973a) holds that every such ranking is a *total preorder*: two worlds can be equally similar to w , but they must be comparable, so that either they are equally similar or one is more similar than the other. (Stalnaker, 1968, discusses the special case of the logic where no two worlds are equally close to each other; Pollock, 1976, discusses a generalization where worlds may be incomparable in terms of closeness.) $A \Box \rightarrow C$ is true at w just in case C is true at all the A -worlds that are most similar to w .

Formally, the closest-worlds interpretation can be modeled using a system of 'spheres'—sets of worlds such that every world in the set is closer to w than every world outside it (D. Lewis, 1973a). Then $f(A, w)$ is the intersection of the set of A -worlds with the smallest sphere containing at least one A -world.³

Unlike the strict conditional interpretation, the closest-worlds interpretation of the selection function can explain why transitivity, contraposition, and antecedent-strengthening seem invalid. On the closest-worlds interpretation, they *are* invalid, and we can use diagrams (adapted from D. Lewis, 1973a) to illustrate why.

-
- ² Hájek argues that the problem extends beyond strict conditional accounts; it also affects the closest-worlds account in Section 4.2. K. S. Lewis (2015) argues that we can save the closest-worlds account by ignoring worlds that are deemed irrelevant by a contextually-determined standard of relevance.
- ³ Some technical difficulties arise when there is no smallest sphere containing at least one A -world, but only a limitless sequence of ever-smaller spheres; see D. Lewis (1973b, pp. 424–425); Stalnaker (1981, pp. 96–99); Warmbrod (1982); and Díez (2015) for discussion.

To see why transitivity is invalid, consider a system of spheres model centered on a particular world w , depicted in Figure 1a. (Worlds are points in the diagram, and spheres are concentric circles.) The A -worlds are the points inside the shape labeled A , the B -worlds are the points inside the shape labeled B , and the C -worlds are the points inside the shape labeled C . All the closest A -worlds to w are B -worlds, and all the closest B -worlds are C -worlds; yet none of the closest A -worlds are C -worlds. Figure 1b shows a counterexample to contraposition, and Figure 1c shows a counterexample to antecedent strengthening.

Defenders of the closest-worlds theory have the burden of spelling out what ‘closeness’ amounts to. D. Lewis (1973a) claims that closeness is based on similarity among worlds: to say that one world is closer to w than another is to say that the first world is more similar to w than the second. But Fine (1975) presents an example where greater similarity does not make for greater closeness. (I have taken a few liberties with the details of the example.)

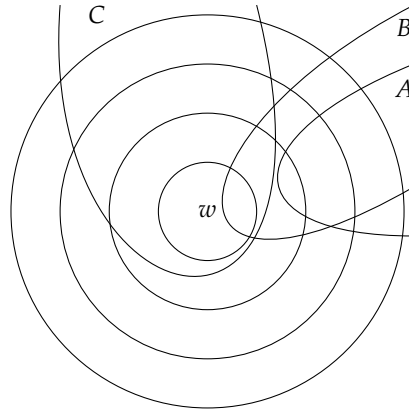
On September 26, 1983, at the height of the Cold War, a Soviet early-warning system went off, falsely reporting that missiles had been launched at Russia from the US (Aksenov, 2013). The officer who saw the alarm, Stanislav Petrov, did not report it to his superiors, and so Russia did not launch missiles in retaliation. The following conditional seems true:

PETROV If Petrov had informed his superiors at the time of the false alarm, then there would have been a nuclear war.

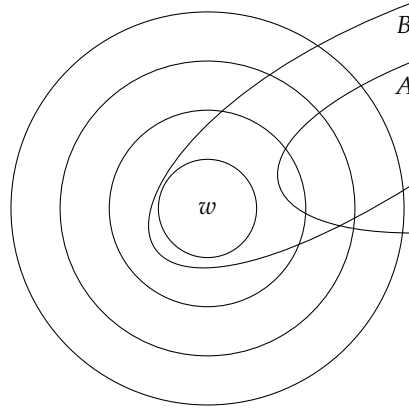
After all, Petrov’s superiors were poised to launch the missiles in the event of an attack, and it seems that the phone lines and missile system were in working order. The only missing ingredient was the report from Petrov.

But among the worlds where Petrov informs his superiors at the time of the false alarm, those where the Soviet missile launch is prevented by a happy accident—incompetence by Petrov’s superiors, or a broken telephone, or a malfunction of the Soviet missile system—are more similar to the actual world than those where the launch goes through. Worlds where the missile launch is prevented by a happy accident agree with the actual world about the total number of nuclear wars in the 20th Century—surely a more important dimension of similarity than the functioning or malfunctioning of one measly telephone line.⁴

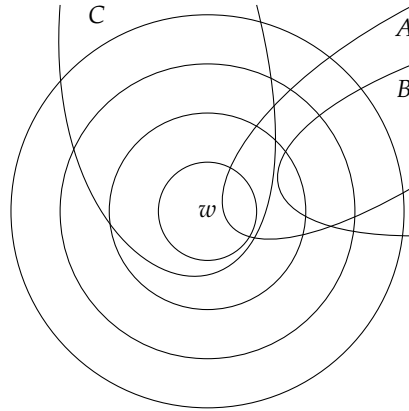
⁴ Defenders of the closest-worlds interpretation reply that we should understand ‘similarity’ so that agreeing about the total number of nuclear wars in the 20th Century does not make for greater similarity than agreeing about the functioning or malfunctioning of one measly telephone line; see D. Lewis (1979) and Arregui (2009).



(a) Transitivity



(b) Contraposition



(c) Strengthening the antecedent

Figure 1: Counterexamples to transitivity, contraposition, and strengthening the antecedent in the closest-worlds framework

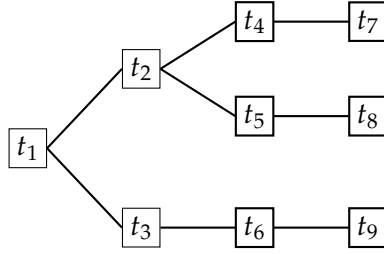


Figure 2: A model of branching time

4.3 Past Predominance

To handle the PETROV example, a natural thought goes, we need an account of the selection function that treats the past differently from the future. When Petrov made his choice, the missile launch system was already in working order—but it was not yet determined whether there would be a war.

Thomason and Gupta (1980) propose an account of the selection function that takes seriously the past-future asymmetry. They model the universe using branching time, where each moment has only one possible past, but multiple possible futures. (Cross, 1990, shows that the assumption of branching time is dispensable; past predominance can also be modeled using ordinary possible worlds.) Figure 2 depicts such a model. The nodes t_1, t_2, \dots, t_9 are moments. Paths through the tree—in this example, $\{t_1, t_2, t_4, t_7\}$, $\{t_1, t_2, t_5, t_8\}$, and $\{t_1, t_3, t_6, t_9\}$ —are called *histories*.

We can think of each possible world as containing information about which moment is present, as well as information about which history is actual. (On this way of understanding the model, even when the present moment has more than one possible future, there is a fact of the matter about which future will occur.)

Thomason and Gupta adopt a *past predominance* principle, which says that if a world x is in $f(A, w)$, then it must diverge from w as late as possible—there can be no other A -world whose history overlaps w for a longer span than $f(A, w)$.⁵

The past predominance view can explain the PETROV example. Consider the following interpretation of our diagram: the actual history is $\{t_1, t_2, t_4, t_7\}$. At t_1 , it is not yet settled whether the early warning system goes off. The early warning system goes off t_2 , and Petrov must decide what to do. (At t_3 , which belongs to an alternative history, there is never any alarm.) At t_4 , Petrov decides not to notify his superiors, and so at

⁵ For technical reasons, Thomason and Gupta also assume that $f(A, w)$ is a singleton set, and posit that each world contains a *choice function*, which specifies not just what the future will be like, but what the future would have been like had the past gone differently. I pass over the details.

t_7 , there is no nuclear war. (At t_5 , which belongs to another alternative history, Petrov decides to notify his superiors, and a nuclear war ensues at t_8 .)

Now consider the conditional PETROV, as uttered at t_7 . Its antecedent is false at the actual world, which has the history $\{t_1, t_2, t_4, t_7\}$. The closest worlds where its antecedent is true must have the history $\{t_1, t_2, t_5, t_8\}$, which diverges from the actual world's history at the last possible moment yet still makes the antecedent true. Since the actual present moment is t_7 , it seems reasonable to select t_8 as the present moment at all the closest worlds. Since there is a nuclear war at t_8 , the consequent of PETROV is true at all the the closest worlds; hence PETROV is true at the actual world.

4.4 Causal Models

A class of examples called *Morgenbesser cases* (Slote, 1978, 27n) suggest that the selection function should respect causal as well as temporal constraints. Edgington (2004) gives a representative Morgenbesser case.

Our heroine misses a flight to Paris due to a car breakdown. She complains to the repairman: 'If I had caught the plane, I would have been halfway to Paris by now!' But he corrects her: 'I was listening to the radio. It crashed. If you had caught that plane, you would be dead by now.'

The repairman claims that the following counterfactual is true.

LETHAL If the heroine had caught that plane, she would be dead by now.

He is right. It's not clear that past predominance can explain why he's right: the plane crash occurs after our heroine would have made her flight.⁶ What matters is that the plane crash is causally independent of whether she makes her flight. This is why, when assessing what would have happened if our heroine had made her flight, we should hold the plane crash fixed.

Pearl (2009) proposes a causal theory of counterfactuals that accounts for Morgenbesser cases. His theory relies on the concept of a *causal model*, consisting of a set of *variables*, which represent what circumscribed parts of the world are like, and a set of *structural equations*, which represent direct causal links between variables. Each variable is assigned an *actual value*; we can think of variables as questions about parts of the world, their possible values as possible answers to those questions, and their actual values as the correct answers in the actual world. Note that although I introduced selection semantics as a recipe for assigning truth values to

⁶ But see Phillips (2007) for an argument that past predominance *can* provide an adequate explanation.

conditionals at worlds, Pearl's theory is a recipe for assigning truth values to conditionals at model-valuation pairs.⁷

We can understand Pearl's theory by first building a causal model of Edgington's plane example, then using the model to evaluate the conditional LETHAL. The model will include the following variables.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CAR} &= \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if the car is working,} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \\ \text{CATCH} &= \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if our heroine catches her plane,} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \\ \text{CRASH} &= \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if there is a crash,} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \\ \text{LOCATION} &= \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if our heroine ends up stuck at the side of the road,} \\ 1 & \text{if our heroine ends up in Paris,} \\ 2 & \text{if our heroine ends up dead.} \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

CAR and CRASH are what Pearl calls *exogenous* variables; their values are determined by factors outside the model. CATCH and LOCATION are *endogenous* variables; their values are determined by the values of other variables in the model.

For each of the endogenous variables, the model specifies a structural equation. In the plane example, the structural equations are as follows.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{CATCH} &= \text{CAR} \\ \text{LOCATION} &= \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if CATCH} = 0, \\ 1 & \text{if CATCH} = 1 \text{ and CRASH} = 0, \\ 2 & \text{if CATCH} = 1 \text{ and CRASH} = 1. \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

(NB: the structural equations are asymmetric. The variable on the left-hand side has its value causally determined by the variables on the right-hand side.)

⁷ Pearl's theory can be understood as a version of the situation semantics defended by Barwise and Perry (1981). Instead of assigning truth values to propositions at worlds, it assigns truth values to propositions at situations, which represent ways that circumscribed parts of the world could be.

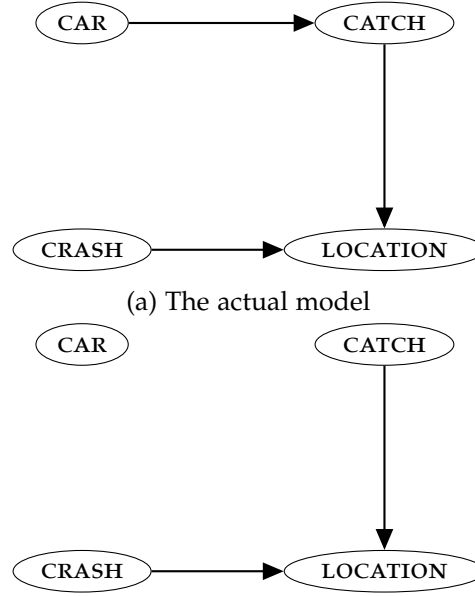


Figure 3: Causal graph used to evaluate the counterfactual LETHAL: ‘If the heroine had caught that plane, she would be dead by now’.

In the plane example, the variables take on the following values.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{CAR} &= 0, \\
 \text{CATCH} &= 0, \\
 \text{CRASH} &= 1, \\
 \text{LOCATION} &= 0.
 \end{aligned}$$

We can summarize information about the variables and structural equations using the causal graph in Figure 3a. An arrow from one variable to another indicates that the first variable exerts direct causal influence on the second, but unlike the structural equations, the causal graph doesn’t specify the nature of that influence.

Given a pair consisting of a model and an assignment of values to variables in the model, we can use a selection function to assign truth values to conditionals. (This time, the selection function takes in a model, and returns a singleton containing one new model.) Pearl’s account is restricted to counterfactuals whose antecedents are either ‘literals’, which say that a particular variable takes on a particular value, or conjunctions of literals. (So ‘the heroine’s car breaks down and the plane crashes’ is an acceptable antecedent, while ‘the heroine’s car breaks down or the plane crashes’ is not.)

Where $\langle M, V \rangle$ is a model paired with an assignment of values to variables, and A is an antecedent with the appropriate form, we can generate a

submodel $\langle M_A, V_A \rangle$ by ‘intervening’ on $\langle M, V \rangle$ to make A true. Intuitively, we can imagine an intervention as an action by someone outside the model who ‘reaches in’ to make the antecedent true, without tinkering with variables that are causally independent of the antecedent. For instance, a cabbie could intervene to set $\text{CATCH} = 1$ by driving our heroine to the airport regardless of whether or not her car has broken down.

Formally, the submodel M_A is a model with the same variables as M , but different structural equations. If X is one of the variables mentioned in A , and X is endogenous, we delete the structural equation corresponding to X , and make X exogenous instead. (This corresponds to the idea that an intervention makes A true regardless of whether its typical causes obtain; the intervening cabbie enables the heroine to get to the airport whether or not her car is in working order.) We then set the value V_A of each X mentioned in A to the value specified by A . (This corresponds to the idea that the intervention makes the antecedent true.) If a variable is not causally influenced (either directly or indirectly) by any of the variables mentioned in the antecedent, then V_A assigns it the same value as V . (This corresponds to the idea that an intervention is *minimal*, so that only the variables mentioned in the antecedent are directly effected.) Finally, if a variable is causally influenced by one of the variables mentioned in the antecedent, then its value V_A is fixed by the structural equations. (This corresponds to the idea that an intervention is minimal in another sense: it does not interfere with the downstream effects of the variables mentioned in the antecedent.)

We are now ready to evaluate the counterfactual

LETHAL If the heroine had caught that plane, she would be dead by now.

in our original model. To check whether LETHAL is true in the original model, we intervene to make its antecedent true—i.e., to set $\text{CATCH} = 1$. We then check whether the consequent is true (i.e., $\text{LOCATION} = 2$) in the resulting submodel.

First, we delete the structural equation for CATCH , turning CATCH into an exogenous variable. Our only remaining structural equation is

$$\text{LOCATION} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } \text{CATCH} = 0, \\ 1 & \text{if } \text{CATCH} = 1 \text{ and } \text{CRASH} = 0, \\ 2 & \text{if } \text{CATCH} = 1 \text{ and } \text{CRASH} = 1. \end{cases}$$

(The graph for the resulting submodel is shown in Figure 3b.)

Second, we set the values of the variables. The antecedent requires that

$$\text{CATCH} = 1.$$

Since neither CAR nor CRASH is downstream from CATCH, we have

$$\begin{aligned}\text{CAR} &= 0, \\ \text{CRASH} &= 1.\end{aligned}$$

Finally, the value of LOCATION is fixed by the structural equation. Since CATCH = 1 and CRASH = 1, we have

$$\text{LOCATION} = 2.$$

Therefore, in the submodel, the protagonist is dead, so in the original model, had she caught her plane, she would have been dead.

The procedure described is a type of selection semantics: given an antecedent and a model-valuation pair, we call on a ‘submodel’ selection function that returns the singleton set of another model-valuation pair (a submodel). Galles and Pearl (1998) argue that this selection semantics is formally equivalent to the closest-worlds account. However, there is a key difference between the two accounts: the selection semantics lets us assign truth conditions to counterfactuals built up from arbitrary sentences, while the causal modeling account only lets us assign truth values to counterfactuals whose antecedents are literals, or conjunctions of literals. Schulz (2011) and Briggs (2012) propose ways of extending the language to counterfactuals with logically complex antecedents; their proposed theories are logically inequivalent to the closest-worlds semantics. Huber (2013) proposes an alternative way of extending the language that makes it logically equivalent to the closest-worlds account.

5 COUNTERPOSSIBLE CONDITIONALS

Selection semantics has trouble with *counterpossible* conditionals—that is, conditionals whose antecedents are impossible. It counts all counterpossible conditionals as trivially true. Where A is impossible, there are no possible A -worlds. Therefore, if we feed the selection function an impossibility A and a world w and ask it to return a set of possible A -worlds, it returns the empty set. Trivially, all the A -worlds in the empty set are C -worlds, so that trivially $A \Box \rightarrow C$ is true in the original world.

But counterpossibles seem to have non-trivial truth conditions: some are true, while others are false. Examples of true counterpossibles include:

If Hobbes had (secretly) squared the circle, sick children in the mountains of South America at the time would not have cared (Nolan, 1997, p. 544).

If I were a horse, then I would have hooves (Krakauer, 2012, p. 10).

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride (Krakauer, 2012, p. 10).

If intuitionistic logic were the correct logic, then the law of excluded middle would no longer be unrestrictedly valid (adapted from Brogaard & Salerno, 2013).

Corresponding examples of false counterpossibles include:

If Hobbes had (secretly) squared the circle, sick children in the mountains of South America at the time would have taken notice.

If I were a horse, then I would have scales.

If wishes were horses, no one would own any horses.

If intuitionistic logic were the correct logic, then the law of excluded middle would still be unrestrictedly valid.

Assigning non-trivial truth values to counterpossibles doesn't just capture linguistic intuitions; it also enables counterpossibles to do valuable philosophical work. Non-trivial counterpossibles help us assess rival philosophical, mathematical, and logical theories by telling us what would follow if those theories were true (Krakauer, 2012; Brogaard & Salerno, 2013; Nolan, 1997). They explain how necessary events and omissions of impossible events are causally relevant to the actual world—how a mathematician's failure to disprove Fermat's Last Theorem prevented her from getting tenure, how my failure to be in two places at once caused me to miss a colloquium talk, or how the copresence of a mental property and its subvening physical property can result in a subject's raising his arm (Bernstein, 2016). They can be used to give an account of essences: an essential property is one such that, if the bearer had lacked it, then the bearer would not have existed (Brogaard & Salerno, 2013, *forthcoming*). (Non-trivial counterpossibles save this account from certain implausible commitments—e.g., that living in a world where $2 + 2 = 4$ is trivially part of everyone's essence.)

Not everybody agrees that counterpossibles have non-trivial truth values, however. Williamson (2007, p. 172) argues that apparent examples of non-trivial counterpossibles collapse under closer scrutiny. In a slight variant on Williamson's example,⁸ imagine that a student is mulling over a graded arithmetic test. Of the 12 problems on the test, the student has gotten the last one wrong: 'what is $5 + 7$?' The student, who answered '11', laments: 'If only $5 + 7$ were 11, I would have gotten a perfect score!' This seems to be true, and furthermore, it seems false that if $5 + 7$ were 11, the student would have gotten one of the problems wrong. But appearances are deceptive. Suppose that $5 + 7$ were 11. Then in answering all the problems right, the student would have given five right answers followed

⁸ Thanks to Sharon Berry for suggesting this version in conversation.

by seven more right answers, for a total of 11 right answers. Since there are 12 problems on the test, the student would have gotten one problem wrong after all. (For an extended rebuttal of Williamson's argument, see Salerno and Brogaard, [forthcoming](#).)

5.1 *Impossible Worlds*

Nolan (1997) gives an account of counterpossibles by supplementing the closest-worlds account with impossible worlds—ways the world couldn't be. We can then say that $A \Box \rightarrow B$ is true at w just in case B is true at all the closest possible or impossible A -worlds to w . Two questions then arise: what are impossible worlds, and what makes them closer or further away from the actual world?

The ontology of impossible worlds has spawned its own literature: they may be collections of individuals like our actual world (Yagisawa, 2010), or they may be sets of sentences in some suitable language (Hintikka, 1975; Melia, 2001; Sider, 2002; see Berto, 2013, for a general overview and discussion.) Another pressing question for theorists of counterpossibles concerns the logical structure of impossible worlds. Is it the case that for every set of sentences, there is some impossible world where all and only the sentences in the set are true? Or is there more logical structure we can impose on impossible worlds?

Proponents of impossible worlds typically don't require that the impossible worlds be closed under classical logical consequence—in other words, they don't require that whenever some propositions are true at an impossible world, all the classical logical consequences of those propositions are true at the world too. If impossible worlds had to be closed under classical logical consequence, then whenever A was impossible by the rules of classical logic, $A \Box \rightarrow C$ would be trivially true. Nolan (1997, p. 547) argues that we should not require impossible worlds to be closed under any kind of logical consequence, since for every putative logical truth, there are non-trivial facts about what the world would be like if that logical truth did not obtain. A similar line of reasoning suggests that some impossible worlds have truth-value gluts: we can speculate about what would happen if there were true contradictions, so there must be impossible worlds at which there are true contradictions.

Bjerring (2013) argues that some impossible worlds have truth-value gaps. Otherwise, he argues, our theory of counterpossibles would misclassify certain conditionals as true, such as this one: 'If intuitionistic logic were correct, then the Law of Excluded Middle would hold.' (The Law of Excluded Middle says of every proposition that either it or its negation holds; intuitionists famously deny it.)

What about closeness? Nolan (1997) proposes the

STRANGENESS OF IMPOSSIBILITY CONDITION Any possible world is more similar [closer] to the actual world than any impossible world (Nolan, 1997, p. 550).

The Strangeness of Impossibility Condition ensures that where A is a possible proposition, supplementing the closest-worlds account with impossible worlds has no effect on how we evaluate $A \Box \rightarrow C$. So long as A is possible, the set of closest possible A -worlds coincides with the set of closest possible or impossible A -worlds.

Bjerring (2013, p. 348) proposes another constraint on closeness, which implicitly relativizes closeness to the antecedent of a counterfactual. Given a collection of logical systems L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n , where L_1 is classical logic, and where W_{L_i} is the set of worlds deductively closed under L_i 's entailment relation, Bjerring endorses the

RELATIVE CLOSENESS CONDITION For any counterfactual whose antecedent presupposes that some logic L_i is correct (true, adequate), a world in modal space W_{L_i} is closer to the actual world than any world in modal space W_{L_j} , where $W_{L_i} \neq W_{L_j}$, and where $i \geq 1$ and $j > 1$.⁹

Brogaard and Salerno (2013) develop a theory on which impossible worlds are close to the actual world to the extent that they

1. minimize discrepancies with relevant background facts about the actual world (where the relevance of background facts is fixed by context), and
2. minimize violations of relevant *a priori* entailment (where relevant *a priori* entailment is spelled out in more detail in the paper).

As an illustration of these conditions, Brogaard and Salerno use them to evaluate the counterpossible conditional 'if water had not been H_2O , then water would have been a monkey'. This counterpossible is false. Their theory delivers the correct verdict, they claim, because it is *a priori* that water is not a monkey.

To derive this verdict, they consider two impossible worlds where the antecedent is true. At w_1 , water is some chemical compound XYZ (different from H_2O), while at w_2 , water is a monkey.

⁹ As stated by Bjerring, the Relative Closeness Condition seems to presuppose that W_{L_i} and W_{L_j} do not intersect. We can get rid of this presupposition by modifying the condition slightly:

RELATIVE CLOSENESS CONDITION* For any counterfactual whose antecedent presupposes that some logic L_i is correct (true, adequate), a world in modal space W_{L_i} is closer to the actual world than any world outside W_{L_i} .

w_1	w_2
water is not H ₂ O	water is not H ₂ O
water is XYZ	water is a monkey

Since there are more *a priori* truths that hold at w_1 than at w_2 , and since both agree with the actual world about the same number of propositions, w_1 is closer to the actual world than w_2 . (Brogaard and Salerno tacitly assume that there are no antecedent worlds closer to the actual world than w_1 or w_2 .) Thus, at least one of the closest impossible worlds where water is not H₂O is one where water fails to be a monkey, so the conditional is false at the actual world.

5.2 Relevant Logic

Relevant logics are motivated by the thought that the conditional ‘if A , then C ’ claims that the truth of A is connected to the truth of C . Relevant logics originated as rivals to the material conditional account, on which the conditional ‘if A , then C ’ is true just in case A is false or C is true (see Section 6). However, some of the same intuitions that favor relevant logics over the material conditional account also favor them over the closest-worlds account. After all, the reason it seems wrong to say ‘if Hobbes had squared the circle, sick children in the mountains of South America would have cared’ is that there is no connection between Hobbes’s squaring the circle and the interests of sick South American children. Likewise, the reason it seems right to say ‘if I were a horse, I would have hooves’ is because something’s being a horse is connected to its having hooves.

Relevant logics are often characterized in proof-theoretic terms. But Routley and Meyer (1973, 1972a, 1972b) develop a versatile semantics for the conditionals of relevant logics, which generalizes the strict conditional semantics of Section 4.1. Recall that on the strict conditional interpretation, $A \Box \rightarrow C$ is true at w just in case C is true at all possible A -worlds (relative to w). We can rewrite the selection function in terms of a two-place accessibility relation among worlds: we say that Rwx just in case world x is possible according to world w , and that $f(A, w)$ is the set of all A -worlds x such that Rwx .

Routley and Meyer interpret the conditional in terms of a three-place accessibility relation among worlds. ‘If A , then C ’ is true at w just in case, for all worlds x and y such that $Rwxy$ and x is an A world, C is true at y . Different restrictions on relation R generate different relevant logics. (For some logics, we need impossible worlds where both a sentence and its negation fail to be true, or impossible worlds where both sentence and its negation are true.)

This three-place R relation is formally useful, but does it mean anything? Beall et al. (2012) propose three interpretations of $Rwxy$, which spring from different ways of grouping w , x , and y .¹⁰ All three interpretations can be illustrated with the conditional

THERMITE If you light a bucket of thermite with a titanium fuse, then a huge explosion will ensue.

GROUPING THE SECOND AND THIRD WORLDS TOGETHER: $Rw\langle xy\rangle$. 'If A , then C ' says at the actual world w , there are no counterexamples where A is true and C is false. We typically think of counterexamples as involving a single world which makes some things true and other things false, but relevant logicians split the labor between two worlds x and y , so that whatever holds at x is true, while whatever fails to hold at y is false. In the example of **THERMITE**, we might think of potential counterexamples as divided into an earlier part x , when a bucket of thermite may or may not be lit with a titanium fuse, and a later part y , when there may or may not be an explosion. If the actual world w admits some possible two-part scenarios that begin with the lighting of thermite with a titanium fuse, but fails to end in a huge explosion, then these scenarios are counterexamples that falsify **THERMITE**.

GROUPING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLDS TOGETHER: $R\langle wx\rangle y$. 'If A , then C ' says that using one's current information to draw inferences from A will yield the information that C . To say that $Rwxy$ is to say that when the rules of w are applied to the information in x , it is possible to infer y (or some information that entails y). In the case of **THERMITE**, we can imagine w as a parcel of information specifying the actual laws of nature, and x as another parcel of information specifying that a bucket of thermite has been lit with a titanium fuse. If sticking these parcels of information together licenses the conclusion that there has been a huge explosion (and does so no matter how we fill in x , the information that the thermite has been lit), then the conditional **THERMITE** is true.

GROUPING THE FIRST AND THIRD WORLDS TOGETHER: $Rw\rangle x\langle y$. 'If A , then C ' says that C is necessary relative to A , or that C is necessary in an A -ish way. The conditional **THERMITE** does not say it is absolutely necessary that a huge explosion will ensue. The world w may permit a possible scenario y in which no huge explosions occur. However, once we enrich w with some additional information x , specifying that a bucket of thermite has been lit with a titanium fuse, we can consider what is possible

¹⁰ For a discussion of other ways of interpreting the ternary relation, with references, see Jago (2013).

under that supposition. If there is some way of filling in the antecedent that makes y a possibility, then y is possible not just absolutely, but under the supposition that the antecedent of THERMITE is true.

Mares and Fuhrmann (1995) propose a theory of counterfactuals that combines the closest-worlds interpretation of the selection function with the relevant interpretation of the conditional: $A \Box \rightarrow B$ is true at a world w just in case the relevant conditional ‘if A , then B ’ is true at all closest A -worlds to w . Mares (1994) argues that this theory has useful applications to conditional analyses of causation, and to theories of conditional obligation.

6 THE MATERIAL CONDITIONAL ACCOUNT OF INDICATIVES

According to the material conditional account defended by Grice (1989) and Jackson (1987), an indicative conditional $A \rightarrow C$ is true just in case either its antecedent A is true, or its consequent C is false. (The material conditional account is almost always offered as a theory of indicative conditionals alone, since counterfactual conditionals with false antecedents can be false. Even though I don’t keep a horse, it is false that if I were to keep a horse, it would breathe fire.) The material conditional account has a simple explanation for the apparent validity of all the inferences discussed in Section 2 (modus ponens, modus tollens, conditional proof, strengthening the antecedent, transitivity, contraposition, and simplification): these inferences really are valid.

Furthermore, there are persuasive arguments for the conclusion that an indicative conditional $A \rightarrow C$ is true if and only if the corresponding material conditional ‘not A or C ’ is true. Suppose the indicative conditional is true. Then it can’t have a true antecedent and a false consequent; that would be a violation of modus ponens. So the indicative conditional entails the material conditional. But when I know that either C holds or A doesn’t, I can infer that if A , then C . So the material conditional entails the indicative. (Stalnaker, 1975, p. 136, calls this the direct argument.) Since the material and indicative conditionals entail each other, they must be equivalent.

Gibbard (1981) provides a formal argument for the equivalence of the indicative and material conditionals based on three logical principles. Where ‘not A ’ is abbreviated $\neg A$ and ‘ A or B ’ is abbreviated $A \vee B$, the principles are:

PSEUDO MODUS PONENS $A \rightarrow C$ entails $\neg A \vee C$.

IMPORT-EXPORT $A \rightarrow (B \rightarrow C)$ is equivalent to $(A \wedge B) \rightarrow C$.

CONDITIONAL PROOF If A entails C , then $A \rightarrow C$ is a logical truth.

To show that $A \rightarrow C$ and $\neg A \vee C$ are equivalent, Gibbard only needs to show that each entails the other. By Pseudo Modus Ponens, $A \rightarrow C$ entails $\neg A \vee C$. The proof that $\neg A \vee C$ entails $A \rightarrow C$ is as follows.

1. $((\neg A \vee C) \wedge A)$ entails C . (By tautological reasoning.)
2. It is a truth of logic that $((\neg A \vee C) \wedge A) \rightarrow C$. (By 1 and Conditional Proof.)
3. It is a truth of logic that $(\neg A \vee C) \rightarrow (A \rightarrow C)$. (By 2 and Import-Export.)
4. It is a truth of logic that $\neg(\neg A \vee C) \vee (A \rightarrow C)$. (By 3 and Pseudo Modus Ponens.)
5. $(\neg A \vee C)$ entails $(A \rightarrow C)$. (By 4 and tautological reasoning.)

Despite these points in its favor, the material conditional account faces substantial difficulties. It seems to yield wrong predictions about logical validity, often called ‘paradoxes of material implication’.

For example, the material conditional account entails that all of the following are truths of logic:

Either the unburied dead will walk the Earth if I bury a chicken head in my backyard, or the unburied dead will walk the Earth if I fail to bury a chicken head in my backyard (McGee, 2005).

Either you are virtuous if you are rich, or you are rich if you are virtuous.

One of these three things holds: if you grant voting rights to children, you will grant them to guinea pigs; if you grant voting rights to guinea pigs, you will grant them to inanimate objects; or if you grant voting rights to inanimate objects, you will take them away from adult human beings.

Furthermore, the material conditional account entails that all of the following inferences are valid. (The proof of God’s existence is due to Edgington, 1986.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. I will not do my chores today. | |
| <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> | |
| \therefore If I do my chores today, then the world will implode. | |
| | |
| 1. Dinner will be delicious. | |
| <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin: 5px 0;"/> | |
| \therefore If I burn the veggie burgers and pour sand into the sweet potatoes, then dinner will be delicious. | |

1. If God does not exist, then it's not the case that if I pray, my prayers will be answered.
 2. I do not pray.
-
- ∴ God exists.

In addition to yielding bad predictions about validity, the material conditional account yields bad predictions about the probabilities of conditionals. Suppose I draw a card at random from a 52-card deck. The material conditional 'either I do not draw a red ace, or I draw the ace of hearts' has probability 51/52. (The only way for me to make it false is to draw the ace of diamonds.) Therefore, by the material conditional account, I should assign probability 51/52 to the indicative conditional 'if I draw a red ace, then it will be the ace of hearts'. But the indicative conditional 'if I draw a red ace, then it will be the ace of hearts' should get probability 1/2, since half the time when I draw a red ace, it will be an ace of hearts.

More generally, the material conditional account falls afoul of

THE THESIS Whenever A and C are propositions, the probability of the indicative conditional $A \rightarrow C$ is equal to the conditional probability of C given A , understood as

$$Pr(A|C) = \frac{Pr(A \wedge C)}{Pr(C)}.$$

THE THESIS is a plausible way of unpacking the so-called *Ramsey test*, based on a famous remark by Ramsey (1978, 143n):

If two people are arguing 'If p will q ?'; and are both in doubt as to p , they are adding p hypothetically to their stock of knowledge and arguing on that basis about q ; so that in a sense 'If p , q ' and 'If p , [not q]' are contradictories.

Unfortunately, the material conditional account is straightforwardly incompatible with THE THESIS, and with the Ramsey test more generally. The probability that a material conditional is true is not, in general, the conditional probability of the consequent given the antecedent. (The probability of the material conditional may be anywhere between that conditional probability and 1.) Furthermore, where A is highly unlikely, the material conditional 'not A or C ' is both highly believable and highly assertible, whether or not adding A to one's stock of knowledge would justify a high degree of confidence in C .

Grice (1989) and Jackson (1987) explain these wrong predictions by distinguishing between true sentences and sentences that can appropriately be asserted. According to Grice, in a situation where I will not do my chores today, it is technically true that if I do my chores today, then the

world will implode. Likewise, in a situation where dinner will be delicious, it is technically true that if I burn the veggie burgers and pour sand into the sweet potatoes, then dinner will be delicious. Nonetheless, it is misleading to assert a conditional when I know that its antecedent is false, or when I know that its consequent is true, because it is misleading to assert a weak claim when I could have asserted a stronger one. Refusing to assert the stronger claim is liable to mislead my audience into thinking that I do not know it. The supposedly paradoxical arguments are valid. When their premises are true, their conclusions may be bad, but this does not make their conclusions false.

Grice's proposed mechanism for explaining away the problem is useful in other domains: it can explain why some non-conditional assertions are misleading. For instance, if you ask where John is, and I know that he is in the library, it is misleading for me to reply 'He is either at the pub, or in the library.' A similar trick works for negated conjunctions, as an example by D. Lewis (1976) shows. If I point out a harmless mushroom that I plan to keep for myself, and remark 'You won't eat that and live', knowing that my assertion will prevent you from eating it, then I am guilty of misleading you, though what I say is technically true.

Jackson (1987) is not satisfied with Grice's explanation, since sometimes, it is all right to assert an indicative conditional even if you know that the antecedent is false, or the consequent is true. I know that Oswald killed Kennedy, but can nonetheless assert that if Oswald didn't kill Kennedy, someone else did. Jackson has a different explanation for why technically true conditionals might sound wrong. While the material conditional account captures the truth conditions of an indicative conditional, the meaning of 'if... then...' goes beyond its truth conditions. Built into the meaning of an English indicative conditional is the implication that it would still be appropriate to assert the material conditional, even if its antecedent were known. (Jackson calls this feature 'robustness'.) The Oswald-Kennedy conditional is robust, because even if I had reason to doubt that Oswald killed Kennedy, I would still have good reasons to believe that either Oswald or someone else killed him.

7 THE NO TRUTH VALUES (NTV) ACCOUNT OF INDICATIVES

Suppose you are convinced that the material conditional account gives the wrong truth conditions for the indicative conditionals. You might hope that there was some other account of the truth conditions for indicative conditionals—one that could better explain the truth of THE THESIS. Unfortunately, a collection of so-called 'triviality theorems' suggests that no truth conditions whatsoever will do the trick. Triviality theorems motivate Edgington (1986, 1995) and Appiah (1985) to claim that indicative condi-

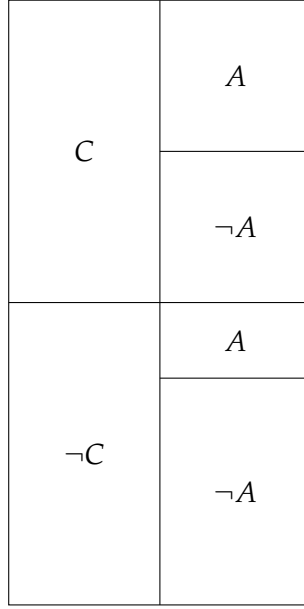


Figure 4: A probability space

tionals lack truth values altogether. (Edgington, 2008, goes on to develop a Y-shaped theory on which counterfactual conditionals also lack truth values altogether.)

In general, triviality theorems show that if THE THESIS is true in general, then every probability function is *trivial*: it assigns positive probability to at most two mutually exclusive alternatives. But it is absurd to claim that every probability function is trivial. (Here is a non-trivial probability function: the one that assigns probability $1/6$ to each possible outcome of the roll of a single die.) Therefore, we must reject THE THESIS.

To see how triviality theorems work, we can consider an early result by D. Lewis (1976), illustrated by system of diagrams adapted from Edgington (1995). Edgington visualizes probabilities using rectangles, divided into horizontal segments representing propositions. The height of a segment represents the probability of the corresponding proposition; the entire rectangle is normalized to have height 1. In Figure 4 the proposition C has probability $1/2$. C is subdivided into the propositions $A \wedge C$ (probability $1/4$) and $A \wedge \neg C$ (probability $1/4$). $\neg C$ (also with probability $1/2$) is subdivided into the propositions $\neg C \wedge A$ (probability $1/8$) and $\neg C \wedge \neg A$ (probability $3/8$).

Figure 5 shows how to calculate the probability of A conditional on C by erasing the bottom half of the diagram, and stretching out the remaining part of the rectangle so its height is 1 (in effect multiplying the height of each of its sub-regions by $\frac{1}{Pr(C)}$). The new height of the A region is $Pr(A|C)$.

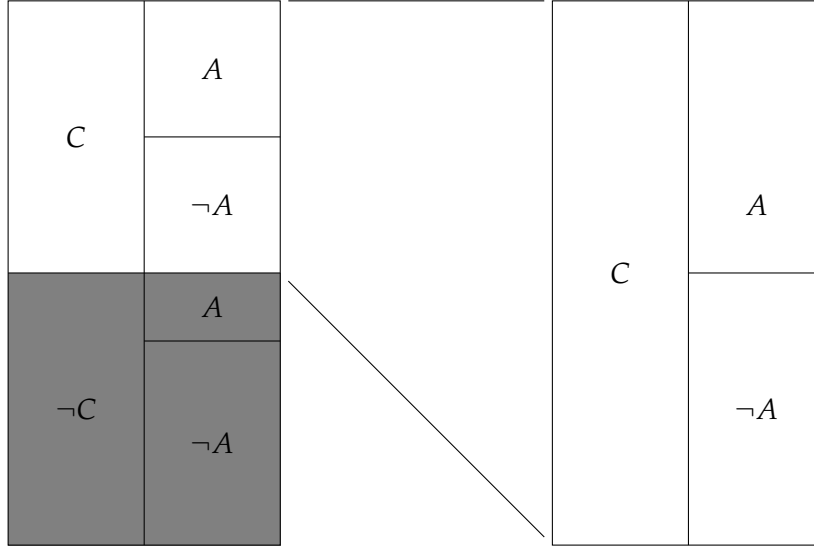
Step 1: Erase the $\neg C$ area.Step 2: Stretch the C area.

Figure 5: Calculating conditional probability

According to the Law of Total Probability (illustrated in Figure 6), for any two propositions X and Y ,

$$Pr(Y) = Pr(Y|X) \times Pr(X) + Pr(Y|\neg X) \times Pr(\neg X). \quad (1)$$

Consider any two propositions A and C such that $P(A \wedge C) > 0$, and $P(A \wedge \neg C) > 0$. Plugging in A for X and $A \rightarrow C$ for Y in Equation 1 yields:

$$Pr(A \rightarrow C) = Pr(A \rightarrow C|C) \times Pr(C) + Pr(A \rightarrow C|\neg C) \times Pr(\neg C). \quad (2)$$

In other words, we can split the probability space into a C part and a $\neg C$ part, and figure out the probability of $A \rightarrow C$ by averaging its probabilities conditional on each part, a procedure illustrated in Figure 7. Consider the probability distribution Pr_C such that for all propositions X , $Pr_C(X) = Pr(X|C)$ (shown in the top center of Figure 7). Using the fact that $Pr_C(A) > 0$, the fact that $Pr_C(C) = 1$, and the definition of conditional probability, we can show that

$$Pr_C(C|A) = 1. \quad (3)$$

Thus, by THE THESIS and Equation 3,

$$Pr_C(A \rightarrow C) = 1. \quad (4)$$

By the definition of Pr_C and equation 4,

$$Pr(A \rightarrow C|C) = 1. \quad (5)$$

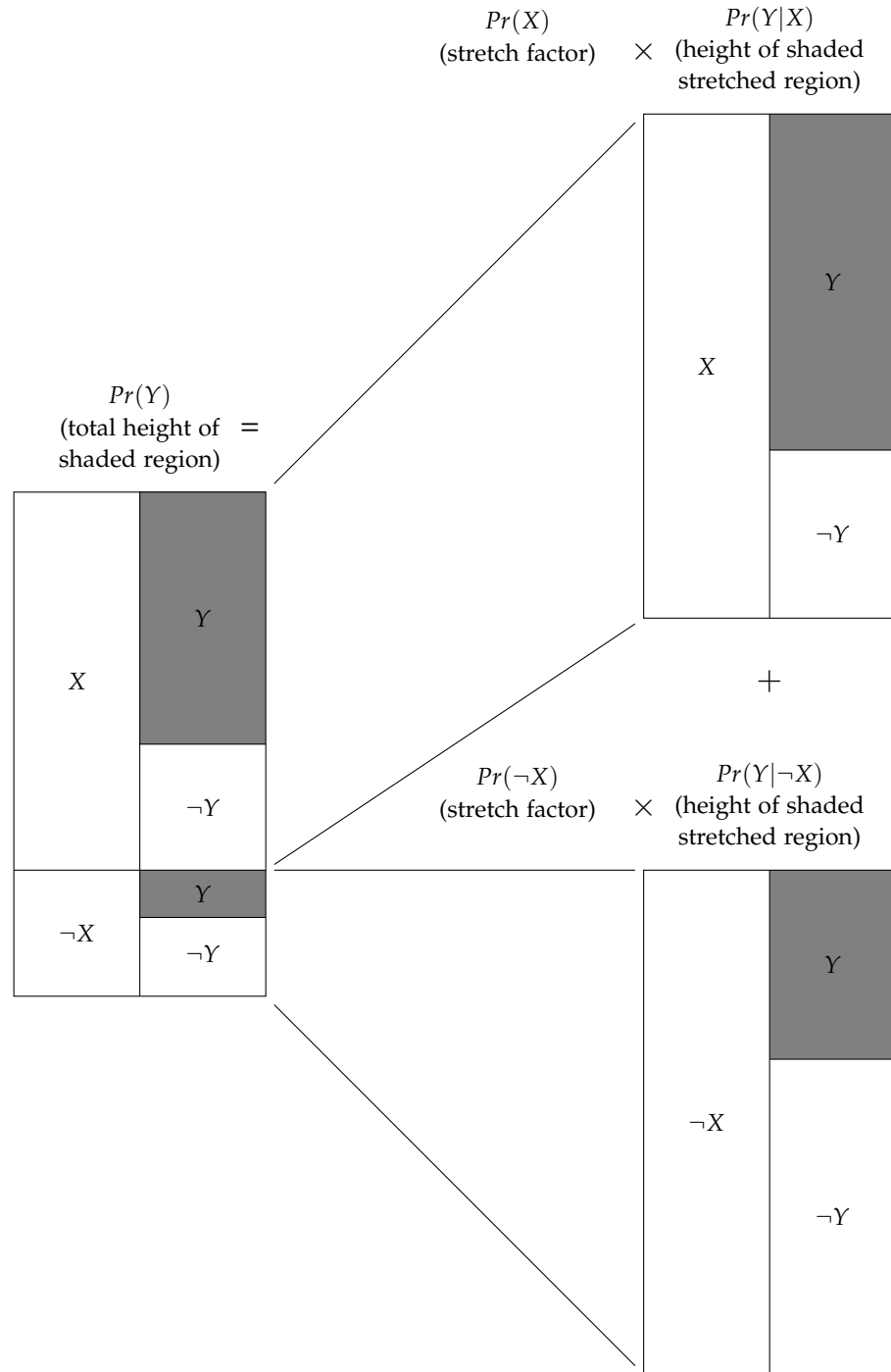


Figure 6: The Law of Total Probability

Likewise, when we consider the probability distribution $Pr_{\neg C}$ such that for all X , $Pr_{\neg C}(X) = Pr(X|\neg C)$ (shown in the bottom center of Figure 7), we see by the fact that $Pr_C(A) > 0$, the fact that $Pr_C(C) = 1$, and the definition of conditional probability that

$$Pr_{\neg C}(C|A) = 0. \quad (6)$$

Thus, by THE THESIS, and Equation 6,

$$Pr_{\neg C}(A \rightarrow C) = 0. \quad (7)$$

And by the definition of $Pr_{\neg C}$ and Equation 7,

$$Pr(A \rightarrow C|\neg C) = 0. \quad (8)$$

Using Equations 5 and 8 to make the appropriate substitutions into equation (2), we get:

$$Pr(A \rightarrow C) = 1 \times Pr(C) + 0 \times Pr(\neg C) = Pr(C). \quad (9)$$

But by THE THESIS,

$$Pr(A \rightarrow C) = Pr(C|A). \quad (10)$$

Substituting $Pr(C|A)$ for $Pr(A \rightarrow C)$ on the left-hand side of Equation 9, we get:

$$Pr(C|A) = Pr(C) \quad (11)$$

—in other words, A and C are probabilistically independent.

The above proof shows that Equation 11 holds for arbitrary propositions A and C , provided both $Pr(A \wedge C)$ and $Pr(A \wedge \neg C)$ are both greater than 0. Therefore Equation 11 should hold for all pairs of propositions A and C such that $Pr(A \wedge C)$ and $Pr(A \wedge \neg C)$ are both greater than 0. But this is only possible in trivial probability spaces. So one of our assumptions must have gone wrong, and the natural place to pin the blame is on THE THESIS.

There are various possible ways out of Lewis's triviality theorem. The proof assumes that the conditional $A \rightarrow C$ has a single set of truth conditions, which remain stable across Pr , Pr_C , and $Pr_{\neg C}$. Defenders of THE THESIS might reject this assumption and claim that the truth-conditions of conditionals are context-dependent. The proof also assumes that THE THESIS holds for all probability functions and all conditionals. Defenders of THE THESIS might retreat and claim that it is true for only some conditionals, or some probability functions.

Unfortunately, both escape routes are treacherous. New triviality theorems can be derived from much weaker assumptions; for a helpful survey, see Hall and Hájek (1994). There are even triviality results that use non-probabilistic variants of THE THESIS (Gärdenfors, 1988), and trivializing

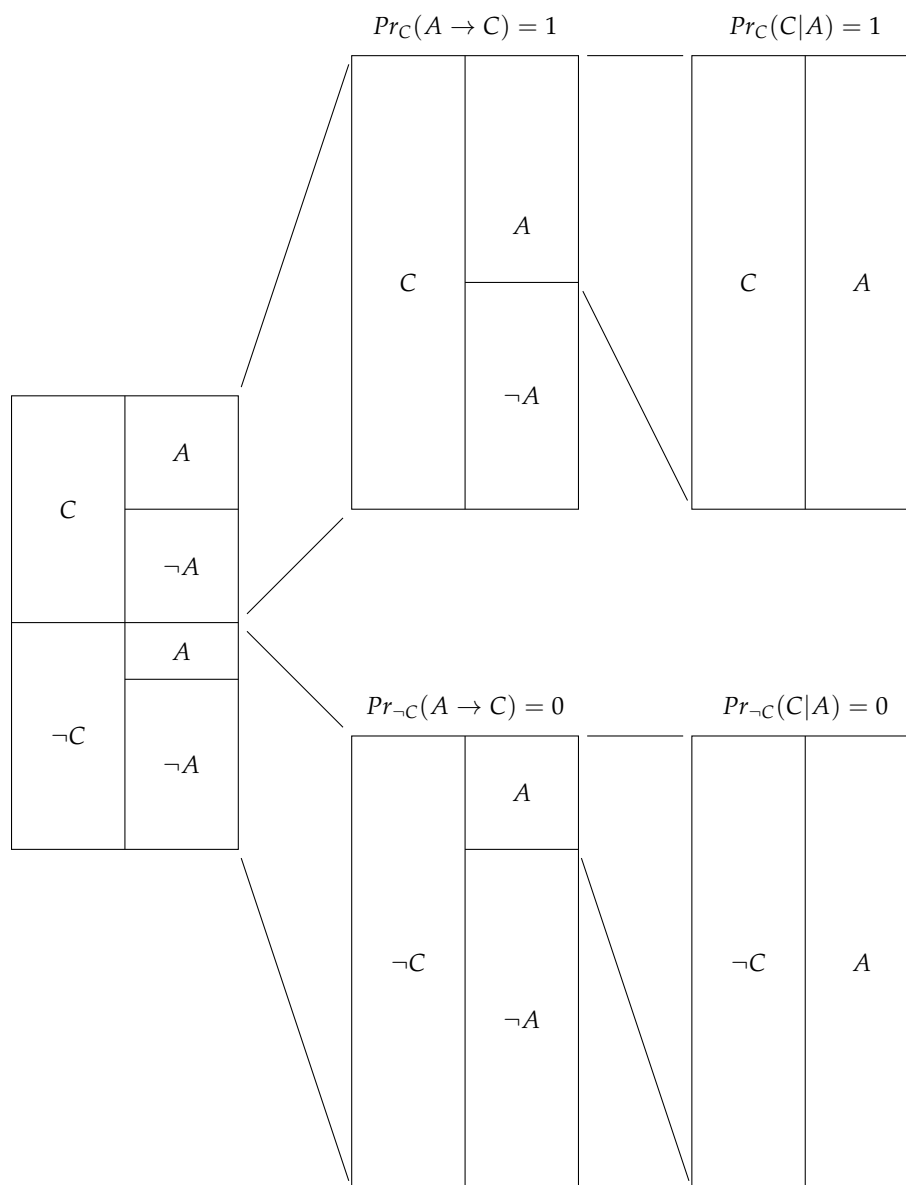


Figure 7: The Lewis triviality theorem illustrated

versions of THE THESIS that apply to counterfactuals rather than indicatives (Williams, 2012). On a slightly more optimistic note, *non*-triviality results can be obtained by adopting (sufficiently weak) non-classical logics (Morgan & Mares, 1995).

Another way out of Lewis's triviality theorem is to reject THE THESIS. Kaufmann (2004) produces examples of indicative conditionals in English that intuitively seem to violate THE THESIS, and Douven and Verbrugge (2013) provide experimental evidence that English speakers' judgments about indicative conditionals violate THE THESIS.

If probability is probability of truth, defenders of the NTV view should reject THE THESIS too. However, defenders of the NTV view typically defend versions THE THESIS, but adopt alternative interpretations of 'probability', on which the probability of a conditional is not the probability of its truth.

Calling on alternative theories of probability makes sense: probability is a versatile explanatory tool, and the NTV theory has plenty of explaining to do. In particular, the NTV theory needs to explain why conditionals seem to have the features of truth-evaluable statements. It is sometimes reasonable to believe a conditional—but ordinarily, to believe something is to believe that it is true. Likewise, it is sometimes reasonable to assert a conditional—but ordinarily, to assert something is to claim that it is true. Arguments with conditionals in their premises and conclusions are sometimes valid and sometimes invalid—but ordinarily, a valid argument is one that cannot have true premises and a false conclusion, and it's not clear how to fruitfully apply the concept of validity when a premise or conclusion lacks truth conditions altogether.

Adams (1975) and Edgington (1986) give a probabilistic account of belief in conditionals. Belief comes in degrees, which are measured by probabilities. A person's degree of belief in a conditional is simply her conditional degree of belief in its consequent on its antecedent.

Adams (1975) gives a probabilistic account of validity for conditionals. An argument is said to be probabilistically valid just in case it is impossible for its premises to be probable and its conclusion improbable. More precisely, an argument from premises P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n to conclusion C is valid just in case, for every real number $\epsilon > 0$, there is a real number $\delta > 0$ such that, if each of P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n has probability greater than $1 - \delta$, then C has probability at least $1 - \epsilon$.

Adams' definition of validity coincides with the classical definition where P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n and C are conditional-free sentences, and lets us define validity for arguments containing simple conditionals. The theory is built to handle only simple conditionals, and does not let us assess validity for arguments containing compound sentences with conditionals as parts. McGee (1989) extends Adams' theory to cover compounds of conditionals.

Edgington (1995) gives a non-probabilistic account of what it is to assert a conditional: it is to assert the consequent if the antecedent is true, and to assert nothing otherwise. She argues that her account assimilates conditional assertions to a larger class of conditional speech acts, including:

CONDITIONAL QUESTIONS ‘If he phones, what shall I say?’

CONDITIONAL COMMANDS ‘If he phones, hang up.’

CONDITIONAL PROMISES ‘If he phones, I promise not to be rude.’

CONDITIONAL AGREEMENTS ‘If he phones, we’re on for Sunday.’

CONDITIONAL OFFERS ‘If you phone, you can have a 20% discount.’

Any speech act whatsoever, she claims, can be performed conditionally or unconditionally. We can think of conditionals as ‘speech act bombs’ primed to detonate when and only when the antecedent is true (see Egan, 2009).

8 DYNAMIC SEMANTICS

So far, we’ve seen several accounts of conditionals that posit more to their meanings than truth conditions—either because conditionals have no truth conditions (on the NTV account) or because their truth conditions are not sufficient to determine when they can reasonably be asserted (on the material conditional account). Enter dynamic semantics, which provides new tools for modeling meaning.

Dynamic semantics explains the meanings of sentences by appeal to a *conversational context*—a set of background assumptions taken for granted by all the participants in a conversation. For instance, if a group of friends is discussing where to go for lunch, the conversational context might include the information that among the nearby restaurants are Veggie Garden and Buddha’s Palace. The *context set* is a set of worlds compatible with those background assumptions (see Stalnaker, 1999, p. 84).¹¹

The conversational context changes as the conversation progresses, and the context set shrinks and grows accordingly. When a participant makes an assertion, then the content of the assertion is added to the context, and all the worlds incompatible with what is asserted are eliminated from the context set. For instance, if someone asserts that Veggie Garden is open,

¹¹ To give a complete theory of conditionals, the conversational context will need to include more information than just the context set. Other proposed parameters include a probability function or set of probability functions (Yalcin, 2007, 2012b), and a function that ranks worlds from most to least likely (Spohn, 2015). However, I focus my exposition on the context set to provide a simple illustration of the main ideas.

then the worlds where Veggie Garden is closed are eliminated from the context set.

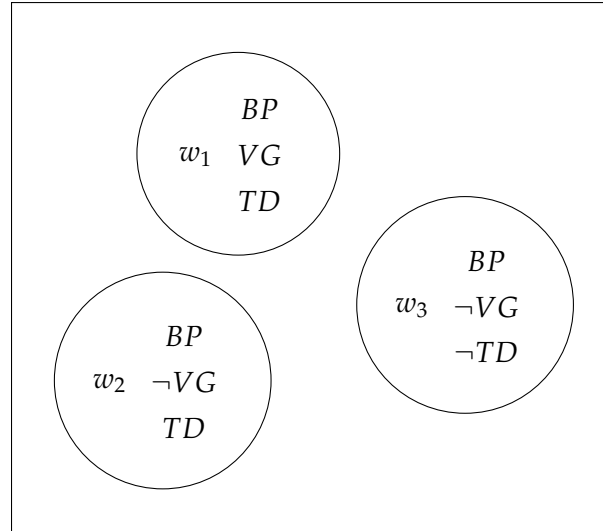
Figure 8 depicts the effect of asserting ‘Veggie Garden is open today’ on the context set. The original context set is shown in the rectangle at the top of the figure: the circles depict worlds. Each world is labeled with a set of propositions true at that world: ‘BP’ stands for ‘Buddha’s Palace is open’; ‘VG’ stands for ‘Veggie Garden is open’; and ‘TD’ stands for ‘we can get gluten-free tofu dogs’.

Notice that some assertions have no effect on the context set. If someone were to assert ‘Buddha’s Palace is open’, none of the worlds in the context set would be eliminated. This is because ‘Buddha’s Palace is open’ is already acceptable in the original context—it follows from what is accepted.

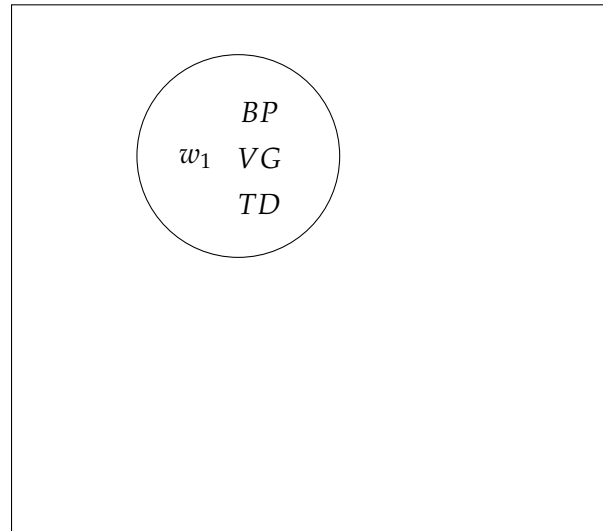
Starr (2014) proposes that within this dynamic semantics framework, conditionals can be understood as *tests*, along the lines of the Ramsey test. To determine the effect of asserting a conditional ‘if A , then B ’ on a context c , we first suppose A , by considering the context $c[A]$ that results from adding A to c . We then check whether B is true under the supposition. If B is true at $c[A]$, then c ‘passes’ the test, and c remains unchanged. Otherwise, c ‘fails’ the test. If a conditional passes the test, it is acceptable in the original context.

This characterization of acceptability, by itself, is not enough to determine the effect of uttering a conditional in a context where it is not already acceptable. For instance, suppose you go to pet a dog, and I say ‘if you pet it, it will bite.’ This conditional doesn’t follow from our shared background information, but you can use it to rule out possibilities—in particular, those possibilities where you pet the dog and it does not bite. What explains the relationship between my utterance and the corresponding change to the context set? In very broad terms, uttering a conditional should change the context set so that the conditional becomes acceptable, and the change involved should be the smallest one that does the job. There are multiple ways of spelling out what constitutes a minimal change to contextual information, but the part of the account that deals with acceptability can be separated from the part that deals with context change.

To illustrate the concept of a conditional test, consider the conditional ‘if Veggie Garden is open, then we can get gluten-free tofu dogs’, as asserted in the context depicted by Figure 8a. To perform the test, we first create a new context, by augmenting the old context with the information that Veggie Garden is open; the resulting context set is depicted in Figure 8b. We then check whether, in the new context, ‘we can get gluten-free tofu dogs’ is acceptable. If so, the old context passes the test, and the conditional is acceptable in the old context; otherwise, the old context fails the test, and the conditional is not acceptable in the old context. Starr extends his account to handle counterfactuals (which use a modified test



(a) The original context set



(b) The context set after an assertion of 'Veggie Garden is open'

Figure 8: The effects of an assertion on the context set

in which the context set is expanded with extra possibilities before adding the information in the antecedent).

Other theorists offer context-dependent truth conditions for conditionals using the tools of dynamic semantics. Stalnaker (1975) and Williams (2008) defend a modified closest-worlds theory of indicative conditionals, where, if w is a world in the context set, every world in the context set is stipulated to be closer to w than every world outside it. Gillies (2007) and Fintel (2001) propose strict conditional theories of counterfactuals, where a set of salient worlds is fixed by the context. New worlds are added to the set as the conversation goes on; in particular, if someone asserts a conditional whose antecedent is false at all the salient worlds, the set is expanded to include at least one world compatible with the antecedent.

9 CONDITIONALS AS MODAL RESTRICTORS

According to Kratzer (2012, p. 86), many of the above views of conditionals are ‘based on a momentous syntactic mistake.’ Contrary to popular opinion, she claims, ‘There is no two-place *if...then* connective in the logical forms for natural languages.’ Instead, conditionals restrict modal operators.

One can think of modal operators as quantifiers over possible worlds: to say that necessarily $2 + 2 = 4$ is to say that in all possible worlds, $2 + 2 = 4$; to say that possibly pigs fly is to say that in some possible world, pigs fly; and to say that it will probably rain is to say that in most possible worlds (on some suitable way of measuring ‘most’), it rains. Like quantifiers, modal operators can be restricted. To say that necessarily, if the Peano axioms are true, then $2 + 2 = 4$, is to say that in all possible worlds where the Peano axioms are true, $2 + 2 = 4$. Likewise, to say that if pigs had hollow bones, then possibly pigs would fly, is to say that in some possible world where pigs have hollow bones, pigs fly, and to say that if there are cumulus clouds on the horizon, it will probably rain, is to say that in most possible worlds where there are cumulus clouds on the horizon, it will rain.

The modal restrictor view is a generalization of work by D. Lewis (1975) who notes that conditionals can be used to restrict quantifiers. Consider the following class of examples.

Sometimes	
Always	if a farmer owns a donkey, she feeds it carrots.
Usually	
Never	

The quantifiers ‘sometimes’, ‘always’, ‘usually’, and ‘never’ are what Lewis calls *unselective quantifiers*. To say that always, farmers feed donkeys carrots is to say that for all ways of assigning a farmer to x and a donkey to y , x feeds y carrots. To add the clause ‘if a farmer owns a donkey’ is to restrict the quantifier, so that it ranges only over cases where farmer x owns donkey y .

The modal restrictor view is Y-shaped: it can handle both indicatives and counterfactuals (Kratzer, 1981). To explain how this works, we need three ingredients: a modal base, the modal force of an operator, and an ordering.

According to Kratzer, the context of an utterance supplies a *modal base*, or a function f mapping each world w to a set of propositions that is ‘held fixed’ when we speculate about what might or must have been true at w . When we consider what is physically possible, the modal base might assign to each world the laws of physics that obtain at that world, but leave out physically contingent truths. When a detective speculates about who the burglar might be, the modal base might assign to each world the detective’s evidence at that world. To determine what is possible (or necessary, or likely) at a world w , we need to quantify over the possible worlds where the all of the propositions in $f(w)$ are true.¹²

Different operators are associated with different kinds of *modal force*—roughly, different kinds of quantification over possible worlds. The operators ‘necessarily’, ‘possibly’, ‘it is likely that’, and ‘it is a good possibility that’ are all associated with different modal forces. Finally, the context of utterance supplies an *ordering source* g , which lets us map each world to an ordering over worlds.¹³ (One possible interpretation of this ordering is the ‘closeness’ ordering from Section 4.2, but there are others. Conditional and unconditional statements about what ought to happen use an ordering source that ranks worlds from most to least ideal.)

We can then say that the conditional ‘Necessarily if A , then B ’ is true at a world w just in case B is true at all the closest A -worlds to w (according to the ordering $g(w)$) where all the propositions in $f(w)$ are true. Likewise,

¹² Kratzer’s theory could be reformulated in terms of a familiar two-place accessibility relation among worlds. We might say that world x is accessible from world w (Rwx in the usual formalism) if and only if all of the propositions in $f(w)$ are true at x . A few complications arise when the modal base maps some worlds onto inconsistent sets of propositions. Kratzer wants to say that in such cases, there are non-trivial facts about what is possible; she gives the example of a modal base that assigns to each world the set of propositions that are required by a group of Maori elders in that world (Kratzer, 1981, pp. 16–20). In one world w , the elders disagree amongst themselves, and so their requirements are inconsistent. Nonetheless, there are non-trivial facts about what is necessary at w according to the elders’ requirements; Kratzer claims that the structure of the set $f(w)$ of propositions plays an essential role in determining what is necessary.

¹³ Kratzer’s ordering source officially maps worlds to sets of propositions, which are then used to create an ordering. I omit this extra step.

‘Possibly if A , then B ’ is true at a world w just in case at some of the closest A -worlds to w (according to the ordering $g(w)$) where all the propositions in $f(w)$ are true, and similarly for other operators with other modal force. For indicative conditionals, the modal base is some piece of salient known information. For counterfactual conditionals, the modal base is empty (and thus, all possible worlds are consistent with it) while the ordering source is very rich. Kratzer’s account even has the material conditional account as a special case, where the modal base maps each world w to a set of propositions true only at w , and the strict conditional as another special case, where the modal base is empty and the ordering source is completely noncommittal, invariably ranking all worlds on a par with each other.

‘Bare’ conditionals cause trouble for the modal restrictor view. Conditionals supposedly restrict modal operators, but where is the modal operator in a conditional like ‘If the lights in his study are on, then Roger is home’? Kratzer (1979, 1981) argues that conditionals without overt modal operators nonetheless contain implicit modal operators; the underlying logical form of the example conditional is ‘(MUST: the lights in his study are on) Roger is home’; the epistemic ‘MUST’ is unspoken.

Heim (1982) provides evidence for Kratzer’s modalized interpretation of bare conditionals in the form of ‘donkey sentences’ like ‘If John owns a donkey, then he feeds it carrots’. On at least one plausible reading, our sample donkey sentence means that John feeds carrots to every donkey he owns—or in more cumbersome terms, for every x such that x is a donkey and John owns x , John feeds x carrots. If the conditional were an ordinary two-place connective, we would have trouble explaining how the same variable x , bound by the same quantifier, could occur in both the antecedent and the consequent of the donkey sentence. The conditional would have the form $A \rightarrow B$, where A contained a quantifier ranging over donkeys. But Kratzer’s restrictor analysis, together with the assumption that bare conditionals contain a tacit necessity operator, gives the correct reading, while providing a uniform treatment of bare and modalized conditionals.

It is often claimed that Kratzer’s modal restrictor theory allows us to escape the triviality results of Section 7. Rothschild (2013), for instance, suggests that Kratzer can escape the triviality results by denying THE THESIS. To illustrate Rothschild’s argument, let’s consider the conditional I originally used to motivate THE THESIS.

ACE If I draw a red ace, then it will be the ace of hearts.

I accept the conditional:

CHANCY ACE With probability 1/2, if I draw a red ace, then it will be the ace of hearts.

Rothschild suggests that on Kratzer's account, CHANCY ACE does not express the thought that ACE has probability $1/2$, or the thought that the probability of ACE's being true is $1/2$. When I assert CHANCY ACE, I am not asserting that ACE has probability $1/2$. Furthermore, when I am 50% confident that if I draw a red ace, it will be the ace of hearts, this does not amount to my being 50% confident that ACE is true.

Charlow (2015) argues that even if Rothschild is right, Kratzer's account is still vulnerable to the triviality result, since steps Equations 5 and 8 can be motivated independently of THE THESIS. He goes on to argue that other easy ways out of the triviality result fail on the modal restrictor view.

10 CONCLUSION

Conditionals are important in both everyday reasoning and philosophical argument. There are conditional beliefs, conditional assertions, and conditional propositions, all of which can figure in arguments. The theories canvassed in this article try to systematize the broad range of data about which conditionals seem true, and which inferences seem valid. More phenomena remain to be explained: this article has focused on conditional beliefs and assertions, and on conditionals in English.

We can gather the similarities among the accounts discussed above into a sort of rake-shaped theory (a generalization of Bennett's concept of a Y-shaped theory), with a short 'handle' that captures what is common to all conditionals, which then splits into many 'tines' that capture the particularities of individual theories. All of the theories we have considered so far have the following commitments in common.

1. Conditionals are evaluated at 'points'.
2. To evaluate a conditional 'if A , then C ' at a point p , one generates a new point q by adding the information in A to p .
3. The evaluation of the consequent C at q is the evaluation of the entire conditional at p .

The accounts disagree about the natures of points, what status conditionals and their consequents should be evaluated for, and what adding an antecedent amounts to. Table 1 summarizes how different views answer this question. (NB: Selection function and relevant logic accounts typically treat the initial point and the new point as belonging to different types—the initial point is a world, while the new point is a set of worlds. But we can ensure that both points are of the same type by rewriting the theory so that the initial point is a singleton set of one world; this is what I have done in Table 1.)

	Points	Status	Adding A to a Point
STRICT CONDITIONAL	Sets of worlds	Truth in all worlds (original point is a singleton $\{w\}$)	Taking all worlds possible at w compatible with A
CLOSEST WORLDS AND PAST PREDOMINANCE	Sets of worlds	Truth in all worlds (original point is a singleton $\{w\}$)	Taking all closest worlds possible at w compatible with A
CAUSAL MODELING	Causal models with valuations	Truth in a model	Intervening to make A true
RELEVANT LOGIC	Sets of worlds	Truth in all worlds (original point is a singleton $\{w\}$)	Taking all worlds y such that $Rwxy$ for some world x compatible with A
MATERIAL CONDITIONAL	Worlds	Truth in the world	Doing nothing if A is true; moving to the 'absurd world' (where everything is true) otherwise
PROBABILITY ACCOUNTS	Probability functions	Probability $x \in [0, 1]$	Conditionalizing on A
DYNAMIC TEST THEORY	Contexts	Acceptability	Updating to accommodate an assertion of A
MODAL RESTRICTORS	Information states: modal base + ordering source	Obtaining with a given modal force	Taking all closest worlds to A in the modal base, according to the ordering source

Table 1: Theories of conditionals and their components

Within each of the accounts, there are open questions: the nature of the selection function; the correct interpretation of counterpossibles; how best to respond to the triviality theorems; what makes a conditional believable or assertable in a given context; how to handle bare modals on the restrictor account.

There are also open questions about how the accounts interact. Some accounts seem to be special cases of others: the past predominance view is a way of filling in the meaning of ‘closest’ on the closest-worlds account. At other times, different accounts appear to be rivals: it can’t be both that indicative conditionals have the truth conditions given by the material interpretation, and that they lack truth values. At other times, they seem to be modeling different domains: as with Pearl’s causal modeling theory of counterfactuals and Starr’s dynamic semantics theory of indicatives. Much of the interest for future research lies in understanding the interactions between the different models of conditionals.

If conditionals are useful in a wide variety of domains, from childhood development to everyday reasoning to philosophy, then conditionals are well worth studying. I have given reasons for thinking that conditionals are useful in a wide variety of domains. You may draw your own conclusions.

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