Announcements and Such

- One Song — *Traffic*
  - "Every Mother's Son" from *John Barleycorn Must Die*

- Make sure you get your first essays back (GSIs)

- Second essay will be assigned on March 20th.

- Today: Part II of three parts on the Architecture of Knowledge (*very* serious theoretical epistemology)

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Foundationalism *vs* Coherentism

- Various kinds of foundationalism are compatible with the epistemic regress argument (ERA).

  - *Strong* foundationalism: indirectly justified beliefs get *all* their justification from **F**.

  - *Moderate* foundationalism: indirectly justified beliefs would not have *any* justification were it not for **F**, but they can get *some* justification from *other sources* (perhaps even *coherence*!).

- The main alternative to foundationalism is *coherentism*, which says (broadly construed):

  - The justifiedness of a belief depends on its *coherence with other beliefs one holds*.

- There are various versions of coherentism. We'll begin with "circular" *vs* "holistic" coherentisms.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Circular Coherentism

- *Circular* coherentism holds that, for each (justified) belief *B*, there is a (justificatory) *line* going from premises *P* to *B*, and from other premises *P** to the first set *P*, and so on, until we return to the original proposition *B* as a premise.

  - We may never actually *trace* the line (making the appropriate inferences), but it is always *there*.

- On this sort of view, it is natural to to allow variation in the *unit of coherence* (the set of other beliefs that *B* must cohere with in order to receive justification), depending on the "size of *B*'s circle"

- We have seen problems with circular epistemic chains, so this sort of coherentism is troubled.

- We will focus on another kind of coherentism that is *non-linear*: it is called *holistic* coherentism.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Holistic Coherentism

- Holistic coherentism is *epistemically* non-foundationalist, since it doesn't think all *justification* is *ultimately grounded* (in **F**).

- That is, it doesn't think that *epistemic* chains must *terminate* in some foundational justified belief(s).

- Indeed, holistic coherentism differs both from foundationalism and from circular coherentism in that it denies that justification is *linear*.

- For the holistic coherentist, *all* of *S*'s beliefs are tied together in a *holsitic* "*web*"*of belief*, and the degree of coherence of *B with the entire web* contributes to *B*'s degree of justification (for *S*).

- 3 issues: (1) how to respond to the ERA?, (2) what *is* "coherence"?, (3) does coherence really contribute to degree of justification &/or probability of truth?

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Responding to the Regress Arguments

- Remember, there are really *two* sorts of regress:

  - Inferential regress [*psychological*]

  - Epistemic regress [*epistemological*]

- The holistic coherentist's response to the *inferential* regress argument is to *accept its conclusion*: *psychological* foundationalism is right!

- That is, the holistic coherentist simply *concedes* that some beliefs are *psychologically direct* and *non*-inferential (*e.g.*, simple perceptual beliefs).

- But, they will *deny* that there must be *epistemically* basic beliefs, in order for there to be any justification — beliefs can get *some* justification from coherence, *even if there is no epistemic* **F**.

- This contradicts *even* **moderate** foundationalism!

The Architecture of Knowledge II
What is Coherence? I

- Two remaining challenges for the coherentist:

  - What *is* coherence?

  - Is it (alone) truth/justification-*conducive*?

- There are various views about what coherence is.

- Let's start with what it is *not*. It is not *mere logical coherence*, since that's *too weak* to contribute to probability of truth and/or degree of justification.

- Thus, coherence has to be a *more substantive kind* of "hanging together" of beliefs. Audi considers *explanatory* connections, but these seem *asymmetric* ("hanging together" seems *symmetric*).

- He also mentions *probabilistic correlation* as a way of explicating coherence. That's a very popular idea right now (I've even defended it myself!).

The Architecture of Knowledge II
What is Coherence? II

- Probabilistic correlation is the following relation:

  - $\Pr(p \mid q) > \Pr(p)$

- In other words, p and q are probabilistically correlated if the probability of p is greater *conditional on q* than it is *unconditionally*.

- Probabilistic correlation is *symmetric* as well:

  - $\Pr(p \mid q) > \Pr(p) \Rightarrow \Pr(q \mid p) > \Pr(q)$

- There are various measures of degree of correlation, which could be used to gauge the degree of correlation of a *set* of propositions.

- So, one proposal would be that the degree of coherence of a set of propositions is proportional to its (overall) degree of "mutual correlation".

- There are other probabilistic proposals as well.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
What is Coherence? III

- Another popular probabilistic proposal is called the "degree of relative overlap" approach.

- According to the relative overlap approach, degree of coherence c goes according to the following:

$$c(p, q) = \frac{\Pr(p \,\&\, q)}{\Pr(p \vee q)}$$

- This is also a *symmetric* relation, which can be generalized to sets with more than 2 propositions.

- The correlation approach and the relative overlap approach differ in various significant ways.

- The technical details aren't important for us. I just wanted to give you some sense of recent proposals.

- Most coherentists don't offer a *precise theory* of what coherence is. We'll work with *intuitions* now.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? I

- No matter how we think of what coherence *is*, the key questions for any epistemic coherentist are:

  - Is coherence *truth/justification*-conducive?

    - Is probability of truth/degree of justification proportional (in some sense) to *coherence*?

  - Is coherence *knowledge*-conducive?

    - Can coherence (alone) generate *knowledge*?

- There are various versions of positive answers to these questions. I will begin with a naive approach:

  - **Naive *Set* Coherentism**. An agent's belief *set* **B** is justified if and only if that set is (sufficiently) coherent, the degree of justification of the belief set being defined as the degree of its coherence.

- This one runs into some trouble rather quickly.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? II

- Here's an example, due to Klein and Warfield:

  - Consider two belief sets. The first, **B**, contains these B's:

  - (B1) Dunnit had a motive for the murder.

  - (B2) Witnesses claim to have seen Dunnit do it.

  - (B3) A credible witness claims to have seen Dunnit 200 miles from the murder scene at the time of the murder.

  - (B4) Dunnit committed the murder.

  - The second, **B***, contains B1–B4, *plus* the following:

  - (B5) Dunnit has an identical twin who was seen by the credible witness 200 miles from the murder scene.

  - **B*** seems more coherent than **B**. *But*, Pr(**B***) < Pr(**B**).

- This shows that the *probability of truth* of a belief *set* is *not* proportional to its (intuitive) coherence.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? III

- This also *seems* to show that degree of *justification* of a *set* is *not* proportional to its coherence.

  - But, *only* on the supposition that degree of *justification* is proportional to degree of *probability* (which doesn't seem *crazy*).

- For this discussion, I will just *assume* that this *is* a counterexample to Naive *set* coherentism.

- What about justification of *beliefs*, not entire *sets*?

  - **Naive *Belief* Coherentism**. The degree of justification of a *belief B* is proportional to the degree of coherence of the *set* **B** *containing* it.

- This one is a little harder to refute. Presumably, (B4) would be *better justified* for someone with belief set **B*** than someone with belief set **B**. No?

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? IV

- One problem for coherentism of *any* kind is that coherence is an *internal* feature of an agent's beliefs. How *could* it be *truth*-conducive (unless we're assuming a coherence theory of *truth* itself)?

  - [We'll discuss some theories of truth later on. Note: coherentists ***don't*** assume a coherence theory of truth!]

- There are *many radically different*, but *equally* (internally) *coherent* belief sets out there.

  - Consider a schizophrenic who thinks he is Napoleon. If he has a consistent "backstory" with enough properly interlocking details, his belief system may be quite coherent. He may even be able to explain quite coherently why there are coherent belief systems that *radically conflict* with his, such as those of his psychiatrists. If coherence *alone* generates justification, then these systems are equally well justified — assuming they are equally coherent.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? V

- There is a crucial additional feature of the kinds of coherentism we've been considering so far: they are all *static* or *synchronic*. Bonjour warns:

  - … a [proper] coherence theory [should not be based] on the *static* coherence of a system of beliefs considered in the abstract but rather on the *dynamic* coherence of an ongoing system of beliefs which someone actually accepts.

- Bonjour (a leading coherentist) thus proposes:

  - A system of beliefs which (a) remains coherent (and stable) over the long run and (b) continues to satisfy the Observation Requirement is likely, to a degree which is proportional to the degree of coherence (and stability) and the longness of the run, to correspond closely to independent reality.

- Let's think more about this clever alternative.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? VI

- Bonjour's Observation Requirement (OR) says the belief systems in question should (*diachronically*):

  - contain beliefs attributing a high degree of reliability to a variety of *psychologically* direct beliefs (including those introspective beliefs which are required for the recognition of other psychologically direct beliefs).

  - **Sophisticated, Dynamical Coherentism**. The probability that the belief system of an agent *S* is accurate is proportional to its *long-run coherence* (assuming it satisfies OR *all along*).

- This sort of coherentism (which Audi doesn't really discuss) is *much* harder to refute.

- The schizophrenic might be coherent *at a time*, but it is less likely that he will *diachronically* be coherent (*and* satisfy OR) *in the long run*.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Is Coherence Justification-Conducive? VII

- Another way of seeing the plausibility of Bonjour's coherentism is to ask yourself what the *best explanation* of such long-run coherence is.

- It is not implausible to suggest that the best explanation of this would be that the person's beliefs are *tracking a mind-independent reality*.

- Even Bonjour's theory has its problems, though.

  - It cannot explain cases of *strong, short-run* justification, which *seem* to occur frequently.

  - And, what about *knowledge*? Do we only get to *know* things *in the long-run*? This seems odd.

  - Moreover, it seems to have trouble explaining the role of experience and reason in J&K.

  - These do *seem* to be *basic epistemic sources*…

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Coherence, Reason, and Experience

- Audi asks the following two questions:

  - Why is it that when I have a vivid experience of the kind characteristic of seeing a green field, I am *apparently* justified, simply by that experience, in believing that there is a green field before me?

  - And why do I *seem* so very strongly justified, simply on the basis of my rational grasp of the proposition that if some dogs are pets then some pets are dogs, in believing this?

- It's interesting that Bonjour's theory is *consistent with S believing* that these *are basic* sources of justification! Indeed, Bonjour *requires* (OR) that *S* believe that they're *epistemically reliable* sources!

- Presumably, Bonjour would say Audi is *conflating psyhcological* directness and *epistemic* directness.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Coherence, and the *A Priori*

- Coherentism seems more plausible for *a posteriori* beliefs than for *a priori* beliefs.

- It seems that reason *can* be a basic source of justification for (at least *some*) *a priori* beliefs.

- And, it's unclear how *mere coherence could be* the source of justification for such beliefs (especially, the most luminous, self-evident ones)

- Note, also, that the two popular probabilistic theories of coherence give unhelpful verdicts:

  - The *correlation* view will say that *a priori p*'s do *not* cohere with *any* other propositions.

  - The *relative overlap* view says $c(\mathsf{T},p) = \Pr(p)$, for *all p*. So, if *S*'s *other* beliefs are *improbable* (jointly), they will only *weakly* cohere with T.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Epistemological *vs* Conceptual Coherentism

- Coherence considerations seem more appropriate for *concepts* than for *beliefs*. As Audi explains:

  - Concepts are what they are partly in relation to one another, and a person acquires concepts, say of (physical) objects and shapes, and of music and sounds, only in relation to one another and must acquire an entire set of related concepts in order to acquire any concept.

- So, holistic coherence considerations may well be important for the *acquisition/grasping* of concepts, and hence with the ability to *have* beliefs at all.

- Even if this is so, it doesn't imply a role for coherence in the *justification* of beliefs we have.

- Recall the distinction between the context of *discovery/genesis* of a belief and the context of *justification* for that belief. The typically *differ*.

  - Beliefs can be *possessed* without being *justified*.

The Architecture of Knowledge II
Coherence & Knowledge

- For the most part, I have focused on coherence and *justification* here. But, the coherentist also needs the generation of *knowledge via* coherence.

- Intuitively, it seems that (*sometimes*) we know things (in the *short-run*) in a *direct* way. It's unclear how coherence can account for this.

- Knowledge isn't different *merely in degree* from justified true belief. It's not as if all we need is some "threshold" of justification in order to *know*.

- That is, knowledge requires more than just "**strong** justification + truth" — think *lottery paradox*.

- So, it seems odd to say that "sufficiently high degrees of coherence" could generate knowledge.

- What would "perfect" coherence be, and could it generate *conclusive* justification/knowledge?