

# Using **RcppTN** in R and C++

Jonathan Olmsted  
jpolmsted@gmail.com

September 3, 2014

This brief document shows simple usage of the function `rtn()` provided by the R package **RcppTN** for drawing from an arbitrary sequence of truncated Normal distributions. Much of the value added by the **RcppTN** package comes from providing a C++-level API to call in development of other **Rcpp**-based C++ codes. Use of this API is also demonstrated. While no other R packages currently provide this functionality in an API, some existing implementations for drawing from a truncated Normal distribution at the R-level include **truncnorm** and **msm**.

## 1 Installation

Currently, there is no CRAN version of the package, so the simplest installation mechanism is using the `install_github()` function from the `devtools` package.

```
library("devtools")
install_github(repo = "RcppTN",
               username = "olmjo",
               subdir = "pkg",
               ref = "development"
            )
```

## 2 R-level Usage

Usage of the `rtn()` function in R is straightforward (albeit not feature-rich). Without any options, we get a single draw from the standard Normal distribution. And, this draw respects R's RNG state so the stream of output is reproducible.

```
library("RcppTN")

## Loading required package: Rcpp

set.seed(1)
rtn()

## [1] -0.6265

set.seed(1)
rtn()

## [1] -0.6265
```

Under this implementation of the Robert (1995) algorithm, a request for a single draw from a Standard Normal distribution truncated from  $-\infty$  to  $\infty$  — the default behavior of the function when called without any arguments — results in the same return value as a single draw from a Standard Normal distribution using `rnorm()`. This is just a by-product of the implementation and holds no practical significance.<sup>1</sup>

```
set.seed(1)
rtn()

## [1] -0.6265

set.seed(1)
rtn(.mean = 0, .sd = 1, .low = -Inf, .high = Inf)

## [1] -0.6265

set.seed(1)
rtn()

## [1] -0.6265

set.seed(1)
rnorm(1)

## [1] -0.6265
```

Of course, `rtn()`'s behavior given RNG seeds is exactly as you would expect for any other generator in **R**.

```
set.seed(11)
rtn()

## [1] -0.591

rtn()

## [1] 0.02659

set.seed(1)
rtn()

## [1] -0.6265

rtn()

## [1] 0.1836

set.seed(11)
rtn()
```

---

<sup>1</sup>See the R package documentation for the citation to the algorithm.

```
## [1] -0.591

rtn()

## [1] 0.02659
```

In practice, this **R**-level function will likely be used in one of two ways:

1. drawing many values from the same truncated Normal distribution
2. drawing many values from different truncated Normal distributions

For the `rtn()` function, these two uses look very similar. The function accepts a `.mean` argument, an `.sd` argument, a `.low` argument, and a `.high` argument. Each should be a vector of length  $K$  corresponding to the  $K$  distributions of interest. The function does not handle value recycling for the user, so the construction of these vectors must be done *before or during* the call of the `rtn()` function. Incorrectly sized inputs result in an error.

```
## Not Run -- will cause error
rtn(.mean = c(0, 1), .sd = 1)
```

Importantly, this function returns an **NA** value for draws corresponding to invalid input parameters along with a warning. **NA**-inducing input parameters don't interfere with other valid parameters and a vector of the requested length is returned.

For example,

```
rtn(0, -1, 0, 1)

## Warning: NAs returned. Check for invalid parameters.

## [1] NA

rtn(0, 1, 0, -1)

## Warning: NAs returned. Check for invalid parameters.

## [1] NA

rtn(c(0,0), c(1,1), c(0,0), c(-Inf,Inf))

## Warning: NAs returned. Check for invalid parameters.

## [1] NA 1.178
```

To suppress input and output checks, use the following:

```
## Not Run -- no warning given
rtn(0, -1, 0, 1, .checks = FALSE)
```

However, this is not recommended unless inputs are being checked before use. Skipping checks in `rtn()` provides a slight performance advantage, but most applications will benefit more from safer code.

## 2.1 Multiple Draws from a Single Distribution

Multiple draws from the same distribution may be requested with a function call like the following:

```
set.seed(1)
output <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 1000),
              .sd = rep(1, 1000),
              .low = rep(1, 1000),
              .high = rep(2, 1000)
            )
length(output)

## [1] 1000

mean(output)

## [1] 1.389
```

Here, we are generating 1,000 draws, with each draw,  $x$ , coming from  $N(0, 1)$  truncated below at 1 and above at 2. The population mean of this distribution is

$$E[x] = \mu + \frac{\phi(\frac{a-\mu}{\sigma}) - \phi(\frac{b-\mu}{\sigma})}{\Phi(\frac{b-\mu}{\sigma}) - \Phi(\frac{a-\mu}{\sigma})} \cdot \sigma,$$

where  $\mu = 0$ ,  $\sigma = 1$ ,  $\phi$  denotes the pdf of the standard Normal distribution,  $\Phi$  denotes the standard cdf of the standard Normal distribution, and  $a$  and  $b$  are the lower and upper bounds of truncation, respectively. So, for the above parameter values we have

$$\begin{aligned} E[x] &= \mu + \frac{\phi(\frac{a-\mu}{\sigma}) - \phi(\frac{b-\mu}{\sigma})}{\Phi(\frac{b-\mu}{\sigma}) - \Phi(\frac{a-\mu}{\sigma})} \cdot \sigma \\ &= 0 + \frac{.242 - .054}{.977 - .841} \cdot 1 \\ &\approx 1.383 \end{aligned}$$

Our sample mean for the 1,000 draws (1.389) is close to the population mean (1.383). To get a better sense of how dispersed the sampling distribution for the mean of a sample of 1,000 draws from this distribution is, we can simulate it.

```
bigoutput <- rep(NA, 1000)
for (i in 1:length(bigoutput)) {
  bigoutput[i] <- mean(rtn(.mean = rep(0, 1000),
                              .sd = rep(1, 1000),
                              .low = rep(1, 1000),
                              .high = rep(2, 1000)
                            )
                    )
}
summary(bigoutput)
```

##	Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
##	1.36	1.38	1.38	1.38	1.39	1.41

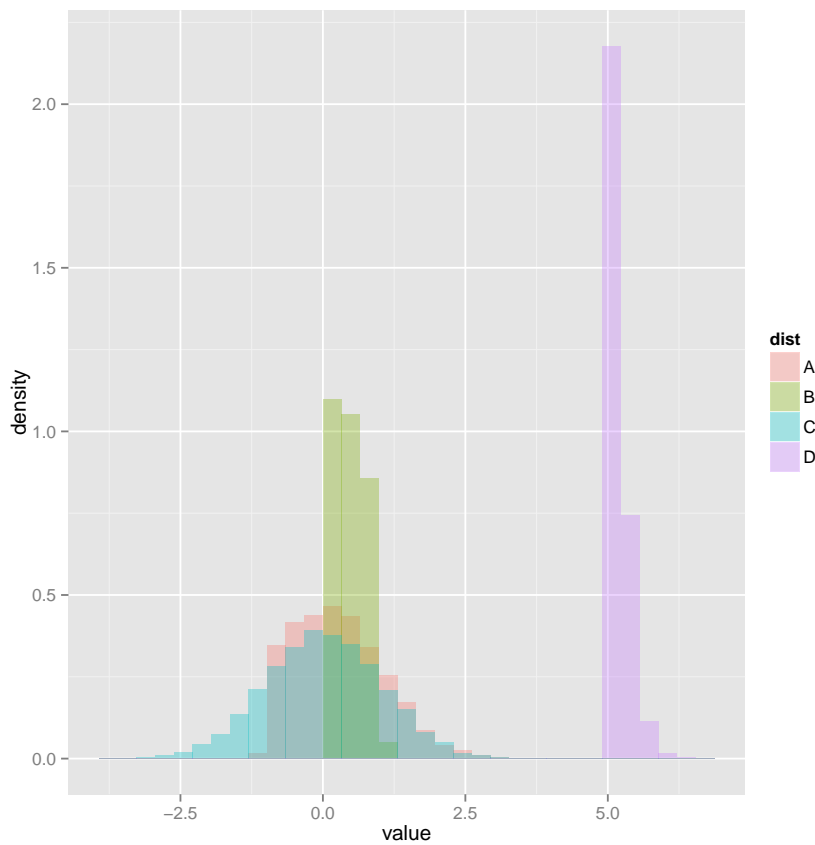
Looking at the summary of the sample means, we see that the sampling distribution of sample means is centered directly on the population mean.

As shown above, valid input for `rtn()` includes `-Inf` and `Inf`. Below are histograms for four different truncated Normal distributions. The `rtn()` function works perfectly well in simulating draws from regions that have a low (read nearly 0) density in a non-truncated Normal distribution. Distribution “D” is an example of this.

```
library(ggplot2)
outputA <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 5000),
               .sd = rep(1, 5000),
               .low = rep(-1, 5000),
               .high = rep(Inf, 5000)
             )
outputB <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 5000),
               .sd = rep(1, 5000),
               .low = rep(0, 5000),
               .high = rep(1, 5000)
             )
outputC <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 5000),
               .sd = rep(1, 5000),
               .low = rep(-Inf, 5000),
               .high = rep(Inf, 5000)
             )
outputD <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 5000),
               .sd = rep(1, 5000),
               .low = rep(5, 5000),
               .high = rep(Inf, 5000)
             )

dfOutput <- rbind(data.frame(value = outputA, dist = "A"),
                  data.frame(value = outputB, dist = "B"),
                  data.frame(value = outputC, dist = "C"),
                  data.frame(value = outputD, dist = "D")
                  )

ggplot(dfOutput) +
  geom_histogram(aes(x=value,
                    y=..density..,
                    fill = dist
                  ),
               alpha = 1/3,
               position = "identity"
  )
```



## 2.2 Multiple Draws from Different Distributions

Taking multiple draws from different distributions proceeds in a similar way, though the construction of the arguments passed to `rtn()` changes a bit. If we were interested in characterizing a distribution of draws from a truncated Normal distribution where one (or more) of the parameters was, itself, stochastic, `rtn()` could easily be put to use. Here, the vector of lower bounds and upper bounds are each the result of an `rtn()` function call (notice that  $a < b$  by construction).

Then, we can sample 1,000 draws from this truncated Normal distribution of interest where the mean and standard deviation are fixed, but the bounds of truncation, themselves, are taken from a distribution (in this case, a truncated Normal distribution).

```

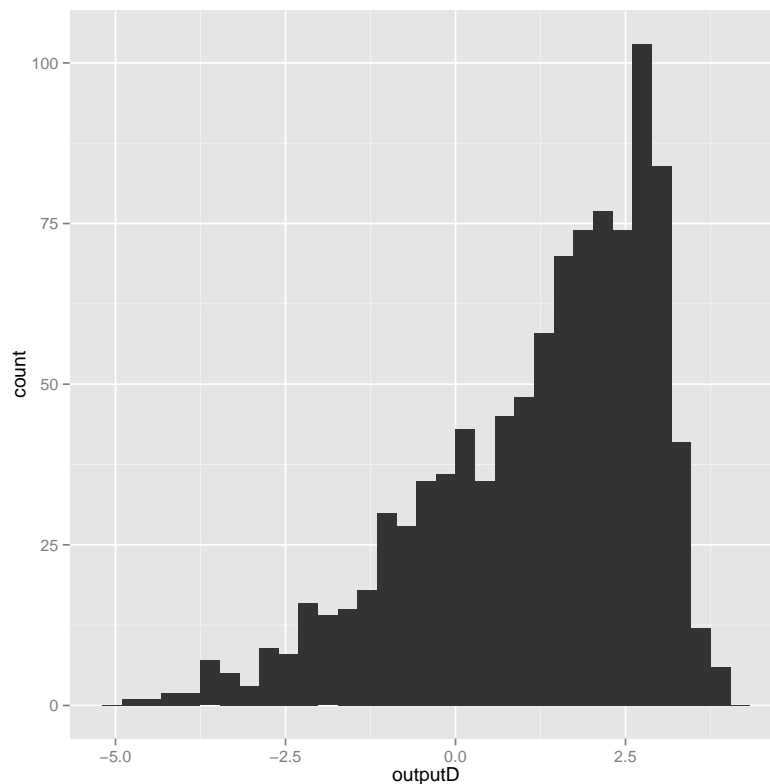
lows <- rtn(rep(0, 1000),
            rep(3, 1000),
            rep(-10, 1000),
            rep(3, 1000)
            )
highs <- rtn(rep(0, 1000),
             rep(3, 1000),
             rep(3, 1000),
             rep(4, 1000)
             )
all(lows < highs)

```

```
## [1] TRUE

outputD <- rtn(.mean = rep(0, 1000),
               .sd = rep(3, 1000),
               .low = lows,
               .high = highs
               )

ggplot() +
  geom_histogram(aes(x = outputD))
```



This sampling distribution is non-standard and the easiest way to characterize it would be through a simulation like the above.

### 3 C++-level Usage

This section documents how to use the C++-level functionality in subsequent C++ development. Specifically, using the **RcppTN** C++ API via `sourceCpp()` and an **Rcpp**-based R package are shown. Presently, only two functions are exposed at the C++ level: `rtn1()` and `etn1()`.

#### **rtn1**

```
double rtn1(double mean, double sd, double low, double high) ;
```

#### **etn1**

```
double etn1(double mean, double sd, double low, double high) ;
```

**vtn1**

```
double vtn1(double mean, double sd, double low, double high) ;
```

**dtn1**

```
double dtn1(double x, double mean, double sd, double low, double high) ;
```

**Caveats.** The R-level function ultimately calls these C++-level functions. So, all of the features of the R-level function apply here (e.g., respecting R' RNG state). However, as is true in **Rcpp**, this is left to the user to enforce. No checking or error handling is provided with these functions. These functions live in the **RcppTN** namespace.

### 3.1 Examples

**Via sourceCpp().** In non-package R code, use is very straightforward due to the mechanisms provided by **Rcpp**. Include the appropriate header file as you would for **Rcpp**. In addition, use the depends pseudo-attribute with “// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppTN)]]” to ensure that linker finds the symbols. From there, use is as you would expect.

```
library("Rcpp")
sourceCpp(code = "
#include <Rcpp.h>

#include <RcppTN.h>
// [[Rcpp::depends(RcppTN)]]

using namespace Rcpp ;

// [[Rcpp::export]]
List rcpp_hello_world() {
  double a = RcppTN::rtn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  double b = RcppTN::etn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  double c = RcppTN::vtn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  double d = RcppTN::dtn1(3.6, 0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  NumericVector y = NumericVector::create(a, b, c, d) ;
  List z = List::create(y) ;
  return(z) ;
}
"
)

rcpp_hello_world()

## [[1]]
## [1] 3.569725 3.588118 0.003245 4.901908
```



**Via an Rcpp-based package.** In R, use `Rcpp.package.skeleton()` from **Rcpp** to create an empty, but functional, R package.

```
library("Rcpp")
Rcpp.package.skeleton(path=~ /Desktop")
```

Navigate inside the newly created `anRpackage` directory and edit the `DESCRIPTION` file. Add `RcppTN` to the `Depends:` and `LinkingTo:` lines of the file as in

```
Depends: RcppTN
LinkingTo: Rcpp, RcppTN
```

Now, edit the C++ function `rcpp_hello_world()` in `anRpackage/src/rcpp_hello_world.cpp` to read

```
#include <Rcpp.h>
#include <RcppTN.h>

using namespace Rcpp;

// [[Rcpp::export]]
List rcpp_hello_world() {
  double a = RcppTN::rtn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  double b = RcppTN::etn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  double c = RcppTN::vtn1(0.0, 1.0, 3.5, 3.7) ;
  NumericVector y = NumericVector::create( a, b, c ) ;
  List z = List::create( y ) ;
  return(z) ;
}
```

To see the effect of this, install the “`anRpackage`” package and the load it in R. From there, make subsequent calls to the `rcpp_hello_world()` function. With a similar approach, the `rtn1()` function can be called in a more useful way within other C++-level codes without the need for re-coding the wheel. The only difference between this approach and the `sourceCpp()` approach is that the `depends` pseudo-attribute is no longer needed and is replaced by the modification to the `LinkingTo:` field of the `DESCRIPTION` file.