

Abstract

Some Bayesian epistemologists accept that it is not necessary for a rational agent to hold sharp credences. There are various compelling formal theories how such a non-traditional view of credences can accommodate decision making and updating. They are motivated by a common complaint: that sharp credences can fail to represent incomplete evidence and exaggerate the information contained in it. Indeterminate credal states, the alternative to sharp credences, face challenges as well: they are vulnerable to dilation and under certain conditions do not permit learning. This paper focuses on two concessions that Thomas Augustin and James Joyce make to address these challenges. The concessions undermine the original case for indeterminate credal states. I use both conceptual arguments and hands-on examples to argue that rational agents always have sharp credences.

1 Introduction

The claim defended in this paper is that rational agents are subject to a norm requiring sharp credences. I defend this claim in spite of the initially promising features of indeterminate credal states to address problems which sharp credences have as they reflect a doxastic state.

Traditionally, Bayesians have maintained that a rational agent, when holding a credence, holds a sharp credence. It has recently become popular to drop the requirement for credence functions to be sharp. There are now Bayesians who permit a rational agent to hold indeterminate credal states based on incomplete or ambiguous evidence. I will refer to Bayesians who continue to adhere to the classical theory of sharp credences for rational agents as ‘Laplaceans’ (e.g. Adam Elga and Roger White). I will refer to Bayesians who do not believe that a rational agent’s credences need to be sharp as ‘Booleans’ (e.g. Richard Jeffrey, Peter Walley, Brian Weatherson, and James Joyce).

There is some terminological confusion around the adjectives ‘imprecise,’ ‘indeterminate,’ and ‘mushy’ credences. In the following, I will exclusively refer to indeterminate credences or credal states (abbreviated ‘instates’) and mean by them a set of sharp credence functions (which some Booleans require to be convex) which it may be rational for an agent to hold within an otherwise orthodox Bayesian framework (see Jeffrey, 1983).

More formally speaking, let Ω be a set of state descriptions or possible worlds and \mathcal{X} a suitable algebra on Ω . Then $X \in \mathcal{X}$ is a proposition toward which an agent entertains a credal state $C(X)$. C is a function $C : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{R}$, where \mathcal{R} is an algebra on \mathbb{R}_0^+ , in some cases required to be convex. The credal state is potentially different from an agent’s doxastic state, which could be characterized in more detail than the credal state (examples will follow). Laplaceans require that $\mathcal{R} \subseteq \{\{x\} | x \in \mathbb{R}_0^+\}$. Indeterminate alternatives are that \mathcal{R} is

a set of Borel sets or a set of convex Borel sets. Since both Laplaceans and Booleans are Bayesians, the elements of \mathcal{R} will not contain numbers greater than one.

In this paper, I will introduce a *divide et impera* argument in favour of the Laplacean position. I assume that the appeal of the Boolean position is immediately obvious. Not only is it psychologically implausible that agents who strive for rationality should have all their credences worked out to crystal-clear precision; it seems epistemically doubtful to assign exact credences to propositions about which the agent has little or no information, incomplete or ambiguous evidence (Joyce calls the requirement for sharp credences “psychologically implausible and epistemologically calamitous,” see Joyce, 2005, 156). From the perspective of information theory, it appears that an agent with sharp credences pretends to be in possession of information that she does not have.

The *divide et impera* argument runs like this: I show that the Boolean position is really divided into two mutually incompatible camps, the plebeian camp and the aristocratic camp. The plebeian camp has the advantage of owning all the assets of appeal against the Laplacean position. The stock examples brought to bear against sharp credences have simple and compelling instate solutions from a plebeian Boolean position. The plebeian Boolean position, however, has deep conceptual problems which I will describe in detail below. Aristocratic Booleans, chief among them Thomas Augustin and James Joyce, can solve them. Their refinement of the plebeian Boolean position is successful in so far as it resolves the conceptual problems. Their success depends on what I call Augustin’s concessions, which undermine all the appeal that the Boolean position as a whole has over the Laplacean position. With a series of examples, I seek to demonstrate that in Simpson Paradox type fashion the Laplacean position looks genuinely inferior to the amalgamated Boolean position, but as soon as the mutually incompatible strands of the Boolean position have been identified, the Laplacean position

is independently superior to both.

2 Partial Beliefs

Bayesians, whether Booleans or Laplaceans, agree that full belief epistemology gives us an incomplete account of rationality and the epistemic landscape of the human mind. Full belief epistemology is concerned with the acceptance and the rejection of full beliefs, whether an agent may be in possession of knowledge about their contents and what may justify or constitute this knowledge. Bayesians engage in another project investigating partial beliefs. There are belief contents toward which a rational agent has a belief-like attitude characterized by degrees of confidence. These partial beliefs are especially useful in decision theory (for example, betting scenarios). Bayesians have developed a logic of partial beliefs, not dissimilar to traditional logic, which justifies certain partial beliefs in the light of other partial beliefs.

Some epistemologists now seek to reconcile full and partial belief epistemology (see Spohn, 2012; Weatherson, 2012; and Moss, 2013). There is a sense in which, by linking knowledge of chances to its representation in credences, Booleans also seek to reconcile traditional knowledge epistemology concerned with full belief and Bayesian epistemology concerned with partial belief. If my paper is correct then the Boolean approach will not contribute to this reconciliation because it mixes full belief and partial belief metaphors in ways that are problematic. The primary task of Bayesians is to explain what partial beliefs are, how they work, and what the norms of rationality are that govern them. The problem for Booleans, as we will see, is that only plebeian Booleans have an explanation at hand how partial beliefs model the epistemic state of the agent (to speak in Brian Weatherson's terms, see Weatherson, 2012, 19) in tandem with the way full beliefs do their modeling: as we will see by example, plebeian Booleans often look at partial beliefs as full beliefs

about objective chances. Aristocratic Booleans debunk this approach, which leaves the project of reconciliation unresolved.

Three advantages of instates sound particularly persuasive.

- **INTERN** Instates represent the possibility range for objective chances (objective chances internal to the instate are not believed not to hold, objective chances external to the instate are believed not to hold).
- **INCOMP** Instates represent incompleteness or ambiguity of the evidence.
- **INFORM** Instates are responsive to the information content of evidence.

Here are some examples and explanations. Let a $coin_x$ be a Bernoulli generator that produces successes and failures with probability p_x for success, labeled H_x , and $1 - p_x$ for failure, labeled T_x . Physical coins may serve as Bernoulli generators, if we are willing to set aside that most of them are approximately fair.

Example 1: INTERN. Blake has two Bernoulli Generators in her lab, $coin_i$ and $coin_{ii}$. Blake has a database of $coin_i$ results and concludes on excellent evidence that $coin_i$ is fair. Blake has no evidence about the bias of $coin_{ii}$. As a Boolean, Blake assumes a sharp credence of $\{0.5\}$ for H_i and an indeterminate credal state of $[0, 1]$ for H_{ii} . She feels bad for Logan, her Laplacean colleague, who cannot distinguish between the two cases and who must assign a sharp credence of $\{0.5\}$ for both H_i and H_{ii} .

Example 2: INCOMP. Blake has another Bernoulli Generator, $coin_{iii}$, in her lab. Her graduate student has submitted $coin_{iii}$ to countless experiments and emails Blake the resulting bias, but fails to include whether the bias of $2/3$ is in favour of H_{iii} or in favour of T_{iii} . As a Boolean, Blake assumes an indeterminate credal state of $[1/3, 2/3]$ (or $\{1/3, 2/3\}$, depending on the

convexity requirement) for H_{iii} . She feels bad for Logan who must assign a sharp credence of $\{0.5\}$ for H_{iii} when Logan concurrently knows that her credence gets the bias wrong.

Example 1 also serves as an example for INFORM: one way in which Blake feels bad for Logan is that Logan’s $\{0.5\}$ credence for H_{ii} is based on very little information, a fact not reflected in Logan’s credence. Walley notes that “the precision of probability models should match the amount of information on which they are based” (Walley, 1991, 34). Joyce explicitly criticizes the information overload for sharp credences in examples such as example 1. He says about sharp credences of this kind that, despite their maximal entropy compared to other sharp credences, they are “very informative” and “adopting [them] amounts to pretending that you have lots and lots of information that you simply don’t have” (Joyce, 2010, 284).

Walley and Joyce appeal to intuition when they promote INFORM. It just feels as if there were more information in a sharp credence than in an instate. Neither of them ever make this claim more explicit. Joyce admits:

It is not clear how such an ‘imprecise minimum information requirement’ might be formulated, but it seems clear that C_1 encodes more information than C_2 whenever $C_1 \subset C_2$, or when C_2 arises from C_1 by conditioning. (Joyce, 2010, 288.)

Since for the rest of the paper the emphasis will be on INTERN and INCOMP, I will advance my argument against INFORM right away: not only is it not clear how Joyce’s imprecise minimum information requirement might be formulated, I see no reason why it should give the results that Joyce envisions. To compare instates and sharp credences informationally, we would need a non-additive set function obeying Shannon’s axioms for information. This is a non-trivial task. I have not succeeded in solving it (nor do I need to carry

the Booleans' water), but I am not convinced that it will result in an information measure which assigns, for instance, less entropy to a sharp credence such as $\{0.5\}$ than to an instate such as $\{x | 1/3 \leq x \leq 2/3\}$. The challenge is in the Booleans' court to produce such a non-additive set function. I doubt that they will succeed and hope to produce more formal constraints for it in the future, if not an impossibility theorem.

Against the force of INTERN, INCOMP, and INFORM, I maintain that the Laplacean approach of assigning subjective probabilities to partitions of the event space (e.g. objective chances) and then aggregating them by David Lewis' summation formula (see Lewis, 1981, 266f) into a single precise credence function is conceptually tidy and shares many of the formal virtues of Boolean theories. If the bad taste about numerical precision lingers, I will point to philosophical projects in other domains where the concepts we use are sharply bounded, even though our ability to conceive of those sharp boundaries or know them is limited (in particular Timothy Williamson's accounts of vagueness and knowledge). To put it provocatively, this paper defends a 0.5 sharp credence in heads in all three cases: for a coin of whose bias we are completely ignorant; for a coin whose fairness is supported by a lot of evidence; and even for a coin about whose bias we know that it is either $1/3$ or $2/3$ for heads.

Consider the following reasons that incline Booleans to permit instates for rational agents:

- (A) The greatest emphasis motivating indeterminacy rests on INTERN, INCOMP, and INFORM.
- (B) The preference structure of a rational agent may be incomplete so that representation theorems do not yield single probability measures to represent such incomplete structures.
- (C) There are more technical and paper-specific reasons, such as Thomas

Augustin’s attempt to mediate between the minimax pessimism of objectivists and the Bayesian optimism of subjectivists using interval probability (see Augustin, 2003, 35f); Alan Hájek and Michael Smithson’s belief that there may be objectively indeterminate chances in the physical world (see Hájek and Smithson, 2012, 33, but also Hájek, 2003, 278, 307); Jake Chandler’s claim that “the sharp model is at odds with a trio of plausible propositions regarding agnosticism” (Chandler, 2014, 4); and Brian Weatherson’s claim that for the Boolean position, open-mindedness and modesty may be consistent when for the Laplacean they are not (see Weatherson, 2015, using a result by Gordon Belot, see Belot, 2013).

This paper mostly addresses (A), while taking (B) seriously as well and pointing towards solutions for it. I am leaving (C) for more specific responses to the issues presented in the cited articles. I will address in section 6 Weatherson’s more general claim that it is a distinctive and problematic feature of the Laplacean position “that it doesn’t really have a good way of representing a state of indecisiveness or open-mindedness” (Weatherson, 2015, 9), i.e. that sharp credences cannot fulfill what I will call the double task. Weatherson’s more particular claim about open-mindedness and modesty is a different story and shall be told elsewhere.

3 Plebeians and Aristocrats

My *divide et impera* argument rests on the distinction between a plebeian and an aristocratic Boolean position. The difference is best captured by a simple example and then some quotations to show how epistemologists advocate the plebeian Boolean position or relapse into it, even when they have just advocated the aristocratic Boolean position.

Example 3: Skittles. Every skittles bag contains 42 pieces of candy. It is filled by robots from a giant randomized pile of candies in a warehouse, where the ratio of five colours is 8:8:8:9:9, orange being the last of the five colours. Logan picks one skittle from a bag and tries to guess what colour it is before she looks at it. She has a sharp credence of $9/42$ that the skittle is orange.

Plebeian Booleans reject Logan’s sharp credence on the basis that she does not know that there are 9 orange skittles in her particular bag. A $9/42$ credence suggests to them a knowledge claim on Logan’s part, based on very thin evidence, that her bag contains 9 orange skittles. Logan’s doxastic state, however, is much more complicated than her credal state. She knows about the robots and the warehouse. Therefore, her credences that there are k orange skittles in the bag conform to the Bernoulli distribution:

$$C(k) = \binom{42}{k} \left(\frac{9}{42}\right)^k \left(\frac{33}{42}\right)^{42-k} \quad (1)$$

For instance, her sharp credence that there are in fact 9 orange skittles in the bag is approximately 14.9%. One of Augustin’s concessions, the refinements that aristocratic Booleans make to the plebeian Boolean position, clarifies that a coherent Boolean position must agree with the Laplacean position that doxastic states are not fully captured by credal states. We will see in the next section why this is the case.

It is a characteristic of the plebeian Boolean position, however, to require that the credal state be sufficient for inference, updating, and decision making. Susanna Rinard, for example, considers it the goal of instates to provide “a complete characterization of one’s doxastic attitude” (Rinard, 2015, 5) and reiterates a few pages later that it is “a primary purpose of the set of

functions model to represent the totality of the agent’s actual doxastic state” (Rinard, 2015, 12).

I will give a few examples of the plebeian Boolean position in the literature, where the authors usually consider themselves to be defending an amalgamated Boolean position which is *pro toto* superior to the Laplacean position. Here is an illustration in Hájek and Smithson.

Example 4: Lung Cancer. Your doctor is your sole source of information about medical matters, and she assigns a credence of $[0.4, 0.6]$ to your getting lung cancer.

Hájek and Smithson go on to say that

it would be odd, and arguably irrational, for you to assign this proposition a sharper credence—say, 0.5381. How would you defend that assignment? You could say, I don’t have to defend it, it just happens to be my credence. But that seems about as unprincipled as looking at your sole source of information about the time, your digital clock, which tells that the time rounded off to the nearest minute is 4:03—and yet believing that the time is in fact 4:03 and 36 seconds. Granted, you may just happen to believe that; the point is that you have no business doing so. (Hájek and Smithson, 2012, 38f.)

This is an argument against Laplaceans from the plebeian Boolean position because it conflates partial belief and full belief (for another similar example and argument see Kaplan, 2010, 43f). The precise credences in Hájek and Smithson’s example, on any reasonable Laplacean interpretation, do not represent full beliefs that the objective chance of getting lung cancer is 0.5381 or that the time of the day is 4:03:36. A sharp credence rejects no hypothesis about objective chances (unlike an instate in the plebeian Boolean position). It often has a subjective probability distribution operating in the background,

over which it integrates to yield the sharp credence (it would do likewise in Hájek and Smithson's example for the prognosis of the doctor or the time of the day). The integration proceeds by Lewis' summation formula (see Lewis, 1981, 266f):

$$C(R) = \int_0^1 \zeta P(\pi(R) = \zeta) d\zeta. \quad (2)$$

If, for example, R is the proposition that Logan's randomly drawn skittle in example 3 is orange, then

$$C(R) = \sum_{k=0}^{42} \frac{k}{42} \binom{42}{k} \left(\frac{9}{42}\right)^k \left(\frac{33}{42}\right)^{42-k} = 9/42 \quad (3)$$

No objective chance $\pi(R)$ needs to be excluded by it. Any updating will merely change the partial beliefs, but no full beliefs. Instates, on the other hand, by giving ranges of acceptable objective chances suggest that there is a full belief that the objective chance does not lie outside what is indicated by the instate (corresponding to INTERN). When a plebeian Boolean learns that an objective chance lies outside her instate, she needs to resort to belief revision rather than updating her partial beliefs. An aristocratic Boolean can avoid this by accepting one of Augustin's concessions that I will introduce in section 5.

While most examples are examples of presenting the plebeian Boolean position as an amalgamated Boolean position, without heed to the refinements of Augustin and Joyce, it is also the case that aristocratic Booleans relapse into plebeian patterns when they argue against the Laplacean position. This is not surprising, because, as we will see, the aristocratic Boolean position

is more coherent than the plebeian Boolean position, but also left without resources to address the problems that have made the Laplacean position vulnerable in the first place.

Joyce, for instance, refers to an example that is again in all relevant respects like example 3 and states that Logan is “committing herself to a definite view about the relative proportions of skittles in the bag” (see Joyce, 2010, 287, pronouns and example-specific nouns changed to fit example 3). Augustin defends the Boolean position with another example of relapse:

Imprecise probabilities and related concepts . . . provide a powerful language which is able to reflect the partial nature of the knowledge suitably and to express the amount of ambiguity adequately. (Augustin, 2003, 34.)

Augustin himself (see section 5 on Augustin’s concessions) details the demise of the idea that indeterminate credal states can “express the amount of ambiguity adequately.” Before I go into these details, however, I need to make the case that Augustin’s concessions are necessary in order to refine the plebeian Boolean into an aristocratic version and make it more coherent. It is two problems for instates that make this case for us: dilation and the impossibility for learning. Note that these problems are not sufficient to reject instates—they only compel us to refine the plebeian Boolean position via Augustin’s concessions. The final game is between aristocratic Booleans and Laplaceans, where I will argue that aristocratic Booleans have lost the intuitive appeal of the amalgamated Boolean position to present solutions to *prima facie* problems facing the Laplacean position.

4 Dilation and Learning

Here are two potential problems for Booleans:

- DILATION Instates are vulnerable to dilation.
- OBTUSE Instates do not permit learning.

Both of these can be resolved by making Augustin’s concessions and refining the plebeian Boolean position. I will introduce these problems in the present section, then Augustin’s concessions in the next section, and the implications for the more general disagreement between Booleans and Laplaceans in the final section.

4.1 Dilation

Consider the following example for DILATION (see White, 2010, 175f and Joyce, 2010, 296f).

Example 5: Dilation. Logan has two Bernoulli Generators, $coin_{iv}$ and $coin_v$. She has excellent evidence that $coin_{iv}$ is fair and no evidence about the bias of $coin_v$. Logan’s graduate student independently tosses both $coin_{iv}$ and $coin_v$. Then she tells Logan whether the two tosses are correlated or not ($H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ or $H_{iv} \equiv T_v$, where $X \equiv Y$ means $(X \wedge Y) \vee (\neg X \wedge \neg Y)$). Logan, who has a sharp credence for H_v , takes this information in stride, but she feels bad for Blake, whose credence in H_{iv} dilates to $[0, 1]$ even though Blake shares Logan’s excellent evidence that $coin_{iv}$ is fair.

Here is why Blake’s credence in H_{iv} must dilate. Her credence in H_v is $[0, 1]$, by stipulation. Let $c(X)$ be the set of sharp credences representing Blake’s instate, for example $c(H_v) = [0, 1]$. Then

$$c(H_{iv} \equiv H_v) = c(H_{iv} \equiv T_v) = \{0.5\} \tag{4}$$

because the tosses are independent and $c(H_{iv}) = \{0.5\}$ by stipulation. Next,

$$c(H_{iv}|H_{iv} \equiv H_v) = c(H_v|H_{iv} \equiv H_v) \quad (5)$$

where $c(X|Y)$ is the updated instate after finding out Y . Booleans accept (5) because they are Bayesians and update by standard conditioning. Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} c(H_{iv}|H_{iv} \equiv H_v) &= c(H_v|H_{iv} \equiv H_v) = \frac{c(H_{iv})c(H_v)}{c(H_{iv})c(H_v) + c(T_{iv})c(T_v)} \\ &= c(H_v) = [0, 1]. \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

Blake's updated instate for H_{iv} has dilated from $\{0.5\}$ to $[0, 1]$.

This does not sound like a knock-down argument against Booleans (it is investigated in detail in Seidenfeld and Wasserman, 1993), but Roger White uses it to derive implications from instates which are worrisome (for example, see his Chocolates case in White, 2010, 183).

I will characterize the problems that dilation causes for the Boolean position by three aspects (all of which originate in White, 2010):

- **RETENTION** This is the problem in White's Chocolates case. When we tie the outcome of a random process whose objective chance we know to the outcome of a random process whose chance we do not know, White maintains that we should be entitled to *retain* the credence that is warranted by the known objective chance. One worry about the Boolean position in this context is that credences become excessively dependent on the mode of representation of a problem.
- **REPETITION** Consider again example 5, although this time Blake runs

the experiment 10,000 times. Each time, her graduate student tells her whether $H_{iv}^n \equiv H_v^n$ or $H_{iv}^n \equiv T_v^n$, n signifying the n -th experiment. After running the experiment that many times, approximately half of the outcomes of $coin_{iv}$ are heads. Now Blake runs the experiment one more time. Again, the Boolean position mandates dilation, but should Blake not just on inductive grounds persist in a sharp credence of 0.5 for H_{iv} , given that about half of the coin flips so far have come up heads? Attentive readers will notice a sleight of hand here: as many times as Blake performs the experiment, it must not have any evidential impact on the assumptions of example 5, especially that the two coin flips remain independent and that the credal state for $coin_v$ is still, even after all these experiments, maximally indeterminate.

- REFLECTION Consider again example 5. Blake's graduate student will tell Blake either $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ or $H_{iv} \equiv T_v$. No matter what the graduate student tells Blake, Blake's credence in H_{iv} dilates to an instate of $[0, 1]$. Blake therefore is subject to Bas van Fraassen's reflection principle stating that

$$P_t^a(A|p_{t+x}^a(A) = r) = r \quad (7)$$

where P_t^a is the agent a 's credence function at time t , x is any non-negative number, and $p_{t+x}^a(A) = r$ is the proposition that at time $t+x$, the agent a will bestow degree r of credence on the proposition A (see van Fraassen, 1984, 244). Van Fraassen had sharp credences in mind, but it is not immediately obvious why the reflection principle should not also hold for instates.

To address the force of RETENTION, REPETITION, and REFLECTION, Joyce hammers home what I have called Augustin's concessions. According to Joyce, none of White's attacks succeed if a refinement of the plebeian Boolean

position takes place and instates are not required either to reflect knowledge of objective chances or doxastic states. I will address this in detail in section 5, concluding that Augustin’s concessions are only necessary based on REFLECTION, whereas solutions for RETENTION and REPETITION have less far-reaching consequences and do not impugn the plebeian Boolean position.

4.2 Learning

Here is an example for OBTUSE (see Rinard’s objection cited in White, 2010, 84 and addressed in Joyce, 2010, 290f). It presumes Joyce’s supervaluationist semantics of instates (see Hájek, 2003; Joyce, 2010, 288; and Rinard, 2015; for a problem with supervaluationist semantics see Lewis, 1993; and an alternative which may solve the problem see Weatherson, 2015, 7), for which Joyce uses the helpful metaphor of committee members, each of whom holds a sharp credence. The instate consists then of the set of sharp credences from each committee member: for the purposes of updating, for example, each committee member updates as if she were holding a sharp credence. The aggregate of the committee members’ updated sharp credences forms the updated instate. Supervaluationist semantics also permits comparisons, when for example a partial belief in X is stronger than a partial belief in Y because all committee members have sharp credences in X which exceed all the sharp credences held by committee members with respect to Y .

Example 6: Learning. Blake has a Bernoulli Generator in her lab, $coin_{vi}$, of whose bias she knows nothing and which she submits to experiments. At first, Blake’s instate for H_{vi} is $[0, 1]$. After a few experiments, it looks like $coin_{vi}$ is fair. However, as committee members crowd into the centre and update their sharp credences to something closer to 0.5, they are replaced by extremists on the fringes. The instate remains at $[0, 1]$.

It is time now to examine refinements of the Boolean position to address these problems.

5 Augustin's Concessions

Joyce has defended instates against DILATION and OBTUSE, making Augustin's concessions (AC1) and (AC2). I am naming them after Thomas Augustin, who has some priority over Joyce in the matter. Augustin's concessions distinguish the plebeian and the aristocratic Boolean position, the former of which do not make the concessions and identify partial beliefs crudely with full beliefs about objective chances. A sophisticated view of partial beliefs recognizes that they are *sui generis*, which necessitates a substantial reconciliation project between full belief epistemology and partial belief epistemology. My task at hand is to agree with aristocratic Booleans in their argument against plebeian Booleans that this reconciliation project is indeed substantial and that partial beliefs are not full beliefs about objective chances; but also that aristocratic Booleans fail to summon arguments against the Laplacean position without relapsing into an unrefined version of indeterminacy.

Here, then, are Augustin's concessions:

- (AC1) Credal states do not adequately represent doxastic states. The same instate can reflect different doxastic states, even when the difference in the doxastic states matters for updating, inference, and decision making.
- (AC2) Instates do not represent full belief claims about objective chances. White's *Chance Grounding Thesis* is not an appropriate characterization of the Boolean position.

I agree with Joyce that (AC1) and (AC2) are both necessary and sufficient to resolve DILATION and OBTUSE for instates. I disagree with Joyce about what this means for an overall recommendation to accept the Boolean rather than the Laplacean position. After I have already cast doubt on INFORM, I will show that (AC1) and (AC2) neutralize INTERN and INCOMP, the major impulses for rejecting the Laplacean position.

Indeterminacy imposes a double task on credences (representing both uncertainty and available evidence) that they cannot coherently fulfill. I will present several examples where this double task stretches instates to the limits of plausibility. Joyce’s idea that credences can represent balance, weight, and specificity of the evidence (in Joyce, 2005) is inconsistent with the use of indeterminacy. Joyce himself, in response to DILATION and OBTUSE, gives the argument why this is the case (see Joyce, 2010, 290ff for OBTUSE; and Joyce, 2010, 296ff for DILATION). Let us begin by looking more closely at how (AC1) and (AC2) protect the aristocratic Boolean position from DILATION and OBTUSE.

5.1 Augustin’s Concession (AC1)

(AC1) says that credences do not adequately represent a doxastic state. The same instate can reflect different doxastic states, where the difference is relevant to updating, inference, and decision making.

Augustin recognizes the problem of inadequate representation before Joyce, with specific reference to instates: “The imprecise posterior does no longer contain all the relevant information to produce optimal decisions. Inference and decision do not coincide any more” (Augustin, 2003, 41) (see also an example for inadequate representation of evidence by instates in Bradley and Steele, 2014, 16). Joyce rejects the notion that identical instates encode identical beliefs by giving two examples. The first one is problematic. The

second one, which is example 5 given earlier, addresses the issue of DILATION more directly. Here is the first example.

Example 7: Three-Sided Die. Suppose \mathcal{C}' and \mathcal{C}'' are defined on a partition $\{X, Y, Z\}$ corresponding to the result of a roll of a three sided-die. Let \mathcal{C}' contain all credence functions defined on $\{X, Y, Z\}$ such that $c(Z) \geq 1/2$, and let \mathcal{C}'' be the subset of \mathcal{C}' whose members also satisfy $c(X) = c(Y)$ (see Joyce, 2010, 294).

Joyce then goes on to say,

It is easy to show that \mathcal{C}' and \mathcal{C}'' generate the same range of probabilities for all Boolean combinations of $\{X, Y, Z\}$, and so LP and PSET deem them equivalent. But they are surely different: the \mathcal{C}'' -person believes everything the \mathcal{C}' -person believes, but she also regards X and Y as equiprobable.

example 7 is problematic because \mathcal{C}' and \mathcal{C}'' do not generate the same range of probabilities: if, as Joyce says, $c(Z) \geq 1/2$, then $c(X) = c(Y)$ implies $c(X) \leq 1/4$ for \mathcal{C}'' , but not for \mathcal{C}' . What Joyce wants to say is that the same instate can encode doxastic states which are relevantly different when it comes to updating probabilities, and the best example for this is example 5 itself.

To explain this in more detail, we need to review for a moment what Lewis means by the Principal Principle and by inadmissibility. The Principal Principle requires that my knowledge of objective chances is reflected in my credence, unless there is inadmissible evidence. Inadmissible evidence would for instance be knowledge of a coin toss outcome, in which case of course I do not need to have a credence for it corresponding to the bias of the coin. In example 5, I could use the Principal Principle in the spirit of RETENTION to derive a contradiction to the Boolean formalism: (*) $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ does not

give anything away about H_{iv} , therefore $(^{**})$ $c(H_{iv}|H_{iv} \equiv H_v) = c(H_{iv})$ by the Principal Principle and in contradiction to (6).

Joyce explains how $(^*)$ is false and blocks the conclusion $(^{**})$, which would undermine the Boolean position. $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ is clearly inadmissible, even without (AC1), since it is information that not only changes Blake's doxastic state, but also her credal state.

We would usually expect more information to sharpen our credal states (see Walley's anti-dilation principle and his response to this problem in 1991, 207 and 299), an intuition violated by both DILATION and OBTUSE. As far as DILATION is concerned, however, the loss of precision is in principle not any more surprising than information that increases the Shannon entropy of a sharp credence.

Example 8: Rumour. A rumour that the Canadian prime minister has been assassinated raises your initially very low probability that this event is taking place today to approximately 50%.

It is true for both sharp and indeterminate credences that information can make us less certain about things. That is the simple solution for RETENTION. If one of Joyce's committee members has a sharp credence of 1 in H_v and learns $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$, then her sharp credence for H_{iv} should obviously be 1 as well; ditto and mutatis mutandis for the committee member who has a sharp credence of 0 in H_v . (AC1) is unnecessary.

Here is how dilation is as unproblematic as a gain in entropy after more information in example 8:

Example 9: Dilating Urns. You are about to draw a ball from an urn with 200 balls (100 red, 100 yellow). Just before you draw, you receive the information that the urn has two chambers which are obscured to you as you

draw the ball, one with 99 red balls and 1 yellow ball, the other with 1 red ball and 99 yellow balls.

Dilation from a sharp credence of $\{0.5\}$ to an instate of $[0.01, 0.99]$ (or $\{0.01, 0.99\}$, depending on whether convexity is required) is unproblematic, although the example prefigures that there is something odd about the Boolean conceptual approach. The example licences a 99:1 bet for one of the colours (if the instate is interpreted as upper and lower previsions), which inductively would be a foolish move. This is a problem that arises out of the Boolean position quite apart from DILATION and in conjunction with betting licences, which we will address in example 12.

So far we have not found convincing reasons to accept (AC1). Neither dilation as a phenomenon nor Lewis' inadmissibility criterion need to compel a plebeian Boolean to admit (AC1), despite Joyce's claims in the abstract of his paper that reactions to dilation "are based on an overly narrow conception of imprecise belief states which assumes that we know everything there is to know about a person's doxastic attitudes once we have identified the spreads of values for her imprecise credences." Not only does example 7 not give us the desired results, we can also resolve RETENTION and REPETITION without recourse to (AC1). It is, in the final analysis, REFLECTION which will make the case for (AC1).

It is odd that Joyce explicitly says that the argument REPETITION "goes awry by assuming that credal states which assign the same range of credences for an event reflect the same opinions about that event" (Joyce, 2010, 304), when in the following he makes an air-tight case against the anti-Boolean force of REPETITION without ever referring to (AC1). Joyce's case against REPETITION is based on the sleight of hand to which I made reference when I introduced REPETITION. There is no need to repeat Joyce's argument here.

Let me add that despite my agreement with Joyce on how to handle REPE-

TITION, although we disagree that it has anything to do with (AC1), a worry about the Boolean position with respect to REPETITION lingers. Joyce requires that Blake, in so far as Blake wants to be rational, has a maximally indeterminate credal state for H_{iv}^{10000} after hearing from her graduate student. The oddity of this, when we have just had about 5000 heads and 5000 tails, remains. Blake’s maximally indeterminate credal state rests on her stubborn conviction that her credal state must be inclusive of the objective chance of $coin_{iv}^{10000}$ landing heads.

Logan, if she were to do this experiment, would relax, reason inductively as well as based on her prior probability, and give H_{iv} a credence of 0.5, since her credal state is not in the same straight-jacket of underlying objective chances—just as in example 3 Logan is able to have a sharp credence of 9/42 for picking an orange skittle, when her credence that there are 9 orange skittles in the bag is only 14.9%. This worry supports Augustin’s second concession (AC2) that the relationship between instates and objective chances is much looser than for the plebeian Boolean, but more about this in the next subsection.

We are left with REFLECTION, which takes up little room in Joyce but bears most of the burden in his argument for (AC1). It is indeed odd that a rational agent should have two strictly distinct credal states C_1 and C_2 , when C_2 follows upon C_1 from a piece of information that says either X or $\neg X$ —but it does not matter which of the two. Why does the rational agent not assume C_2 straight away? Joyce introduces an important distinction for van Fraassen’s reflection principle: It is not the degree of credence that is decisive as in van Fraassen’s original formulation of the principle, but the doxastic state. X and $\neg X$ (in example 5, they refer to $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ and $H_{iv} \equiv T_v$) both lead from a sharp credence of 0.5 to an instate of $[0, 1]$ for H_{iv} , but this updated instate reflects completely different doxastic states. In Joyce’s words, “the beliefs about H_{iv} you will come to have upon learning $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ are complementary to the beliefs you will have upon learning $H_{iv} \equiv T_v$ ”

(Joyce, 2010, 304). Committee members representing complementary beliefs agree on the instate, but single committee members take opposite views depending on the information, X or $\neg X$. Credal states keep track only of the committee's aggregate credal state, whereas doxastic states keep track of each committee member's individual sharp credences.

This resolves the anti-Boolean force of REFLECTION by making the concession (AC1). Ironically, of course, not being able to represent a doxastic state, but only to reflect it inadequately, was just the problem that Laplacean sharp credences had which Boolean instates were supposed to fix (recall Weatherston's general argument against the Boolean position). One way an aristocratic Boolean could respond is like this:

Aristocratic Riposte: If you are going to make a difference between *representing* a doxastic state and *reflecting* a doxastic state, where the former poses an identity relationship between credal states and doxastic states and the latter a supervenience relationship, then all you have succeeded in making me concede is that both instates and sharp credences reflect doxastic states. Instates may still be more successful in reflecting doxastic states than sharp credences are and so solve the abductive task of explaining partial beliefs better.

There are several reasons why I doubt this line of argument can be successful. The Laplacean position has formal advantages, for example that it is able to cooperate with information theory, an ability which the aristocratic Boolean position lacks. There is no coherent theory of how relations between instates can be evaluated on the basis of information and entropy, which are powerful tools when it comes to justifying fundamental Bayesian tenets (see Shore and Johnson, 1980; Giffin, 2008; and Lukits, 2015). Furthermore, the Laplacean position is conceptually tidy. It distinguishes between the quantifiable aspects of a doxastic state, which it integrates to yield the sharp credence, and other

aspects of the evidence, such as incompleteness or ambiguity. Instates dabble in what I will call the double task: trying to reflect both aspects without convincing success in either. That instates fail to represent doxastic states was established in this section.

5.2 Augustin’s Concession (AC2)

(AC2) says that instates do not reflect knowledge claims about objective chances. White’s *Chance Grounding Thesis* (which White does not endorse, being a Laplacean) is not an appropriate characterization of the Boolean position.

Chance Grounding Thesis: Only on the basis of known chances can one legitimately have sharp credences. Otherwise one’s spread of credence should cover the range of possible chance hypotheses left open by your evidence.
(White, 2010, 174)

Joyce considers (AC2) to be as necessary for a coherent Boolean view of partial beliefs, blocking OBTUSE, as (AC1) is, blocking DILATION (see Joyce, 2010, 289f).

OBTUSE is related to VACUITY, another problem for Booleans:

- VACUITY If one were to be committed to the principle of regularity, that all states of the world considered possible have positive probability (for a defence see Savage et al., 1963, 211); and to the solution of Henry Kyburg’s lottery paradox, that what is rationally accepted should have probability 1 (for a defence of this principle see Douven and Williamson, 2006); and the CGT, that one’s spread of credence should cover the range of possible chance hypotheses left open by the evidence (implied

by much of Boolean literature); then one's instate would always be vacuous.

Booleans must deny at least one of the premises to avoid the conclusion. Joyce denies the CGT, giving us (AC2). It is by no means necessary to sign on to regularity and to the above-mentioned solution of Henry Kyburg's lottery paradox in order to see how (AC2) is a necessary refinement of the plebeian Boolean position. The link between objective chances and credal states expressed in the CGT is suspect for many other reasons. I have referred to them *passim*, but will not go into more detail here.

6 The Double Task

Sharp credences have a single task: to reflect epistemic uncertainty as a tool for updating, inference, and decision making. They cannot fulfill this task without continued reference to the evidence which operates in the background. To use an analogy, credences are not sufficient statistics with respect to updating, inference, and decision making. What is remarkable about Joyce's response to DILATION and OBTUSE is that Joyce recognizes that instates are not sufficient statistics either. But this means that they fail at the double task which has been imposed on them: to represent both epistemic uncertainty and relevant features of the evidence.

In the following, I will provide a few examples where it becomes clear that instates have difficulty representing uncertainty because they are tangled in a double task which they cannot fulfill.

Example 10: Aggregating Expert Opinion. Blake has no information whether it will rain tomorrow (R) or not except the predictions of two weather forecasters. One of them forecasts 0.3 on channel GPY, the other

0.6 on channel QCT. Blake considers the QCT forecaster to be significantly more reliable, based on past experience.

An instate corresponding to this situation may be $[0.3, 0.6]$ (see Walley, 1991, 214), but it will have a difficult time representing the difference in reliability of the experts. We could try $[0.2, 0.8]$ (since the greater reliability of QCT suggests that the chance of rain tomorrow is higher rather than lower) or $[0.1, 0.7]$ (since the greater reliability of QCT suggests that its estimate is more precise), but it remains obscure what the criteria might be.

A sharp credence of $P(R) = 0.53$, for example, does the right thing. Such a credence says nothing about any beliefs that the objective chance is restricted to a subset of the unit interval, but it accurately reflects the degree of uncertainty that the rational agent has over the various possibilities. Beliefs about objective chances make little sense in many situations where we have credences, since it is doubtful even in the case of rain tomorrow that there is an urn of nature from which balls are drawn. What is really at play is a complex interaction between epistemic states (for example, experts evaluating meteorological data) and the evidence which influences them.

As we will see in the next example, it is an advantage of sharp credences that they do not exclude objective chances, even extreme ones, because they express partial belief and do not suggest, as plebeian instates do, that there is full belief knowledge that the objective chance is a member of a proper subset of the possibilities (for an example of a crude version of indeterminacy that reduces partial beliefs to full beliefs see Levi, 1981, 540, “inference derives credal probability from knowledge of the chances of possible outcomes”; or Kaplan, 2010, 45, “you should rule out all and only the assignments the evidence warrants your regarding as too high or too low, and you should remain in suspense between those degree of confidence assignments that are left”).

Example 11: Precise Credences. Logan’s credence for rain tomorrow, based on the expert opinion of channel GPY and channel QCT (she has no other information) is 0.53. Is it reasonable for Logan, considering how little evidence she has, to reject the belief that the chance of rain tomorrow is 0.52 or 0.54; or to prefer a 52.9 cent bet on rain to a 47.1 cent bet on no rain?

The first question in example 11 is as confused as the plebeian confusion found in example 4 discussed earlier. As for the second question in example 11: why would we prefer a 52.9 cent bet on rain to a 47.1 cent bet on no rain, given that we do not possess the power of discrimination between these two bets? It is important not to confuse the claim that it is reasonable to hold both X and Y with the claim that it is reasonable to hold either X (without Y) or Y (without X). It is the reasonableness of holding X and Y concurrently that is controversial, not the reasonableness of holding Y (without holding X) when it is reasonable to hold X .

Let $R(S, Z, t)$ mean “it is rational for S to believe Z at time t .” Then R is exportable (see Rinard, 2015, 6) if and only if $R(S, X, t)$ and $R(S, Y, t)$ imply $R(S, X \wedge Y, t)$. Beliefs somehow grounded in subjectivity, such as beliefs about etiquette or colour perception are counter-examples for the exportability of R . Vagueness also gives us cases of non-exportability. Rinard considers the connection between vagueness and indeterminacy to be an argument in favour of indeterminacy.

My argument is that non-exportability blunts an argument against the Laplacean position. In a moment, I will talk about anti-luminosity, the fact that a rational agent may not be able to distinguish psychologically between a 54.9 cent bet on an event and a 45.1 bet on its negation, when her sharp credence is 0.55. She must reject one of them not to incur sure loss, so proponents of indeterminacy suggest that she choose one of them freely without being constrained by her credal state or reject both of them. I claim that a sharp credence will make a recommendation between the two so that only one of

the bets is rational given her particular credence, but that does not mean that another sharp credence which would give a different recommendation may not also be rational for her to have. Partial beliefs are non-exportable.

The answer to the second question in example 11 ties in with the issue of incomplete preference structure referred to above as motivation (B) for in-states.

It hardly seems a requirement of rationality that belief be precise (and preferences complete); surely imprecise belief (and corresponding incomplete preferences) are at least rationally permissible. (Bradley and Steele, 2014, 2, for a similar sentiment see Kaplan, 2010, 44.)

The development of representation theorems beginning with Frank Ramsey (followed by increasingly more compelling representation theorems in Savage, 1954; and Jeffrey, 1965; and numerous other variants in contemporary literature) bases probability and utility functions of an agent on her preferences, not the other way around. Once completeness as an axiom for the preferences of an agent is jettisoned, indeterminacy follows automatically. Indeterminacy may thus be a natural consequence of the proper way to think about credences in terms of the preferences that they represent.

In response, preferences may very well logically and psychologically precede an agent's probability and utility functions, but that does not mean that we cannot inform the axioms we use for a rational agent's preferences by undesirable consequences downstream. Completeness may sound like an unreasonable imposition at the outset, but if incompleteness has unwelcome consequences for credences downstream, it is not illegitimate to revisit the issue. Timothy Williamson goes through this exercise with vague concepts, showing that all upstream logical solutions to the problem fail and that it has to be solved downstream with an epistemic solution (see Williamson, 1996). Vague concepts, like sharp credences, are sharply bounded, but not

in a way that is luminous to the agent (for anti-luminosity see chapter 4 in Williamson, 2000). Anti-luminosity answers the second question in example 11: the rational agent prefers the 52.9 cent bet on rain to a 47.1 cent bet on no rain based on her sharp credence without being in a position to have this preference necessarily or have it based on physical or psychological ability (for the analogous claim about knowledge see Williamson, 2000, 95).

In a way, advocates of indeterminacy have solved this problem for us. There is strong agreement among most of them that the issue of determinacy for credences is not an issue of elicitation (sometimes the term ‘indeterminacy’ is used instead of ‘imprecision’ to underline this difference; see Levi, 1985, 395). The appeal of preferences is that we can elicit them more easily than assessments of probability and utility functions. The indeterminacy issue has been raised to the probability level (or moved downstream) by indeterminacy advocates themselves who feel justifiably uncomfortable with an interpretation of their theory in behaviourist terms. So it shall be solved there, and this paper makes an appeal to reject indeterminacy on this level. The solution then has to be carried upstream (or lowered to the logically more basic level of preferences), where we recognize that completeness for preferences is after all a desirable axiom for rationality and “perfectly rational agents always have perfectly sharp probabilities” (Elga, 2010, 1). When Levi talks about indeterminacy, it also proceeds from the level of probability judgment to preferences, not the other way around (see Levi, 1981, 533).

Example 12: Monkey-Filled Urns. Let urn A contain 4 balls, two red and two yellow. A monkey randomly fills urn B from urn A with two balls. We draw from urn B (a precursor to this example is in Jaynes and Bretthorst, 2003, 160).

The sharp credence of drawing a red ball is 0.5, following Lewis’ summation formula for the different combinations of balls in urn B . This solution

is more intuitive in terms of further inference, decision making, and betting behaviour than a credal state of $\{0, 1/2, 1\}$ or $[0, 1]$ (depending on the convexity requirement), since this instate would licence an exorbitant bet in favour of one colour, for example one that costs \$9,999 and pays \$10,000 if red is drawn and nothing if yellow is drawn.

How a bet is licenced is different on various Boolean accounts. Rinard, for example, contrasts a moderate account with a liberal account (see Rinard, 2015, 7). According to the liberal account, the \$9,999 bet is licenced, whereas according to the moderate account, it is only indeterminate whether the bet is licenced. The moderate account does not take away from the force of example 12, where it should be determinate that a \$9,999 bet is not licenced.

To make example 12 more vivid consider a Hand Urn, where you draw by hand from an urn with 100 balls, 50 red balls and 50 yellow balls. When your hand retreats from the urn, does it not contain either a red ball or a yellow ball and so serve itself as an urn, from which in a sense you draw a ball? Your hand contains one ball, either red or yellow, and the indeterminate credal state that it is one or the other should be $[0, 1]$. This contradicts our intuition that our credence should be a sharp 0.5 and raises again the mode of representation issue, as in RETENTION. Sharp credences are more resistant to partition variance when the partition is along lines that appear irrelevant to the question (such as symbols on pieces of chocolate as in White's Chocolates case or how a ball is retrieved from an urn as in example 12).

Example 13: Three Prisoners. Prisoner X_1 knows that two out of three prisoners (X_1, X_2, X_3) will be executed and one of them pardoned. She asks the warden of the prison to tell her the name of another prisoner who will be executed, hoping to gain knowledge about her own fate. When the warden tells her that X_3 will be executed, X_1 erroneously updates her probability of pardon from $1/3$ to $1/2$, since either X_1 or X_2 will be spared.

Walley maintains that for the Monty Hall problem and the Three Prisoners problem, the probabilities of a rational agent should dilate rather than settle on the commonly accepted solutions. For the Three Prisoners problem, there is a compelling case for standard conditioning and the result that the credence for prisoner X_1 to receive a pardon ought not to change after the update (see Lukits, 2014, 1421f). Walley’s dilated solution would give prisoner X_1 hope on the doubtful possibility (and unfounded assumption) that the warden might prefer to provide X_3 ’s (rather than X_2 ’s) name in case prisoner X_1 was pardoned.

This example brings an interesting issue to the forefront. Sharp credences often reflect independence of variables where such independence is unwarranted. Booleans (more specifically, detractors of the principle of indifference or the principle of maximum entropy, principles which are used to generate sharp credences for rational agents) tend to point this out gleefully. They prefer to dilate over the possible dependence relationships, independence included. Dilation in example 5 is an instance of this. The fallacy in the argument for instates, illustrated by the Three Prisoners problem, is that the probabilistic independence of sharp credences does not imply independence of variables. Only the converse is correct. Probabilistic independence may simply reflect an averaging process over various dependence relationships, independence again included.

In the Three Prisoners problem, there is no evidence about the degree or the direction of the dependence, and so prisoner X_1 should take no comfort in the information that she receives. The rational prisoner’s probabilities will reflect probabilistic independence, but make no claims about causal independence. Walley has unkind things to say about sharp credences and their ability to respond to evidence (for example that their “inferences rarely conform to evidence”, see Walley, 1991, 396), but in this case it appears to me that they outperform the Boolean approach.

Joyce also commits himself to dilation for the Three Prisoners problem and would thus have to call the conventional solution defective epistemology (see Joyce, 2010, 292), for in the comparable case of example 5 he states that “behaving as if these two events are independent amounts to pulling a statistical correlation out of thin air!” (Joyce, 2010, 300.) The two events in question are H_{iv} and $H_{iv} \equiv H_v$ in example 5, but they could just as well be ‘ X_1 will be executed’ and ‘warden says X_3 will be executed’ in example 13.

To conclude, a Boolean in the light of Joyce’s two Augustinian concessions has three alternatives, of which I favour the third: (a) to find fault with Joyce’s reasoning as he makes those concessions; (b) to think (as Joyce presumably does) that the concessions are compatible with the promises of Booleans, such as *INTERN*, *INCOMP*, and *INFORM*, to solve *prima facie* problems of sharp credences; or (c) to abandon the Boolean position because (AC1), (AC2), and an array of examples in which sharp credences are conceptually and pragmatically more appealing show that the initial promise of the Boolean position is not fulfilled.

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