

## 1. Background

### 1.1. Fogelin's characterization of coherentism

- The only thing that justifies a belief is a belief (the doxastic assumption in Pollock & Cruz)
- The only thing that justifies a belief is *another* belief (anti-foundationalism)

### 1.2. Narrowing the field

*Positive linear coherentism* engenders the Regress Argument (see Pollock & Cruz)

Fogelin also claims that *negative coherentism* doesn't provide a satisfactory answer to the Regress Argument, as it begs the question against the Pyrrhonian skeptic:

- Negative coherentists assume that all beliefs are *justified* until there are reasons to think otherwise. The skeptic denies that any beliefs are *justified*. As with the previous chapter, consider whether the skeptic or the negative coherentist carries the burden of proof, and why.

Hence, all that remains is *positive, holistic* coherentism. Fogelin focuses on Laurence Bonjour's version of this doctrine. (Hereafter, "coherentism" refers to Bonjour's position unless otherwise noted.)

## 2. Bonjour's coherentism

### 2.1. Three central theses

1. Coherentism is a theory of justification, rather than a theory of truth. As a result, the coherence of a belief-system does not guarantee the truth of its constituent beliefs.
2. Coherentism provides a response to Pyrrhonian skepticism.
  - There is a further question as to whether coherence hooks up with the world (Cartesian skepticism). Bonjour handles this with a task he calls *meta-justification*.
3. Coherentist justification must, in principle, be accessible to the believer. It's impossible that one both has a justified belief and also could never become aware of what is providing justification.

### 2.2. Standards of coherence

1. A system of beliefs is coherent only if it is logically consistent.
2. A system of beliefs is coherent in proportion to its degree of probabilistic consistency
3. The coherence of a system of beliefs is increased by the presence of inferential connections between its component beliefs and increased in proportion to the number and strength of such connections.
4. The coherence of a system is diminished to the extent to which it is divided into subsystems of beliefs which are relatively unconnected to each other by inferential connections.
5. The coherence of a system of beliefs is decreased in proportion to the presence of unexplained anomalies in the believed content of the system.

Since it will prove useful below, let us say that the logical consistency, probabilistic consistency, inferential connectedness, and explanatory power of a belief-system are some of its *coherence-making properties*.

### 2.3. Justification

$S$  is justified in believing  $p$  if and only if (1)  $p$  is a member of her belief system, (2)  $S$  is able to recognize that  $p$  is a member of her belief system, and (3)  $S$  is able to recognize that her belief system is coherent.

- Condition 3 is related to the "doxastic presumption." [NB: Unfortunately, the doxastic *presumption* is Bonjour's term, and it is NOT the same thing as the doxastic *assumption* in Pollock & Cruz. For simplicity's sake, let's only call the doxastic presumption "DP."]

### 3. Fogelin's Objections to Bonjour

#### 3.1. *Is Bonjour's theory utopian?*

- U1. A system of beliefs is coherent only if it is logically consistent.  
 U2. Nobody's belief system is logically consistent.  
 U3.  $\therefore$  Nobody's belief system is coherent (U1, U2)  
 U4. If coherentism is true, then if  $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$ ,  $S$ 's system of beliefs is coherent.  
 U5. For some  $S$  and some  $p$ ,  $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$  (Bonjour's 2<sup>nd</sup> Thesis)  
 U6. Coherentism is not true. (U3-U5)

#### 3.2. *The doxastic presumption [DP]*

DP: For all coherence-making properties  $C$  of a belief system, if  $S$  represents her belief system as being  $C$ , then  $S$ 's belief system is approximately  $C$ . (For a list of coherence-making properties, see §2.2.)

- D1. If coherentism is true, then it is possible for  $S$  to recognize that her belief system is coherent. (See definition above.)  
 D2. If it is possible for  $S$  to recognize that her belief system is coherent then the DP is true: if  $S$  represents her belief system as being  $C$ , then  $S$ 's belief system is approximately  $C$ .  
 D3. However, DP is false: it is possible for  $S$  to misrepresent the coherence-making properties of her belief system.  
 D4.  $\therefore$  Coherentism is not true. (D1-D3)

#### 3.3. *Coherence and observation (input objection)*

- I1. The doxastic *assumption* is true iff only a belief can justify a belief.  
 I2. Perceptual beliefs are typically based on how physical objects causally interact with our senses.  
 I3. How physical objects causally interact with our senses is not a belief.  
 I4.  $\therefore$  If the doxastic assumption is true, then perceptual beliefs are typically not justified. (I1-I3)  
 I5. Perceptual beliefs are justified.  
 I6.  $\therefore$  The doxastic assumption is false: in addition to beliefs, other things can also justify a belief. (I4, I5)

##### 3.3.1. *Bonjour's response*

I2 is false: perceptual beliefs justified because they are a species of "cognitively spontaneous beliefs," i.e. beliefs that arise without being inferred but must fit into our belief-systems. They are not justified by how physical objects interact with our senses. More precisely, if  $S$  is perceptually justified in believing that  $p$ , then  $p$  fits into  $S$ 's belief system as follows:

- B1.  $S$  has a cognitively spontaneous belief that  $p$  which is of kind  $K$  (let  $K$ = observational). (Cognitive spontaneity concerns a belief's inferential connections, so this follows from DP)  
 B2. Conditions  $C$  obtain. (lighting, good senses, etc.)  
 B3. Cognitively spontaneous beliefs of kind  $K$  in conditions  $C$  are very likely to be true.  
 B4.  $\therefore$   $S$ 's belief that  $p$  is very likely to be true (B1-B3). [probably]  
 B5.  $\therefore p$ . (B4)

- Note that B1-B5 are supposed to be beliefs in  $S$ 's system.
- B2 and B3 are built into our very concept of empirical justification, it requires that a reasonable variety of our cognitively spontaneous beliefs are reliable= *Observation requirement*

NB: Fogelin rejects B1 because he rejects DP (see §3.2.)

#### 3.4. *The multiple-choice problem (alternative/many systems objection)*

- MC1. If coherentism is true, then two or more conflicting belief systems satisfy the observation requirement.  
 MC2. If two or more conflicting belief systems satisfy the observation requirement, then there will be some  $p$  such that  $p$  is both justified and unjustified.  
 MC3. A proposition is either justified or unjustified, but not both.  
 MC4.  $\therefore$  Coherentism is not true. (MC1-MC3)

### 3.5. Coherence & truth

- T1. A criterion of justification is *truth-conducive*: for all justificatory criteria  $J$ , if  $S$  satisfies  $J$ , then  $S$ 's beliefs are more likely to be true than if  $S$  does not satisfy  $J$  (all else being equal.)
- T2. Coherence is not truth-conducive: a person could have a massively false but highly coherent belief system, while another person could have a mostly true but disjointed (i.e. non-coherent) belief system.
- T3.  $\therefore$  Coherence is not a criterion of justification. (T1, T2)

#### 3.5.1. Bonjour's response: T2 is false.

- B1. That a system of beliefs corresponds to reality best explains why it (a) remains coherent and stable over the long run and (b) continues to satisfy the Observation Requirement.
- B2. If  $p$  best explains  $q$ , then  $p$  is likely.
- B3. A system of beliefs that (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, stability, and length of the run, to correspond closely to an independent reality. (B1, B2)

#### Fogelin's critiques:

- B3 and T2 are consistent: e.g., coherent beliefs systems that are either unstable or (more tellingly) are in the "short run" need not be truth-conducive.
  - Furthermore, how do we distinguish the short- and long-run?
- B1 is unsubstantiated. Why should this be the best explanation of these facts in a manner that doesn't beg the question against the Pyrrhonian?