

Metaphysics // Fall 2024

Handout 7

Induction and relativism: Goodman

GOODMAN AND HUME. In the broadest outline, we can say that, unlike Hume, Goodman takes much more seriously the idea that there *are* good and bad inductive inferences and tries to offer some ways of positively characterising the distinction between them. In the first part of his discussion Goodman argues against some alleged misinterpretations of Hume's argument. We should not seek a global justification of induction. Any such justification would also employ induction (as already observed above). But that does not mean that induction should be arbitrary. Hume himself traced the confidence we have in induction to our 'habits'. And this may point in a right direction. Justification of induction must involve descriptions how induction takes place. That is: inductive practices can justify themselves.

THE PROBLEM OF LAWLIKENESS. One could argue that a justification of induction is possible by inductive means. That is: we give up on proving validity of inductive inference in any acceptable way. But we maintain that such inferences should work where sufficient evidence has been accumulated. Inductive inference, while unjustifiable, are *reliable*.

Example 1 (Copper and electricity). Suppose that in one case 1000 samples of copper were examined and found to conduct electricity (R_1). Suppose that in another case 50 samples of copper were examined and found to conduct electricity (R_2). Then the body of evidence R_1 supports my belief—that the next sample of copper conducts electricity—to a greater extent than R_2 . And that is all that matters.

However, this ignores the question why other hypotheses are not *in the least* confirmed by evidence, and why, in these cases, inductive inferences are not reliable. Thus, while a piece of copper conducting electricity confirms the hypothesis that all pieces of copper conduct electricity, the fact that that piece of copper is owned by Donald Trump does not confirm the hypothesis that all pieces of copper in the world are owned by Trump. The difference between the two hypotheses is not in their logical relation with the respective pieces of evidence, but in that one is a lawlike generalisation, and the other is an accidental one. So we have to attend to the notions of lawlikeness and lawhood. Moreover, it is not as though we have problematic cases on the margins. No, *every* predicate you may think about—that is, every hypothesis—faces the same problems.

GRUE! Now suppose we stick with intuitively lawlike predicates. Take, for instance, 'x is green'. Then even for this predicate there is a problem of using the available evidence to confirm a general law. To this end we devise a new predicate 'grue':

(7-1) x is grue $\leftrightarrow [(x$ is examined before t and x is green) or (x is not examined before t and x is blue)].

Observe the difference with:

(7-2) x is grue $\leftrightarrow [(x$ is green before t) and (x is blue after t)].

Question 2. How significant is the difference in the two formulations of 'grue'?

BLEEN! So the problem is to distinguish the confirmability of 'green' from the confirmability of 'grue'. It may be thought that the problem is in the temporal (or other indexical) relativisation of the predicate. That is, such a predicate will not be admissible into a scientific theory, since we will stipulate that any such theory would contain only purely qualitative predicates. But consider:

(7-3) x is bleen $\leftrightarrow [(x$ is examined before t and x is blue) or (x is not examined before t and x is green)].

(7-4) x is green $\leftrightarrow [(x$ is examined before t and x is grue) or (x is not examined before t and x is bleen)].

We are left with a new riddle of induction. Unlike Hume, we do not doubt that the future will resemble the past. But we are unable to say *in what way* it will resemble the past.

THE PROBLEM OF PROJECTION. We face the following situation:

H_1 : 'All emeralds are green'

H_2 : 'All emeralds are grue'

E : 'An emerald is observed as green'.

Given E , which of the two hypotheses is confirmed? On the face of it, both. Ideally, however, we want to say that H_1 is, but the monster H_2 isn't. In other words, H_1 is projectible, but H_2 is not. Well, how can we say that? 81

As mentioned earlier, in this puzzle we go beyond Hume. We agree that regularities establish habit, and habit is the basis of inductive inference. But we observe that some regularities do and some do *not* establish habit. We also observe that predictions based on some regularities are good, and those based on other are not.

There is another way of putting the problem that is mentioned by Goodman, but not elaborated. What, exactly, is our evidence? I have observed an emerald with a certain colour? Is my evidence E , or is it rather this: 82

E' : 'An emerald is observed as grue'?

For, of course, if my evidence is E , then it might confirm H_1 better than H_2 for the reasons of simplicity, for example. But I don't know how to distinguish between E and E' to begin with (recall that I can't antecedently prefer the predicate 'grue' over 'green', for the reasons of 'bleen' mentioned earlier).

LANGUAGE AND REALITY. Goodman begins by warning us about the dangers of 'linguomorphism', the idea that the world has the same features as our descriptions thereof. This invites a *reductio*. Even if our descriptions are couched in English, the world isn't. A less trivial danger is that even a more respectable feature like simplicity can't be read into the world itself: the world is not simple, even if our descriptions and theories are. 48

But if linguomorphism is wrong, should we embrace 'mysticism' and a form of scepticism. We might say: 49

Our theories *distort* the world. As its objects are filtered through our representations (of them), they and their relations get distorted. How the world is can never be found out.

Goodman claims that this is not the view he wants to defend.

THE GIVEN. To understand how the world is, and in accordance with our empiricist credentials, we may naturally turn to the question how the world is given to us in experience. Goodman mentions three positions: monism, atomism, and pluralism. The details turn out not to matter much, because Goodman complains that the locution 'given as' is meaningless. The world is not given to us in any particular way. *We* interpret the world in some way, whether atomistically, monistically, or what have you. 50

SEEING THE WORLD. The next possibility for discovering how the world is would be to appeal to a camera-like view of the world. But, Goodman complains, there is no special faithfulness to expect from the camera shots. It all very much depends on the camera's position. 51

The other point is that what *we* take as 'faithful' representations of the world would depend on our training and habits. 52

Now this last idea may seem rather trivial. There isn't any *a priori* reason to expect our parochial visual representations to give a completely faithful representation of the world. Various visual illusions much explored in psychology since Descartes and Berkeley would illustrate this *ad nauseam*. But I think that Goodman means to make a general point. There is no on faithful visual representation in principle, since in principle it must be made from some perspective and some (arbitrary) standards of correctness. 52-53

DESCRIBING THE WORLD. Could we hope to get the most faithful description of the world? Well, our ways of describing, as Goodman noted already, are the world's ways of being. They are just a reflection of our standards and conventions. To achieve, in our descriptions, the likeness to the world (to the way the world is) is a 'delusive goal'. 54

CONCLUSION. So there is no way the world is. Not because we don't know or can't know what way it is, but because the original question was meaningless, and the assumption behind it false. There isn't *the* way the world is, only *a* way. Each of our descriptions or pictures may be correct, if it meets *our* standards. Change the standards, and you change the 'truth' of your descriptions or pictures.

So mysticism mentioned earlier is false too, so far as it assumes that we can't know the one, *real* state of the world. If questioned about it, the mystic should fall silent. But we shouldn't: there are many answers, many of them equally good answers.

Remark 3 (Scepticism). Note that Goodman's position is not sceptical, even though it originates in a set of Humean concerns. To be filled in class...

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