

GOODMAN'S GRUESOME RIDDLE

the 30-second philosophy

Nelson Goodman claimed that the inductive rule 'infer that past regularities will be continued in the future' cannot be right, since it leads to conflicting conclusions. To illustrate this he defined a predicate 'is grue' as follows: something is grue at time t if, and only if, it is green and t is before the first moment, of the year 2100, or it is blue and t is that moment or later. Suppose all emeralds so far observed are green. Then they are also grue, because they are green and have been observed before 2100. So, the rule of induction tells us to infer that emeralds after the year 2100 will be green, and also that they will be grue. But after the year 2100, grue emeralds are blue not green! Goodman concluded that the rule of induction must be modified to say that the future will be like the past, but only in certain respects that are 'projectible'. The problem is specifying which predicates are projectible, and which aren't. One idea is that 'grue' is not 'projectible' since it is defined in terms of 'green' and 'blue'. But 'green' and 'blue' are just as easily definable in terms of 'grue' and 'bleen'.

RELATED PHILOSOPHIES

see also
HUME'S PROBLEM OF
INDUCTION
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POPPER'S CONJECTURES
& REFUTATIONS
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3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

NELSON GOODMAN
1906-1998

30-SECOND TEXT

Barry Loewer

On the 25th of the month, the rooster realized that the induction had been wrong all along. He turned grue with fright.

3-SECOND THRASH

The rule 'infer that past regularities will be continued in the future' must be modified to apply only to projectible predicates.

3-MINUTE THOUGHT

Prior to Goodman propounding his riddle, Bertrand Russell had already remarked that reasoning that the future will be like the past can lead one astray. He imagined a chicken who observed the farmer having always in the past selected a chicken other than herself for his dinner. Thus the chicken concluded that in the future the farmer would always select a chicken other than herself for his dinner.

So she's safe?
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Like drunk driving?