INDUCTION AND SEMNIFICATION. HUME'S CRITICS OF USING WORDS

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Abstract: *Anglo-Saxon classical thinking delimits in the area of European thinking, a new paradigm for the interpretation of concepts (words). The new paradigm, based on induction*[1] *as a form of knowledge, reaches new project on the meaning of words, and implicitly the reality they reflect. This project, applied both to epistemology and linguistics, had been completed by analytic philosophy in general, and by R. Carnap, in particular.*

Key words: *Induction, the empirical criterion of meaning, semantic principle*.

Introduction

The traditional or Humean problem of induction, called simply the problem of induction, is whether and why inferences should be acceptable as rational or reasonable from epistemic or cognitive terms. Let's suppose we have a certain property which is an experimental or observational situation and that a number of cases were observed and had the characteristic A and characteristic B. Moreover, let's suppose that circumstances were not specified in these descriptions and have varied to a large extent and also that we do not have information on the frequency of B-s or A-s on nomologic causal connections or between cases A and B. In this case, an inductive illustrative inference would assume that m/n of observed cases of A are cases of B in some cases, and we shall conclude that approximately m/n of all A are B-s. Here, class of A-s should be taken so as to include not only A-s which were observed, however, or future ones, but also possible or hypothetical A-s. An alternative conclusion may refer to the probability that the following A to be seen should be B. So Hume rightly asks whether and why this mode of reasoning is likely to lead us to true sentences about the world. Is there any reason or no reason to believe that the conclusions we reached at in this way are probably true - or even that their chances of truth are significantly greater? Hume's answer is completely negative and sceptical also: inductive inferences are rationally based, but are the result of an essentially rational process, of a custom or of a habit. Hume advocates the causes of induction to produce a convincing argument that would lead an inductive premise to an appropriate conclusion and provides a highly influential argument in the form of a dilemma (sometimes called "Hume's fork") to show that such reasoning can not exist. Such reasoning, Hume arguments should be either *a priori*

[1] Referring to the problem of induction K.R. Popper considered that "the principle of empiricism (which argues that in science only observation and experiment can decide on the acceptance or rejection of scientific statements, including laws and theories) can be fully preserved, since the fate of a theory, its acceptance or rejection, is determined by observation and experiment, based on test results. As long as a theory resists the toughest tests we can imagine, it is accepted. If not, it is rejected." (POPPER, 2000: 111-112).

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demonstrative reasoning on the relations between ideas, or an experimental (empirical) reasoning on matters of fact or existence. The reasoning can not be first type, since all reasoning are based on demonstration avoiding contradiction and is not contradictory to say that "nature can change the course", that an order observed in the past would not continue in the future. But it can not be any of the second type, because any empirical argument would rely on success that the reasoning we were looking was in the experience over the past. But what we questioned are the merits of generalising from past experience - so any call to an empirical argument would make us commit a "petitio principii." So, Hume concludes, there can be no argument of the type we sought.

Induction and Significance

All subsequent answers given to the problem of induction supports the main conclusion of Hume's argument: inductive inferences can not be justified for the purpose of showing that these inferences are likely to have true conclusions if the premises are true, and ended up looking (and found) another type of foundation of induction. These responses are divided into two broad categories: first - the attempt on pragmatic founding of induction, position adopted by logical empiricism, in general, and by Hans Reichenbach, in particular, on the other hand, and the attempt that induction is founded on common language, a position taken by Peter Frederick Strawson, in particular. Other thinkers will try to dismiss Hume's dilemma arguing that, despite appearances, induction can be justified inductively without circularity, whether is possible, however, a foundation *a priori* of induction.

This latter idea seems the most natural of all: it only deals with inductive reasoning and valid and independent reasoning as conclusion about which can be considered reasonably that result, although perhaps only likely in the premises. This is also embraced by B. Russell: "The question you need to discuss is whether there is any reason to believe in what is called the *uniformity of nature*. The belief in the uniformity of nature is the belief that everything that happened or will happen is an instance of a general law that has no exceptions." (RUSSELL, 2004: 55) But the uniformity of the world is always an assumption, the fruit of a possible, inductive reasoning. And Russell saw in argumentation danger "ad infinitum", and then writes: "The principle on which we review could be called *the principle of induction*, and its two parts can be stated as follows:

a) when it was observed that a certain type of work is associated with another type B and was never seen something separate from B, with higher number of cases were associated A and B, the greater is the probability that they should be associated in a new case when we know that one of them is present;

b) at the same circumstances, a sufficient number of cases of association will make the probability of a new association to approach certainty without limitation." (*Ibidem*: 58)

But Russell's inductive principle can not be demonstrated by an appeal to experience. Experience may confirm this principle with reference to the cases already reviewed, but when we speak about unexamined cases only he can justify any inference from what was looked to what was not examined. Our entire behaviour is based on associations that we have established in the past and we consider probable in the future, this probability depends on the inductive principle. "In conclusion, Russell writes that, based on experience, tells us something about what is not directly based on a belief that experience can neither confirm nor deny, and yet one which, at least in terms of more

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concrete explanations seems as firmly rooted in us as many other facts of experience." (RUSSELL, *op. cit.*: 60)

Against this *a priori* approach of induction are many arguments. First Hume showed that induction of an a priori defence should involve "turning induction into deduction" and show that any inductive conclusion follows deductively from the premises, so that would be a formal contradiction to accept the premises and deny the conclusion.

Furthermore, Popper has to question induction in Hume's dissent, that was close to "was always incorrect formulated what might be called philosophical tradition." (POPPER, *op. cit.*: 112) That inductive inference means a shift from situations commonly seen in cases observed is still safe, but that such an inference is, in terms of time, predictive or retrospective, is of relatively minor importance. Although he criticised Hume's scepticism and irrationalism (this had done also B. Russell), Popper agreed with the Scottish thinker, believing that "there is simply a logical entity of type of inductive inference, and all so-called inductive inferences are logically invalid." (*Ibidem*: 113)

Rejecting the idea of causality, Hume could not have a different attitude toward inductive inference. Like Russell, Hume believes that reason (even aided by experience) can not lead us to an observed correlation between two things of the same way, one located in the future. If they do so, it should be based on the assumption "that all future cases will resemble past cases" or that always "the course of nature is continuous" or that the world is determined by the principle of uniformity. All inferences from past experiences or present to a question of fact which was not observed are based on this principle. But reason alone can not guarantee in any way this principle. If the future resembles the past, is a matter of fact, contingent. The experience is needed to ensure this principle, but it can not do it alone, as this principle is partly due to future and past experience alone can not tell us but how things were before. But not reasoning, even combined with past experience, can be one that leads us think of the future which will resemble the past. If it were, this would happen with an inference from past experience on the principle that the future will resemble the past. And, as before, any such inference should be based on the assumption that the future will resemble the past. But this obviously means that we are moving in circle and that we see true that thing which is questionable.

In conclusion, we may say that "there is nothing in any object, considered in it, which can give us basis to conclude beyond it." (HUME, 1987: 108)

Although he does not exhibit a systematic theory of meaning, however, based on the distinction between impressions and ideas, and defining the latter ones as accurate representations or copies of the first, Hume sets out an empirical criterion of the significance of being used as the main instrument in analysis of concepts (of words in the acceptance of R. Carnap).

Hume believes at the outset that there are terms or words with meaning and terms or words without meaning. Those terms that express ideas have meanings and those who did not express ideas have no meaning. The idea expressed by a term is its significance. R. Carnap had to accept this view when he was trying to prove that all metaphysical sentences are meaningless: "when a word (in a made up language) has a meaning, it is customary to say that it would designate a concept, if we take into account only the appearance that a word has a meaning while in fact he has none, then we talk about an apparent concept (W. Scheinbegriff)." (CARNAP, 2001: 44) We recognize here Locke's principle of semantics: ideas are meanings of words and have

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meaning only those words that express ideas. Berkeley criticized this principle, arguing that there are words that have meaning even if they do not express ideas and gave as example sentences that express emotional, volitional or mandatory states. Carnap would consider that there are several ways for a word, term, concept to go as one with any meaning as long as it has not "either by error (meaningless words have been considered as such n.n.) either they have meaning, but they are assembled opposed to syntax so they can not give a meaningful sentence." (*Ibidem*: 47)

For Hume the answer to how can we know if a term expresses an idea or not comes from the theory of impressions and ideas. Since every idea is a copy of impression, then those ideas which can be produced are true (or given in experience), impressions from which they derive are fictitious and those for which such impressions can not be produced. In other words, if the idea may be considered as appropriate impression, then this idea is a genuine one and the term it produced is one word that symbolizes the significance. Otherwise the idea is fictional and the term symbolizes the significance. On Hume the empirical criterion has a double meaning background, of the word (concept) in the idea and the idea in sight. Empirical criterion of meaning lies in the reduction of immediate giving: the impression.

"When you cherish any doubt, Hume writes, that any philosophical term is used without any meaning or idea (...), we must investigate the resulting impression of the alleged idea. And if it is impossible to assign any, this will serve as confirmation of our suspicions." (HUME, *op. cit.*: 108) The significance of this criterion would be, in Hume's opinion, in the fact that impressions, unlike ideas, are always precisely defined, clear and distinct and therefore could not be a source of error.

The same treatment applies to complex ideas, reducible to simple ideas, copies of some impressions. Therefore, if a term which is attributed to a complex idea, Hume says, seems ambiguous, we have only to break that idea in simple component ideas and then apply the criterion of empirical significance. But beyond these considerations, Hume shows that not always analysis and moving from concept to ideas and from ideas to impressions is so simple. It is possible that an impression may not be produced for the idea attributed to a term, and still this term should not be meaningless because it expresses another idea that may be given in experience, an impression which it derives, but the difficulty lies precisely in this analysis. It is the case of appropriate terms as *necessary connection, personal identity* or *self*.

The issues concerning the meaning of words and concepts determined to a certain extent the whole British empiricism, getting systematic forms in Locke's philosophy[1], but especially that of Berkeley's.

[1] Referring to this, Hume writes: "deceived in this matter of scholars who, using undefined terms, have stretched their disputes to exhausting proportions." (Hume, *op. cit.*: 104)

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Conclusions

Hume is clearly original by spelling out an empirical criterion of meaning as a necessary instrument of reflection on the meaning of words, in an attempt to remove the errors of knowledge from erroneous use of terms and concepts. At limit, the analysis of this criterion may be the true dimension of Hume's philosophy as long as it is based on the whole antimetaphysical system. As in Carnap later, the words have meaning only if they express ideas, and this is true only if they can be reduced to accurate impressions. Moreover, words can not receive objective meaning given that impressions are not intended as representations of external things. In other words, the meaning of a word lies in the type of experience covered. So the distinction between simple ideas and complex ideas should be interpreted as distinguishing between words which get meaning directly from experiment and words that are defined on them, gaining meaning under this definition.

R. Carnap should have completed Hume's antimetaphysical effort by showing that metaphysics is meaningless, it is just a life experience, and how long it is based on pseudosentences consisted of meaningless metaphysical terms. For Carnap terms as *Principle, God, Idea, Absolute, Work itself,* etc. are totally meaningless as much as is *babic*, because they are unable to meet necessary and sufficient condition for a term to have meaning: "a) experimental evidence of *a* (sign-term n.n.) are known, 2) it shall be the protocol statements *S (a)* may be inferred, 3) are determined truth conditions for *S (a),* 4) verification process *S (a)* is known." (CARNAP, *op. cit*.: 50)

In conclusion, we can say that the value for the empirical criterion of significance proposed by Hume lies precisely in the fact that there are terms of direct reference on the basis of experiment and terms defined on their basis, standing at the beginnings of analytic philosophy, of modern realism, whether we only refer to the formal analysis in the science of language.

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