

Rationality Postulates for Induction

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Abstract. I study the process of inductive hypothesis formation from two perspectives: finding general rules that explain given specific evidence, and finding general rules that are confirmed by the evidence. Both forms of hypothesis formation are axiomatised on the metalevel of consequence relations, which provides us with a set of rationality postulates for various forms of induction.

1. Introduction

In this paper I develop a rationality theory of inductive reasoning, applying the methodology of Kraus, Lehmann & Magidor (1990) to views on philosophy of science developed by Peirce and Hempel. This introductory section sketches the motivation for this paper, defines the main concepts and notation, and provides an overview.

1.1 Motivation

Consider a reasoning agent R that, upon observing several black crows, conjectures that all crows are black. Such an agent is said to reason *inductively*: from specific observations about members of a class it tentatively draws general conclusions about the whole class. Clearly, not any general conclusion will do: for instance, R couldn't conclude that all crows are white. Thus, we may draw a distinction between rational and irrational behaviour of R . This paper studies limits of rational behaviour of inductive reasoning agents.

In the ideal case, rationality simply prescribes what conclusions are allowed from what premisses, as in the case of formal deductive reasoning, where rationality is defined by a fixed notion of (deductive) validity. In the general case, however, rationality draws a distinction between reasoning behaviours that is more complex than distinguishing between valid and invalid arguments. For instance, inductive rationality as studied in this paper does not prescribe the number of black crows one must have observed before adopting the hypothesis 'all crows are black', but it does prescribe that once one adopts this hypothesis, observation of yet another black crow cannot be a reason to reject it. This establishes a rationality principle of the form 'if a reasoning agent accepts this inductive argument, it should also accept that inductive argument'. Most of the rationality principles we will consider in this paper are of this form. Other possible forms we will consider are 'if a reasoning agent accepts this inductive

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Rationality Of Induction

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