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Contextualist References in Nelson Goodman’s Solution to the “New Riddle of Induction”\(^1\)

Abstract
This paper pursues two aims. The first aim is to appraise Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction” by relating it to different theories of epistemic justification. The second aim is to look at the conclusions that can be drawn from Michael Williams’ claim that Goodman’s account is best interpreted as a kind of contextualism. Especially, this claim can be seen as a hint to Williams’ understanding of his own contextualist theory. It sheds light on the ranking of those elements in his theory that play an important role in Goodman’s account.

Introduction
In his book *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, Nelson Goodman addresses David Hume’s well known Problem of Induction. Unlike many other contributors to the debate, Goodman takes it that the problem has been solved (or dissolved). By introducing his famous predicate “grue”, he poses the “new riddle of induction” and proposes a surprising solution to it.

This solution will be surveyed in the following passages. For this the connection between Hume’s Problem of Induction and Goodman’s “new riddle of induction” plays an important role. Following an idea of Michael Williams’, this connection will be investigated in the light of an analogy between approaches to the justification of inductive inferences and theories of epistemic justification. A special focus will be laid on Williams’ thesis that Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction” can be interpreted as an application of a (namely Williams’ own) contextualist theory of justification.

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second aim is to look at the conclusions that can be drawn from Williams’ claim that Goodman’s account is best interpreted as a kind of contextualism. Especially, this claim can be seen as a hint to Williams’ understanding of his own contextualist theory. It sheds light on the ranking of those elements in his theory that play an important role in Goodman’s account.

1. The old problem of Induction

The Problem of Induction is often called Hume’s Problem because David Hume raises and investigates it in his books A Treatise of Human Nature and An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. It is a problem concerning the justification of inductive inferences.

Inductive inferences are generalizing inferences that take us from a finite set of observations to a general statement. They play an important role in everyday life as well as in science: When I sit down on a chair, I do not expect the chair to dissolve into thin air. This is because I have sat down a lot of times in my life and nothing as strange as this ever happened to me. Scientists infer general laws from individual observations: A general law of falling bodies can only be inferred from a finite set of observations of bodies that are released near the surface of the Earth (Williams 2001, 201).

Hume raises the question of the justificatory status of such inferences. At first he notices that we cannot know *a priori* that future or unobserved cases resemble the observed cases. It is in principle not contradictory to conceive a change in the course of Nature to the effect that future cases

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2 At least, this is the way induction is understood today. Hume seems to think of inductive inferences as inferences from past experience to future experience. As Michael Williams puts it, Hume is more interested in prediction than in generalization.

The Problem of Induction as raised by Hume can be transferred to today’s understanding of induction easily, as is shown in n. 3. Therefore I will disregard for the differences of the two understandings of induction in the following (cf. Williams 2001, 204ff).

3 This characterization of the problem, stated in temporal terms by Hume, has to be generalized in the face of today’s characterization of inductive inferences: The fundamental problem is not that the course of Nature might change to the effect that especially *future* cases will not resemble the observed cases. Rather, the question is how we know that the observed cases are a representative part of the world *at all* (and not only with regard to different *periods of time*). “[T]he problem of prediction from past to future cases is but a narrower version of the problem of projecting from any set of cases to others” (FFF, 83; cf. Williams 2001, 205).
will not turn out to be the way we expect them to be on the basis of an inductive inference: The thought that a heavy stone released near the surface of the Earth will not fall down does not amount to a logical contradiction.

So we have to look for another kind of justification for inductive inferences. A natural suggestion is that we rely on a principle to the effect that the future resembles the past, or rather future unobserved cases resemble the past observed ones. This principle would allow us to infer from a finite set of observations to a general statement. But how can we justify this principle of uniformity in Nature itself? As we have already seen, the thought that the future does not resemble the past does not amount to a contradiction. So there seems to be no possibility of justifying the principle a priori. But an a posteriori justification seems to be ruled out as well: The principle is itself a general statement that could be justified empirically only by an inductive inference. But such an inductive inference, as we have seen above, would have to rely on the principle of uniformity in Nature. So there is no non-circular way of justifying the Uniformity Principle empirically (Hume 1975, 37f).

Hume’s negative result is that there is no rational defence of the validity of inductive inferences. Still it cannot be denied that we rely on inductive inferences frequently and that we are convinced of their validity. But what brings us to this unshakable conviction? Hume’s answer is that it is from sheer force of habit that we assume future cases to resemble past ones (Hume 1975, 43). So the reason why we rely on inductive inferences is not that we have a rational insight into their validity but that it is a principle of human nature that we expect future cases to resemble past ones.

At first sight this answer does not seem to be a solution to the Problem of Induction. It rather sounds like a sceptical conclusion: While Hume sheds light on the source of inductive reasoning, his answer does not seem to address the question of the legitimacy of inductive inferences.

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4 Strictly speaking this principle has to be broadened out to cover an inference to a general statement. See n. 3.

5 “[I]t is not reasoning which engages us to suppose the past resembling the future [...]. This is the proposition which I intended to enforce in the present section” (Hume 1975, 39).
2. Goodman’s (dis)solution of Hume’s Problem

In his book *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, Nelson Goodman tells us that he takes the Problem of Induction to have been solved or rather dissolved. On Goodman’s view, the basic idea for the answer to the problem can already be found in the writings of Hume.6

Goodman draws attention to the question of what we can expect from a justification of inductive reasoning. In approaching this issue, he first takes a look at how we justify deductive reasoning (*FFF*, 63).

So how do we justify a deductive inference? According to Goodman, we do this by showing that it conforms to the general rules of deductive inference. But how are the rules of deductive inference themselves to be justified? Goodman explicitly rejects the idea that the rules of deductive inference follow from self-evident axioms or are grounded in the nature of the human mind.7 His, at first sight, somewhat surprising answer is that the principles of deductive inference are justified by their conformity with accepted deductive practice.

As Goodman readily concedes, this line of argument seems to be hopelessly circular: Deductive inferences are justified by their conformity to valid rules of deductive inference, while these rules of inference, in turn, are justified by their conformity to valid deductive inferences. According to Goodman, however, this circle is not vicious: The rules of inference on the one hand and the inferences on the other hand are justified by the agreement that is achieved by making mutual adjustments between them.8

On Goodman’s view, this model of justification can be transferred to the case of inductive reasoning: Accepted inductive inferences and general

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6 “What is commonly thought of as the Problem of Induction has been solved, or dissolved [...]” (*FFF*, 59). “I think Hume grasped the central question and considered his answer to be passably effective. And I think his answer is reasonable and relevant, even if it is not entirely satisfactory” (*FFF*, 61).

7 “Here again we encounter philosophers who insist that these rules follow from some self-evident axiom, and others who try to show that the rules are grounded in the very nature of the human mind. I think the answer lies much nearer the surface” (*FFF*, 63).

8 “The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences; and in the agreement achieved lies the only justification needed for either” (*FFF*, 64). For an illuminating illustration of this process of making mutual adjustments, see (Haack 1978, 15f).
rules of inductive inference are justified by the agreement that is achieved through making mutual adjustments between them. Inferences and rules support one another. The Problem of Induction, Goodman tells us, is not a problem of demonstrating that inductive inferences are valid but of defining the difference between valid and invalid inductive inferences.

Does Goodman really offer a satisfactory solution to the Problem of Induction? To answer this question, we will have to take a further look at the kind of justification Goodman proposes for deductive and inductive inference.

3. Excursus: Theories of epistemic justification

Obviously, Goodman’s account of justification for inductive and deductive inference resembles coherence theories of justification. It is reasonable to assume that a comparison with theories of this kind will shed light on Goodman’s account.

Coherence theories of justification can be seen in relation to the problem of scepticism. The most famous kind of scepticism is scepticism about knowledge of the external world, which is also called Cartesian Scepticism, because its first clear formulation can be found in the writings of René Descartes. Descartes points out that all our sense impressions are compatible with the hypothesis that we are only dreaming and that the external world is completely different from what we normally expect it to be on the basis of our sense impressions. To put it generally, the sceptical line of argument goes like this: A (sometimes bizarre) possibility is pointed out that is compatible with all our evidence but that is completely different from what we expect to be the actual state of our world. In the face of such a sceptical scenario we are obliged to hold that all our beliefs about the external world are unjustified.

The classical reaction to this problem is the attempt to argue for a positive theory of knowledge that is able to explain how knowledge is possible. Historically, foundationalism is the standard choice for such a constructive project.

The common idea behind all versions of foundationalist theories of justification is to ground our empirical beliefs on a foundation. The foundation is supposed to consist of so-called basic beliefs that have a certain degree of noninferential justification, i.e. justification that does not
derive from any further beliefs. In early foundationalist theories it was even demanded that these basic beliefs have only self-evident truths as their contents or be in some way beyond rational doubt. The justification of all other empirical beliefs is supposed to derive directly or indirectly from this set of epistemically privileged basic beliefs.

There are a lot of problems for foundationalist accounts especially in connection with Cartesian Scepticism. The main problem seems to be choosing the scope of the basis: On the one hand, it has to be rich enough to include basic beliefs that can serve as an inferential basis for all our empirical beliefs, on the other hand, all the basic beliefs have to be good candidates for beliefs that have a certain degree of intrinsic justification. One of the classical accounts is to suggest that beliefs about our immediate sense impressions are beyond reasonable doubt and so can be classified as basic beliefs. But the Cartesian dream hypotheses just shows that our beliefs about the external world are underdetermined by our beliefs about our immediate sense impressions.

Coherence theories of justification are an alternative to foundationalism and are often advocated by philosophers exactly because they hold that the problems faced by foundationalism are unsolvable. The basic idea is that a system of beliefs is holistically justified by inferential relations between the beliefs. Intuitively, coherence is a measure of how good a system of beliefs “hangs together” (BonJour 1985, 93). This “hanging together” of the beliefs is ensured by various inferential and explanatory relations. The crucial point is that the involved relations are not one-way relations that correspond to an objective epistemic priority of certain beliefs over others, as is advocated by foundationalists. Rather, coherentists argue, these relations are reciprocal relations of mutual support.

Coherence theories too are faced with serious problems. I will focus here on one objection against coherence theories that has a special significance for the subject of this paper. This is the so-called alternative coherent systems objection: According to coherence theories as described above a system of beliefs is justified solely by its internal coherence. But no matter how the concept of coherence is analysed in detail, it will always be possible to construct competitive systems of beliefs that are equally

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9 Cf. (BonJour 1985, 95ff), and in greater detail (Barthelborth 1996, 148ff, 172ff).
10 A clear structured summary of various objections against coherence theories of justification is offered by (BonJour 1999, 127ff).
coherent. So on a coherence theory we have no more reason to think that our actual beliefs are true than to think that the beliefs of another, equally coherent system are true (BonJour 1985, 107).

4. The relation between the Problem of Induction and Cartesian Scepticism

As Michael Williams remarks, the Problem of Induction is analogous to Cartesian Scepticism in an interesting way: Both are underdetermination problems (Williams 2001, 211). As we have seen above, the Cartesian dream hypotheses shows that our attempt to justify our beliefs about the external world by showing that they are inferable from immediate knowledge about our own sense impressions is doomed to fail: In view of the fact that it is possible that we are only dreaming and that the external world is completely different from what we expect it to be on the basis of our sense impressions, we have to realize that beliefs about the external world are underdetermined by our beliefs about our immediate sense impressions. Analogously, Hume’s considerations show that beliefs about future events are underdetermined by past observations: It is not contradictory to think that future cases will be completely different from what we expect them to be on the basis of an inductive inference.

The underdetermination problem raised by the Cartesian dream hypotheses is strongly connected with a foundationalist structure of justification. It arises from the attempt to infer our beliefs about the external world from our beliefs about our sense impressions. Analogously, it can be said that the attempts to justify inductive inference considered and rejected by Hume have a foundationalist structure. The basis can be said to consist of beliefs about past events; beliefs about future events are to be justified by being inferred from them.

As we have seen above, the problems of foundationalism have led to the consideration of giving up the idea of a foundationalist structure of justification and of developing a coherence theory instead. Goodman seems to have something similar in mind in connection with the Problem of Induction. Agreeing with Hume, he holds that it is impossible to justify inductive inferences in a foundationalist way. That is why he proposes justifying the rules of inductive inference and the accepted inductive
inferences by making mutual adjustments between them to the effect that they support each other. Obviously, this thought is coherentist in spirit.

It seems that, by making this move, Goodman incurs the typical problems faced by coherence theories. In particular, the alternative coherent systems objection can be raised against Goodman’s account: It seems to be very easy to construct alternative systems consisting of well adjusted inference rules and inferences that are just as coherent as our accepted deductive and inductive inferences and inference rules.

To see how this objection can be dealt with within the framework of Goodman’s account, we turn now to the famous “new riddle of induction”.

5. The “new riddle of induction”

As indicated above, Goodman’s way of dealing with the Problem of Induction is connected with a reassessment of the problem:

The problem of induction is not a problem of demonstration but a problem of defining the difference between valid and invalid inferences (FFF, 65).

On Goodman’s view, the debate concerning the Problem of Induction in the wake of Hume has been misguided. While most of the contributors to the debate tried to demonstrate that inductive inferences are valid, Goodman thinks that this is not necessary. Instead of trying to demonstrate that inductive inferences are valid, Goodman analyses the difference between valid and invalid inferences.11

As we have seen in the last section, this means that Goodman rejects attempts at justifying inductive inferences in a foundationalist way. Instead, he puts forward the coherentist idea of making mutual adjustments

11 With this in mind it can be said that Goodman dissolves the problem of the justification of inductive inference: “We no longer demand an explanation for guarantees that we do not have, or seek keys to knowledge that we cannot obtain” (FFF, 64).

On Goodman’s view, Hume has already recognized that the more relevant question is the question of the distinction between valid and invalid inferences: “And we owe belated apologies to Hume. For in dealing with the question how normally accepted inductive judgments are made, he was in fact dealing with the question of inductive validity. The validity of a prediction consisted for him in its arising from habit, and thus in its exemplifying some past regularity” (FFF, 64f).

It has to be said, though, that this reading of Hume probably deviates from what can be said to be the standard interpretation.
between accepted inductive inferences and the rules of inductive inference. A successful model is the case of deductive inference: There are familiar and highly developed laws of logic that are in agreement with our accepted deductive inferences (FFF, 65).

But inductive inference is a much more problematic case. As Goodman’s famous “new riddle of induction” illustrates, there can be no purely syntactic rule that defines the difference between valid and invalid inductive inferences. To show us this, Goodman defines a predicate “grue”:

[T]he predicate ‘grue’ [...] applies to all things examined before t just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue (FFF, 74).

Let us now have a look at an example of an inductive inference that we normally take to be valid: Suppose that all emeralds examined before a certain time t are green. We assume, at least if we have tested enough cases, that this supports the hypotheses \( H_1 \) that all emeralds are green.\(^{12} \)

According to the definition of the predicate “grue”, all emeralds that have been examined before t and are green are grue as well. So it seems that the observations made up to the time t also support the hypotheses \( H_2 \) that all emeralds are grue. But the predictions that can be inferred from \( H_1 \) and \( H_2 \) contradict each other: According to \( H_1 \) all emeralds found after t will be green. According to \( H_2 \) they will be grue and therefore blue.

This example illustrates that there are hypotheses we do not assume to be confirmable: While we think that the hypothesis that all emeralds are green is confirmed by positive instances, we evidently do not think that the same holds for the hypothesis that all emeralds are grue. The “new riddle of induction” is the question what distinguishes hypotheses that are confirmable from those that are not (FFF, 80f).

To answer this question, Goodman tells us, we have to take into account the *entrenchment* of the predicates contained in the hypotheses. The entrenchment of a predicate results from the repeated actual projection of it. A predicate is more entrenched than another predicate if it was projected, i.e. used in inductive inferences, more often (FFF, 94). The predicate “green”, having been projected so many times, is obviously much

\(^{12}\) As indicated by Hume, the observations do not *guarantee* the hypotheses to be true. Nevertheless we normally assume that certain hypotheses are *confirmed* by positive instances. Goodman’s task is to define the difference between inductive inferences of this kind and inductive inferences that we take to be obviously invalid.
more entrenched than the predicate “grue” that we only know since Goodman invented it. To put it in a nutshell, Goodman’s solution of the “new riddle of induction” is that the hypothesis $H_1$ overrides the conflicting hypothesis $H_2$ because the predicate “green” contained in it is more deeply entrenched than the predicate “grue” that is contained in $H_2$ (FFF, 101). So on this account $H_2$ is not confirmed by positive instances because there is a hypothesis $H_1$ disagreeing with $H_2$ about future cases and containing a predicate that is more deeply entrenched.

It is a remarkable feature of this solution that it reverses our common sense picture of the connection between the actual projection of predicates and their projectibility (cf. Ernst 2005, 102). We in general assume that we got into the habit of projecting predicates like “green” just because we judge them to be projectible. On Goodman’s view, it is just the other way round:

[...] I submit that the judgment of projectibility has derived from the habitual projection, rather than the habitual projection from the judgment of projectibility. The reason why only the right predicates happen so luckily to have become well entrenched is just that the well entrenched predicates have thereby become the right ones (FFF, 98).

6. Interim conclusion

Let us take a look at the results up to now: Following Hume, Goodman holds that it is impossible to demonstrate the validity of inductive inferences. Unlike many other contributors to the debate, however, Goodman does not think that this is a problematic result. Instead of attempting to justify inductive inference in a foundationalist way, he puts forward the idea of making mutual adjustments between accepted inductive inferences and the rules of inductive inference. As indicated in section 4, this coherentist idea gives rise to the alternative coherent systems objection: If accepted inferences and rules of inductive inference were justified solely by relations of mutual support, we could construct indefinitely many systems consisting of well adjusted inferences and rules of inference that were justified to the same degree.

In the light of Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction”, however, we can now see how this objection can be dealt with: Valid inferences are not only justified by being part of a coherent system of
inferences and inference rules. In addition to this, they have to meet the requirement of being accepted by us in practice. This kind of entrenchment makes the difference between a constructed and an accepted system of mutually adjusted inferences and inference rules.

In connection with the attempt to compare Goodman’s account with theories of epistemic justification, we can now raise the question whether Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction” is really genuinely coherentist. As indicated in the beginning, Michael Williams holds that Goodman’s solution is rather to be interpreted as an application of a contextualist theory of justification (Williams 2001, 216). To be able to investigate this thesis, we first have to take a look at Williams’ contextualist theory of justification.

7. Excursus: Contextualism

In the face of the problems connected with foundationalist and coherentist attempts to respond to the challenge of scepticism, some epistemologists look for other ways of facing the sceptic. Michael Williams, for instance, puts forward an indirect or diagnostic approach to scepticism, the aim being to uncover the epistemological presuppositions of the sceptical arguments. His main thesis is that the sceptical arguments presuppose theoretical ideas that are not as intuitive or natural as they appear. So the aim of his theoretical diagnosis is not to refute scepticism once and for all, but to shift the burden of argument. If it can be shown that the sceptic needs to base his arguments on highly theoretical presuppositions that are not as simple and intuitive as they appear, the sceptic has to come up with arguments supporting them (Williams 1996, xvii).

According to Williams, the decisive theoretical presupposition of the sceptical arguments is the thesis that our beliefs have an intrinsic epistemological status, i.e. that they “arrange themselves into broad, theoretically coherent classes according to certain natural relations of epistemological priority” (Williams 1996, 116).14

13 By intuitive or natural ideas Williams means ideas that can be understood “[...]
without prior indoctrination in contentious theoretical ideas [...]” (Williams 1996, xv) and that “[...] almost any reflective person can understand and be moved by” (Williams 2001, 58).

14 To show that the sceptic is committed to this thesis is one of the main goals in (Williams 1996).
In order to shift the burden of argument to the sceptic, Williams develops a contextualist theory of justification based on the thesis that there are no objective relations of epistemic priority between beliefs or classes of beliefs.\(^{15}\) This complete negation of objective relations of epistemic priority leads to the conclusion that the epistemological status of a proposition is not only dependent on contextual factors, but that independently of all contextual influences a proposition has no epistemic status at all (Williams 1996, 119). A context is generated by a set of legitimate presuppositions that are not currently under scrutiny. As Williams emphasizes with reference to Wittgenstein, the question “What has to be tested by what?” can only be answered against the setting of a context (Williams 1996, 118). Wittgenstein writes in *On Certainty*:

> If a blind man were to ask me “Have you got two hands?” I should not make sure by looking. If I were to have any doubt of it, then I don’t know why I should trust my eyes. For why shouldn’t I test my eyes by looking to find out whether I see my two hands? What is to be tested by what? (Who decides what stands fast?)
> (Wittgenstein 1969, 125)

All in all, these considerations result in a contextualist theory of justification according to which the standards of knowledge attribution are not objective, but are dependent on contextually variable factors. Besides other factors listed by Williams, especially the so-called *intelligibility or semantic constraints* are a source of entitlements to contextual presuppositions: Unless we assume that most of our beliefs are true, Williams points out, we cannot make sense of our beliefs and are not in a position to raise questions at all:

> At some point mistakes shade of into unintelligibility. Someone who cannot do the simplest calculations, or perform the simplest counting operations, is not making arithmetical mistakes: he does not understand numbers (Williams 2001, 160).

In foundationalist theories we often encounter this thesis as the claim that we have a priviledged access to our immediate sense impressions and that beliefs concerning our sense impressions are therefore epistemically prior to beliefs about the external world. Coherentists, although emphasizing that there are no objective relations of epistemic priority between the beliefs of our belief system, hold that the justification of individual beliefs depends on the coherence of the whole system of beliefs which is genuinely prior. So even coherentists do not dismiss the idea of epistemic priority completely (cf. BonJour 1985, 241, n. 20). \(^{15}\) While his arguments against the sceptic are spelled out in detail in (1996), Williams develops his own account in particular in (2001).
According to Williams, this example illustrates that although individual beliefs can be legitimately challenged and then have to be defended or to be given up, we always have to assume that most of them are true.

So Williams’ contextualist account gives rise to a picture of justification according to which we can presuppose a lot of beliefs without having gone through a prior process of justification: Making such presuppositions is not epistemically irresponsible, it is also not just a practical limitation but it is a condition on which questions concerning epistemic justification make sense at all.

A highly interesting feature of this contextualist account is that both foundationalist and coherentist ideas can be connected with it. On the one hand beliefs can be justified by being inferred from beliefs that are contextually basic. Those contextually basic beliefs are not basic in a substantially foundationalist sense, i.e. they do not have a positive epistemic status just because of their content. Rather, in every context there are beliefs that are exempted from doubt and can be used as premisses in justifying arguments for other beliefs while they are in need of justification themselves in other contexts. On the other hand, contexts, since they involve a lot of contextually basic beliefs, can be assessed by coherentist standards. Roughly speaking, this can be taken as the idea that a context is a better basis for justification the more the beliefs contained by it are connected by inferential relations.

This combination of foundationalist and coherentist features takes us back to Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction”.

8. A (Goodman’s?) contextualist solution to the “new riddle of induction”

As we have seen, contexts are characterized by sets of presuppositions that are not currently under scrutiny because they enjoy a positive default status. Williams emphasizes that contextually basic beliefs concern matters of general as well as particular fact. In particular, a lot of presuppositions concerning the projectibility of predicates and the confirmability of hypotheses are implicit in our inductive practice (Williams 2001, 211).

16 At least sometimes Williams seems to point to such a possibility: “A contextualist account of justification may be, so to say, locally holistic, in that a context of justification always involves a significant array of beliefs” (Williams 1996, 287).
There seem to be good reasons to count these presuppositions as contextually basic beliefs, many of which have to be (and are) presupposed to make sense of questions concerning justification at all.

According to Williams, Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction” suggests a contextualist reading along these lines. At first sight Goodman’s idea of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences seems to hint at a genuinely coherentist account. His “new riddle of induction” shows that inductive logic can never be purely formal. Finally, Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle” is based on the idea that the process of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences is, as Williams puts it, “constrained by prior views about how the world can usefully be described: in effect, by general views about the way the world works” (Williams 2001, 216).

As we now can see, foundationalist as well as coherentist ideas play an important role in this account: On the one hand the assumptions concerning the projectibility of predicates that are implicit in our record of past projections are part of the set of contextual basic beliefs we have to presuppose to be able to make sense of questions concerning the validity of inductive inferences. On the other hand there is the demand for a reflective equilibrium between rules and accepted inferences.

9. Concluding remarks

As we have seen, Goodman’s solution to the “new riddle of induction” can indeed be interpreted as an application of a contextualist theory of justification.

Following Hume, Goodman holds that it is impossible to justify inductive inferences in a foundationalist way. Instead, he puts forward the coherentist idea of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences. As Goodman himself shows by introducing his famous predicate “grue”, this idea of a reflective equilibrium is not sufficient for a definition of the difference between valid and invalid inferences. To approach such a definition, Goodman adds a pragmatic component to his account: The distinction between valid and invalid inferences has to be made against the setting of our previous inductive practice. This

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17 “It seems to me that this contextualist outlook is reinforced by Goodman’s arguments” (Williams 2001, 216).
combination of a coherentist and a pragmatic component can be interpreted as an application of a contextualist theory of justification to the Problem of Induction.

Because Williams himself holds that Goodman’s account is contextualist, we can also draw conclusions concerning Williams’ understanding of his own contextualist theory. Firstly, we can now see that the semantic constraints introduced as context factors by Williams give his account a strong pragmatic touch: If Williams wants to solve the “new riddle of induction” in Goodman’s way, the semantic constraints of contexts must lead to a higher initial credibility of those beliefs that are entrenched in our practice. Secondly, by taking up Goodman’s idea of a reflective equilibrium between rules and accepted inferences Williams indicates the inclusion of coherentist ideas in his account. While Williams otherwise mentions coherentist elements of his account only in passing and concentrates on foundationalist features of a contextualist structure of justification, this application of contextualism to the Problem of Induction shows the importance of coherentist ideas to a contextualist theory of justification.

References


