

**DO THE
SAME THING
IN SIMILAR
CASES**

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eidos :: 7 Dec 08

What reasoning? /1

“Turning the question around, if it is satisfactory to say that the constituents in a state of affairs are united as a matter of brute fact, then why isn’t it also satisfactory to say that the two situations just mentioned differ as a matter of brute fact [...]? If you are going to reach for a brute fact, **why not do it sooner rather than later?**”

(Vallicella 2000)

What reasoning? /2

“If no second relation is required to bind the substratum and *R* together, why was *R* required to bring together substrata and properties **in the first place?**”

(Armstrong 1978)

Overview talk

Part I

How to meet infinite regresses? or
The AHA principle

Part II

Meeting Brad’s Regress AHA-wise

Part III

The sceptic against AHA

A classic thought experiment

“A piece of philosophical folklore goes as follows: some well known philosopher [...], in the course of explaining that the Earth is round and revolves around the sun, is interrupted by an interlocutor who dismisses the theory as rubbish. After all, the Earth cannot just hang there in space – something must hold it up. The true story, according to the interlocutor, is that the Earth is a disk on the back of a giant turtle. **The philosopher then asks** what keeps the turtle up. The interlocutor’s reply is something like “You can’t get me that easily: it’s turtles all the way down” – that is, each turtle is supported by another, ad infinitum.”

(Nolan 2001)

How to meet regresses?

Task 1:

Generate its steps

Task 2:

Map all strategies

Task 3:

Select the best strategy

→ AHA

Task 1:
Generate its steps

The Turtle Regress is generated by:

An initial problem (IP):
 The earth cannot just hang there in space.

A general rule (GR):
 Anything not falling is supported by a turtle.

Problems, responses

- T The earth isn't falling.
 - S1 What keeps the earth up?
 By GR, the earth is supported by a giant turtle.
 - S2 What keeps the giant turtle up?
 By GR, this turtle is supported by a second turtle.
- And so on infinitely, according to the P/R pattern:
- SN What keeps the n-1th turtle up?
 By GR, the n-1th turtle is supported by a nth turtle.

(cf. Gratton 1994, 1997)

The Pile



Dispensing with GR

Regresses are generated by:

an initial problem (IP)

an initial response (IR)

&

a methodology (M):

Be ready to detect IP-similar problems,
 and to provide IR-similar responses.

M does all the work

- T The earth isn't falling.
- IP What keeps the earth up?
- IR The earth is supported by a giant turtle.
- IP-sim₁ By M, what keeps the giant turtle up?
- IR-sim₁ By M, this turtle is supported by a second turtle.
- IP-sim₂ By M, what keeps the second turtle up?
- IR-sim₂ By M, the turtle rests on the back of a second turtle.
- IP-sim_n ...
- IR-sim_n And so on to infinity.

Task 2:
Map all strategies

- #1: Don't be ready to detect IP-similar problems.
- #2: Be ready to detect IP-similar problems, but don't provide IR-similar responses.
- #3: Respect M endlessly, and deny the badness of the regress.
- #4: Modify IR in such a way that there are no IP-similar problems.

Ad #3

E.g. the infinite pile is too absurd, too false, too impossible, too complicated, too uneconomical, etc.

More seriously:

What the infinite regress brings out is that the IR-theorist doesn't really solve IP, she simply shifts it, i.e. she reproduces the problem that was to be solved.

Cf. Armstrong (1978):

"He is like a man who presses down the bulge in a carpet only to have it reappear elsewhere."

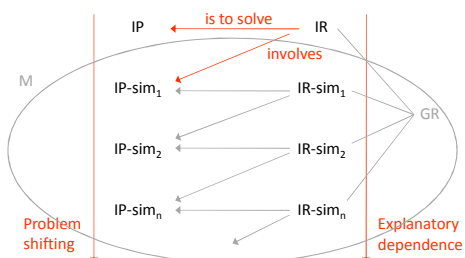
Problem shifting

IP What keeps the earth up?
 PS ↓
 IP-sim₁ What keeps the turtle up?
 PS ↓
 IP-sim_n What keeps the nth turtle up?
 PS ↓

But what's so bad: IP has its solution, so why care about the regress?

Well, if the solution to IP wholly depends upon all solutions to the infinity of IP-similars, there might be a problem about completing the explanation.

In search of viciousness



Task 3:

Theory choice

My proposal:
 Choose the strategy which avoids ad hocery.

?

ad hoc =
 "for this particular purpose only"

Aspect 1

"The axiom of reducibility was introduced as a means of overcoming the not completely satisfactory effects of the theory of types [...] and so to avoid paradoxes such as Russell's paradox. Although technically feasible, many critics concluded that the axiom of reducibility was simply too ad hoc to be justified philosophically."

(Irvine 2003)

Aspect 2

"Cargle: I agree that appearance is no safe guide to reality. But here your scepticism is entirely ad hoc. In no other case would you say that there is a single, disconnected object where we intuitively count two, connected ones."

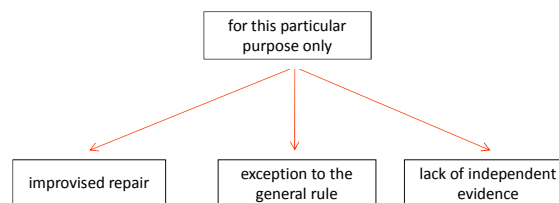
(Casati & Varzi 2004)

Aspect 3

"Indeed, unless justification can be found for the postulation of truthmakers for every truth whatever it takes, such postulation is **ad hoc**. There is **no independent reason** for accepting the postulations of such entities other than to uphold the truthmaker principle."

(Daly 2005)

Three-in-one



Ad Hoc Avoidance

Roughly:

Avoid moves that are solely and provisionally invented to get rid of a regress (or paradox, counterexample, etc.).

More informatively:

For any problem **X** and solutions **Y_{1-*n*}**, by sameness of evidence, choose one of the **Y**'s that can be generalized for **X**-similar problems.

Or

Avoid ad hocery

=

If you don't have independent reasons to deviate,

Do the same thing in similar cases

Recap Russell

"If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may **just as well** be the world as God [...]. It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu's view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said, 'How about the tortoise?' the Indian said, 'Suppose we change the subject.' The argument is really no better than that."

(Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian*)

Four stories

#1:

The earth is supported by a giant turtle, and we drop our explanation after having introduced this turtle.

#2:

The earth is supported by turtle no. 1, this turtle is supported by turtle no. 2, and this second turtle is not in need of any support because it can swim through space (i.e. it is self-supporting).

#3:

The earth is supported by turtle no. 1, this turtle is supported by turtle no. 2, which in turn is supported by turtle no. 3, and so on, it's turtles all the way down.

#4:

The earth is self-supporting and not in need of any external support.

Assessing #1

The earth is supported by a giant turtle, and we drop our explanation after having introduced this turtle.

Violates AHA:

The response to IP-sim₁ cannot be generalized.

&

We have no independent reason to deviate:
Why drop now and not earlier?

Assessing #2

The earth is supported by turtle no. 1, this turtle is supported by turtle no. 2, and this second turtle is not in need of any support because it can swim through space (i.e. it is self-supporting).

Violates AHA:

The response to IP-sim₂ cannot be generalized.

&

We have no independent reason to deviate:
Why accept a self-supporting entity now, whereas we weren't prepared to accept a self-supporting entity before (e.g. in case of the earth)?

Assessing #3

The earth is supported by turtle no. 1, this turtle is supported by turtle no. 2, which in turn is supported by turtle no. 3, and so on, it's turtles all the way down. Here, no entity is self-supporting.

Respects AHA:

All responses to IP-similar can be generalized.

Assessing #4

The earth is self-supporting and not in need of any external support.

Doesn't violate AHA:

Since there are no IP-similar problems to be solved, it need not to provide non-generalizable responses to stop the regress.

Conclusion so far

If you want to avoid ad hocery, then either

(i) don't block the regress,

or, if the regress is somehow unacceptable,

(ii) block the regress by modifying IR in such a way that there are no IP-similar problems.

Part II

Meeting Brad's Regress AHA-wise

The relevant IP

"When two terms have a relation, is the relation related to each? To answer affirmatively would lead at once to an endless regress; to answer negatively leaves it inexplicable **how the relation can in any way belong to the terms.** [...] To solve this difficulty – if it indeed be soluble – would, I conceive, be the most valuable contribution which a modern philosopher could make to philosophy."

(Russell 1899,
cf. Bradley 1893: ch. 3)

The Plan

I – BRAD'S REGRESS

Is generated by:
(IP)
Relating of relations?
(IR)
Relations relate in virtue
of binding relations.
(M)
Be ready to detect IP-
similar and to provide IR-
similar.

II - STRATEGIES

#1: Don't be ready to
detect IP-similar.
#2: Be ready to detect
IP-similar, but don't
provide IR-similar.
#3: Respect M
endlessly, and deny the
badness of the regress.
#4: Modify IR in such a
way that there are no
IP-similar.

III - THEORY CHOICE

AHA ≈
Do the same thing in
similar cases.
By AHA, explore
either #3 or #4.

The relevant IR

In virtue of what do relations relate relata?

Not i.v.o. relata, nor the relations themselves, nor brute
fact, nor non-relation ties, nor gaps, nor unmereological
composition, nor external operator, but:

i.v.o. **additional binding relations.**

Brad's Regress

T	aRb
IP	In virtue of what does R relate a, b ?
IR	In virtue of EX_1 which unifies R with a and b .
IP-sim ₁	By M, in virtue of what does EX_1 relate a, b, R ?
IR-sim ₁	By M, in virtue of EX_2 which unifies EX_1 with a, b, R .
IP-sim ₂	By M, in virtue of what does EX_2 relate a, b, R, EX_1 ?
IR-sim ₂	By M, in virtue of EX_3 which unifies EX_2 with a, b, R, EX_1 .
IP-sim _n	...
IR-sim _n	And so on to infinity.

The Four Ways

#1:
Relations relate in virtue of additional binding relations, and we drop our
explanation after having introduced this relation.

#2:
Relations relate in virtue of additional binding relations, and additional
binding relations relate in virtue of themselves.

#3:
Relations relate in virtue of first-order binding relations, first-order binding
relations relate in virtue of second-order binding relations, and so on, it's
binding relations all the way down.

#4:
Relations relate in virtue of themselves.

Assessing #1

Relations relate in virtue of additional binding relations, and we drop our
explanation after having introduced this relation.

Violates AHA:

The response to IP-sim₁ cannot be generalized.

&

We have no independent reason to deviate:
Why drop now and not earlier?

Assessing #2

Relations relate in virtue of additional binding relations, and additional binding relations relate in virtue of themselves.

Violates AHA:

The response to IP-sim₁ cannot be generalized.

&

We have no independent reason to deviate:
Why accept relata-specific relations now, whereas we weren't prepared to accept relata-specific relations before?

Assessing #3

Relations relate in virtue of first-order binding relations, first-order binding relations relate in virtue of second-order binding relations, and so on, it's binding relations all the way down.

Respects AHA:

All responses to IP-similars can be generalized.

Assessing #4

Relations relate in virtue of themselves.

Doesn't violate AHA:

Since there are no IP-similar problems to be solved, it need not to provide non-generalizable responses to stop the regress.

Conclusion

By AHA, you should meet Brad's Regress:

- (i) by submitting to binding relations all the way down,
or, if the regress is somehow unacceptable,
- (ii) by choosing another IR from the very beginning, e.g.
the view that relations are relata-specific.

Part III

The sceptic against AHA

The sceptical question

AHA, like all methodological constraints, conveys normative power ("we *should* meet regresses like such and such").
But where does this power come from?

or:

How to justify AHA?

or:

What's so bad about ad hocery?

What sceptic?

- Opposing Sceptic:**
Someone who believes that ad hocery isn't bad, but good.
- Ignoring Sceptic:**
Someone who believes that ad hocery doesn't matter (as opposed to other constraints).
- Relativistic Sceptic:**
Someone who doesn't believe in "the best strategy": strategies are good and bad relative to different principles.
- Fundamental Sceptic:**
Someone who doesn't believe in theory choice at all.

Their beliefs

- Opposing Sceptic:**
Do different things in similar cases.
- Ignoring Sceptic:**
Please do such and such, but it doesn't matter whether you do the same thing in similar cases.
- Relativistic Sceptic:**
By AHA, do the same thing in similar cases.
&
By other constraints, you may do different things in similar cases.

I object

- On the basis of arguments
1. From utility
 2. From economy
 3. From explanation

From utility

Relative to alternative principles such as intuitiveness and elegance, AHA is non-vague and applicable.

We should adhere to AHA because₁ there are no obvious alternative principles of theory choice.

From economy /1

AHA entails a **minimal ideology**:

#3: Any relation relates in virtue of a binding relation.
#4: Any relation relates in virtue of itself.
vs.
A general rule plus exceptions.

AHA entails a **minimal ontology** (taken qualitatively, of course):

#3: Relata-unspecific relations.
#4: Relata-specific relations.
vs.
An ordinary ontology plus extra category.

From economy /2

So

We should be economical because we should avoid ad hocery.

&

We should adhere to AHA because₂ it explains the economy principles (at least partly).

From explanation

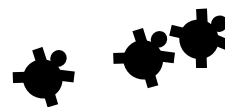
Consider #2:

E_1 [IP is to be solved] \rightarrow IR [relations relate i.v.o. binding relations]
 E_2 [IP-sim₁ is to be solved] \rightarrow IR-nonsim [binding relations relate i.v.o. themselves]

E_1 is structurally identical to E_2
 (provided that we lack independent deviating evidence),
 but what we infer is structurally different.

Hence, the inferences are arbitrary,
 so that what has been inferred can't explain the evidence.

We should adhere to AHA because₃ our theories lose all explanatory power
 if we didn't.



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 SAME THING
 IN SIMILAR
 CASES

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eidoss :: 5-6 Dec 08