

“DO THE SAME THING IN SIMILAR CASES”

Jan Willem Wieland :: spinozie@gmail.com

Bradley’s regress is one of the most oft-discussed infinite regresses in the literature. Perhaps no other regress has more solutions than this one. Also: perhaps no other regress has more ad hoc solutions than this one (think of the special ties and the brute facts).

My talk divides into three sections. In **Section 1**, I set out a methodological framework for meeting infinite regresses which consists of three tasks: (a) spelling out the exact steps of the regress and the assumptions on the basis of which it is generated, (b) mapping all strategies (e.g. arguing for the badness of the regress and trying to block it by modifying one of its underlying assumptions), (c) assessing the strategies and selecting the best among them. It is this third task that I would like to focus upon, and where the ad hoc avoidance principle (AHA) enters the picture. Roughly, to avoid ad hocery is to avoid moves that are provisionally invented to get rid of a regress (or some other difficulty). More informatively, the principle is this:

AHA For any problem **X** and solutions $Y_{1..i}$, by sameness of evidence, choose one of the **Y**’s that can be generalised for **X**-similar problems.

(Or simpler: if you have no independent reason to deviate, do the same thing in similar cases.) I conclude this section by making two general claims: (i) without AHA no infinite regress is generated in the first place, and (ii) if a certain regress is unacceptable and to be stopped (but I shall stay neutral on the so-called criterion/a of viciousness), AHA is sufficient to select the best blocking strategy.

In **Section 2**, I give the details of how this all works in case of Bradley’s regress.

In **Section 3**, I try to convince three sceptics who don’t accept my AHA principle. First argument: relative to alternative principles such as intuitiveness and elegance, AHA is non-vague and applicable. Second argument: we should adhere to AHA because it can explain the economy principles. Third argument: we should adhere to AHA because the inferences from evidence to solution would become arbitrary if we didn’t.¹

¹ Parts of this talk derive from my thesis: *Minimize Ad Hoc Turtles* (2008)

URL = <https://www.surfgroepen.nl/personal/jjj/shared%20documents/wieland_maht.pdf>