

A few words on Nelson Goodman's method for justification of inferences

- Basis of John Rawl's reflective equilibrium
 - An inference remains valid if it conforms to general rules, even if its conclusion happens to be false. Conversely, an inference is fallacious if it violates general rules, even if its conclusion is true (and apparently even if the general rules are false at the time). Eventually, though, the general rules and the inferences need to mutually adjust one another (Stich, 97).
- Goodman's "virtuous circle"
 - "A rule is amended if it yields an inference we are unwilling to accept; an inference is rejected if it violates a rule we are unwilling to amend" (Stich, 98).

Stich's stipulations about Goodman's method of justification

- Directly addresses processes of reasoning and the problem of cognitive diversity; inference is a cognitive process (98).
- Reflective equilibrium test is constitutive of justification: Justification is identical to a state of reflective equilibrium (98).
- The claim that reflective equilibrium is constitutive of justification is a conceptual truth, that is, a necessary truth knowable a priori (99).

The role of intuition in reflective equilibrium

- Goodman's skepticism about induction elaborates on the Humean problem.
- Hume doubts that our past experiences confirming natural laws will ensure the continuity of those laws in the future.
- Goodman doubts the veracity of our past observations in the first place.
- Subjective language in Goodman's formula: "willingness" as criterion (98).

Stich's empirical tests on intuitions

- Determining if the inferences motivated by the reflective equilibrium process "strike us as systems that a rational person ought to invoke" (99)
- This test can only challenge the claim that reflective equilibrium is constitutive of justification *as a conceptual truth* (99).
- In an earlier paper, "Justification and the Psychology of Human Reasoning," Stich and Nisbett demonstrate empirical cases in which subjects maintain that false inferences are in reflective equilibrium with false rules for inference.
- Such counterfactual situations challenge the success of reflective equilibrium as a conceptual, i.e., necessary and a priori truth.
- Reflective equilibrium is open to the kind of objections that actualists raise against Kripke's possible world semantics.
- In the earlier paper, Stich and Nesbitt tried to hone the applicability of reflective equilibrium by stipulating explicitly *whose* concept of justice the test was supposed to verify.
 - "Expert reflective equilibrium": Deference to authority in assessing inference
 - But we can only pick out the experts in a question-begging way.
- Competing inferences (as in the gambler's fallacy) seem to demonstrate Stich's notion of cognitive diversity.
 - Cognitive processes are neither innate nor necessarily convergent across cultures.
 - E.g., linguistic diversity
 - With cognitive diversity, we seem incapable of verifying either our intuitions about particular inferences or our intuitions about general rules for inference.
 - "If there are lots of different ways in which the human mind/brain can go about the ordering and reordering of its cognitive states... *which of these ways should we use?*" (97).

Alternate solution and the "Neo-Goodmanian" project

- Use wide reflective equilibrium as an analysis of the intuitions generated by narrow reflective equilibrium

- Quinian Holism
 - Neurath's ship
 - We build our scientific and methodological theories out of sensations. To evaluate specific scientific questions, and to challenge certain entrenched theories, we test them against parts of our theoretical background that for the moment we are not challenging.
- Stich holds that even a widened reflective equilibrium approach leaves room for principles and convictions that include dubious inferential rules. Philosophical, metaphysical, psychological beliefs are just as likely to be diverse and, thus, contingent as the principles they are supposed to filter.
- The "neo-Goodmanian line" is derived from these arguments against wide and narrow reflective equilibrium and can be summarized as follows (pg 102):
 - There is one process of assessing whether or not an inferential practice is justified.
 - When we know what this process is, we will know what it is for an inferential practice to be justified b/c our processes of assessment are constitutive of justification.
 - In describing what justification is, we will have solved the cognitive diversity problem b/c we can apply it to our own, as well as other's, processes.
- Stich argues that the revisions of the reflective equilibrium theory still fail to account for cognitive diversity b/c they are based on empirical assumptions about the conceptual structures that shape our assessment of cognitive processes. (pg 103)
 - Reflective equilibrium is a "non-starter": nothing to suggest that a process like r.e. plays a role in assessing the justification of a cognitive process.
 - Invokes one notion of justification: different people have different notions of justification. One person can employ different procedures on different occasions, as well.
 - The properties/tests don't necessarily characterize the concept: diverse folk theories and tests eliminate the possibility of, a priori, conceptual truths.

Stich's Argument against Analytic Epistemology Altogether

Stich outlines what he thinks is the basis of analytic epistemology as follows:

- The ultimate goal of epistemological theories is to determine which cognitive states are justified and which are not. (Pg 105)
- Constructing an epistemic theory will require that we come up with a system of rules that will evaluate cognitive processes as justifiable, or not. Many systems will emerge and each will be subjected to a "criteria of rightness." (pg 105)
- There is a common core idea embedded in everyday thought and language which the epistemic theorists are trying to capture.

Analytic Epistemologists are Xenophobes, Says Stich

- In light of cognitive diversity, our cognitive processes are merely a historical accident and we can't say if ours are better than anyone else's.
- Evaluative epistemic concepts embedded in everyday thought and language are culturally acquired and can change in different instances: no help in affirming/denying justification of cognitive processes.

What we Should do Instead...

- We can only helpfully evaluate our epistemic justification processes based on non-epistemic values like: happiness, reproduction, truth, etc.