

Bertrand Russell's Inductivist Turkey

The turkey found that, on his first morning at the turkey farm, that he was fed at 9 a.m. Being a good inductivist turkey he did not jump to conclusions. He waited until he collected a large number of observations that he was fed at 9 a.m. and made these observations under a wide range of circumstances, on Wednesdays, on Thursdays, on cold days, on warm days. Each day he added another observation statement to his list. Finally he was satisfied that he had collected a number of observation statements to inductively infer that "I am always fed at 9 a.m.". However on the morning of Christmas eve he was not fed but instead had his throat cut.

It is evident, that Adam with all his science, would never have been able to demonstrate, that the course of nature must continue uniformly the same, and that the future must be conformable to the past; What is possible can never be demonstrated to be false; and it is possible the course of nature may change, since we can conceive such a change. Nay, I will go farther, and assert, that he could not so much as prove by any probable arguments, that the future must be conformable to the past. All probable arguments are built on the supposition, that there is this conformity between the future and the past, and therefore can never prove it. This conformity is a matter of fact, and if it must be proved, will admit of no proof but from experience. But our experience in the past can be a proof of nothing for the future, but upon a supposition, that there is a resemblance between them. This therefore is a point, which can admit of no proof at all, and which we take for granted without any proof.

David Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, (1740)