

# Handout: Dasgupta on Realism and the Absence of Value

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## 1. “The New Riddle of Induction”

Consider Goodman’s grue/bleen example:

$X$  is grue iff  $X$  is green and observed before time  $t$  or blue and not so observed.

$X$  is bleen iff  $X$  is blue and observed before time  $t$  or green and not so observed.

And the reversed definitions of green and blue:

$X$  is green iff  $X$  is grue and observed before time  $t$  or bleen and not so observed.

$X$  is blue iff  $X$  is bleen and observed before time  $t$  or grue and not so observed.

Regarding grue and bleen as genuine properties/predicates leads to absurdity: the absurdity that the same empirical observations could equally support both a reliable hypothesis that all emeralds are green and an unexpected hypothesis that all emeralds are grue. But denying the ontological/semantic statuses of grue and bleen leads to another absurdity: that we have no good reason to do so.

A plausible response to this riddle comes from appealing to the distinction between elite properties and non-elite ones. Here “elite” is introduced as a label for properties that are theory-guiding (p. 290). And “theory-guiding” is a second-order normative property such that any first-order property which instantiates it should guide our theoretical attitudes and activities such as forming beliefs, performing inductive inferences, giving explanations, and so on (pp. 290-291).

## 2. Ideal Realism

Ideal realism about any topic should consist in three claims.

- 1) The ontological claim: There are  $X$ s as such.
- 2) The normative/value-theoretic claim:  $X$ s have objective values.
  - In Dasgupta’s words,  $X$ s should not be “normatively inert”.(Roughly speaking, normativity here include phenomena like rationality,

reasons, oughts and shoulds, right and wrong, and so on.)

- This an externalist principle. Carefully distinguish it from the internalist claim about human mental states such as normative judgments, motivations, and so on. (p. 292)
- Being theory-guiding is a way of having objective (epistemic) values.
  - Normative epistemology. (p. 291)

3) The epistemic/cognitivist/semantic claim: Knowledge about *Xs* could be acquired through respectable, non-obscure means (e.g. perception, inference, memory, testimony, intuition, etc.).

- This claim is sometimes called a semantic claim. That's to say, utterances involving *Xs* must express beliefs and be apt for truth and falsity. (p. 313)

Strictly speaking, only the first claim is essential for robust/pure realism. For instance, agnostic theism and Schopenhauer's moral realism (?) may dispense with the semantic principle, and Moore's non-naturalist metaethical realism may dispense with the value-theoretic principle (pp. 294-295), etc. It is noteworthy that Dasgupta's paper has nothing to do with the epistemic/semantic claim (p. 284).

### **3. The anti-realist upshot**

There is no explanation of why elite properties are theory-guiding. The demand for explanation here should be understood in a metaphysical sense. According to Dasgupta, epistemological explanations are highly irrelevant in this context (pp. 292-293). While logical explanations of this fact get things the wrong way round, since this fact can hardly be a fundamental one (p. 293).

Consider, for instance, a specific gloss of the claim that naturalness is theory-guiding: "natural beliefs are better than unnatural beliefs." (p. 295) Dasgupta proposes two potential explanatory strategies for it, and opposes them respectively.

- The first explanatory strategy: We can explain why naturalness is theory-guiding by appeal to the constitutive nature of the notions involved in this claim (i.e. belief, betterness, naturalness)

- Dasgupta's general objection: We cannot explain why we should prefer non-gruesome notions (e.g. belief, betterness, naturalness) over their gruesome counterparts (e.g. schmelief, gretteness, graturalness).
- The second explanatory strategy: We can explain why naturalness is theory-guiding by appeal to the connection between naturalness and other notions (e.g. nomic notions, metaphysical notions, semantic notions).
- Dasgupta's general objection: No matter which notion we choose to explain why natural belief is theory-guiding, we can replace this notion with its gruesome counterpart and then present an explanation of the claim that gruesome belief is theory-guiding.

#### **4. Anti-realism**

- The positive claim about the anti-realist explanation: Green is elite (for us) because of facts about our interests and cultural history.
  - The semantics of the utterance of "x is elite". (p. 313)
- The negative claim about the realist explanation: Green's being elite cannot be explained (in the objective sense) by green's being natural.

#### **5. The only way of avoiding the problem of missing value**

- Appeal to perceptual acquaintance.
  - Realism as idealism (a promising view)
  - This strategy cannot be applied to every property. (Really?)
    - Do we have perceptual acquaintance with causal power? Consider a putative theory about naturalness according to which objects that instantiate a natural property *F* must exhibit the same causal power in some respect.