In defence of Francis Bacon: A criticism of the critics of the inductive method.

Mary Horton

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The Critics

My purpose in writing this paper is to try to show that the contemporary critics of inductivism as a scientific method are not criticizing the method for the interpretation of Nature described by Bacon in *Novum Organum*. My aim is not to attempt to justify the inductive method, even if I could do so; it is merely to show that Bacon may have been misunderstood, certainly by the critics of inductivism and possibly also by his followers.

The greatest contemporary critic of inductivism is undoubtedly Sir Karl Popper, but as a definitive example of present-day criticism, I am taking P. B. Medawar’s *Induction and Intuition in Scientific Thought.*

I propose to summarize Medawar’s descriptions of the shortcomings of inductivism and then show by a careful and annotated description of the Method as put forward by Bacon, that none of the so-called shortcomings existed in the original formulation, although they might well do so in the practice of inductivism as a scientific method.

Medawar lists seven main shortcomings of inductivism:

1. Induction involves the belief that the intellectual processes which lead toward a generalization can be logically spelled out, and that therefore these processes are themselves the grounds for supposing the generalization to be true. There is no distinction between discovery and proof.
2. Inductive theory insists on the primacy of facts and thinks that scientific knowledge grows out of simple unbiased statements reporting the

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*P. B. Medawar, Induction and Intuition in Scientific thought* (London: Methuen, 1969). In this Medawar sets out most explicitly his objections to the inductive method; but the essay by the same author, ‘Hypothesis and Imagination’, in *The Art of the Soluble* (London: Methuen, 1967), sets out in more detail his opposition to Bacon himself.


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