PROBABLE INFERENCE

Probable inference could not exist until the conclusion was problematically recognised: this is inductive or experimental inference. Such a relation (a) which may be altogether irrespective of whether the conclusion is recognised or not, yet such that it could not exist if the consequent were not probable; this is probable deduction. Such a relation may consist merely in the premise fact having some character, which may agree with, or be in some other relation to, a character which the conclusion fact would possess if it existed; this is presumptive inference.

1. The first case is that in which we begin by asking how often certain described conditions will, in the long run of experience, be followed by a result of a predigested description; then proceeding to note the results as events of that kind present themselves in experience; and finally, when a considerable number of instances have been collected, inferring that the general character of the whole event connotes similar events in the course of experience will be approximately of the character observed. For that event is not made by any one character, and it would be absurd to say that experience has a character which is never manifested. But there is no other way in which the character of that event can manifest itself than when the endless series is in complete. For it may be wholly or in part made up of a certain period in which the whole series symptoms, still that the series goes on, it must eventually be found, however irregularly, towards becoming so; and all the rest of the event's life will be a continuation of this inferential process. This inference in particular does not depend upon any assumption that the series will be endless. For we are reasoning exclusively from experience, that is, from the observations which the history of our lives are the sum of. So far as we can, it will not be the least, nor that nature is uniform, or that upon any material assumption whatever.

2. Logic imposes upon us two rules in performing this inference. The first is this: we do not infer that it is not the case; and the second is, that we must take pains that we do not, in taking the instances from which we are to reason, select the conditions of the case from those to which the question referred.

The second prescription of logic is that the conclusion be confined strictly to the question: if the instances examined are found to be remarkable in any other respect than that for their conformity to the conditions of the case, or that we are aware of no reason for inferring to one rather than to another. This is an error often apparent on the thinker's mind of fully deduced from it. And it is an error of the kind of inference called probable or inverse probability (see that subject under PROBABILITY, where the view of Laplace is criticised).

3. Probable inference of the third kind includes those cases in which the facts asserted in the premises do not compel the truth of the conclusion, and where the significant observations cannot be suggested by the consideration of what the consequences of the conclusion would be, but have either suggested the conclusion or have been remarked during a search in the facts for features agreeable to conflicting with the conclusion. The whole argument then reduces itself to this, that the observed facts show that the truth is similar to the conclusion. This may, of course, be reinforced by arguments of some other kind; but we should begin by considering the case in which it stands alone. An example to fix ideas, suppose that I am reading a long anonymous poem. As I proceed, I meet with a trait after which seems as if the poet were written by a woman. In what way do I do this? It proves that a woman wrote it; because the Catholic doctrine of purgatory is no exception, inasmuch as purgatory is conceived to be a place of purification, not of trial. The belief is entertained by many, however, that the period of trial, or of purgation, is eternal, or death, but extends indefinitely into the future.

Problems (in theology) [Lit. problem, a task]: Div. Præfatio; Fr. préface; Ital. tempo di prova. The state of moral trial in which the soul of man exists during the time that the offer of salvation is open to it. The belief of the great majority of Christians is that probation extends in this life. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory is no exception, inasmuch as purgatory is conceived to be a place of purification, not of trial. The belief is entertained by many, however, that the period of trial, or of purgation, is eternal, or death, but extends indefinitely into the future.

Litterature: Hodge, Theology; Donker, Christl. Gläubenslehre (1880); Farsan, Eternal Hope; Martin, Christ. Dogmatik. (A.D.R.)

Problem (Gr. πρόβλημα, from πρό, before + βλέπων, beholding); Ge. Problem, problem; V. πρόβλημα, problematic; Fr. problème; Ital. problematico. (A.D.)

1. A demonstrable practical proposition that something is possible. The solution usually consists in showing how it is possible and is not impossible.

2. Problematic (for deriv. see PROBLEM; the word was not in use in Gr. or Lat., though it possibly occur); Ge. Problem; Fr. problématique; It. problematico.

3. The subject involving the laws of the three grades of MODALITY (q.v.); see PROBABILITY — PROBLEMATIC.