

Fiction

The Story of Chief Bunga

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It's Adam's holidays. Being the prosperous and bossous of Londontown's Central Meteorology Centre, he decides that this summer's destination shall be the Pacific Ocean.

A long flight from He-Throws takes him to the southern hemisphere's most beautiful port, Tarkarta, where he rents a beautiful and swift sailing boat and embarks through the pure pacific waters in no time.

Adam's cruise is tranquil, easygoing, undisturbed and serene. In one word: Pacific. But eight sunny days after having left Tarkarta, he catches the glimpse of a distant island and decides, without the slightest hesitation, to pay it a visit.

Shortly after coming ashore, he unexpectedly sees a multitude of savages noisily running towards him. The throng bumps into our brave meteorologist and a few exchanges in sign language and cheap English ensue. They happen to be friendly and welcoming people and classically take Adam to their leader.

After a fast-paced collective walk through the jungle and the climbing of a hill, the savages guide Adam between the huts of their hilltop village until he finds a dark, large and smiling man in front of him. It is, of course, the chief of the savages.

Adam and the chief simultaneously extend their right hands (to Adam's partial astonishment) and pump them a few times while innocently staring at each other, Goldman Sachs style. Adam's hand is still held by the chief when the latter declares in correct English:

"Welcome to our island. My name is Chief Bunga. Allow us to honour your visit with a banquet in my hut."

Adam obviously accepts Chief Bunga's offer. It was lunchtime and Adam was frankly starving, especially after the preceding walks and hill-climbing. And after all, how could anyone say "no" to such an adequate, polite and friendly offer?

A few minutes later, he is inside Chief Bunga's hut, Chief Bunga on his side

and quantities of delicious tropical foods and drinks in front of him.¹ Adam's having a great time comfortably eating and talking to Chief Bunga and his people.

But almost suddenly, something happens.

It starts raining.

The savages' immediate reaction is close to panic, the women cry and the men are extremely frightened. Adam observes the noisy and sad commotion for some time and then looks at Chief Bunga. The dark and large man is no longer smiling and his face expresses an obvious concern for what is happening.

Adam reasons. "Ha. These poor savages evidently ignore the actual cause of the phenomenon of rain and apparently attribute it to some kind of macabre spell. I shall enlighten them with my acute and thorough knowledge of this matter forthwith." But Chief Bunga talks first:

"Adam, you will have noticed that water is falling on my hut." Adam vehemently acknowledges the fact. Chief Bunga continues: "Yes, Adam, rain it is" and adds in a critical tone: "do you, by any chance, know why it rains?"

Sensing a speck of taunting which strikes deep in the heart of an accomplished meteorologist, Adam is about to embark on a admittedly condescending speech which shall conclusively eradicate such stupid ignorance, but Chief Bunga speaks first, and a dialogue ensues:

CHIEF BUNGA: It rains because God is angry.

ADAM: Excuse me?

C: Why, it is plainly obvious.

A: But Chief Bunga, of course not! It rains because there are clouds in the sky!

C: Of course! God uses the clouds to throw rain at us.

A: But Chief Bunga, that's not how it works at all! Let me explain it to you.

C: Please do.

A: Water uuh-vah-pohr-ates from the ocean, goes up to the sky and condenses into what we see as clouds. When these very clouds (the one we have up our heads, for instance, is what we call a cumulonimbus) are full of big drops of water and strong winds kind of push them, rain ensues.

C: Adam, I'm impressed by your detailed knowledge of God's actions. But we here

1 Political correctness won't allow me to mention naked tropical dancers.

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already know what the Sacred Water Cycle is. We're not stupid. How else do you think God obtains water? Of course he must pull it out of the sea and store it into a cloud if he wants to throw it at us whenever he's angry.

A: Chief Bunga, I follow you, but let me tell you that there is no God involved in this process.

C: Excuse me?

A: You see, our world is a result of [Big Bang, bla bla bla] and life developed on its face because of [Evolution, bla bla bla].

C: Dear Adam, we know all this [pointing at a bookshelf on the back of the hut with the 1962 edition of the full Encyclopedia Britannica]. Do you think we're savages? I'm impressed that you didn't even mention genetics in your explanation.

A: Oh, genetics, yeah, that's...

C: [Interrupts him] And to be more precise, the phenomenon of genetic drift. Which, as I hope you know, is God's interference with alleles² aimed at producing all types of Holy Mutations. We, like other living organisms, are the product of the Holy Mutations.

A: Chief Bunga! Genetic drift depends on nothing more than a tendency which varies randomly in frequency over time!

C: Of course not! God decided and is deciding every single genetic drift occurring on the face of this planet. At least those are the findings we obtained from astrophysics and biology.

A: ...

C: Adam, it is a fact that the Universe was created in God's Divine Big Bang and the Earth was populated with God's Holy Evolution.

A: ...

C: However, I don't see why you omit the religious nomenclature in your accounts...

A: (loud and infuriated tone) Do me a favour! What is your specific goddamned evidence for the existence of God and the cause of rain???

C: Well it's very simple. You see, my ancestor saw God. God told my ancestor that he will throw rain on us every time he was angry. My ancestor then told my grandfather, my grandfather told my father and my father told me. Of course, all my people share this knowledge.

A: Chief Bunga, with all due respect, your argument is invalid, your belief is absurd, and your sanity is doubtful.

C: Really? Let's examine what you just said:

2 The DNA sequences that code genes (ours and those of any other living organism)

Your argument, Adam, is a distinctively inductive one.³ All the knowledge you and your sciences have has generally been gathered through the observation of a finite number of natural instances, such as the formation of clouds, and the formulation of generalisations, such as the Sacred Water Cycle. You and me know about God's Divine Big Bang and God's Holy Evolution because of induction. And I hope that you already know that the premises of any inductive argument only provide reasons to support the probable truth of the conclusion. Even if the premises are true, it is merely likely that the conclusion will be true.

It follows that no-one can say whether induction really determines empirical truth without facing a huge inconclusive debate. And get your terminology right: my argument is deductively valid and your argument is (slightly) cogent.⁴ I'll add that any speck of deductive argumentation that your sciences use to produce conclusions inevitably rest on premises gathered through induction.

My argument is more of a deductive one. It is from a generality, namely God declaring that he'll throw rain on us whenever he's angry, that we deduce that it now rains because God is angry.

Because the conclusion follows from the premises in all possible situations, it is deductively valid.

Of course, and as for the deductive arguments we hear from sciences (for instance), I might be deluded into thinking that my argument is a purely deductive one and ignore the fact that my first premises have actually been gathered through nothing less than induction. But be reassured, dear Adam: their truth value has been deduced through Bayesian calculus.⁵ Bingo the statistician used Bayes' rule to estimate the probable truth of these two explanations for rain: my ancestor's account of God and the meteorologists' account; assuming they're mutually exclusive. Bingo concluded that there is a 79.3% chance of your account being true while my account has an 83.8% chance of being true.

So not only is my argument valid it is also reasonably sound. Oh, and it also is inductively stronger than yours (if you wish to see it as an inductive one).

A: (perplexed) This is still absurd... Chief Bunga, you only decided to believe that

³ Induction is the inference of a general principle from the observation of specific instances. Deduction, on the other hand, is the inference of specific instances from a generality.

⁴ Adam's argument is cogent because the truth of Adam's premises render the truth of Adam's conclusions probable.

⁵ A device smart people use to calculate the likelihood of an event happening if another influencing event happened.

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there is a God...

C: We decided to believe that there is a God? Look, Adam, our first premise, i.e. God's existence and him causing rain, is simply axiomatic. We'll hold on to this notion it as strongly as a mathematician will hold on to the notion that " $2+3=5$ " and as strongly as you, Adam, hold on to the notion that rain is purely incidental.

(in a philosophical tone) Every person selects which axioms he or she will presuppose in the course of his or her life. But most people fail to realise that these are ultimately axioms: simple and somehow trivial self-evident "truths".

And if you think that belief in axioms is absurd, I'm very sorry for you, because either you fail to realise what sanity rests on, or, you're utterly insane yourself.

*Now please step into the frying pan:
God's wrath can only be appeased if we fry a stranger.*

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