

Truly Undesirable Hypotheses

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Hypotheses may be undesirable for a number of reasons. Some hypotheses are just too slippery to be subjected to tests. They are what Popper has called 'unfalsifiable'. Others are just plain false; in Popperian terminology, these are hypotheses that have been falsified. Yet others suffer from ad hoc-ness. The focus of this talk is ad hoc hypotheses. I begin with a brief examination of some notable conceptions of ad hoc-ness in the literature. It is pointed out that there is a general problem afflicting most such conceptions, namely the intuitive judgments that are supposed to motivate them are not universally shared. Instead of getting bogged down in what ad hoc-ness exactly means, I shift the focus of the analysis to one undesirable feature often present in alleged cases of ad hoc-ness. I call this feature the 'monstrousness' of a hypothesis. A fully articulated formal account of this feature is presented by specifying what it is about the internal constitution of a hypothesis that makes it monstrous.