

1023-01-946

Byron E. Wall* (bwall@yorku.ca), 205 Bethune College, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3, Canada. *Robert Leslie Ellis on the misuse of the principle of insufficient reason.*

The so-called principle of insufficient reason assigns equal probability to events with unknown or indeterminate causes, where there is no known reason to favor one outcome over another. The classic case is the coin toss. This principle is easily buried and not made manifest as an axiom in probability calculations, leading to circular "proofs." In 1842, the Cambridge mathematician Robert Leslie Ellis read a paper to the Cambridge Philosophical Society which explored the ramifications of this. Ellis's life was cut short by illness, hence he was not able to pursue or expand upon this topic. Though some of his key points were taken up by others, some remain unresolved. (Received September 23, 2006)