

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006
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Lecture Notes, May 10

I. Quiz: What, for Hume, is a cause?

II. Three problems of induction

1. Weak problem of induction:

We have limited intelligence and experience.

There is not enough evidence to draw the conclusions that we draw.

But if we were smarter or had more time, we could solve the problem.

This is not Hume's problem of induction.

This problem is just a problem of limitations on evidence.

Sometimes there are two or more equally well-supported theories about the world, theories which agree on all the empirical evidence we have gathered.

Even if we presume that physical laws will be uniform and stable, we don't know which theory to use.

The weak problem is solved by gathering more evidence.

It is not really a philosophical problem.

2. Strong problem of induction:

Even given all possible evidence from the past, we can not know that the laws of nature will not shift radically and unexpectedly.

This is Hume's problem, p 19, p 22.

We do make predictions, despite the problem.

Consider dropping a book in mid-air.

Prediction #1: The book will rise.

Prediction #2: The book will fall.

We predict the latter, but experience does not support this.

The strong problem of induction is Hume's worry that we can not know that the laws of nature will remain uniform and stable.

We presume that they will, but this is unjustified.

3. New Problem of Induction

The 'New Problem of Induction' gets its name from Nelson Goodman's *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*.

You know what it means for an object to be green.

Consider the property called 'grue'.

An object is grue if it is green until 1/1/2010, when it suddenly turns blue.

How can you tell if a plant is green or grue?

All evidence for its being green is also evidence for its being grue.

Green things and grue things are exactly alike until 2010.

The new problem of induction shows that Hume's problem is not just about physical laws, but about common terms we use to describe the world, too.

For, one could construct other artificial properties, like the property of being a papod.

A papod is a piece of paper which, on 1/1/2010, turns into an Ipod.
All papods look exactly like pieces of paper right now.
There is, in principle, no way to tell them apart.

III. Hume conclusions

The problems of induction are among the most serious in philosophy, especially in the philosophy of science. Berkeley had shown that Lockean empiricist principles led to difficulties with our beliefs in an external, material world.

Hume shows that these problems infect all of science, not merely belief in matter.
Goodman shows that the problem infects even our most common uses of language.
Berkeley thinks that we can continue to speak with the vulgar and think with the learned.
Hume shows that even the most learned beliefs are unjustified.

Perhaps the problem is with Locke's basic empiricist principle.
But Descartes' position was unacceptable as well.
Perhaps we are just stuck as skeptics.

If you wish to continue to think about these matters, take Modern Philosophy, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Science.

We did not talk about Kant, whose work is the culmination of all that we've studied.
These issues are treated differently in contemporary philosophy, but same themes recur.
Similarly, some of these themes are found in earlier writers, like Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.

IV. Plato (~428 B.C. - ~348 B.C.) and his metaphysics

The basic metaphysical question is, "What is there?"
Descartes and Locke argued that there were bodies, minds, and God
For Berkeley, there were just minds (and their ideas) and God.

Plato argues for the existence of two distinct worlds: the material world, and the real world of forms.
The material world is full of contradictions, like those discussed by Descartes (the wax and the sun), Locke (the water experiment, porphyry, the almond) and Berkeley (the Lockean arguments).
To know something, it can not be false.
But the material world is constantly changing, and what was once true may become false.
I was once a child, and now I'm an adult; once I had long hair, and now I am bald.
The material world and its properties, since they change, can not be objects of knowledge.
Berkeley solved the problems by denying the existence of a material world.
Plato's solution is similar.
He claims that the material world is not the real world.
The real world is the world of forms, or ideas.

The sensory world is a world of shadow and illusion, and contradiction.
Forms are the real things, perfect, and unchanging.
Consider this quote from Plato. (Forms are indicated by capitalized words, or by the term "itself.")

I assume the existence of a Beautiful, itself by itself, of a Good and a Great and all the rest... If there is anything beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is beautiful for no other reason than that it shares in that Beautiful, and I say so with everything... I no longer understand or recognize those other sophisticated causes, and if someone tells me that a thing is beautiful because it has a bright color or

shape or any such thing, I ignore these other reasons - for these all confuse me - but I simply, naively and perhaps foolishly cling to this, that nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned, for I will not insist on the precise nature of the relationship, but that all beautiful things are beautiful by the Beautiful... Do you not think so?... And that it is through Bigness that big things are big and the bigger are bigger, and that small things are made small by Smallness?" (*Phaedo*, 100b-e)

The properties in our world are patterned after the forms.

Forms are the causes of the qualities of things.

They are like universals, what Descartes called the building blocks of the material world.

When we say that the sky is blue, Plato says that we mean that the sky participates in the form of blueness.

There are forms of beauty, and justice, and truth, and love, and man, and life.

There is some debate about whether base things like mud have forms.

We learn about forms through thinking, and reasoning.

Our souls become acquainted with the forms in the netherworld, before our birth.

We know them through recollection.

Compare with Descartes' innate knowledge.

See also the analogy of the cave, in Plato's dialogue *The Republic*, for further details.

Why do we need forms?

If we want to know if an act is just, we must know what justice is.

If we want to know if we have knowledge, we must know what knowledge is.

We need to understand the general concept before we can apply it in individual cases.

We have sensory acquaintance only with particulars, which won't give us general rules or scientific laws.

This is Hume's point.

To know some things are equal, we have to know what equality is.

Consider, how can we learn what blue is?

We can not unambiguously point to a color, since we are also pointing to a shape, and an object.

This discussion of the forms may be unsatisfying, but we aren't going to argue for the forms here.

Take Burstein's *Republic* course, if you want to know more.

Here, just note that Plato solve's Hume's problem.

If we can know the forms, then we can know the PUN, we can have direct insight into the nature of reality.

In the *Euthyphro*, we want to look at how he seeks the forms.

V. Plato's dialogues

Plato was an Athenian, a student of Socrates.

Socrates spent much of his life asking questions, of any one who would listen.

Plato transcribed some of these conversations into dialogues, like plays.

These dialogues more formally seek answers to puzzling philosophical questions.

For example: What is justice? What is friendship? What is knowledge? What is beauty?