

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2006  
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Lecture Notes, May 8

I. Quiz: Distinguish matters of fact from relations of ideas.

II. Habit, and the mental interpretation of cause and effect

Hume says that we are isolated from the connections in nature, the causal laws.  
All we can experience are conjunctions of events.  
Some of these are regular, but we can not know that the regularity will persist.  
Still, we do believe that there are connections between events.  
We exit through the door, not the window.  
We do not really doubt that the sun will rise.

Hume argues that our confidence in the regularity of nature is mere unjustified habit, p 50.  
We make a mental leap, unsupported by evidence.  
Consider if a man were suddenly brought into the world, p 27-8.  
He would have no habits, and so no knowledge.  
But habit, again, gives you only conjunction, and not connection.

Hume defines cause as a mental phenomenon, not a physical one, p 51.  
He makes it internal, rather than external, pp 35-6.  
Causes are not in nature, but only in our minds.

[Contrast with Frege's criticism of psychologism in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, if you are feeling ambitious. §25 - §27 are applicable to the work we have done.]

Berkeley, when faced with the limits of what we can know, interpreted our terms referring to objects as referring to our mental states.  
Hume, rejecting Berkeley's idealism, assumes that there is a material world.  
Still, we can not know about the laws which govern the interactions of objects in the world.  
Instead of internalizing the world, Hume internalizes cause and effect.

III. Hume and Berkeley on Laws of Nature.

Both Hume and Berkeley deny that we know the laws of nature, but for different reasons.  
Berkeley says that we have knowledge of how the world works on the basis of experience.  
But he does not give us knowledge of causes.  
He merely relies on the grace of God to keep order in the world.  
Berkeley thinks that there are regularities in nature, which show the goodness of God, §151.  
These regularities ensure that human beings can be productive and safe.  
(Compare with Descartes on the role of the senses.)  
Berkeley also thinks that there are exceptions to these regularities, blemishes in nature, §152.  
See also his defense of the reality of miracles, §84.  
Remember, that while Locke and Descartes were seeking a philosophical foundation for science, Berkeley has

other concerns.

Consider this miracle, for example:

In Book of Joshua, God makes the sun stand still so that Joshua can get all his killing done before dark:

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel. (Joshua, 10:11-14)

Hume not only denies that miracles happen, he denies that they are possible.

He denies that there can be irregularities in nature.

If we experience an anomaly, an event inconsistent with what we think are the laws of nature, we will adjust the laws.

See pp 76-7, and p 38.

He even claims that there is no chance in nature, p 37.

(Compare with Einstein's claim, against quantum mechanical probabilities that God does not play dice.)

A wise man uses evidence from the past to guide his beliefs and behaviors, p 73.

A side issue: Would God know the laws?

Or, are laws of nature merely human constructs?

A possible solution: God works only in particulars, and has no need for universals.

This solution seems consistent with Berkeley's position.

This last claim seems to contradict his skeptical claims about the laws of nature.

For, the problem of induction was exactly that we have no evidence about the future.

Hume is recommending a practical response to the skeptical problem.

Consider his remarks, on pp 104-5, concerning our knowledge of the existence of the universe, and the resemblance hypothesis.

We have no real evidence for it, but we proceed as if the world exists as we perceive it.

Berkeley claims that views like those of Hume lead to skepticism.

Hume agrees, in a way, but denies that it leads to immorality. (See Section VIII.)

Hume sees skepticism as practically defeasible, p 109.

Extreme skepticism is self-refuting, p 103, and p 110.