Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class 20 - April 7
Start Hume

Some Things We Know

P1. It is sunny outside right now.
P2. It snowed in February.
P3. Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.
P4. 2 + 2 = 4.
P5. I exist.
P6. Objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at 9.8 m/s^2.
P7. The sun will rise tomorrow.

- Our account of our beliefs about P1 appeals to occurrent sense experience.
- Our accounts of our beliefs about P6 and P7 appeal to universal scientific principles.

Mathematical Claims

P4. 2 + 2 = 4.

- Many empiricists are nominalists or fictionalists about mathematical terms.
- Fictionalism: mathematical objects are merely convenient fictions
  - Existential mathematical claims are false.
    - There are four prime numbers between 10 and 20.
  - Conditional mathematical claims are true, but only vacuously so.
    - All parallelograms have congruent opposite angles.
- Berkeley was a nominalist about both mathematical terms and scientific laws, claiming that are illegitimate abstractions from particular ideas.

Hume on Abstraction

agrees with Berkeley

The idea of extension...is wholly dependent on the sensible ideas or the ideas of secondary qualities. Nothing can save us from this conclusion but the asserting that the ideas of those primary qualities are attained by *abstraction*; an opinion which, if we examine it accurately, we shall find to be unintelligible, and even absurd (*Enquiry*, §XII.1, AW 595b).

Inference and Mediation

- We are immediately aware of only our ideas, not an external world of objects.
- The external world is perceived only mediately, or inferred.
  - Physical laws
  - Mathematical principles
- Locke claimed knowledge of the external world, science, and mathematics on the basis of a modified resemblance hypothesis, and a principle of abstraction.
- Berkeley denied Locke's resemblance hypothesis and doctrine of abstract ideas, and asserted idealism.
  - Only a practical knowledge of general scientific regularities
  - Mathematical principles are fundamentally flawed by their reliance on abstraction.
- For the early empiricists, our beliefs about mathematics and our beliefs about scientific theories are treated together.
  - Descartes, too, but as innate

Hume's Move

Separating Mathematics and Science

- Hume bases our knowledge of mathematics on the principle of contradiction and our bare psychological capacities.
- But, he has deep concerns about our knowledge of science.
- He agrees with Berkeley that our conclusions about the material world are unjustified.
  - The mind never has anything present to it but the perceptions and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connection with objects. The supposition of such a connection is, therefore, *without any foundation in reasoning* (*Enquiry*, §XII.1, AW 595a, emphasis added).
- His conclusions are skeptical, rather than idealistic.
- Hume returns to and extends Locke's skepticism.
  - For Locke, skepticism is mainly an expression of humility.
  - For Hume, skepticism is a philosophy.

Induction and Deduction

- Hume's main focus is on the laws of nature, and the ways in which we formulate predictive scientific theories on the basis of our experience.
- The methods of science are inductive.
- Induction is the derivation of a general law from particular cases.
  - We see lots of objects moving, and stopping, and we generate hypotheses about why this happens.
  - We see that in events E_1, E_2, E_3.... a law applies.
  - We conclude that in all similar cases, this law must apply.
- Induction is contrasted with deduction, in which we infer a particular case from a general rule or law.
  - All goobles are froom.
  - Trazzie is a gooble.
  - So, Trazzie is froom.

Universal Scientific Laws

We're supposed to know these.

- Newton's three laws of motion
  - L1: Inertia: an object in motion will remain in motion, an object at rest will remain at rest, unless acted on by an unbalanced force.
  - L2: The force produced by an object is equal to the product of its mass and its acceleration.
  - L3: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.
- Laws of motion are generalizations from experimental evidence.
- The phenomena, the E_n, are sensory experiences.

Hume's Skepticism

Our beliefs in scientific laws are unjustified.

- This skeptical claim arises from what is called the problem of induction.
- Berkeley turns toward knowledge of God as the only cause.
- Hume turns away from certainty.
- Universal scientific claims are unknowable.
- "In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature and, consequently, all their effects and influence may change without any change in their sensible qualities" (*Enquiry*, §IV.2, AW 547b).
- Even our knowledge of our selves is impugned by Hume's philosophy.

Hume's Methods

- We start with a modest appraisal of our experience and our psychological capacities.
- We examine the nature of our psychology, and see what conclusions are warranted.
- And, we will humbly avoid making unsupported claims.
- The major difference between Hume and Locke is the severity with which Hume invokes his empiricist limitations, and his consequent skepticism, and atheism.

Hume's Work

- Published the *Treatise* in 1739 when he was 27, anonymously.
  - "It fell stillborn from the press."
- Suppressed his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
  - published posthumously
  - Hume's atheism was widely known and ridiculed.
  - His proposed university appointments were blocked by the Scottish clergy twice.
  - Virginia Woolf
- *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1748.

Topics in Hume

1. Causation and Induction
2. The Bundle Theory of the Self
3. Free Will and Compatibilism

Ideas and Impressions

Louisa and Cara

Matters of Fact and Relations of Ideas

Relations of Ideas

All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, namely, *relations of ideas*, and *matters of fact*. Of the first kind are the sciences of geometry, algebra, and arithmetic; and in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. *That the square of the hypothenuse is equal to the square of the two sides* is a proposition which expresses a relation between these figures. *That three times five is equal to the half of thirty* expresses a relation between these numbers. Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. Though there never were a circle or triangle in nature, the truths demonstrated by Euclid would for ever retain their certainty and evidence (*Enquiry*, §IV.1, AW 542a).

- Matters of fact are *a posteriori*, contingent.
- Relations of ideas are *a priori*, necessary, and deductive.