Class 23: April 19
Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, VIII-IX (AW 564-576); XII (AW593-600)

I. Two Humes

We have seen two aspects of Hume's work.
The skeptical Hume argues that we have no knowledge of the future or unobserved, and no knowledge of the self.
The naturalist Hume presumes our beliefs in universal scientific laws, and explains them in terms of our natural psychological capacities.
But, to explain is not to justify, and the problem of induction persists.
The next two topics, miracles and free will, will start from the naturalist assumptions.

II. Hume, Berkeley, Laws of Nature and Miracles

Philosophy, like politics, often makes strange bedfellows.
We have been noting the deep similarities between the Anglican bishop, Berkeley, and the Scottish skeptic and agnostic, Hume.
Both Hume and Berkeley deny that we know laws of nature, but for different reasons.
Berkeley thinks that there are some general regularities in nature.
These regularities ensure that human beings can be productive and safe, and so demonstrate the goodness of God.
Berkeley also thinks that there are exceptions to these regularities, blemishes in nature.
These blemishes, exceptions to the laws of nature, are miracles, and Berkeley is determined to leave room for them.

> It cannot be denied that God, or the intelligence that sustains and rules the ordinary course of things, might if He were minded to produce a miracle, cause all the motions on the dial-plate of a watch, though nobody had ever made the movements and put them in it (Berkeley, *Principles* §62; see also §84).

Consider the supposed miracle, in the book of Joshua, in which God makes the sun stand still so that Joshua can complete his killing 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)

In contrast to Berkeley, Hume not only denies that miracles happen, he denies that they are possible.
There can be no irregularities in nature, because the very notion of a regularity presupposes uniformity.
If there were exceptions to the laws, we wouldn't call them laws.

> Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden, because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle, nor can such a proof be destroyed or the miracle rendered credible but by an opposite proof which is superior (*Enquiry*, §X, AW 579b).

A problem for Hume's argument for the impossibility of miracles arises when we have nearly uniform experiences, and one small irregularity.
If we experience an anomaly, though, an event inconsistent with what we think are the laws of nature, we will adjust the laws.

> When any cause fails of producing its usual effect, philosophers ascribe not this to any irregularity in nature, but suppose that some secret causes in the particular structure of parts have prevented the operation (*Enquiry*, §VI, AW 556a).

Note the tension here between Hume's claim that we have no knowledge of causal laws, on the one hand, and his insistence that there are universal regularities in nature.
Not only are there regularities, but there can be no exceptions to those regularities.
Hume argues that there is no chance in nature.
All probability arises from our ignorance of causal connections; it is epistemic, rather than objective.
As Einstein (later) said, God does not throw dice.

One way to understand how Hume's skepticism is compatible with his denial of irregularities is to remember that Hume does have a psychological account of causation.
The regularities that we find are real, even if among our ideas.
Hume is not, like Berkeley, leaving room for divine intervention.
He is taking seriously the empiricist's problem of being cut off from the external world, the veil of ideas.

III. Compatibilism

We have talked quite a bit about free will and determinism in this course so far.
Consider three broad kinds of positions on free will.

1. Libertarianism: our will is free
2. Determinism: our will is not free, but determined
3. Compatibilism: we are both free and determined

Note that 'libertarianism' in this context has nothing to do with the political position of the same name.
Also note that libertarianism and determinism are both what we call incompatibilist positions.

The problem of free will arises since we have reasons to believe both that we are free (our conscious experience feels free) and that we are determined (either by God's will or deterministic laws of physics, or both).
Descartes was a libertarian, attributing our ability to err to our freedom.
To avoid determinism, the libertarian tries to show that the future is not fixed.
We might do that by appealing, say, to the indeterminacy of quantum physics.
But, quantum indeterminacy does not seem to rise to the macro level.
Moreover, the deterministic-seeming laws of physics do not suffer from the random indeterminacies we find at the quantum level.
Indeed, if they did, not only would the future seem undetermined, it would seem chaotic.
Our freedom does not seem to consist of random moments inconsistent with the laws.
Our freedom is rooted in our ability to choose among various options.

Given our feeling of freedom, the determinist tries to show that our belief in our free will is illusory.
Appearances of free will may be due to a lack of understanding of the laws and the initial conditions.
Or, they can be attributed to the inability of a finite mind to comprehend the infinitude of God.
Spinoza was a determinist, and claimed that freedom was an illusion.

Determinism seems troubling, and not just because of the unpleasant thought that I don't have the freedom I appear to have.
Determinism seems to undermine our ordinary notions of moral responsibility.
Ordinarily, we think that we are morally responsible only for behavior that we could have avoided; we are not responsible when we have no ability to do otherwise.
So, I am not personally responsible for, say, ending global warming, since I can not personally end it.
I am certainly not responsible for, say, tidying up the surface of Jupiter, or for preventing the great Chicago fire of 1871, since the laws of physics prevent me from doing anything about them.
On the other hand, since I could have contributed, in some way, to the relief of suffering and misery in the Sudan, say by contributing to a charity that provided food and water to refugees, I may be responsible for doing so.
But, if determinism is true and entails that I can never do otherwise than what I do, it seems that I can never be morally responsible for any of my actions.
Intuitively, we do think people are morally responsible for some of their actions.
So, determinism clashes with these intuitions.
This is a puzzle.

Leibniz also subscribed to determinism, but tried to make it compatible with free will.
I did not introduce the term 'compatibilism' at that point.
But, it's worth using now, as we look at Hume, who is another compatibilist.
Compatibilism is the view that determinism is not opposed to free will.

As we saw in the discussion of miracles, Hume accepts that there are strictly deterministic laws, that there is no chance in nature.

> It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it (*Enquiry*, §VIII.1, AW 565b).

Hume pursues this deterministic line of reasoning through to human actions.

People do not generally surprise us with their actions.
When they do, it is due to our own ignorance, rather than any unpredictability, in principle, in their behavior.

> The philosopher, if he is consistent, must apply the same reasoning to the actions and volitions of intelligent agents. The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for by those who know every particular circumstance of their character and situation (*Enquiry*, §VIII.1, 568a).

Given Hume's determinism, or what he calls necessity, it seems odd that he could also hold that we have free will, which he calls liberty.
For, as we have seen, free will seems directly opposed to determinism.
Hume claims that the dispute between libertarians and determinists is mainly verbal, since the freedom that we really care about is not in fact opposed to determinism.

Hume's claim is that 'freedom' is ambiguous.
In one sense, 'freedom' is opposed to 'determinism', or 'necessity'.
In that sense, the debate over free will lives on.
But, Hume claims, freedom in that sense is not even desirable.
If our actions were free, in the sense of undetermined, we would have no reasons for acting at all.
Our acts would be random, and chaotic.
Worse for the traditional libertarian, since our actions do not proceed determined from our will, we seem to be blameless.
We only hold people responsible for their actions when they are done intentionally, by a conscious agent.
We do not hold the lion morally culpable for killing the wildebeest.
Similarly, we should not blame the person whose actions, even if bad, are undetermined.

> The actions themselves may be blamable; they may be contrary to all the rules of morality and religion. But the person is not answerable for them and, as they proceeded from nothing in him that is durable and constant and leave nothing of that nature behind them, it is impossible he can, upon their account, become the object of punishment or vengeance. According to the principle, therefore, which denies necessity, and consequently causes, a man is as pure and untainted after having committed the most horrid crime as at the first moment of his birth, nor is his character any way concerned in his actions, since they are not derived from it, and the wickedness of the one can never be used as a proof of the depravity of the other (*Enquiry*, §VIII.2, 572b).

Hume has thus turned the table on the determinist.
We were worried, before, that determinism prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.
Hume has argued that free will, in the sense opposed to determinism, also prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.
Thus, we should look for a different sense of 'freedom'.

In its proper sense, Hume claims, 'freedom' should be contrasted with 'constraint'.
That is, an action is done freely when it is done without external constraint: if I am not dragged, pushed, or held at gunpoint to perform an action.

> For what is meant by liberty when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean that actions have so little connection with motives, inclinations, and circumstances that one does not

> follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. By liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will* - that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to everyone who is not a prisoner and in chains (*Enquiry*, §VIII.1, AW 571a).

According to Hume, then, if I do something only because I could not have done otherwise, I do not do it freely.
I do not return to the ground when I jump in the air of my free will; I could not have done otherwise in that case.
More importantly, if I pay my taxes because I am afraid of being fined or imprisoned, or if I refrain from cheating only out of fear of punishment, or if I am forced by threat to do any action I do not wish to perform, I do not act freely.
On the other hand, if I want to pay taxes, since I approve of their uses in building and maintaining roads, schools and armed forces; or if I refrain from cheating because I do not wish to cheat, then I am acting in accordance with my will, freely.
Consequently, we can hold people morally responsible for those acts they perform freely, in Hume's sense, and not for those they perform under constraint.

Hume, by focusing on a sense of 'freedom' that is not opposed to determinism not only makes free will compatible with determinism.
He also makes both the acceptance of both free will and determinism compatible with ascriptions of moral responsibility.
He allows us an account of moral responsibility which aligns with our belief that we are responsible only for that which we choose.
Hume's definition is consistent with the doctrine that ought implies can, that our moral responsibilities do not exceed our powers.
Everyone should be happy.

IV. Worries About Compatibilism

The reflective determinist will be unsatisfied with Hume's definition of 'freedom'.
Hume fails to take into account any constraints on our will.
The determinist, that is, can pursue the question of whether we are free or determined by asking whether we are free to choose what we choose, or whether we are constrained.
If our thoughts are themselves the products of physical processes, mainly brain processes along with their inputs (from perception), then the same problem of determinism recurs with regard to our will.
Our will itself seems to be determined.
Our actions may be in accord with our will, but we are prevented from willing freely.

If our wills are constrained, then there is a deep sense in which we are not free, even if we are not under external constraint.
We excuse children from legal responsibility, because we think that they are not free to choose otherwise, even when they are not constrained by an external force.
Similarly, we excuse people with various mental illnesses, when we believe that the illness prevents a free choice, again even in the absence of external constraints.

We do not make such excuses for ordinary adults, who we suppose to be free.
But, the differences between adults, on the one hand, and children and people with dementia, on the other, may not be as significant as is ordinarily assumed.
As psychology progresses, we find an increasing number of phenomena considered to be mental illnesses.
Mental disorders are standardly listed by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostics and Standards Manual, or DSM, the fifth edition of which is currently being prepared.
Since the original DSM was produced in 1952, the number of disorders listed has tripled, and the size of the manual has increased seven-fold.
Some characteristics, like homosexuality, have been removed from the DSM, but the overwhelming trend is toward greater diagnoses of disorders.
There is actually quite an interesting controversy over the methods being used to develop the DSM-V.
As a result of increased diagnoses of mental disorders, more of our actions are seen as the result of mental predispositions than as the result of free choice.
Neuroscientific progress and advances in genetics have also increased the number of phenomena for which scientific theories can account in the absence of any role for free will.
Presumably, such scientific progress will include, eventually, substantial predictive power.
If psychological theories turn out not to be predictive, they will be abandoned by scientists.
Advances in fMRI technology have allowed machines to begin to read our thoughts by scanning our brains.
It would be difficult to maintain, as the compatibilist does, that we are free, if a computer could predict our behavior.
Scientific advances seem to provide a challenge to the compatibilist.
We reduce our ascriptions of moral responsibility when a subject's actions can be predicted.
The absence of free will implied by the predictability of our actions seems to excuse.
And, that is the essence of incompatibilism.

The following considerations, which we discussed earlier in the term, may help illuminate Hume's view of free will.
Harry Frankfurt presents a contemporary version of Hume's compatibilism.
Frankfurt begins by noting that we are inclined to endorse the following principle of alternate possibilities (PAP):

> PAP A person's act is free if and only if that person could have done otherwise.

On PAP, if determinism is true and incompatible with free will, no one ever could have done otherwise.
No one ever acts freely.
And, thus, no one can be morally responsible in a deterministic universe.
Frankfurt argues that one can be morally responsible even if one could not have done otherwise.
He presents the example of $Jones_4$, which seems to provide a counterexample to PAP.

> Suppose someone — Black, let us say — wants $Jones_4$ to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So he waits until $Jones_4$ is about to make up his mind what to do, and does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of such things) that $Jones_4$ is going to decide to do something other than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that $Jones_4$ is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that $Jones_4$ decides to do, and that he does do, what he wants him to do... Now suppose that Black never has to show

> his hand because $Jones_4$, for reasons of his own, decides to perform and does perform the very action Black wants him to perform. In that case, it seems clear, $Jones_4$ will bear precisely the same moral responsibility for what he does as he would have borne if Black had not been ready to take steps to ensure that he do it. It would be quite unreasonable to excuse $Jones_4$ for his action...on the basis of the fact that he could not have done otherwise. This fact played no role at all in leading him to act as he did... Indeed, everything happened just as it would have happened without Black's presence in the situation and without his readiness to intrude into it (Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," 835-6).

So, $Jones_4$ could not have done otherwise, since Black was prepared to force him to act.
But $Jones_4$ still bears moral responsibility.
Note that Black, in this example, is a stand-in for the laws of physics.
He is what ensures that $Jones_4$ could not do otherwise.
While Black was not impelling $Jones_4$ to act, he was ensuring that $Jones_4$ could not have done otherwise.
Yet, $Jones_4$ was responsible for his action.
Thus, PAP is false.
Frankfurt has shown PAP to be false without impugning the more plausible claim that moral responsibility is excluded by coercion.
If we are truly coerced, we are not morally culpable for our actions.
But, there are cases, like that of $Jones_4$, in which we can not do otherwise, and yet we are morally responsible.

Hume and Frankfurt thus show that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism.
That's useful for both the determinist and the compatibilist, both of whom accept that we can not do other that what we do.
But, it does not settle the question of whether we have free will, in the sense opposed to determinism.
That is, the compatibilist recovers moral responsibility while avoiding the metaphysical question about freedom.

V. Conclusions on Hume

The empiricists of the modern era believed that they could limit the extravagant speculations of the continental rationalists by paying close attention to our epistemic capacities.
As early as Hobbes, we saw attention paid to psychological matters, especially the principles governing the connections of our ideas.
Hobbes's analogy of the water on the table was meant to illuminate the way in which our thoughts are connected.
Locke claimed that our ideas of reflection were those produced by memory, comparison, augmentation, and abstraction.
Hume claims that the connections among ideas are exhausted by the three categories of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect relations.
Philosophy of mind throughout the modern era is characterized by a representational theory, in which we apprehend only our ideas, which may or may not stand for objects external to us.
The representational theory may be contrasted with Aristotle's theory of direct perception, in which we are immediately acquainted with the external world.
For all of the moderns, our experience of the world is mediated by our ideas.
The representational theory leads to the Lockean veil of ideas; we are cut off from the external world.

The empiricists, who all agreed with Locke that the contents of the mind have to arise in sense experience, thought of ideas as pictures in the mind, like a movie in which the external world is duplicated.
But even Descartes held the representational theory.
The lasting importance of Descartes's work, for the theory of mind, is that he separated thought from sensation; our ideas need not be sense impressions.
That is the point of the chiliagon example in the Fifth Meditation, for instance: we know about the chiliagon without having anything like a clear and distinct sense idea of it.
Indeed, it is helpful to think of Descartes's criterion as clear and distinct conception, rather then perception.

Both Berkeley and Hume may be read, in retrospect, as reductio arguments on the representational theory of mind, though of course they did not think of their work in that way.
Berkeley shows that this theory of mind, coupled with our sensory apparatus, gives us no reason to believe in a material world.
Hume, as we have seen, shows that the combination gives us no reason to believe that we have knowledge of the laws of nature.

Hume recommends a practical response to the skeptical problem.
We have no evidence for our beliefs in laws governing an external world, but we proceed as if the world exists as we perceive it.
The philosopher who seeks universal truths will be frustrated.
But we can just ignore the skeptical questions.

> The abstruse philosophy, being founded on a turn of mind which cannot enter into business and action, vanishes when the philosopher leaves the shade and comes into open day, nor can its principles easily retain any influence over our conduct and behavior. The feelings of our heart, the agitation of our passions, the vehemence of our affections, dissipate all its conclusions and reduce the profound philosopher to a mere plebeian (*Enquiry*, §I, AW 534a-b).

Berkeley decried skepticism as an immoral philosophy.
Hume denies that skepticism leads to immorality.
As we saw in the discussion of free will, Hume thinks that moral responsibility is consistent with his claims.
Hume sees skepticism as practically defeasible.

> The great subverter of *Pyrrhonism*, or the excessive principles of skepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools, where it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade an by the presence of the real objects which actuate our passions and sentiments are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke and leave the most determined skeptic in the same condition as other mortals (*Enquiry*, §XII.2, AW 597b).

Extreme skepticism is self-refuting.

> The Cartesian doubt...were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as plainly it is not) would be entirely incurable and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and

> conviction upon any subject (*Enquiry*, §XII.1, AW 593a).
>
> A Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind or, if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease, and men remain in a total lethargy until the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence (*Enquiry*, §XII.2, AW 598a).

Hume's skepticism is a philosophical position, not a practical one.
We leave through the door, rather than through the window, despite the fact that we have no justification for our actions.

Despite such claims, Hume's work has long been deemed excessively skeptical.
Some contemporary research on Hume minimizes the importance of skepticism to his greater goals.
Many philosophers see him as the intellectual ancestor of today's naturalists.
Instead of arguing for skepticism, we can see Hume as trying to develop a science of human nature, of psychology, using the success of physical science as a paradigm.
This view of Hume's work, while not obviously the best interpretation of his words, has been fruitful.

In contemporary philosophy of mind, substantial attention has been paid to the nature of ideas, and to the language of thought.
If you are interested in such questions, you should pursue courses in the philosophy of mind and in the philosophy of language (hint hint).
But, the modern era has one last gasp.
Kant thinks that he can find his way through the haze by adopting a transcendental method of arguing.

VI. Postscript on Humean Supervenience

In my discussions of personal identity and induction, I mentioned that according to Hume, as far as we know, the world might be completely disconnected, rather than unified by causal laws.
Questions about the nature of the laws, and the deep structure of the world, persist in contemporary philosophy.
There is a view, called Humean Supervenience (HS), defended in the twentieth century by David Lewis, on which the laws of nature are not real properties of the world.
The world is just the loose conjunction of events that is all we can know about the world.

> All there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another (Lewis, 1986).

HS derives, of course, from Hume's work.

> All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another, but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected* (*Enquiry*, §VII.2, AW 562b).

Hume's claim is epistemological: we experience only constant conjunction of events, not connections,

and so that is all we can know about the world.
Lewis's claim is metaphysical: the world itself is just a loose connection of events.
Hume does not deny that there are causes, or necessary connections, or laws.
He just argues that we have no evidence of them.
We are ignorant of the ultimate springs and principles of nature.

Lewis's claim is that laws of nature have no metaphysical status beyond the local matters of fact to which they apply.
They are nothing more than regularities among the facts.
What the local facts are is a matter of some dispute.
Mass and position seem to be local facts, as long as we choose a frame of reference.
Motion is a relation between two local facts over time.

In contrast to HS, some philosophers defend the reality, and the governing quality, of the laws of nature.
In an example from both Saul Kripke and David Armstrong, reminiscent of Newton's bucket example, we are asked to consider two possible worlds that contain only a completely homogeneous and continuous disk, or sphere.
There is no difference discernible among the parts of the sphere, even at the most fundamental level.
In one of these worlds, the sphere is spinning.
In one of these worlds, the sphere is stationary.
We can see that there are differences between the two worlds.
But there are no differences in the facts within in the world.
There are no distinct parts to discern, since the sphere is homogeneous.
So, there are no differences between any two specific points or regions in the two worlds at any point.
The local qualities are all the same in both worlds.

In order to distinguish the two spheres, we must pick out two arbitrary regions, one on each sphere, and an arbitrary reference frame for each world, and identify the two regions.
At one moment, these regions will be (by stipulation) in the same place.
At another moment, keeping the reference frame constant, the two regions will be in different places.
This procedure will allow us to differentiate the worlds.
But, notice, it requires that we be able to identify one region in one worlds over time.
It requires us to be able to differentiate parts of the sphere over time.
This sort of persistence through time is unavailable to the defender of HS.
For, there are no local qualities, temporally local qualities, that will support this difference.
Even to formulate, say, the velocity of one region, is to talk about the change in position over time.
Only a temporally persistent object can change location over time.
We need some way to identify the object that is changing over time.
And, ex hypothesi, there are no differences among any of the parts or regions in either of the worlds!

A person with a little bit of physics and calculus might suppose that one could try to differentiate between the parts of the rotating sphere and the parts of the stationary sphere using instantaneous velocity.
Or, we could use the Lorentz transformations to note that one world is contracting a bit.
That would be smart, but it would not help us to differentiate between worlds with sphere rotating in opposite directions.
Leibniz might help, here, since he would claim that two such worlds, with no discernible difference, could not possibly exist.

To use Leibniz's strategy, though, one would have to defend the principle of sufficient reason, which no one really believes any more.

Here is another example of how HS might be insufficient, from Michael Tooley.
In Tooley's world, there are 10 particles.
So, there are 55 possible interactions.
Imagine that we have studied 54 of them, and we know the laws which govern these 54.
But, suppose conditions are such that the last pair, X and Y, never interact.
Still, if X and Y did interact, there would be some result.
There is nothing in the world to determine the nature of this interaction.
Still, it does seem like there would be some result.
Intuitively, there are laws governing their interaction.
But nothing non-nomic will suit the bill.
The laws of nature do not seem to merely reduce to facts about the world.