

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Finish Hume

Some Things We Know

P1. It is raining outside right now.

- Occurrent sense experience

P2. It snowed in February.

- Memory

P3. Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

- Testimony

P4. $2 + 2 = 4$.

- Relations of ideas

P5. I exist.

- Nope

P6. Objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at 9.8 m/s^2 .

- Nope

P7. The sun will rise tomorrow.

- Nope

Relations of Ideas and the Principle of Contradiction

- If a statement entails a contradiction, then it is necessarily false.
 - *reductio ad absurdum*
- We know mathematical claims because their negations are self-contradictory.
 - “We are possessed of a precise standard by which we can judge of the equality and proportion of numbers and, according as they correspond or not to that standard, we determine their relations without any possibility of error” (*Treatise* I.3.1, p 8).
 - “The only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number...All other inquiries of men regard only matter of fact and existence and these are evidently incapable of demonstration. Whatever *is* may *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction” (*Enquiry* XII.3, AW 599b).
 - Also definitions and logical claims
- The principle of contradiction can not do all the work by itself.
- We need auxiliary tools to frame an hypothesis, to determine whether a statement is in fact a contradiction.
- Frege and the syntactic test for contradiction
 - a formal language in which contradictions could be represented
 - $\alpha \bullet \sim\alpha$
- Hume and the moderns appeal to our psychological ability to recognize contradictions.

Two Tools for Relations of Ideas

RI1. The principle of contradiction.

RI2. Our ability to recognize similarity and difference.

- Leibniz also appeals to these abilities
 - ▶ intuitive knowledge of the axioms
 - ▶ adequate knowledge of how theorems are derived from axioms
- Locke appeals to what he calls intuitive and demonstrative knowledge.
 - ▶ “If we will reflect on our own ways of thinking, we shall find that sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two *ideas* immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other. And this, I think, we may call *intuitive knowledge*” (Locke, *Essay* §IV.II. 1, AW 389a).
- Hume on Intuition
 - ▶ “Only four [philosophical relations], depending solely upon ideas, can be the objects of knowledge and certainty. These four are *resemblance*, *contrariety*, *degrees in quality*, and *proportions in quantity or number*. Three of these relations are discoverable at first sight and fall more properly under the province of intuition than demonstration” (*Treatise* I.III.1, p 7).

The Denial of a Law of Nature is Not a Contradiction

The course of nature may change, and...an object seemingly like those which we have experienced, may be attended with different or contrary effects. May I not clearly and distinctly conceive that a body, falling from the clouds, and which in all other respects resembles snow, has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire? Is there any more intelligible proposition than to affirm that all the trees will flourish in December and January and decay in May and June? Now, whatever is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived implies no contradiction and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning *a priori* (§IV.2, AW 546a-b).

Laws of Nature and Efficient Causation

- Berkeley anticipates Hume on laws of nature.
 - Laws are useful summaries of regularities.
 - They do not reveal the fundamental causal structure of the universe.
- Objection: Not all uniformities are laws.
 - There are no balls of uranium one mile in diameter.
 - There are no balls of gold one mile in diameter.
- The difference between lawlike and non-lawlike uniformities is the presence of causal connections underlying those uniformities.
- For Berkeley, the only true causal ascriptions apply to God.
 - “Reason proves that there is some cause or principle of these phenomena, and this is generally called *gravity*. Since, however, the cause of the fall of heavy bodies is dark and unknown, gravity in that sense cannot be called a sensible quality; consequently, it is an occult quality. But we can scarcely conceive -and indeed not even scarcely - what an occult quality is, and how any quality can act or effect anything. It would be better then, if men would attend only to the sensible effects, putting the occult quality out of view. Abstract words - however useful they are in discussion -should be discarded in meditation, and the mind should be fixed on particular and concrete things, that is, on the things themselves” (*On Motion*, §4, AW 504b-505a).
- That’s not going to work for Hume!

Ignorance of Laws

- It seems difficult to defend any claims about causation or the laws of nature.
- Since they pronounce on future events, we go beyond our experiences of the past, inductively, and project into the future.
- But since they are matters of fact, they have to be traceable back to original sense impressions.
- We do not have any experience of the future, so they can not be confirmed by experience.
- *“The utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles productive of natural phenomena to a greater simplicity and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery, nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and inquiry... Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy and meets us at every turn in spite of our endeavors to elude or avoid it” (§IV.1, AW 544a-b, emphasis added).*

Fixing the Hole in the Inductive Argument

The Principle of the Uniformity of Nature

- Consider a specific version of the problem of induction.
 - B1. I have seen one billiard ball strike another many times.
 - B2. Each time the ball which was struck has moved, motion was transferred.
 - BC. So, the struck ball will move this time.
- BC does not follow deductively from B1 and B2.
- We can make it valid by adding the principle of the uniformity of nature (PUN).
 - PUN The future will resemble the past.
 - B1. I have seen one billiard ball strike another many times.
 - B2. Each time the ball which was struck has moved, motion was transferred.
 - B3. The future will resemble the past.
 - BC. So, the struck ball will move this time.

Cause, Effect, and Uniformity

- We have no reason to believe the principle of uniformity.
 - ▶ “All inferences from experience suppose as their foundation that the future will resemble the past and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities. If there is any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless and give rise to no inference or conclusion. It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future, since all these arguments are founded on the supposition of that resemblance” (§IV.2, AW 547b).
- The past has resembled the future in the past, but we don’t know that it will continue to resemble the future!
- If we had knowledge of cause and effect relations, of the connections among events, we could tie them together to yield PUN.
 - ▶ We would know of the hidden springs by experience.
 - ▶ But, we only have knowledge of constant conjunction.
- So, all scientific generalizations which do not limit themselves to observed evidence are unjustified.
- Physical laws like Newtonian gravitation, or the gas laws, go beyond experimental evidence.

Skepticism and Revolution

- Philosophers speculate broadly about the world and its laws.
- Hume insists that such speculation is unfounded.
- He proposes that philosophy be rid of such speculation.
- “When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in hand any volume - of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance - let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion” (§XII.3, AW 600b).

The Naturalist Hume

- We formulate laws of nature from regularities we have perceived.
- We can not know that the regularity will persist.
- Still, we do believe that there are connections between events.
 - “When one particular species of event has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another, we make no longer any scruple of foretelling one upon the appearance of the other, and of employing that reasoning which can alone assure us of any matter of fact or existence. We then call the one object *cause*, the other *effect*. We suppose that there is some connection between them, some power in the one by which it infallibly produces the other and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity” (§VII.2, AW 563a).
- By experience, we develop certain habits, certain expectations, all while never having any experiences of causal connections.
 - “Suppose...that he has acquired more experience and has lived so long in the world as to have observed familiar objects or events to be constantly conjoined together - what is the consequence of this experience? He immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. Yet he has not, by all his experience, acquired any idea or knowledge of the secret power by which the one object produces the other, nor is it by any process of reasoning he is engaged to draw this inference. But still he finds himself determined to draw it. And though he should be convinced that his understanding has no part in the operation, he would nevertheless continue in the same course of thinking. There is some other principle which determines him to form such a conclusion. This principle is *custom* or *habit*” (§V.1, AW 549a-b).
- Mental capacity, not insight

Hume on Miracles

- “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” (§X, AW 579b).
- If we experience an anomaly, 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” (§VI, AW 556a).

Skepticism and Regularities

- 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.
 - ▶ There is no chance in nature.
 - ▶ All probability arises from our ignorance of causal connections.
 - epistemic, not objective
 - ▶ "God does not throw dice" (Einstein).
- Hume employs a psychological account of causation.
- The regularities that we find are real, even if among our ideas.

Problems with Psychologism

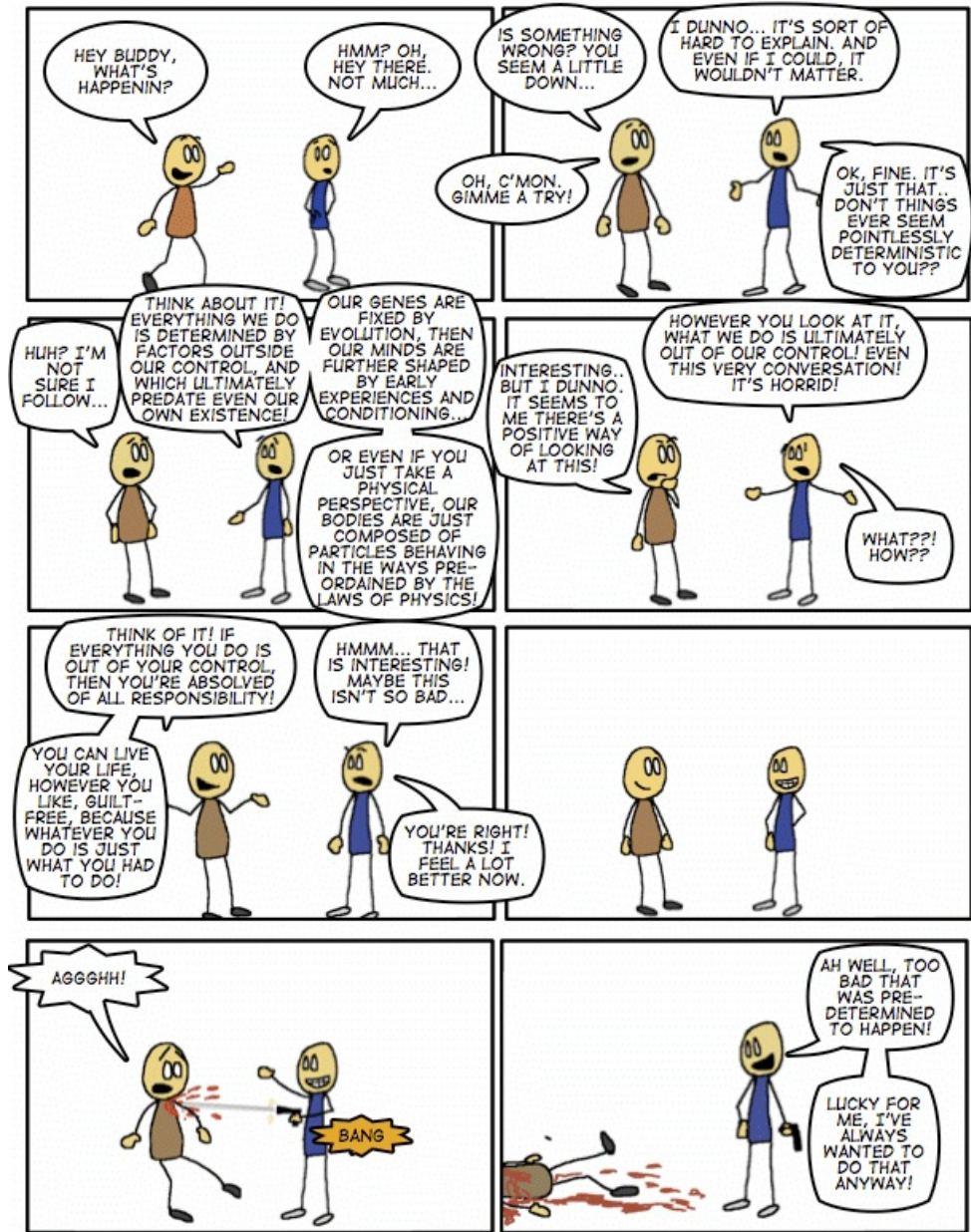
- “Number is no whit more an object of psychology or a product of mental processes than, let us say, the North Sea is. The objectivity of the North Sea is not affected by the fact that it is a matter of our arbitrary choice which part of all the water on the earth’s surface we mark off and elect to call the North Sea. This is no reason for deciding to investigate the North Sea by psychological methods. In the same way number, too, is something objective. If we say ‘The North Sea is 10,000 square miles in extent’ then neither by ‘North Sea’ nor by ‘10,000’ do we refer to any state of or process in our minds: on the contrary, we assert something quite objective, which is independent of our ideas and everything of the sort” (Frege, *Grundlagen*, §26).
- We speak as if the world and the causal laws are objective, existing independently of us.
- But, Hume argues that we are unjustified in believing that.
- Thus, the psychologist is left as a skeptic.

Two Humes

- The skeptical Hume argues that we have no knowledge of the future or unobserved.
- The naturalist Hume presumes our beliefs in universal scientific laws, and explains them in terms of our natural psychological capacities.
- The two Humes are compatible.
- The Radical Hume
 - ▶ We have no knowledge of the laws of nature, causes, the self.
 - “When I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).
 - ▶ The future is completely determined; we are not free.
- The Moderate Hume
 - ▶ ‘Causation’ is a mental phenomenon, arising from habit.
 - ▶ Mathematical theorems are secure relations of ideas.
 - ▶ We believe that nature is uniform.
 - ▶ We are free, in the only sense that is important.

Hume's Compatibilism

- Compatibilism: determinism is not opposed to 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.
- Hume: an act is free if it is done in accordance with our will, even if both the act and the will are also determined.
- Freedom, in its important sense, is not opposed to determinism.
- Freedom is opposed to external constraint.



Toward the Kantian Revolution

- Both Berkeley and Hume may be read as *reductio* arguments on the representational theory of ideas.
 - Berkeley shows that this theory, coupled with our sensory apparatus, gives us no reason to believe in a material world.
 - Hume shows that the combination gives us no reason to believe that we have knowledge of the laws of nature.
- Something has gone seriously wrong.
- Kant attempts a Copernican revolution in philosophy.
 - The empiricists took a weak psychology into a dead end of skepticism.
 - Kant starts with our knowledge, and works backwards to our psychological capacities.
- Transcendental arguments
 - We know we have knowledge of causes, and mathematics.
 - Our experiences are insufficient to support this knowledge.
 - So, there must be psychological capacities which support our knowledge.