

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class #23
Hume on the Self and Free Will

Mindreading Video

Two Humes

The skeptic and the naturalist

- We formulate laws of nature from regularities we have perceived.
 - We 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.
 - “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).
- We can not know that the regularities we have observed will persist.
 - Those regularities are mere psychological habits, not objective facts.

Hume's Psychologism

- Where Berkeley makes the entire world psychological, Hume assumes the existence of an external, physical world.
- But Hume internalizes the causal laws.
- Taking cause and effect to be psychological phenomena is odd.
- Compare to Frege (1884), responding to Mill's psychologistic view of numbers.
 - “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).
- Hume recognizes that we speak as if the world and the causal laws are objective, existing independently of us.
- But he argues that we are unjustified in believing that.
- Thus, we are left as skeptics with unjustified but perhaps explicable habits.

Laws of Nature and Miracles

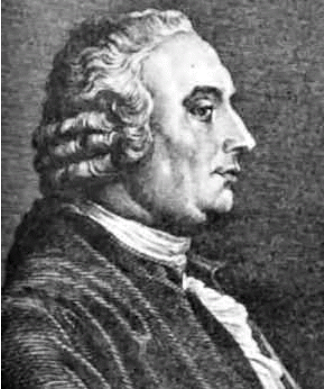
- We have been noting the similarities between the Anglican bishop, Berkeley, and the Scottish skeptic and agnostic, Hume.
- Both Hume and Berkeley deny that we know laws of nature, but for different reasons.
- Berkeley thinks that there are some general regularities in nature, and exceptions to these regularities.
 - “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).
 - Joshua and the halting of time
- Hume not only denies that miracles do 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.

Hume on Miracles

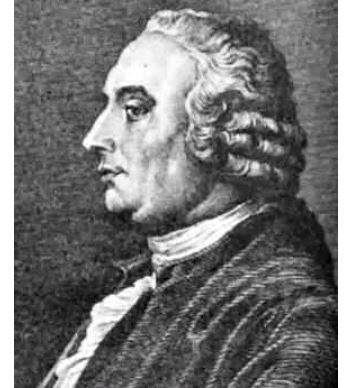
- “Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden, because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead 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.
 - 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.
- 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.



Reconciling the 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.
- But, to explain is not to justify, and the problem of induction persists.
- The next two topics, the self and free will, will start from naturalist assumptions.

Topics in Hume

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

Locke and Berkeley on the Self

- Locke argued that we identify with our conscious experience, linked by memory.
 - The prince and the cobbler
 - The day/night man
- Berkeley worried that given Locke's constraints on our capacities to acquire beliefs, we have no sense of self.
 - We never sense our selves.
 - We sense our bodies, but they are always changing, while the self remains constant.
 - We have no idea of the self, which Berkeley identified with the soul, or of God.
 - "There can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert... they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts... The words *will*, *soul*, *spirit* do not stand for different ideas or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which, being an agent, cannot be like or represented by any idea whatsoever - though it must be admitted at the same time that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of those words" (Berkeley, *Principles* §27, AW 452b).
- We posit the self in order to unify our experiences; we posit God as the source of all the ideas.

Hume Stands His Ground

- Since we have no idea of the self, we have no reason to believe in any such thing.
 - “If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions or from any other that the idea of self is derived, and, consequently, there is no such idea” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 526a).
- There is no underlying, unifying object which we can call the self.
- There are just perceptions.
 - “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 Bundle Theory

or, the no-self theory of the self

- The self, for Hume, is a loose bundle of experiences.
- The experiences are joined only by the same connections among ideas that govern all of our thoughts: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect.
- But, those principles do not connect ideas; they merely conjoin them.
- Even memory, on which Locke based his account of personal identity, merely demonstrates those conjunctions.
 - ▶ It can not add further connections.
 - ▶ The common notion of self which we are pursuing outruns our memories: there are experiences which I call mine that I do not remember.
 - ▶ “Memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. It will be incumbent on those who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory” (*Treatise* I.4.6, AW 530b).

The Self as Diversity

- Instead of being a paradigm of unity, as the rationalists saw it, the self, according to Hume, is an exemplar of diversity.
- Just as Berkeley argued that the apple is just a bundle of independent sense experiences, its taste independent from its roundness and its crunch, we are just a collection of various, independent experiences.
- As far as we know, the world itself is just a loose collection of events, unconnected by causal laws.
 - Everything is particular, and all the particulars are independent.
 - “Every distinct perception which enters into the composition of the mind is a distinct existence and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive” (AW 529b).
- Even the self is dissolved.
 - The Buddhist view: There is no I, beyond the experiences.
- Descartes’s claim that the cogito yields the existence of a thinker is too strong.
 - There is just thought.

Topics in Hume

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

Three Positions on Free Will

1. Libertarianism: Our will is free

- ▶ We have reasons to believe that we are free: our conscious experience feels free.
- ▶ Descartes

2. Determinism: Our will is not free, but determined

- ▶ We have reasons to believe that we are determined: either by God's will or deterministic laws of physics, or both.
- ▶ Spinoza
- ▶ Libertarianism and determinism are both incompatibilist positions.

3. Compatibilism: We are both free and determined

Libertarian Freedom

- Descartes attributed our ability to err to our freedom.
- The libertarian believes that the future is not fixed.
- Phenomenology of human action
- Indeterminacy of quantum physics?
 - Quantum indeterminacy does not seem to rise to the macro level.
 - Random indeterminacies
- Our freedom does not seem to consist of random, chaotic moments inconsistent with the laws.
- Our freedom is rooted in our ability to choose among various options.

The Deterministic Response

- To avoid libertarianism, the determinist tries to show that our feeling of free will is illusory.
- Appearances of free will might, say, be attributed 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.

Problems with Determinism

- The thought that I don't have the freedom I appear to have is unpleasant.
- 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.
 - I am not personally responsible for ending global warming, tidying the surface of Jupiter, or preventing the great Chicago fire of 1871.
 - In contrast, since I can contribute to the reduction of carbon in our atmosphere, I may be responsible for doing so.
- If determinism is true, and if it 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.

Compatibilism

- Compatibilism: determinism is not opposed to free will.
- Leibniz defended determinacy with contingency
 - Caesar example
 - implausible
- Hume: an act is free if it is done in accordance with our will, even if the act is also determined.
 - 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).
- People do not generally surprise us with their actions.
 - When they do, it is due to our ignorance rather than any unpredictability 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” (§VIII.1, 568a).
- The dispute between libertarians and determinists is mainly verbal.
 - The freedom that we really care about is not opposed to determinism.

‘Freedom’ and Necessity

- 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, 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, since our actions did not proceed determined from our will, we seem to be blameless.
 - We do not hold the lion morally culpable for killing the wildebeest.

How Libertarian Freedom Prevents Moral Responsibility

- “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” (§VIII.2, 572b).
- Hume has turned the table on the determinist.
- We were worried that determinism prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.
- Hume argues that free will, in the sense opposed to determinism, also prevents ascriptions of moral responsibility.

‘Freedom’ and Constraint

- Hume claims that an action is done freely, properly understood, when it is done without external constraint.
- I act freely 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” (§VIII.1, AW 571a).

Moral Responsibility in a Deterministic World

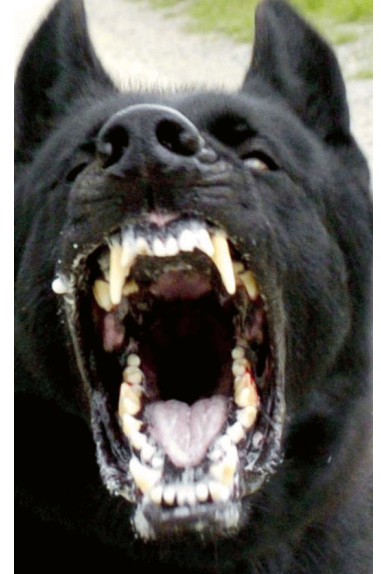
- If I do something only because I could not have done otherwise, I do not do it freely.
 - I do not return to the ground when I jump in the air of my free will.
 - If I pay my taxes because I am afraid of being fined or imprisoned, or if I refrain from cheating only out of fear of punishment, or if I am forced by threat to do any action I do not wish to perform, I do not act freely.
- 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.

The Compatibilist Wins!

- By focusing on a sense of 'freedom' that is not opposed to determinism, Hume 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.

Not So Fast!

- The reflective determinist will be unsatisfied with Hume's definition.
- The determinist 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.
- That is, we do seem to distinguish between cases in which our will is constrained and cases in which it is not.



The
incompatibilist

Freedom and Constraint of the Will

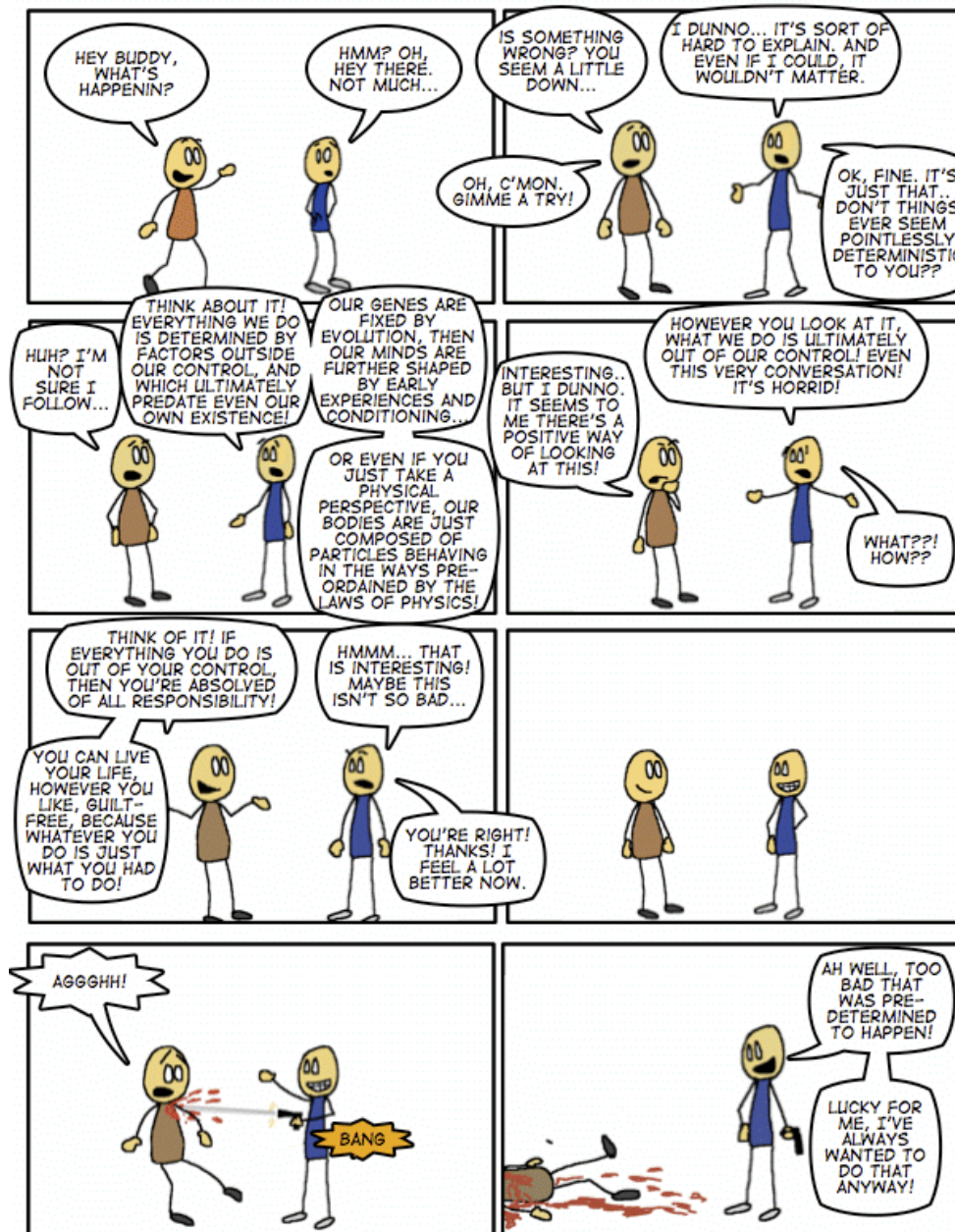
- If our wills are constrained, then there is a deep sense in which we are not free, even if we are not under external constraint.
- We excuse children from legal responsibility, because we think that they are not free to choose otherwise, even when they are not constrained by an external force.
- Mental disorders
 - 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.
 - More of our actions are seen as the result of mental predispositions than as the result of free choice.
 - DSM-V
- Neuroscientific progress and advances in genetics
 - Such scientific progress will include, eventually, substantial predictive power.
 - fMRI and mindreading
- Can we maintain, as the compatibilist does, that we are free, if a computer can predict our behavior?
 - The absence of free will implied by the predictability of our actions seems to excuse.
 - That is the essence of incompatibilism.
- Compatibilism does not settle the question of whether we have free will, in the sense opposed to determinism.

Frankfurt Cases

- One can be morally responsible even if one could not have done otherwise.
 - Suppose someone — Black, let us say — wants Jones₄ 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 Jones₄ 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 Jones₄ is going to decide to do something other than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones₄ is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones₄ 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 Jones₄, 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, Jones₄ 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 Jones₄ 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).
- Jones₄ could not have done otherwise, since Black was prepared to force him to act.
- But Jones₄ still bears moral responsibility.
- Thus we have a case in which someone bears responsibility despite not being able to do otherwise, which PAP denies.

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.
- 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 than what we do.
 - it does not settle the question of whether we have free will, in the libertarian sense opposed to determinism.
 - The compatibilist recovers moral responsibility while avoiding the metaphysical question about freedom.



Topics in Hume

- ✓1. Causation and Induction
- ✓2. The Bundle Theory of the Self
- ✓3. Free Will and Compatibilism
- Now, let's conclude.

Psychologistic Rehabilitation

- 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.
 - 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.
- According to the representational theory, we apprehend only our ideas, which may or may not stand for objects external to us.
 - Contrast with Aristotle's theory of direct perception, in which we are immediately acquainted with the external world.
 - Our experience of the world is mediated by our ideas; we are cut off from the external world.
- Locke and Hume try to reclaim some of our knowledge as psychological knowledge.
 - Causation as a psychological phenomenon
 - Mathematics as relations of ideas
- We speak as if the world and the causal laws are objective, existing independently of us, but, we are unjustified in believing that.
- Thus, the psychologist is left as a skeptic.

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
 - Even P1 - P3 are problematic, given the problems with our beliefs in an external world.

Hume's Practical Response to Skepticism

- 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” (§I, AW 534a-b).
- Berkeley decried skepticism as an immoral philosophy; Hume denies that skepticism leads to immorality.
- 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 and 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” (§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” (§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” (§XII.2, AW 598a).

Return of the 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.

Toward the Kantian Revolution

- Despite attempts to tone down Hume's skepticism (with practical and naturalist interpretations), Hume's conclusions are baldly skeptical.
- Both Berkeley and Hume may be read, in retrospect, 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.