Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2005
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Lecture Notes, December 12

I. 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.]

II. Hume and Berkeley on Laws of Nature.

Both Hume and Berkeley deny that we know the laws of nature.
They have different reasons, which are vital to distinguish.

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.

Hume denies that there can be irregularities in nature.
He not only denies that miracles happen, he denies that they are possible.
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.

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.

III. Three problems of induction

1. Weak problem of induction:
We have limited intelligence and experience.
There is not enough evidence to draw the conclusions that we draw.
But if we were smarter or had more time, we could solve the problem.
This is not Hume's problem of induction.
This problem is just a problem of weak science, limitations on evidence.

2. Strong problem of induction:
Even given all possible evidence from the past, we can not know that the laws of nature will not shift radically and unexpectedly.
This is Hume's problem, p 19, p 22.

We do make predictions, despite the problem.
Consider dropping a book in mid-air.
P1: The book will rise.
P2: The book will fall.
We predict the latter, but experience does not support this.

Does God know the laws?
Are laws merely human constructs?
A possible solution: God works only in particulars, and has no need for universals.
This seems consistent with Berkeley's position.

The weak problem of induction is just that sometimes there are two or more equally well-supported theories about the world, theories which agree on all the empirical evidence we have gathered.
Even if we presume these theories will continue to hold, and the physical laws will continue to be uniform and stable, we don't know which theory to use.
The weak problem can be solved by gathering more evidence.

The strong problem of induction is Hume's worry that we can't know that the laws of nature will remain uniform and stable. We presume that they will, but this is unjustified.

3. New Problem of Induction

Now, consider the 'New Problem of Induction'.
(It gets its name from Nelson Goodman's *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*.)
You know what it means for an object to be green.
Consider the property called 'grue'.
An object is grue if it is green until 1/1/2010, when it suddenly turns blue.
How can you tell if a plant is green or grue?
All evidence for its being green is also evidence for its being grue.
Green things and grue things are exactly alike until 2010.

The new problem of induction shows that Hume's problem is not just about physical laws, but about common terms we use to describe the world, too.
For, one could construct other artificial properties, like the property of being a papod.
A papod is a piece of paper which, on 1/1/2010, turns into an Ipod.
All papods look exactly like pieces of paper right now.
There is, in principle, no way to tell them apart.

IV. Hume conclusions

The problems of induction are among the most serious in philosophy, especially in the philosophy of science.
Berkeley had shown that Lockean empiricist principles led to difficulties with our beliefs in an external, material world.
Hume shows that these problems infect all of science, not merely belief in matter.
Goodman shows that the problem infects even our most common uses of language.
Berkeley thinks that we can continue to speak with the vulgar and think with the learned.
Hume shows that even the most learned beliefs are unjustified.

Perhaps the problem is with Locke's basic empiricist principle.
But Descartes' position was unacceptable as well.
Perhaps we are just stuck as skeptics.

If you wish to continue to think about these matters, take Modern Philosophy, Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of Science.
We did not talk about Kant, whose work is the culmination of all that we've studied.
These issues are treated differently in contemporary philosophy, but same themes recur.
Similarly, some of these themes are found in earlier writers, like Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.