

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, April 13

Introduction to Hume

Consider each of the following sentences.

- 1) You are taking a philosophy class.
- 2) Your best friend likes you.
- 3) Enron committed accounting fraud.
- 4) Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.
- 5) $2 + 2 = 4$.
- 6) The sun will rise tomorrow.
- 7) $F = ma$. Or, objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at 9.8 m/s^2 .
- 8) Every effect has a cause.

In groups, for each of the preceding statements, we answered the following questions:

A) Is the sentence something you know, or merely something you believe?

B) If it is a mere belief, is your doubt merely skeptical?

For example, I believe both that the Mets are a baseball team and that they will win 81 games this year.

Only skeptical doubts make me doubt that they are a baseball team.

C) How do you know it? Or, why do you believe it?

The answers to these questions may differ.

The answer to the first question might involve some kind of introspection.

The answer to the last might involve scientific principles, or assumptions about the world.

The last four are problems for empiricism.

Empiricists may even deny them.

Many empiricists are nominalists about mathematical terms.

Fictionalism: mathematical objects are convenient fictions.

Berkeley is a nominalist.

Consider his claims about infinite divisibility and the minimum sensibilia.

For him, scientific laws are regularities, provided by God for convenience, but with exceptions (miracles).

But these regularities, as abstract ideas, are not real ideas.

Hume agrees with Berkeley, in part, about abstract objects, p106.

So why should we believe in empiricism?

Hume has an argument.

We will examine Hume's argument next week.