Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, May 2

I. Hume's problem of induction

Before break, we saw how Hume argued that we have no knowledge of laws of nature.
We don't know that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that gravity will continue to draw objects together.
The laws could suddenly shift, from what we think they are.
Our inability to know physical laws is generally known as the problem of induction.

How do we get knowledge of the unobserved?
Consider the example of the chicken and its feed.
Induction is how you know about unobserved phenomena, especially predictions about the future.
It is also how you know that the person next to you has a beating heart.

Hume's Skeptical argument about induction (Handout, VI):
1) Our beliefs about future events and unobserved objects are matters of fact.
2) Beliefs about matters of fact are based on experience.
3) Experience tells us how things were, not how they will be; it tells us only about actually observed phenomena.
So, our beliefs about the future and the unobserved are uncertain.

A specific version of the problem of induction (Handout, VII):
1) I have seen one billiard ball strike another many times.
2) Each time the ball which was struck has moved, motion was transferred.
So, the struck ball will move this time.

Notice that the conclusion does not follow.
You can see this if you consider what would happen if the laws of physics shift.
Then the conclusion could be false, while the premises remain true.

II. A failed attempt to solve the problem of induction

We need a further premise to make the conclusion follow from the premises.
Consider the principle of the uniformity of nature (PUN): The future will resemble the past.
See Handout, VIII, and p 22.
If we add PUN as a third premise, then the conclusion will follow.

What could justify PUN?
We have no basis for believing in it.
All inductive inference instead presupposes it.
It can not justify itself.
(Compare this problem with the problem of Cartesian circularity.)

III. Cause and effect

If we had knowledge of cause and effect relations, we would know PUN.
We have only knowledge of constant conjunction.
If we had knowledge of the connections, we could tie events together.
This would get us PUN.
Descartes thought he had knowledge of the laws through rational insight.
Hume rejects this, for Locke's reasons.
See Hume on Descartes, p 105.
We do not know the connections, p 46.
We can not find effects in causes.

Berkeley, on the other hand, pulls the rabbit out of the hat.
He does not give us knowledge of causes.
He merely relies on the grace of God to keep order in the world.

IV. Habit, and the mental interpretation of cause and effect

Still, we do believe that there are connections between events.
We exit through the door, not the window.
We don't really doubt that the sun will rise.

Hume argues that this is mere unjustified habit, p 50.
We make a mental leap, unsupported by evidence.
Consider if man were suddenly brought into 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.]