

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

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Class 22 - Hume  
The Revolutionary and the Naturalist  
Free Will  
Miracles

# Applying the Matters of Fact/Relations of Ideas Distinction, I

- Consider some things we might say that we know.
  - P1. It is chilly outside right now.
  - P2. It snowed in February.
  - P3. It is cold at the North Pole.
  - P4. Shakespeare wrote *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.
  - P5.  $2 + 2 = 4$ .
  - P6. I exist.
  - P7. Objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ .
  - P8. The sun will rise tomorrow.
- P1-P4 all state matters of fact.
- P1 is justified directly by sense perception.
- P2 is justified by memory.
- P3 and P4 rely on testimony from the sense perceptions of others.
- Hume claims that such assertions can be traced back to original impressions.
- For these four propositions, Hume's claim seems plausible.
  - Trickier than Hume thought
  - Carnap, *Logical Structure of the World*

# Applying the Matters of Fact/Relations of Ideas Distinction, II

- Consider
  - P5.  $2 + 2 = 4$ .
  - P6. I exist.
  - P7. Objects near the surface of the Earth accelerate toward the center of the Earth at  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ .
  - P8. The sun will rise tomorrow.
- P5 states a mathematical fact, and is thus a relation of ideas.
- P6, our knowledge of ourselves, leads to a complication to which we shall return on Tuesday.
- P7 and P8 refer to physical laws, like Newton's laws of motion.
  - Not relations of ideas
  - Their denials do not lead to a contradiction.
  - We can not discover that denials of laws of nature are false by mere process of thought.

# 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).

# Ignorance of Laws

- It seems difficult to defend any claims about the laws of nature.
- We do not have any experience of the future, so they can not be confirmed by experience.
- If they are matters of fact, they have to be traceable back to original sense impressions.
- When they pronounce on future events, we go beyond our experiences of the past, inductively, and project into the future.
- Those claims about the future are unfounded.
- We thus can have no knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow.
- This is the problem of induction.

# Cause and Effect

- The problem of induction is rooted in our ignorance of causes.
- Scientific laws are generally taken to describe the causal structure of the universe.
  - There are no balls of uranium larger than one mile in diameter.
- But we have no sense impressions of many terms used, including 'gravity', 'force', 'mass', and 'energy'.
- We have experience only of events, not their causes.
- “The effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be discovered in it. Motion in the second billiard ball is a quite distinct event from motion in the first, nor is there anything in the one to suggest the smallest hint of the other. A stone or piece of metal raised into the air and left without any support immediately falls. But to consider the matter *a priori*, is there anything we discover in this situation which can beget the idea of a downward rather than an upward or any other motion in the stone or metal?...When I see, for instance, a billiard ball moving in a straight line towards another, even suppose motion in the second ball should by accident be suggested to me as the result of their contact or impulse, may I not conceive that a hundred different events might as well follow from that cause? May not the first ball return in a straight line or leap off from the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable” (§IV.1, AW 543b-544a).

# Secret Powers

- The secret powers, the connections between events, are hidden from us.
- The cohesion of marble
- “Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object is entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, though his rational faculties are supposed entirely perfect at the very first, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it would consume him” (§IV.1, AW 543a).

# Connection and Conjunction

- When we perform inductions, and pronounce on the laws connecting events, we go beyond the evidence of our experience.
- We pretend that we see connections among events,
- But, in fact, all we ever see are conjunctions.
- “We only learn by experience the frequent conjunction of objects, without being ever able to comprehend anything like connection between them” (§VII.1, AW 560b).

# No Causes, No Laws

- All our beliefs about the world are based on experience.
- Experience only tells us what was, not what has to be.
- This follows from the fact that we have no access to the causes.
- Laws of nature reduce disparate phenomena to simple statements.
- But, such reductions require insight into the causal structure of the world, which we do not have.
- Thus we can not establish the truth of laws of nature, despite our best efforts.
- *“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

- 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.
  - B is an invalid argument.
  - The conclusion could be false, while the premises remain true.
- We can add a premise, the principle of the uniformity of nature (PUN).
  - PUN The future will resemble the past.

# The Problem Resolved

- This argument is valid!
  - 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.
- The problem with B\* is that we have no basis for believing B3, the PUN.
- “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!

# Cause, Effect, and PUN

- 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 what the hidden springs are 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).

# A More-Moderate 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.
- 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).

# Belief in Laws is a Habit

After a repetition of similar instances the mind is carried by habit upon the appearance of one event to expect its usual attendant and to believe that it will exist. This connection, therefore, which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression from which we form the idea of power or necessary connection...The first time a man saw the communication of motion by impulse, as by the shock of two billiard balls, he could not pronounce that the one event was *connected*, but only that it was *conjoined* with the other. After he has observed several instances of this nature, he then pronounces them to be *connected*. What alteration has happened to give rise to this new idea of *connection*? Nothing but that he now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other. When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only that they have acquired a connection in our thought (§VII.2, AW 563a).

# Habits Come from Experience

- Consider if a person were suddenly brought into the world.
- She would have no habits, and so no beliefs about regularities or causal powers.
- By experience, she would 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).
- What she has developed is a mental capacity, not an insight.

# The Mental Interpretation of 'Cause'

- Remember, Hume agrees with Berkeley that we experience our sensations, and not their causes.
- We have no experience of the things in themselves.
- Thus, the term 'cause' refers to a mental phenomenon.
- “The appearance of a cause always conveys the mind, by a customary transition, to the idea of the effect. Of this also we have experience. We may, therefore, suitably to this experience, form [a] definition of cause, and call it *an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other*” (VII.2, AW 563b).
- Properly distinguished, causes are internal, rather than external.
  - They are not in nature, but in our minds.
  - Causes are psychological, rather than objective.

# Berkeley and Hume

- Berkeley, when faced with the limits of what we can know, interpreted the terms we use that seem to refer to objects as referring to our mental states.
- Hume, rejecting Berkeley's idealism, assumes that there is a material world, but interprets terms referring to causal relations (including those stating physical laws) as referring to our mental states.
- We can not know about the laws governing the interactions of objects in the world, but we know about our mental states, and we presume (non-rationally) that they project onto the world, in some way.
- Instead of internalizing the world, Hume internalizes cause and effect.
- Hume psychologizes, or naturalizes, our scientific beliefs.

# 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, miracles and free will, will start from the naturalist assumptions.

# 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, we are unjustified in believing that.
- Thus, the psychologist is left as a skeptic.

# Laws of Nature and Miracles

- 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.

# Three Positions on Free Will

- We have reasons to believe that we are free: our conscious experience feels free.
- We have reasons to believe that we are determined: either by God's will or deterministic laws of physics, or both.
- 1. Libertarianism: Our will is free
- 2. Determinism: Our will is not free, but determined
  - 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.
- Spinoza was a determinist, and claimed that freedom was an illusion.

# 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, I may be responsible for the relief of suffering and misery in the Sudan.
- 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
  - Many of us found Leibniz's claim implausible.
- Hume: an act is free if it is done in accordance with our will, even if it is also determined.
- People do not generally surprise us with their actions.
- When they do, it is due to our own ignorance, rather than any unpredictability, in principle, 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).
- Hume claims that the dispute between libertarians and determinists is mainly verbal, since 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 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; I could not have done otherwise in that case.
- 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.
- Hume fails to take into account any constraints on our will.
- The determinist, that is, 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.
- Our will itself seems to be determined.
- Our actions may be in accord with our will, but we are prevented from willing freely.

# 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.

# Frankfurt Cases

- One can be morally responsible even if one could not have done otherwise.
  - ▶ Suppose someone — Black, let us say — wants Jones<sub>4</sub> 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 Jones<sub>4</sub> 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 Jones<sub>4</sub> is going to decide to do something other than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones<sub>4</sub> is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones<sub>4</sub> 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 Jones<sub>4</sub>, 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, Jones<sub>4</sub> 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 Jones<sub>4</sub> 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).
- Jones<sub>4</sub> could not have done otherwise, since Black was prepared to force him to act.
- But Jones<sub>4</sub> still bears moral responsibility.
- Hume, and Frankfurt, thus argue that 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 sense opposed to determinism.
- The compatibilist recovers moral responsibility while avoiding the metaphysical question about freedom.