

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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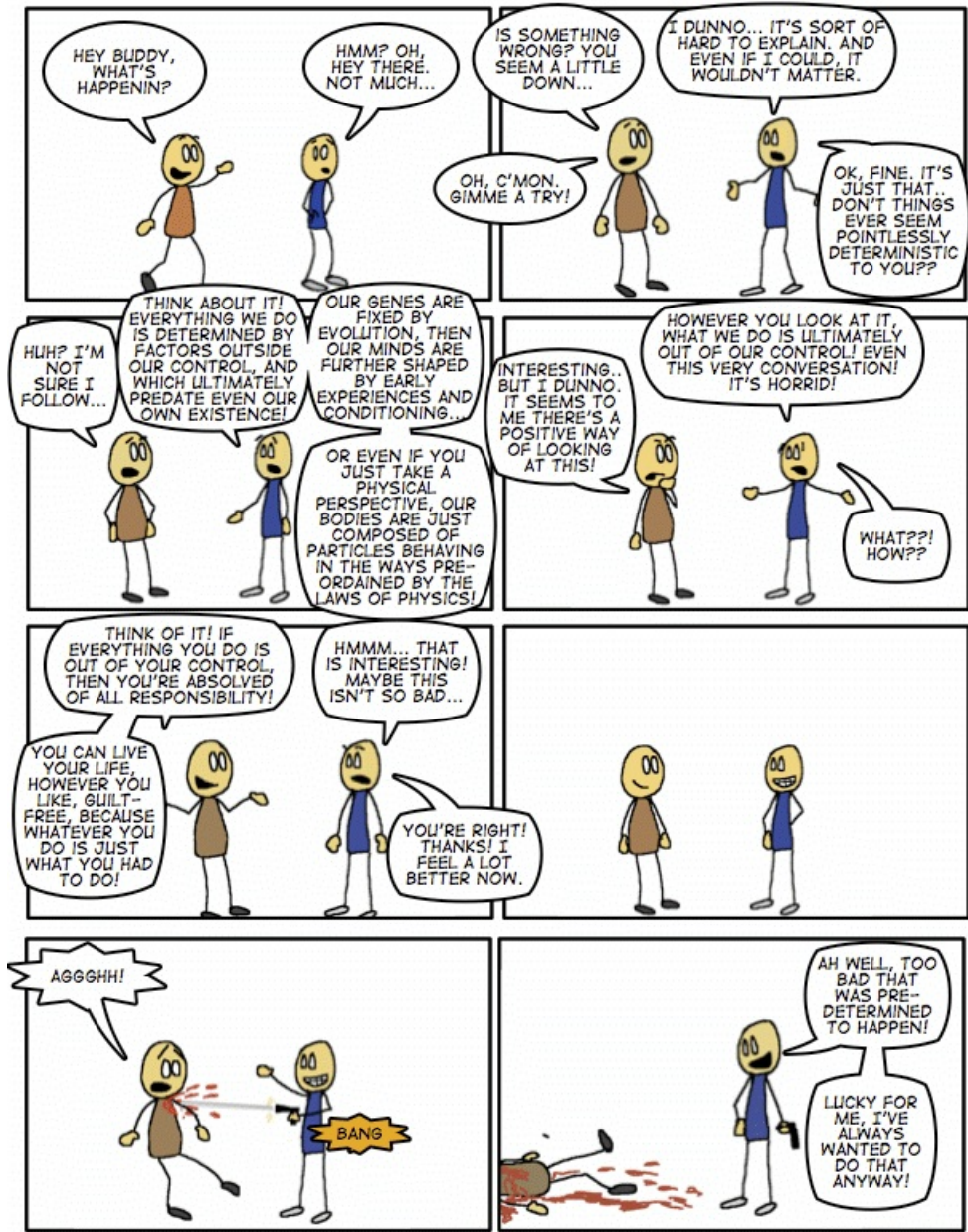
Class 23 - Finishing Hume

Hume Overview

- The two Humes are completely 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.

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.

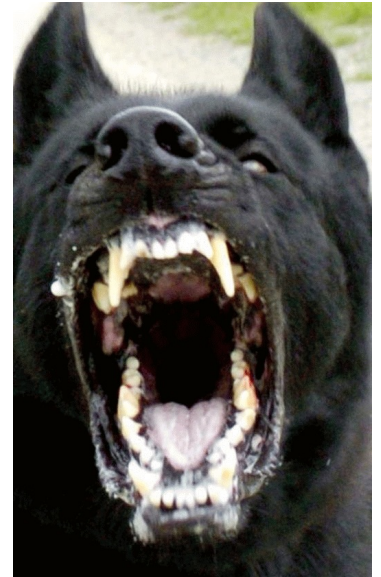


Compatibilism and Moral Responsibility

- Determinism seems to undermine our ordinary notions of moral responsibility.
 - ▶ We are not ordinarily taken to be responsible when we have no ability to do otherwise.
 - ▶ 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.
- By focusing on a sense of 'freedom' that is not opposed to determinism, Hume makes determinism compatible with ascriptions of moral responsibility.
- We are responsible for those actions that are done in accordance with our will
- Frankfurt's case
 - ▶ A could not have done otherwise, since B was prepared to force him to act.
 - ▶ But A still bears moral responsibility.

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.
- The compatibilist recovers moral responsibility while avoiding the metaphysical question about freedom.

Three Problems of Induction

The Weak Problem of Induction

WI: We have limited intelligence and experience.

- There is not enough evidence to draw the conclusions that we draw.
- Scientific theories are generally under-determined by the evidence.
- Often there are two or more competing yet equally well-supported theories about the world.
- Such theories agree on all the empirical evidence we have gathered.
- Even if we presume that physical laws will be uniform and stable, we don't know which theory to use.
- If we were smarter or had more time, we could solve the problem of WI by gathering more evidence.
- WI is not Hume's problem of induction.
 - It is just a problem of limitations on evidence.
 - It is not really a philosophical problem.

The Strong Problem of Induction

SI: Even given all possible evidence from the past, we can not know that the laws of nature will not shift radically and unexpectedly.

- SI is Hume's problem.
- Despite Hume's complaints about inductive processes, we do make successful predictions.
- We presume that the laws of nature will remain uniform and stable, even if that assumption is unjustified.

The New Riddle of Induction

from Nelson Goodman

- Consider the property called 'grue':
 - ▶ An object is grue if it is green until 1/1/2020, 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 2020.
- NRI: Even given that the laws of nature remain stable, we do not know which predicates are confirmed.
 - ▶ NRI shows that Hume's problem is not just about physical laws, but about common terms we use to describe the world, too.
 - ▶ Papod

The Persistence of the Problem

- SI and NRI are among the most serious problems 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's riddle 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.

Hume's Practical Response

- 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).

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

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.

Toward the Kantian Revolution

- 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.