

Reading Assignment 8: The Problem of Induction

Assigned Reading

1. D. Hume. *An enquiry concerning human understanding*. Ed. by T. L. Beauchamp. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 108-118
2. K. F. Schaffner et al. *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Hackett, 1999, pp. 55-58.

Questions

Answer questions one, three, eight, nine, and eleven below.

1. In your own words, describe Hume's distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact." Provide one of Hume's examples of each, and provide your own example of each.
2. Today, some philosophers distinguish among the following three types of propositions:
 - (a) *Analytic*. A proposition is analytic, roughly, if it's true in virtue of meaning. For instance, "Widowers have a deceased spouse" would be called analytic. A proposition is called *synthetic* if it's not analytic.
 - (b) *A priori*. A proposition is called *a priori* if, in principle, it can be justified without observation or experiment by someone who understands the proposition. Mathematical theorems, like $2 + 3 = 5$, are often thought to be *a priori*. A proposition is called *a posteriori* if it's not *a priori*.
 - (c) *Necessary*. A proposition is called *necessary* if it could not be false, or as some philosophers say, it is true in all possible worlds/universes. For example, "If Hume was Scottish, then Hume was Scottish or French" would be called a necessary proposition. A proposition is called a *contradiction* if its negation is necessary, and propositions that are neither necessary nor contradictory are called *contingent*.

Would Hume think relations of ideas are analytic or synthetic? *A priori* or *a posteriori*? Necessary, contradictory, or contingent? What about matters of fact? Provide quotations that support your answer.

3. How are all matters of fact about that "which is absent" justified? Or to use Hume's terminology, on what relation are all matters of fact founded?
4. Provide your own example of a causal relation that is *collateral* according to Hume. Give examples of near, remote, and direct causal relations too.
5. What thesis is Hume's example involving the two pieces of marble intended to illustrate? Provide your own example that is intended to illustrate the same thesis.
6. Would Hume agree or disagree with the following assertion? Our belief that a particular canon ball will follow a parabolic path when shot from a cannon is not justified by experience; it can be derived using some mathematics and Newton's law of gravity. Explain your answer.
7. According to Hume, what is the relationship between conceivability and contradictory propositions?
8. In no more than a paragraph, summarize Hume's argument that any "moral" or "probable" argument that "the future may be conformable to the past" is circular. To do so, briefly try to explain what you think a "circular argument" is. Then carefully read and summarize the argument in paragraph on the bottom of page 115 (margin number 19) beginning with the sentence, "If we be, therefore, engaged by arguments to put trust in past experience, and make it the standard of our future judgment, these arguments must be probable only."

9. According to Schaffner et. al.'s interpretation of Hume, if we repeatedly conduct an experiment in which one billiard ball is thrown into another, what are the three features of the experiment that we observe and which make us infer the existence of a causal connection?
10. According to Schaffner et. al.'s interpretation of Hume, does Hume's argument establish that, although we cannot justifiably predict *particular* future events (e.g., the sun rising tomorrow), we can nonetheless justifiably believe *scientific laws* (e.g., Newton's law of gravity)? What passages in Hume's *Enquiry* might support this interpretation?
11. According to Schaffner et. al.'s interpretation of Hume, is it fair to say that Hume's argument shows that, although one cannot *prove* the sun will rise tomorrow, one can nonetheless show the conclusion to be *probable*? Briefly explain.

Instructor's Note: Although I disagree with Hume on a number of matters, I unreservedly endorse the following thesis: "I must confess, that a man is guilty of unpardonable arrogance, who concludes, because an argument has escaped his own investigation, that therefore it does not really exist."