

General Philosophy Paper (PPE Prelims etc.)

Topic 4: Induction

What is Hume aiming to prove with his famous argument concerning induction, and how (in broad outline) does it proceed? What, if anything, does it actually prove, and should we be worried by it? What response to it do you favour? Does Goodman's "New Riddle" of induction add anything to Hume's problem?

READING

The asterisked items in the list below are those on the Faculty's official reading list, and therefore likely to "set the agenda" for the examination. I have added several others, but you should not feel obliged to read everything!

- * David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, ed. Peter Millican, Oxford World's Classics, 2007), Sections IV and V. This is on the Web at <http://www.davidhume.org/texts/ehu#SBN25>, and my editorial introduction is at <http://www.davidhume.org/papers/millican/2007%20Introduction.pdf> – this will help to set the argument in context (and §10 and §11 are particularly important here).

Section IV contains perhaps the most famous (indeed notorious) philosophical argument ever composed in the English language. However although the general thrust of the argument is clear enough, understanding exactly what Hume is up to is tricky, having been the subject of a lot of recent interpretative debate (to which I have contributed at some length, if you're interested in reading more at some stage). The following article is a brief summary of what I take to be Hume's overall attitude:

Peter Millican, "Is Hume an Inductive Sceptic?", *Vox* 15 (2011), pp. 9-13 and available on the web at http://www.davidhume.org/papers/millican/2011_VOX.pdf.

Bertrand Russell was probably the most influential philosopher of the early twentieth century, and he thought very highly of Hume. His presentation of the Problem of Induction in his well-known introductory book remains a good read:

- * Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (OUP, 1912), chapter 6.

Peter Strawson's "solution" to Hume's problem suggests that induction is a paradigm of what we mean by a "rational" procedure, so that the question of its rationality cannot arise:

- * P.F. Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory* (Methuen, 1952), chapter 9.

Hugh Mellor's Inaugural Lecture as Professor at Cambridge gives a clear and accessible presentation of another response to Hume's argument, taking a broadly "externalist" position to claim that induction remains "warranted":

- * D.H. Mellor, "The Warrant of Induction", in D.H. Mellor, *Matters of Metaphysics* (CUP, 1991), chapter 15. Available in both text and audio at <http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/3475>.

Wesley Salmon's article is specially written to explain the significance of Hume's problem in a way that engages with younger readers. Though perhaps superficially a bit condescending, it is actually philosophically pretty deep, and gives a useful outline of strong responses to a variety of attempts to deal with the problem (including Russell's and Strawson's):

Wesley Salmon, "An Encounter with David Hume", in Joel Feinberg (ed.), *Reason and Responsibility* (Dickenson, third edition 1975), pp. 190-208.

Nelson Goodman famously came up with a "New Riddle of Induction", to add to Hume's "Old Riddle":

- * Nelson Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction", in *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Harvard University Press, 1983 – though it doesn't matter which edition you read), chapter 3.

If you've read the following book, then you might like to refresh your memory about Humean and Goodman-esque topics. The last of these sections hints at difficulties in trying to get round the problems by appeal to natural laws:

Simon Blackburn, *Think* (OUP, 1999), pp. 211-7 ("Plausible Reasonings" and "The Lottery for the Golden Harp") and 250-3 ("Straightjackets and Laws").