

Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections V & VI

(NOTE: While Hume thinks that the principle of inductive reasoning cannot be *justified*, he does think that his “physics of the mind” can give a *causal explanation* of the fact that we constantly engage inductive reasoning.)

Human nature compels us to reason from past to future.

What is it in human nature that makes us do this?

Not reason. (This is the upshot of Section IV.)

But rather custom or habit. (336) “Custom, then, is the great guide of human life.” (337)

Some fact must be present to memory or the senses. Otherwise no conclusion could be drawn. (338)

Summing up:

“All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object, *present to the memory or senses*, and a *customary conjunction* between that and some other object.” (339, my italics)

Forming beliefs in this way is unavoidable. (339) It’s a matter of *instinct*. (339)

The nature of belief

What is the difference between *fiction* and *belief*?

Belief is not just another *idea*. If it were, we could combine it with other ideas at will. (340)

Belief must therefore be some *sentiment* or *feeling* that is joined to the idea believed.

We probably cannot *define* belief. But we can say this.

“... belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain.” (341)

It is “that act of the mind, which renders realities, or what is taken for such, more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination.” (341)

How is belief generated?

It arises from “a customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses.” (342)

Excursus: Some analogous operations

The “gentle and insensible movement” produced by the association of ideas. (342)

Resemblance, contiguity, and the causal relation *enliven* our conceptions of various objects. (342-3)

e.g., the ceremonies of the Roman Catholics (343)

Note, however, the belief is *presupposed* rather than *produced* by these operations. (344)

A “pre-established harmony”

Between “the course of nature” and “the succession of our ideas.” (345)

“Custom is the principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct...” (345)

(NOTE: You should *not* think of this as a *pragmatic argument* for trusting inductive reasoning. You should instead think of it as an expression of that trust.)

Probability and degrees of belief

The principles already discussed help explain our probabilistic beliefs.

The probability of chances: Imagine a die marked one way on four of its sides, and another way on the remaining two. Since the first mark is the one that usually turns up, the mind meets it more often, and the idea of that mark will be “livelier” than that of the other.

“If we allow, that belief is nothing but a firmer and stronger conception of an object than what attends mere fictions of the imagination, this operation may, perhaps, in some measure, be accounted for.” (347)

(Question: Does Hume mean to suggest that we *believe* – with 2/3 degree of confidence – that the first mark *will* turn up? As opposed to believing that it is two to one that it will turn up? If so, he is badly mistaken.)

The probability of causes: “irregular and uncertain causes” produce a lower degree of belief. (347-8)