The Problem of Induction, II

- When we’re thinking about induction (ways of forming beliefs about unobserved things on the basis of observed ones), here are two questions we might ask:

  Q1. Which inductions are good, and which are bad?
  Q2. Why are the good inductions good?

Hume supposes that our answer to Q1 will be that the good inductions are those which assume that the future will resemble the past, or that nature will operate uniformly. He argues from there that we cannot give any satisfactory answer to Q2.

- But it really doesn’t matter what answer we give to Q1. Whatever answer we give — call it ‘INDUCT’ — Hume is still going to be able to argue that we cannot give a satisfactory answer to Q2.

- Here’s why: if we are to give an answer to Q2, then we will have to provide some reasons, $P_1, P_2, ..., P_N$, for thinking that INDUCT is true. But then, Hume will want to know, do those reasons deductively entail that INDUCT, or do they merely lend inductive support?

\[
\begin{array}{c}
P_1 \\
P_2 \\
\vdots \\
P_N \\
\hline
\text{INDUCT}
\end{array}
\quad \text{or} \quad
\begin{array}{c}
P_1 \\
P_2 \\
\vdots \\
P_N \\
\hline
\text{INDUCT}
\end{array}
\]

- Hume’s Dilemma is that, either way we go, there will be problems. If we attempt to justify INDUCT deductively, we are doomed to failure, since deduction is too strong. If we have a deductive argument argument from $P_1...P_N$ to INDUCT, then we could always just take any inductive argument from $Q$ (some known claim about the past or present) to $C$ (some contingent conclusion about the future) and add the extra premises $P_1...P_N$ to get a deductive argument for the conclusion that $C$.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
Q \\
P_1 \\
P_2 \\
\vdots \\
\hline
\text{C}
\end{array}
\quad \Rightarrow 
\begin{array}{c}
Q \\
P_1 \\
P_2 \\
\vdots \\
\hline
\text{P}_N \\
\hline
\text{C}
\end{array}
\]

But if we had a deductive argument from known premises for a contingent conclusion about the future, then we wouldn’t be able to conceive of the premises being true while the conclusion is false. But we can conceive of the future being false, even given everything we know about the present and the past. So, we can’t have a deductive argument that INDUCT is correct.
• Induction, on the other hand, is circular. If we attempt to justify induction by using induction, then we will have simply argued in a circle.