PHIL 300 - Reflection Prompt #2

In this paper, I will first, introduce two kinds of human reasoning. Second, introduce the concept of Cause and Effect towards Necessary Connection. Third, through the concept of Necessary Connection towards Inductive Argument and explain how it is related with the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature. Finally, I will explain how we cannot be justified in accepting the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature, and thus, to justify Hume’s doubt on our ability to reason about future matters of fact.

According to Hume, all the objects of human reason or enquiry can be divided in two kinds, they are relations of ideas and matters of fact (Hume, §20). Relations of ideas are known as a priori, which suggests knowledge that is justified and independent of experience, such as geometry or algebra. Matters of fact are known as a posteriori, which suggests knowledge that is justified by experience (Hume, §21), for instance*, the sun will rise tomorrow*. Hume notes that relations of ideas are certain, they are discoverable by thinking, without depending on the existence of anything in the universe (Hume, §20). On the contrary, matters of fact are not ascertained in the same manner, the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible to be conceived by the mind, therefore, it does not lead to contradiction (Hume, §21). For example, it is not logically impossible to think that *the sun will not rise tomorrow*. Hume notes that “all reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect” (Hume, §22). For instance, if someone finds a watch on a desert island, then that person will conclude that there had been another person on this island before. That is, the other person is the cause for that watch to be left on the desert island. The reason for us to think this way is that we believe that there is a necessary connection between the existence of another person on this island before and a watch left on a desert island. Now that the question arises as how we are concluded that there is a necessary connection between Cause and Effect, Hume proposes that “cause and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience” (Hume, §24). That is, our experiences lead us to believe the concept of necessary connection between things. Imagining someone is faced to an object that is entirely new, they would not be able to discover any of its cause and effect. For instance, one cannot infer from *the transparency of water* to know that it would suffocate them.

Among all matters of fact, human mind attains the knowledge about future matters of fact based on experience as well (Hume, §25). Consider the following, *I have concluded that* *the sun will rise tomorrow, because I have observed that the sun rose everyday in the past*. Since I am attaining the knowledge about future matters of fact and as I introduced before that it is logically possible to conclude either that *the sun will rise* or the negation of such conclusion. Therefore, I must infer from my experience for me to decide either one of the conclusions is more likely to occur. That is, for all reasoning as such is called inductive reasoning (Hume, §29), a method of reasoning which premises are used to support conclusion. The argument for an inductive reasoning regarding the knowledge about future matters of fact is followed as such, premise one: all events of type A that we have observed in the past have had events of type B as their effect. Conclusion: it is likely that all events of type A will cause events of type B. However, Hume notes that the argument given above missed a key premises, it is the assumption that the future will resemble the past (Hume, §30). As noted by Hume, it is called the principle of the uniformity of nature.

The principle of the uniformity of nature suggests that the course of nature will continue uniformly. As such, the uniformities observed in the past will hold for the future (Hume, §29). If we are justified to accept the principle of the uniformity of nature, then the argument for inductive reasoning is valid and we will be able to justify the use of inductive argument for the knowledge of future event. Premise one: all events of type A that we have observed in the past have had events of type B as their effect. Premise two: the future will resemble the past. Conclusion: it is likely that all events of type A will cause events of type B. However, the question arises as whether we are justified to accept the second premise, the principle of uniformity of nature? By Hume’s analogy, either one of the following statements must be accepted in order to be justified to accept the principle of uniformity of nature, a) the principle of uniformity of nature is justified by priori reasoning, or b) the principle of uniformity of nature is justified by experience (Hume, §30). Hume denies a) by suggesting that there is no contradiction even if the future matters of fact do not continue uniformly, because it is not logically impossible to think that every regular pattern we have observed in the past being broken, “for whatever can be distinctly conceived, it can never be proved false by any priori reasoning” (Hume, §30). Hume denies b) by suggesting that the principle of uniformity of nature itself suggests the use of inductive argument, and we cannot justify it by accepting induction itself (Hume, §30). It is clear by now that Hume casts doubt on both statements and therefore, he doubts the truth of the principle of the uniformity of nature. Therefore, “Premise two: the future will resemble the past” might have appeared to be a false premise and we can not reach the conclusion that “it is likely that all events of type A will cause events of type B.” based on a false premise. Since human reasoning regarding future matters of fact relies on inductive reasoning, and we cannot justify the use of inductive reason. We can conclude that there is a doubt on human’s ability to reason about future matters of fact.

Empiricist such as Hume would say that there might be a metaphysical relationship between experience and future event. However, human’s mind is induced to use inductive reasoning (Hume, §31), an unjustified method of reasoning to retain the knowledge regarding future matters of fact, there is a doubt on human’s ability to reason about future matters of fact. I believe that Hume casts such doubt to show that one should be cautious to draw universal conclusion based on a finite set of experience.