

Hume's Problem

• Inductive reasoning seems like a sensible way of forming beliefs about the world.

• Surely the fact that the sun has risen every day in the past gives us good reason to believe that it will rise tomorrow?

Q) What justifies this faith we place in induction? How should we go about persuading someone who refuses to reason inductively that they are wrong?

• David Hume argued that the use of induction cannot be rationally justified at all.

• How did Hume arrive at this startling conclusion? He began by noting that whenever we make inductive inferences, we seem to presuppose what he called the 'uniformity of nature'.

• Let's recall our examples. We had the inference from the 'first five eggs in the box were good' to 'the sixth egg will be good'; from 'the Down's syndrome patients examined had an extra chromosome' to 'all those with Down's syndrome have an extra chromosome'; and from 'my computer has not exploded until now' to 'my computer will not explode today'.

• In each case, our reasoning seems to depend on the assumption that objects we haven't examined will be similar, in relevant respects, to objects of the same sort that we have examined. That assumption is what Hume means by the 'uniformity of nature'.

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