

List of Topics for Paper #1 (Revised)

- Write a paper on *one* of the following topics.
- Length: 2 pages *maximum*. (12-point font, double-spaced, and no fiddling with margins.)
- Due in my Eliot mailbox by 4pm on Friday, September 16.¹

1. Consider the following claims:

- (1) Virtually all observed As have been Bs (for a large sample of As and Bs observed across a wide variety of circumstances).
- (2) Virtually all As are Bs.
- (2') We have reason to believe that virtually all As are Bs.

In the preliminary portion of your paper:

- (i) Explain why (1) does not entail (2).
- (ii) Explain why Strawson maintains that (1) entails (2').

In the remainder of your paper, address the following questions: Assuming Strawson is right in affirming that (1) entails (2'), is he also correct in claiming (pg. 261) that 'we have good inductive reasons for believing...that induction will continue to be successful [in the future]'? If so, why? If not, why not?²

2. Some version of the following claim plays a pivotal role in Hume's argument for scepticism about the unobserved:

- (*) If S can have reason to believe matters of fact claims about the unobserved, then S has reason to believe that the course of nature will remain uniform.

In the following passage (*Enquiry*, pp. 37-8), Hume appears to offer a single-premise argument for (*): [A]ll inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless and can give rise to no inference or conclusion.

For the purposes of your paper, employ the following reconstruction of Hume's argument:

- (1) If S has reason to believe that the course of nature will *not* remain uniform, then S cannot have reason to believe matters of fact claims about the unobserved.³

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- (*) If S can have reason to believe matters of fact claims about the unobserved, then S has reason to believe that the course of nature will remain uniform.

Evaluate this single-premise argument for soundness. Is (1) true, or at least plausible? Does (1) entail (*).⁴

¹ For my lateness and extension policy, please see my syllabus for Philosophy 200.

² This portion of the question is deceptively tricky. At first glance, Strawson appears to be guilty of mind-numbing stupidity and vicious circularity in affirming that we have good inductive reasons for the continued success of induction. On reflection, however, the issue is far more complex. If you don't see why, keep thinking and/or come talk to me during office hours.

³ That is, matters of fact claims *other* than the bare proposition that the course of nature will not remain uniform.

⁴ The second of these questions is also deceptively tricky. (*) appears to be the contrapositive of (1), and every conditional entails its contrapositive. (N.B., The contrapositive of a conditional [If p, then q] is the conditional [If not-q, then not-p].) Hint: The argument is not valid; (1) does not entail (2). Second hint: It is possible for someone to be in an epistemically neutral situation with respect to a proposition; S may have no evidence or reasons in favor of P and no evidence or reasons against P (i.e., in favor of not-P). S's evidence and reasons may be neutral with respect to the truth or falsity of P.