

Part IA, Paper 1, Question 7

'Is there any good reason to think that the future will resemble the past?'

The question of whether there is any good reason to think that the past will resemble the future concerns induction. In this essay I will argue that the only good reason to suppose that the past will resemble the future is due to logical necessity, any other reason is nullified. I will first set out the argument for inferring from the past to the future, I will then disregard a possible justification of induction. Finally, I will show why logical necessity entails a good reason to infer the future from the past.

First, with respect to the argument from the future based on past experience, the argument is as follows:

P1) Empirical experience taught me that all Xs are Ys  
P2) Experience taught me on multiple occasions that all Xs are Ys  
∴ All Xs are Ys

The argument, inherently circular in nature states that we can move from specific instances of experience to a general belief that an explanation is the right one. This is inference to the best explanation and can be understood using Van Fraassen's analogy of "scratching, pattering of little feet, cheese keeps disappearing". On multiple occasions, these characteristics have indicated that a mouse is in one's house, so if faced with a similar situation in future, we could again infer the presence of a mouse. From past experience, one is able to infer that the future will resemble the past.

Inference to the best explanation fails on account of the circularity of its argument. We are not right to infer that because past experience has shown us that instances lead to other instances that we are justified in assuming all future instances will resemble the past. For example, it may not be the case that behaviour commonly indicative of a mouse may be present – a rat could be in the house instead. Moving from instances to a restricted generalisation cannot be justified as we have not experienced all possible instances in history to warrant this supposition.

Aside from the circularity and unwanted generalisations supported by inference to the best explanation, we can argue that induction is a mere product of the mind. There is nothing to confirm that our sensory experiences are completely infallible. We may fail to pay proper attention to the nature of an instance before moving to a sweeping generalisation. An example of such behaviour is commonly associated with lobsters. Many assume that because all lobsters seen so far are red, that all lobsters are red. In actuality, a failure to consider the background conditions has rendered the generalisation arrived at incorrect. A red lobster is extremely rare with only 1 in 30 million lobsters being red – it is rather the case that a failure to consider that most observed lobsters have been observed partially or fully cooked that leads to a false generalisation. On this account, we are therefore not justified in thinking that the future will resemble the past.

The only instances that I can deem good reason to think that the future will resemble the past is in cases of logical necessity. Logical necessity exists when it would be contradictory to suppose that a fact of set of facts are false if necessarily true or true when necessarily false. For example, it would be a logical necessity that if today were Friday that tomorrow would be Saturday. In all previously observed instances where Fridays were followed by Saturdays we could be justified in believing that the following Friday would be followed by a Saturday, only in instances of logical necessity are we given good reason to think that the future will resemble the past.

In conclusion, the only good reason to think that the future will resemble the past is in instances of logical necessity. In all other instances, we cannot be certain as the mind is fallible and we lack sufficient evidence to make sweeping generalisations.

### **Comments**

The essay is reasonably well structured and its individual sentences are clear enough, but there is a large number of errors. First, the stated argument from P1 and P2 is a rather awkward way to describe inductive inference in general. Second, *this* argument is not (as stated) circular. Third, the candidate confuses the claim that the next X will be Y with the claim that all X's are Y's. Fourth, it is not clear what the argument has to do with inference to the best explanation. Fifth, the example concerning lobsters appears to be beside the point. Sixth, the difference between circularity and 'unwanted generalization' is nowhere clearly explained. On the other hand the point about logical necessity is reasonable and the example is appropriate. A low 2.2.