

# Department of Philosophy

## Colloquium Series

### Reasoning and Rule-Following in Hume's Sceptical Doubts and Solution

Thursday,  
November 3  
4-6 p.m.

Watson Hall  
Room 517



**Jonathan Cottrell**  
(University of Edinburgh)

In Sections 4 and 5 of the first Enquiry, Hume argues for a "sceptical" view of inductive reasoning. And yet, by the end of the Enquiry, he takes himself to have vindicated this kind of reasoning as a method for conducting empirical science, including his own "science of human nature". Accordingly, in the Enquiry and his other mature works, he presents inductive reasoning in support of his own beliefs about the unobserved, and he endorses inductive reasoning as preferable to other ways of forming such beliefs, especially ways involving the influence of religious passions. How can we reconcile (i) Hume's "sceptical" view of induction with (ii) his own commitment to inductive science, without downplaying or denying either? In this talk, I hope to make some headway with this puzzle by examining the conception of reasoning at work in Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" and "Sceptical Solution". I think that scholars' focus on Hume's "juvenile" Treatise of Human Nature has distorted our understanding of this conception. Focusing instead on Hume's mature works, I argue that reasoning involves rule-following and that Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" concern our justification to follow the rule of inductive reasoning. More specifically, they aim to show that this justification does not derive from any prior knowledge or justified belief that the inductive rule is likely to preserve truth. These arguments help us to see the task for a "Sceptical Solution": namely, to explain what, if anything, does provide us with justification to follow the inductive rule. Hume provides only a sketch of this explanation. I consider two ways of filling in its details, one a form of "internalist reliabilism", the other a form of "norm externalism". I argue that Hume should favour the latter. Lastly, I argue that this account of our justification to follow the inductive rule allows us to see why Hume feels able to recommend inductive reasoning as the proper tool for empirical science.

**Everyone Welcome!**

For accessibility requirements, please contact [philosophy@queensu.ca](mailto:philosophy@queensu.ca)

Please note that all in-person attendees must conform to the Queen's vaccine policy:  
<https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/policies/administration-and-operations/covid-19-vaccination->