

# Bertrand Russell - problems of philosophy



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As humans we naturally believe that the sun will rise tomorrow. But why is it that we believe this? In the following essay I will explore the logic behind this question focusing on Bertrand Russell's arguments of induction, and the uniformity of nature as presented in his book "The Problems of Philosophy".

Russell's principle of the uniformity of nature suggests humans and animals fall into the trap of believing that everything that has and will happen becomes a "general law with no exceptions" (Russell, 63). In other words, the more frequently something occurs, the more certain it is to occur again. Russell provides an example citing the relationship between a chicken and a farmer. When the chicken sees the farmer coming everyday, he assumes, as per usual, that he will be fed, but ultimately one day the farmer will kill the chicken (Russell, 63). This is the trap that we frequently fall into by becoming too accustomed to what has already occurred, and assuming that it will always happen again. Russell argues that this is because humans use inductive logic to generate these general laws, which are used as the basis for the uniformity of nature (Russell, 66). This principle of induction states that the more times we see two things to be associated, the greater the certainty that this association is accurate (Russell, 67). An example is the rising of the sun. Through inductive logic we have determined that every morning, the sun will inherently rise (Russell, 64). There is however, a small chance that the world's rotational force could stop which would result in the sun not rising. However, as inductive logic brings us to "certainty without limit", it is seemingly impossible that the sun wouldn't rise, based on the billions of times it has risen in the past (Russell, 69). This is where I believe there is an issue in Russell's argument. I believe that there is no legitimate evidence supporting the relationship between induction and the uniformity of

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nature. In my opinion regardless of how many times the sun comes up; the chance of the sun rising the next day, does not change. From this I conclude that induction is not a proper way of determining whether or not the sun will rise, because there is still an unchanging probability that it will not. Russell counters this by arguing that through induction we can approach a level of "almost certainty, without limit" (Russell, 67). I believe this to be a fallacy as well because this statement in itself is an oxymoron. It suggests that there are different degrees of certainty, which is contrary to the definition of certainty itself. While I do believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, my belief is routed in the uniformity of nature, not in induction, as I am not convinced of this "certainty" which induction requires. Russell would once again refute this suggesting that it's not the level of certainty, but rather the probability of the sun rising that increases. I however, believe that this probability cannot change. Each sunrise is independent of one another, just as each flip of a coin is. Regardless of how many heads in a row I get, I cannot by any logical measure deduce that the coin will always flip heads. Similarly, I cannot conclude that the sun will always rise just because it has in the past. Based on these grounds, the argument of induction does not stand, and hence, is not related to the uniformity of nature.