

Problem of Inductive Inference – A Comparative Study on David Hume and Karl Popper

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Abstract

In the history of philosophy, David Hume and Karl Popper are significant figures in the philosophy of science, especially when it comes to inductive inference. Hume, an 18th-century Scottish philosopher, is best known for his criticism on induction, skepticism about causality. He argued that we infer future events from patterns of regular succession and contiguity in our experiences. We observe that certain events are consistently followed by others (regular succession), and from this, we infer that future will be like the past. Hume's view is heavily based on induction, meaning we infer generalizations from observed and predict the unobserved. Karl Popper, a 20th-century philosopher of science, had a different approach about induction. Popper was focused on the scientific method and the demarcation problem means science from pseudo-science. Popper, like Hume, was aware of the problem of induction. However, instead of relying on inductive inference, he proposed a deductive approach. In Popper's view, scientific theories should not be confirmed by repeated observation, but should be rigorously tested and falsified through experiments. Both Hume's and Popper's views are similar in certain context they differ in important points. The research problem is here to query the reason and to find the background of the differences. Objective of the study is to elaborate the detailed account of their views on induction. Since it is a descriptive study, qualitative research design was employed. From secondary sources, the data were collected. David Hume's and Popper's works (especially Objective Knowledge) have been used as original sources and other writings were also used to get more understanding of the subject. The data were analyzed qualitatively and findings were proved based on textual evidences. Hume focused on inductive reasoning, suggesting that future events are inferred from repeated observation, while Popper rejected induction as a reliable method for establishing truth. Instead, Popper championed falsification. Inductive knowledge and causal theories should be testable and open to falsification through experiments.

Keywords: Induction, generalization, Hume, Popper, inference