

Reading Guide #4

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

These questions are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you first to read the material through, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Boldfaced questions may appear on exams.

Section I

1. What are the two types of philosopher? What is the general opinion of each?
2. What is Hume's goal, in the *Enquiry*?

Section II

- 3. What is Hume's distinction between ideas and impressions?**
- 4. What can we not conceive?**
- 5. From where do ideas come? How does Hume show this? Are there any exceptions?**
- 6. How can we determine, according to Hume, whether a philosophical term is meaningless?**

Section III

7. Explain each of the three principles of connection among ideas.

Section IV

- 8. What is Hume's distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact? Describe each.**
- 9. How do we learn propositions that are solely concerned with relations of ideas?**
- 10. "The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible..." (15) How does Hume support this claim?**
- 11. What evidence do we use to explain knowledge of matters of fact? What relation helps us get this evidence?**
- 12. How do we learn to connect specific causes with their effects? How can we not learn this, according to Hume?**
- 13. Why can't effects be discovered by examining their causes?**
- 14. "Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy..." (19) Explain. Why does Hume make this conclusion?**
- 15. What information does past experience give us? What does it not give us?**
- 16. "These two propositions are far from being the same, *I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect, and I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects.*" Explain.**
- 17. What do inferences about the future presuppose, as their foundation? Why can't experience establish this premise?**
- 18. "In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience." (24) Why "in vain"?**
- 19. How does Hume's example of a child pulling his hand away from a fire help show that it is not 'reason' which leads us to infer that the past will resemble the future?**

Section V

- 20. Would a person suddenly brought into the world recognize causal connections? Explain.**
- 21. What is the role of custom, or habit, in our understanding of cause and effect?**
- 22. "The conclusions which [reason] draws from considering one circle are the same which it would form upon surveying all the circles in the universe. But no man, having seen only one body move after being impelled by another, could infer that every body will move after a like impulse." (28) How does Hume**

explain this difference? What does it show?

23. Ultimately, from where do our beliefs about matters of fact come, according to Hume?
24. What is a belief? How is belief different from imagination?
25. **“Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas...” (36) Explain how this harmony arises.**
26. Why does our mind connect like effect with like causes?

Section VI

27. **Hume says there’s no such thing as chance, but there is probability. Explain the difference.**
28. **How do we respond when a general cause and effect rule fails to apply in a particular instance? Do we assume that nature is irregular?**
29. “[W]hen we transfer the past to the future, in order to determine the effect, which will result from any cause, we transfer all the different events, in the same proportion as they have appeared in the past...” (39) Explain. Why is this relevant here?

Section VII

30. What are the differences between mathematics and the “moral” sciences?
31. How does Hume propose to examine the ideas of power and necessary connection? Why?
32. Does Hume think we find connections between causes and effects by examining objects? What can we learn that way?
33. Can we discover the ideas of power and necessary connection by reflecting on our own powers? Can we get the ideas of force or energy this way?
34. **“[W]e learn only by experience the frequent *Conjunction* of objects, without ever being able to comprehend anything like *Connexion* between them.” (46) Explain the difference between conjunction and connection (connexion).**
35. What’s wrong with the arguments of the Cartesians who refer all explanations of causation directly to God?
36. **Why do we call some objects causes and others effects? What gives us the feeling that there is a connection between the two?**
37. **How does Hume define cause?**

Section VIII

38. What are the two bases for our understanding of the ideas of necessity and causation?
39. “From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim that the connexion between all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes.” (58) Explain. Do irregular events undermine our belief in the necessary connections between causes and effects?
40. In what ways do all people agree about necessity?
41. “If we examine the operations of body, and the production of effects from their causes, we shall find, that all our faculties can never carry us farther in our knowledge of this relation, than barely to observe, that particular objects are *constantly conjoined* together, and that the mind is carried, by a *customary transition*, from the appearance of one to the belief of the other.” (61) Why does Hume call this a ‘conclusion concerning human ignorance’?
42. How does Hume define liberty?
43. What is the opposite of liberty, for Hume?
44. Are Hume’s definitions of necessity and liberty consistent with moral principles?
45. Do Hume’s definitions eliminate the notion of wrongdoing? Explain?

Section IX

46. Describe the role of analogy in science.
47. Do animals reason to the conclusion that nature is uniform in operation? Do humans?

Section X

48. "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence." (73) Explain.
49. Is human testimony infallible? Why do we rely on it?
50. Explain Hume's proof that miracles can't have happened, from Part I.
51. Briefly describe the four arguments against miracles in Part II. How are these different from the argument in Part I?

Section XI

52. Speaking as Epicurus, what does Hume wish to demonstrate as regards God?
- 53. What argument for God's existence do Epicurus' critics advance?**
- 54. "When we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect." (93) Explain.**
55. Does Hume believe that we can behave morally without believing in God? Explain.
- 56. "While we argue from the course of nature, and infer a particular intelligent cause, which first bestowed, and still preserves order in the universe, we embrace a principle, which is both uncertain and useless."(98) Explain.**
57. Why can we infer beyond the original effects in the case of human action? What makes the case of God different?

Section XII

58. Why is Cartesian doubt incurable?
59. What is the proper role of a moderate skepticism?
60. What kind of evidence against the senses does Hume dismiss? How does he dismiss it?
- 61. Why do we believe in an external universe, according to Hume?**
- 62. Can experience verify the existence of a physical world?**
- 63. How does Hume reject Descartes' explanation of our sensory experience?**
- 64. What does Hume say about the primary/secondary distinction? With whom does he agree?**
- 65. How does Hume evaluate Berkeley's metaphysical system?**
66. What does Hume say about infinite divisibility? What does this mean for mathematics?
- 67. "The great subverter of Pyrrhonism or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life." (109) Explain.**
- 68. What's wrong with extreme philosophical skepticism?**
- 69. Describe Hume's preferred moderate skepticism.**
- 70. "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make?" (114)**