

Hume Guide

PHIL410

updated: 1/17/12

*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*¹

Sects. II-IV, V.i, VII (pp. 60-70, 73-79)

Study Guide

Section II

1. Into what two classes does Hume divide mental states, and on what basis does he make this division?
2. What is the relationship between an idea and an impression, according to Hume?
3. Is it possible, on Hume's account, to have an idea having no origin in experience?

Section III

1. Is the sequence of thought random, according to Hume, or does it proceed in accord with some principle or principles?
2. What principles of association does Hume identify for the mind's association of ideas?

Section IV

1. What are the two kinds of objects of human reason, according to Hume? (p. 25)
2. How are truths concerning *relations of ideas* determined, on Hume's view? (p. 25)
3. Why does Hume think that we cannot demonstrate the truth of *matters of fact*? ("Demonstrate," for Hume, means to prove by valid argument.) (pp. 25-6)
4. What sort of evidence can we have for supposed matters of fact? (pp. 26f)
5. How, according to Hume, do we come to have knowledge of cause and effect relations? (pp. 27f)
6. Why does Hume think that we cannot come to know causal relations *a priori*? (pp. 27f)
7. What is Hume's view of the prospects of science to provide knowledge of the ultimate "springs and principles" of the material world? (pp. 30-1)
8. What claim does Hume advance concerning the conclusions we draw – how we draw them – from our experience of cause and effect? (p. 32)
9. Why does Hume think that it is not by any act of reasoning that we infer from past experience expectations about future events? (pp. 33-4)
10. What argument does Hume advance for the claim that we cannot infer from past experience anything about future events? (pp. 35-8)
11. Why does Hume think that it is no help to try to make the inference from numerous experiences of the same kind (e.g., many instances of bread nourishing the body) to an expectation of future conjunction of cause and effect (i.e., a future instance of bread nourishing the body)? (pp. 36-7)

¹ A respectable revision of Hume's text, one that is easier to read, may be found here: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/he.html>

Section V, Part I

1. Why does Hume regard philosophical skepticism as the most innocent of philosophical theories? (pp. 40-1)
2. What principle is it that determines us to form cause-effect expectations? (pp. 42-3)
3. What, then, is Hume's complete account of beliefs concerning matters of fact? (p. 46)
4. What role is played by reason, according to Hume, in human knowledge? (see note beginning p. 43)

Section VII

1. Why does Hume seek the "impression" by which we have the idea of necessary connection? (pp. 62-3)
2. From what sources does Hume attempt to discover the impression of causal power? With what results? (pp. 63f)
3. What does Hume mean by suggesting that the idea of causal power may be "an idea of reflection," one deriving from our awareness of our own acts of volition? (p. 64)
4. What is Hume's opinion of that possibility (as applied to acts of physical motion)? By what arguments does he reach this conclusion? (pp. 65-7)
5. Why does Hume deny that our awareness of our willing of mental acts is the source of the idea of causal power? (pp. 67f)
6. According to Hume, from what impression do we form the idea of the necessary connection between cause and effect? (pp. 75-6)
7. Why does Hume think of his account of causality as showing weakness in human reason? (p. 76)
8. What two definitions of causation are provided by Hume? Are these two definitions equivalent? (pp. 76-77)
9. What do we really mean, according to Hume, when we say that a vibrating string causes a sound? (p. 77)

Some Research Suggestions

1. Must every idea originate in an impression?
2. Are "relations of ideas" significant, where the empirical world is concerned?
3. Is skepticism as innocent as Hume suggests?
4. Is Hume right to say that we lack the idea of causal necessity?