

Reading Guide #6

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (AW 533-600)  
*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part 4, §6 (AW 525-532)

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. Page numbers refer to the Ariew and Watkins collection.

*Enquiry*, §I-§IV (AW 533-548)

1. What are the two types of philosopher? What is the general opinion of each?
2. What is Hume's goal, in the *Enquiry*?
3. Distinguish ideas from impressions. From where do ideas come?
4. "What was never seen or heard of, may yet be conceived, nor is anything beyond the power of thought except what implies an absolute contradiction" (§II, AW 539b). Explain.
5. How does Hume argue that all ideas are derived from impressions?
6. Describe the case of the missing shade of blue. What is the relevance of that case to Hume's claims about impressions?
7. How can we determine, according to Hume, whether a philosophical term is meaningless?
8. Explain each of the three principles of connection among ideas.
9. Distinguish relations of ideas from matters of fact. How do we learn propositions that are solely concerned with relations of ideas?
10. How does Hume argue that the contrary of every matter of fact is still possible?
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. How does Hume argue that effects can not be discovered by examining their causes?
14. What are the goals of science, the "utmost effort of human reason" (§IV.1, AW 544a)?
15. "Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy..." (§IV.1, AW 544b). Explain. Why does Hume make this conclusion?
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*" (§IV.2, AW 546a). Explain.
17. What do inferences about the future presuppose, as their foundation? Why can't experience establish this premise?
18. Why are our attempts to learn the nature of bodies 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 future will resemble the past?

*Enquiry*, §V-§IX (AW 548-576)

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? Does Hume explain the cause of this cause?
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” (§V.1, AW 549b-550a). How does Hume explain this difference? What does it show?
23. How does Hume argue against the distinction between reason and experience? (See footnote 9.)
24. What distinguishes belief from imagination?
25. “Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas...” (§V.2, AW 554b). Explain how this harmony arises.
26. How does our mind connect like effects with like causes?
27. Hume says that there is no such thing as chance, but that 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...” (§VI, AW 556a-b). Explain.
30. What are the differences between mathematics and reasoning concerning matters of fact, which Hume calls 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. Distinguish causes from occasions. Why do some philosophers prefer accounts of natural phenomena in terms of occasions? How do such accounts rob nature of power? How does Hume evaluate such accounts?
35. Distinguish conjunction from connection. Of which do we have knowledge?
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’?
38. “From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim that the connection between all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes” (§VIII.1, AW 567b). Explain.
39. Regarding their determinacy, how do human actions differ from physical interactions?
40. How does Hume define liberty? How does this definition make the debate over free will merely verbal?
41. Is liberty the opposite of necessity or constraint? Explain.
42. According to Hume, when are actions deemed blameworthy or praiseworthy? How can a necessary act be the object of praise or blame?
43. Do Hume’s definitions of necessity and liberty make God morally responsible for my actions instead of me?
44. Describe the role of analogy in science.
45. Do animals reason to the conclusion that nature is uniform in operation? Do humans?

*Enquiry*, §X-§XII (AW 576-600)

46. Is human testimony generally reliable?
47. What is a miracle? Why should testimony of miracles not be convincing?
48. Explain Hume's different responses to the eight-days-of-darkness case and the resurrection-of-Elizabeth case.
49. What argument for God's existence do Epicurus's critics advance?
50. "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" (§XI, AW 588a). Explain.
51. Does Hume believe that we can behave morally without believing in God? Explain.
52. "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" (§XI, AW 590b). Explain.
53. Why can we infer beyond the original effects in the case of human action? What makes the case of God different?
54. How does Hume criticize causal arguments for God's existence?
55. Why is Cartesian doubt incurable?
56. What is the proper role of a moderate skepticism? (See also §XII.3, AW 598b et seq.)
57. What kind of evidence against the senses does Hume dismiss? How does he dismiss it?
58. Why do we believe in an external universe, according to Hume?
59. Can experience verify the existence of a physical world?
60. "To have recourse to the veracity of the Supreme Being in order to prove the veracity of our senses is surely making very unexpected circuit" (§XII.1, AW 595a). Explain.
61. Can we prove the existence of an external world? Explain.
62. How does the concept of infinite divisibility appear paradoxical?
63. "The great subverter of Pyrrhonism or the excessive principles of scepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life" (§XII.2, AW 597b). Explain.
64. What's wrong with extreme philosophical skepticism?
65. What kinds of propositions can we know by mere reasoning?
66. "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make?" (§XII.3, AW 600b).

*Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, §6 (AW 525-532)

67. Do we have an idea of our selves? What do we think about when we think about our selves?
68. What is the self? How is the self an exemplar of diversity?
69. How does the continuity of an object depend on the proportion of its changes? How do gradual changes affect identity?
70. "Every distinct perception which enters into the composition of the mind is a distinct existence and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive" (AW 529b). Explain. What does this mean for personal identity?
71. What is the relation between identity and resemblance, contiguity, and causation?
72. How does Hume criticize accounts of identity which rely on memory?