A Treatise of Human Nature Study Guide

A Treatise of Human Nature by David Hume

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Treatise of Human Nature ranks among the great works of philosophy in all of history. David Hume (1711 - 1776) wrote the Treatise in 1738 and published it in 1739 and 1740. Its originality alone would have given Hume a place in history but the maturity of the book, though written by Hume at such an early age, establishes him as one of history's great geniuses.

The Treatise is an exercise in epistemology, moral psychology and cognitive science. Hume is out to give an account of human nature. Hume gives accounts of how humans come to know things, how they think about things, what emotions are, what perception is, whether there is free will, the relationship between will, reason and passion, the basis of morality and virtue, the nature of moral judgment, and the origins of society and social morality. He answers these questions in three books; Book I concerns the understanding, Book II, the passions, and Book III, morality.

In Book I, 'Of the Understanding,' Hume begins by making a series of crucial distinctions that lie at the foundations of his system. Hume is a radical empiricist. He believes that all the substantive, non-trivial knowledge that we possess derives from the senses. Further, he thinks our mind trades exclusively in perceptions - it does not know reality directly. Skepticism of a radical sort is always a possibility when one does philosophy. Hume divides perception into impressions, ideas and relations between them. Hume uses this taxonomy of mental entities to reach several important conclusions. First, universals are mere mental entities. Second, there are no truths of reason except stipulated definitions. Third, causation is not real, it is only a relation we impose on the world.

In Book II, 'Of the Passions,' Hume uses the ideas of Book I to generate an account of human psychology, emotions and judgments. Hume begins by rooting all emotions in the idea of judgments of approbation and disapprobation which he ties to the sensations of pleasure and pain. He roots pride and humility in these ideas and then roots what he calls 'indirect passions' such as love and hatred. He explains emotions in terms of relations of sensations and judgments to the self or to others and connects emotions derived from others in sympathy. Finally, Hume addresses direct passions and famously argues that there is no free will, for a volition is merely an internal impression.

In Book III, 'Of Morals,' Hume gives an explanation of morality. Hume first argues against moral rationalists who hold that moral truths are truths of reason. Hume thinks that reason only moves the mind from extant desires to conclusions, giving his famous instrumentalist account of reason. From this Hume famously argues that reason is merely the slave of the passions. Sentiment and emotion grounds morality - all moral judgments are judgments of relations between perceptions in the world or of the self in relation to a sensation of pleasure or pain. Hume then ties the idea of virtue and vice to what brings pleasure or pain to the mind. Hume goes on to distinguish between natural and artificial virtues. He gives a famous spontaneous order theory of the evolution of norms of justice, which he believes to be an artificial, culturally constructed set of ideas.

He ends with his account of natural virtues and how they come to be understood through their connections to pleasures and pains.

Book 1, Part 1, Of Ideas, Their Origin, Composition, Connexion, Abstraction, Etc.

Book 1, Part 1, Of Ideas, Their Origin, Composition, Connexion, Abstraction, Etc. Summary and Analysis

Hume's Treatise of Human Nature is composed of three books. The first book, 'Of the Understanding' contains four parts of what he believes are the basic features of the human mind and cognition generally. Part 1 covers The Elements of the Mental World. At the outset, it bears noting that there is a cottage industry devoted to determining the proper interpretation of Hume's Treatise. This guide gives what the author understands as the ordinary interpretation of the book.

Hume is one of the arch-empiricists in the history of philosophy. As such, he believes that knowledge of the world comes primarily through experience. Hume is usually interpreted to divide knowledge into two parts: definitions and observations. Definitions are trivially true, like 2 + 2 = 4 and have no substantive content. All of the substantive knowledge that humans have comes from their senses. Thus, The Elements of the Mental World is an anatomy of the objects of the mind. Further, Hume's understanding of human perception is far from the common sense view. The ordinary person believes that when she senses a tree she knows that the tree is in front of her. However, Hume believes that all the individual receives is something internal to the mind, an idea or image. Even things perceived in the real world are to be analyzed as mental entities. Our mind trades in representations of the world, not the world itself.

Hume's aim in the treatise is to analysis the workings of the individual human and his society, and so Hume will focus not on what exists in the world but on what Hume calls ideas, impressions, perceptions and relations between these. In 1.1 of the Treatise, Hume will analyze perceptions and relations. These elements must be understood, for they are foundational for the entire structure of the book.

A Humean 'perception' is the object of thought that is immediately before the mind. These come in two types: impressions and ideas. Impressions are a class of mental entities that includes 'all our sensations, passions and emotions'. Impressions come into the mind with powerful 'force and vivacity' in contrast to ideas, which do not. When we actually see something it makes an impression in the mind but when we remember it, the image or sensation is softer, less forceful, more like an idea. Beware though, for Hume believes that many ideas have great 'force and vivacity.'

Ideas and impressions come in two types: simple and complex. The simple ideas and impressions are those sensations or thoughts that cannot be divided, such as the experience of a color or a taste. Complex ideas and impressions can be imagined into

parts. Take the idea of a chair or a city, for example. Hume rejects the then widespread view that there are innate ideas and holds instead that all human concepts and principles are learned.

Hume divides impressions once more into impressions of sensation and impressions of reflection. Sensory impressions come directly from the senses. They are for scientists to inquire into; Hume declines to say more about it, remaining agnostic about how external objects produce sensory impressions. Reflection impresses are secondary impressions, and come partly from ideas. Ideas come from simple, sensory impressions, such as the idea of heat and the mind forms ideas of them which can later be recalled and manipulated. Impressions become ideas when they are copied.

Hume then turns to describe relations, and distinguishes between natural relations and philosophical relations. Natural relations are relations between impressions. Resemblance, contiguity and causation are the three natural relations. Resemblance is a relation of similarity between ideas and impressions, whereas contiguity occurs when ideas or impressions are next to one another. The most discussed of Hume's relation is the relation of causation. Hume's theory of causation is that causes are not features of the world, but are merely associations between two ideas in the mind. The relation of causation we judge to obtain when we see two objects in 'constant conjunction.' Natural relations are immediate judgments imposed upon us by the mind. The mind makes judgments of resemblance, contiguity and causation mostly automatically.

Philosophical relations are distinct. First, they concern ideas, not impressions. The human imagination can generate these relations at will from ideas. There are seven philosophical relations. Humans can ask whether two ideas resemble each other, are identical, contrary, or contiguous. They can also be assigned proportions of quantity or degrees of any quality. Finally, they can be related in terms of cause and effect.

The final part of Book I leads to a review of abstract ideas. These ideas do not represent objects in the world but represent members of a class of things. Take the idea of the Treatise. There are many copies of the Treatise but our idea of THE Treatise is an abstract idea because it is the idea of a class or real-world objects.

Book 1, Part 2, Of The Ideas of Space and Time

Book 1, Part 2, Of The Ideas of Space and Time Summary and Analysis

There is a problem with 1.1 though. We have ideas of space and time that do not fit neatly into Hume's categories, so Hume focuses on them in 1.2. Hume will not comment on the nature of space and time, only on our ideas of space and time. Since all ideas come from impressions, the idea of space must come from an impression as well. We get the idea of space from arrays of objects that extend over an area and then extent that idea far beyond our senses. Simple impressions can be representations of having 'extension' and so the idea of extension becomes the idea of space.

There are no simple impressions of time, only an idea. The idea is generation from the succession of perceptions, which follow from one another. The mind has an idea of determinate units of succession and from this time is derived.

In Hume's day and before, there were many intense debates about the nature of space and time. Hume wants to avoid this debate by focusing merely on appearances. However, he also avoids the debate because he just isn't talking about how the world is but of how the mind comes to interact with the world and engage in its internal activities. The Treatise is a theory of human nature, not of metaphysics.

Book 1, Part 3, Of Knowledge and Probability

Book 1, Part 3, Of Knowledge and Probability Summary and Analysis

1.3 has two tasks. Hume must first given an account of knowledge and probability and distinguish them from one another. He then has to explain his conception of causation. Hume's work on belief and causation is very original and versions of his theory of causation are still popular today.

Hume is going to distinguish between knowledge and probability by bringing in the idea of philosophical relations. Relations come in two general classes - resemblance and contrariety. Ideas are either similar or dissimilar in various respects. The relation of resemblance is uncovered through comparing objects and looking for what they share and how perceptions of the objects relate to one another. Ideas can resemble on another in proportion, quantity, number, and degrees of quality. When these relations are constant, ideas resemble one another. The last three relations, identity, time and place and causation are derived from how the world presents impressions to the mind.

The first four types of relations ground certainty and knowledge. Intuition - just 'seeing' the relation - and demonstration - 'deriving' the relation - are modes are grasping these relations. We can have knowledge of whether ideas have these relations; but identity, time and place, and causation cannot be known—only rendered probable.

Causation comes in for an extended analysis in 1.3. We reason about causes all the time and causal reasoning allows the mind to reason about systems in the world that are not available to the senses. It also allows us to make predictions, which is vital to our survival. Hume is only interested in a detailed analysis of the relation of causation in this area of the Treatise. He wants to understand probability, specifically the probability of effects given their causes and causes given their effects. Relations of causation when observed produce beliefs immediately, such as when one sees one billiard ball strike another and then sees the other billiard ball speed away. Hume believes that human beings never observe causes in the world. Instead, they generate beliefs about causes from their observations of the impressions and ideas conjuncted.

Hume is very interested in the idea of a 'necessary connection.' Ideas and impressions can be accidentally related all the time, but what about the appearance of causal regularities? Hume wants to answer many questions about causation. Hume wants to explain why people think effects always have causes, why causes have effects, the sorts of interference made from cause and effect, the sort of belief that comes from causes and effects inferred, how experience produces the idea of necessary connection, how we form causal expectations and how we reason about causes and effects we have yet to experience.

We get the idea of effects having causes by making an inference from our repeated experience of causes following effects. This is also how we get the idea of why particular causes bring about particular effects - from repetitious observation of the same events. These inferences of cause and effect allow individuals to make predictions about what effects will be produced by certain causes. So predictions are inferences. These inferences from impressions, when conjoined, produce belief. All of these concepts must be learned.

The same goes for our idea of the uniformity of nature. We believe nature is uniform because we infer it from our observation of its uniformity. We see causal regularities, make inferences and predictions, see the predictions confirmed over and over again and are then able to make probabilistic judgments. We can't prove that every effect has a cause or that nature is uniform, but we must believe it. It is custom that produces these beliefs. Further, Hume's account of a belief is peculiar - a belief is just an idea that has particular 'force and vivacity' that is derived from an impression.

It is very important for the reader to understand how radical and counter intuitive Hume's view of causation is (he recognizes this). Hume holds that cause and effect are not features of the world but only of the mind. If we did not infer causes and effects, if there were no humans around, there would be no cause and effect at all. One important theme in Hume's work is that people all too often mistake their perceptions for reality. We think there are real causes in the world, but really that's just a perception. Distinguishing between perception and reality often leads to counter intuitive positions. Hume claims, but this does not mean that these positions cannot be true. When it comes to common life, we must project perception onto reality, but when we do philosophy, we can abstract from them and see the illusion involved.

Book 1, Part 4, On the Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy

Book 1, Part 4, On the Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy Summary and Analysis

1.4 discusses skepticism about various common sense features of reality. His theory of perception will show that even the apparent endurance of objects over time, INCLUDING THE SELF, are mere perceptions and have no reality. Reason and the senses give no knowledge on these matters, while the senses and automatic inference do not produce these ideas, only the imagination, which is often unreliable. We never experience objects persisting through time, only our successive perceptions of them. And we never experience ourselves directly either. Impressions cannot produce these ideas.

Hume thinks it is pointless to wonder about the existence of the external world and external objects. We should just presume that it is true, although it is fruitful to ask what it is about human cognition that makes us believe in the external world and external objects. Hume says that either the senses, reason or the imagination produces belief in external objects, but the sense and reason can't produce these beliefs. The senses only give us impressions and they aren't enough to make an impression of an object because we have to infer the existence of the object from a succession of impressions. Further, impressions don't tell us whether there is an external world.

Reason does not produce belief in external objects either. The best rationalist arguments for the external world are only known by a few and so cannot ground the widespread belief in the external world. We get the belief without reason. So only the imagination can do the job. It makes immediate inferences about external objects from impressions it receives. These inferences are involuntary and have great perceptual force in uniting successive impressions together. Belief in external objects also produces a sort of coherence in our perceptions. It holds them together in a way that helps us function.

Hume points out that there are two types of ways objects can exist - independently of the mind and dependently on the mind. Some objects only exist because we think they do, others not. However, we have no grounds from experience to believe in mind-independent objects. Hume says that he is inclined to put no faith in his senses of imagination. Sadly, one can never rid oneself of the possibility of skepticism.

Hume rejects the idea that there is an immaterial soul that exists now or after death because no sensory impression of the soul is possible. And the idea of immateriality is unintelligible. He argues that those philosophers who think they have impressions of themselves are confused. When Hume looks inside himself for his self he finds only perceptions but no perception of a perceiver.

Where then does the idea of the self come from? Acts of the mind resemble one another which makes one think that there is some entity within which they occur, like a soul or mind or self, a mysterious object that ties impressions and ideas together. This inference, however, is simply an illusion. Later, when Hume revisits the Treatise, he is frustrated by his conclusion on this matter and declares himself unable to solve it. Hume then conclusions Book I.

Book 2, Part 1, Of Pride and Humility

Book 2, Part 1, Of Pride and Humility Summary and Analysis

The Treatise of Human Nature is a theory about human nature as a whole. It does not merely cover the understanding, but also the passions and society and morality. Book I covered the understanding. Book II covers the passions. Book III will cover society and morality. Book II makes great use of the impressions from Book I, specifically passions or 'impressions of reflection'. The passions just are immediate sensations of your internal states. Hume wants to explain where the passions come from and what their nature is. He will not discuss physiology, just experience. Passions will include bodily feelings like pleasure, pain, hot and cold and also emotions like pride, rage, love, etc.

Hume divides the passions into two types - productive and responsive. Productive passions are those the produce pleasure and pain, whereas responsive passions are those that react to it. Hume focuses mainly on the latter as the former are the proper study of scientists. Hume will argue that innate human feelings combined with Hume's principles of association explain the emotions. Hume will also argue that the will is not a power; it's just a faculty. Further, he will deny free will, arguing that nothing can make uncaused choices. Finally, he will argue that 'reason is the slave of the passions' or that only passions can cause us to act, not pure reason.

Impressions are simple but we can say much about them. Hume understands pride as an agreeable impression due to an observation of our virtue, beauty, riches or power that makes us feel satisfied. Humility is a disagreeable impression when the opposite occurs. They are similar because they have the same objects and cause, a resemblance between certain ideas (virtue, power, etc.) and impressions of the self. Pride and humility are relations of impressions between subjects and qualities.

Pride and humility cannot be reduced to other passions; instead, they are fundamental features of the human mind. Pride is strange because we often have pride in things other than ourselves. How is that possible? Hume relies on his principles of association. One can take pride in things by means of philosophical relations of resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect. When we cause something that has qualities we approve of it and there is agreement between the subject and its qualities, we are proud of it. The same goes when we resemble the thing or are contiguous with it. All pride in other things is tied to pride in oneself.

Pride brings pleasure and humility brings pain. The relations that cause pleasure and pain can be quite complex due to the connection between ideas and impressions and the relations of both to the ideas and impressions within the self.

Hume's theory of pride and humility are next subjected to 'tests' against the qualities of virtue, vice, beauty, and deformity, wit and stupidity. Pleasure is produced by the

judgment of virtue and beauty, humility by the judgment of beauty and deformity. Now this does not mean Hume thinks qualities like beauty and virtue are only feelings; instead they are what cause pleasure. Pleasure is the heart of virtue and beauty and wit but they are not the same things.

Now power and wealth cause pride too but often power and wealth are not exercised. One can have power but not use it; the same goes for wealth. How can dormant things cause pleasure? Hume denies the distinction between 'power and the exercise of it.' Hume then roots the pleasure of power and wealth in experience of its exercise. Wealth exercised allows you the anticipation of acquisition, and so causes pleasure.

Sympathy can also cause pride and humility. Your attitude towards others can make them feel proud or humble and vice versa. One's pride and humility are deeply affected by the praise and blame of others. Note that for Hume, sympathy is not compassion or pity; it means something more like empathy, how we know the thoughts and feelings of others. This account of sympathy is absolutely crucial for Book III. It is important that you can feel proud of a friend's accomplishment or that wronging a friend can lead them to cause you to feel humility. How exactly does this work? Hume holds that your high esteem for me can cause me to feel proud because I am able to convert your esteem into pride through sympathy.

Book 2, Part 2, Of Love and Hatred

Book 2, Part 2, Of Love and Hatred Summary and Analysis

Love and hatred next come in for scrutiny. Love and Hatred are also basic features of the mine, indefinable in other terms. They both relate to persons in the same way as pride and humility and are caused by the same qualities that produce pride and humility - wit, wealth, power, beauty, virtue, etc. However, they differ because pride and humility derive always from the self, whereas love and hatred are always other-directed. Section 2.2 continues to affirm and elaborate Hume's principles of association. Hume will conduct eight experiments to show that his theory of association is true for these four passions. Some complexities arise, however, because pleasure and pain received from others can caused love and hatred.

Hume holds that our passions are not activated against the actions of others that are not intended or that are coerced. When individuals harm us, we typically don't blame them and even if we get angry, the passion dissipates much faster than otherwise. Without direct, intentional causation, the passions cannot be activated to the same degree. Sometimes, though, intent of the agent alone is enough to produce the passions of love and hatred.

Hume also argues that his theory explains why we love those we know far more than strangers and why we admire the rich and powerful - we resemble those we know more than strangers and are contiguous with them and the rich and powerful are admired because they possess what we affirm as valuable. Sympathy has a crucial role here, however, for it connects our passions to judgments about others.

Many passions are compound on Hume's view. He discusses three groups of contrary, compound passions: benevolence and anger, respect and contempt and pity and malice. He also discusses envy and romantic love. Benevolence is composed of the desire to add happiness to someone loved while anger is composed of the desire to add pain to someone hated. Pity is like love because it involves concern for the good of others; malice is like hatred because it gets pleasure from the suffering of others. Envy is produced by pleasures in others relative to me. Respect mentions love and humility with respect to another person, whereas contempt is the opposite. Romantic love or 'amorous passion' comes from combining the impression and subsequent pleasure of beauty, the desire to procreate and kindness or goodwill.

Other dispositions and inclinations are required to get passions associated with all of their objects; passions are, after all, predictable and so their predictability must have an explanation. Four dispositions are involved with the passions: comparison, mental momentum and general rules, projections and tendencies and attendant emotions. We often feel passions due to comparison, such as envy or respect. One can have pride due to comparison as well. We also feel passions in accord with very general rules that

get a sort of 'mental momentum' from their application through association. We know that if someone breaks a moral rule, indignation will be appropriate, for instance.

The mind can project itself onto others and dishonestly produce sympathy with others, such as pretending to be sad for someone when you don't really care. We also project passions onto others not currently feeling them. If a man's daughter dies while he is in a coma, we feel for his pain. Finally impressions and ideas can be disposed to cause certain emotions due to their associations. One example might be a photograph that reminds one of a lost love. Hume claims that when we imagine someone rich, we invariably feel a twinge of respect for them.

Book 2, Part 3, Of the Will and Direct Passions

Book 2, Part 3, Of the Will and Direct Passions Summary and Analysis

Part 3 of Book II advances and defends Hume's unique conception of the will as a feeling rather than a power. He believes that a proper understanding of the will is crucial to a proper account of the passions. For Hume the will is simply not a power of choice.

Instead, the will is an impression of volition that accompanies direct passions. One feels the impression of volition, for instance, whenever one desires a good. Hume knows he faces some puzzles here though because he is rejecting the doctrine of free will. The feeling of volition is simply an illusion. The will is completely determined by other causes. After all, for Hume, the will is simply an impression. Hume now attempts to refute the doctrine of free will.

First, many defenders of free will argue that the will can choose without influence or cause. Hume completely rejects this view arguing that the connection between impressions of the physical world implies determinism and that by analogy the connection between the impressions of the mental world does as well. He endorses the idea of causal necessity. Motive and character necessarily lead to action. Even moral choices work in this way. And since the will is a feeling it is very likely subject to cause and effect. So there is no reason the internal or 'moral' world of choices is different from the physical will and is so determined.

Hume next wants to explain why many believe that the will can act without external influence and can produce uncaused choices. We believe first because when we examine past actions we do not see the actions caused or necessary from outside of us. We weren't coerced or restrained but we confused this with uncaused action. Next, we do have a false sensation, but a sensation nonetheless, of uncaused choice; but the sensation is not proof that there is such uncaused choice.

Finally, lots of people are religious and religious people focus on free will a lot and this confuses people. They argue that one can't be moral without free will but Hume thinks that one can't be moral with free will because one cannot be responsible for uncaused choices. They wouldn't be the choices of anyone in that case!

Hume next asks one of his most famous questions. Since the will can't act uncaused, what causes it? Is it the understanding or is it the passions? Hume denies that reason can do it. Reason never trumps the passion neither do reason and passions conflict, as so many often think they do. Passions alone determine the will and so keep reason from being a cause and since the will isn't determined by reason, reason can't direct it. Finally, since reason follows the passions it can't have separate causal power.

The argument is complex and famous. First, Hume argues that reason consists of two types: demonstrative and probable. However, demonstration and probability only move from certain desires to certain courses of action. Yet desires are produced entirely by the passions! Reason doesn't produce desire and so reason is driven by passion. Reason does not concern ends, only means (this view of Hume's is also very famous - his instrumentalist account of practical reason).

These arguments lead Hume to hold that reason is the slave of the passions. Passions determine choices but reason only directs us to ideas and connection between facts. Reason concerns facts and so does not have causal power. The reader should understand though that Hume believes reason is significant even if it is determined by the passions. Why do so many believe that reason and the passions conflict? They don't realize that there are calm and violent passions. Calm passions are often thought of as reason but this is a mistake. And so the reason-passion conflict is just the calm-passion-violent-passion conflict in disguise.

Hume next divides direct passions into two types - those which respond to pain or pleasure or expecting them (examples include desire, joy and fear), and those which are natural instincts that produce pleasure and pain such as a desire to punish enemies or give happiness to friends. Hunger is another case. The direct passions are simple and derive straight aware from pleasure and pain.

Hume then discusses the impressions, ideas and relations that produce the direct passions and how memories can do the same. Remoteness in time and space can reduce the strength of direct passions. These observations bring Book II to a close, with final observations that there is a passion of curiosity or love of the truth; it is unique but a natural instinct. This is the instinct that caused Hume to write the Treatise.

Book 3, Part 1, Of Virtue and Vice in General

Book 3, Part 1, Of Virtue and Vice in General Summary and Analysis

Book III, 'Of Morals,' rounds out the Treatise. Hume is concerned to outline the basic features of morality and wants to know how individuals make moral distinctions. He also believes that moral distinctions arise only under certain circumstances and he wants to figure out what those circumstances are. Hume again emphasizes the distinction between impression and ideas and holds that all of human action is originally determined by perception. Since all ideas and impressions begin with perceptions, which impressions or ideas help us to divide virtue from vice?

Hume wants to answer this question because he is interested in the foundations of morality and he wants to argue that morality is not based on reason. He also has a general goal in the Treatise to explain the origins of ideas and impressions. Moral ideas and impressions are among these. Hume will argue that moral distinctions are based in two impressions of reflection, approbation and disapprobation.

He will distinguish between the internal and external conditions for these judgments and distinguish between natural and artificial virtues. Natural virtues are instinctual, whereas artificial virtues are culturally evolved. Hume will argue that justice is an artificial virtue and give a highly original, spontaneous order theory of its development.

Remember that Hume believes reason is the slave of the passions. For this reason, morality must be rooted in passions, not reason alone, which leads Hume to reject a rationalistic view of morality. There is nothing in the mind but impressions and ideas so moral judgments must be rooted in one of these. Reason alone only connects these; it cannot generate morality.

Those who root morality in reason misunderstand that moral judgments are deeply tied to emotions and intrinsically - by their very nature - motivate action. For this reason, they must be at least partly due to passion. Further, since morality is the result of passions, volition and action, morality cannot be composed of rational truths because passions, volition and action are not truth-apt because they do not seek to represent the world like, say, beliefs do. If an idea or impression cannot be true or false, then it cannot be a truth of reason.

Further, the fact that moral judgments can be mistaken does not show that moral truths are truths of reason. Circumstances can specify when a judgment or action is appropriate or inappropriate - worthy of praise and blame. Further, the rationalists cannot account for the degrees of morality. Finally, if the rationalist position is true than

reason must make moral distinctions through some fact that reason can uncover or through some derivation from ideas.

Neither will work. There is no morality in our perceptions. We do not see or hear 'good' or 'bad' in the world. Second, none of the relations of ideas can ground morality alone. Hume then argues against the possibility of a distinctive and unique moral relation between a subject idea and an object idea but our practices of praise and blame do not apply to the external world in this way.

Hume rejects all other moral theories because they cannot explain obligation. They all describe what 'is' the case but reason cannot move from what 'is' to what 'ought' to be. This comment leads to the famous ethical idea that one cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is.' Morality cannot be deduced because deductions are relations between 'is' statements and moral statements are not 'is' statements and cannot be reduced to them. Instead, morality is grounded in impressions, sensations and feelings. However, which impressions of reflection do this?

For whatever reason, virtue is tied to agreeableness and vice to disagreeableness. When we see vice, we have the impression of a pain, and virtue brings the impression of a pleasure. So virtue and vice are tied to pleasure and pain, but they are pains and pleasures of a particular sort. Moral pleasures and pains only occur in special circumstances; they are felt only when we stop taking a purely self-interested point of view and take an impartial perspective between ourselves and others. We judge individuals according to their motives and actions and praise and blame them accordingly. He will explain how these pleasures and pains get associated with virtue and vice.

Book 3, Part 2, Of Justice and Injustice

Book 3, Part 2, Of Justice and Injustice Summary and Analysis

Part 2 concerns the artificial virtues. He must consider whether moral distinctions are based on nature or nurture. Hume thinks that nature is responsible for some moral distinctions, nurture for others. Some virtues are part of human nature; these are the natural virtues. Justice and promise-keeping, however, are artificial. Natural virtues are built into human nature, always motivate types of behavior, produce good/pleasure whenever they operate and produce the sentiment of moral approval when observed in others.

In contrast, artificial virtues are not built into human nature; they have no always regulated human action. Instead, they come from self-interest where men are modified to have them through an evolutionary process that benefits them. The general practice of artificial virtue is beneficial to all and produces pleasure, but individual instances may cause great pain and only generate weak sentiments of approval.

In the tribe, humans did not need the artificial virtues like justice and promise-keeping because natural sentiment was enough to regulate them. Once society developed a more extended order, justice was required to regulate interactions for the common good. Strangers now had to enter into our practices of praise and blame and this required additional morality.

Hume explains the distinction between natural and artificial virtue in terms of the motives that produce virtuous actions. Actions themselves don't have moral character and only appear moral by extension from individual principles assumed to be in the mind or passions. Motives determine whether action is good or bad, but some self-interested motives can be taken to be virtuous when they are connected to artificial virtue.

Many individuals will have vice but want the moral approval that comes with virtue; as a result, they will fake the practice of virtue but he thinks this could not be true of everyone and would still not be virtuous.

Hume turns to the artificial virtues, beginning with justice. Suppose that an individual borrows money from someone else and the borrower doesn't want to return the money. Why should he? Justice requires it, one might claim, but we have to ask why it does, on Hume's view. Hume thinks the question would have no answer under certain circumstances.

There are three motives to action built into human nature, for Hume: self-love, general benevolence and private benevolence. None of these motives are sufficient to produce justice. None of them could make a barbarian cave man return the money he borrowed.

Self-love motivates injustice, he doesn't know the man he borrowed from well, so private benevolence won't work and the sentiment of general benevolence is too weak. Morally primitive people do not understand justice.

How, though, did we get justice and why do we think being just is a moral matter? Hume argues that humans are not well-equipped to satisfy their needs from nature alone, in contrast to the animals. Men have far more desires than they have means to meet them. For this reason, men need to work together for their mutual benefit. To keep men from fighting, they need convention-governed social units - societies, in other words.

The formation of general rules is selected for because the societies that have the rules out-compete those that do not. Norms of justice are extended across larger and larger social groups. Thus, justice is the produce of historical evolution and not founded on reason itself. Our motive to be just is enlightened self-interest where we know that following the rules is required for society to hold together. If we are really aware of our self-interest, we will understand why we should be just.

The conventions of justice that develop are the conventions of property, that prevent stealing, enforce agreements, punish offenders, and so on. Without basic private property rights, society cannot survive, much less prosper. From these benefits of 'property, right and obligation' humans acquire new abilities - to talk about and understand claims about justice. Over time justice gets more complex. Justice and injustice produce moral sentiments due to these faculties.

After some social evolution, individuals are no longer just out of self-interest but have developed a moral sentiment that is sufficient to motivate them - a sense of justice. Justice must be moral and not just prudential in order to properly motivate us. Otherwise, individuals would defect from social cooperation whenever it was prudent. Only if most members of society regard justice as moral will they be just in a general way required for society to flourish. Sympathy also helps to extend our sentiment of justice, even to people we do not know.

Hume moves to give an analysis of other artificial virtues. He argues that humans do not have a natural virtue of promise-keeping. Initially, there were no promises but they developed as a way of securing the benefits of repeated cooperation. It then developed as justice did. Allegiance and loyalty works in the same way. Without common loyalty, societies could not defend themselves against attack and therefore could not survive. They would also have more internal squabbles.

Further, loyalty allows humans to be governed which is crucial. Treaty-keeping is another artificial virtue that develops in the same way and for the same reasons. Chastity and modest are similar - and while they are mostly virtues for women - they are important and evolve to preserve the family unit, which is crucial to any flourishing society. Women must be bound to the family in order for it to be healthy. If women had sex with men other than their husbands, the family will break down, so women need a sentiment of chastity and it must be moral.

Book 3, Part 3, Of the Other Virtues and Vices

Book 3, Part 3, Of the Other Virtues and Vices Summary and Analysis

Part III of Book III discusses Hume's account of the natural virtues. They are rooted in human nature, not in social evolution and derive from natural passions and dispositions. Artificial virtue contributes to the common good but many private virtues only benefit the possessor. Hume does not give an exhaustive list of natural virtues but specifies a few, such as well-founded pride, fidelity, friendship, and the like. Natural abilities are virtues as well, such as industry and perseverance, which are useful. There are natural vices that are contraries.

When we see the natural virtues of others, sympathy produces pleasure and pain within us. Hume argues that we are motivated primarily by pleasure and pain or the expectation of it and that objects or qualities which produce these generate the indirect passions - pride, humility, love or hatred. Moral distinct are rooted in the pleasures and pains we feel when we perceive mental qualities within the self or another and these mental qualities also produce the indirect passions. Those qualities that produce love or pride and virtues, those that cause the opposite are vices. Actions have a moral character when they are produced by reliable mental qualities and by relevant actions that indicate the qualities. Only the virtues play this role.

Human beings are similar and so share natural sympathy with each other. We can communicate passions directly and subtly. Sympathy also allows us to take an impartial or general point of view which is 'the true origin of morals.' The qualities that give rise to moral sentiment are of four types: qualities useful to self or other and qualities immediately agreeable to self or others. On this model, Hume then explains why various natural virtues are in fact virtues, such as benevolence, which generates pleasure through immediate agreeableness but is also useful to society and the individual.

Hume then turns to analyze natural abilities which are themselves moral; this claim is unusual because many separate skills and virtues. However, Hume thinks the observation of abilities and the more traditional virtues produce the same pleasures and are required to have good reputation. Some argue that natural abilities are involuntary but really virtues often are too and we still think they are moral.

Hume holds that sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions, as he states when he concludes Book III. Our approval of just acts derives from the usefulness of justice to society. Hume argues that justice isn't simply arbitrary just because it is artificial; its artificiality is still based on deep features of human nature.

Appendix, An Abstract of a Book Lately Published, Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature

Appendix, An Abstract of a Book Lately Published, Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature Summary and Analysis

Before ending, Hume includes a postscript to the Treatise he wrote long afterward. The reviews of the Treatise were not positive and many complained that the book was hard to understand. In the appendix, Hume cleans up some of what he regarded as his errors. Since Hume was very insecure and was deeply upset by negative assessments of his work, he includes the abstract, which outlines the main argument of the Treatise. Despite its initial poor reception, the book is still a masterpiece in the history of philosophy and generated many philosophical and psychological research programs that remain very popular and are rigorously pursued to the present day.

Characters

David Hume

David Hume (1711-1776) is one of the great philosophers of history, particularly within the empiricist tradition and the Scottish Enlightenment. He wrote broadly on matters ranging from epistemology, cognitive science, moral psychology, free will, personal identity, perception, morality, justice, virtue, history, specifically British history, economics, and philosophy of religion. He is the author of the Treatise of Human Nature. While Hume is not a character of the book, it really has no characters. The Treatise is not a narrative; it is a philosophical ... treatise. As the author, however, Hume's ideas and personality pervade the book.

Hume is a committed empiricist and sentimentalist. An empiricist holds that all substantive knowledge comes from experience or an inference from experience. As such Hume thinks that the senses are the source of all mental entities, impressions derived directly from the senses, ideas which represent impressions and the relations that obtain between them.

Hume's empiricism also leads to his sentimentalism. Many hold that humans act primarily on reasons, rather than passions, desires and emotions. Hume rejects this view, famously holding that reason is the slave of the passions. Hume's account of morality flows from this view, for Hume holds that morality is derived primarily from sentiment, not reason. As a result, moral judgments are based in emotional reactions to moral violations.

Even Hume's account of justice is ultimately rooted in sentiment, although the relationship between justice and sentiment is quite complex. All of this is what makes Hume a sentimentalist. Hume's role in the book is as an advocate of his distinct views, and while his empiricism and sentimentalism is not unique to him, he is a foundational figure in both traditions.

The Man of Common Sense

The Man of Common Sense is something of an implicit character in the Treatise. Hume never explicitly mentions the Man of Common Sense but he does constantly realize and comment on the fact that his conclusions are at striking variants with what the common sense view of some issue is. Thus, when Hume worries about his view being counterintuitive he thinks of the man of common sense and his objections.

For instance, Book I of the Treatise generates at least three Humean positions that are opposed to common sense. First, Hume denies that causation is a genuine feature of reality. For Hume events occur and are sensed. Sense-data enters the mind through the senses as impression and sometimes lead to ideas. Causation is merely an idea, not a bona fide feature of reality.

Hume maintains further that the view that events have causes is merely an idea imposed on the understanding and that space and time are merely ways of organizing information. The Man of Common Sense will find these ideas insane and have a tendency to think that any philosophical argument for these positions must be wrong based on the absurdity of the conclusion.

Matters are even worse in Book II. Recall that Hume denies three common sense beliefs: that there is no free will, that there is no personal identity and that there is no soul and so no afterlife. Most humans believe that they have free will, that they have (or are) souls and that they exist as coherent selves. The Man of Common Sense would find this either repulsive or terrifying. Hume, however, seems to find something satisfying in frustrating the Man of Common Sense.

Locke

The 17th century British Empiricist who influenced Hume but who Hume went beyond. Hume discusses his views from time to time.

Leibniz

One of the great 17th century rationalists many of whose views Hume is trying to oppose.

Descartes

One of the great 17th century rationalists many of whose views Hume is trying to oppose. In particular, Hume opposes Descartes's views that humans have innate ideas, that we know substantive, non-empirical truths and that humans have immaterial souls.

The Scholastics

Followers of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas whose views Hume sees as archaic, anti-scientific and sophistical. They are one of Hume's philosophical opponents in the Treatise.

Hutcheson

Hume's major empiricist and sentimentalist predecessor who laid the foundations for much if not most of Hume's thought.

Moral Rationalists

Moral rationalists are those who conceive of morality as a series of transcendent, objective moral truths that can be accessed via pure reason. They believe that once an individual has grasped her duty that she can act on that reason independently of passion. Hume rejects moral rationalism at every level and opposes it vigorously in Book III.

Human Society

Hume is interested in theorizing about human society as a whole, particularly with respect to justice.

Minor Characters

Description

Objects/Places

The Understanding

For Hume, the understanding is that part of the mind that is conscious and its associated mechanisms.

Impressions

Sense-data that human consciousness confronts directly and that is represented by other mental entities.

Ideas

Ideas are the mental entities that represent impressions and those that are stored by the mind.

Relations

Relations are a series of basic categories for comparing ideas to impressions, impressions to impressions and ideas to ideas.

Pleasure and Pain

Hume sees pleasure and pain at the root of the passions, moral judgments, and moral distinctions.

The Indirect Passions

Passions that related impressions to the self or other persons, such as pride, humility, anger, etc.

Reason

Hume thinks that reasoning alone cannot motivate us, only when supplemented by the passions. Hume famously argued that reason was the slave of the passions.

Belief

For Hume, a belief is a impression with significant 'force and vivacity.'

Volition

Not choice, but rather the impression and belief in choice, as Hume denies that humans freely choose. He acknowledges, however, that humans think that they freely choose.

Natural Virtue

Behaviors and dispositions approved of through approbation that are inborn.

Artificial Virtue

Behaviors and dispositions approved of through approbation that evolve through cultural and social evolution.

Justice

For Hume, justice is an artificial virtue that evolves in order to enable individuals to secure the gains of social cooperation. Many think of the rules of justice as transcendent, mind-independent moral truths, but not Hume. They are a construction, not by human design, but through a spontaneous order process.

Moral Qualities

For Hume, moral qualities are properties of thoughts about the actions of others; they are derived from judgments of pleasure and pain, approbation and disapprobation.

Social Evolution

Hume is one of the first in history to understand the concept of a spontaneous order, such as biological evolution, the spontaneous order within chemical or physical systems, or in the economic order. Hume first applied the idea of evolution to the evolution of morality, particularly the idea of justice.

The Scientific Method

Hume was unusual in the history of philosophy for applying the scientific method to the study of the human mind. His early work helped to produce modern cognitive science.

Themes

Radical Empiricism

Hume is one of history's great empiricists. An empiricist is someone who believes that non-trivial knowledge comes only from the senses, denying that reason alone has access to the world as it is. Hume believes that the mind trades only in perceptions, which consist in impressions or sense-data. Hume holds that the mind then generates impressions of representations, ideas and uses them in various ways. All ideas, however, originate in impressions; there are no ideas of pure reason.

Further, Hume argues that the mind makes use of relations between ideas and impressions, ideas and other ideas and impressions and other impressions. Every single mental entity in the mind, all representations and all relations come from the senses and nothing more. This is empiricism in a radical form.

Hume's empiricism leads him to all number of striking and shocking positions. Holding that all mental ideas are rooted or derive from perception, Hume holds that the ideas of space and time are inferred from sensation rather than perceived. He holds that the idea that events have explanations is simply an inference the mind makes and he famously denies that causation is something that occurs in reality, but is merely an inference the mind makes automatically from the observance of the 'constant conjunction' of events.

In Book II, Hume's empiricism leads him to base all emotions in instinctual judgments of relations between impressions in the world, the body and their associated ideas which are then tied to feels of approval, disapproval, pleasure and pain. Thus, Hume is led to embrace a thoroughly empiricist account of the emotions, holding that they do not express commitments to certain truths but are at their root sensory in nature.

Since Hume roots all mental entities in perception, he denies both the idea of free will and the idea of personal identity. These two denials are extremely famous because they are so shocking. There is no free will because we only have impressions of choice, but these do not imply genuine choice and we have no reason to believe in the self because there is no direct observation of it or inference to it from impressions. Further, there is no soul that is immaterial for similar reasons.

Book III follows on Hume's empiricism by basing all of morality on emotional judgments, generating a sentimentalist account of morality. It leads him ultimately to posit a highly naturalistic conception of morality, virtue and vice and leads him to an ingenuous, spontaneous order account of the rules of justice.

Anatomy

The most common interpretation of The Treatise is that Hume is making substantive arguments that one should think of the understanding thus-and-so, or of passions in a particular way, or of morality as he sees it. They see his account of the human being as primarily prescriptive; he is telling us what we should believe about his subject matter and major questions. However, some deny this and maintain that Hume is merely an 'anatomist' meaning that his primary aim is merely to give a philosophical and scientific account of human cognition, psychology, emotions, and morality.

While his arguments for his 'anatomy' are prescriptive they are only prescriptive because they are part of a description of how the human works. Anatomists generally maintain that Hume is not trying to dismiss many of the commonsense views he dismisses, rather that he only maintains that they cannot be grounded in an account of human nature alone.

Whatever one thinks of this interpretative dispute, it is clear that Hume is giving an anatomy of the human being. Even if he is primarily interested in making prescriptive claims that arguments for his prescriptions are rooted in an anatomy of the human. Thus, Hume is at least an anatomist, if not only one.

Introducing the descriptive-prescriptive contrast is important because it helps the reader to see that Hume aims to root the study of human beings in scientific inquiry, demystifying much of the foregoing centuries of discussion about human nature. Hume is not only engaging in the great philosophical disputes of his day, he is trying to lay the groundwork for moving many of the most important questions about the human into the realm of natural science and away from the vague, confusing and often pernicious ideas of philosophers.

Counterintuitiveness the Necessary Product of Philosophical

Another interpretative controversy in Hume studies is over whether Hume was a true radical skeptic. A skeptic in this context is someone who denies a wide range of common sense truths. Hume will initially appear to be a radical skeptic, and shockingly so. He denies all of the following common sense claims: that humans have knowledge of reality as it really is, that all contingent events have causes, that causation is a bona fide feature of reality, that emotions have a rational component, that humans make free choices, that humans have a self and a soul, that morality is at least partly rooted in reason, that justice is natural to humans, and that morality is ultimately about something more than pleasure and pain. How then could Hume be anything else but one of history's greatest skeptics?

To be sure, Hume believes that common sense can often mislead and that the beliefs of the rabble are not definitive. Yet some have maintained that Hume is not a true skeptic;

rather, they hold that he thinks that philosophical inquiry detached from common sense and custom leads to radical skepticism. In common life, Hume sometimes says, we have common sense beliefs, and while Hume thinks pure philosophical inquiry shows them to be groundless, that pure philosophical inquiry is, for this very reason, flawed when practiced by itself.

Now, the interpretation of Hume as a common-sense theorist is not widely held. Regardless of whether it is true, it brings out an important feature of Hume's philosophical work: philosophical inquiry necessarily leads one to counter intuitive conclusions at shocking variance with common sense. A commitment to studying the human being scientifically and philosophically threatens to undermine what one philosopher has called humanity's 'manifest image' of itself and the world.

This attitude is still pervasive in philosophy and science to this day and it was Hume who lent it powerful force.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the Treatise of Human Nature is that of its author, David Hume. Hume is one of the great philosophers and perhaps the greatest philosopher of the 18th century. Hume is perhaps the foremost member of what is known as the Scottish Enlightenment. He is one of largest figures in the tradition of British Empiricism. Hume is also something of an iconoclast, a notorious skeptic and opponent to the beliefs of common sense. These biases should be explained in more detail.

First, as a member of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hume is committed to the idea of social, moral, legal and economic evolution. It was the figures of the Scottish Enlightenment who generated the idea of evolution and spontaneous order decades before Darwin. Hume's conception of spontaneous order is most prominent in his discussion of the evolution of justice in Book III, Part II.

Hume is also a sentimentalist, another view characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment. A sentimentalist is one who holds that moral judgments are derived from emotions, rather than reason. Hume ardently maintains the human action is entirely rooted in perception and emotion.

Hume's empiricism is most evident when he argues that all mental entities are either perceptions or are derived from perceptions. Hume's distinction between impressions, ideas and relations show that he is committed to the empiricist thesis that all substantive, non-trivial knowledge derives from experience. Hume's empiricist commitments lead to many striking and novel conclusions, particularly in how he structures the passions and how the passions and perception are tied to moral judgments.

Hume's empiricism also leads to his skepticism of common sense. As readers of this guide are aware, Hume denies that causation is part of reality, that free will exists, that the self exists and that morality has a rational foundation. He also denies the existence of an immaterial soul. Hume's perspective is also colored by a strong desire to root the study of human nature on a sound scientific footing.

Tone

The tone of the Treatise of Human Nature is a mix indicative of Hume's complex personality. Hume is a committed philosopher, historian, economist and social scientists generally speaking. Hume is an intellectual of the highest caliber, but he is also something of an iconoclast: intent to expose certain views as false, contradict common sense, yield shocking conclusions and in general show that the philosophical truth about the human are at striking variance with what helps humans rest easy and be satisfied with life.

The scholarly tone of the Treatise pervades the text. Hume's writing style is more colloquial than many of the great philosophers but he is consistently making distinctions, arguments and offering hypotheses and these distinctions, arguments and hypotheses build on one another throughout the book. The analysis of impressions, ideas and relations in Book I makes the analysis of the passions in Book II possible and without Book II Hume cannot give his unique account of morality and social evolution.

Hume's arguments, however, lead to shocking conclusions. He believes we have no real contact with the real world save through a medium of sense-data. He thinks that the only substantive truths are empirical. He denies that causation is a genuine feature of reality and he rejects the idea of free will. Hume denies the existence of the self and an immaterial soul, argues that emotions have no rational component, holds that moral judgments are rooted merely in sentiment rather than reason, that justice is evolved, rather than a series of rational truths, and on and on. Hume's positions are not as famous as they are merely because his ideas were new or well-argued for. Hume is provocative and without this provocation, the tone of the Treatise would lose its extraordinary appeal.

Structure

The structure of Hume's Treatise is extremely systematic. Hume is out to give a systematic picture of human nature and divides human mind, cognition and society into three parts. Book I covers the understanding, Book II covers the passions and Book III covers morality. Each builds on each other. Book I has four major sections, Book II has three major sections, as does Book I.

In Book I, 'Of the Understanding,' Hume begins by making a series of crucial distinctions that lie at the foundations of his system. Hume is a radical empiricist. He believes that all the substantive, non-trivial knowledge that we possess derives from the senses. Further, he thinks our mind trades exclusively in perceptions - it does not know reality directly. Skepticism of a radical sort is always a possibility when one does philosophy.

Hume divides perception into impressions, ideas and relations between them. Hume uses this taxonomy of mental entities to reach several important conclusions. First, universals are mere mental entities. Second, there are no truths of reason except stipulated definitions. Third, causation is not real; it is only a relation we impose on the world.

In Book II, 'Of the Passions,' Hume uses the ideas of Book I to generate an account of human psychology, emotions and judgments. Hume begins by rooting all emotions in the idea of judgments of approbation and disapprobation which he ties to the sensations of pleasure and pain. He roots pride and humility in these ideas and then roots what he calls 'indirect passions' such as love and hatred.

Hume explains emotions in terms of relations of sensations and judgments to the self or to others and connects emotions derived from others in sympathy. Finally, Hume

addresses direct passions and famously argues that there is no free will, for a volition is merely an internal impression.

In Book III, 'Of Morals,' Hume gives an explanation of morality. Hume first argues against moral rationalists who hold that moral truths are truths of reason. Hume thinks that reason only moves the mind from extant desires to conclusions, giving his famous instrumentalist account of reason. From this Hume famously argues that reason is merely the slave of the passions. Sentiment and emotion grounds morality - all moral judgments are judgments of relations between perceptions in the world or of the self in relation to a sensation of pleasure or pain.

Hume then ties the idea of virtue and vice to what brings pleasure or pain to the mind. Hume goes on to distinguish between natural and artificial virtues. He gives a famous spontaneous order theory of the evolution of norms of justice, which he believes to be an artificial, culturally constructed set of ideas. He ends with his account of natural virtues and how they come to be understood through their connections to pleasures and pains.

Quotes

"As 'tis from the disposition of visible and tangible objects we receive the idea of space, so from the succession of ideas and impressions we form the idea of time." (28)

"Nothing is ever really present with [or to] the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas." (49)

"To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive." (49)

"Thus my general position, that an opinion or belief is nothing but a strong and lively idea derived from a present impression related to it ..." (73)

"What! The efficacy of causes lie[s] in the determination of the mind! As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind, and wou'd not continue their operation, even tho' there was no mind existent to contemplate them, or reason concerning them." (113)

"For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or another .... I never catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perceptions." (165)

"Thus we have establish'd two truths without any obstacle or difficulty, that 'tis from natural principles this variety of causes excites pride and humility, and that 'tis not by a different principle each different cause is adapted to its passion." (185)

"From these two relations, resemblance and a parallel desire, there arises such a connexion betwixt the sense of beauty, the bodily appetite, and benevolence, that they become in a manner inseparable ..." (254)

"I desire it may be observ'd, that by the will, I mean nothing but the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of the mind." (257)

"Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. As this opinion may appear somewhat extraordinary, it may not be improper to confirm it by some other considerations." (266)

"In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequences." (302)

"Here then is a proposition, which, I think may be regarded as certain, that 'tis only from the selfishness and confin'd generosity of man, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin." (318)

"The approbation of moral qualities most certainly is not deriv'd from reason, or any comparison of ideas; but proceeds entirely from a moral taste, and from certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust, which arise upon the contemplation and view of particular qualities or characters." (371)

Topics for Discussion

What is Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas? How is it important? Does it make sense?

What is Hume's argument against free will? What do you think of it?

How is Hume an empiricist? Why is Hume an empiricist?

Why is reason the slave of the passions? What is the significance of this fact?

Explain Hume's account of belief and explain why it is widely considered implausible.

What are passions, on Hume's account? What are the indirect passions and how do they come about?

How does Hume's account of the passions in Book II lay the groundwork for the account of morality in Book III?

Why can't morality be based on reason, but must be rooted in the passions instead? What are two of Hume's arguments for this view? Do you agree? Why or why not?

What is Hume's distinction between natural and artificial virtue? Do you agree with his classification of the virtues into these categories? Is justice, for instance, an artificial or a natural virtue on your view?

Explain in great detail Hume's account of justice. To what extent does it resemble Adam Smith and Charles Darwin's accounts of spontaneous order processes in economics and nature?