

DAVID HUME
PROMPTS FOR THIRD PAPER

Paper assignment

You are free to choose one of the example prompts here or write on another topic. Either way, your paper should be narrowly focused on one particular argument Hume makes. As you'll see in the prompts, I want you to focus on no more than a few paragraphs of Hume. In your paper, I want you to give an “explication” of Hume's argument – you need to give all the details of the argument for a reader. Assume your reader knows general facts about Hume, his general view of things and the strategy of the Treatise, but that they don't remember anything about the argument you've chosen. So you need to give every little detail of the argument.

After you have presented Hume's argument, I would like you to critically engage with it. Choose *one* of the following types of critical engagement: (a) You may argue against Hume, by pointing out a mistake in his reasoning. You could do this by arguing that one of his premises is false (i.e. the argument is not sound) or that his conclusion doesn't follow from his premises (i.e. the argument is invalid). Alternatively (b) you could defend Hume against an objection. Be sure the objection you're arguing against is somewhat plausible. Finally, (c) you could offer a new argument in favor of Hume's conclusion. In every case, assume you are writing for an audience who disagrees with you, you must try to convince them – with good arguments – why you are correct.

In addition to the paper, I would like you to turn in an argument diagram of the argument you are considering. A link about argument diagrams is available on Blackboard.

Example prompts

Prompt 1

In Book 2, Part 3, Section 1, Hume argues that human action must have the same necessity as physical objects – that humans have no more free will than do rocks. This argument starts at the beginning of section and continues through the sixth paragraph of the section. Summarize and discuss this argument.

Prompt 2

In Book 3, Part 1, Section 1, Hume gives many arguments for why morality cannot have its foundation exclusively in rationality. I would like you to choose one of the first three arguments for this paper. The first argument begins with the 6th paragraph of the section on page 325. The second starts with the 9th paragraph on page 326, and the third starts on paragraph 10 on page 326.

Choose ***one*** of the arguments and discuss.

Prompt 3 (A little more challenging)

At the bottom of page 411 (10th paragraph of Book 3, Part 3, Section 1), Hume gives an argument for why we should agree with him that all human moral judgment arises from sympathy. Describe his argument in this paragraph and critically engage with it. (Hint: Hume is appealing to something William of Ockham said when he describes the “inviolable maxim in philosophy.”)