

DAVID HUME
PROMPTS FOR FIRST 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 1, Part 1, Section 7, Hume takes on the philosophical notion of abstract ideas – ideas that are abstracted away from any particular quality. He is taking on the claim that we can reason about numbers in general without thinking about any collection of objects or about extension without thinking about an object with a particular size.

He gives an argument against abstract arguments in paragraphs 3-6 of that section (pages 13-14 of our text). Analyze and critically engage with this argument.

Prompt 2

In Book 1, Part 3, Section 2, Hume analyzes the properties of causation. In paragraph 7 (page 55 of our text), he argues that causes must occur *before* their effects. Hume claims that it would be absurd if causes sometimes occurred at the same time as their effects, and he offers an argument in this paragraph as to why this cannot happen. Analyze and critically engage with this argument.

Prompt 3

In Book 1, Part 3, Section 8, Hume presents his theory that to believe that an idea represent reality is simply to have an idea that is more vivid and forceful. So the only difference between my idea of something that doesn't exist – like a mountain made out of gold – and something that does exist – like Denali – is that the later is more vivid than the former.

Hume argues that belief must be like this in a very short argument in the 7th paragraph of the section (page 73 of our book). Analyze and critically engage with this argument.