

DAVID HUME
PROMPTS FOR SECOND 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 4, Section 1, Hume gives an extended argument that belief is not a result of reasoning but rather comes about from natural habits of the mind. Summarize this argument and discuss it. The argument is long, so feel free to focus on one part of the argument and just give a quick summary of another part.

Prompt 2

In Book 1, Part 4, Section 4, Hume argues that we cannot have any clear impression of the “self.” This argument is targeted against philosophers, like Descartes, who use the existence of the self as the basis of their philosophy.

Hume presents two arguments that there can be no impression of the self. One is in the second paragraph of the section (page 179-180). The second is in the third paragraph of the section (page 180). Choose **one** of these arguments to summarize and discuss.

Prompt 3

In Book 1, Part 1, Section 2, Hume is laying out his theory about pride and humility. He notes that pride and humility always have the same object, the “self,” but that the “self” cannot be the sole cause of pride and humility. He argues for this in the third paragraph of the section (page 198). Summarize and discuss this argument.

(If you would like, you may also combine this with a discussion of a similar argument Hume gives about the cause of love and hatred in Book 2, Part 2, Section 1. But this is not required.)