

Brief Notes on Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, First Installment

1. Section I: Of the Different Species of Philosophy
 - a. Moral philosophy, the science of human nature, may be treated in two manners:
 - i. From the point of view of man's actions, praising virtue
 - ii. From the point of view of the intellect, attempting to discover the ultimate foundation of morals
 - b. The second approach has been so far unfruitful, and is unpleasant and pernicious, as cloaking its failures in superstition
 - c. The only way to free mankind from the bane of the second approach is to undertake an inventory of the powers of the human mind
2. Section II: Of the Origin of Ideas
 - a. All our perceptions (mental contents) are either ideas or impressions
 - b. Ideas are memories or copies of impressions
 - c. Impressions are sensations
 - d. To emphasize, we have no perceptions that are not either impressions or copies of impressions
 - e. Therefore, if we desire to test an expression to see whether it has a meaning, we have only to determine whether there is an impression corresponding to it
3. Section III: Of the Association of Ideas
 - a. One impression or idea leads to another idea in our minds—the association of ideas.
 - b. There are three principles of the association of ideas:
 - i. Resemblance
 - ii. Contiguity in time or place
 - iii. Cause and effect
4. Section IV: Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operation of the Understanding
 - a. Part One
 - i. All objects of human inquiry may be divided into
 1. Relations of ideas
 2. Matters of fact
 - ii. Relations of ideas may be ascertained without reference to existence.
 1. (Under this heading are included all mathematical questions.)
 - iii. How are matters of fact to be ascertained?
 1. Via the relation of cause and effect, as revealed in sense experience
 2. It follows from this that we can never discover the ultimate reasons for things—we can only reduce our experiences to more universal ones.
 - b. Part Two
 - i. But on what basis do we infer from the past conjunctions of “causes” with “effects” that it is or will always be so?

- ii. Not (validly) from the fact that it has always been so, for that involves a begging of the question (from A it has always followed that B, whenever two things have been observed always to have been connected in the past, they have always continued to be connected in past futures; therefore in the future from A it will continue to follow that B).
- 5. Section V: Skeptical Solutions of These Doubts
 - a. Part One
 - i. Skeptics promote doubt, the suspense of judgment, and the confinement of inquiry to within narrow bounds.
 - ii. Skepticism does not destroy morality or the conduct of daily life.
 - iii. In fact there is no rational basis for arguing from cause and effect, only custom or habit. From repeated conjunctions, we come to expect the same in the future.
 - b. Part Two
 - i. Belief is nothing but the vividness, liveliness, force, and steadiness of an idea. Belief in a “cause” is produced by its constant conjunction with an “effect” in our experience.
- 6. Section VI: Of Probability
 - a. Probability is a weaker belief than belief in a cause, produced in our minds by a less constant, but still predominant, conjunction
- 7. Section VII: Of the Idea of Necessary Connection
 - a. Part One
 - i. There is no impression, internal (introspective) or external (sensory), that corresponds with the expressions “force,” “power,” “energy,” or “necessary connection.”
 - b. Part Two
 - i. There is nothing to our idea of causation except constant conjunction, and no means by which we can inquire into it further.
- 8. Section VIII: Of Liberty and Necessity
 - a. Part One
 - i. The dispute between liberty and necessity is merely verbal, since everyone has always agreed that
 - 1. All things are governed by the law of cause and effect, interpreted as constant conjunction (there is no such thing as chance)
 - a. Both in the moral and in the natural sphere
 - b. This principle is necessary for the conduct of life.
 - 2. We (sometimes) have the power to do as we will
 - ii. The view that these principles are in conflict is due to the confused belief in necessary connection as characterizing external events but not our volitions.
 - iii. Hume’s view is called “compatibilism,” and it attempts to relegate libertarianism to the realm of fruitless and obscure speculation
 - b. Part Two
 - i. These principles are not “dangerous.”

- ii. Both of these principles are necessary for the conduct of life and for the assigning of praise and blame
- iii. Two objections not considered:
 - 1. Then, since God is the author of everything, everything is good. Admittedly, not comforting to the sufferer.
 - 2. Then, since there is evil, God is the author of evil. I will not try to address this, as being too abstruse.
- iv. (An observation:) Here it seems that Hume begins to be ironic and indirect, because he is not permitted to say what he really thinks about God.