

Questions about *Treatise* I.ii

1. General suggestion: when you're reading through this Part, make a note every time Hume appeals to the Copy Principle or the Separability Principle, and try to get a clear idea what role the principles are playing in his arguments. (In fact, this would be a good plan to follow throughout the entire book.) Can we make any interesting new generalisations about the roles these principles play for Hume?
2. What are Hume's arguments in section I.ii.i for the claim that our ideas and impressions are not infinitely divisible?
3. On p. 28 Hume says that it is extremely difficult for us to form a 'just notion' of a mite (or, by extension, any other large object). Why does he say this? What does he mean by 'just notion' in this passage?
4. In the two paragraphs on pp. 29–31, Hume gives two interesting arguments for the conclusion that 'no finite extension is infinitely divisible'. The first argument has as a premise the conclusion of section I.ii.i about our *ideas* of extension. What additional assumptions does Hume need to make to get from this to his conclusion about extension in general? Are these assumptions reasonable ones?
5. In the course of presenting the second argument (p. 30), Hume writes, 'That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together; nor can such an unity any more exist alone than number can, as being in reality a true number'. This passage has been interpreted as entailing that composite material objects (tables, etc.) don't really exist, literally speaking; literally speaking there are only many simple things. How does the argument work, on this interpretation? Does the conclusion that no finite extension is infinitely divisible really follow from this premise? Is this interpretation of Hume's claim correct, and if not, what else might be going on in this argument?
6. In section I.ii.iii, Hume argues that extension is inconceivable without colour or 'solidity' (a.k.a. 'tangibility'). Does it follow that it is impossible for there to be an object—for example, one of the tiny mites discussed in I.ii.i—that is too small to see or touch? Why/why not? (Cf. section I.ii.v.)
7. Hume claims (p. 41) that we can imagine two contiguous points of different colours. Consider the following question, which brings out the strangeness of Hume's "discrete" geometry: what is the maximum number of points that can be contiguous to any given point? What can Hume say about this question? Should he hold the answer to the question to be *a priori*? Might it have one answer in the case of our ideas of extension, and another answer in the case of actual physical extension?

8. On pp. 45–53, Hume presents his theory of geometry—that is, ordinary Euclidean geometry—according to which this science contains “errors”, although none that are “considerable”. How persuasive is Hume’s case for the claims he makes which contradict ordinary Euclidean geometry, e.g. the claim (p. 51) that two lines which approach each other at a very acute angle have more than one point in common? Does Hume really need to make these claims?
9. In the important section I.ii.v, Hume argues that (i) there is no empty space (‘vacuum’), even though (ii) it is possible for two objects to be some distance apart without there being any other objects between them. How are these two claims consistent?
10. What are the members of the “revival sets” of the abstract ideas ‘existence’ and ‘external existence’, according to Hume (section I.ii.vi)?
11. The last two paragraphs of this section deserve special attention. They have sometimes been understood as advocating something like Berkeleynian idealism or even solipsism. Is this correct? If not, what is Hume saying here? (One thing you need to know: ‘specifically different’ means ‘different in species’, i.e. ‘different in kind’.) What do you think Hume means when he says in the last paragraph that we might form a “relative” idea of external objects, if we wanted to conceive them as “specifically different” from our ideas and impressions?