

Questions about *Treatise* I.iv

1. There are two ways in which further reflection about the process which led to the formation of a probable judgment might affect the degree of probability with which we assent to that judgment: the probability could be decreased, if we decide that we were too confident in the original judgment, or alternatively it could be increased, if we decide that we weren't confident enough in the original judgment. How is this observation relevant to the argument Hume gives in I.iv.i for the claim that belief must eventually be 'reduc'd to nothing' by the process of reflecting on the processes which generate it? Does this undermine Hume's argument?
2. In section I.iv.ii, what are the different possible explanations which Hume considers for our belief in an external world, i.e. in 'continu'd and distinct' entities? What does he mean by the suggestion (p. 189–193) that this belief might arise from the 'senses', and why does he reject this suggestion? What is the explanation which Hume considers on pp. 195–198, and why does he reject it as inadequate? Why isn't this explanation 'of the same nature as our reasonings concerning causes and effects' (198)?
3. Explain in your own terms the explanation which Hume finally comes up with, beginning on p. 199. What role does the premise that it is impossible for something which exists at one time to be identical with something that exists at another time unless the object in question exists at each intervening time play in this explanation?
4. Why does Hume reject the "vulgar" view according to which the very objects which are present to the mind (our impressions) continue to exist when unperceived? What is his explanation for the fact that when we have considered the arguments against the vulgar view, instead of become 'extravagant sceptics' we instead adopt the "philosophical" view according to which there are permanent "objects" in addition to our fleeting and changeable impressions? Why does Hume's answer to this question make him become (as he confesses on pp. 217–218) temporarily inclined towards extravagant scepticism? If Hume were right about the psychological mechanisms underlying our belief in an external world, what effect should that have on a reasonable person's beliefs about the external world?
5. In I.iv.iii, what is Hume's explanation of the belief in substances which he attributes to the 'antient philosophy'? What are Hume's reasons for denying the truth of this belief? (Section I.iv.v is also relevant to this latter question.)
6. What does Hume take to be the 'fundamental principle' of the modern philosophy (section I.iv.iv)? Explain the argument for that thesis which Hume considers on p. 226. How good is this argument? Why does Hume think that the 'modern philosophy' collapses into 'the most extravagant scepticism'? How might someone who wanted to resist this extravagant scepticism resist the argument for the modern philosophy on p. 226?

7. How does Hume understand the debate concerning the immateriality of the soul (I.iv.v), and why does he reject the question as meaningless? What is the question concerning the ‘local conjunction’ of the soul with matter which Hume spends most of this section in considering? What is Hume’s answer to this question? Is Hume right that there are things (passions, impressions of sound and smell and taste) which cannot coherently be conceived as having a spatial location?
8. In a famous passage in section I.iv.vi (p. 252), Hume writes ‘For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.’ What claim is Hume here defending on the basis of introspection? Is it true?
9. On pp. 253–255, Hume describes certain inconsistent beliefs about identity to which we are prone. How does this propensity work? How does it relate to the propensities already described in sections I.iv.ii and I.iv.iii? What, then, does Hume take to be at issue when those of us who have recognised the inconsistency of these beliefs ask questions about “personal identity” and the identity of material objects? How does Hume’s understanding of the nature of these questions affect his views on how we should go about answering them?
10. (Hard question) What are Hume’s reasons, in the *Appendix* (pp. 633–636) for doubting his own conclusions concerning personal identity?
11. What attitude towards sceptical arguments does Hume recommend philosophers to adopt, in the important and famous section I.iv.vi?