I. Epistemology: The Copy Principle:

The only ways, says Hume, to solve the problems of disagreements & speculations regarding “abstruse questions” is to “enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show from an exact analysis of it powers and capacities, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse objects.”

A. Starting point is the Content of the Mind: Perceptions of the mind take two forms: impressions & ideas. The Copy Principle:

1. The contents of the mind can all be reduced to materials given to us by the senses and experience, & those materials Hume calls perceptions. Thus, perceptions of the mind take two forms: impressions & ideas. 2. Hume’s epistemology starts from the distinction between impressions & ideas. a. An “impression” is the original stuff of thought. b. An “idea” is merely a copy of an original impression. This is called the Copy Principle. This is his general maxim & first principle in his science of human nature.

3. Difference between an impression & idea is only its degree of vividness. Thus, the original impression is an impression, as when we hear, see, feel, love, hate, desire, or will. The impressions are “lively,” & clear. They are ideas, then, when we reflect upon them. When we reflect upon these impressions, we have ideas of them, & those ideas are less-vivens versions of the original impressions. For ex., to feel pain is an impression, whereas the memory of that sensation is an idea.

4. Without impressions there would be no ideas. Why? An idea is a copy of an impression. Thus, it follows that for every idea there must be a prior impression.

B. Faculty of Imagination Joins Two or More Ideas:

1. Not every idea reflects a corresponding impression. For example, we’ve never seen a unicorn even though we have ideas of them. Hume explains that these ideas as being the product of the mind’s “faculty of compounding, transposing, or diminishing the material afforded to us by the senses and experience.” For ex. our imagination joins two ideas, “horse” & “horn,” which we originally acquired as impressions through our senses.

C. Association of Ideas:

Though there is no special faculty of the mind that associates one idea with another, Hume believed that by observing actual patterns of our thinking & analyzing the groups of our ideas, we might discover an explication of the association of ideas. These ideas become related to each other whenever they possess the following 3 qualities: (a) resemblance, (b) contiguity (being so near as to be touching) in time or place, & (c) cause & effect. Hume believed that the connection of all ideas to teach other could be explained by these qualities & gave the following explication of how they work: [a]. “A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original [resemblance]; [b]. The mention of one apartment in the building naturally introduces an inquiry… concerning the others [contiguity]; [c]. And if we think of a wound, we can scarcely beware reflecting on the pain which causes it” [cause & effect].

D. Causation:

Hume’s most famous & original metaphysical concept:

Treatise of Human Nature, Bk I, pt II, & Enquiry, VI-VIII:

1. Q: What impression gives us idea of causality?

a. Locke nor Berkeley challenged basic principle of Causality (though Berkeley did say that we can’t discover efficient causes in things, his intention was to look for the cause of phenomena & thus, the predictable order of nature in God’s activity). b. For Hume, the very idea of causality is suspect & approached the problem by asking the question by asking: “What is the origin of causality?” Since ideas are copies of impressions, Hume asks what impression gives us the idea of causality?

2. Answer: Idea of causality arises in mind when we experience certain relations between objects. For example, when we speak of cause and effect, we mean to say that A causes B. But what kind of relation does this indicate between A & B?

Experience offers 3 relations: a. Relation of Contiguity: A & B are always close together; b. Priority: “For, the “cause,” always precedes B, the “effect”; c. Constant Conjunction: For we always see A followed by B. Therefore, causality is not a quality in the objects we observe, but rather a “habit of association” in the mind produced by the repetition of instances of A & B.

Why is this important? By assuming that the causal principle is central to all kinds of knowledge, this attack on our idea of causality & the validity of all knowledge. He sees no reason for accepting the principle that whatever beings to exist must have a cause as either intuitive or capable of demonstration. Thus, Hume considered reasoning or thinking stories that cannot extend beyond our immediate experience.

The Principle of Necessary Causation is not a matter of Fact. We never actually experience one event’s causing another. Our experiences of an event happening immediately followed by another, or constant conjunction of events. However, we never actually experience the first event’s bringing about the second event; we merely assume that the 1st event brought about the 2nd. There is no logical connection between the 1st event’s happening & the 2nd’s happening because we cannot actually experience this happening day by day. Thus, we never actually experience one event’s causing another, the Principle of Necessary Causation is not a matter of Fact. Hence, there is no reason to believe in a world of enduring objects. The intended result is to produce an idea without copying it from a former impression. Is Hume right to suggest that all exceptions to the copy principle are far-fetched? Does it mean that the copy principle is to be regarded an empirical generalization, rather than a priori principle? But if so, how is Hume entitled to use the copy principle to further aggressively inclined to the Principle of Universal Causation, like the concepts of material objects and their properties? Discuss.

E. 2 Types of Truth: Relation Ideas & Matters of Fact:

1. Relations of Ideas: Truths that are true because of the meanings of & the logical relationships between the ideas involved (All bachelors are unmarried). 2. Matters of Fact: Truths that are true because they correspond to a direct sense experience (This book is red). All the things we can think or believe or reason about are either “relations of ideas” or “matters of fact.” Refer to the discussion in section 3.9 holds necessarily; its negation implies a contradiction. Such truths are discoverable by the operation of pure thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. 2. Each matter of fact is connected with its negation is directly conceivable & represents a possibility. For ex., the sun will not rise tomorrow is no longer intelligible & no more implies a contradiction than the proposition that it will rise. Thus, thought alone is never sufficient to assure us of the truth of any proposition. This is just one of many.

3. What turns a thought of something into the belief that it is so is the presence of an impression, not just an idea, of something associated with that thing in the past: A belief is a “lively idea” related to or associated with a present impression. It is in following out connections established in our minds by past experience that we are led by a present impression to believe in a matter of fact.

4. Not reason alone, but experience is the source of inference. a. But reason, even in combination with past experience can’t be what lead us from an observed correlation between two kinds of beliefs that a correlation will continue in the future. b. All inferences from past to present by the “principle” that the same event will recur. c. But no assurance can be given to that principle from reason alone. d. But reason, even when combined with experience can’t be what leads us to believe that the future will resemble the past.

5. Imagination is responsible for making the empirical inferences we do. a. There are certain general “principles of the imagination” according to which we are to be the powers & principles of the human mind. b. It is the task of the “science of human nature” to discover such principles, but without itself going beyond experience.

6. It is certain “principles of the imagination” that explains our belief in a world of enduring objects. Experience alone can’t produce an idea of a “world of enduring objects.” For ex., if I imagine the 2 kinds of perceptions that impressions are the originals of which ideas are the copies; there is also the case of complex perceptions, which are the copies of our simple perceptions. The idea of a complex perception is not an idea of the distinct simple impressions but rather a new complex. An idea is a copy of a complex impression. Thus, our understanding of cause & effect is not a genuine phenomenon. The Principle of Universal Causation, like the concepts of material objects and their properties, can’t be discovered by reason or experience. It is an idea borrowed from the original impressions.

Hume’s policy, both in the Treatise & in the Enquiries, was to apply the Newtonian experimental method to the British empiricists’ investigations into the powers & principles of the human mind. The intended result was to be a truly experimental science of human nature. Main purpose of Bk 1 is to treat empiricism as an empirical fact & thus, examine several metaphysical systems & philosophical problems.