Hume's *Treatise* Final Exam Preview

What you will be asked to do

The exam will be held from 10:30-12:30 on Tuesday, 15 March in Cobb 203, the room where lectures are held. Please bring blue books.

The exam has two parts. In the first, you will be asked to choose *two* out of four passages. For these two passages, you will be asked to do what you did on the midterm exam: *explain* what it says, *describe* what Hume was trying to do, and *evaluate* his argument. Remember that the third part is the most important one. The passages will be drawn from the readings we have done since the midterm, that is, the readings on the syllabus from 8 February to the end, from Books 2 and 3. Clarke, Hobbes, Kant, and "A Dialogue" are fair game too.

In the second part, you will be asked to write an essay on *one* of the following topics. If a topic is redundant with the paper you wrote, please address a different one

Topics

1. Many people regard Hume's *Treatise* as an entirely negative work. It knocks down ideas but tells us nothing about how to understand or lead our lives. Using an example from any part of the *Treatise*, explain why someone might have that reaction. How might Hume respond to this charge? What do you think: is Hume's philosophy entirely negative or not?

2. Hume contrasts religious beliefs with "natural" ones on several occasions: in dismissing the fictions of the ancient philosophy (1.4.4.1), in explaining why he believes there is a point to philosophy despite its skeptical conclusions (1.4.7.13), and in describing the "artificial lives and manners" of people like Pascal ("A Dialogue," pp. 488-9). But the description is curious: religious belief seems to be a pervasive feature of human life. What do you think Hume had in mind?

3. Is morality a subjective matter or an objective one on Hume's theory? That is, do vice and virtue or moral right and wrong depend on what people want or not? In what sense does Hume think morality depends on what people want? In what sense does it not? Is Hume's theory compatible with what you think about morality?