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PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATES WORKBOOK

VOLUME I

Ethics and the Good Life

A guided study workbook in six debates

INSIDE EACH UNIT

Clear positions · key terms · argument maps · objections and replies · contemporary cases · discussion · knowledge checks · essay planning

For independent learners, reading groups and introductory philosophy courses

About this workbook

Original educational material designed to accompany the free Open Philosophy Library debates

This workbook turns six comparative debates into active study. It does not reproduce the online essays.

The Open Philosophy Library Study Method

Each debate follows six stages: Orient · Compare · Reconstruct · Test · Discuss · Write. This consistent method helps readers understand competing positions, examine their arguments, apply them to contemporary cases and develop independent philosophical judgements.

1 · Orient	Read the central question, learning outcomes and key terms.
2 · Compare	Study each position and locate the deepest point of disagreement.
3 · Reconstruct	Follow the argument maps; then state each case in your own words.
4 · Test	Apply both positions to a contemporary problem.
5 · Discuss	Practise charitable disagreement before defending a verdict.
6 · Write	Complete the knowledge check and build an essay plan.

A note on interpretation

READ CHARITABLY

These are interpretive comparisons, not imaginary historical conversations. Reconstruct the strongest plausible version of each view before criticising it. Where a philosopher's texts allow more than one reading, treat disagreement as an invitation to return to the primary work.

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UNIT 1

Kant vs Hume

Reason, Sentiment and Moral Obligation

CENTRAL QUESTION

Does morality derive its authority from universal rational duty, or from sentiment, sympathy and our responses to character?

Learning outcomes

- Distinguish acting from duty from merely acting in accordance with duty.
- Explain Hume's claim that moral distinctions depend on sentiment.
- Test rational universalism and sentimentalism against partiality and prejudice.
- Construct a qualified judgement about moral authority and motivation.

Works in view

Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*; Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* and related writings.

Before you read

Write a provisional answer to the central question. What experience or assumption most influences your answer?

Read the full free debate: [Kant vs Hume: Reason, Sentiment and Moral Obligation](#)

Unit 1 · The positions

Build the strongest version of each view

Kant Morality must be capable of binding every rational agent. Feelings can support good action but cannot supply a universal law. Moral worth is clearest when an agent acts because duty requires it, even when inclination pulls elsewhere.	Hume Reason discovers facts and relations, but approval and motivation arise through sentiment. Reflection can enlarge sympathy beyond private interest, allowing us to assess useful and agreeable traits from a more general point of view.
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Side-by-side

ISSUE	KANT	HUME
Source of morality	Practical reason	Refined human sentiment
Test	Can the maxim be universal law?	Would an informed, general standpoint approve?
Motivation	Respect for duty	Feeling, sympathy and concern
Main risk	Formalism or motivational thinness	Partiality, instability or prejudice

Fair summary

In no more than 50 words each, state what makes each position attractive to an intelligent defender.

Unit 1 · Argument workshop

Premises, conclusions, objections and replies

Kant · core argument

1	Moral requirements claim necessity, not mere popularity.
2	Only principles valid for all rational agents can explain that necessity.
3	Therefore moral authority rests on rationally universal law.

Hume · core argument

1	Reason alone identifies facts but does not generate approval or action.
2	Moral judgement characteristically involves approval, blame and motivation.
3	Therefore sentiment is indispensable to morality.

Objection and reply

Against Kant: The same maxim can be described narrowly or broadly, and duty may seem detached from care.

Possible reply: Kant can insist that honest maxim-formulation and respect for humanity discipline application; cultivated judgement still matters.

Against Hume: Shared feeling can exclude outsiders or reproduce social prejudice.

Possible reply: Hume can appeal to corrected information and a general point of view that extends sympathy and checks private bias.

Your verdict: Which premise is most vulnerable? Defend your choice.

Unit 1 · Contemporary case

Apply both theories before deciding

THE CASE

A nurse is exhausted after a long shift. A distressed patient asks for help that another colleague could provide. The nurse feels no sympathy at that moment, but recognises a professional duty. Later, learning the patient's history awakens concern. What makes the assistance morally valuable: duty, care, both, or something else?

Guided analysis

1. State the nurse's maxim in one sentence.

2. Could that maxim be willed as a general practice? Explain.

3. Which sentiments are morally relevant, and which may be unreliable?

4. Does motivation affect whether the action is right, admirable, or both?

5. Give the strongest verdict available to each philosopher.

Unit 1 · Check, discuss, write

Consolidate knowledge and develop an argument

Knowledge check

1. Why does Kant distinguish acting from duty from acting merely in accordance with duty?

2. What role does reason play for Hume?

3. Name one shared commitment.

4. What problem does partial sympathy create?

Discussion

- What is the strongest point of agreement between the two thinkers?
- Which theory handles moral disagreement more convincingly?
- Name a case that would make you revise your present verdict.

Essay question

QUESTION

‘A moral theory must explain not only why an action is required, but why anyone would be moved to perform it.’ Assess with reference to Kant and Hume.

Working thesis (one contestable sentence):

Best objection to your thesis:

Continue the complete workbook

This sample contains selected pages from Volume I. The complete 50-page workbook contains all six debate units, synthesis exercises, the capstone study, answer guidance, an essay planner, glossary and further reading.

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