1. Why does the brain have a harder time with bad experiences than very bad experiences? Why are people generally unable to predict their emotional responses in the future? Explain your answer using terminology/citing page numbers from the text.

The brain has an “easier” time with very bad experiences because the very bad experiences trigger the psychological immune system, whereas the semi-experiences don’t. Therefore, for the very difficult situations we encounter, we have a defense system. For the annoying, petty frustrations, we do not. People cannot predict their emotional responses because they are unaware of how their brains work and unable to predict our reaction to events.

2. Why do people generally regret inaction more than action? Explain your answer using terminology/citing page numbers from the text.

People regret inaction because they know what happens in an event they experience, but they don’t know what happens if the event doesn’t transpire. The mind has the opportunity to imagine numerous possible outcomes when the event doesn’t happen, exploring the “what ifs” or “could have been’s.”

3. Throughout “Immune to Reality,” Gilbert describes mental operations using terms from everyday life: the brain is “one smart shopper,” our brains are “conspirators.” Gilbert is seeking to make his thoughts about human psychology readily accessible, but what is he trying to convey with these descriptions? As you look over the essay again, identify other images or analogies that Gilbert uses to describe mental operations. What do these images or descriptions reveal about Gilbert’s theory of mind?

Gilbert believes that the mind is subjective and shifts information to suit the individual. We “cook facts,” linger and ruminate over unexplored outcomes, and file away events that we have experienced and emotionally processed like laundry.

4. Why do unexplained events have greater emotional impact? Explain your answer using terminology from the text.

Unexplained events have greater emotional impact because they seem “rare and unusual” and manage to stay in our minds gathering emotional strength.

5. On the basis of the experiments and studies that Gilbert presents, would you say that happiness is fundamentally an illusion? Or is it the pursuit of happiness that deserves to be reconsidered? If happiness is not something that we can pursue consciously then how do we go about becoming happy? Should we be pursuing something other than happiness?

Happiness is illusive. It would be more conducive to explore what aspects lead to happiness than happiness itself. One main aspect to focus on is becoming aware: aware of how we think, handle challenges, deal with setbacks, attend to tasks, perceive new information, learn and unlearn, and generally how our minds work.
6. What is “reality” according to Gilbert’s discussion on “the psychological immune system?” What is his point on how we construct reality? And if choices don’t generally yield positive results, how do we balance too little and too much freedom of choice?

Reality is what we make it. It is our individual choices that shape our realities. As Gilbert points out, we ultimately prefer less choice; however developing a tolerance for the ambiguity and the “messiness” we encounter in the brain and understanding how our brains “cook facts” and employ a “psychological immune system” will help to deal with the variety of choices we are faced with moment to moment. Basically, an understanding of how the brain works will enable us to develop a tolerance for the choices we face.

7. What does “Immune to Reality” mean? Does Gilbert suggest through the title that we are all in some form of denial? Or is it meant in a positive way - to protect us from the harsh realities of life? Or both?

We do not experience the same reality as others. We experience the world based on our subjective experience of it. The psychological immune system unconsciously protects us from trauma and adversities, but it can also prevent us from fully experiencing and processing trauma or very difficult events. The psychological immune system acts as a filter, it is a defense mechanism and survival instinct. However, for people to be truly happy they need to become aware of these unconscious processes, work out emotionally intense experiences to live unfettered and truly free.