

Early Modern Philosophy (PHIL 10182)

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Description

This course will introduce students to the philosophy of David Hume (1711–76), a student of the University of Edinburgh and a major figure of the Scottish Enlightenment. In his lifetime, Hume was notorious for his scepticism and irreligion. Today, he is lauded for pioneering “the science of human nature” – an empirical, naturalistic approach to the study of human mental and social life that is a forerunner of today’s cognitive and social sciences. Hume’s work still exerts a major influence on many areas of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and action, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion.

We will focus on Hume’s mature epistemology, philosophy of action, and ethics. We will also examine his views about differences of sex and race. The questions we will address include: Are any of our beliefs based on good reasons? Are human actions causally necessitated by past states of the universe, and, if so, are any of our actions truly free? Is it rational for us to believe that miracles have occurred? Can human actions ever be motivated by reason alone, or are all of our actions motivated partly by passion? Are we ever truly altruistic, or do we only ever act from self-interest? Is moral evaluation based on reason or feeling, or a combination of the two? What is the relationship between morality and self-interest? Are there universal moral standards, or are moral standards relative to different cultures or different times?

Texts and Citation Style

We will focus on the following primary texts by Hume. Please cite these works by paragraph, following the citation conventions of Hume Texts Online: <<https://davidhume.org/>>, as explained below:

- *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (aka “first *Enquiry*”), cited as ‘E’ followed by section and paragraph numbers, e.g. ‘E 4.4’ refers to first *Enquiry*, section 4, paragraph 4
- *A Dissertation on the Passions* (aka “*Dissertation*”), cited as ‘P’ followed by section and paragraph numbers
- *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (aka “second *Enquiry*” or “moral *Enquiry*”), cited as ‘M’ followed by section and paragraph numbers; appendixes are cited as ‘M App’ followed by appendix number and paragraph number, e.g. ‘M App1.21’ refers to moral *Enquiry*, Appendix 1, paragraph 21
- *A Dialogue*, always published as an unnumbered appendix to the moral *Enquiry*, cited as ‘M D’ followed by paragraph number

Authoritative editions of these and all Hume's published works are available at Hume Texts Online. Links will be provided to these editions in LEARN.

PLEASE DO NOT USE ANY OTHER EDITIONS OF HUME'S WORKS.

Assessment

This course is assessed by two essays and a participation assignment.

Two Essays (40% + 55%)

1. 1,500-word midterm essay (40%) (essay topics to be distributed via Learn)
2. 2,500-word final essay (55%) (essay topics to be distributed via Learn)

Participation Assignment (5%)

On LEARN, 24 hours before each of your tutorial meetings, you must post a two- or three-paragraph response to the reading(s) to be discussed at that meeting. At the end of Week 5, you must write a self-assessment of your own posts in relation to the best posts you have seen throughout the semester. At the end of Week 11, you must identify your three best posts. These three posts will be marked. Your marks for these three posts will determine your overall mark for the participation assignment.

Instructions for posting will be distributed on LEARN during Week 1.

Seminars and Tutorials

Teaching will take place in two kinds of weekly meetings: **seminars** and **tutorials**. Information about the timing and format of these meetings will be on the LEARN page for the course.

In **seminars**, I will try to explain and clarify the main philosophical claims and arguments in the primary texts. Seminars start in Week 1.

Tutorials are your opportunity to critically discuss the philosophical claims and arguments from the texts and seminars with your classmates. Tutorials start in Week 2.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Please note that each reading assignment must be completed several times, carefully, *before* the meeting for which it is assigned.

Week 1: "Moral Philosophy, or the Science of Human Nature"

- Hume, "My Own Life"

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 1–3, paragraphs 1–2 of Section 4, and paragraphs 24–34 of Section 12
- Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, Section 5
- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section 1

Week 2: Sceptical Doubts and a Sceptical Solution

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 4–6 and 9

Week 3: Necessity, Freedom, and Responsibility

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 2, 7 and 8

Week 4: Irreligion

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 10 and 11
- Hume, Letter to Rev. Hugh Blair (1761)
- Hume, Letter to Rev. George Campbell (7 June, 1762)

Week 5: Science and Scepticism

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section 12
- Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Parts 1 and 2

Week 6: Reason, Passion and Motivation

- Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions*
- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 2 (“Of Self-Love”)
- Hume, “Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature”
- Optional: Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 2, Part 3, Section 3 (“Of the influencing motives of the will”)

Week 7: Reason and Sentiment

- Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, Section 5
- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Section 1 and Appendix 1

Week 8: Virtues and Vices

- Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Sections 2–9 and Appendixes 3 and 4

Week 9: Moral Difference and Moral Relativism

- Hume, *A Dialogue* (published as an unnumbered appendix to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*)
- Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”

Week 10: Human Difference

- Hume, “Of National Characters”

- Hume, “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”
- Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3, Part 2, Section 12 (“Of chastity and modesty”)
- Hume, “Of Polygamy and Divorces”

Week 11: Catch Up, Wrap Up, and Review

- No new readings this week