

Early Modern Philosophy (PHIL 10182)

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Description

This course introduces 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. What exactly is Hume’s “science of human nature”? What, if anything, justified him in trying to study human nature scientifically? What does he claim to discover about human nature, based on his scientific enquiries, and is he justified in making those claims? Whilst investigating these questions, we will analyse and evaluate Hume’s arguments about human and animal reasoning, causation and free will, virtue and vice, egoism and altruism, and religious belief.

Texts

There are two kinds of required reading: **primary texts** written by Hume and his contemporaries; and **secondary texts**, which are commentaries on Hume (and/or his contemporaries) written by twentieth and twenty-first century authors. Our seminars will focus on primary texts. Secondary texts will provide targets for discussion during tutorials, and models of writing in the history of philosophy. Additional secondary texts on specific topics may be recommended during the course.

Primary Texts

The course focuses on the following **primary texts** by Hume:

Title	First Edition	Last Edition prepared by Hume	Nickname(s)	Citation Style
<i>An Abstract of a Book Lately Published; Entitled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.</i>	1740	N/A	The <i>Abstract</i>	A x (paragraph) E.g. ‘A 23’ refers to paragraph 23 of the <i>Abstract</i>
<i>An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding</i>	1748	1777	The <i>Enquiry</i>	E x.y (section.paragraph)

			The first <i>Enquiry</i>	E.g. ‘E 4.15’ refers to section 4, paragraph 15 of the first <i>Enquiry</i>
<i>A Dissertation on the Passions</i>	1757	1777	The <i>Dissertation</i>	P x.y (section.paragraph)
<i>An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals</i>	1751	1777	The second <i>Enquiry</i> The moral <i>Enquiry</i>	M x.y (section.paragraph)
“A Dialogue” (always published as an appendix to the moral <i>Enquiry</i>)	1751	1777	N/A	D x (paragraph)

Excellent editions of these and Hume’s other works are freely available online at [Hume Texts Online](#).

We will also read some selections from Hume’s essays, which are also available at [Hume Texts Online](#); and selections from his correspondence, which is [available online via PastMasters](#).

The following edition of Hume’s first *Enquiry*, which is [available online via the University Library](#), includes a valuable introduction and notes by the editor. You should consult it in connection with the “Participation” assignment (see below):

Hume, D. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford Worlds Classics edition, edited by Peter Millican. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

If you prefer to use paper editions of Hume’s works, then please use *either* those in the [Oxford Philosophical Texts](#) series *or* those in the [Clarendon Hume Editions series](#), which are both published by Oxford University Press.

PLEASE DO NOT USE ANY EDITIONS OF HUME’S TEXTS, OTHER THAN THOSE RECOMMENDED ABOVE.

The website [Early Modern Texts](#) offers “translations” of Hume’s works into twenty-first century English. You may find they help you to understand Hume’s eighteenth-century language, but you should not use them as a substitute for reading his own words.

Secondary Texts

Our main **secondary texts** are taken from the following edited collections, which are all available online via [the University Library](#):

- Peter Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), aka ‘HU’
- Jacqueline Taylor (ed.), *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), aka ‘PM’
- Paul Russell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), aka ‘OH’

Assessment

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

Two Essays (40% + 55%)

1. 1,500-word midterm essay (40%), due **Thursday 22nd October, at noon** (essay topics to be distributed via Learn)
2. 2,500-word final essay (55%), due **Thursday, 10th December, at noon** (essay topics to be distributed via Learn)

Participation Assignment (5%)

The participation assignment will be a group exercise. The goal is to prepare an online edition of Hume’s *Enquiries* with glossary entries for key terms, analyses of key arguments, notes on difficult sentences or paragraphs, and links to other online resources that illuminate part(s) of the text—like the student editions that Oxford publishes, but in digital form. (For a traditional paper example, see the Oxford Worlds Classics edition of the first *Enquiry*, citation above.)

Each group must prepare an online edition of one section of one of Hume’s two *Enquiries*. Your edition of the section will include glossary entries for key terms, argument maps of key arguments, notes on difficult sentences or paragraphs, and links to other online resources that illuminate part(s) of the section. Your edition will be due **one month ahead of the final essay deadline**. Collectively, we will then have prepared our class’s own edition of Hume’s *Enquiries*. You can then use this edition to help you with your final essays.

Further details of the participation assignment and an example section will be provided in Week 1. Groups and sections will be assigned in your first tutorial meeting, which will take place in Week 2.

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.

The primary texts are by Hume unless otherwise noted.

For secondary texts, I use the following abbreviations (see “Texts” above for full citations)

- HU: *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Millican (Oxford, 2002)
- PM: *Reading Hume on the Principles of Morals*, ed. by Jacqueline Taylor (Oxford, 2020)
- OH: *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, ed. by Paul Russell (Oxford, 2016)

Week 1: Introduction to the Course and to Hume’s Philosophy

Primary Texts:

- Letter to a Physician
- “My Own Life”
- Adam Smith, Letter to Strahan
- *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction
- *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 4, Section 7 (“Conclusion of this Book”)
- *Abstract*
- A Letter to a Gentleman from his Friend in Edinburgh
- First *Enquiry*, §§1–3
- Advertisement

Secondary Texts:

- Peter Millican, “The Context, Aims, and Structure of Hume’s First *Enquiry*” (HU)

Week 2: Naturalizing the Understanding: “Sceptical Doubts” and a “Sceptical Solution”

Primary Texts:

- The *Abstract* (re-read)
- First *Enquiry*, §§4–6, §9, and ¶¶21–22 of §12

Secondary Texts:

- Peter Millican, “Hume’s Sceptical Doubts concerning Induction” (HU)

Week 3: Naturalizing the Will: Causation, Freedom, and Responsibility

Primary Texts:

- First *Enquiry*, §2 and §§7–8
- *Moral Enquiry*, §1 and Appendix 1

Secondary Texts:

- Helen Beebee, “Hume and the Problem of Causation” (OH)
- Tony Pitson, “Hume, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility” (OH)

Week 4: Belief in Miracles and Providence

Primary Texts:

- First *Enquiry*, §§10 and 11
- Letter to Hugh Blair, probably autumn 1761
- Letter to Rev. George Campbell, 7 June 1762

Secondary Texts:

- Don Garrett, “Hume on Testimony concerning Miracles” (HU)
- J.C.A. Gaskin, “Religion: The Useless Hypothesis” (HU)

Week 5: Science and Scepticism

Primary Texts:

- *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 4, Section 7 (“Conclusion of this Book”) (re-read)
- First *Enquiry*, §§4–5 and §12
- *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Parts 1 and 2

Secondary Texts:

- David Fate Norton, “Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy” (HU)

Week 6: The Passions

Primary Texts:

- *Dissertation*

Secondary Texts:

- Amyas Merivale, *Hume on Art, Emotion, and Superstition*, Introduction and Chapters 7 and 8
- Jane L. McIntyre, “The Passions in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*” (PM)

Week 7: Reason and Taste

Primary Texts:

- *Dissertation*, Part 5 (re-read)
- *Moral Enquiry*, §1 and Appendix 1

Secondary Texts:

- P.J.E. Kail, ““Concerning Moral Sentiment”: The Moral Sense in the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*” (PM)

Week 8: Virtue and Convention

Primary Texts:

- *Moral Enquiry*, §§2–9 and Appendix 3

Secondary Texts:

- James Harris, “Justice in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*” (PM)

Week 9: Egoism and Altruism

Primary Texts:

- Moral *Enquiry*, §9 and Appendix 2
- “Of the Dignity and Meanness of Human Nature”

Secondary Texts:

- Angela Calvo de Saavedra, “Benevolence and Self-Interest in Hume’s Moral Philosophy” (PM)
- Amyas Merivale, *Hume on Art, Emotion, and Superstition*, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 10: Moral Standards and Moral Relativism

Primary Texts:

- Moral *Enquiry*, §5, §9, and Appendix 1 (re-read)
- “A Dialogue”
- “Of the Standard of Taste”

Secondary Texts:

- Dario Perinetti, “Moral Pluralism and the Historical Point of View: Reading “A Dialogue”” (PM)
- Amy Schmitter, “Negotiating Pluralism in Taste and Character: Reading the Second *Enquiry* with “Of the Standard of Taste”” (PM)

Week 11: Wrap-Up and Review