

Early Modern Philosophy (PHIL10182)

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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 an empirical, naturalistic approach to the study of human mental and social life—a forerunner of present-day cognitive and social sciences. His 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 epistemology and ethics, and on his philosophy of religion, where he applies his epistemological and ethical views to questions about the existence and moral character of God. 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? Is moral cognition based on reason or feeling, or on a combination of the two? What is the relationship between morality and self-interest? Is it rational to believe in God? If so, is it rational to believe that God is morally good?

Structure

The course involves a weekly seminar and a weekly tutorial (starting in Week 2). In tutorials, we will discuss material from the previous week’s lecture.

Seminar (please note that Week 9’s seminar has a different location):

- Weeks 1–8 and 10–11: Thursday, 14:10–16:00, Hunter Building, Lecture Theatre O17
- Week 9: Thursday, 14:10–16:00, **North-East Studio Building, Room J03**

Tutorials (start in Week 2):

- Monday, 11:10–12:00, Dugald Stewart Building, room 1.17
- Monday, 13:10–14:00, Dugald Stewart Building, room 3.11 (the David Hume Room!)
- Tuesday, 10:00–10:50, Dugald Stewart Building, room 3.10
- Tuesday, 13:10–14:00, Dugald Stewart Building, room 3.10

Assessment

1,500-word midterm essay (40%), due **Thursday, 24th October, at noon**; 2,500-word final essay (60%), due **Thursday, 12th December, at noon**. Essay topics to be distributed via Learn.

Reading

The course will focus on the following works by Hume:

- *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, aka “the first *Enquiry*” (cited by ‘E’, followed by section and, where appropriate, paragraph numbers)
- *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, aka “the second *Enquiry*” or “the moral *Enquiry*” (cited by ‘M’, followed by section and, where appropriate, paragraph numbers; appendices 1–4 are cited by ‘M App1’, ‘M App2’, etc., followed, where appropriate, by paragraph numbers)
- “A Dialogue” (appended to M; cited by ‘MD’, followed by paragraph numbers)
- *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, aka “the *Dialogues*” (cited by ‘D’, followed by part numbers)
- *A Dissertation on the Passions* (cited by ‘P’, followed by section number)

Readings from these texts will be supplemented by optional readings from:

- *A Treatise of Human Nature* (cited by ‘T’, followed by book, part, section and, where appropriate, paragraph numbers)

Excellent editions of these and other of Hume’s works are freely available online at www.davidhume.org. Please note that the versions available on www.earlymoderntexts.com are modern English “translations” of Hume’s works—not the originals. You may find they help you to understand Hume’s eighteenth-century language, but you should not use them as a substitute for reading Hume’s own words.

If you wish to use paper editions of Hume’s works, then I recommend:

- Hume, D. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Hume, D. *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Hume, D. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*. Edited by Dorothy Coleman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

For introductions to Hume’s life and works by present-day scholars, I recommend:

- Blackburn, Simon. *How to Read Hume*. (London: Granta, 2008)
- Cohon, Rachel. “Hume’s Moral Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/hume-moral/>
- Millican, Peter. “The Significance of David Hume” (Philosophy Bites interview). Available online: https://nigelwarburton.typepad.com/philosophy_bites/2008/04/peter-millican.html
- Morris, William Edward, and Brown, Charlotte R. “David Hume,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/hume/>.

For more advanced general overviews of Hume's philosophy, I recommend:

- Garrett, Don. *Hume*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015); see also the accompanying video at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw1Z9yOSnk8>>
- Stroud, Barry. *Hume*. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977)

For a collection of essays on various aspects of Hume's philosophy, I recommend:

- Radcliffe, Elizabeth S. (ed.). *A Companion to Hume*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008)

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Seminars will focus on the core readings. Secondary readings will provide targets for discussion during tutorials, and models of writing in the history of philosophy. Additional secondary readings on specific topics may be recommended during the course.

Hume's Epistemology

Week 1. Introduction: Hume's life; Hume's works; the first Enquiry

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, "My Own Life"
 - Hume, E 1–3
 - Optional: Hume, T Intro, T 1.1
- Secondary Reading: Millican, Introduction to *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, available online: <<https://davidhume.org/scholarship/papers/millican/2007%20Introduction.pdf>>

Week 2. Matter-of-Fact Reasoning

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, E 4–6 and 9
 - Optional: Hume, T 1.3
- Secondary Readings:
 - Beebee, *Hume on Causation*, chs. 1–3
 - Garrett, *Hume*, ch. 6
 - Millican, "Hume's 'Scepticism' about Induction," available online: <https://davidhume.org/scholarship/papers/millican/2012_Induction.pdf>

Week 3. Two Definitions of Cause; Liberty and Necessity

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, E 7 and 8
 - Optional: Hume, T 2.3.1–2
- Secondary Readings:
 - Beebee, "Hume and the Problem of Causation"
 - Pitson, "Hume, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility"

Week 4. Scepticism

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, E 12
 - Hume, D 1
- Secondary Reading:
 - Norton, “Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy”

Hume’s Ethics

Week 5. The Social Virtues

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, M 1–5, App2, App3
 - Optional: Hume, T 3.2.1–2, 3.3.1–3
- Secondary Reading:
 - Taylor, “Hume’s Later Moral Philosophy,” Introduction and §§I–IV

Week 6. Other Virtues; Two Definitions of Virtue

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, M 6–9 and App4
 - Optional: Hume, T 3.3.4–6
- Secondary Reading:
 - Taylor, “Hume’s Later Moral Philosophy,” §§V–VII

Week 7. Reason and Sentiment

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, M 1, 9.22–25, and App1
 - Hume, P 5
 - Optional: Hume, T 2.3.3, 3.1.1–2
- Secondary Reading:
 - Gill, “Moral Rationalism vs. Moral Sentimentalism: Is Morality More Like Math or Beauty?”

Week 8. Moral Relativism

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, M 9 and MD
- Secondary Reading:
 - Bohlin, “Universal Moral Standards and the Problem of Cultural Relativism in Hume’s ‘A Dialogue’”

Hume's Philosophy of Religion

Week 9. Revealed Religion

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, M 10
 - Reid, "Of the Analogy Between Perception and The Credit We Give to Human Testimony" (*An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ch. 6, §24)
- Secondary Reading:
 - Pritchard and Richmond, "Hume on Miracles"

Week 10. Natural Religion

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, E 11
 - Hume, D 2–9 and 12
- Secondary Readings:
 - Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, ch. 2
 - Gaskin, "Religion: The Useless Hypothesis"

Week 11. God and Morality; Wrap-Up

- Core Readings:
 - Hume, E 11
 - Hume, D 10–12
- Secondary Reading:
 - Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, chs. 3 and 4