Early Modern Philosophy (PHIL10182)

Course Organiser: Dr. Jonathan Cottrell  
Email: j.cottrell@ed.ac.uk  
Office Hour: TBC

Course Secretary: Ms. Ann-Marie Cowe  
Email: philinfo@ed.ac.uk

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. *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:

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>

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


**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

**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

**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:

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:

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:

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