Philosophy Honours (fourth year): Hume's Philosophy of Religion
Autumn Semester 2021

Course Organiser: Dr Andrew S Mason.
Email: A.S.Mason@ed.ac.uk
Telephone: (0131) 315 2036

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

Course Description.
David Hume is Edinburgh’s most significant historic philosopher, and his critique of religion is one of the most important and influential aspects of his work. This course will be based on a systematic coverage of Hume's central works on religious topics, including the sections of the first *Enquiry* dealing with religious questions, the ‘Natural History of Religion’, and the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. It will consider his arguments against religious positions, the grounds for his critique of religion, his scepticism, and the question whether he should be seen as an atheist.

Information about format and timing of classes will be available on the LEARN page for the course.

**Primary Reading** (all works by David Hume):
*Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* 10 and 11
‘Of Suicide’
‘Of the Immortality of the Soul’ (sometimes called ‘Of the Mortality…’)
*The Natural History of Religion*
*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion.*
(These should be read by all. All works are accessible online through the Library catalogue. Open-access versions of them may be found at Hume Texts Online [davidhume.org], and elsewhere. Many of them are also included in Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin, Oxford World’s Classics.)

**Recommended Secondary Reading.**
J. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion.* (Not available online).
J. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure.* (About his discussion of miracles.)
D. O’Connor, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Religion.* (About the *Dialogues*, despite the wider-seeming title.)
S. Tweyman, ed. *Hume on Natural Religion.* (A collection of historical critiques.)
(These should be read to the extent you find them helpful. All works except Gaskin and Kemp Smith are accessible online through the library catalogue. Other works may be recommended, and more specific sections of these works indicated, in the course of the semester.)

**Weekly Topics.**
1. Natural Religion: *Enquiry* Sec. 11.
2. Revealed Religion and Miracles: Enquiry Sec. 10.
7. The Concept of God: Dialogues 4-5. (Topics from sections 6-8 may also be discussed.)
10. Hume’s Scepticism and the conclusion of the Dialogues: Dialogues 12 (see also Dialogues 1).
11. Overview of Hume’s Position on Religion. (No required reading.)

**Assessment.**

Assessment for Honours students will consist of:

A midterm essay of no more than 1500 words (40%), due by noon on Thursday 21st October.

A final essay of no more than 2500 words (55%), due by noon Thursday 9th December.

A participation element (5%): this will be based on contributions to the course discussion board (on Learn).

Essays should be fully referenced, giving page or paragraph numbers where appropriate.

Students who intend to submit a coursework dissertation in this course should consult the course organiser about choice of a topic before the decision date (Monday 18th October).