

**Philosophy Honours (fourth year): Hume's Philosophy of Religion  
Autumn Semester 2020**

**Course Organiser:** Dr Andrew S Mason.

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**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

'On Suicide'

*Treatise of Human Nature* I.4.5

'On the Immortality of the Soul' (sometimes called 'On 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 also be found at Hume Texts Online [davidhume.org], and elsewhere.)

**Recommended Secondary Reading.**

A. Bailey and D. O'Brien, *Hume's Critique of Religion: Sick Men's Dreams*.

J. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*. (Not available online).

J. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*. (About his discussion of miracles.)

R. Fogelin, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles*.

N. Kemp Smith, Introduction to Hume, *Dialogues* (in his edition of the *Dialogues*).

D. O'Connor, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Religion*. (About the *Dialogues*, despite the wider-seeming title.)

R. Swinburne, 'The Argument from Design', *Philosophy* 1968.

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 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.

3. Religion and Morality: 'On Suicide'.

4. Immortality: *Treatise* I.4.5, and 'On the Immortality of the Soul'.
5. The Origins and Effects of Religion: 'The Natural History of Religion'.
6. The Argument from Design: *Dialogues* 2-3.
7. The Concept of God: *Dialogues* 4-5. (Topics from sections 6-8 may also be discussed.)
8. The Cosmological Argument: *Dialogues* 9.
9. The Problem of Evil: *Dialogues* 10-11.
10. Hume's Scepticism: *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 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

A final essay of no more than 3000 words (55%), due by noon Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> December.

A participation element (5%): each student will be required to give a brief introduction of a topic to a tutorial group in the course of the semester.

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 19<sup>th</sup> October).

Assessment for M. Sc. students will consist of an essay plan (15%) and a final essay of no more than 3000 words (85%): submission dates TBC.