



PHIL 609.45 Lec 01 – “Topics in the History of Philosophy: Hume on Religion”

Spring Term 2014

Course Outline

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays 8:30-11:15 in Social Sciences 006

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Course Description

Hume has had a major impact on the way religion is viewed in Western thought. The course will study various aspects of Hume's thought on religion, including his philosophical objections to natural theology and revealed religion, his thought on the relation between religion and morality, and his views on the political and social impact of major Christian institutions (e.g. the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Calvinist churches) and of non-Christian religions such as Judaism and Islam. We will study Hume's views on these topics as they surface in Hume's publications on religious topics, e.g. the essay “Of Miracles” and the books *The Natural History of Religion* and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, paying special attention to Hume's 18th century context. Towards the end of the course we will survey Hume's influence on some major 19th and 20th century thinkers, including Kant, Darwin, Bertrand Russell, Rudolf Carnap, A.J. Ayer, and John Mackie.

Evaluation and grading

Writing assignments

There will be one take-home writing assignment on Hume's “Of Miracles” (30% of the final grade), due June 5; another take-home writing assignment on Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (30% of the final grade), due June 17; and a third take-home writing assignment on Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (40% of the final grade), due June 26. Those who take the course as PHIL 505 will have to answer one main question per writing assignment, and those who take the course as PHIL 609 will have to answer two main questions per writing assignment. (Each writing assignment should comprise approximately 1500-3000 words for those who take the course on the PHIL 505 level, and approximately 2000-3500 words for those who take the course on the PHIL 609 level).

There will be no Registrar-scheduled final exam.

The writing assignments must be handed in to pass the course. They are due before 4 pm on the date indicated in a drop-box labeled for this course and located in the main hallway of the Philosophy Department (12th floor, Social Sciences Building).

Evaluation and grades

On each writing assignment you will receive a letter grade. “Slash grades” may occur (e.g. “A/B”). The meanings of letter grades amount roughly to the following criteria:

A Excellent – superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter.

B Good – clearly above average performance.

C Satisfactory – basic understanding of the subject matter.

D Minimal pass – marginal performance.

F Fail – unsatisfactory performance.

The quality of your writing will be a factor in grading. If you use terminology ambiguously, for example, you are likely to receive a lower mark.

Grading Scheme

The final grade will be the letter grade corresponding to the weighted average of your assignments and papers plus a margin of 0.2. For the final grade, +’s and -’s are possible, too; as defined in the Calendar, +/- adds/subtracts 0.3 grade points. In other words, a course average of 3.8 or higher receives an A; between 3.5 and 3.8, an A-; between 3.1 and 3.5, a B+; between 2.8 and 3.1, a B; and so on. There is no D- grade; to earn a D you require a course average of at least 0.8. The A+ grade is reserved for “truly outstanding” performance. (The .2 margin means that an average of A, A, A- is an A but the average of A, A-, A- is A-.)

In computing your final grade, your marks will be converted to grade points and averaged according to the weights given above. The correspondence of letter grades with grade points is defined in the Calendar (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0). “Slash” grades receive 0.5 below the value of the higher grade (e.g., A/B = 3.5).

For example, someone who receives the grades ‘B’, ‘A/B’, and ‘A’ on writing assignments 1, 2, and 3 will receive the average grade point 3.55 (since $3 \cdot .3 + 3.5 \cdot .3 + 4 \cdot .4 = 3.55$), i.e. the final grade A-.

Policy on Late Assignments

Late assignments will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If accepted, late assignments may be subject to penalties, although no more than 1/4 of a letter grade per day.

Required Texts

Primary course material

(This material will be available in the university bookstore.)

Hume, David: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Russell, Paul: *The Riddle of Hume’s Treatise: skepticism, naturalism, and irreligion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Additional course material

Some additional course material will be accessible online via the University Library, or will be made accessible via a link to an external online source, or will be uploaded on the online course site.

Tentative Syllabus

15/5: Overview of Hume's life and writings, and of modern Hume-scholarship

20/5: Religion and theology in early 18th century Britain

22/5: Philosophy and science in early 18th century Britain

27/5: Religion and Hume's *Treatise*

29/5: Hume's "Of Miracles"

3/6: Hume's "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" and "Of National Characters"

5/6: Hume's *Natural History of Religion*

Writing assignment on Hume's "Of Miracles" due 5/6

10/6: Religion in Hume's *History of England*

12/6: Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (I)

17/6: Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (II)

Writing assignment on Hume's *Natural History of Religion* due 17/6

19/6: Hume's "Of suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul"

24/6: Hume's influence on 19th and 20th century thought

26/6: Review

Writing assignment on Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* due 26/6.