**HUME’S MORAL THEORY**

**Instructor**: Simon Rippon, Associate Professor <RipponS@ceu.edu>

**Department**: Philosophy

Central European University

**Course Status**: Elective. 2 credits. Fall, 2017-8

(Can be counted toward either History of Philosophy or Axiology and Practical Philosophy area in Philosophy 1 year MA program)

**Course e-learning site**: <https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=7268>

**Time and location**: Mondays 3:30-5:10, N13 / 223

**Office Hours**: Tuesdays 2:00-4:00, Fridays 2:00-4:00 in my office: N13, room 204

Please go online to: <http://simonrippon.youcanbook.me> to see current available times and reserve a slot.

Course Description  
The primary goal of this course is to gain a better understanding of David Hume’s moral theory through careful reading and discussion of his work, with special reference to his *Treatise of Human Nature*. We will read his sentimentalist moral theory and try to interpret it within two broader contexts: the context of his broader philosophical project, and the context of a historical conversation with his predecessors about the nature of morality. Interpretative problems discussed will include Hume's view of what reason is and is not, the nature of "sympathy", the nature of the so-called "narrow circle" and “general point of view”, and Hume's famous distinction between "is" and "ought". We will also discuss some of the differences between his moral theory as expressed in the *Treatise of Human Nature* and that expressed in his later *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. The course aims at fostering the direct engagement of students with Hume’s views, therefore required readings will be drawn almost entirely from primary sources.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

* Perform careful reading of Hume’s work, analyze and charitably reconstruct his arguments, and summarise them clearly and succinctly
* Recognize and critically discuss the problems that Hume’s moral philosophy was designed to respond to
* Critically discuss interpretations of various aspects of Hume’s moral theory
* Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of Hume’s moral theory

Course Requirements

Regular attendance, careful completion of the assigned readings before class, active participation in discussions, and a 20 minute in-class presentation to start discussion will be expected from all students, whether registered for audit or taking the class for a grade.

The 20 minute presentation should include a brief exposition of the logic of one or more of the arguments from the primary sources, and should present ambiguities to consider, offer potential criticisms, or raise other questions for discussion. Students may wish to prepare a handout (2 pages **maximum**) or slides, but will not be required to do so. Advance consultation during office hours on the presentation is strongly recommended. Please reserve a slot.

Students taking the class for a grade are additionally required to write a term paper of approximately 2,500 words (the topic must be agreed in advance with the instructor).

The course grade will be determined as follows:

* 25% seminar participation and 20 minute presentation

A blank “Presentation Score Sheet” listing the evaluation criteria according to which presentations will be assessed is available on the course web site. It is most important that in-class presentations do not merely reproduce material in the readings in condensed form: to earn at least a B+ grade, they must offer significant clarifications (e.g. by logically reconstructing arguments), raise important questions, and/or add the presenter’s own well-grounded opinions and arguments. Presentations will otherwise be assessed primarily according to their clarity, focus, soundness of arguments, and helpfulness in understanding the topic. Excessively long or rushed presentations (exempting time taken for questions or other interruptions) will be marked down 1/3 of a grade. Participation in the rest of the seminar will count equally with the presentation, and will be graded according to attendance, preparation, attention to others, and quality of contributions in class throughout the term.

* 75% term paper

Quantity:

All other things being equal, it's better if the paper is close to the required length. Writing a good paper using few words is more difficult than writing a good paper using more words, and that will be taken into account in the grading. So any additional use of paper will need to be well-justified. In any event, don't go more than 20% over the required length.

Quality:

To earn a B+, the written assignment must clearly and concisely address the agreed question, must be written in good academic English. The paper must demonstrate a solid understanding of the arguments from readings in the course as well as in-class presentations and discussions. Important principles and concepts should be clearly explained. Hume’s views and those of others as relevant should be charitably, clearly and succinctly reconstructed, and properly cited. The paper must show that you have analyzed and independently organized the material yourself in response to the question.

To earn an A-, the assignment must demonstrate all the above plus evidence of genuine progress as a result of your own independent thinking, such as your own substantive evaluation and critique of the validity and soundness of the arguments of others, or your own original positive argument. If there are any problems with the exposition or arguments in the paper, these will be minor. Any obvious objections to your argument will have been anticipated and answered.

Papers that earn an A will demonstrate all the above virtues, to the extent that they are nearly flawless in writing style, organization, exposition and soundness of arguments. While remaining entirely relevant to the question, such a paper will be ambitious in scope and will demonstrate an exceptional degree of understanding and insight into the topic.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Primary Texts

***Treatise*** = Hume, D. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Page numbers refer to the vol. edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch. Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1978.

**EPM** = Hume, D. *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Page numbers refer to the following vol.: Hume, D *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by P.H. Nidditch and L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

**You must bring some version of the above of Hume’s books (whether paper or electronic) to class with you**.

If you would like to own the above editions (which are highly recommended), you should be able to buy a used one reasonably cheaply at: <http://www.bookfinder.com> (ensure that the year of publication is as above or later).

Authoritative **online** editions of Hume’s works are available free at: <http://davidhume.org> This excellent web site, edited by Peter Millican and Amyas Merivale, also has a great search facility.

Recommended Additional Readings

If you have time for additional reading, I would first recommend reading more of Hume himself, including sections of the above books that I have not set as required reading (especially the other pieces of Book III of the *Treatise* and of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*). In addition, you may find the following recommended sources useful:

Primary Sources

* Raphael, D.D. (ed.) *British Moralists, 1650-1800*. Vol. I. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1991.
* Hume, David. *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. Eugene F. Miller, ed. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc. 1987. Library of Economics and Liberty. http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL.html

Secondary Sources

* Cohon, Rachel. “Hume’s Moral Philosophy.” Edited by Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/hume-moral/
* Korsgaard, Christine M. *The Sources of Normativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
* Mackie, J.L. *Hume’s Moral Theory*. London ; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980.
* Stroud, Barry. *Hume*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.
* Garrett, Don. *Hume*. London: Routledge, 2014

All the readings listed below are **mandatory**.

Week 1

Hume’s naturalist philosophical project and theory of ideas

*Treatise*: “Introduction” (xiii-xix); Book I, Part i “Of Ideas, Their Origin, Composition, Connection, Abstraction, etc.” (1-25)

Week 2

On causation: ideas, impressions, transfer of liveliness as a source of belief

*Treatise*: Book I, Part iii, “Of Knowledge and Probability”, sec. 1-8 (69-106), sec. 14 (155-172)

Week 3

Theory of the passions: Pride and humility, Love and hate

*Treatise*: Book II, Part i “Of Pride and Humility” (275-328)

*Treatise*: Book II, Part ii, “Of Love and Hatred” secs 1-4 (329-368)

Week 4

Free will, reason and motivation

*Treatise*: Book II, part iii, “Of The Will and Direct Passions”, secs 1-3 (399-418), 9 (438-448)

Week 5

Free will, reason and motivation (continued)

*Treatise*: Book II, part iii, “Of The Will and Direct Passions”, secs 1-3 (399-418), 9 (438-448)

Week 6

Historical Context

Mackie, J.L. *Hume’s Moral Theory*. Ch. 2, “Some Predecessors: Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Clarke, Wollaston, Mandeville, Hutcheson, Butler” (7-43)

Week 7

The origin of moral judgments: The Limits of Reason

*Treatise*: Book III, Part i, Section i. “Moral Distinctions not deriv’d from Reason” (455-470)

*EPM*: Section I “Of the General Principles of Morals” (169-175); Appendix I “Concerning Moral Sentiment” (285-294)

Week 8

The origin of moral judgments (contd.): The Moral Sense

*Treatise*: Book III, Part i, Section ii. “Moral Distinctions deriv’d from a Moral Sense” (470-476)

*EPM*: Section I “Of the General Principles of Morals” (169-175); Appendix I “Concerning Moral Sentiment” (285-294)

Week 9

The natural virtues

*Treatise*: Book III, Part iii “Of the other virtues and vices” (574-617)

*EPM*: Section 5 “Why Utility Pleases” (212-232)

Week 10

The artificial virtues

*Treatise*: Book III, Part ii, “Of justice and injustice” Sections 1-2 (477-501) and 5-6 (516-534)

Week 11

Normativity and reflexivity

*Treatise*: Book III, Part iii, Section 6 “Conclusion of this book” (618-621)

*EPM*: Section 9 “Conclusion” (268-284)

Week 12

Hume and some anachronistic -isms: Subjectivism, expressivism, projectivism, utilitarianism.

Reading TBA