Philosophy 166a: David Hume

When: M,W,Th 10-11 am.
Where: TBD
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Course Description
This course will be an in-depth examination of the philosophical ideas of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, covering his views in metaphysics and epistemology, his philosophy of mind, his moral and political philosophy, and his philosophy of religion. Much of the course will be spent reading his most important philosophical work, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. At the end of the semester, we will read the posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

Hume is sometimes labeled a skeptic—who denies, for example, that we have good reason to believe anything about the future. We will consider to what extent this label is appropriate. We will consider two very different contemporary interpretations of Hume’s work: Barry Stroud reads Hume as a genuine skeptic, while Don Garrett argues that Hume’s real views are much less skeptical than they have often been taken to be. Hume is also sometimes called a naturalist—who seeks to develop a “science of human nature” that might be thought of as a precursor to modern social science. We’ll attempt to determine in what sense Hume is appropriately called a naturalist. Finally, contemporary readers of Hume’s *Treatise* have found reconciling Hume’s alleged skepticism with his naturalism a vexing problem. How can Hume both hold that, for example, past experience gives us no reason to believe anything about the future, and yet try to develop a science of human nature that is based on observation and experience? We will consider several ways one might solve this problem.

Requirements
Students will be required to write three essays of 3-5 pages. One of these papers will be revised and expanded into a final research paper.

Grading
The essays will be worth 60% of the grade for the class. The final paper will be worth 30% and participation will count for the remaining 10% of the grade.

Late papers will be deducted one third of a grade (e.g. from a B to a B-) for each day they are late. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late. If you need
an extension on an assignment, perhaps because you have work due in other classes on the same day or for personal reasons, please ask me. I am willing to grant short extensions, provided you ask for them at least a full day in advance. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time because of an unexpected illness, please let me know as soon as possible.

You should come to class prepared, having done the readings in advance. *You should bring the texts with you to class!* We will frequently be referring to the texts during class, so it is important that you have them.

**Readings**
There is one required text for the course. Additional readings will be posted on LATTE or distributed in class.

David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature.*

**Academic Integrity at Brandeis**
Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section Three of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure of the course or on the assignment, or in suspension or dismissal from the University. *If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course or about how to properly cite the sources you’ve used, it is your responsibility to ask for help.* If you have questions about academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me, refer to the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, or contact the office of Student Development and Conduct.

*Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).*

**Schedule**

Note about the schedule: The following is a rough guide to the topics we’ll cover in the class and the approximate amount of time I’d like to spend on each one. If past experience is any guide to the future, it is safe to assume that we’ll depart from this schedule fairly regularly. Depending on students’ interests, we may add topics to this list or pass over some topics. Because the schedule is subject to change, due dates for the papers are also approximate!
Note about the reading: Primary reading is always required. For the larger units, I will provide more detailed reading instructions (e.g. which sections to focus on) as we go. I will assign some of the secondary reading listed below, depending on how much time we are spending on a topic. The rest of the secondary reading will be left optional.

**Week 1:**

Unit 1: Background to Hume’s *Treatise*
Reading: Introduction to the *Treatise.*

**Week 2:**

Unit 2: The Theory of Ideas
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 1, Part 1


**Weeks 4-6:**

Unit 3: Induction, Causation and Belief
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 1, Part 3

Secondary reading:
  - On induction:
    - Garrett, Cognition and Commitment, Chapter 4.
  - On causation:
  - On belief:

*Paper #1 due in class on [TBD].*
Weeks 7-9:

Unit 4: Humean Skepticism
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 1, Part 4, Appendix section on personal identity.

Secondary reading:
- On skepticism with regard to the senses:
- On personal identity:
- On skepticism and naturalism:

Week 10:

Unit 5: Action and Will
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 2, Part 3

Secondary reading:

*Paper #2 due in class on [TBD].*

Weeks 11-12:

Unit 6: The Moral Sentiments
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 3, Part 1

Secondary reading:
- David Fate Norton, “Hume, human nature, and the foundations of morality” in the *Cambridge Companion to Hume*.
Weeks 12-13:

Unit 7: Justice  
Primary reading: *Treatise*, Book 3, Part 2  
Secondary reading:  
  - Stroud, Hume, Chapter 9.  
  - Knud Haakonssen, “The structure of Hume’s political theory” in the *Cambridge Companion to Hume*.

Weeks 14-end:  
Unit 8: Natural Religion  
Primary reading: Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*  
Secondary reading:  

**Paper #3 due in class on [TBD].**  
**Final research paper due during exam period.**