

PHIL 452  
Descartes vs Hume  
– University of Montana –  
Fall 2009

Soazig Le Bihan



# Syllabus

## 0.1 Course Information

- Course Number: PHIL 452
- Credits: 3
- Class meets: MWF 1:10 - 2:00
- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan
  - Office Number: LA 153
  - Office Hours: MW 4-5pm
  - Mailbox: LA 101
  - Email: soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu
- Websites:
  - Note that all current course information (including class handouts, assignments, announcements, any revision of the schedule, exam questions, links etc.) can be found on the course web site  
<http://www.soaziglebihan.org/0909-PHIL452.php>
  - Information about your grades: blackboard: <https://courseware.umt.edu>

## 0.2 Course Description

What is the word like and how do we know about it? René Descartes tried to give a rational answer to these questions in his *Meditations*. David

Hume provided a radical critique of the standard philosophical answers à la Descartes in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. In this course, we will study both Descartes' and Hume's philosophies through a close reading of the *Meditations* and the *Treatise of Human Nature*.

Students are expected to learn how to interpret, understand, explain and critically evaluate difficult philosophical texts both orally and in writing. They will be asked to closely analyze philosophical texts every week. They will be required to give two class presentations on articles of secondary literature on Descartes and Hume. They will also be guided through the process of writing a research paper.

### 0.3 Books and other sources

#### Textbooks :

- The following texts are required and are available for purchase in the university bookstore:

- Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R., and Murdoch, D., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 (ISBN: 0-521-28808-8).
- Hume D., *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford Philosophical Texts), David Fate Norton (Editor), Mary J. Norton (Editor), (ISBN: 0198751729)

- The following texts will be used in class, are recommended for purchase but will also be on reserve at the Mansfield Library:

- Stephen Gaukroger, *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* (Blackwell Guides to Great Works)
- Saul Traiger, *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* (Blackwell Guides to Great Works)

#### Good additional sources include:

- Two great websites:
  - The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu>

- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

No need to say, there is a lot of *inaccurate if not plainly false* information on the web. You need to learn how to recognize good sources of information.

- You can search for scholarly articles on the the Mansfield Library website
- A few books you can trust:
  - Introductory texts:
    - \* John Cottingham, *The Rationalists*, History of Western Philosophy Series, Oxford University Press
    - \* Jonathan Bennett *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford University Press
  - Texts on Descartes:
    - \* John Cottingham, *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*
    - \* Amelie Rorty, *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*. Berkeley: U of California Press
  - Texts on Hume:
    - \* David Norton, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*
    - \* Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*

## 0.4 Tentative Schedule

I use the following abbreviations:

- **CSM**: Cottingham, J., Stoothoff, R., and Murdoch, D., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988
- **BGD**: Stephen Gaukroger, *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* (Blackwell Guides to Great Works)
- **T**: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford Philosophical Texts), David Fate Norton (Editor), Mary J. Norton (Editor)

- **BGH:** Saul Traiger, *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* (Blackwell Guides to Great Works)

The following schedule is subject to change. Updated information will be on the course website.

**Week 1** – 8/31-9/4 – Introduction to Descartes, First Meditation started:

- Descartes:

Dedicatory Letter+ Meditation I

Objections and Replies:

- Seventh O and R: CSM II, 302-321.
- Sixth O and R: CSM II, 281-2 (ninth difficulty), 293-96.
- Third O and R: CSM II, 121.
- Second O and R: CSM II, 92, 110-20 (Method).

- BGD1 (Ariew)

**Week 2** – 9/7-9/11 – First Meditation, continued

*No class on Monday 9/7*

- BGD2 (Larmore)

**Week 3** – 9/14-9/18 – Second Meditation

- Descartes, Meditation II

- Objections and Replies:

- Fifth O and R: CSM II, 180, 244; 192-3, 248-9.
- Second O and R: CSM II, 100.
- Sixth O and R: CSM II, 278, 285.
- Third O and R: CSM II, 122-23.
- Fourth O and R: CSM II, 150, 171-2.

- BGD3 (Curley), 4 (Rozemont) or 5 (Secada)

**Week 4** – 9/21-9/25 – Third Meditation

- Descartes, Meditation III
- Objections and Replies:
  - a) Third O and R: CSM II, 132; 127-8.
  - b) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 195-97, 251.
  - c) First O and R: CSM II, 66-7, 74-5.
- BGD6 (Nadler)

**Week 5** – 9/28-10/2 – Fourth Meditation

- Descartes, Meditation IV
- Objections and Replies:
  - a) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 219, 259.
  - b) Sixth O and R: CSM II, 281-2, 291-2.
- BGD 9 (Della Rocca)

**Week 6** – 10/5-10/9 – Fifth Meditation

*Prospectus due on 10/5*

- Descartes, Meditation V
- Objections and Replies:
  - a) Fifth O and R: CSM II, 224, 262-3.
  - b) First O and R: CSM II, 72, 83-5.
  - c) Second O and R: CSM II, 89-90, 100-105.
  - d) Fourth O and R: CSM II, 150, 171.
- BGD 7 (Nolan and Nelson) or 8 (Hatfield)

**Week 7** – 10/12-10/16 – Sixth Meditation

- Descartes, Meditation VI
- Objections and Replies:
  - a) Fourth O and R: CSM II, 140-3, 154-9.
  - b) Sixth O and R: CSM II, 296-99.
- BGD 10 (Clarke), 11 (Cottingham) or 12 (Schmaltz)

**Week 8** – 10/19-10/23 – Catch up and Conclusion on Descartes

**Week 9** – 10/26-10/30 – Introduction to Hume

- T: Abstract, pp. 407-417, and Advertisement and Introduction, pp. 2-6

- T: Introductory Material – pp. I2-I15

- BGH1 (Wright) (Optional BGH2)

**Week 10** – 11/2-11/6 – Impressions and Ideas

- T 1.1.1-7

- T: Introductory Material – pp. I16-I20

- BGH 3 (Broughton)

**Week 11, 12 and 13** – 11/9-11/23 – Knowledge, Probability, Belief, Causation

*Outline due on 11/9 No Class on 11/11*

- T 1.3.1-16

- T: Introductory Material – pp. I24-I37

- BGH 5 (Morris) and 6 (Roth)

**Week 13** – 11/25-11/27 – Thanksgiving Break

**Week 14** – 11/30-12/4 – Skepticism

*Paper due on 12/4*

- T: 1.2.6 and 1.4.1-4

- T: Introductory Material – pp. I38-I47

- BGH 7 (Baxter)

**Week 15** – 11/7-11/11 – Catch up and Conclusion on Hume

## 0.5 Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following:

1. Attendance and participation 10 %;
2. 2 text analyses 10% each;
3. 2 presentations 10% each;
4. 1 research paper, 50%, including a prospectus (5%), an 3 page outline (10%) and the final version of your paper (35%).

**Attendance** Attendance is required, and necessary to succeed in the course. There will be a lot of material covered, and the material covered will be hard.

You are allowed to miss 3 classes without penalty. Following that, you will lose 1% up to a maximum of 5 per cent (that is, half a letter grade) every time you miss a class without proper excuse.

You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. *Three late arrivals count as one absence.* If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class.

To attend a class does not mean merely sitting in class. You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other modes of communications should be silenced for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. *Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.*

That said, absences may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. You also will be expected to have worked by yourself on the material covered during the classes you may have missed.

**Participation** I encourage you to participate in class. Trying to answer my questions or asking questions yourselves both qualify as participation. You will not be penalized for answering incorrectly. I want to emphasize that your questions are welcome and that you should leave the classroom with a good understanding of the material covered.

Here are a few elements which will count for my appraisal of your participation:

- On Mondays at the beginning of the class, I will ask one of you to make a 5 to 10 min summary of our discussions from the week before.
- You will be expected to have actively read the texts assigned. I will provide you with study questions, to which you should write down short answers of your own.
- On Wednesdays (First part of the class), we will discuss the material covered during the Monday lecture. You are expected to prepare at least 3 questions of your own on the readings, preferably with possible answers.
- On Wednesdays (Second part of the class), we will explain an excerpt of the readings. You will be expected to be able to present your analysis of the text in 5 to 10 min.
- On Fridays, you will be expected to be familiar with the article presented, and to be able to discuss it in a constructive way.

While you will not be given a specific grade for your participation, I will take it into consideration when deciding upon your final grade. Active and consistent participation to the class can raise or lower your final grade by 5%, that is, half a letter grade.

**Text analyses** We will spend part of our Wednesdays explaining a short passage of the readings. The aim is to get you learn how to read and explain a philosophical text in details.

Every student is required to prepare an analysis of the text assigned, which should consist in:

- finding out the main claim(s) of the passage
- extracting the argument structure
- formulating three questions for the further evaluation of the argument

Every week, I will pick up your text analyses and grade two of them. You will not be told in advance whose analyses I grade – but I will have decided in advance who is to be graded. I will turn your analyses back to you once everybody in the class has a grade.

For very useful guidelines on how to read philosophy, see J. Pryor web site:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

**Presentations** You will be required to present on two articles in class from secondary literature. These will be made in groups of two students. For your presentation you will have to have an excellent command of the article you are presenting on as you will be leading discussion. The presentations should have two parts: 1. A summary of the main problems the author(s) deal(s) with and their proposed solutions (taking not more than 30 min.) and 2. a set of problems formulated by your group for discussion. You should provide a handout (with your names written on it) to me and the class with a list of the problems for discussion.

To be clear, a problem is a reason for thinking the author's argument is defective in some way, i.e. defective premises or weak inductive argument structure. In addition, some of your questions might relate the article being discussed to previous work we have discussed.

*I will expect to see a copy of your handout at least a week in advance of your presentation so I can give you feedback.* I am happy to meet with you to help you understand what's going on in your presentation article.

**Research Paper** You will be required to write a paper on the order of 12 pages (no less than 10) on a topic of your choosing. Original thinking is necessary for a research paper. That said, original thinking does not amount to asserting your personal opinions without taking into account any appropriate literature on your topic. For a research paper, the challenge is to find a topic which is not too broad and to treat it incisively. In order to help you do this, I will require that you take on at least one secondary source (from a reputable collection of papers or philosophy journals) as starting point. Such a source should not have been used in class. Reference works, encyclopedia articles, etc. do not meet this requirement. I will be glad to assist in the selection and formulation of the topic.

- You will be required to submit a prospectus by October 5th. A prospectus should contain your thesis statement, a short outline of your argument, and a bibliography.

- You will be then required to submit a 2 to 3 page outline of your paper on November 9th.

- The final version of your paper is due on December 4th, at 4 pm in my mail box

The papers must be typewritten, double-spaced, paginated, stapled, the notes at the bottom of the pages; no outline or bullet points. Follow any of the standard styles and formats.

**Late Assignment Rules** Late Assignments: without prior arrangements being made with the instructor, the grade of any late assignment will be lowered by one step of a letter grade a day (B+ to B for example).

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** If you encounter difficulties concerning an assignment, it is almost always possible to make arrangements before the assignment is due. No accommodation is possible once the deadline has passed. **COME AND TALK TO ME BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.**

**Writing Center** Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144 : drop in or by appointment)

“The Writing Center exists to help all UM students improve their writing skills as they pursue their academic and professional goals. We provide free writing instruction through one-on-one tutoring, in-class workshops, and the Writing Assistant program.” (quoted from the writing center website)

The tutors won't write your paper for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go the website: [http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom\\_about.htm](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom_about.htm)

**Academic Misconduct** You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu.SA>).

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. In case of plagiarism, your assignment will receive a zero. You may fail the class altogether depending on circumstances. Also, I will report the case to the Dean.

I will be glad to answer questions you may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime you take a phrase or sentence from someone, you have to quote it. Anytime you take an idea from someone, you have to cite your sources.

**Students with Disabilities** If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, contact me privately to discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised I may request that you provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying your right to reasonable modifications. If you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lommasson Center 154, please do so in order to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at [www.umt.edu/dss/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/).

## 0.6 Grading Policies

### Participation evaluation

- A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in lecture and section. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.
- B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.
- C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.

Failure to fulfill satisfactorily any of these criteria will result in a grade of "D" or below.

### **Text analysis and presentation evaluation**

- A range: You present an accurate reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and a careful criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You take an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's comments. In particular, you will have anticipated responses to your discussion questions, especially how you think the author(s) might respond, and use those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.
- B range: You present a reasonable reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and some criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.
- C range: You state the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. You provide a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). You provide discussion questions that are related to the text, but aren't primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. You ask questions, but don't develop discussion.

### **Paper evaluation**

Six criteria for evaluating a paper:

- Substance,
- Thesis and argument structure, including introduction and conclusion,
- Use of supporting material and evidence,
- Quality of analysis, including the crucial distinction between unsupported assumptions, value judgments vs. analysis and argumentation,
- Use of quality sources,

- Quality of writing including grammatical correction, clarity, concision and persuasiveness.

*Objectives for a good paper: rigorous inquiry, critical thinking, effective written argumentation.*

- A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content.
  - The materials covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that he or she has a command on the materials, including a critical understanding.
  - The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course.
  - The argument is unified and coherent.
  - The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled.
  - The analysis is complex and nuanced.
  - The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature.
  - No grammatical mistakes, clear, precise and concise style.
- B range: The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A range paper.
  - The material covered in class is well understood: the student does not make any mistake on the materials but does not show great depth in critical understanding.
  - The paper's thesis is clear.
  - The argument is coherent.
  - The paper presents evidence in support of its points.
  - The paper is reasonably well written and proofread.
- C range: This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure).  
For example:
  - a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or
  - no clear or incoherent thesis, or

- incoherent structure of argument, for example simply repeats points made in class without an overall argument, or
- presents no evidence in support the thesis
- no use of original texts, but only secondary or popular literature (encyclopedia...)
- poorly written and proofread.

A paper will fall below a “C” if it lacks more than one of the basic components of an argumentative essay.

### **Sources**

- Tips for grading in the humanities, Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning website
- Introduction to the Humanities Program, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Information for Faculty, 2005-06  
<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/ihum/instructors/>