

PHL 462: David Hume  
– Origins and Limits of Knowledge –  
– The Cases of Causation and Induction –

Soazig Le Bihan  
University of Montana  
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# Syllabus

## Course Description

What are the fundamental constituents of the world? Early modern Philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, or Leibniz gave coherent, rational and largely a priori answers to these questions. David Hume, by contrast, is known to have developed a radical critique of such traditional answers in his *Treatise of Human Nature* focusing on the epistemic means we have (or not!) to reach such metaphysical knowledge.

In this course, we shall first study how Hume's philosophies of mind and knowledge challenge the traditional views through a close reading of the *Treatise of Human Nature* and of the most recent work by Hume scholars. We shall then focus on the possible interpretations that one should give to Hume's views on causation and induction. Is Hume rightly characterized as the father of the regularity theory of causation? Did he truly hold that the world is made of unconnected events? Did he truly aim to show that no inductive inference can be justified? We shall finally briefly explore the extent to which the puzzles that Hume leveled concerning traditional philosophical views have shaped contemporary analytic philosophy.

Students will be asked to closely read, analyze, and discuss philosophical texts every week, taken both from primary and secondary literature (60 pages a week on average). They will be evaluated on the basis of the quality of their contributions to the discussion in class. They will be required to give one class presentation on an article about Hume from the secondary literature. They will be required to turn in weekly short papers on the assigned readings for that week. They will also be guided through the process of writing a 12 page research paper on interpretative issues concerning Hume's metaphysical or epistemological views. In this process, they will be required to provide (1) a written abstract and bibliography for their project, (2) an oral presentation describing the progress made, the difficulties encountered in their research project, and their plan to address such difficulties, and (3) a presentation of the final version of the paper, and (4) the final version of their paper in writing.

Upon completion of the course, students are expected to:

1. demonstrate a deep understanding of the views of Hume's metaphysics and epistemology, which includes understanding the most important interpretational debates in the secondary literature,
2. learn how to understand, interpret, explain, and critically evaluate difficult philosophical texts and arguments from original authors and from scholars, both orally and in writing,
3. be able to construct, convey, and argue for their interpretational views concerning the author studied (which includes making sense of the limitations of that interpretation), both orally and in writing,
4. be able to construct, convey, and argue for their own epistemological and metaphysical positions in comparison to the metaphysical and epistemological views of the author studied (which includes making sense of the limitations of these views), both orally and in writing.

## Course Logistics

- PHL 462, 3 Credits, TR 9:40-11am, LA 146

- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan

Office: LA 153, Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:10-12am, Mailbox in LA 101.

- Websites: Information about your grades can be found on Moodle. Besides grades, all current course information (including class handouts, assignments, announcements, any revision of the schedule, links etc.) can be found on the course web site. It is your responsibility to check the website regularly for updated information concerning the syllabus.

<http://www.soaziglebihan.org/1209-PHL463.php>

- Email: I will send out important class and individual messages to your UM email account. You should check that account regularly. I also encourage you to use email to contact me (soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu). I usually answer email messages within 24 hours during the week and within 48 hours on weekends and holidays.

- Textbooks

The following texts are required for the course and available for purchase on the university bookstore:

- **T:** Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford Philosophical Texts. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton.
- **Bb:** Beebee, Helen (2006) *Hume on Causation*. Routledge.

The following texts will be used in class and will be on reserve in the Boyce Library (LA 101):

- **BGH:** Saul Traiger (2008). *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*. Blackwell Guides to Great Works. Wiley-Blackwell.
- **BC:** Radcliffe, Elizabeth S. (2011). *A Companion to Hume*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- **CC:** Norton, David Fate and Taylor, Jacqueline (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*. Cambridge University Press.

## Course Requirements

**Attendance and Participation – 10% of the final grade.** 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 **2% up to a maximum of 10%** (that is, a letter grade) every time you miss a class without a proper excuse. You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. **Three late arrivals count as one absence.** 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 – 10% of the final grade .** You will be expected to participate in classroom discussion. Trying to answer questions or asking questions 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. Participation in class discussion should be facilitated by your short paper on the material. It is your obligation to show through your contribution to class discussion:

- (1) that you are in command of the material previously covered in class and,
- (2) that you have actively read the assigned readings for the week, and that you are ready to discuss it in a critical and constructive way.

Participation will be graded on the following scale:

- 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 previously in class. 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 class 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 previously discussed in class and shows interest in other students' contributions.
- C range: The student meets the basic requirements of class 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 material previously covered, but offer very few insightful ideas, and do not facilitate a discussion.
- D range: The student comes to class, but often unprepared. This student's contributions are often unrelated to the topic at hand, provide no insightful ideas, and do not facilitate discussion.
- F range: The student often does not come to class, or, if s/he does, s/he generally neither participates nor makes any insightful contributions related to the topic at hand

**Weekly short papers, two of which will be graded, 10% each.** You will be required to turn in a 2 page (absolutely no more than 1000 words, preferably more like 700, double-spaced) each week, except for the week when you give a presentation. These short papers will be due by 6am each Tuesday, and must deal with the readings for the forthcoming Tuesday *and* Thursday. You should turn them in by sending them to me as e-mail attachments; please be sure that your name is on both the paper itself and on the file.

The paper must concern the reading for the week, but the specific topic may be any of the following: you may summarize the material, give a detailed reading of a passage that you found particularly difficult, criticize one of the arguments offered in the readings, defend one of these arguments against a possible criticism (whether that criticism has been made explicit in the readings or not), offer further reasons to support one the claims defended in the readings, offer examples which help explain one of these claims, or which help to make one of these claims more plausible, offer counter-examples to one of these claims, discuss the consequences that some of these claims would have if they were true, offer a revised version of one of these claims in light of an objection, or contrast the strengths and weaknesses of two opposing views featured in the readings.

You must turn all weekly short papers in order to pass the course (even if you miss class for good reasons), but only two of these papers will be graded. I will grade the first one, so that you get a better sense of what I am looking for. Following this, I will grade two of the papers each week. You will not be told who is been graded each week. I will turn your papers back to you at the beginning of the 10th week of class at the earliest, i.e. when we turn to your research projects.

Short papers will be graded on the scale provided in the "research paper section".

**Presentation – 10% of the final grade.** You will be required to present on one article from secondary literature. 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 issues the author(s) deal(s) with and their proposed solutions (taking not more than 20 to 30 min.) and 2. a set of problems formulated 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 material we have covered.

You must provide a handout or outline for distribution to all class participants. You will be required to turn in a draft of your handout via email by 6 am on the Thursday the week before your article is scheduled to be discussed in class. We will discuss your draft between 11 and 12 that day, after class. Not turning in the draft for your presentation will lower your grade for your presentation by a letter grade.

Presentations will be graded on the following scale:

- A range: The student presents 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 the discussion questions. S/he takes an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's comments. In particular, s/he will have anticipated responses to the discussion questions, especially how s/he thinks the author(s) might respond, and uses those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.
- B range: The student presents 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 the discussion questions. S/he will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.
- C range: The student states the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. S/he provides a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). S/he provides discussion questions that are related to the text, but that are not primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. S/he asks questions, but does not develop discussion.
- D range: The student misconstrues the author's main claims in some significant respect. S/he provides a poor summary or reconstruction of the argument. S/he does not provide any discussion questions, or, if s/he does, such questions are to a large extent irrelevant to the problem at stake.
- F range: The student fails to provide a reconstruction of the paper, and, if s/he provides discussion questions, such questions are irrelevant to the problem at hand.

**Research Paper – 50% of the final grade, including a prospectus (10%), 2 presentations (10% each) and the final written version of the paper (20%).** 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 a 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 you in the selection and formulation of the topic. Among the options, you may criticize one of the arguments offered in the article, defend one of such arguments against a possible criticism (whether that criticism has been made explicit in the article or not), offer further reasons to support one the claims defended in the article, offer examples which help explain one of these claims, or which help to make one of these claims more plausible, offer counter-examples to one of these claims, discuss the consequences that some of these claims would have if they were true, offer a revised version of one of these claims in light of an objection, or contrast the strengths and weaknesses of two opposing views featured in the article or related literature. I also strongly recommend that you schedule a research session with Sue Samson from the Mansfield Library (406.243.4335), who can introduce you to peer-reviewed journal articles, books, e-books, research databases and more.

- You will be required to submit a **prospectus by October 9th.** A prospectus should contain your thesis statement, a short outline of your argument, and a selective bibliography. You should turn in a hard copy of your prospectus in class. I will be providing you with feedback on your prospectus.

You will be expected to take such feedback into account when pursuing your project. If you have any questions about the feedback you receive, you are welcome to come and talk to me about it.

- You will then be required to give a 10 minute presentation on the progress you have made on your project during weeks 10-13. At this stage, you will be expected (1) to have worked out in detail parts of your argument on the basis of your readings, (2) to have identified potential difficulties for your argument, (3) to have designed a plan for addressing such difficulties, including which further readings you are hoping will help. You must provide a handout featuring all three elements above. You will be given feedback from me and your fellow students. You will be expected to take such feedback into account in the final version of your paper.

- You will be required to give a 15 minute presentation on the final version of your paper during the last two weeks of class. At this stage, you should be able to state the results of your research, including how you handled the difficulties encountered before and how you implemented the feedback that you received in class during the previous presentation.

**- The written final version of your paper is due by 12pm on December 10th in my mailbox.**

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

Papers will be graded on the following scale:

- A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content. The material covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that s/he has a command on, including a critical understanding of, the material. 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. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a 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 material but does not show great depth in critical understanding either. The paper's thesis is clear and the argument is coherent. The paper presents evidence in support of its points. The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.
- 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: the paper features a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or the thesis is not clear or incoherent, or the argument is not coherently structured, or evidence in support of the thesis is lacking, or only poor quality sources are used. The student still utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as an appropriate argumentative writing style.
- D range: This paper features few of the basic components of an argumentative essay. The material covered in class is not understood. The paper may be rather poorly written and proofread.
- F range: This paper does not qualify as an argumentative essay and/or the material covered in class is profoundly misunderstood and/or it is very poorly written and proofread.

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

## Tentative Schedule

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

**Week 1** – Introductions and Welcome. Introduction to Hume and the *Treatise*.

T: Abstract 407-417, Advertisement and Introduction, pp. 2-6 + Introductory Material pp. I2-I15

BGH1 (Wright)

Optional: BGH2, BC1, CC1

**Week 2** – Impressions and Ideas

T 1.1.1-7 + Introductory Material – pp. I16-I20

BGH3 (Broughton)

BC2 (Garrett)

Optional: CC2, CC3

**Week 3 and 4** – Knowledge, Causation, and Belief

T 1.3.1-16 + Introductory Material pp. I24-I37

BGH5 (Morris) and BGH6 (Roth)

BC5 (Watanabe Dauer) and BC6 (Loeb)

Optional: CC5

**Week 5** – Skepticism

T: 1.2.6 and 1.4.1-4 + Introductory Material – pp. I38-I47

BGH7 (Baxter)

BC7 (Malherbe)

Optional: CC7

**Week 6, 7 and 8** – Interpreting Hume's views on Causation and Induction

Bb in its totality (7 chapters over three weeks)

*Prospectus due on 10/9 in class*

**Week 9** – Hume's legacy: Causation and Induction

Lewis, David (1973). Causation. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 70: 556-567.

Beebe, Helen (2006). Does Anything Hold the Universe Together? *Synthese* 149 (3):509-533.

Beebe, Helen (2011). Necessary Connections and the Problem of Induction. *Noûs*, 45: 504-527.

**Week 10, 11, 12 and 13** – Presentations: Research Projects

*No class on 11/6, 11/15 and 11/22*

**Week 14 and 15** – Presentations: Final Paper

*Final paper due on 12/10 by 12pm in my mailbox*



## University Resources and Policy

**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 will not 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)

**Students with Disabilities.** I will be happy to provide otherwise qualified students with disabilities with reasonable accommodations for this course. If you are a student with a disability and wish to be offered reasonable accommodations for this course, it is your responsibility to contact me to discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised I will 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/).

**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.

