

**IDH2930 Uncommon Read: Some Strange Uncouth Monster: Science,
Superstition, and Skepticism in the Philosophy of David Hume
Section 2323/Class #28713
Fall 2023**

Instructor: Brooks Sommerville
Day/Period: T 7 (1:55-2:45pm)
Rooms: Little 119
Office Hours: W 11:00am-12:00pm; R 11:00am-12:00pm, CSE - E512
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I will respond to legitimate inquiries within 48 hours, not including weekends. If you do not receive a reply within this period, please resubmit your question(s). Each email message must include in the subject line the course identifier and a concise and clear statement of purpose (e.g. "IDH2930: question about final paper"); otherwise it is likely to be deleted. For technical issues, please contact UF's Computing Help Desk: <https://helpdesk.ufl.edu/>.

Course Description:

The eighteenth century brought a revolution in science and philosophy. In Britain, this revolution took the form of a rejection of innate ideas and a new emphasis on experience as the sole source of knowledge. While this approach generally sought to support and complement the monumental scientific achievements of the time, it also generated new skeptical worries about the limits of the human intellect.

No single work illustrates this dialectic between enlightenment and skepticism more vividly than David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*. It begins with great fanfare, promising "a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new." Hume's remarkable confidence was grounded not only in the empiricist conviction that all genuine knowledge rests on experience, but more fundamentally, on the insight that all other sciences and disciplines, from physics to economics, theology to politics, are applications in one way or another of the human mind. For this reason, Hume maintained that the *Treatise's* signature focus on the mechanics of human reasoning represented the only true foundation for the sciences. As the progenitor of this new science of human nature, Hume understood himself to stand above even the towering figures of natural science – Bacon, Boyle, and Newton among them – as the preeminent scientist of his age.

Little of this confidence survives the ordeals of the scientific method, however. As the *Treatise* begins to subject the inner workings of the intellect to relentless empirical scrutiny, we discover that many of our "rational" convictions owe much more to our non-rational faculties of imagination and sentiment than we would care to admit. From our trust in the senses to our most basic inferences, our belief in the external world to the ordinary idea of the self, all of our convictions seem to melt under the searing light of Hume's microscope. By the end of Book I, Hume confronts a demoralizing choice "betwixt a false reason and none at all."

This course aims to understand this tug of war between naturalism and skepticism in the *Treatise*. Focusing on key moments in Book I, we will endeavor to understand precisely how Hume

understands the relationship between scientific inquiry and radical doubt. We will also investigate his remedies (such as they are) for total skepticism.

Learning Outcomes: This course will provide students with the ability to identify, describe, and explain the history, underlying theories, and methodologies used in interpreting a philosophical treatise. Beyond this, it will enable students to communicate their knowledge, thoughts, and reasoning clearly and effectively.

Grading:

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| 1. Attendance: | 10% |
| 2. Class participation: | 10% |
| 3. Short (5-10 min.) In-Class Presentation: | 10% |
| 4. One-Page Write-Up of In-Class Presentation: | 10% |
| 5. Final Paper (8-10 pages): | 60% |

A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Completion credit.

Textbook (required, and available at the University of Florida Bookstore):

Title of Text: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2nd Edition)

Author: David Hume

ISBN: 9780198245889

Publisher and Year of Publication: Oxford UP, 1978

Additional Information About Grading:

Attendance: Attendance will be taken at the start of class. Five or more unexcused absences will result in an attendance grade of zero. Students who arrive significantly late to class will be marked absent.

Class participation: You are expected to have read the week's assigned readings before the meeting of that week, and to be able to answer basic questions about them. Note that readings for this class can be rather difficult, and will generally need to be read more than once. Work until you at least get a basic sense of the reading. Then we will have a foundation for discussion in class, and we can work together to gain an understanding of the more difficult points.

In-Class Presentations: Early in the semester, every student will be asked to sign up for a slot to deliver a short (roughly 5-10 minute) in-class presentation. **Failure to deliver a presentation on this date will result in a presentation grade of zero.** For your presentation, you are asked to select a specific "element" from the readings assigned for that week. An "element" can be an example, a claim, even a single term from the assigned readings. Your job in your presentation is to (i) delineate as precisely as you can the element you have selected; and (ii) to explain what you take to be its contribution to the work as a whole. Elements must be approved by the instructor at least one week in advance.

Presentation Write-Up: At the end of your presentation, you are expected to submit in hard copy a written summary of your in-class presentation. Write-ups should be single-spaced, 12 pt. font with one-inch margins, and should not exceed a single one-sided page.

Final Papers: A final paper (8-10 pages) is due in hard copy in class on Dec. 5, 2023. Final papers should be double-spaced in 12 pt. font with one-inch margins. Students should have the topic of their final paper approved via email by the instructor no later than 5:00pm on Nov. 21, 2023.

Secondary Sources: You are not expected to consult any secondary sources in writing your final paper. If you do consult any material beyond the required text, you should do so sparingly and give appropriate citations.

Please retain an electronic copy of your in-class presentation write-up and final paper until you receive a final grade for the course.

Course Policies:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies. Click here to read the university attendance policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center:

<https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>

(352) 392-8565

It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Please follow the following link for current UF grading policies for assigning grade points:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals.

Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Course Work: Failure to submit a final paper will result in a grade of F. No final papers will be accepted after **Dec. 6, 2023**.

Cell phones must be turned off in class.

Honor Code: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have

neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

In-Class Recording: Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness:

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources:

Honors Program: 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email advisor@honors.ufl.edu

Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings:
<https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising>

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information. On-Line Students Complaints: View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process: <https://distance.ufl.edu/state-authorization-status/#student-complaint>.

Reading Schedule:

Week 1 (Aug. 29): Introduction

Week 2 (Sept. 5): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction (xiii-xix)

Week 3 (Sept. 12): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II: Of the Passions
Part III: Of the will and direct passions
Section I: Of liberty and necessity
Section II: The same subject continu'd
(pp. 399-412)

Week 4 (Sept. 19): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part I: Of ideas; their origin, composition, connexion, abstraction, etc.
Section I. Of the origins of our ideas
Section II. Division of the subject
Section III. Of the ideas of the memory and imagination
(pp. 1-10)

- Week 5 (Sept. 26): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part I: Of ideas; their origin, composition, connexion, abstraction, etc.
Section IV. Of the connexion or association of ideas
Section V. Of [relations]
Section VI. Of modes and substances
Section VII. Of abstract ideas
(pp. 10-25)
- Week 6 (Oct. 3): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part II: Of the ideas of space and time
Section VI. Of the idea of existence and of external existence
Part III: Of knowledge and probability
Section I. Of knowledge
Section II. Of probability; and of the idea of cause and effect
(pp. 66-78)
- Week 7 (Oct. 10): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part III: Of knowledge and probability
Section III. Why a cause is always necessary?
Section IV. Of the component parts of our reasonings concerning causes and effects
Section V. Of the impressions of the senses and memory
Section VI. Of the inference from the impression to the idea
Section VII. Of the nature of the idea, or belief
(pp. 78-98)
- Week 8 (Oct. 17): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part III: Of knowledge and probability
Section XIV. Of the idea of necessary connexion
Section XV. Rules by which to judge of causes and effects
Section XVI. Of the reason of animals
(pp. 155-179)
- Week 9 (Oct. 24): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy
Section I. Of scepticism with regard to reason
(pp. 180-187)
- Week 10 (Oct. 31): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy
Section II. Of scepticism with regard to the senses
(pp. 187-218)

- Week 11 (Nov. 7): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy
Section III. Of the antient philosophy
Section IV. Of the modern philosophy
(pp. 219-231)
- Week 12 (Nov. 14): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy
Section V. Of the immateriality of the soul
Section VI. Of personal identity
(pp. 232-263)
- Week 13 (Nov. 21): Discussion of final paper topics
- Week 14 (Nov. 28): *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding
Part IV: Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy
Section VII. Conclusion of Book I
(pp. 263-274)
- Week 15 (Dec. 5): **Review – Hard copies of final papers due in class**