COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course examines a specific topic in the philosophy of religion, such as faith and reason, religious experience, or an important thinker. It may be repeated with permission of the instructor. This semester the course will focus on the work of David Hume (d. 1779), arguably the most influential philosopher of religion of all time.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS
David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779).
David Hume, *Natural History of Religion* (1757).

ADDITIONAL READINGS (available online on Canvas):
George Campbell, *Dissertation on Miracles* (1763).
Alvin Plantinga, [Reply to Draper], selection from *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Religion and Naturalism* (2011).

SECONDARY SOURCES (for research papers and presentations)

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES AND COURSE STRUCTURE
In this course we will focus on David Hume’s philosophy of religion and related texts. Hume is acknowledged as the one of the most important philosophers of religion, in addition to being one of the most significant skeptics of all time. That is to say, Hume’s writings about religion, despite their brevity, are the point of departure for every significant work in the philosophy of religion from Hume’s time to our own day. His *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739) and *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748, but definitive edition published posthumously in 1777) rank as two of the most influential works in the history of philosophy. Immanuel Kant exclaimed that it was Hume who awakened him from his “dogmatic slumber,” and he is the nemesis whom Kant intended to refute in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787).

Hume’s impact on the philosophical movement known as “Logical Positivism” or “Logical Empiricism” (the Vienna Circle and its leading members: Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Hans Reichenbach, A. J. Ayer) in the first half of the 20th century cannot be
underestimated. Positivism’s strongly dismissive view of religion is due in large part to Hume. More recently, the philosophy of the most important philosopher (at least of the second half) of the 20th century, W. V. Quine (d. 2000), can be understood as an updated version of Hume’s epistemology as found not in the less radical *Inquiry* but in his first philosophical work, the *Treatise*.

As most of you know by now, my approach is textual and focused on primary sources. In particular, we will start by looking at Hume’s theory of knowledge in his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* to get a grasp of Hume’s general epistemological approach, which is the key to understanding his philosophy and interpretation of religion. We will jump immediately into his early essay on the immortality of the soul (and related text in the *Treatise*), and then to his famous critique of miracles in Section X of the *Inquiry* (1748). Next will turn to Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published in 1779, but written much earlier), which includes Hume’s extremely influential formulation of the “argument from evil” against God’s existence. The course will conclude with a reading of his *Natural History of Religion* (1757), in which Hume offers a prescient naturalistic interpretation of religion that anticipates the psychological-anthropological interpretation of religion formulated by E. B. Tylor (1871), James Frazer (1890-1915), and Sigmund Freud in his *The Future of an Illusion* (1915). As a supplement to his published work, we will also look at selections from his letters.

The reading of Hume’s texts will be complemented by critiques of his work, such as Campbell’s *Dissertation on Miracles* (1762), which Hume himself acknowledged as having great merit; and Nelson Pike’s “Hume on Evil” (1963), considered as the definite refutation of Hume’s *logical* argument from evil. We will also look at Paul Draper’s evidential argument against God and his reformulation of Hume’s argument from evil, whose antecedents can be traced to in Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The relevant responses to Hume by the influential Christian philosophers Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig will also be examined.

We will not feel obligated to read through every text, but we will try to read as much as time permits. One reason for not rushing through the texts is that Hume’s thought is demanding, despite the simplicity of his style. The good news is that in terms of number of pages, the readings are quite manageable. Hume did not write much and neither are his works are rather compact. So it is entirely possible for us to read every of the assigned works in their totality.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

1. One research 12-15 research paper on a topic provided by the instructor (70% of final grade).

2. Class Presentation (based on the reading assignment for each week): Two (2) pages, orally delivered in class (30% of final grade).

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3. **Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding**

4. **Treatise**

5. **Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion**

6. **Natural History of Religion**

7. **Dissertation on Miracles**

8. **The Future of an Illusion**

9. **Letters**
COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1

Introduction: Syllabus, Requirements, Textbooks, Overview of course

Hume’s Theory of Knowledge: The Cartesian Background
Recommended Reading: Descartes, Meditations I-III.

Week 2

Hume’s Theory of Knowledge: Naturalized Epistemology
Required Reading: Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

Week 3

Hume on the Immortality of the Soul
Required Reading: “On the Immortality of the Soul”; selection from the Treatise on Human Knowledge, Part IV.5 and 6 (“Immateriality of the Soul,” and “Personal Identity.”

Presentation: ____________________________

Week 4

Hume’s Critique of Miracles
Required Reading: Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section X; Video: Hume on Miracles; George Campbell’s Critique of Hume on Miracles: Dissertation on Miracles
Required Reading: Selections from Campbell’s Dissertation on Miracles.

Presentation: ____________________________

Week 5

George Campbell’s Critique of Hume on Miracles: Dissertation on Miracles
Required Reading: Selections from Campbell’s Dissertation on Miracles, continued.

Presentation: ____________________________

Week 6

Hume’s Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, I
Required Reading: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
Video: Hume’s critique of Cosmological Argument
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmU0ZAwBEN0

Presentation: ____________________________

Week 7

Hume’s Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, II
Required Reading: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
Video: Hume’s critique of Argument from Design
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gv_y00WQ9kI

Presentation: ____________________________

Week 8

Hume’s Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, III
Required Reading: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
Video: Hume’s formulation of the problem of evil
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EmU0ZAwBEN0

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 9


Presentation: ________________________________

Week 10

Paul Draper’s “Evidential Argument.”
*Required Reading*: Paul Draper, “Evolution and the Problem of Evil” (on Canvas).

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 11

Alvin Plantinga, Reply to Draper.

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 12

William Lane Craig’s Debate with Cal Tech Physicist Sean Carroll
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0qKZqPy9T8

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 13

Hume’s Natural History of Religion, I
*Required Reading*: Hume, *Natural History of Religion*.

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 14

Hume’s Natural History of Religion, II
*Required Reading*: Hume, *Natural History of Religion*.

Presentation: ________________________________

Week 15

Has Hume been Refuted?

**LAST DAY OF CLASSES, RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**