

**Relationality, Affect, Law: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature***  
**PHL 445, Winter 2018**  
**Peg Birmingham**

**Office hours: Tuesdays 2:45-4:00 and by appointment;**  
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**Course Objectives:**

Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* calls into question contemporary claims made by thinkers such as Macpherson, and, more recently, Butler and Cavarero, that the modern subject is autonomous, self-possessed and powerful, which, in turn, provides the foundation of the sovereign, modern state. Instead, Hume begins with a sensing, material mind (similar to Hobbes, there is no mind/body split) bombarded with sensations and secondary affects, caught in an externality of relations in which the mind is nothing other than a circulation of tendencies and forces. The *Treatise of Human Nature* is an account of how this circulation of external, material relations becomes an ethical and political subject. Still further, the emphasis on Hume's epistemological skepticism (the fare of most undergraduate courses on Hume) obscures the ways in which his skepticism is only the first moment in rethinking a notion of human nature that emerges only through a progression of material affects that ultimately requires political institutions to achieve any semblance of stability, coherence, and power. Unlike Hobbes, however, Hume gives us a public space that is non-hierarchical, non-sovereign, and organized organically rather than mechanically.

We will begin with Hume's epistemological skepticism (Part I), which denies the possibility of synthetic knowledge (a denial that awakens Kant from his slumbers) and puts in its place the concept of belief, a concept that requires him to find a way to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate belief (illusion). At the same time, we will see that Hume's primary concern throughout the *Treatise*, including Part I, is not with knowledge, but with being and becoming: how does nature become human nature? We will then follow Hume as he sets out in his leaky metaphysical boat to the shores of morality and politics (Parts II and III of the *Treatise*.) Hume develops a robust theory of the passions in Part II and shows in Part III why a theory of justice and the political is needed in order to artificially enlarge what he calls "the partial sentiments" of the affective subject. In other words, and against Hobbes, he claims our interests, formed out of exterior and extensive relations, are not egoistic, but they are partial. What motivates us to extend them? What motivates us to move from partial interests to general interests?

Alongside the *Treatise*, we will read Deleuze's second monograph (1953), *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*. This second monograph follows Deleuze's first book-length publication in 1952 (in collaboration with André Cresson), *David Hume: Sa vie, son oeuvre, avec un exposé de sa philosophie*. With these two texts marking the beginning of Deleuze's thinking, it is not too much to claim that his work is in large part indebted to Hume, especially Hume's theory of the affects. Deleuze's seminal reading of Hume and his question, "How does the mind become a subject," will accompany us in our reading of Hume's *Treatise*.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (recommended; copies of essays provided)

Deleuze, *Empirisme et subjectivité. Essai sur la Nature Humaine selon Hume* (available on Amazon.fr as a Kindle book) [Also available in paperback at LPC Bookstore]

English translation: *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*)

## **REQUIREMENTS**

This is a reading intensive seminar as we will read in ten weeks the entirety of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and Deleuze's *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Along the way we will take side excursions into Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as well as examine three of his essays. The main requirement of the seminar, therefore, is to engage fully with the readings and come to seminar prepared to discuss them.

In addition, students are required to give two protocols during the course of the quarter. The protocols should summarize and make sense of the previous class discussion as well as raise one or two critical questions for the class as we go forward in our reading. The protocol may also want to address issues or topics in the readings from the previous class that might not have been fully addressed or which need further explication. The protocol should be between 2-3 typed single-spaced pages; **it may not exceed 3 1/2 pages**.

**Students are responsible for bringing sufficient copies of the protocol to class.**

## **OUTLINE OF THE COURSE**

### **January 4**

Hume, *Treatise*: Introduction, Book One, Part 1

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter One

### **January 11**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book One, Parts 1 and 2

Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections II-III

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter One

### **January 18**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book One, Parts 3-4

Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections IV-VIII

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapters Four and Five, "God and the World" and "Empiricism and Subjectivity"

### **January 25—continuation of readings for January 19**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book One, Parts 3-4

Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections IX-XII

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapters Four and Five

**February 1**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Two, Part 1

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter Two, “Cultural World and General Rules”

**February 8**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Two, Part 2

Hume, *Enquiry*, Section VIII

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter Two

**February 15**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Two, Part 3

Hume, *Essays*, “On the Delicacy of Taste and the Passions”

**February 22**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Three, Part 1

Hume, *Essays*, “On the First Principles of Government”, “Of the Origin of Government”

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter Three, “The Power of the Imagination in Ethics and Knowledge”

**March 1**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Three, Part 2

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Chapter Six, “The Principles of Human Nature”

**March 8**

Hume, *Treatise*, Book Three, Part 3

Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Conclusion, “Purposiveness”