

# Foundations Seminar: Barriers to Entailment

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This seminar will be about barriers to entailment, i.e. ‘theses that say that you can’t deduce certain kinds of conclusion from certain kinds of premise. A famous example is Hume’s Law, which says that you can’t get an *ought* from an *is*, but barriers show up in a variety of other philosophical areas, including time, modality, and context-sensitivity. The seminar will be an opportunity to study a classic problem in logic and metaethics, and (if you like) learn more about what I work on. Readings will be posted ahead of the seminar, except for the ones from my book *Barriers to Entailment*, which is available for free through the ANU library subscription to Oxford Scholarship Online. Some parts of this seminar will be easier if you have taken an introductory course in formal logic, but you will be able to get something from it even without that background.

Week 1	Monday 12th August
Week 2	Monday 19th August
Week 3	Monday 26th August
Week 4	Monday 2nd September
Week 5	Monday 9th September
Week 6	Monday 16th September

## Week 1: introduction to barriers to entailment

This week will be an introduction to the subject, looking at what barriers to entailment are and where they show up in philosophy. We’ll focus on five:

1. Universal conclusions don’t follow from Particular premises.
2. Conclusions about the Future don’t follow from premises about the Past.
3. Necessity-type conclusions don’t follow from premises which merely say how things actually are.
4. Indexical conclusions don’t follow from premises which aren’t indexical.
5. Normative conclusions don’t follow from descriptive premises (Hume’s Law)

I’ll distribute some selections from texts and we’ll look at A. N. Prior’s famous attempt to give a counterexample to Hume’s Law.

Reading:

[Prior, 1960] plus selections from Hume, Prior, Lewis, etc. provided in class.

## Week 2: a survey of counterexamples

A more comprehensive survey of the literature on counterexamples to Hume's Law. We'll ask to what extent these counterexamples can be reformulated for use against the other four barriers.

Reading:

[Searle, 1989]

Optional additional reading:

Chapter 1 of *Barriers to Entailment* [Russell, 2023]

## Week 3: first attempts at proof

In the first half we'll look at two extant attempts to prove Hume's Law, due to Charles Pigden and Gerhard Schurz respectively. We'll go on to look at a very different, model-theoretic approach, and consider objections to one version of this approach made by Schurz and Peter Vranas.

Reading:

[Pigden, 1989]

## Week 4: Universality and Time

This week we'll look in more detail at how to formulate and prove two of the barriers:

1. No Universal conclusions from Particular premises.
2. No Future conclusions from Past premises.

Reading:

Chapter 2 of *Barriers to Entailment*

## Week 5: Modality, Indexicality, Normativity

How do we formulate the modal barrier? Aren't there multiple modal logics (T, S4, S5 etc.)? Does it make a difference which one we use? What about the indexical and normative barriers? In this session we'll see the final versions of the formal barrier theorems.

Reading:

[Humberstone, 1982]

Optional additional reading:

Chapter 5 of *Barriers to Entailment*

## Week 6: Hume's Law beyond logic

Some philosophers have suggested that even if we can prove Hume's Law, this might not mean that Hume's Law is true. In this final session we'll look at the extent to which we can make sense of this view, and how formal approaches to the barriers can respond to it, and what formal approaches can say about intractably informal counterexamples.

Reading:

[Maitzen, 1998]

## References

- [Humberstone, 1982] Humberstone, I. L. (1982). Necessary conclusions. *Philosophical Studies*, 41:321–335.
- [Maitzen, 1998] Maitzen, S. (1998). Closing the 'is' - 'ought' gap. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 28(3):349–366.
- [Pigden, 1989] Pigden, C. R. (1989). Logic and the autonomy of ethics. *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 67:127–151.
- [Prior, 1960] Prior, A. N. (1960). The autonomy of ethics. *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 38:199–206.
- [Russell, 2023] Russell, G. K. (2023). *Barriers to Entailment: Hume's Law and other limits on logical consequence*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- [Searle, 1989] Searle, J. (1989). How performatives work. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 12:535–558.