

PHIL 31004-001: BRITISH EMPIRICISM (SPRING 2024)

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OFFICE LOCATION: Bowman Hall, 320, Room N

PRIMARY OFFICE HOURS: Wednesdays, 1-4pm, Fridays, 11-1pm

COURSE TEXTS

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Hackett (1996), Winkler, ed.

George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*, OUP (1996), Robinson, ed.

David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, OUP (2007), Millican, ed.

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cambridge (2007), Coleman, ed.

Note that simplified, annotated, and abridged versions of *all* of the readings are available on the web, for free, courtesy of Professor Jonathan Bennett. Visit <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/>
I encourage you to look at these, to compare them with the original versions, and to use them for your weekly reading throughout the semester.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The 17th and 18th centuries witnessed a massive surge in our understanding of several important aspects of nature. These gains in scientific knowledge were reflected in far-reaching developments in technology, agriculture, and medicine. But they also carried significant philosophical ramifications. The sheer power of the new science developed by Galileo, Descartes, Boyle, Newton, and others, occasioned a wholesale re-evaluation of traditional assumptions about both reality (metaphysics) and the proper methodologies for gathering knowledge (epistemology). The “empiricist” conception of our capacities for sensing, feeling, and thinking emerged in this context. In this course, we will delve into the works of three empiricist philosophers—John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume—whose intellectual achievements shaped much of western thought. Our goal will be to see the interconnections between the topics that gripped these thinkers: mind, matter, space, time, God, morality, freedom, reasoning, and knowledge.

WRITING INTENSIVE

This course may be used to satisfy the Writing Intensive Course (WIC) requirement. The purpose of a writing-intensive course is to assist students in becoming effective writers within their major discipline. A WIC requires a substantial amount of writing, provides opportunities for guided revision, and focuses on writing forms and standards used in the professional life of the discipline.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Reading

Readings will be assigned for every class session. The schedule of readings appears at the end of the syllabus. Please note that minor revisions to the schedule may be needed throughout the semester. These will be announced in class and by email. All readings are required, except those that are marked 'optional'. You will be expected to complete all readings for a class session *before* that session; please prepare accordingly. Remember, philosophical writing is different from other genres of writing, and requires a different approach on the part of the reader. It will often happen that you need to read the same text more than once to grasp its meaning and to critically evaluate the authors' claims and arguments. Please make sure to allocate time for this in your weekly schedule.

Three Macro Papers (15% each, for a total of 45% of the final grade)

This course is intended to improve your writing skills and to enhance your use of writing as a tool for critical thinking and reflection. In keeping with these goals, I will ask you to write three macro papers, as well as several shorter assignments. The minimum length of each macro paper is 2000 words. This is a strict minimum; papers that don't meet this requirement will automatically receive an F. The due dates for these papers can be found in the course schedule below. I will provide instructions for each paper well in advance. In addition, we will take some class time to go over the basics of writing a philosophical essay, with a focus on constructing an effective thesis statement and organizing your ideas into a cogent argument.

In general, philosophical writing should be clear, focused, persuasive, and attentive to every detail. Please avoid using jargon and '-isms'. Wherever possible and express your ideas in commonsense terms, though always with an eye for academic standards of diction. The biggest factor in determining the grade on a philosophical paper is the strength of the overall argument, and the author's ability to anticipate and forestall challenges to his or her claims and inferences. Also important is the author's care with factual claims, as well as his or her comprehension of the course material. The grade is *never* based on the thesis that the author has chosen to put forward. The goal of this course is to teach students to reason well about difficult abstract issues. Success in the course consists in learning to argue well for your conclusions, whatever they happen to be.

Students who receive a B or below on their first macro paper will have an opportunity to submit a revised draft for a higher grade no later than 2 weeks from the day the paper was returned. When revising your paper, please make sure to take into account *all* of the comments that I put on it, as well as any that you received from your peer reviewer. (See below for information about peer review.)

Important: When turning in a revised version of your paper, please make it clear which words, sentences, or paragraphs were revised, by casting them in a different color. Note that *I will not accept the revision if this requirement is not met.*

First Paper Peer Review (10% of the final grade)

For your first macro paper, you will be asked to engage in a process of peer review, which will count toward your final grade in the course. This will work as follows: When you submit your paper to me on the due date, I will give it to one of your fellow classmates for evaluation. Each student will receive a paper to review. You will have **one week** to submit your review of your peer's paper. Your review should focus on all of the following: the quality of the thesis statement, the author's diction, organization, paragraph/topic transitions, grammar, style, and, of course, most importantly, content. You will be given a grading rubric, on which you will score all of these aspects of your classmate's work. In addition to providing your comments and suggestions, you will be asked to assign a grade (A-F). The grade you assign will *not* affect your classmate's grade on that paper, but it will be of interest to see how often it coincides with the official grade that I have assigned.

Important: If you wish to preserve your anonymity, either as an author or as a reviewer, you should make sure to submit a version of your paper and/or your peer review that doesn't have any identifying information (both within the file and in the filename). Otherwise, *you automatically waive your right to anonymity*, which would have been guaranteed by FERPA.

Five micro papers (35% of the final grade)

In addition to the three macro papers discussed above, you will be asked to submit five micro papers. The due dates for these are listed in the schedule below. Each micro paper must be at least 1000 words long (again, strict minimum), and should demonstrate strong familiarity with the readings assigned for the previous week. If you don't feel that you understand the reading well enough to summarize it, even after multiple re-readings, please contact me by email or meet with me during office hours.

You will receive comments on some of your micro papers. Please feel absolutely free to incorporate text from your micro papers into your macro papers, provided that you make revisions in light of the feedback that you receive from me. Recycling text without making the needed revisions is a Bad Idea.

Late papers will be accepted, but will receive a lower grade.

Class Participation (10% of the final grade)

Class participation consists in contributing to class discussion by asking questions or making comments that demonstrate a grasp of the course material and an interest in the topics. Although attendance is required, it does *not* count as class participation. I think of participation as a kind of intellectual investment in the course, which goes beyond simply completing the reading and writing assignments. Some students will initially find it difficult to speak up in front of a crowd. Nevertheless, public speaking is an essential aspect of the course, and also a requirement; *no student can receive an A in the course without engaging actively in class discussion*. Limited class participation credit can also be earned by engaging with me by email or at office hours.

To make the class participation grade as objective as possible, you will be asked to write down some keywords from your contribution to the class discussion at the end of each class session.

Summary of the grading system

Here is how your final grade will be calculated:

- 45% of the final grade for the macro papers (15% each)
- 35% of the final grade for the five micro papers (8% each)
- 10% of the final grade for the peer review assignment
- 10% of the final grade for class participation

The following provides a translation from the numerical score to a letter grade:

A 96-100	B+ 86-90	C+ 71-75	D 56-60
A- 91-95	B 81-85	C 66-70	F 55 or below
	B- 76-80	C- 61-65	

There is no “curve” for the course. It is conceivable—though exceedingly unlikely—that everyone in the course will receive an A. (Or an F.) This means that *you are not in competition with your classmates for high grades*. You are encouraged to organize study groups and help each other out.

When you receive your final grade for the course, please note that it is *non-negotiable*. I will not change grades, unless I have made a demonstrable clerical error in my calculations.

Attendance

Aside from two excused “freebie” absences, attendance is mandatory throughout the semester. After the two freebies, any unexcused absence or major lateness will negatively impact your final grade in the course. More than 6 unexcused absences will automatically result in a failing grade for the course.

A sign-in sheet will be passed around during each class session. All students are expected to come to class on time and to be engaged for the length of the class session. If you miss multiple class sessions, please discuss your situation with me, either in person or by email. Students who are absent from class for religious reasons or due to documented medical treatment will not incur any penalty on their final grade, but are responsible for all required reading and writing assignments.

Religious Accommodations

The University welcomes individuals from all different faiths, philosophies, religious traditions, and other systems of belief, and supports their respective practices. In compliance with University policy and the Ohio Revised Code, the University permits students to request class absences for up to three days, per term, in order to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or other religious or spiritual organization. Students will not be penalized as a result of any of these excused absences.

The request for excusal must be made, in writing, no later than 14 days after the first day of instruction in a particular course and include the date(s) of each proposed absence or request for alternative religious accommodation. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities. The request must also provide the particular accommodation(s) you desire.

You will be notified by me if your request for accommodation is approved, or, if it is approved with modification. I will work with you in an effort to arrange a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement. For more information regarding this Policy you may contact the Student Ombuds (ombuds@kent.edu).

Office Hours and Availability

My primary office hours are on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. However, many other options are available. If you want to meet with me at some other time, or virtually (on Teams), let me know and we can try to arrange it.

Needless to say, I can be reached by email at any time. I will do my best to respond to your emails as quickly as possible. Sometimes I will reply to your message immediately, even at odd hours, like 4am. However, please do not assume that this is always possible. Occasionally, I will not have access to email or will not be able to respond for up to several days. In such cases, please be patient.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and other forms of Academic Dishonesty

Please note that I do not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form. I take a strict stance on this. Be aware that I will dole out *maximum* penalties for violations, including assigning failing grades and pushing for suspension and/or expulsion from Kent State. If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please make it your business to learn about this immediately. Ignorance of university policy will not be accepted as an excuse. University policy 3-01.8 deals specifically with the problem of academic dishonesty. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have questions, please visit <https://www.kent.edu/plagiarism>

Please note that I consider the use of Chat GPT (or anything like it) to be a form of academic dishonesty. Although times may change, at present it is unacceptable in the academic setting. As above, I take a strict stance on this.

Diversity Statement and Statement on Race and Racism

Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

The Kent State University community will continue to work towards opposing all forms of racial discrimination, harassment, intimidation, hatred, belittling, stereotypes, condescension, microaggressions and recognize their legacies which ostracize groups based on race and skin color. We understand that these forms of domination have historically existed within structural and systemic oppressions supported by classism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other markers.

Information for Students with Documented Disabilities

Kent State University is committed to inclusive and accessible education experiences for all students. University Policy requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to course content. Students with disabilities are encouraged to connect with Student Accessibility Services as early as possible to establish accommodations. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on a disability (including mental health, chronic medical conditions, or injuries), please let me know immediately. Here is the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Contact Information:

Location: University Library, Suite 100

Email: sas@kent.edu

Phone: 330-672-3391

Web: www.kent.edu/sas

Registration and Withdrawal

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) and correct any registration errors prior to the deadline.

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 16 and 18: Introduction, no readings

PART I

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett edition)

January 23: Locke, *Essay*, Epistle and Book 1, chapters i-ii, pp. 38-54 in the Hackett edition

January 25: Locke, *Essay*, Book 1, chapter iii, pp. 55-75 in the Hackett edition

January 30: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, chapters i-viii, pp. 76-102 in the Hackett edition

February 1: Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, chapters ix-xii, 103-117 in the Hackett edition

Sunday, February 4: micro 1 due

February 6: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, chapters 13-23

February 8: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 2, chapters 24-33

February 13: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 3, chapters 1-7

February 15: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 3, chapters 8-11

Sunday, February 18: micro 2 due

February 20: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 4, chapters 1-8

February 22: John Locke, *Essay*, Book 4, chapters 9-21

Sunday, February 25: Macro Paper #1

Secondary sources

Carlin, *The Empiricists: A Guide for the Perplexed*, "John Locke" (chapter 6, pp. 78-111)

Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*, "John Locke" (chapter 6, pp. 74-106)

Priest, *The British Empiricists*, "Locke" (chapter 3, pp. 64-115)

Lowe, *The Routledge Guide to Locke's Essay*

Book 1, chapters 1-2

Book 2, chapters 3-6

Book 3, chapter 7

Book 4, chapter 8

Newman, *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's Essay*

Book 1, chapters 1-2

Book 2, chapters 3-7

Book 3, chapters 8-10

Book 4, chapters 11-15

Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*

Book 1, chapter. 23

Book 2, chapters. 21, 22, 39

Book 3, chapter. 26

Book 4, chapter. 27

PART II

George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*

Feb. 27: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, First Dialogue

Feb., 29: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, First Dialogue (continued)

March 5: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, First Dialogue (continued)

March 7: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue

March 12: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue (continued)

March 14: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue (continued)

Sunday, March 17: micro 3 due

March 19: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue

March 21: George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue (continued)

Sunday, March 24 or 31: Macro Paper #2

Secondary Sources

Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*, "George Berkeley" (chapter 7, pp. 107-132)

Carlin, *The Empiricists: A Guide for the Perplexed*, "George Berkeley" (chapter 8, pp. 128-154)

Priest, *The British Empiricists*, "Berkeley" (chapter 3, pp. 116-143)

Garrett, *Berkeley's Three Dialogues: A Readers Guide*

Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, chapters 28-31

SPRING BREAK: No classes on March 26th and 28th

PART III

David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Primary Reading: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

April 2: David Hume, *Enquiry*, section 2

April 4: David Hume, *Enquiry*, sections 3 and 9

April 9: David Hume, *Enquiry*, section 4

April 11: David Hume, *Enquiry*, section 5

Sunday, April 14: micro 4 due

April 16: David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sections 6-8

April 18: David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 10

Sunday, April 21: micro 5 due

Primary Reading: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

April 23: David Hume, *Dialogue 1*

April 25: David Hume, *Dialogue 2*

April 30: David Hume, *Dialogue 2 (continued)*

May 2: David Hume, *Dialogue 3*

Saturday, May 11: Macro Paper #3

Secondary Sources

Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*, “David Hume” (chapter 6, pp. 133-161)

Carlin, *The Empiricists: A Guide for the Perplexed*, “David Hume” (chapter 9, pp. 155-177)

Priest, *The British Empiricists*, “Hume” (chapter 3, pp. 144-182)

Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, chapters 32-36