Philosophy 224: Topics in British Empiricism
Spring Term 2015
Mondays 2-4, Emerson 310

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS
This course is a graduate research seminar in Classic British Empiricism. As such, it presupposes familiarity with the basic texts and ideas of John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume of the sort students get from taking Phil 122 or its equivalent. If you want to take this course but have not taken Phil 122 (or its equivalent) we strongly urge you to audit Phil 122 this semester alongside the seminar. Each week we will read a recent research article. Your job will be to (a) read it carefully; (b) determine its strengths as an interpretation of Locke, Berkeley, or Hume; and (c) determine the main challenges to the interpretation. In order to do that, you will have to work through the relevant primary texts and, often, some of the opposing secondary literature. In class we will discuss the article with the author, who will join us either in person or via Skype.

Although the articles range in topic, we mean to keep our eye on an overarching question throughout the term: What is the relationship between empiricism and skepticism? While Locke was no skeptic, and seems to have had little patience for skeptical worries, he does emphasize the limit of human understanding, and many have charged that his “way of ideas” invites skepticism. Berkeley is routinely treated as a kind of skeptic, despite his insistence that one of the aims of his philosophical project is precisely to combat skepticism. In spite of his idealism, he maintains that he is in fact a defender of commonsense who sides “in all things with the mob.” Hume is regularly portrayed as a skeptic, and he spends much of Treatise Liv apparently developing skeptical arguments. But the take away of Hume’s engagement with skeptical arguments remains hotly contested among early modern scholars and many have seen him as a champion of naturalism rather than skepticism.

The objectives of this course are: (a) to give you familiarity with the current interpretive debates and research in Classic British Empiricism; (b) to give you the opportunity to hone your research skills by engaging in depth with current work in the field, which will require you to engage the primary texts and related secondary literature on your own; (c) to give you the opportunity to become actively involved in conversation with leading scholars on a number of exciting topics in early modern philosophy.
Texts
We will make the weekly articles available on the course website:
http://isites.harvard.edu/k109796.

If you need the primary texts, we recommend the following editions:


If you would like to review of British Empiricism through some helpful if opinionated guides to Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, we recommend the following:


Assignments
1. Weekly Preparations. Each week you will prepare a guide to the article under discussion. Precisely how you organize the guide is up to you (an outline, prose, images, diagrams, musical composition), but it should include the following:
   - capsule summary of the main thesis of the paper
   - clarificatory questions you’d like to ask the author
   - capsule summary of one central argument of the paper
   - a challenge, worry or objection to something in the article’s discussion
   - three to five key passages that you think we should look at in discussing the topic (either ones the author quote/cites or ones you think are important to the topic)

2. Seminar Paper. By the end of the semester you will write a (roughly) 25-page seminar paper, due May 16. It’s hard to sit down in Week 10 and write a paper from scratch, so start looking for a topic immediately. We will ask you to meet with us to discuss your topic and the structure of your paper during the course of the semester. Details will follow.
Course Schedule

January 26: Introduction

February 2: Locke on Sensitive Knowledge

Focus paper

Jennifer Marusic, “Locke’s Simple Account of Sensitive Knowledge” manuscript.

Recommended primary literature:

Essay II.xxx-xxxii; IV.i; IV.iv.1-4; IV.ix; IV.xi. The very ambitious might want to look up the bits of the Stillingfleet correspondence that Jen cites in the paper.

Some related literature:


February 9: Locke on Substance and Mode: Where’s the Self?

NB: MEETS IN BARKER CENTER ROOM #114 (the Kresge Room), 4-6 p.m.

Focus paper


Recommended primary literature:

TBA

Some related literature:


February 16: NO CLASS President’s Day

February 23: Locke’s Nominal and Real Essences: Are there Natural Kinds?

Focus paper

Matthew Stuart, Locke’s Metaphysics, chapter 4 “Essence.”

Some related literature:
Peter Anstey, *John Locke & Natural Philosophy*, chapter 11 “Species.”
Paul Guyer, “Locke’s Philosophy of Language” in *Cambridge Companion to Locke*.

March 2: **Locke’s Mechanical Skepticism and the (non)Science of Body**

*Focus paper*


*Some related literature:*

Peter Anstey, *John Locke and Natural Philosophy*, chapters 7 “Demonstration,” and 8 “Explanation.”

March 9: **Berkeley’s New Theory of Vision**

*Focus paper*


*Recommended primary text*: Berkeley’s *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, and *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (copies available through the course web site)

*Some related literature:*


March 16: **NO CLASS Spring Break**

March 23: **Berkeley on Spirits and Activity**

**Focus paper**


**Some related literature:**


March 30: **Idealism in the First Dialogue**

**Focus paper**

Sam Rickless, Berkeley’s Idealism, Introduction (pp. 1-10), and Chapter 4: The Argument for Idealism in the First Dialogue (pp. 138-188).

**Recommended primary texts:** Berkeley’s Principles 1-15 and the First Dialogue.

**Some related literature:**


Stephen Harris, “Berkeley’s Argument from Perceptual Relativity,” History of Philosophy Quarterly 14) 99-120.
April 6: **Hume's Naturalistic Response to Skepticism: Psychology and Normativity of Belief**

*Focus paper*

**Don Garrett**, “Hume’s Sense of Probability” manuscript.

*Some related literature:*


April 13: **Hume’s Skepticism with Regard to the Senses: Realist, Anti-Realist, or Skeptic?**

*Focus paper*


*Some related literature:*


April 20: **Humean Skepticism in “The Conclusion of this Book”**

*Focus paper*


*Some related literature:*

Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, (you can read selectively).


April 27: **TBA**