

Modern Empiricism

Philosophy 3221, T/Th 11.40-12:55
Rockefeller 132
Office hour: W 1:30-3pm

Andrew Chignell
228 Goldwin Smith
chignell@cornell.edu

Description:

A mid-level look at the epistemology and metaphysics of the early modern empiricists. Topics include: ideas, skepticism, belief, knowledge, science, bodies, minds, God, causation, natural laws, afterlife, and personal identity.

Empiricism, loosely speaking, is the thesis that experience is an essential constraint on substantive thought. We will consider as the course goes on how this loose characterization might be tightened up. What is “experience,” exactly, and in what ways does it constrain thought? Why is the constraint on “substantive” thought only, rather than on thought in general? In what sense is the constraint on thought as a whole, rather than merely on knowledge? What would a viable alternative to empiricism look like?

Although there were empiricists before the early modern period and in other parts of the world (Aristotle, for instance!), we will take as our focus the powerful empiricist movement among English, Scottish, and Irish thinkers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The so-called British Empiricists (a title that includes the Anglo-Irishman, George Berkeley) lived in an era that was characterized by the success of the new experimental sciences and increased religious diversity. Their efforts are geared towards providing a philosophical account of natural science, as well as a framework for ethical, political, and religious agreement (or, at the very least, toleration). In addition to the main epistemological and metaphysical themes, we will also keep an eye on the ramifications that these philosophers think empiricism has for religious doctrine and belief.

Prerequisite:

At least one previous course in philosophy, preferably at the 2000-level (e.g. Ancient Philosophy, Modern Philosophy, or The Rationalists)

Required texts:

I have not ordered books this term, because many copies the required texts are available online from used and new book-dealers, and for less money than they would have been sold for by the Cornell Store or Buffalo St. Books. Please order Locke’s *Essay* as soon as possible, so that we all have it in hand by Week Two. I will assume that you have the editions below and paginate the handouts, etc. accordingly.

1. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Nidditch, ISBN 0198245955

2. George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Oxford University Press; New edition (February, 1998), paperback, ISBN 0198751613
3. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. R.M. Adams, paperback, ISBN: 0915144611
4. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Norton and Norton, paperback: ISBN 0198751729
5. Other readings will be available on the course Blackboard site.

Supplementary sources:

Primary

1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Curley, Hackett Publishing Company, paperback, ISBN: 0872201775
2. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Buckle, Oxford University Press, paperback, ISBN 0521604036
3. Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Brookes, Penn State/Edinburgh Press, paperback: ISBN 0271020717
4. Margaret Atherton (ed.), *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, Hackett Publishing Company, paperback: ISBN 0872202593

Secondary

1. Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume* **Vol. 2** Oxford University Press, Paperback, new edition (November, 2003) ISBN 0199266298

*This is an extremely useful source, and I will often refer to it in lectures. The chapters that are relevant for each of our discussions will be obvious.

2. For a detailed bibliography of the secondary literature on these authors, as well as helpful overview articles, see the *Locke*, *Berkeley*, and *Hume* volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* series.
3. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has good articles on all of our philosophers, as well as one on “Rationalism vs. Empiricism” by Peter Markie (linked from the course website).

4. A more introductory overview of the period is found in Stephen Priest, *The British Empiricists*, paperback, ISBN 0415357241. There are also Routledge Guidebooks to each of our primary source readings.
5. Jonathan Bennett maintains a helpful primary source website at www.earlymoderntexts.com. I recommend against taking the required reading for this course from that source (Bennett freely abridges them, and the pagination will be different), but if you want to look at some of the other works by our authors, there are good editions available there in PDF.
6. Other recommendations for more advanced secondary source readings are available upon request.

Required Work:

→ Readings

Daily assignments of anywhere from 10 to 50 pages. The texts are very complicated and should be read at least twice for full understanding.

→ Three medium-sized papers (7-10 pages).

Topics: One on Locke/Cockburn, one on Berkeley, and one on Hume. Sample paper topics will be distributed, though you are also free to develop your own (feel free to email me your ideas as you have them, or catch me after class).

Format: 1-inch margins all around, 12-point Times New Roman or equivalent.

Style guidelines: On writing a philosophy paper, there is no better guide than that of (Cornell alum) James Pryor. *Please* use it if you haven't written much philosophy before. In grading papers, I will *assume* that you have read Pryor. There's a link to his guide on the course website.

Extensions: Granted, but only for really good reasons (illness requires a physician's note). Please don't ask for an extension without a really good reason; consult the Cornell student handbook for guidelines.

Late papers: Without an extension, one full letter grade lower. No papers accepted more than a week after due date without an extension.

*Exception: graduate students may work on the Hume paper over the winter break, but then it should obviously be longer and more substantive.

Sources: Papers should adhere to some consistent practice of footnoting and citation (Chicago, MLA, Harvard, etc.). I prefer Chicago (most philosophers use this) but don't really mind which one you use as long as you are consistent. In general, you won't be expected to use secondary sources in this course, but if you do, please cite them. If you loosely paraphrase something or take the main gist of a thought from someone else, you need to say that in a note.

Plagiarism: <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/Academic/AIC.html> has details. Statement from the Administration: “Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else’s work as your own. Regardless of your background, you are responsible for not plagiarizing... Plagiarism will be prosecuted; it can affect your permanent record.” We will run the papers for the course through Turnitin.

→ Five quizzes

Each quiz will contain five multiple-choice or short answer questions, and you’ll have 10 minutes to complete it. It will cover the *required* readings and the lectures we’ve had since the last quiz (including the required readings assigned for the day of the quiz), and should be easy if you’ve kept up with the reading. No makeups for quizzes, but I’ll throw out the lowest grade so don’t worry if you miss (or bomb) one of them. Quizzes will be announced one class beforehand.

→ One Presentation (grad students)

Graduate students in the course will be asked to choose a day on which they will begin our discussion with a presentation (circa 15 mins) of some aspect of the philosopher’s view and then raise what they take to be the most important questions.

Section

There will be a recommended undergraduate section for the course that will meet at a time and place to be determined. I strongly encourage you to go to section if at all possible; discussion is key to understanding this material. In certain weeks, the section time may also be used for individual meetings with students about papers.

Grading:

Attendance/Participation/Presentation for grad students: 15%

Papers: 60% (20% each)

Quizzes: 25% (5% each)

Note: this means that **each question on a quiz is worth 1% of your final course grade**. Again, at the end of term, I’ll throw out your lowest grade and count your highest grade twice.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS (subject to change)

WEEK ONE: Hobbes’ empiricist materialism

August 30: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, ch. 1-7

September 1: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, ch. 12

WEEK TWO: Locke takes on Innate Ideas

Sept 6: The Motive for the *Essay*

Book I

Epistle Dedicatory

Epistle to the Reader, pp. 5-10

Ch. i

Ch. ii (esp. 1-9, 15, 23)

Sept 8: Innate Ideas: Speculative, Practical, Theological

Book I

Ch. ii, continued

Ch. iii, 1-10

Ch. iv, 13-20

WEEK THREE: Locke's positive project

Sept 13: Ideas of various sorts

Book II

Ch. i, (esp. 1-9, 22-25)

Ch. ii

Ch. xi, 1-11

Ch. ix

Ch. xii

Ch. xxix-xxxii

Sept 15: Minds and Bodies

Book II

Ch. iii-vii

Ch. x

Ch. xx

WEEK FOUR: Substances and their qualities

Sept 20: Primary and Secondary Qualities

Book II

Ch. viii

Ch. xxiii, 9-12

Ch. xxxi, 1-2, 6

Ch. xxxii, 1-18

Sept 22: Substance and Essence

Book II

Ch. xi, 1-11

Ch. xii, 3-6

Ch. xxiii, 1-8, 13-18, 29-30, 37

Ch. xxiv

Book III

Ch. iii

Ch. vi

WEEK FIVE: Persons and Causes

Sept 27: Identity through time, Personal identity

Book II

Ch. xxvii

Sept 29: Causation, Freedom, Action

Book II

Ch. xxi, 1-34

Ch. xxv, 1-4, 8-9, 11

Ch. xxvi, 1-2, 4-6

WEEK SIX: Knowledge, Faith, and Religion

Oct. 4: Knowledge and Belief

Book IV

Ch. i-iii

Ch. iv, 1-12

Ch. vii, 1-7

~~Oct 6: Rational Religion~~ This reading was dropped

~~Book IV~~

~~Ch. x~~

~~Ch. xviii~~

~~Ch. xix~~

WEEK SEVEN: Intermission

Oct. 11: Fall Break

Oct. 13: Instructor away at conference

WEEK EIGHT: Cockburn and the Remarker

Oct 18: Catherine Trotter Cockburn, selections from her *Vindication* (on BB)
*First Paper due by classtime via Turnitin. Those who come to class may turn it in by 11.59pm without penalty.

Oct 20: Cockburn, continued
Peter Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (on BB)

WEEK NINE: Berkeley's Project

Oct 25: Berkeley, *Principles* I.1-33

Oct 27: Berkeley, *Principles* I.34-100

WEEK TEN: On Seeing with the Mite

Nov 1: Berkeley, *Principles* I.101-156
Recommended: Berkeley, *Principles*, Introduction

Nov 3: Berkeley, *Dialogues*, Dialogue 1

WEEK ELEVEN: The Bishop vs. Lady Shepherd

Nov 8: Berkeley, *Dialogues*, Dialogue 2-3

Nov 10: Lady Mary Shepard, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (selections, available on BB)

WEEK TWELVE: Hume's Empiricism and The Modern Philosophy

Nov 15: Hume, *Treatise*, Introduction
Hume, *Treatise*, I.iv.1-2

Nov. 16, 7-8.30pm: Makeup session, featuring guest speaker (and Berkeley/Hume expert) Georges Dicker

Nov 17: Hume, *Treatise* I.i.1-7

WEEK THIRTEEN: External Existence and Secondary Qualities

Nov 22: Hume, *Treatise*, I.ii.6
Hume, *Treatise*, I.iv.4

*Second paper due by class time via Turnitin. People who come to class may turn in the paper by 11.59pm without penalty.

Nov 24: No class, Thanksgiving

WEEK FOURTEEN: Cause, Identity, Self

Nov 29: Hume, *Treatise*, I.iii.1-6; 14-16

Dec 1: Hume, *Treatise* I.iv.6
Hume, *Treatise*, Appendix

*December 16: Third paper due by 11.59pm via Turnitin