Important Information:

Lecture: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12, Emerson Hall 104  
Professor: Jeffrey McDonough  
Office Hours: 314 Emerson Hall, time TBA  
E-mail: jkmcdon@fas.harvard.edu  
Course Web Page: Through my.harvard, Course iSite

Discussion Sections: TBA  
Teaching Fellow: Colin Chamberlain  
Office hours: TBA  
E-mail: cwchamb@fas.harvard.edu

Recommended Texts (available at the Coop):


Course Description:

The seventeenth century was one of the most exciting and revolutionary periods in the history of philosophy. Among the prominent philosophers working in that period, Locke, Berkeley and Hume have traditionally been grouped together under the label “British Empiricists” in virtue of their rejection of innate ideas and emphasis on experience as a source of knowledge. In this course, in addition to gaining an overview of the development of early modern empiricism, we will try to dig more deeply into a number of central issues, arguments and controversies. Topics will include the theory of ideas, the nature of body, personal identity, idealism, human agency, causation, and induction among others.
Requirements and Grading:

1. **Reading**

   The ability to read texts carefully and thoughtfully is one of the most important skills the study of philosophy can help foster. In order to better understand what is being taught, and to promote informed classroom discussions, required readings should be completed before lecture. Those readings are typically very short, but also very difficult, and students who wish to do well in the course are advised to read the assigned texts several times. They may also wish to read the primary texts listed under “optional reading” in order to further improve comprehension. Readings listed “optional” are not required for the course.

2. **Exams**

   One of the aims of this course is to help students to gain an overview of some central themes in early modern empiricism. To promote that aim, as well as to provide students with an alternative means of being evaluated, three exams will be administered over the course of the term. They are intended to test comprehension of the material covered in required readings, lectures, and discussion sections, and will not require outside reading or research. Furthermore, exams will be primarily non-cumulative and designed to test material in association with the most recently completed unit (although comparison questions – especially where those comparisons have been highlighted in lecture – will be fair game).

3. **Term Paper**

   In order to give students a chance to explore a topic in greater depth, and to improve upon their skills in writing philosophical essays, a term paper has been assigned. Undergraduates should produce a 10-12 page essay, while graduate students should write between 15-25 pages. All students are encouraged to talk with me and their fellow students about their topics, and undergraduates are encouraged to also discuss their papers with the teaching fellow.

4. **Grading**

   Grades for undergraduates will be determined by their performance on their exams, final papers, and participation in discussion sections. Each paper and the exam will count for 25% of a student’s grade. Regular attendance in lecture and discussion section, as well as participation in discussion section, is expected, and grades for most students will not be affected by participation. Exceptionally helpful contributions to discussion, or conversely failure to become productively involved in discussion, may result in the raising or lowering of a student’s final grade by up to a third of a full letter (e.g. from a B+ to an A- or from a B+ to a B). Any student with four or more unexcused absences should expect to receive a failing grade for the course. For graduate students each exam will count for 10% of the final grade, with the term paper counting for the remaining 70%.
5. Graduate Student Section

A graduate student section will meet once a week to discuss the material from class and some selected secondary literature. Further details will be discussed at our first meeting.

6. Special Needs and Emergencies

Students requiring special assistance are encouraged to inform either the professor or teaching fellow. We will do everything we can to help. Absences from class or exam periods, and late papers, will be dealt with in accordance with the policies described in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences handbook. Students should expect that failure to attend an exam without an excuse deemed legitimate by those policies will result in a score of zero for that exam, and under the same circumstances, late papers will be marked down a third of a letter grade for each day that they are late and not in the hands of the person who will be grading it. Requests made to the professor or teaching fellow prior to an absence or due date may result in special accommodation – if something is coming up, let us know ahead of time; we must be fair, but we are here to help you.

Tentative Schedule

Thursday, January 29: Introduction to Early Modern Empiricism
Optional: “The Epistle to the Reader” in Locke’s Essay

--LOCKE--

Note: Unless otherwise indicated the following readings are from Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding; reference will be to book (capital Roman numeral), chapter (lower case Roman numeral), and section (Arabic numeral). So, for example, I.i.1 would denote the first book, the first chapter, the first section of the Essay.

Tuesday, February 3: Locke’s Attack on Innate Knowledge
Required reading: I.ii; I.iii.3-4; I.iv.1-6, 20-22, 25
Optional reading: I.i-iv; From Leibniz’s New Essay concerning Human Understanding I.i and I.iii. (A copy of the Leibniz reading will be posted on the course web site.)

Thursday, February 5: Locke’s Theory of Ideas I (what ideas are)
Required: II.i.1-5, 25; II.ii-iii; II.vi-vii; II.xii.1-7
Optional: II.i.6-24

Tuesday, February 10: Locke’s Theory of Ideas II (what ideas do)
Required: II.ix., II.xi
Optional: II.x; II.xxiii
Thursday, February 12: Philosophy of Body and the Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction
Required: II.viii, II.xxiii.9-12, II.xxi.1-2, IV.ii.11
Optional: II.iv; II.xiii

Tuesday, February 17: Language and Classification
Required: III.iii
Optional: II.xxx-xxxii; III.i-vi; III.ix-x; IV.iv.11-14, IV.vi.4-6

Thursday, February 19: Knowledge and Its Limitations
Required: IV.iii, II.xxiii.15-19, 22-32; IV.x
Optional: Correspondence with Stillingfleet, Note I, reference at IV.iii.6 (pages 696-726 in Woolhouse edition)

Tuesday, February 24: Substance
Required: I.iv.18; II.xii; II.xiii 17-20; II.xxiii; III.iii.6
Optional: Correspondence with Stillingfleet, Note E, reference at II.xxiii.2 - pages 654-659 in Woolhouse edition. (I’ll post a copy of the Stillingfleet on the course web site.)
Graduate: Ayers 1:81-124

Thursday, February 26: Personal Identity
Required: I.iv.3-5; II.xxvii
Optional: Correspondence with Stillingfleet, Note F, reference at II.xxvii.29 - pages 659-684 in Woolhouse edition. (I’ll post a copy of the Stillingfleet on the course web site.)

Tuesday, March 3: LOCKE EXAM IN CLASS

--BERKELEY--

Thursday, March 5: Berkeley’s Attack on Abstract Ideas
Required: Introduction to the Principles
Optional: Principles: 3, 10, 11-13, 97, 98, 100, 116, 125, 143; Locke’s Essay II.xiii.13; III.iii.7

Tuesday March 10: Against Materialism: Principles
Required: Principles 1-24
Optional: Dialogues I and II

Thursday, March 12: Against Materialism: Dialogues
Required: Dialogues I and II
Optional: Principles 1-24

Tuesday, March 17: Sensible Things
Required: Principles 3, 45-48; Dialogues III
Thursday, March 19: Human Agency

Required: Principles 25-28, 137-138; Dialogues 3:236-240; Philosophical Commentaries 107, 461, 499, 548, 699. (I’ll post a copy of the relevant sections of the Commentaries on the course web site.)

Optional: Samuel Johnson Letter 10 September 1729; Berkeley’s Reply 25 November 1729

-- Note: Spring Vacation: March 21 – 29 --

Tuesday, March 31: Human Agency

Required: Principles 25-28, 137-138; Dialogues 3:236-240; Philosophical Commentaries 107, 461, 499, 548, 699. (I’ll post a copy of the relevant sections of the Commentaries on the course web site.)

Optional: Samuel Johnson Letter 10 September 1729; Berkeley’s Reply 25 November 1729

Thursday, April 2: BERKELEY EXAM IN CLASS

--HUME--

Tuesday, April 7: The Study of Human Nature


Optional: Enquiry, Sections 1-3

Thursday, April 9: Hume’s Critique of Induction

Required: Enquiry, Section 4

Optional: Treatise I.iii.

Tuesday, April 14: Hume’s Skeptical Solution?

Required: Enquiry, Sections 5-6

Optional: Treatise I.iii

Thursday April 16: Skepticism with Regard to Reason

Required: Treatise I.iv.1

Optional: Treatise I.iii.16

Tuesday, April 21: Skepticism with Regard to the Senses, first half

Required: Treatise I.iv.2 – paragraphs 1-22

Optional: Treatise I.iv.2 – paragraphs 22 – 57

Thursday, April 23: Skepticism with Regard to the Senses, second half

Required: Treatise I.iv.2 – paragraphs 22 – 57

Optional: Treatise I.iv.3-4
Tuesday, April 28: Personal Identity

*Required: Treatise I.iv.5-6
*Optional: Treatise I.iv.7

Thursday, April 30: HUME EXAM IN CLASS

Final papers are due on Wednesday, May 13 by 5:00 pm