

# Early Modern Philosophy

The Empiricists

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# 1 Course Content

## 1.1 Course Overview

Week	Topic
1	Primary and Secondary Qualities
2	Substance and Reality
3	Causation
4	Personal Identity

In this part of the *Early Modern Philosophy* course, we will look at *empiricist* approaches to philosophy, as exhibited in the works of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. In doing so, we'll be following on from previous thinking about *rationalist* approaches to philosophical problems. We will consider what the major differences between rationalist and empiricist approaches are and consider the merits of empiricist theorising in philosophy. The way that we will set about doing this is by introducing ourselves to the views of one of the major empiricist philosophers through the lens of their views on a particular subject. The work here will build on themes from the *General Philosophy* component of the *Introduction to Philosophy* paper, but there's no presupposition that students will have studied any particular parts of the *General Philosophy* course.

First, we will consider project of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In particular, we will look to find a way into the project through thinking about the issues of *primary* and *secondary* qualities of objects. Locke sought to distinguish between properties such as mass and shape, which are inherent in objects and properties such as colour and texture, which are better understood as the capacities that objects have to produce particular types of sense impressions in observers. In this tutorial, we will look at Locke's views as well as considering competing views on the qualities of objects from Berkeley and Hume.

Having considered each of these approaches, we will turn to consider Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* through considering its major thesis, on the subject of substance and reality. In considering Berkeley's distinctive approach to substance and the nature of reality, we will compare Berkeley's picture with Locke's conception from his *Essay*.

Our next tutorial will consider Hume's *Treatise Concerning Human Nature*. Like the works of Locke and Berkeley respectively, Hume's *Treatise* is an exhibition of a distinctive approach to philosophy. This comes out most clearly in Hume's approach to causation. We will thus use Hume's views on causation to get an overall view on philosophical principles. We will also reflect on how Berkeley conceives of causal power from within a very different framework to Hume.

Lastly, we will consider all three approaches, from Locke, Berkeley and Hume on the questions of personal identity and personal ontology. Doing so will give us a chance to compare all three approaches to philosophy through a single issue. Questions of personal ontology concern what kind of being each of us is and questions of personal identity assess how we persist through time.

## 2 Course Admin

### 2.1 Website

I'll post the materials for these tutorials on my website as we go along. They can be downloaded at:

[www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com](http://www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com) on the right-hand side of the page under the 'Early Modern Philosophy' link.

### 2.2 A Note on the Reading List

The reading for the *Early Modern Philosophy* course works slightly differently to the reading lists for most other courses. There are primary and secondary sources for each of the authors. The primary sources in each case are *indispensable*. If you try and get through the course using only the secondary literature, you won't be doing the course correctly and that's the kind of thing that can come back to hurt you later on. Nonetheless, I've divided the readings into two sets.

Readings marked as required are exactly that – they're readings you just have to do. Some of these are hard, but don't worry, we can discuss anything that you don't understand in tutorials. After this, there are some further readings. These you will want to look at in your own time, possibly after the tutorial (or maybe before) and they will help develop your thinking on these subjects further. For the purposes of the tutorial essay, however, I'd like you to focus particularly carefully on the readings that I've identified as required for the class. This is *not* to say that all of the readings for each week will be relevant to every essay for that week. You'll have to use (and develop) your judgement for working out what is and isn't useful in each case. But it is to say that you should read those required readings particularly carefully because I'll be expecting you to know about them in advance of the tutorial.

# denotes overview reading

† denotes required reading.

\* denotes background reading.

Lastly, don't be shy about asking me if you find any of the readings hard to get hold of. If you can't find any of the readings, I'll either email you a PDF of it or else replace it on the reading list with something that can be found or sent.

## 2.3 Essays and Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour unseen examination, which you will take along with your other Finals examinations. There are, however, weekly essays that must be written before each tutorial. If your other course requirements enable you to claim an exemption from writing essays in any particular week, then you must let me know about this in the week before you come to write the essay (so if you're claiming an exemption from an essay in 7th week, then you must let me know this by the end of the tutorial in 6th week.)

Exemptions aside, you are required to write and submit an essay of around 2,000 words each week. There's a reason for this choice of word-length. You will, of course, be able to say more than 2,000 words on the subject and there's certainly more than that to be meaningfully said, but limiting yourself to around 2,000 words gives me a chance of reading your stuff before the tutorial. Any more than that and it becomes difficult for me. Any less and it becomes difficult for you to write an adequate answer to the question. Essays need to be written and emailed to me (address above) at least 24 hours in advance of the tutorial. I'll read them and comment on them and get them back to you before the tutorial starts. During the tutorial, I won't get you to read out your essay, but you should have it with you, because the material that you've developed will be relevant to the questions that we'll be thinking about and you're warmly encouraged to use the content of your essays in discussion.

## 2.4 Tutorials

In tutorials, we'll be talking about four things:

- (1) The readings that you've been looking at.
- (2) The essay that you've written.
- (3) Anything that you're particularly keen to discuss.
- (4) A set of questions on the subject that I've prepared.

Different tutorials might give different weight to each of (1)-(4) and that's absolutely fine. In some tutorials we might discuss your essay less, or you might have fewer questions occurring to you in other tutorials. If nothing obvious emerges, then we'll work through a set of pre-prepared questions that I'll have put together on the topic of the tutorial. I'll give you a copy of these at the end of the tutorial and at the end of the course, I'll make a copy of the course outline with all of the questions available. But I won't tell you what the questions will be in advance. The reason is that you will ultimately be assessed by an unseen examination and this will test your understanding and your ability to think on your feet. One of the best ways to prepare for this is to confront questions that you haven't previously seen and think your way through them, with some support, advice and guidance. That's what having an unseen question sheet in tutorials simulates. After

the tutorials, you can use the questions to structure your own revision, if you wish. The questions won't be a comprehensive list of everything that might come up and they won't all be essay questions. Some will simply test your understanding. But working your way through them would be a good way to start your revision when the time comes.

## 2.5 Doing Philosophy

During your time doing philosophical work, you'll want to read things that aren't on the reading lists. And it's really important that what you read is good quality. It's very easy to waste a lot of time and energy in philosophy reading stuff that just isn't helpful. If you read stuff from poor sources, you're liable to wind up confused or misinformed. You want to be reading things that are written by people who have, at the very least, more philosophical experience than you. In the case of several sources, though, there's no filtering or checking to make sure that this is the case. Obviously, the reading lists provided by the faculty are a great place to look. But even they don't contain *everything*. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for you to get you started. As always, do get in touch and ask me if you find yourself in any doubt at all.

Some good places to start your reading are:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu> is an excellent resource. It gives you an overview of some of the topics that we'll be working on and also comes with a useful bibliography, all of which is of an appropriate quality for you to be using.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> is another excellent online philosophy encyclopedia. Like the Stanford Encyclopedia, its entries are reviewed before they are published and also have useful suggestions for further reading.

Philpapers at <http://www.philpapers.org> is an online collection of philosophy articles that can be searched by category. There are some excellent articles on here and the site is a useful way of finding things to read. This site requires some caution, though. Unlike the above two, anyone can add their papers, regardless of whether or not they have actually been published in journals, or are ever going to be! As a rule of thumb, if you can't see publication details for a paper on this site, then proceed with caution. This notwithstanding, it is an excellent and important source.

Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.co.uk/> is a relatively recent research tool and one that's extremely useful. The best thing that you can use Google Scholar for is finding papers that are relevant to what you've been reading. If you run a search for a paper that you've just read, Google Scholar will help throw up any papers that have cited the paper you searched for. This is extremely useful for helping you figure out where to go next. As with PhilPapers, however, there's no quality filter, so if you are in any doubt about what you've found (as with any of the above resources) feel free to ask me first. Lastly, note that this *is* an acceptable use of Google's resources, where searching for philosophers or themes and then reading what you find absolutely is *not*. Likewise, stay off looking for things on Wikipedia.

## 2.6 Preliminary Reading

As background for the course, revisiting any of the material from the *General Philosophy* course would be useful preparation. In addition, you will obviously want to have a look at the primary sources for each of the philosophers that we'll be looking at. Our thematic approach means that we won't primarily be focusing on getting an overall picture on what any particular philosopher thinks, so you'll want to fill in the gaps in their thinking for yourself. We'll have some chance to piece this stuff together, but we won't be primarily focusing on this. The relevant primary texts are the following:

John Locke (1689) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Indiana: Hackett.

George Berkeley (1710) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Indiana: Hackett.

David Hume (1738) *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Aside from these, the following gives you a fairly easy-to-digest overview of the empiricist movement:

John Shand (1993) *Philosophy and Philosophers: An Introduction* London: UCL Press. Chapter 5.



## 3 Tutorial 1 – Primary and Secondary Qualities

Our study of empiricism will begin with the issue of primary and secondary qualities. Our principal focus will be on Locke's attempt to distinguish between an object's primary and secondary qualities. In this tutorial, we will seek to do three things. Firstly, we will seek to understand what Locke's distinction amounts to. Secondly, we will consider the viability of this distinction, particularly in the light of Berkeley's objection and counterargument that all qualities are secondary qualities. And lastly, we will seek to understand the context of Locke's distinction, both in terms of its relationship to theories of qualities given by Berkeley and Hume and in terms of its place in Locke's overall project.

### 3.1 Readings

- # J.R. Milton (2005) 'John Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*' in John Shand (ed.), *Central Works of Philosophy: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* London: Acumen Chapter 5.
- † John Locke (1689) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Indiana: Hackett Book II Chapter 8.
- † George Berkeley (1710) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Indiana: Hackett Sections 8-15.
- † David Hume (1738) *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature* Oxford: Oxford University Press Book I Part 4 Section 4.
- \* Michael Jacovides (2007) 'Locke's Distinctions Between Primary and Secondary Qualities' in Lex Newman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding'* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 4.
- \* J.L. Mackie (1976) *Problems from Locke* Oxford: Oxford University Press Chapter 1.
- \* Barry Stroud (1980) 'Berkeley vs. Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities' *Philosophy* 55 (212):149-166.
- \* Michael Ayers (2011) 'Primary and Secondary Qualities in Locke's *Essay*' in Lawrence Nolan (ed.), *Primary and Secondary Qualities: The Historical and Ongoing Debate* Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 136-157.

- \* Alan Nelson and David Landy (2011) 'Qualities and Simple Ideas: Hume and his Debt to Berkeley' in Lawrence Nolan (ed.), *Primary and Secondary Qualities: The Historical and Ongoing Debate* Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 216-238.

*Questions: Does Locke succeed in identifying a distinction between primary and secondary qualities?*

### 3.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is Locke's stated purpose at the outset of the *Essay*?
- (2) What are the main themes contained within the *Essay*?
- (3) On what grounds does Locke object to the thesis that there might be such things as *innate ideas*?
- (4) How does Locke distinguish between *sensation* and *reflection*?
- (5) How are *simple* ideas related to *complex* ideas, according to Locke's thesis?
- (6) Do you perceive any tension between the official definition of primary qualities that Locke gives and the examples that he uses to illustrate it?
- (7) How does Locke distinguish between primary and secondary qualities?
- (8) If secondary qualities are not real and colours such as green are secondary qualities, does this mean that something cannot be green?
- (9) Is there a meaningful distinction to be drawn between primary and secondary qualities?
- (10) Assuming that such a distinction can be drawn, does Locke put the distinction in the right place?
- (11) What might the ultimate constituents of reality be like?
- (12) How does Berkeley's objection to Locke based on abstracting away primary qualities go?
- (13) Might there be some sort of analogy between the idea of shared properties in the case of ideas and objects?
- (14) What are *structural isomorphisms* and what might they have to do with the relationship between objects and ideas?
- (15) Could we distinguish between primary and secondary qualities using the sensory modalities to which they are available in each case?
- (16) What does Hume think about primary and secondary qualities?

## 4 Tutorial 2 – Substance and Essence

In this tutorial, we will turn our attention to Berkeley's philosophy. Berkeley's philosophy is most famous for its commitment to *immaterialism*, the doctrine that there are no material objects and all that exists are ideas and mental objects. We will examine Berkeley's immaterialism by looking at the argument that Berkeley gives for immaterialism and its central role in Berkeley's overall philosophical worldview. With this in hand, we will compare Berkeley's position with Locke's account of substance, which appeals to a notion of a *substratum*. We will think carefully about how the competing approaches compare against one another.

- # Tom Stoneham (2005) 'George Berkeley: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*' in John Shand (ed.), *Central Works of Philosophy: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* London: Acumen Chapter 6.
- † George Berkeley (1710) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Indiana: Hackett Sections 1-24.
- † George Berkeley (1713) *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* Indiana: Hackett Dialogue 1.
- † John Locke (1689) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Indiana: Hackett Book I: ch. 4, sec. 18; Book II: ch. 12, sec. 6; ch. 13, sec.19; ch. 23; ch. 30, sec. 5; ch. 31, secs. 3-11; Book III: ch.3; ch.6; ch.9, secs.11-16; Book IV: ch. 3, sec. 9-16; ch.6, secs. 6-15; ch. 16, sec.12.
- \* A.C. Grayling (2005) 'Berkeley's Argument for Immaterialism' in Kenneth P. Winkler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 6.
- \* Kenneth P. Winkler (1989) *Berkeley: An Interpretation* Oxford: Clarendon Press Chapter 6.
- \* P.J.E. Kail (2014) *Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 4.
- \* Margaret Atherton (2014) 'Essences, Real and Nominal' in S.J. Savonius-Wroth (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Locke* London: Bloomsbury Publishing pp. 143-144.
- \* Michael Ayers (2014) 'Substance' in (ed.), in S.J. Savonius-Wroth (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Locke* London: Bloomsbury Publishing pp. 218-223.

*Question: Does Berkeley succeed in arguing for immaterialism?*

## 4.1 Study Questions

- (1) What are the two problems Berkeley sets out to address and how do they fit into the context of other thinkers associated with the Early Modern Philosophy paper?
- (2) What is the difference between *immaterialism* and *idealism* and how does each relate to Berkeley's project?
- (3) How does Berkeley's conception of ideas relate to Locke's?
- (4) In what sense does Berkeley believe that ideas cannot exist *without* a mind?
- (5) How does Berkeley argue for the existence of God?
- (6) Is Berkeley's claim that ideas are inert plausible?
- (7) Do minds have any causal power on Berkeley's view?
- (8) What is the *receptivity assumption* and how does it relate to Berkeley's metaphysics?
- (9) Can Berkeley's theory distinguish between perceptual experiences and imagined experiences?
- (10) Is there also a problem of how my actions can be free if my perceptions of them are involuntary, for Berkeley?
- (11) Can Berkeley distinguish between sense-perceptions and illusions?
- (12) How does Berkeley's "Master Argument" go?
- (13) In what ways might this argument be challenged?
- (14) What is an essence?
- (15) Why is Berkeley of Locke's claim that objects have essences?

## 5 Tutorial 3 – Causation

In this tutorial, we will think about issues concerning causation. Rather than trying to give a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for statements of causation, we will instead be thinking about the metaphysical status of causation. Our focus in this tutorial will be on Hume. There is a wide discussion of Hume's thinking on causation, but we will be interested primarily in attempting to figure out whether we should interpret Hume's thinking about causation in terms of realism, projectivism, or regularity. We will also consider the place of Hume's thinking about causation in his philosophical outlook more broadly and its relationship to Berkeley's observations about causation.

### 5.1 Readings

- # P.J.E. Kail (2005) 'David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*' in John Shand (ed.), *Central Works of Philosophy: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* London: Acumen Chapter 7.
- † David Hume (1738) *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature* Oxford: Oxford University Press Book I Part 3.
- † George Berkeley (1710) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Indiana: Hackett Sections 25-29.
- \* Don Garrett (2015) 'Hume's Theory of Causation: Inference, Judgement, and the Causal Sense' in Donald C. Ainslie and Annemarie Butler (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume's Treatise* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 4.
- \* Kenneth P. Winkler (1985) 'Berkeley on Volition, Power, and the Complexity of Causation' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1):53-69.
- \* Francis Watanabe Daver (2011) 'Hume on the Relation of Cause and Effect' in Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (ed.), *A Companion to Hume* London: Blackwell Chapter 5.
- \* Kenneth Clatterbaugh (2009) 'The Early Moderns' in Helen Beebe, Peter Menzies and Christopher Hitchcock (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Causation* Oxford: Oxford University Press Chapter 3.
- \* Kenneth P. Winkler (1989) *Berkeley: An Interpretation* Oxford: Clarendon Press Chapter 5.

*Question: What is Hume's theory of causation and is it successful?*

## 5.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is Hume's project in the *Treatise of Human Nature*?
- (2) How does Hume's *Copy Principle* relate to his empiricism more generally?
- (3) What does the Copy Principle have to do with Hume's investigation of causation?
- (4) On what basis does Hume think we ascribe necessary connection between two different types of events?
- (5) Why does Hume think that necessity, connexion and other ideas such as power and force are simple ideas?
- (6) Is necessary connexion an essential component of our conception of a cause?
- (7) How does repetition help us develop an idea of power or necessary connexion?
- (8) Does Hume need necessary connexion to be an impression in order to satisfy the copy principle?
- (9) In what sense does Hume say causation is in the mind, not in objects?
- (10) Is it correct to say that one object being connected to another is to say something about the way that we think rather than about the world?
- (11) How does Hume respond to the idea that his theory is just mad and it's clear that causes operate independently of the mind?
- (12) Is Hume a sceptic about causation?
- (13) What are Hume's two definitions?
- (14) What do New Humeans believe about Hume's theory of causation?
- (15) Why might we doubt the correctness of a New Humean interpretation?
- (16) Why does Hume give two definitions of causation?

## 6 Tutorial 4 – Personal Identity

### 6.1 Readings

- † John Locke (1689) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Indiana: Hackett Book II Chapter 27.
- † David Hume (1738) *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature* Oxford: Oxford University Press Book I Part 4 Sections 4-5 and Appendix.
- \* Donald C. Ainslie (2011) ‘Hume on Personal Identity’ in Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (ed.), *A Companion to Hume* London: Blackwell Chapter 8.
- \* Galen Strawson (2011) *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* Princeton: Princeton University Press Chapter 3.
- \* Annemarie Butler (2015) ‘The Problem of Believing in Yourself: Hume’s Doubts About Personal Identity’ in Donald C. Ainslie and Annemarie Butler (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume’s Treatise* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 7.
- \* Harold Noonan (1989) *Personal Identity* London: Routledge Chapter 2.
- \* Harold Noonan (1989) *Personal Identity* London: Routledge Chapter 3.
- \* Harold Noonan (1989) *Personal Identity* London: Routledge Chapter 4.
- \* K. Joanna S. Forstrom (2010) *John Locke and Personal Identity: Immortality and Bodily Resurrection in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* London: Continuum Chapter 6.

*Question: Can we learn anything about personal identity from considering the writings of Locke and Hume?*

## 6.2 Study Questions

- (1) What themes motivate Locke's discussion of personal identity?
- (2) What is Locke's *Principle of Individuation*?
- (3) Does Locke say that people are substances?
- (4) What does Locke think the identity of an organism such as an oak depends on?
- (5) Why does Locke want to show that the same organism can consist of various different substances at various different times?
- (6) What does Locke think makes for sameness of person?
- (7) How does Locke define a person?
- (8) Why does Locke think that sameness of consciousness is what makes for sameness of person?
- (9) What does Locke mean by the claim that "person" is a forensic term?
- (10) How does Locke seek to accommodate the idea that we shouldn't punish a mad/sane person for what they did when they were not mad/sane?
- (11) Is Locke's claim that personal identity is a *necessary* condition for moral responsibility defensible?
- (12) What motivates Hume's account of the self and personal identity?
- (13) How does Hume's account differ from Locke's?
- (14) Is Hume's scepticism about the self pragmatically viable?
- (15) Should we regard Hume's methodological approach to personal identity as fundamentally similar to, or different to, Locke's?
- (16) Why does Hume think that it is difficult for there to be an impression of self?



## 7 Revision Reading

Below are some ideas to get you started on your revision for this course. Three good works for this kind of thing to help get you started rethinking about these issues are the following:

Jonathan Bennett (1971) *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Jonathan Bennett (2001) *Learning from Six Philosophers, Volume 2* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

R.S. Woolhouse (1988) *The Empiricists* Oxford: Opus.

Since we've been mainly looking at things thematically, it would be good to get a more general feel for what's going on in the individual projects of each of the thinkers that we've been looking at during the course. With that in mind, here are some suggestions for works that might help you to get a feel for the individual projects of each of the philosophers and formulate their ideas into a coherent whole:

### 7.1 Locke

E.J. Lowe (1995) *The Routledge Guide to Locke on Human Understanding* London: Routledge.

### 7.2 Berkeley

P.J.E. Kail (2014) *Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge: An Introduction* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### 7.3 Hume

Saul Traiger (2005) *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise* London: Blackwell.