

Early Modern Philosophy

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1 Course Content

1.1 Course Overview

Week	Topic
1	The Cartesian Circle
2	Cartesian Dualism
3	Leibniz's Theory of Necessary and Contingent Truths
4	Leibniz and Locke on Innate Knowledge
5	Locke and Berkeley on Primary and Secondary Qualities
6	Berkeley's Immaterialism
7	Hume's Theory of Causation
8	Locke, Hume and Reid on Personal Identity

In the *Early Modern Philosophy* course, we will be looking at a combination of themes in philosophy during the early modern period as well as some of the most significant figures that were thinking and writing about philosophy at that time. The early modern philosophers can be divided into two main traditions. There are the *rationalists* who, in some sense, were reasonably optimistic about what we can come to know and figure out without relying on input from our senses and there are the *empiricists* who, to keep things simple, were altogether more pessimistic in this regard. The rationalists that we'll consider will be Descartes and Leibniz. On the empiricist side, we'll look at Locke, Berkeley and Hume. We'll look at some of the key differences in rationalist and empiricist approaches in tutorial 4, where we come to compare Leibniz and Locke on the subject of innate knowledge.

We will begin our study of the early modern philosophers by considering Descartes' *Meditations*. In the first two tutorials, we will have a look at the project that Descartes seeks to undertake and his general strategy for achieving it. We will consider the epistemological project in the first tutorial and in the second we will look at the controversial doctrine of *substance dualism* and Descartes' arguments for it.

Having done this, we will turn to consider Leibniz's general views in the third tutorial. Whilst our focus will be on theory of the difference between necessary and contingent truths, we will be looking at this as a component part of Leibniz's more general philosophy. The distinction between necessary and contingent truths will bring us into contact with Leibniz's controversial theory of truth more generally as well as his theory of freedom and the existence of God.

Our fourth tutorial will illustrate the distinction between rationalist and empiricist approaches to philosophy most sharply. We will be considering the question of whether or not individuals have any innate ideas or knowledge. Leibniz, a rationalist, was attracted to the idea that we do. Locke, an empiricist, was suspicious of the idea. In the tutorial, we will consider Locke's attack on innate ideas, Leibniz's case for innate knowledge and think about questions such as where the

burden of proof lies in these disagreements.

In tutorial 5, we will consider two empiricist approaches. We will consider Locke's distinction between primary and secondary qualities in the light of objections to it from a fellow empiricist, in the form of Berkeley. We will consider what the distinction, as Locke sought to draw it, amounts to, whether or not it is viable in this form and whether or not there is a viable distinction between primary and secondary qualities to be drawn at all, in any form.

Next, we will turn to consider a famous thesis from Berkeley. According to Berkeley, there is no mind-independent reality. Where Locke acknowledged a distinction between the appearances that are the direct objects of our perceptions and the external world itself, Berkeley sought to allow no such distinction. According to Berkeley, there is nothing to reality over and above that which we directly perceive and furthermore, what we directly perceive is a mind-dependent construct. We will have a look at different ways of understanding Berkeley's claim.

The final philosopher that we will look at will be Hume. In tutorial 7, we will investigate Hume's approach to causation. As well as considering Hume's general approach to causation, we will have a think about how it relates to some of the more general themes in Hume's empiricism and his approach to philosophy in general. Hume's theory of causation is one that has been extremely influential and we will assess its overall viability as well as the arguments that Hume makes for it.

Lastly, we will consider the theme of personal identity. We will look at three distinct approaches to personal identity from philosophers in the early modern tradition. We will examine Locke's psychological approach and the objections to it from Reid (an early modern figure whom we won't have looked at extensively). We will compare this approach from Locke to the sceptical approach to personal identity that can be derived from Hume's general empiricist methodological principles.

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 on the right-hand side of the page under the 'Early Modern Philosophy' link.

2.2 A Note on the Reading List

One of the awkward things about the *Early Modern Philosophy* course is that there's a division between primary and secondary sources. In tutorials, we'll focus on the secondary literature. Unfortunately, this isn't because the primary readings are dispensable. To really get into the details of the course, you'll need to read the primary texts associated with the tutorials that you're eventually planning on working on for the exam. But the idea is that you should be in a position to make an educated guess about which areas you'd most like to read the primary source material for, having done the tutorials looking at the secondary literature.

Readings for tutorials marked as required are exactly that – they're readings that you just have to do before the tutorial. You'll need these to write your essay from. Sometimes they're a bit hard, but that's ok. Anything that you don't understand, we can discuss in tutorials. After this there are some further readings. These are things you'll want to look at in your own time, possibly after tutorials (or maybe before, if you think the topic has been an interesting one) and they will help you to develop your thinking about the subjects further. For the purposes of the tutorial essay, though, I'd like you to focus your energies mainly on the required readings. This is *not* to say that all of the readings will be directly and obviously connected to the essay question. The readings won't carry you all the way in writing your essays, either – you will have to actually *think* about things. 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.

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 this course, you will obviously want to have done the reading associated with the vacation work sheet for this course. In addition to that, revisiting any of the material from *General Philosophy* would be helpful.

3 Tutorial 1 – The Cartesian Circle

In the *Meditations*, Descartes sought to establish beyond doubt the veracity of his beliefs about the external world. In doing so, he appealed to the idea that there existed a God who would ensure that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceived was true. In support of the idea that such a God existed, Descartes appealed to a clear and distinct perception of such a God. This has the appearance of being circular. In this tutorial, we will look at various attempts at showing that Descartes' reasoning didn't in fact exhibit a fundamental and problematic circularity. Understanding whether or not we should think that Descartes' argumentation was in fact circular, of course, naturally involves having a closer look at what the project that gave rise to this apparently circular reasoning was supposed to be.

3.1 Readings

3.1.1 Required Readings

- James Van Cleve (1979). Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle. *Philosophical Review* Vol. 88, No. 1, pp. 55-91.
- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume I* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 355-373.
- Bernard Williams (2005). *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* London: Routledge, pp. 170-198.

3.1.2 Further Readings

- Louis E. Loeb (2008). 'The Cartesian Circle' in John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 200-235.
- Anthony Kenny (1970). The Cartesian Circle and the Eternal Truths. *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 67, No. 19, pp. 685-700.
- Christopher Peacocke (2012). Descartes Defended. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* Vol. 86, No. 1, pp. 109-125.

3.2 Essay Question

Did Descartes argue in a circle?

4 Tutorial 2 – Cartesian Dualism

According to Descartes, the physical reality of extended objects doesn't exhaust all that there is. There is also another realm of non-physical *thinking* things. We will look at two of the arguments that Descartes gives for substance dualism. The first is the *epistemological* argument, which seeks to establish the distinction between the physical and the non-physical based on what can be conceived of in the right way. The second is the *divisibility* argument, which appeals to the idea of the non-physical being indivisible in ways that the physical is not. In this tutorial, we will investigate these two arguments.

4.1 Readings

4.1.1 Required Readings

- Marleen Rozemond (2011) 'Descartes' Dualism' in Janet Broughton and John Carriero (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Descartes* London: Blackwell Publishing pp. 372-389.
- John Cottingham (2008). 'Cartesian Dualism: Theology, Metaphysics, and Science' in John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 236-257.
- Margaret D. Wilson (1976). The Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness. *Nous* Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 3-15.

4.1.2 Further Readings

- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume I* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 66-83.
- Bernard Williams (2005). *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* London: Routledge, pp. 87-114.
- Alan Nelson (2014) 'Descartes' Dualism and its relation to Spinoza's Metaphysics' in David Cunning (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 277-298

4.2 Essay Question

Is the Cartesian case for dualism successful?

5 Tutorial 3 – Leibniz’s Theory of Necessary and Contingent Truths

In this tutorial, we’ll think about a few connected themes in Leibniz’s metaphysics. First and foremost, we’ll be looking at the distinction that Leibniz seeks to draw between necessary and contingent truths. We’ll focus our attention around two related questions. The first is whether or not the theory that Leibniz offers is an adequate one in that it gives a viable account of the difference between necessary and contingent truths. The second concerns whether or not the theory is one that’s adequate for Leibniz’s purposes. In doing so, we’ll think about what Leibniz was hoping to achieve with the distinction between necessary and contingent truths and whether or not it matches up to those purposes. We’ll also look at where Leibniz’s account of modality comes from in terms of the more general theory of truth that underpins it.

5.1 Readings

5.1.1 Required Readings

- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume I* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 312-334.
- Robert M. Adams (1994). *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 9-52.
- Bertrand Russell (1937). *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* London: Routledge, pp. 9-28.

5.1.2 Further Readings

- Benson Mates (1988). *The Philosophy of Leibniz* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 84-121.
- Martin Linn (2012). Rationalism and Necessitarianism. *Nous* Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 418-448.
- Nicholas Jolley (2005). *Leibniz* London: Routledge, pp. 125-154.

5.2 Essay Question

Is Leibniz’s distinction between necessary and contingent truths adequate for the purposes to which he wanted to put it?

6 Tutorial 4 – Leibniz and Locke on Innate Knowledge

This tutorial provides a bridge between the half of the course focused on the rationalists and the part of the course focused on the empiricists. We will consider the differing attitudes to the possibility of innate ideas from Leibniz and Locke. The question of whether or not some ideas are (in some sense) innate marks out the main difference between rationalist and empiricist approaches. We will examine Leibniz's account of innate modal knowledge and Locke's rejection of innate knowledge.

6.1 Readings

6.1.1 Required Readings

- Nicholas Jolley (2005). *Leibniz* London: Routledge, pp. 103-118.
- J.L. Mackie (1976). *Problems from Locke* Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 204-226.
- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume II* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 34-58.

6.1.2 Further Readings

- Samuel Rickless (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, pp. 33-66.
- Bertrand Russell (1937). *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* London: Routledge, pp. 89-102.
- Martha Bolton (1990). 'Leibniz and Locke on the Knowledge of Necessary Truths' in J.A. Cover and Mark Kulstad (eds.), *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy* London: Hackett, pp. 195-226.

6.2 Essay Question

Critically compare the views of Locke and Leibniz on innate ideas.

7 Tutorial 5 – Locke and Berkeley on Primary and Secondary Qualities

Our study of empiricism will begin with primary and secondary qualities. We will examine Locke's attempt to distinguish between an object's primary and secondary qualities, both in terms of what the distinction amounts to and its place in Locke's overall project. We will then evaluate the arguments that Berkeley made against the distinction.

7.1 Readings

7.1.1 Required Readings

- Barry Stroud (1980). Berkeley vs. Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities. *Philosophy* Vol. 55, No. 212, pp. 149-166.
- J.L. Mackie (1976). *Problems from Locke* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 7-36.
- 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, pp. 115-136.

7.1.2 Further Readings

- 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, pp. 101-129.
- Jonathan Bennett (1971). *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 89-123.
- 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.

7.2 Essay Question

Does Locke succeed in identifying a plausible distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

8 Tutorial 6 – Berkeley’s Immaterialism

In this tutorial, we will turn our attention to Berkeley’s famous immaterialist philosophy. We will situate Berkeley’s immaterialism in his broader philosophical outlook before looking more closely at two components of Berkeley’s case for immaterialism. Berkeley’s immaterialism is built on the foundations of his rejection of materialism. We will investigate both Berkeley’s arguments against materialism as well as his argument for immaterialism.

8.1 Readings

8.1.1 Required Readings

- 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, pp. 137-166.
- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume II* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 124-145.
- Peter Kail (2014). *Berkeley’s ‘A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge’* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 54-69.

8.1.2 Further Readings

- Bill Brewer (2011). *Perception and its Objects* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 15-32.
- Samuel Rickless (2013). *Berkeley’s Argument for Idealism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 91-137.
- Andre Gallois (1974). Berkeley’s Master Argument *Philosophical Review* Vol. 83, No. 1, pp. 55-69.

8.2 Essay Question

Does Berkeley make a convincing case for immaterialism?

9 Tutorial 7 – Hume on Causation

The last major work that we will consider is Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, in which Hume outlines a grand philosophical theory. We will identify the basic principles behind Hume's approach to philosophy, before coming to consider his discussion of causation. In approaching Hume's theory of causation, as with Berkeley's immaterialism, we will consider both the negative case against other views of causation as well as Hume's own positive case.

9.1 Readings

9.1.1 Required Readings

- Peter Kail (2005). 'David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*' in John Shand (ed.), *Central Works of Philosophy: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* London: Acumen pp. 167-192.
- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume II* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 245- 267.
- Barry Stroud (1977). *Hume* London: Routledge, pp. 68-95.

9.1.2 Recommended Readings

- John Wright (2009). *Hume's 'A Treatise of Human Nature'* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 79-128.
- Don Garrett (2015). *Hume* London: Routledge, pp. 172-212.
- Helen Beebe (2006). *Hume on Causation* London: Routledge, pp. 108-141.

9.2 Essay Question

What is Hume's positive theory of causation? Does Hume argue for it adequately?

10 Tutorial 8 – Locke, Hume and Reid on Personal Identity

10.1 Readings

10.1.1 Required Readings

- Harold Noonan (1989). *Personal Identity* London: Routledge, pp. 24-46.
- Barry Stroud (1977). *Hume* London: Routledge, pp. 118-140.
- James van Cleve (2015). *Problems from Reid* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 239-262.

10.1.2 Required Readings

- Dan Robinson and Tom Beauchamp (1978). Personal Identity: Reid's Answer to Hume. *The Monist* Vol. 61, No. 2, pp. 326-339.
- 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, pp. 165-187.
- Galen Strawson (2011). *Locke on Personal Identity: Consciousness and Concernment* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp. 5-22.

10.2 Essay Question

Critically compare the views of Locke, Hume and Reid on personal identity.