

101 Early Modern Philosophy

Sample Reading List

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1 Tutorial Structure

We will have eight 1-hour tutorials, one tutorial per week. For each tutorial, you will be expected to produce an essay on the topic question for that week.

The details for the tutorials and essays are as follows:

Tutorial Time and Location: TBA

Word Limit: 1500-2000 words. Please double-space.

Deadline: Each essay is due 24 hours before the tutorial is scheduled.

Email: luke.davies@philosophy.ox.ac.uk. Please send your papers in .doc format.

These tutorials will cover the following topics:

Week 1. Descartes: God

Week 2. Descartes: the Cartesian Circle

Week 3. Descartes: dualism

Week 4. Locke and Leibniz: innate ideas

Week 5. Locke and Berkeley: abstract ideas

Week 6. Locke: personal identity

Week 7. Hume: the copy principle and the ‘distinction betwixt feeling and thinking’

Week 8. Hume: causation

2 Course Overview

The current description of this paper in undergraduate Course Handbooks is as follows:

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to gain a critical understanding of some of the metaphysical and epistemological ideas of some of the most important philosophers of the early modern period, between the 1630s to the 1780s.

This period saw a great flowering of philosophy in Europe. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, often collectively referred to as “the rationalists”, placed the new “corpuscularian” science within grand metaphysical systems which certified our God-given capacity to reason our way to the laws of nature (as well as to many other, often astonishing conclusions about the world). Locke wrote in a

different, empiricist tradition. He argued that, since our concepts all ultimately derive from experience, our knowledge is necessarily limited. Berkeley and Hume developed this empiricism in the direction of a kind of idealism, according to which the world studied by science is in some sense mind-dependent and mind-constructed.

The examination paper is divided into two sections and students are required to answer at least one question from Section A (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz) and at least one from Section B (Locke, Berkeley, Hume). **NB: previously this paper was known as “History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant” and further allowed study of Kant (who remains available within paper 112).**

Here is the relevant extract from the University’s official Examination Regulations:

Candidates will be expected to show critical appreciation of the main philosophical ideas of the period. The subject will be studied in connection with the following texts: Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*; Spinoza, *Ethics*; Leibniz, *Monadology, Discourse on Metaphysics*; Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*; Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*. The paper will consist of three sections; Section A will include questions about Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz; Section B will include questions about Locke, Berkeley and Hume. Candidates will be required to answer three questions, with at least one question from Section A and at least one question from Section B.

The topics we will cover have been selected in the light of the above, and examination questions over the last five years. It is worth looking at past papers, to have a sense of the kinds of questions that have been asked. It is also important to read the examiners’ reports for the ethics paper and to look at the faculty reading list. Past papers, examiners’ reports, and the faculty reading list are all available on WebLearn.

3 Reading List and Essay Questions

This reading list begins with some general introductory readings, including some excellent online resources. For each week, there is both primary and secondary material assigned. It is important to read all of the primary material, and a much of the secondary material as time permits. For each topic, it may be worth reading the primary texts first, then going through some of the secondary literature, then returning to the primary texts.

Remember that doing good philosophy is hard, and takes time. Time management will thus be very important.

This reading list is not exhaustive, neither in terms of the readings for each topic nor the list of topics for the paper. Consequently, students are encouraged to seek further readings. For example, one should look at the bibliographies in the readings below. Nevertheless, **it is certainly not expected that a student will have covered all the suggested reading**

for a particular topic for a weekly essay. At the bottom of this document, there are some helpful links for writing a good philosophy essay.

If you have questions or comments concerning this reading list, please send them to me.

Introductions

Shand (ed.), *Central Works in Philosophy*, vol. 2

Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*

Cottingham, *The Rationalists*

Online resources

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

[Philosophy Compass](#)

[Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy](#)

Note that Wikipedia is unlikely to be an excellent online resource.

Descartes

The set texts for Descartes are *Meditations on First Philosophy* and *The Objections and Replies*.

These appear in Volume Two of: CSM: Descartes, René, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (eds.). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

Week 1 - Descartes: God

Question: Choose one of Descartes' arguments for the existence of God. Explain and evaluate it.

a. Cosmological Argument

Descartes:

- Preface to the Reader (CSM II, 6-8),
- Synopsis of Third Meditation (CSM II, 10-11 & SPW 74-75),
- Third Meditation (CSM II, 24-36 & SPW 86-98),
- Principles of Philosophy Pt. I, secs. 17-21 (CSM I, 198-200 & SPW, 165-67),
- Objections and Replies on Meditation Three (SPW, 131-33).

Secondary Literature:

- Cottingham. 1986. *Descartes*, 47-57.

- Dicker. 1993. *Descartes: an analytical and historical introduction*, 83-119.
- Wilson, C. 2003. *Descartes's Meditations: An Introduction*, chs. 4-5.
- Hatfield. 2003. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations*, 141-169.
- Wilson, M. 1978. *Descartes*, ch. 3.

b. Ontological Argument

Descartes:

- Fifth Meditation (CSM II, 44-49 & SPW 105-10)
- Third Meditation (CSM II, 25 par.3-27 end of par.3 & SPW 89 par.2- 90 end of par.1),
- Discourse on the Method IV (CSM I, 129 & SPW 38),
- Principles of Philosophy Pt. I, secs. 14-16 (CSM I, 197-98 & SPW, 164-65),
- Objections and Replies on Meditation Five — fifth objections (SPW 135-36),
- First Set of Objections and First Set of Replies (CSM II, 69 2nd new par.-72; 81-85).

Secondary Literature:

- Cottingham. 1986. *Descartes*, 57-64.
- Wilson, C. 2003. *Descartes's Meditations: An Introduction*, ch 8.
- Hatfield. 2003. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations*, 203-223.
- Wilson, M. 1978. *Descartes*, ch. 5.

Week 2 - Descartes: the Cartesian circle

Question: Is Descartes guilty of the charge that his reasoning is problematically circular?

Descartes:

- Third Meditation (CSM II, 24-36 esp. 24-25 & SPW 86-98 esp. 86-88),
- Fifth Meditation (CSM II, 44-49 esp. 47-49 & SPW 105-10 esp. 108-10),
- Objections and Replies on the Cartesian circle (SPW 139-43).

Secondary Literature:

- Cottingham. 1986. *Descartes*, 64-73.
- Dicker. 1993. *Descartes: an analytical and historical introduction*, 119-141.
- Wilson, C. 2003. *Descartes's Meditations: An Introduction*, chs. 4-5.
- Hatfield. 2003. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations*, 141-149, 169-180, and 223-234.
- Broughton. 2002. *Descartes's Method of Doubt*, 175-186.

Week 3 - Descartes: Dualism

Question: How does Descartes try to establish that there is a real distinction between mind and body and how successful is he? Does the distinction leave Descartes with a position that is vulnerable to insoluble problems?

Descartes:

- Preface to the Reader (CSM II, 6-8),
- Synopses of Second and Sixth Meditations (CSM II, 9-10, 11 & SPW 73, 74, 75),
- Second Meditation (CSM II, 16-23 esp. 16-19 & SPW 80-86 esp. 80-83) and Sixth Meditation (CSM II, & SPW 110-22),
- Principles of Philosophy Pt. I, secs. 51-54 & 60-63 (CSM I, 210-11 & 213-215 & SPW, 177-178 & 180-182),
- Discourse on the Method IV (CSM I, 27 & SPW 36),
- Objections and Replies on Meditation Six (SPW 143-50),
- Selections from Correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia in *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* ed. by Margaret Atherton (Hackett, 1994), 9-21.

Secondary Literature:

- Rodriguez-Pereyra. 2008. "Descartes Substance Dualism and his Independence Conception of Substance" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.
- Cottingham. 1986. *Descartes*, ch. 5.
- Hatfield. 2003. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and the Meditations*, ch 8.
- Wilson, M. 1978. *Descartes*, 177-201.
- Rozemond. 2011. "Descartes' Dualism", in J. Broughton and J. Peter Carriero (eds.). *A Companion to Descartes*.
- Yandell. 1997. "What Descartes Really Told Elisabeth: Mind-body Union as a Primitive Notion", in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*.

Locke

The set text for Locke is the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, the standard edition of which is:

Locke, John, and P. H. Nidditch (ed.). *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.

References to Locke's Essay take the form:

ECHU, Book no., Chapter no., and, where relevant, Section no

Week 4 - Locke and Leibniz: innate ideas

Question: What does it mean to claim that there are innate principles in the mind? Why and how does Locke attack this claim and how successful is he?

Locke:

- ECHU: Book I, esp. chs. 2 and 4.

Leibniz:

- *New Essays on Human Understanding*, second ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. Book 1, chs. 1 & 3

Secondary Literature:

- Jolley. 1984. *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the "New Essays on Human Understanding"*, ch. 9.
- Rickless. 2007. "Locke's Polemic Against Nativism", in Newman (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding*.
- De Rosa. 2004. "Locke's "Essay, Book I": The Question-Begging Status of the Anti-Nativist Arguments", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.
- Mackie. 1976. *Problems from Locke*, ch. 7.
- Brandt Bolton. 1990. "Leibniz and Locke on the Knowledge of Necessary Truths", in Cover and Kulstad (eds.) *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy: Essays Presented to Jonathan Bennett*.

Week 5 - Locke and Berkeley: abstract ideas

Question: Does Berkeley deliver a 'killing blow' to Locke's account of abstract ideas?

Locke:

- ECHU: Book II: ch. 1, secs.1-5; chs. 2-3; chs. 5-7; ch. 11, secs. 1-9; ch. 12, secs. 1-2; ch. 29, secs. 13-16. Book III: chs. 1-3. Book IV: ch. 7, sec. 9.

Berkeley:

- Berkeley, George, Samuel Johnson, and Jonathan Dancy (ed.). *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Introduction.

Secondary Literature:

- Jolley. 1984. *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the "New Essays on Human Understanding"*, 49-54.
- Chappell. 1994. "Locke's Theory of Ideas" in her (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*.

- Lowe. 1995. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Locke on Human Understanding*, 154-165.
- Kail, P. J. E., and George Berkeley. *Berkeley's A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge: An Introduction*, ch. 3.
- Winkler. 1989. *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, ch. 2.

Week 6 - Locke: personal identity

Question: According to Locke's account of our ideas of persons, are you the same person that you were when you were born? How important is the answer from Locke's perspective?

Locke:

- ECHU: Book II: ch. 27.

Butler:

- "Of Personal Identity", in Perry (ed.) *Personal Identity*. 2nd ed.

Reid:

- "Mr Locke on Personal Identity", in Perry (ed.) *Personal Identity*. 2nd ed.

Secondary Literature:

- Jolley. 1984. *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the "New Essays on Human Understanding"*, ch. 6.
- Weinberg. 2011. "Locke on Personal Identity", in *Philosophy Compass*.
- Winkler. 1998. "Locke on Personal Identity", in Chappell (ed.) *Locke*.
- Garrett. 2003. "Locke on Personal Identity, Consciousness, and "Fatal Errors"", in *Philosophical Topics*.
- Boeker. 2017. "Locke on Personal Identity: A Response to the Problems of His Predecessors" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Hume

The set text for Hume is THN: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I. Either of the following two editions is adequate:

- 1) Hume, David, David Fate Norton and Mary Norton (eds.). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (or alternative edition).
- 2) Hume, David, P. H. Nidditch, and L. A. Selby-Bigge (ed.). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 2nd Ed. / with Text Revised and Variant Readings by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

Week 7 - Hume: the copy principle and the ‘distinction betwixt feeling and thinking’

Questions: How are we to understand Hume’s ‘first principle of human nature’? —OR— Can Hume draw a distinction betwixt ‘betwixt feeling and thinking’? Why is he so casual about it?

Hume:

- THN: Book I, Part 1 (especially sec. 1)

Secondary Literature:

- Garrett. 1997. *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy*, ch. 2.
- Buckle. 2001. *Hume’s Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Part II, section II.
- Noonan. 1999. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Knowledge*, ch. 2.
- Coventry. 2007. *Hume: A Guide for the Perplexed*, ch. 2.

Week 8 - Hume: causation

Question: Does Hume think that causal power is all in the mind?

Hume:

- THN: Book I, Part 3 (especially sec. 14)

Secondary Literature:

- Beebe. 2006. *Hume on Causation*, chs. 5-7.
- Garrett. 2015. “Hume’s Theory of Causation: Inference, Judgment and the Causal Sense”, in Ainslie (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hume’s Treatise*.
- Millican. 2009. “Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science” in *Mind*.
- Strawson. 2014. *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, chs. 1-3.
- Kail. 2014. “Hume on Efficient Causation”, in Schmaltz (ed.) *Efficient Causation: A History*.
- Coventry. 2007. *Hume: A Guide for the Perplexed*, chs. 6-7.

4 Tips for Good Philosophy Essays

The best advice I have seen on how to write good philosophy essays is Jim Pryor’s (<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>). I highly recommend studying this guide, as well as returning to it frequently to refresh your memory.