Reason and Experience: Seventeenth Century Philosophy

PHIL10150

Semester 2, 2016-17

Location and times: Appleton Tower, Rm 2.14, Fridays, 12.10-14.00

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Course aims and objectives: The aim of this course is to introduce students to the philosophies of some of the central figures in seventeenth century thought (Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley) as they strove to resolve key metaphysical issues (e.g. about the nature of reality, the identity of persons and things, causation, the nature of perception, and relations between with mind and the body) through a combination of logical reasoning and empirical observation and as they attempted to address the epistemological issue of the extent to which human reason and experience was capable of addressing these metaphysical issues. The main objective of the course is to give students a solid understanding of the philosophical questions that concerned seventeenth century thinkers, an understanding of the complexities of the debates, and of their continuing philosophical relevance today.

Assessment: One 1500 word midterm essay (40%) and final examination (60%). Deadline for midterm essay: Thursday 2nd March 2017 by 12noon

Seminar Content

1. Overview of rationalism and empiricism

Reading

(This session will also include training in use of the Past Masters database)
2. Scepticism about sense experience and the validation of reason: Descartes

**Reading: primary texts**
Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, Meditations 1-3, Fourth and Fifth Sets of Objections and Replies

**Reading: secondary texts**

**Further optional secondary texts**
M. Williams, "Descartes and the Metaphysics of Doubt". In Cottingham, ed., *Descartes*

3. Rejection of innate principles and the validation of experience: Locke

**Reading: primary texts**

**Reading: secondary text**
J. Jenkins, *Understanding Locke*

4. Innatism and individual substances: Leibniz

**Reading: primary text**
Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sections 8-16

**Reading: secondary text**
R. S. Woolhouse, "The Nature of an Individual Substance", in M. Hooker, ed. *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, pp. 45-64

**Further optional secondary text**

5. Mechanism: Descartes and Locke on body, the primary-secondary quality distinction, and representative perception

**Reading: primary texts**
Descartes, *Meditations* 2 and 6; Locke, Essay Book 2, chapters 1-8
Reading: secondary texts
A. D. Smith, ‘Of Primary and Secondary Qualities’, *Philosophical Review*, 99 (1990), 221-252
P. Alexander, ‘Locke and Boyle on Primary and Secondary Qualities’, in Tipton, ed., *Locke on Human Understanding*

6. Dynamics: Leibniz: activity, force, perception and motion

Reading: primary texts
Leibniz: *New System on the nature and communication of substances*, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sections 16-22; *On Nature Itself; A Specimen of Dynamics*, part one

Reading: secondary texts
P. Phemister, ‘Leibniz and the Elements of Compound Bodies’ in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (1999), 57-78

Further optional secondary texts

7. Language, Nominalism and real essences: Locke and Leibniz

Reading: primary texts
Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* (same sections as for Locke’s Essay)

Reading: secondary texts

Further optional secondary texts

8. Mitigated scepticism: Locke on our knowledge of God, morals and the external world

Reading: primary text
Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book 3, chapter 11, Book 4
9. Berkeley’s’ Esse est percipi’ doctrine and the rejection of primary-secondary quality distinction

Reading: primary text
Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge, Introduction

Reading: secondary text

10. Berkeley’s refutation of scepticism and atheism

Reading: primary text
Berkeley: Three Dialogues, Dialogues 1-3

Reading: secondary text

Further optional secondary text

11. Overview and Revision

Reading List
Primary sources: required
Leibniz, Philosophical Essays, tr. and ed. by Dan Garber and Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989) . Available on the Past Masters database
Berkeley, Principles of Human Knowledge / Three Dialogues, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (Penguin). Berkeley’s Principles and Dialogues are also available in the Collected Works of Berkeley on the Past Masters database

Secondary literature: recommended monographs


**Secondary literature: recommended collections of essays**


### Additional secondary literature


### Additional secondary literature: more advanced


Clarke, Desmond M., *Descartes’s Theory of Mind* (Oxford University Press)


