

Philosophy 4I4/5I4
British Empiricism
T & Th 3:30-4:45
Location: LAI-304
Autumn Semester '09

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Office Hours: T&TH,
II:30 AM–I2:30 PM

FURLOUGH STATEMENT

As many of you know, the State of California has dramatically and suddenly cut funding for all 23 of the California State Universities, including the Long Beach campus. In response, and out of severe necessity, the CSU has raised student rates and cut classes, admissions, and faculty positions. In addition, the remaining faculty at CSU has voted to accept salary reductions in the form of 18 furlough days for this academic year in hopes of avoiding further cuts. A *furlough* is an unpaid leave of absence from work. This means that all faculty will stay home on about 10% of the work days in the coming academic year. On three specific days this semester, all faculty and staff will furlough together, so the entire campus will be shut down (except for essential services). All faculty must choose another six days to be on furlough. Here are my designated furlough dates this semester (these will vary from instructor to instructor), along with the campus-wide closure dates:

F Aug 28	=	faculty furlough day
W Sept 4	=	faculty furlough day
T Sept 8	=	furlough day; all campus closed
Th Oct I	=	faculty furlough day
F Oct 9	=	furlough day; all campus closed
T Nov 24	=	faculty furlough day
W Dec 2	=	faculty furlough day
Th Dec IO	=	faculty furlough day

NOTE: I am not permitted to be available for teaching, advising, email, office hours, or any other work duties on these dates.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Western philosophy as we now know it probes characteristic questions about the nature of knowledge, of reality, of value, and of political authority. But why did European thinkers come to pose *these* questions in particular, and what intellectual concerns shaped their most enduring answers? Many of these questions have roots in the early modern period—the 17th and 18th centuries. The rise of modern science helped push Europeans to rethink the place of human beings in the wider universe. We will begin by discovering specific epistemological and metaphysical questions that arise from scientific work of the era, especially in the writing of Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton. We will spend most of the semester analyzing responses from the

key representatives of the British *empiricist tradition* in early modern philosophy—John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume. The empiricists emphasized the importance of experiment and perceptual experience (rather than rational speculation) in the search for knowledge. They also tended to be suspicious of abstract concepts. Some of the specific issues we will explore include primary and secondary qualities of objects; the nature of ideas; personal identity; the nature (and our knowledge) of space, time, and extension; visual and tactile perception; abstract ideas; and the problem of induction.

COURSE GOALS

Upon completion of this course, diligent students should find that they

- can demonstrate a detailed comprehension of British empiricism—of both its intellectual background and its philosophical foundations.
- can show an improved ability to comprehend and critically analyze philosophical texts.
- can show an improved ability to write essays in the history of philosophy.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Michael Matthews. 1989. *The Scientific Background to Modern Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
2. John Locke. 1690/1997. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Penguin.
3. George Berkeley. 1843/2001. *Works, Vol. I*. Boston: Elibron.
4. David Hume. 1739/2000. *Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

GRADING

Undergraduates

Grades will be based on one 5-6 page paper (worth 30%), one 8-page, final paper (worth 35%), several reading assignments (25% together), class participation (10%), and a plagiarism quiz that you must ace (0%).#

Graduates

Grades will be based on one term paper of approximately 15-20 pages (35%), two required presentations (30% together), several reading assignments to be due in class (25% together), class participation (10%), and a plagiarism quiz that you must ace (0%).#

You cannot pass this class without taking an online plagiarism quiz and scoring 100%. You may take the quiz as many times as you'd like. You must take and ace the quiz before you can submit your first written assignment.

TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

Essays

This is a class in the history of philosophy. On one hand, essays in the history of philosophy have to be good *history*. That is to say that historical scholarship has a serious empirical component; we are trying to understand, on the basis of their literary remains, the intellectual intentions of real people who lived a long time ago.

But on the other hand, essays in the history of philosophy have to be good *philosophy*. It is not enough simply to say new, true things about the dead people we're studying. The new, true things we're trying to say also should have some independent philosophical interest.

Striking an appropriate balance between these two concerns—historical accuracy and philosophical interest—can be a delicate matter. So one goal of this class is to help you cultivate your skills at the two-pronged task of writing the history of philosophy.

Reading Assignments

Reading assignments will be short—around 1 page (certainly no longer than 2 pages). These exercises are meant to give you a kind of sandbox for experimenting with the history of philosophy. The assignments will typically be distributed (online) after class on a Thursday and will be due the following Monday on Turnitin.com (more on this below). The assignments will call your attention to some particular passage in the day's reading. Your task will be to reconstruct and critically analyze the philosophical argument in that passage. There is no need to write an introduction or conclusion. These will be graded on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being highest. By far the most common grade will be a 3.

Presentations [Graduate Students Only]

Throughout the semester, graduate students must give two presentations on secondary articles concerning the primary material we are reading in class. Graduate students must find appropriate and relevant articles themselves; in all cases, they must OK the articles with me before preparing a presentation.

Presentations should be 10 minutes in length, and not a minute longer. I will be savage in keeping you to your time limit! The idea is to force you to pick only the most important aspects of the article to discuss.

Spend the first half of your presentation outlining the author's argument for the central conclusion he or she wishes to establish. Remember that most others in the class will not have read the article you are presenting—so you must take responsibility for *teaching* the rest of us about the main claims of the article.

Spend the second half of your presentation developing a critical analysis of the text. This may mean a discussion of the text's significance, especially in light of other readings from the semester; or you may offer a critical evaluation of the author's argument.

Finally, we'll keep you on the "hot seat" with about five minutes of questions about your presentation.

Attendance/Participation Grade

I've got attendance and participation responsibilities in this class, and so do you.

It's my responsibility to show up to every class prepared to talk about the day's reading. It's also my responsibility to help you understand the reading assignments each week. This means helping you understand what, exactly, the philosophers we're reading are saying. And it means helping you understand a thing or two about the historical context in which the assigned essay or book excerpt was written. Finally, it's my responsibility to try to say something *interesting* about the reading material. I can't guarantee that you'll find everything I say riveting—but since boredom is an obstacle to learning, I will try to keep class discussion as engaging as possible.

You share three responsibilities with me. Like me, you must show up to every class session. Like me, you also must show up *prepared* (in your case, this means that you've read the assigned article with care). And like me—this is the important part—you also must show up to every class ready to say something engaging and interesting about the reading material. Think of class like a well-choreographed talk show. If either the host or interviewee shows up without preparing some questions and points for discussion, the conversation is going to be painfully boring.

At the end of the semester, I'll assign attendance/participation grades on the basis of your contributions to our weekly discussions.

Plagiarism Quiz

I will hand out the answer sheet to a mandatory quiz early in the semester. The quiz itself can be found online: <https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/item1.html>. You can take the online quiz as many times as you'd like—the website will correct your answers immediately. You must hand in a signed answer sheet with 100% correct answers in order to pass this class. The quiz will be due before the first written assignment.

Beachboard

This class requires the use of Beachboard. I will distribute the syllabus and many assignments simply by posting them online. I will also post your grades to Beachboard, and send the occasional group email to all enrolled students. All written assignments should be turned in via the appropriate dropbox in Beachboard.

NOTE: the dropbox automatically sends your paper to turnitin.com, which checks your writing for plagiarism by comparing what you wrote with everything available online, as well as with turnitin.com's database of old student essays.

Withdrawal

I follow the University's current withdrawal policy, which can be found at:

http://www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/catalog/2009-2010/academic_information/withdrawal_policy.html

Attendance

Students are permitted a maximum of three unexcused absences during the semester. I will take attendance each class. You must attend the entire class session in order to count as *present* on any given day.

How to Submit Assignments in Case of an Excused Absence

With the exception of the plagiarism quiz, all written assignments are to be submitted digitally, outside of class. So even in the event of an excused absence, you should still be able to submit your written work with everybody else. In the case of an excused absence in the class where the plagiarism quiz is due, you may submit your answers to me by email, provided you later hand in a signed hard copy.

Disability

I am happy to accommodate any special requirements you may have in connection with a University-documented disability. It is your responsibility to notify me in advance if you need any such accommodation. I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible.

Plagiarism

My penalty for any and all plagiarism is an F for the final course grade. I give no second chances. I will not permit you to rewrite the paper or assignment. I will simply fail you.

To be sure that everybody knows what constitutes plagiarism, you are required to complete a plagiarism quiz before the first written paper is due. See above for details.

Why do I care so much about plagiarism? The grades you have when you graduate, the honors or distinctions that may go along with those grades, and the

letters you get from your professors on the basis of your performance in their courses, are all you will have to show prospective employers or graduate schools that you are qualified to be employed or admitted. Plagiarism is a way of cheating in this process, pure and simple.

The founding idea of the modern university system is precisely that opportunity should be correlated with performance. In fact, the idea that social opportunities like jobs and education should be commensurate with actual performance, not with one's family or fraternity connections, money, or whatever, is also among the founding ideals of our entire American democracy. Since plagiarism is an affront to this idea of a meritocracy, and thus to founding ideals of our nation, I simply will not tolerate it.

Unfortunately the rise of the internet has ushered in a new era of plagiarism. Perhaps plagiarism seems less serious these days because it is so easy to cut, paste, and paraphrase. Whatever its source, the new wave of plagiarism has forced many professors to institute no-tolerance policies, and I am certainly part of that trend. So please—do not get mixed up in a plagiarism case. You will fail the course with no second chance.

LATE PENALTIES

Unless other arrangements are made in advance, written work will be penalized by a fraction of a letter grade per each day late. For example, an otherwise B+ paper submitted after the deadline and before 24 hours has lapsed will be given a grade of B; the same paper submitted during the next 24-hour period will be given a B-, and so on.

EMAIL POLICY

Because of the state budget cuts, I no longer have a phone in my office. So if you need to contact me, please use email. I try to respond to student email within 1 business day of receiving a message. If you do not hear back from me within that period, feel free to give me a gentle e-nudge. Please do use your university email account for all communication.

I'll probably suggest that we meet during office hours if you raise a substantive question over email. If you email and ask for information that is readily available online, please do not be offended if I respond with a very brief message. That helps free me up to deal with more pressing issues related to the class.

Finally, please do not send me email attachments unless we have arranged something in advance.

I am a new faculty member here, so this course is a work in progress. As such, I reserve the right to change any regulations during the semester, though I will try to reach a consensus with the class should the need arise to make any significant alterations.