

## Eighteenth-century Philosophy PHIL 361; 2024

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Office hours: 10-11 TTh

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to important texts and issues of eighteenth-century philosophy. We will take as our theme the influence on philosophy of Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*.

The importance for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy of recent developments in science are reflected in, for example, Locke's Epistle to the Reader in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he describes "the incomparable Mr. Newton" as one of the "master builders" of the commonwealth of learning and satisfies himself with the task of an "underlabourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish, that lies in the way to knowledge". Hume describes his *Treatise of Human Nature* as "an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects". Locke and Hume here reflect two aspects of the influence on philosophy, one concerning the *role* and *content* of philosophy, the other concerning its *method*. These are just two of the underlying themes of this course.

The course will begin with a brief consideration of Newton, with an emphasis on the *method* of experimental philosophy; we will read selections from his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. We will then consider a number of philosophical issues arising out of the *Principles*—ranging from questions about the nature of space to the use of hypotheses, the issue of free will and God's intervention in the universe—as they are discussed in the Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, du Châtelet's *Institutions de physiques*, and selections from Berkeley's *De Motu*. We will then look at the philosophical underpinnings of Berkeley's critique as they are put forward in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*. Finally, we will consider Hume's application of the "experimental method of reasoning" to a new "science of human nature" in his *Treatise of Human Nature*.

**Texts:** *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* and Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* are available at The Word bookstore on Milton Street. Additional readings will be available on MyCourses.

### Requirements:

500-word paper	15%
In-class midterm exam	20%
1000-word paper w/peer review	35%
Final exam	30%

Papers submitted late without advance permission will be penalised half a letter grade per day.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and/or Student Accessibility and Achievement.

McGill University is on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.