Phil 180b: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume

Who, When, and Where
Professor Jennifer S. Marusic
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 12:10-1:00
Location TBD

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday 2-3 pm and by appointment

Course Description
Locke, Berkeley and Hume are the three most important British Empiricists, a group of philosophers who held that our experience constrains what we can know about and even what we can think meaningfully about. Epistemic empiricism is the view that all knowledge depends in some way on experience. Semantic empiricism is the view that the content of our thoughts and what we can think about depends in some way on experience. The aim of this class is twofold. First, we’ll consider in what sense Locke, Berkeley and Hume are empiricists. Are they both semantic and epistemic empiricists? Do they all hold the same sort of empiricism? Second, we’ll consider whether and how their empiricism shapes their other metaphysical and epistemological commitments.

Although Locke, Berkeley and Hume are all empiricists, their philosophical views are surprisingly diverse. Locke is a common-sense realist, who thinks that his philosophy provides a metaphysical and epistemological foundation for contemporaneous science, especially the mechanical science of Boyle and Newton. Berkeley is an idealist, who claims that the very ideas of matter and material substance are incoherent and the only things that exist are ideas and minds. Hume is both a skeptic, holding that almost all of our beliefs about the world are unjustified, and a naturalist, offering naturalistic explanations of very general features of human nature. The question we will be concerned with is: How does the commitment to empiricism lead these three figures to such different worldviews?

Topics to be covered include the origin and nature of ideas, the possibility of having abstract ideas, the primary-secondary quality distinction, real and nominal essences, the nature of material substance, the reasons for our belief that there are material substances, idealism, skepticism about induction, causation, and the nature of belief.
Requirements
Students will be required to write three 5-6 page papers, one on each figure studied in the class. Each paper will be worth 25% of the final grade. You will choose one of these papers to revise and resubmit at the end of the semester. This revision will be worth 25% of the final grade and will evaluated for improvement from the original version and overall quality.

Grading
Late assignments will be deducted one third of a grade (e.g. from a B to a B-) for each day they are late. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late. If you need an extension on an assignment, whether because you have work due in other classes on the same day or for personal reasons, please ask me. I am willing to grant short extensions, provided you ask for them at least a full day in advance. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time because of an unexpected illness, please let me know as soon as possible.

Attendance and participation are required. You should come to class prepared, having done the readings in advance. You should bring the texts with you to class!

Readings
There are three required texts and two optional texts.
The required texts are:
   Berkeley, George. Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous.

The optional texts are:

We will read excerpts from the optional texts; these excerpts will be posted on LATTE.

Laptops and Cell Phones in Class
You may use a laptop to take notes during class, if you wish. However, please do not use your laptop to surf the net, answer e-mail, or do any work not directly related to the lecture during class. If I catch you using your laptop inappropriately, it will seriously affect your participation grade and I will ask you not to use a laptop in class anymore.

Absolutely no cell phones or text messaging during class!
Academic Integrity at Brandeis
Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section Three of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure of the course or on the assignment, or in suspension or dismissal from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course or about how to properly cite the sources you've used, it is your responsibility to ask for help. If you have questions about academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me, refer to the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, or contact the office of Student Development and Conduct.