Kant and his Predecessors
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2 CEU credits/4 ECTS credits
Winter Term 2022.

The course is mandatory for year 2 PPE students who choose Philosophy as one of their primary subjects. It is an elective for the rest of the PPE students.

The aim of this module is to deepen and broaden students’ understanding of philosophy and both to present philosophical ideas in their historical context, and show their contemporary relevance. The aim of this course is to acquire knowledge of the central issues and arguments of the 18th century philosophers, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. The unifying theme will be the relation of all three to idealism, that is, to the idea that our world is essentially mental. We also cover, in the course of this discussion, issues of nominalism, theories of causation and induction, skepticism and personal identity.

Learning outcomes: By the end of the course students will be able to read historical texts and interpret and evaluate their philosophical content, and appreciate their contemporary relevance.

Learning activities/teaching methods. The first class of the week will be a lecture, though one interrupted by questions and challenges. The second one will be more devoted to discussion. Students should submit questions to the e-learning site before the second meeting. It is essential to study the set readings carefully. There will be three short writing assignments over the course of the term and a final examination.

The texts we will be reading from are;
Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge; Three Dialogues*. These are available on the web, and in many paperback versions. If you want to anticipate my views, Oxford World Classics version will help.
Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. Also on the web.
Week by week breakdown. (All readings will be posted on the e-learning site.)

Week 1: Berkeley on ‘abstract ideas’. General reflections on nominalism and particularism.
Reading: introduction to Berkeley’s *Principles*, 17 pages.


Week 3: Looking more deeply into idealism. Berkeley’s ‘master argument’ at *Principles* 23 (1 page). Problems with the concept of matter.

Week 4: The role of the self, God and ‘notions’. *Third Dialogue*, 40 pages.


Week 7: Hume on personal identity. *Treatise, Bk 1, Pt 4, sect 6*, 8 pages.

Week 8: Hume on skepticism with regard to the senses: our construction of the physical world. *Treatise, Bk 1, Pt 4 sect. 2*, 19 pages.

Week 9: Kant’s objective and his conception of metaphysics.

Week 10: Kant and our ignorance of the nature of objects in themselves. How different is he from later empiricists?

Week 11: The role of the categories verses Hume’s ‘tendencies of the mind’.

For Kant, read the *Prologomena* carefully. The issues tend to be spread throughout. More specific reading will be put on moodle later.

Assignments: Students are required to submit questions for discussion every week, before the second meeting. Satisfaction of this requirement, and general contributions in class count for 10% of the grade. Every two weeks,
from weeks 4 – 10, students will have to submit short written answers – 500 words or less – to questions about the readings and discussion. This will count for 40% of the course grade. The remaining 50% of the grade will be determined by an exam, given in the final week of the class.