

Topics in Modern Philosophy: Mary Shepherd's Philosophy of Perception

Professor: Marina Folescu

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Class time: Thurs, 3:30 pm to 5:50 pm

Office Hours: by appointment

Office: Strickland Hall 434

Course Description

This seminar is dedicated to doing some close reading of one of Mary Shepherd's books: *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe and Other Subjects connected with the Doctrine of Causation* (1827). Mary Shepherd (1777-1847) belongs to the Scottish School of Philosophy, rounding up many topics Hume, Berkeley, Reid, and others brought to the fore. She is an astute critic of Hume's theory of causation and one of the first proponents of simultaneous causation, where causes are thought to be simultaneous with their (direct) effects. The focus of this seminar will be her views regarding the existence of an external world, which constitute a response to skepticism. On the way to addressing them, we will also be looking directly at the views she criticizes, thus allowing us to explore the tenets of the British Empiricists (Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Reid) in more detail.

Required Work

I would like each student taking this course for a letter grade to turn in (a) a one-to-two page discussion notes on the weekly readings (due every week on Tuesday) and (b) a term paper on a topic of your choice. Each student will make presentations throughout the semester, based on their weekly responses (we will have at least one such a presentation each week).

Methodology

For the term paper, I would like to see you engaging directly with the themes discussed in this class. There are different ways of doing history of philosophy: one can focus on the history bit, or one can focus on the philosophy bit. Ideally, the papers offer a balanced approach: they do justice to the history, while also taking care to advance issues on the philosophy front. This should be no different from a regular philosophy paper: providing the right amount of context is always key to addressing a philosophical puzzle well.

Required Book

Shepherd, M. (1827). *EPEU – Essays on the Perception of an External Universe and Other Subjects connected with the Doctrine of Causation*.

Other Readings

Links to other readings, both by historical figures and contemporary philosophers, will be provided, as required.