

Phil 410: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy

Hellenistic Philosophy

Prof. Jeremy Reid

1. Course and Contact Information

Meeting times: M W 12:30–1:45pm

Location: Humanities 217

Email: jwreid@sfsu.edu

Office hours: By appointment, in Humanities 360

Course Format: In-person lectures & discussion

2. Course Description

This course serves to provide students with a thorough introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy, the philosophical period after Aristotle into the Roman Imperial period where the main philosophical players in town were the Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics.

We will focus on the heated debates between these schools in ethics, epistemology, and psychology. We will consider a wide range of answers to some of the biggest philosophical questions, including: What is happiness? What is the relationship between pleasure and happiness? What is the relationship between being a good person and being happy? Which emotions contribute to happiness and which undermine it? Are there some emotions we should seek to remove from our lives entirely? What are the foundations of knowledge? Do we all perceive the world in the same way? Can we know anything at all? Do we actually need to know anything in order to be happy?

For this course, we will read Epicurus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Sextus Empiricus, and a sizable chunk of Cicero, along with some scholarship by contemporary philosophers on these issues.

3. Expectations

- You should plan to attend every lecture and be on time. Lectures are the main place to learn course material and to ask questions about it. You cannot do well in this course without coming to lectures. I know SF public transit is a pain, but in life you are expected to show up at the specified start times.
- You should do the readings before class. Trust me, you *really* need to do the readings for this class. If you need help working out how best to read these texts, I would be more than happy to share some strategies with you. Just as you should not expect to do well in an upper-level calculus course without doing any

exercises, you should not expect to do well in a philosophy course without doing the readings. Similarly, if there's a math problem you didn't get right and you don't know why, you will need to talk with your prof and others in the class; so too, if there's a passage of text you don't understand, you need to talk with your profs and others in the class. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise.

- I will not be posting PowerPoints or lecture notes so you will need to take your own notes in class, or pay close attention to what is being said. If you are confused or want to talk more about the class material, arrange a time to meet with me to talk more. I won't have time to meet with everybody who misses class to go over the material again, so class attendance is very important.
- There will be no use of electronics in my classroom unless you require an exemption. Even having a phone on the desk will be distracting for you and those around you—put it away.
- If you're aiming to get an A for this course, you should come to talk with me in office hours to prep for the exams, outline your papers, and (ideally) send me a draft. Notice this means not doing work at the last minute.
- Thinking critically and rational disagreement are the bread and butter of philosophy, so I encourage you to challenge the positions that come up in class. But a central tenet of ancient philosophizing is an awareness of your own cognitive limits and the desire to learn from others. Be respectful of the texts, be respectful of your teachers, and be respectful of others in the class.

4. Assessment

Syllabus and referencing quiz	5%	Fri Feb 3
Paper 1	25%	Fri Mar 3
Paper 2	30%	Fri Mar 31
Paper 3	40%	Fri May 26

Letter grades are assigned as follows: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 60-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 0-59.

Papers are due and quizzes close at 11:59pm. There is no extra credit or make up assignments for this course. If you anticipate that you will not complete the assignment on time, you must contact me *at least* 48 hours before it is due to ask for an extension (which I will almost certainly grant). Remember that philosophy is not done well quickly or at the last minute—so plan ahead.

If you want to appeal a grade, wait 24 hours after the grade has been posted, then ask for written feedback why you got the grade you did. If you still think the grade you have received is unfair, I will submit your paper with my justification to another professor. What grade they determine is final—this means *your grade could go up or down*.

5. Texts

All texts will be provided as pdfs. I recommend getting hard copies of the following (Amazon links are for reference only; you are welcome to use other suppliers):

[Inwood & Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*](#)
[Cicero, *On Moral Ends*](#)
[Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*](#)
[Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*](#)
[Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*](#)

6. Schedule of Readings

Mon Jan 30

Introductions – no readings but bring Inwood and Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*

Wed Feb 1

- Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* (= pp. 28–31 of *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*)

Friday Feb 3 – Syllabus and referencing quiz due

Mon Feb 6

- Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, *Vatican Sayings*, and Doxographical Reports from Diogenes Laertius (= pp. 32–45 of *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*)

Wed Feb 8

- Cicero, *On Moral Ends* [*De finibus*], Book I

Mon Feb 13

- Cicero, *On Moral Ends* [*De finibus*], Book II
- Annas, “Epicurus on Pleasure and Happiness”

Wed Feb 15

NO CLASS – This kiwi be flying

Mon Feb 20

- Lucretius, excerpts from *On the Nature of Things* [*De natura rerum*]
- Arenson, “Epicurus on Marriage as Sexual Therapy”

Wed Feb 22

How to write an ancient philosophy paper and intro to Stoicism– no reading

Mon Feb 27

- Epictetus, *Handbook* [*Enchiridion*]

Wed Mar 1

- Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, excerpts

Fri Mar 3 – Paper 1 Due

Epicureans think that friendship is an important part of the good life, but that romantic love is not. Why do they think that friendship is important? Why do they think that romantic love is not important? How do they think that we should rid ourselves of romantic love? (1500–2000 words)

Mon Mar 6

- Cicero, *On Moral Ends* [*De finibus*], Book III

Wed Mar 8

- Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, chapter 2

Mon Mar 13

- Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book III (= Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, pp. 3–37)

Wed Mar 15

- Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book IV (= Graver, *Cicero on the Emotions*, pp. 39–70)

SPRING BREAK – No class Mar 20–24

Mon Mar 27

- “Epicurean Epistemology”, in Algra, Barnes, Mansfield & Schofield (eds), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, pp. 260–294

Wed Mar 29

- Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus & Letter to Pythocles* (= pp. 5–28 of *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*)
- Inwood & Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, pp. 63–5

Friday Mar 31 – Paper 2 due

Why do the Stoics think that (a) *pathē* (bad emotions) always involve a false judgment and that (b) we are very likely to act badly when we act on the basis of *pathē*? What are some techniques the Stoics give us to minimize or eliminate *pathē*? (2000–2500 words)

Mon Apr 3

- “The Polemic of Plutarch” (= pp. 65–71 of *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*)
- Schwab & Shogry, “Epicureans and Stoics on the Rationality of Perception”

Wed Apr 5

- Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, chapters 5–6, pp. 51–81.

Mon Apr 10

- “Stoicism: Logic and Theory of Knowledge” (= pp. 111–131 of *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*)

Wed Apr 12

- Shogry, “Creating a Mind Fit For Truth: the Role of Expertise in the Stoic Account of the Kataleptic Impression”

Mon Apr 17

- Burnyeat, “Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed”

Wed Apr 19

- Brittain, Introduction to Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*¹ [*Academica*], pp. viii–xliii

Mon Apr 24

- Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, Lucullus (*Academica* Book 2), pp. 3–86

Wed Apr 26

[continued discussion of previous session’s reading, for it is long]

Mon May 1

- Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism*, Varro (*Academica* Book 1), and fragments, pp. 87–112.

Wed May 3

- Annas & Barnes, Introduction to Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, pp. xi–xxxii

Mon May 8

- Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, Book 1

Wed May 10

- Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, Book 2

Mon May 15

- Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, Book 3

¹ Scepticism or Skepticism? It doesn’t matter. C is Latinized, K is Hellenized. Because “skeptical” is a Greek word, most people go with “k” now, but either is fine.

Wed May 17

[end of course general discussion]

Friday May 26 – Paper 3 Due

Present *either* the dogmatic epistemology of the Epicureans or of the Stoics, then consider the strongest skeptical criticism of the view (either Academic or Pyrrhonian). Evaluate whether the dogmatists can adequately respond to the criticism. (2500–3000 words)

7. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

8. Disability Access

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/415-338-2472, video phone/415-335-7210) or by email (dprc@sfsu.edu).

9. Student Disclosures of Sexual Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Title IX Coordinator by completing the report form available at <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>, emailing vpsaem@sfsu.edu or calling 338-2032.

To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

- The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/
- Counseling & Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208;
<http://psyservs.sfsu.edu/>
- For more information: <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>