6AANA014 Hellenistic Philosophy  
Syllabus – Academic year 2013/4

Basic information

Credits: 15  
Module Tutor: Dr. Raphael Woolf, raphael.g.woolf@kcl.ac.uk  
Office: 712  
Consultation time: Wed. 12-1, Th. 1-2  
Semester: 2  
Lecture time and venue*: Fr. 1-2, K3.11

*Please note that tutorial times and venues will be organised independently with your teaching tutor

Module description (plus aims and objectives)

The Hellenistic period of philosophy begins with the founding of the Stoic, Epicurean and Sceptical schools around the time of Aristotle, and extends to the late antique period. These three schools developed some of the most interesting ideas to be found in ancient philosophy, for instance the determinism of the Stoics, the atomism and hedonism of the Epicureans, and of course the sceptical approach initiated by Pyrrho, which culminated in the work of Sextus Empiricus. Hellenistic philosophy reacts to earlier Greek thought – the Presocratics, Plato and Aristotle – but is in many ways a new beginning for ancient philosophy. This course will introduce some of the principal themes of the Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, considering each philosophical school in its own right, as well as some ways they influenced and criticised one another.

Assessment methods and deadlines

- **Formative assessment**: 2 essays, each of 1500 words length  
- **Summative assessment**: 2 essays, each of 2500 words length
Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

The main sourcebook for the course is A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, 'The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol.1' (Cambridge, 1987), referred to below as ‘LS’ followed by chapter number(s).

**Week One** (Jan 17), Stoic physics: matter, god and fate
Reading:
primary (p): LS 44-46, 54-55, 62
further (f): R. Salles, *The Stoics on Determinism and Compatibilism*; S. Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*

**Week Two** (Jan 24), Stoic ethics: Value and virtue
Reading:
(p): LS 57-61
(s): M. Schofield, ‘Stoic ethics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*

**Week Three** (Jan 31), Stoic ethics: Happiness and the good life
Reading:
(p): LS 63-64
(s): T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, ch.9

**Week Four** (Feb 7), Stoics ethics: The emotions
Reading:
(p): LS 65
(s): T. Brennan, *The Stoic Life*, ch.7

**Week Five** (Feb 14), Epicurean physics: Atoms, void and freedom
Reading:
(p): LS 5-14, 20

READING WEEK – NB FIRST FORMATIVE ESSAY DUE – 16.00 on Friday 21 February

**Week Six** (Feb 28), Epicurean ethics: Pleasure and the good life
Reading
(p): LS 21
(s): R. Woolf, ‘Pleasure and Desire’, *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*
(f): G. Striker, ‘Epicurean Hedonism’ in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*;

**Week Seven** (March 7), Epicurean ethics: Virtue and friendship  
Reading:  
(p): LS 22  
(s): E. Brown, ‘Politics and Society’, in the *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*  

**Week Eight** (March 14), Epicurean ethics: God and death  
Reading:  
(p): LS 23-24  
(s): J. Warren, ‘Removing fear’, in the *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*  

**Week Nine** (March 21), Hellenistic epistemology: Stoics v. Sceptics  
Reading:  
(p): LS 39-42  
(f): G. Striker, ‘Sceptical strategies’, in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics*

**Week Ten** (March 28), Pyrrhonism: Scepticism as a way of life  
Reading:  
(p): LS 71-72  

NB SECOND FORMATIVE ESSAY DUE – **16.00 on Friday 4 April**
Suggested essay questions

EITHER: Do the Stoics succeed in reconciling fate with moral responsibility?
OR: How, if at all, does the Epicurean swerve provide a basis for free action?

EITHER: Do the Stoics succeed in showing that virtue is the only good?
OR: ‘The Stoic moral agent is concerned only with his own virtue’. Discuss.

Do the Stoics offer a satisfactory account of the emotions?

Do the Epicureans succeed in showing that pleasure is the highest good?

EITHER: Does Epicurus offer a satisfactory account of the role of virtue in the good life?
OR: Does Epicurus offer a satisfactory account of the role of friendship in the good life?

Are the Epicureans right to claim that we have no good reason to fear death?

Who had the better of the debate between the Stoics and the Academic sceptics over the possibility of knowledge?

Can a Pyrrhonian sceptic live his scepticism?
Suggested additional readings

In addition to what is listed in the weekly readings, there are a large number of volumes dealing with the main philosophical theories of the Hellenistic schools. The following is a selection:

Annas, J., *The Morality of Happiness*
Annas, J. *Hellenistic Philosophy of Mind*
Barnes, J., Burnyeat, M. and Schofield, M. (eds) *Doubt and Dogmatism*
Barnes, J., Burnyeat, M., Brunschwig, J and Schofield, M. (eds) *Science and Speculation*
Barnes, J., and Mignucci, M. (eds)*Matter and Metaphysics*
Brunschwig, J. *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy*
Furley, D. *Two studies in the Greek Atomists*
Hankinson, R.J. *The Sceptics*
Ierodiakonou, K. (ed.) *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*
Long, A.A. *Problems in Stoicism*
Long, A.A. *Stoic Studies*
Mitsis, P. Epicurus’ Ethical Theory
Sedley, D. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*
Sedley, D. *Lucretius and the transformation of Greek wisdom*
Sellars, J. *Stoicism*
Sharples, R. *Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*