6AANA014 Hellenistic Philosophy
Syllabus – Academic year 2016/7

Basic information

Credits: 15
Module Tutor: Dr Shaul Tor, shaul.tor@kcl.ac.uk
Office: B12 North Wing
Consultation time: Tuesday and Thursday 13:00-14:00
Semester: 1
Lecture time and venue: Monday 14:00-16:00, Philosophy Building, room 405

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 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 module 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: 1 essay of 2,500 words length
  o   Deadline: Monday 7 November 2016, 16:00

• Summative assessment: 2 essays, each of 2,500 words length
  o   Deadline: Wednesday 18 January 2017, 16:00
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: 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: Stoic ethics: Value and virtue
Reading:
(p): LS 57-61
(s): M. Schofield, ‘Stoic ethics’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*

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

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

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

Week Six: Epicurean ethics: Pleasure and the good life
Reading
(p): LS 21
(s): R. Woolf, ‘Pleasure and Desire’, *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*
**Week Seven:** Epicurean ethics: Justice, Society and Friendship
Reading:
(p): LS 22
(s): E. Brown, ‘Politics and Society’, in the *Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*

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

**Week Nine:** 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:** Pyrrhonism: Scepticism as a way of life
Reading:
(p): LS 71-72
**Suggested essay questions**

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<tr>
<th>Suggested FORMATIVE essay titles:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do the Stoics succeed in reconciling fate with moral responsibility?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the Stoics succeed in showing that virtue is the only good?</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘The Stoic moral agent is concerned only with his own virtue’. Discuss.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the Stoics offer a satisfactory account of the emotions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the Epicureans succeed in showing that pleasure is the highest good?</td>
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<td>Does Epicurus offer a satisfactory account of the role of virtue in the good life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does Epicurus offer a satisfactory account of the role of friendship in the good life?</td>
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<td>Who had the better of the debate between the Stoics and the Academic sceptics over the possibility of knowledge?</td>
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<td>Can a Pyrrhonian sceptic live his scepticism?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Suggested SUMMATIVE essay titles:</th>
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<tr>
<td>If, according to the Stoics, providence is universal and everything happens in accordance with god’s intention, is it still coherent for them to say that there is evil and vicious behaviour in the world?</td>
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<td>EITHER What does ‘living in accordance with nature’ mean for the Stoics? What role does this idea play in Stoic thought?</td>
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<td>OR Why do the Stoics need the notion of ‘preferred indifferents’? Is this notion ultimately coherent?</td>
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<td>What is at stake in the debate between Chrysippus and Posidonius about the nature of the emotions? Who has the better of it?</td>
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<td>How, if at all, does the Epicurean swerve provide a basis for free action?</td>
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<td>Why does Epicurus think that the absence of pain is the greatest pleasure? How plausible is this claim?</td>
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<td>Do the Epicureans argue convincingly that we have no good reason to fear death?</td>
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<td>EITHER In the end, how subversive is Epicureanism?</td>
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<tr>
<td>OR In the end, how subversive is Stoicism?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How, and how well, did the Academic sceptics respond to the inactivity charge?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expound and assess critically Sextus Empiricus’ fourfold criterion of action.</td>
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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*
Bett, R. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*
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*
Inwood, B. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*
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*
Warren, J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*