

PHH 4141: Hellenistic Philosophy

Spring 2025

Time: MWF 3:00-3:50

Location: Matherly Hall 0051

Instructor: Dr. Jan Maximilian Robitzsch

Email: jm.robitzsch@ufl.edu

Phone: 352-273-1831

Office Location: Griffin-Floyd Hall 307

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11-12 or by appointment

I. Course Description

The Hellenistic period in Greek and Roman history is the period spanning from the 3rd century to the 1st century BCE that is characterized by lively philosophical debate, both as a response to and development of views advanced by Aristotle and Plato. This course will survey the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical views held by Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptic philosophers, that is, of the three major schools of the time, situate these views in their historical context, and evaluate them.

II. Learning Outcomes

In this class, students will learn to

- identify, describe, and explain the major questions addressed, the range of answers offered, and the methods employed in one period in the history of Western philosophy (that is, Antiquity).
- discern the structure of arguments to represent them fairly and clearly and to evaluate them for cogency.
- formulate original arguments, anticipating objections and responding in a conscientious fashion.
- read and discuss complex philosophical texts from historical sources.
- speak and write clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive matters.

III. Required Texts

Cicero. *On Ends*. Trans. by H. Harris Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1914.

Inwood, Brad, and Gerson, Lloyd. Eds. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*. Second Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997.

Epictetus. *The Handbook*. Trans. by Nicholas White. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983.

Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Trans. by Martin F. Smith. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.

Sextus Empiricus. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Trans. by R.G. Bury. Lanham, MD: Prometheus, 1990.

Additional readings will be made available on Canvas.

If you encounter any difficulties logging in or accessing any of the course content, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-4537. Do not contact the course instructor or teaching assistant regarding computer issues.

IV. Expectations

Students who take this class for credit should

- be respectful of fellow students and the instructor.
- read all the assigned texts for the session and be prepared for discussion.
- submit all assignments in a timely fashion.
- attend class regularly and be on time.
- bring a copy of the week's reading to class.
- participate in group work and class discussions.
- refrain from eating during class (discuss exceptions with the instructor).
- refrain from using cell phones and computers in class (discuss exceptions with the instructor).

V. Attendance Policy

Attending class is an integral part of successfully completing this course; philosophical skills are best honed in community with others. Therefore, students should make an effort to attend all meetings. If students have to miss class, they are encouraged to come to office hours and schedule a meeting with the instructor to catch up on material they missed.

Students may miss nine classes in the semester without any effect on their grade. Each absence, beyond the nine, will affect the attendance grade.

If students come late to class regularly (i.e. more than four times over the course of the semester) or come very late to class, the instructor will count the lateness as an absence.

Requirements for all make-up work is consistent with university policies specified at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

VI. Evaluation

The final course grade will be based on the following six components

- Attendance (50 points = 5%)
- Participation (100 points = 10%)
- Reading Posts (100 points = 10%)
- Paper 1 (200 points = 20%)
- Paper 2 (200 points = 20%)
- Final Research Paper (350 points = 35%)

Attendance

All absences beyond the ninth absence will affect the attendance grade. See attendance policy for details.

Participation

Participation is graded on quality and quantity of contributions (with emphasis on the former). The instructor will inform students regularly throughout the semester on how their participation is evaluated.

Reading Posts

Prior to class meetings on Monday, students are required to post a short reading reflection on the week's readings. These have the following function:

- (1) They help students engage with the philosophical texts to be examined in lecture and recitation.
- (2) They give students an opportunity to practice writing in a low-pressure environment.
- (3) They facilitate exchange among students outside of the classroom.
- (4) They give the instructor and teaching assistant feedback on what students thought was interesting about a particular reading.
- (5) They allow the instructor and teaching assistant to give students individual feedback on their philosophical ideas and questions.

These posts consist of a short note (of not more than 100 words) on the week's readings. Posts should substantially engage with the philosophical ideas of the assigned readings. They could:

- ask for clarification in regard to certain ideas, arguments, or concepts in the reading,
- comment on ideas, arguments, or concepts in the reading,
- raise an objection against an idea or argument in the reading,
- draw comparisons between ideas in the reading and ideas in other readings (from class or that students encountered in a different context),
- draw connections between the reading and some contemporary phenomenon, etc.

Posts for any given week have to be submitted by Monday at 9 am via Canvas, starting February 2. Late reading posts submitted by Wednesday at 9 am will receive half credit.

Posts will be graded for content and completion, with emphasis on the latter: Students are not expected to master a reading, but to show that they substantially engaged with it before coming to class. There are 13 opportunities to complete reading posts this semester and each post is worth 10 points. The lowest three posts will not count towards the final grade.

Sample reading posts can be found on Canvas.

Papers

The papers will invite students to more deeply engage with the thinkers and ideas discussed in the course, including secondary literature. The instructor will post the topic(s) at least two weeks before the due date; a writing assignment rubric is found at the end of the syllabus. The first paper will be due

Friday, February 7; the second paper Friday, March 14.

Final Research Paper

The final research paper will ask students to engage with a topic of their own choice, attempting to present an original argument by engaging with the relevant secondary literature. Note that the paper proposal and bibliography due on March 24 will count for 20 points of the term paper. A writing assignment rubric is found at the end of the syllabus.

VII. Grade Scale

The following grade scale will be used to assign final letter grades for the course. See UF grading policies for assigning grade points at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>.

Grade Scale	Grade Value
93-100=A	A=4.0
90-92=A-	A-=3.67
87-89=B+	B+=3.33
83-86=B	B=3.00
80-82=B-	B-=2.67
77-79=C+	C+=2.33
73-76=C	C=2.00
70-72=C-	C-=1.67
67-69=D+	D+=1.33
63-66=D	D=1.00
60-62=D-	D-=0.67
0-59=E	E=0.00

VIII. Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center (<https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

IX. Academic Dishonesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. **Note that any case of academic dishonesty, no matter how minor it may be, may immediately result in the failure of the course as a whole.** If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

X. Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

XI. Tentative Schedule of Meetings and Topics

* = Meetings before which a reading response is due.

Week 1

M 1/13 Ancient Philosophy Overview

W 1/15 Course logistics

EPICUREANISM

F 1/17 General Framework

Life of Epicurus, Letter to Menoecus, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings (= IG I-1, I-4, I-5, I-6)

Week 2

M 1/20 No Class (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

W 1/22 Ethics

Texts on Ethics (= IG I-8 to I-13, I-35 to I-37 to I-64, I-115 to I-159)

F 1/24 Pleasure I

Cicero, *On Ends* I

Week 3

M 1/27 Pleasure II

Cicero, *On Ends* II

W 1/29 Friendship

Handout on Friendship (*Canvas*)
Rossi, "Squaring the Epicurean Circle" (*Canvas*)

F 1/31 Research Resources in Ancient Philosophy

Week 4		
M 2/3	Basic Principles of Natural Philosophy	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> I.1-634 <i>Letter to Herodotus</i> (= IG I-2) Texts on Physics (= IG I-76 to I-114)
W 2/5	Basic Principles of Natural Philosophy (continued)	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> I.635-950
F 2/7	Infinity of the Universe	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> I.951-1117 Archytas, fr. A 24 Huffman (<i>Canvas</i>) Paper 1 due
Week 5		
M 2/10	Atomic Motions and Shapes	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> II.1-729
W 2/12	Secondary Qualities/ Immutability of the World/ 'Free Will'	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> II.730-1174 Epicurus, <i>On Nature</i> (excerpt = IG I-34)
F 2/14	The Soul	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> III.1-829
Week 6		
M 2/17	Death is Nothing to Us	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> III.830-1094 Mitsis, "Epicurus on Death and the Duration of Life" (<i>Canvas</i>)
W 2/19	Epistemology I	Lucretius, <i>On the Nature of Things</i> IV Texts on epistemology (= IG I-7, I-16, I-29, and I-65 to I-75)
F 2/21	Epistemology II	(continued)
Week 7		

M 2/24 Development of Life and the Social World Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* V

W 2/26 Meteorology Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* VI
Letter to Pytholces (= IG I-3)

F 2/28 Catch-up or Review

STOICISM

Week 8

M 3/3 Overview and Epistemology Texts on the Lives, Philosophy, Logic and Theory of Knowledge (= IG I-3 to I-19)

W 3/5 God and the Cosmos Texts on Physics, part 1 (= IG II-20 to II-24)
Cleomedes, *Lectures on Astronomy* (excerpt; *Canvas*)

F 3/7 Cosmogony and Cosmology Hensley, "The Physics of Stoic Cosmogony" (*Canvas*)

Week 9

M 3/10 Metaphysics Texts on Physics, part 2 (= IG II-25 to II-75)

W 3/12 Fate Texts on Fate (= IG II-76 to II-93)

F 3/14 Virtue and Indifferents Diogenes Laërtius, John Stobaeus, and Sextus Empiricus on Stoic Ethics (=IG II-94, II-95, and II-116)
Paper 2 due

Spring Break

Week 10

M 3/24 Appropriation (*oikeiosis*) Seneca, *Letters on Ethics* 124 (= IG II-107)
Cicero, *On Ends* III
Final Paper Proposal and Bibliography due

W 3/26	Ethics (continued)	Cicero, <i>On Ends</i> IV
F 3/28	Clerk Shaw Talk (3-5 or 4-6 pm)	
Week 11		
M 3/31	Society and Politics	Handout on Politics (<i>Canvas</i>)
W 4/2	Emotions	Cicero, <i>Tusculan Disputations</i> IV.7-22 (<i>Canvas</i>)
F 4/4	Therapy	Epictetus, <i>Handbook</i>
Week 12		
M 4/7	Catch-up or Review	

SKEPTICISM

W 4/9	Academic Skepticism	Texts on Academic Skepticism (= IG III-1 to III-21)
F 4/11	Pyrrhonic Skepticism: Overview	Sextus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> I
Week 13		
M 4/14	Pyrrhonic Skepticism: Overview	(continued)
W 4/16	Pyrrhonic Skepticism: Logic/Epistemology	Sextus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> II
F 4/18	Pyrrhonic Skepticism: Physics	Sextus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> III.1-20
Week 14		
M 4/21	Pyrrhonic Skepticism: Ethics	Sextus, <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> III.21-32
W 4/23	Review Final Research Paper due	

XII. Addendum: Writing Assignment Rubric

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Introduction and Thesis	Engaging introduction with the necessary context, sharply focused, insightful thesis well-aligned with goal of the assignment.	Clear introduction, relevant thesis but may lack nuance or originality.	Functional introduction, basic context, thesis somewhat generic or loosely connected.	Unclear or ineffective introduction; thesis vague, poorly developed, or marginally related.	Introduction and thesis missing, irrelevant, fail to address the prompt.
Organization and Structure	Exemplary organization, logical, clear structure enhancing readability and coherent idea development.	Well-organized with a clear structure; minor issues do not hinder the flow or coherence.	Organization evident but flawed; disjointed sections or lack of transitions.	Poor organization, difficult to follow sections, lacking logical progression, impacting clarity.	Structure chaotic or non-existent, severely obstructing readability and understanding.
Clarity of the Argument	Logical argument promoting easy comprehension and engagement throughout the essay.	Generally clear argument, minor ambiguities not significantly affecting the overall point.	Periodically unclear or confusing argument, weakening understanding of main points.	Argument lacks clear direction and clarity, often confusing or obscuring main points.	Argument incoherent or poorly articulated, fails to convey a meaningful point.
Analysis and Strength of Argument	Deep, insightful analysis, logically sound, and compelling, clearly strengthening overall argument.	Solid analysis; persuasive but might lack depth, support, or rigorous logic in parts.	Superficial/generic analysis; mostly logical argument not very persuasive, lacking depth or support.	Minimal/flawed analysis; weak, poorly formulated or largely unpersuasive argument with little support.	No meaningful analysis; unfounded, illogical, or absent argument.
References	High-quality, relevant references effectively integrated, substantially strengthening the claims.	Adequate references from relevant sources; integration may be clumsy, additional references might enhance claims.	References present but insufficiently integrated or occasionally irrelevant; needs more/high-quality references.	Provides weak/minimal references for claims, few or dubious references fail to substantiate claims.	Lacks appropriate references, irrelevant, improperly integrated, failing to support claims.
Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation	Free from grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, meticulous attention to detail and proofreading.	Minor errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation not distracting from readability.	Noticeable errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation, affecting readability/professionalism.	Frequent errors disrupting readability, lack of proofreading evident.	Severe, pervasive grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors, impairing comprehension.