Pyrrhonian scepticism, as represented in the works of Sextus Empiricus, presents both a culmination and critique of the whole achievement of Greek philosophy, and was a major influence on the renaissance and the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century, and continues to influence contemporary epistemology. In this seminar, we will get a general overview of Pyrrhonian scepticism beginning with the doxographies in Book IX of Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Famous Philosophers (including Heraclitus, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno of Elea, Leucippus, Democritus, Protagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, Anaxarchus, Pyrrho, and Timon). The core part of the course will consist of a close reading and discussion of the three books of the Outlines of Pyrrhonian Scepticism by Sextus Empiricus, along with a more detailed examination of the treatment of logic, physics, and ethics in his Against the Dogmatists VII-XI. The last three weeks of the seminar will be devoted to student presentations relating Pyrrhonian scepticism to their own interests in philosophy (whether topical or historical).

Goals

- Learn techniques of interpreting and criticizing works of ancient philosophy in translation, including fragmentary works.
- Obtain an overview of ancient scepticism, especially Pyrrhonian scepticism, its textual basis, predecessors, and influence upon later philosophy and science.
- Conduct original research relating ancient skepticism to your own philosophical interests; compile an annotated bibliography and craft a substantial research paper.
- Develop skills in discussing and presenting philosophical ideas and research, including producing handouts, leading discussions, and fielding questions.

Evaluation

10% Participation and discussion. (Any absence will have to be made up by a one-page report and discussion piece on the missed material posted to the ted.ucsd.edu discussion board.)
20% Annotated bibliography (ten items) and two-page research proposal (electronic copy due November 12—week 6).
30% Presentation and handout (to be scheduled during weeks 8, 9, and 10).
40% Final research paper (electronic copy due December 17—finals week).

Grades: 90-100 = A; 80-90 = B; 70-80 = C.

Textbook


For other books on the reading list: @ = on electronic reserve at ted.ucsd.edu; * = on physical reserve at Geisel Library.
PHILOSOPHY 210: SEMINAR IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY
PYRRHONIAN SCEPTICISM

Schedule of Readings

0. Background.

Recommended:


A. A. Long, Hellenistic Philosophy (2nd ed., London and Berkeley 1996), chapters 2 (Epicureanism), 3 (Scepticism), 4 (Stoicism). *

E. Asmis, “Epicurean epistemology”, 260-294 of CHHP. @

M. Frede, “Stoic epistemology”, 295-322 of CHHP. @

M. Schofield, “Academic epistemology”, 323-354 of CHHP. @


1. (October 8) Pyrrho of Elis.

Primary: Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Famous Philosophers (DL) book IX (especially 11.61-108 on Pyrrho; and IX.12.109-116 on Timon). @


Recommended:


R. J. Hankinson, The Skeptics. London 1995, 3-66. @


2. (October 15) Overview of Pyrrhonian scepticism and the modes of scepticism.

Primary: Sextus Empiricus (S. E.), Outlines of Pyrrhonian Scepticism (PH) I.1-17.


Recommended:

J. Annas and J. Barnes, The Modes of Scepticism. Cambridge 1985. @

J. Barnes, The Toils of Scepticism. Cambridge 1990. *

3. (October 22) Sceptical slogans and beliefs.

Primary: S. E., *PH I*.18-34.


Recommended:


4. (October 29) Pyrrhonian scepticism and logic.

Primary: S. E., *PH II*.1-22; *Against the Dogmatists* (M) VII-VIII


Recommended:

*Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*. Translated and Edited by Richard Bett. Cambridge 2005. @


5. (November 5) Pyrrhonian scepticism and physics.

Primary: S. E., *PH III*.1-20; *M* IX-X

Secondary:


Recommended:

Sextus Empiricus: Against the Physicists. Translated and Edited by Richard Bett. Cambridge 2012. {Electronic edition available through the UCSD Library.}

6. (November 12) No meeting (Professor will be at a conference in Durham, UK).

Due: Electronic copy of research paper proposal and bibliography due by 5pm.

7. (November 19) Pyrrhonian scepticism and ethics.

Primary: S. E., PH III.21-32; M XI


Recommended:


R. Bett, “Can an ancient Greek sceptic be eudaimôn (or happy)? And what difference does the answer make to us?” J. of Ancient Philosophy 6 (2012).

8. (November 26) Student presentations.

Slot 1. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 2. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 3. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.

9. (December 3) Student presentations.

Slot 1. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 2. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 3. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.

10. (December 10) Student presentations.

Slot 1. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 2. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Slot 3. (signup available) Primary: TBD; Secondary: TBD.
Acknowledgements: I’d like to thank Andrew Wong for helping me compile the list of readings.