|  |
| --- |
| Code of course: BBN-FIL-402/102 BMA-FILD-402/102 BBV-020/102 BMVD-020/102 |
| Title of course: **The Sceptical Tradition from Socrates to Descartes** |
| Lecturer: Dr Máté Veres |
| Office hour, consultation (e-mail of the lecturer): mateveres8519 (at) gmail (dot) com |

|  |
| --- |
| General aim of the course:  (No knowledge of Greek or Latin is necessary.)  Ancient Scepticism, unlike its post-Cartesian counterpart, was more than an epistemological challenge to overcome. Ancient Sceptics pointed to cases of widespread disagreement among professional philosophers and scientists and argued that, since alleged experts have failed to deliver on the promise of rational persuasion, one should either suspend judgement about all claims to knowledge and continue the investigation, or realize that the quest for knowledge is fundamentally misguided. Furthermore, prominent ancient Sceptics presented Scepticism as a viable and desirable way of living, calling into question the assumption that knowledge can contribute to, or is necessary for, living a happy human life.  The lectures introduce students to the main textual sources on a variety of Sceptical considerations and positions, and situates these texts in the intepretive debates in contemporary scholarship. In addition, the course will conclude with a glimpse into the medieval and Early Modern transformations of Scepticism.  Familiarity with the basics of philosophical methodology might be useful, but the course is open to non-philosophy students. |

|  |
| --- |
| Content of the course:  Topics to be discussed include:  - Sceptical arguments against Stoic epistemology;  - Sceptical arguments for suspension of judgement;  - Scepticism about specific tenets in logic, ethics, and theology;  - The possibility and desirability of living a Sceptical life;  - Prominent anti-Sceptical strategies in antiquity;  - Highlights of the medieval and Early Modern influence of scepticism. |

|  |
| --- |
| Grading criteria, specific requirements:  The course is delivered in a lecture format. Nevertheless, in-class discussion will be facilitated (ideally comprising about 1/3 of each class).  The final grade will be determined by oral examination. For advanced students, the oral exam might be substituted for a term paper (approximately 3,000–5,000 words, to be discussed individually). |
| Weekly schedule  Students are required to prepare each week's ***Required reading*** for class. Items listed under *Suggested reading* are not required. All readings will be provided by the instructor.  (1) **February 10. Introduction**  No required reading.  (2) **February 17. Socrates, Plato, and Scepticism**  *Required readings*:  \* Plato, *Meno* 80a-86c in D. Sedley (ed.), A. Long (tr.), Plato, *Meno* and *Phaedo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 7-12.  \* Plato, *Theaetetus* 151e-172b in J.M. Cooper (ed.), Plato, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), pp. 168-191. Tr. Levitt / Burnyeat.  *Suggested readings*:  \* Annas, J., 'Plato the Sceptic' in J. Klagge and N. Smith (eds.), *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume, 1992, pp. 43-72.  \* Shields, C.J., 'Socrates Among the Skeptics', in P.A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 341-66.  (3) **February 24. Aristotle and Scepticism**  *Required reading*:  \* Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.3-6 (1005a19-1011b22), in C. Kirwan (tr. and comm.), Aristotle, *Metaphysics Books Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 6-23.  \* Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.1-3 (71a1-73a20) and 2.19 (99b15-100b17), in J. Barnes (tr. and comm.), Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 1-6, 72-4.  *Suggested reading*:  \* Barnes, J., 'An Aristotelian Way with Scepticism' in M. Matthen (ed.), *Aristotle Today* (Edmonton: Academic, 1987), pp. 51-76.  \* Code, A., 'Aristotle and the History of Skepticism', in A. Nightingale and D.N. Sedley (eds.), *Ancient Models of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 97-109.  \* Long, A.A., 'Aristotle and the History of Greek Skepticism', in D.J. O'Meara (ed.), *Studies in Aristotle* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), pp. 79-106.  (4) **March 2. Stoic epistemology and Academic criticism**  *Required reading*:  \* Cicero, *Lucullus* 64-98 in Charles Brittain (ed. and tr.), *Cicero, On Academic Scepticism*(Indianapolis, 2006), pp. 38-57.  *Suggested reading*:  \* Brittain, C., Arcesilaus' and Allen, J., 'Carneades', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online).  \* H. Thorsrud, 'Arcesilaus and Carneades' in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 58-80.  \* Striker, G., 'Sceptical Strategies', in M. Schofield and J. Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism*(Oxford, 1980), 54-83.  (5) **March 9. Pyrrho and Pyrrhonism**  *Required reading*:  \* Chapters 1-3 ('Early Pyrrhonism') in A.A. Long and D.N Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 13-24.  \* Chapter 71 ('Why to suspend judgement') in A.A. Long and D.N Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 468-70.  \* 'Philo and Diogenes on the Modes' in J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism. Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 172-80.  *Suggested reading:*  \* Striker, G., 'The Ten Tropes of Aenesidemus', in M.F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley, 1983), 95-115.  \* Svavarsson, S., 'Pyrrho and Early Pyrrhonism' in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*(Cambridge, 2010), 36-57.  (6) **March 16. Sextus Empiricus 1. Pyrrhonism, inquiry, and belief**  *Required readings:*  \* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, 1-30 and III, 280-281 in J. Annas and J. Barnes (tr.), Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3-11 and 216.  *Suggested reading:*  \* Morison, B., 'Sextus Empiricus' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online).  (7) **March 23. Sextus Empiricus 2. The Modes in Sextus**  *Required reading*:  \* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, sections 31-179 in J. Annas and J. Barnes (tr.), Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 11-44.  *Suggested reading:*  \* Bett, R., 'The Modes in Sextus: Theory and Practice', in his *How To Be a Pyrrhonist: The Practice and Significance of Pyrrhonian Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 108-30.  \* Brennan, T. and Lee, J.J., 'A Relative Improvement', *Phronesis*59 (2014), 246-271.  \* Morison, B., 'The Logical Structure of the Sceptic's Opposition', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 40 (2011), 265-95.  (8) **March 30. Sextus Empiricus 3. Inquiry, proof, and self-refutation**  *Required readings*:  \* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, 187-209, II, 1-11, 337-336a, 463-481 in in J. Annas and J. Barnes (tr.), Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 46-53, 67-70, 155-6, 180-3.  *Suggested readings:*  \* Castagnoli, L., *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine*(Cambridge, 2010), 114-120 and 251-307.  \* Fine, G., *The Possibility of Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), 320-68.  (9) **April 6. Sextus Empiricus 4. Scepticism and ethics**  *Required readings*:  \* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book III, 168-279 (selections).  \* Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists* 110-167 in R. Bett (tr.), Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 19-27.  *Suggested readings*:  \* Annas, J., 'Doing Without Objective Values: Ancient and Modern Strategies', in M. Schofield and G. Striker (eds.), *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*(Cambridge, 1986), 3-29.  \* Bett, R., 'Scepticism and Ethics' in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 181-194.  \* Striker, G., *'Ataraxia*: Happiness as Tranquillity', *Monist*73 (1990), 97-110.  \* Vogt, K., 'Scepticism and Action', in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 165-80.  **!!! NO CLASS ON 13 APRIL !!!**  (10) **April 20. Augustine against the Academics**  *Required reading*:  \* Augustine, *Against the Academicians,*Book III, in Peter King (ed.), *Augustine, Against the Academicians. The Teacher*(Indianapolis, 1995), 52-93.  *Suggested reading*:  \* Kirwan, C., 'Augustine Against the Skeptics', in M.F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition*(Chicago, 1983), 205-23.  \* Vogt, K., 'Why Ancient Skeptics Don't Doubt the Existence of the External World: Augustine and the Beginnings of Modern Skepticism', in G. Williams and K. Volk (eds.), *Roman Reflections: Essays on Latin Philosophy*(Oxford, 2015), 260-74.  (11) **April 27. Al-Ghazālī's 'sceptical crisis'**  *Required reading*:  \* Al-Ghazālī, 'The Rescuer from Error', in M.A. Khalidi (ed. and tr.), *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 2005), 59-86.  *Suggested reading*:  \* Dutton, B., ''Al-Ghazālī on Possibility and the Critique of Causality', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), 23-46.  \* Kukkonen, T., 'Al-Ghazālī's Skepticism Revisited', in H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden / Boston, 2010), 103-29.  (12) **May 4. Descartes and ancient Scepticism**  *Required readings*:  \* Descartes, 'Discourse on the Method for Conducting One's Reason Well and for Seeking the Truth in the Sciences', I-IV in D.A. Cress (ed. and tr.), René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis / Cambridge, 1999), 1-22.  \* Descartes, *Meditations* I-II in M. Moriarty (ed. and tr.), René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and Replies*(Oxford, 2008), 13-24.  *Suggested reading*:  \* Schmitt, C.B., 'The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Times', in M.F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 225-51.  \* Williams, M., 'Descartes' Transformation of the Sceptical Tradition', in R. Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 288-313.  (13) **May 11. Conclusion**  *Possible topics*:  - General discussion;  - Scepticism in the *Zhuangzhi* (e.g., 'Discussion on Making All Things Equal' in Burton Watson (tr.), *The Complete Works of Zhuangzhi,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 7-19). |

|  |
| --- |
| Suggested further reading:  Bett, R. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.  Thorsrud, H. *Ancient Scepticism*. Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008.  Vogt, K.M. *Belief and Truth: A Skeptic Reading of Plato*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.  Vogt, K.M., 'Ancient Skepticism' in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. |