Course Description:

From its origin in ancient Greece, the skeptical tradition has represented a radically different way of engaging in philosophy. In this course, we will trace its development—both as a type of argument and as a way of life—from ancient Greece through the Early Modern period, when it was transformed in light of scientific and religious controversies. Our focus will be directed primarily at the work of Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, Montaigne, Charron, Bayle, Descartes, and Hume.

Required Texts:


Required Work:

Work for the course will include a short paper, a presentation, comments on a classmate’s presentation, and a final paper:

- 20% First paper (5 pages)
- 20% Presentation (20 minutes + Q&A)
- 10% Comments (2 pages)
- 50% Final paper (12 pages)

Course Policies:

1. Active participation in the seminar is required.
2. We will be reading a large number of primary sources in the seminar. Written work should also responsive to the secondary literature.
3. In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed.
4. Extensions must be requested before the due date.
VERY IMPORTANT: plagiarism will not be tolerated. All cases of alleged violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity. Possible penalties range from failing the course to permanent exclusion from the university. For more on plagiarism, see: http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html and http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.html.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

Canvas:

Much of the business of this course will be conducted through Canvas. You are encouraged to check it frequently, as I may post announcements there. To access Canvas, you will need to use your NetID and password: http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html.

Schedule of Readings:

Sept. 19  SEXTUS EMPIRICUS
Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Book 1, sections 1–13

Sept. 26  SEXTUS EMPIRICUS & CICERO
Outlines of Pyrrhonism, Book 1, section 14 (para. 35–90, 135–140), 20, 22, 33; Book 2, section 4
Academica, 2.64–98 (pp. 38–57)

Oct. 3  CICERO
Academica, 2.31–61 (pp. 20–37), 2.98–111 (pp. 57–65)

Oct. 10  MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE & PIERRE CHARRON
Apology for Raymond Sebond, pp. 1–12, 62–82
Wisdom, Book II, ch. 1–2 (pp. 52–67)

Oct. 17  RENÉ DESCARTES
Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditations 1, 2, 3 (first four paragraphs), 5
Second Objections & Replies

Oct. 24  PIERRE BAYLE
“Pyrrho” (pp. 194–209), “Third Clarification” (pp. 421–435)

Oct. 31  PIERRE BAYLE
First papers due

Nov. 7  DAVID HUME
A Treatise of Human Nature, I.i.1, 2, 4, 6, 7
Nov. 14  DAVID HUME
*An Enquiry Concerning Human Knowledge*, sections 1, 4, 5, 12

Nov. 21  Presentations & Comments

Nov. 28  Presentations & Comments

Dec. 6  **Final papers due (5 PM)**

**Bibliography:**

“History of Skepticism,” *Oxford Bibliographies Online*.


