

PHI515: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy

Fall 2020

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The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus, and *Against the Ethicists*

This course aims to give students an overview of the scepticism of the 2nd Century AD Pyrrhonist philosopher, Sextus Empiricus, after which we will read in detail parts of his treatise *Against the Ethicists* (also known as *Adversus Mathematicos (M) XI*). In the first half of semester, we will be looking at extracts from Sextus' 'manifesto' of Pyrrhonism, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)* book I, in order to get a good idea of the basics of his distinctive brand of scepticism. We will be reading *Against the Ethicists* in the light of that manifesto; recent scholars have argued that the scepticism at work in *Against the Ethicists* is different from the 'official' scepticism of *PH I*.

Provisional list of topics/texts to be discussed:

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| 4 th September | Introduction to Sextus Empiricus, his works, book I of the <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> overview, and §§1-7; <i>Against the Ethicists</i>
Bibliography (5), (6) |
| 11 th September | The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus (1): <i>PH I</i> §§8-12 (Scepticism as an ability) |
| 18 th September | The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus (2): <i>PH I</i> §§13-20 (The beliefs of the sceptic)
Bibliography (7), (8) |
| 25 th September | The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus (3): <i>PH I</i> §§21-30 (The life and aims of the sceptic)
Bibliography (12), (13) |
| 2 nd October | The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus (4): <i>PH I</i> §§31-186, esp. §§31-35 (The modes of scepticism)
Bibliography (9), (10) |
| 9 th October | The scepticism of Sextus Empiricus (5): <i>PH I</i> §§187-209, esp. §§187-191, §§202-205 (The sceptical phrases) |

Bibliography (11)

16 th October	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§1-41: the division of things into good, bad, and indifferent
23 rd October	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§42-109: is there good and bad by nature?
30 th October	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§110-140: is it possible to live happily if one postulates things good and bad by nature?
6 th November	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§141-167: is the person who suspends judgment over the nature of the good and the bad happy?
13 th November	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§168-215: is there some sort of skill of living?
20 th November	<i>Against the Ethicists</i> §§216-257: is the skill of living teachable?

The seminar will be held over Zoom. It will not presuppose knowledge of Greek; good English translations exist of both the main works we are discussing. (Some discussion of Greek translation and language is inevitable.) Some of the class time will involve students discussing the text together in smaller sections as preparation for group discussions in the seminar.

Bibliography

Greek Texts

(1) *PH*

Sexti Empirici Opera, ed. Mutschmann (rev. Mau), Teubner, 1956, vol. I

(2) *M XI*

Sexti Empirici Opera, ed. Mutschmann, Teubner, 1914, vol. II

(Both texts also appear in the Loeb edition, although the Greek text is not as reliable as the editions above, and the English translation is not as reliable as the translations below.)

English Translations

(3) Annas, Julia, and Barnes, Jonathan, eds., *Outlines of Scepticism*, second edition (Cambridge, 2000) [translation of *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*]

(4) Bett, Richard, ed., *Against the Ethicists*, translation and commentary (Oxford, 1997)

General

(5) Barnes, Jonathan, Introduction to (3)

(6) Morison, Benjamin, 'Sextus Empiricus', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Specific issues

(7) Burnyeat, Myles, and Frede, Michael, eds., *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis, 1997)

(8) Fine, Gail, 'Sceptical Dogmata: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 13', *Methexis*, 12 (2000), 81–105

(9) Morison, Benjamin, 'The Logical Structure of the Sceptic's Opposition', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XL (2011), 265-95

(10) Morison, Benjamin, 'The Sceptic's Modes of Argumentation', in Thomas Bénatouïl and Katerina Ierodiakonou, eds., *Dialectic after Plato and Aristotle* (Cambridge, 2018), 283-319

(11) Stough, Charlotte, 'Sextus Empiricus on Non-Assertion', *Phronesis* 29.2 (1984), 137-164

(12) Striker, Gisela, 'Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquility', in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 183–95

(13) Vogt, Katja, 'Scepticism and action', in R. Bett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, 2010), 165–80