

This will be a comparative course on Hellenistic and Indian philosophy, concentrating in each case on "scepticism"—chiefly Pyrrhonism (Sextus Empiricus, with background in Pyrrho, Timon, the sceptical Academy and the Cyrenaics) in the Greek case and Madhyamaka (Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti) in the Indian case. (We will also, if time permits, look at the differently oriented scepticism of Jayarāśi.) In describing Madhyamaka as a form of scepticism I do not mean to prejudge any interpretive questions about Madhyamaka. While Madhyamaka has striking similarities to Pyrrhonism, it also has important differences, and whether they should both be called "scepticism," and what we should mean by "scepticism," will be questions for discussion throughout the term. Since these "sceptical" philosophies can only be understood in the context of earlier "dogmatic" philosophies (in the Greek case, especially Stoicism, also Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism; in the Indian case, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, and Buddhist Abhidharma) we will also examine some aspects of these philosophies.

"Dogmatic" philosophies such as Platonism, Stoicism, Sāṃkhya, and Buddhist Abhidharma point to the miseries of ordinary life and the contradictoriness of ordinary beliefs, and challenge ordinary claims of knowledge, reality, and goodness; they substitute a different description of reality, which is supposed to rest on assured means of knowledge, and to support a happy way of life. The "sceptics" in turn challenge the "dogmatist" claims of knowledge, reality, and goodness; they use arguments of the different dogmatic schools against one another, or they argue that a given dogmatic school's claims fall short of its own standards and so succumb to the same arguments that that school uses against ordinary beliefs. The "sceptical" programs give rise to many questions of interpretation: they might be taken either as a defense of ordinary life against the dogmatists, or as a radicalization of the dogmatist challenge to ordinary life. We will discuss these issues both in the Greek and in the Indian case, and will try to use each to illuminate the other. (I will not be mainly concerned with the question of the possible historical influence of Indian on Greek philosophy or *vice versa*, although it is possible that Pyrrho was influenced by Indian philosophers, and I will briefly point to the evidence of that, such as it is.)

We will first quickly introduce the disputes of Greek philosophy—chiefly in physics (cosmology, cosmogony, the ἀρχαί [principles], the gods and their relation to the world) but also with implications for logic/epistemology and ethics—by comparing and contrasting (crucial parts of) Plato's *Timaeus* and the Roman Epicurean Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*. We will then turn to the disputes between the Stoics and the Pyrrhonian sceptics (with some mention of the Academic sceptics as well). We will start by reading through key sections of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, concentrating on Sextus' diagnosis of what is wrong with ordinary life and belief, the differences between dogmatic and sceptical prescriptions for the problem, the concepts of the criterion of truth and of the τέλος (the end or aim of human life, to which philosophy is supposed to be a means). But since many of Sextus' concepts and arguments (and doctrines, if he can be said to have doctrines) are developed as an internal critique of Stoicism, we will periodically turn to look at the Stoic doctrines and arguments that he is criticizing, and at how they try to solve the problems he is raising about, for instance, the criterion or the τέλος, using chiefly the fragments in Long and Sedley's *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Since Sextus is in part developing the Academics' criticisms of the Stoics on these issues, we will also look at Academic fragments to compare Academic and Pyrrhonist versions of "scepticism," and, when it helps in understanding some particular issue, we may also compare texts of other dogmatic

schools. Aristotle and the Stoics and Academics all trace their intellectual genealogies to Plato, and are offering different solutions to Platonic problems; Epicurus and Pyrrho are offering competing, dogmatic and sceptical, claims to the heritage of Democritus. All of these backgrounds, to the extent that we have time to explore them, will help in understanding Sextus.

We will then turn to Indian philosophy, where our main interest is in the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, which can be compared to Pyrrhonism. But to understand Madhyamaka we will need to spend some time both on earlier Indian philosophy, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Philosophy grows out of a desire either to supplement or to compete with the traditional knowledge of ritual passed down among the hereditary priesthood (brâhmanas). Already in the Upanishads it is claimed that, while performance of ritual may lead to a good rebirth, to escape from the whole cycle of rebirth we need some further knowledge, of the cosmos or of the soul/self (âtman) or of the inner meaning of the rituals. One possible way to attain such knowledge is through philosophy proper, systematic accounts of the cosmos and the soul based chiefly on inference from sense-experience; we will concentrate on Sâṃkhya-Yoga, set out in different forms in the Sâṃkhyakârikâs and in the Bhagavadgîtâ. We will also look briefly at Nyâya-Vaiśeṣika, which systematizes the rules of debate and the valid grounds of knowledge (pramâṇas), and which also gives a rival anti-Sâṃkhya account of the cosmos, especially of causality and of the first principles from which the cosmos arose. Buddhism rejects both the efficacy of traditional ritual and the existence of an immortal soul, but nonetheless accepts the cycle of rebirth (this seems paradoxical, and we will have to ask how it is possible), and offers a rival philosophy as a way out of it. Buddhism rejects the theory of substances (both souls and material substances) presupposed by both Sâṃkhya-Yoga and Nyâya-Vaiśeṣika, and uses the arguments of each school against each other in working out an alternative ontology of momentary quality-atoms. Nâgârjuna, the founder of Madhyamaka, radicalizes the Buddhist critique of substance-ontologies and turns it against earlier Buddhist ontologies as well. In so doing he uses arguments very similar to those of Sextus, and we will try to compare their arguments, aims and results (some later Indian writers who may be called sceptics, both Mâdhyamikas and Vedantins, allow further comparisons with Sextus). Is the result a nihilist doctrine, or the lack of any doctrine? How is it supposed to lead to happiness? Does it criticize only dogmatic philosophy, or also ordinary life? Are its arguments parasitic on the arguments of the dogmatic schools, or do they have an independent ground in experience? It is striking that these interpretive issues are disputed, both among modern Western scholars of Pyrrhonism, and among the traditional interpreters of Nâgârjuna. We will try to use each of these discussions to illuminate the other, and to bring out similarities and differences between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka, and perhaps also between the conceptual presuppositions of Greek and Indian philosophy, notably in their concepts of being and becoming, of causality, and of criterion/pramâṇa. While we will only be able to examine a few of these topics in class, the texts will raise many similar questions for students to explore in their term-papers.

The course will be divided into three units, each of roughly four weeks:

U1 The issues of Greek philosophy, contrasting the Timaeus and Lucretius; Sextus Empiricus, with background in the Hellenistic schools, especially Stoicism

U2 The origins of Indian philosophy, Sâṃkhya (and some Nyâya), Buddhism and other nâstika schools

U3 Nâgârjuna and his commentators, with comparisons to Greek scepticism

The main required texts for the course are Sextus Empiricus' Outlines of Pyrrhonism (translated by Annas and Barnes under the title Outlines of Scepticism), Lucretius' On the Nature of Things (translated by M.F. Smith), volume 1 of Long and Sedley's The Hellenistic Philosophers, Nāgārjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (translated by Garfield with his commentary), and Radhakrishnan and Moore's Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, all available at the Word Bookstore. Further assigned texts will be distributed electronically via the iversity site for the course. All of these readings, and not just the books available at the Word Bookstore, are equally required, and you must always have the relevant readings with you in class. Computers and other electronic equipment may not be used in class; if you have accessed material electronically, you must print it out and bring it with you. The readings in Greek and Indian philosophers are not supplements to help you understand the topic that the course is about; the readings are what the course is about.

The course will meet for two 90-minute lecture-discussion sessions per week. Discussions will depend very heavily on details of the reading: you must always have done each day's reading carefully and on time, and must have the texts with you in class, so that you are prepared to answer questions about them. Do not come to class if you have been unable to do the readings. The lectures and discussions will make no sense without the readings.

All students and auditors must sign up for the course on iversity, <http://un.iversity.org>, on the first day of class, so that they can receive reading assignments and any other messages for the course.

The prerequisite for the course is either Philosophy 354 (Plato) or Philosophy 355 (Aristotle). It would be acceptable, if you have not had one of these courses before, to take it simultaneously with this course; but both of those courses are near their cap, and you may not be able to get in. I would consider waiving the prerequisite for students with a strong background in classical Indian philosophy. No knowledge of Greek or Sanskrit is presupposed (although students will need to learn the Greek alphabet, and to be ready to listen to discussions of the meanings of Greek and Sanskrit technical terms), but any further background in classical Greek or Indian languages or cultures would of course be an advantage. (If necessary I will test on the Greek alphabet, and students will have to pass this test to remain in the course.) If there is sufficient interest, I would be happy to meet with Sanskrit-reading students to read some of the Indian texts in the original.

Grades will be based on a 5-7 page short paper (20%; there will be two choices of due date to be announced in class, an earlier one for a paper on Greek philosophy and a later date for a paper on Indian philosophy), a roughly 15-page term-paper due on the last day of class (40%), class participation (20%), and two short handout-analyses of the arguments of particular texts (each 10%). I will ask each student twice during the term to prepare such an analysis and to copy it and distribute it at the beginning of class as an aid to discussion; please also put a copy in my mailbox in Leacock 414 (across from the elevators) at least two hours before class time. If the short paper is on Greek philosophy, the term-paper must be comparative or on Indian philosophy; if the short paper is on Indian philosophy, the term-paper must be comparative or on Greek philosophy. Do not ask for extensions: if a paper is handed in late, I may or may not grade it, but I will make no guarantees ahead of time. The papers should be on texts or topics that we have not discussed, or have only touched on, in class; you should design them as if they were additional lectures or discussion-pieces on a text or a topic that the class did not have time to get to. You should consult with me well before the end of term on your proposed topic for the

term-paper. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. To receive a passing grade for the course, students must show that they have kept up with the readings and are able to discuss them in class. Students who are unable to do this will be asked to withdraw.

McGill requires me to add the following paragraph: "McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information)."

Computers and other electronic equipment may not be used in class; classes may not be recorded under any circumstances.

My office is Leacock 921; I will be available there Wednesdays from 4:00 to 6:00. My office phone number is 398-4400, extension 094720 (no voicemail); I am sometimes there in the afternoons and evenings. I cannot in general respond to emails; I might be able to respond to short messages on the iversity site, but it is better to talk to me in person.