EPICUREAN ETHICS*  
PHIL 627/496-03  
Dr. Kelly Arenson  
Tuesdays, 1:40-4:20pm; Fall 2017

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a close examination of the ethical system of the world's most famous hedonist, Epicurus, who claimed that pleasure is the highest good in life. Course texts will include primary works by Epicurus and his followers, particularly the Letter to Menoeceus, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, various testimonia and fragments, as well as polemical works by Cicero, Plutarch, and others who sought to undermine Epicureanism by arguing that the highest good is not and should not be pleasure. Some attention will be paid to Epicurean physics insofar as it pertains to Epicurean ethics. (The relevance of the physics to the ethics will be a question in this course.) Readings will also include secondary literature.

Major questions to be considered include: What is Epicurus' definition of pleasure? How systematic is his ethics? What role do the virtues, external goods, and friends play in his hedonism? How reliable are polemical treatments of Epicurus' works? How practical is Epicureanism? Topics will also include hedonism as therapy; the fear of death; the nature of justice; and love and sex.

READINGS

Primary
- CICERO, On Moral Ends  
- EPICURUS, Letter to Menoeceus  
- EPICURUS, Principal Doctrines  
- EPICURUS, Vatican Sayings  
- LUCRETIUS, On the Nature of Things (selections)  
- DIOGENES LAERTEIUS, Doxography of Epicurus (his life and works)  
- PLUTARCH, That Epicurus Actually Makes a Pleasant Life Impossible and Against Colotes  
- FRAGMENTS from Cicero, Porphyry, Athenaeus, Diogenes of Oenoanda, and others

Secondary
- J. ANNAS, “The Epicureans: Rethinking What Is Natural”  
- E. AUSTIN, “Epicurus and the Politics of Fearing Death”  
- J. BRUNSWIG, “The Cradle Argument in Epicureanism and Stoicism”  
- M. EVANS, “Can Epicureans Be Friends?”  
- J.C.B. GOSLING AND C.C.W. TAYLOR, The Greeks on Pleasure (selections)  
- M. NUSSBAUM, “Beyond Obsession and Disgust: Lucretius on the Therapy of Love”  
- J. THRASHER, “Reconciling Justice and Pleasure in Epicurean Contractarianism

REQUIREMENTS

PHIL 627
- Term paper  
- Presentation (max. 2000 words)  
- Lead-questioner of other students’ presentation papers

PHIL 496-03
- Paper project (outline, first draft, second draft)  
- Peer review of others’ papers  
- Reflection papers

*This course fulfills the graduate distribution requirement in ancient philosophy.