

**Syllabus for HIST 29516/39516: History of Skepticism**  
**Cross-listed as: CLCV 28517/CLAS 38517, SIGN 26011, HIPS 29516/CHSS 39516, KNOW 21406/31406, RLST 22123/HREL 39516.**

Dr. Ada Palmer  
Winter 2018, Math-Stat 112 (5727 S University)  
Class: Tuesdays 2:00-4:50 PM

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Before we ask what is true or false, we must ask how we can know what is true or false. This course examines the vital role doubt and philosophical skepticism have played in the Western intellectual tradition, from pre-Socratic Greece through the Enlightenment, with a focus on how Criteria of Truth—what kinds of arguments are considered legitimate sources of certainty—have changed over time. The course will examine dialog between skeptical and dogmatic thinkers, and how many of the most fertile systems in the history of philosophy have been hybrid systems which divided the world into things which can be known, and things which cannot. The course will touch on the history of atheism, heresy and free thought, on fideism and skeptical religion, and will examine how the Scientific Method is itself a form of philosophical skepticism. Primary source readings will include Plato, Sextus Empiricus, Lucretius, Ockham, Pierre Bayle, Montaigne, Descartes, Francis Bacon, Hobbes, Voltaire, Diderot, and others.

## READINGS

It is recommended that you purchase the following books. They are also available on reserve in Regenstein. If you do not want to purchase all books, Popkin & Neto (first on the list) will be used the most. If you already own a different edition of one of these books, or have found one online etc., you are welcome to use it, but the page numbers will not correspond, which can create difficulties for some texts when we are reading selections instead of complete works.

- Popkin and Neto eds., *Skepticism* (primary source anthology) 9781591024743
- Epicurus, *The Epicurus Reader*, Hackett 0872202410
- One of these two editions of Lucretius (depending on whether you read Latin)
  - *The Way Things Are* (Humphries translation) Indiana U, 025320125X
  - for Latin-readers: *On the Nature of Things* (Loeb), 0674992008
- One of these two editions of Aristotle (depending on whether you read Ancient Greek)
  - *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Modern Library, 0375757996
  - For Hellenists: *Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics* (Loeb), 0674993594
- William of Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, Hackett, 0872200787
- Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection*, Penguin 0140446028
- Bacon, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Hackett 0872204707
- Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, Hackett, 9780872204201
- You will need one a good Voltaire collection. These are recommended:
  - Voltaire, *Candide and Other Writings*, ed. Haskell M. Block, the Modern Library (1956, out of print hardcover) B004JKINTW (This is better but out of print).
  - Voltaire, *The Portable Voltaire*. Penguin Classics. ISBN 0140150412
    - Note: We are reading *Zadig*, *Micromegas*, *the Tale of the Good Brahman*, *the Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake*, and excerpts from the *Letters on England* and

some other essays. You may use any edition of Voltaire that contains all these texts; Block is best but out of print. If you read French, a French edition is fine.

- Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master* (translated by Robert Loy) 0393009033 (\*)
  - This is the best translation but out of print. If you can't find the Loy, the Penguin Classic will do. If you read French, a French edition is fine.

#### OPTIONAL SECONDARY SOURCE READINGS (for those who want more background)

- Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*
- Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*
- Don Cameron Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea*
- Michael Hunter and David Wootton, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, especially the chapters by David Wootton and Nicholas Davidson
- Alan Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729, Volume I, The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief*
- Anton M. Matytsin, *The Specter of Skepticism in the Age of Enlightenment*
- Alan Kors, *The Birth of the Modern Mind* audio lecture series (The Teaching Company)
- Kenneth Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England 1580-1720, The Atheist Answered and His Error Confuted*

#### E-RESERVES:

Anselm of Canterbury, Ontological Proof of the Existence of God excerpt (15 pages)

Thomas Aquinas, Proofs of the Existence of God excerpt (15 pages)

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpts Book 1 "Man" chapters 1-5, 7 (optionally 6, 8-9, 12-13)

Charles Blount, *Anima Mundi or an Historical Narration of the Opinions of the Ancients concerning Man's Soul After This Life*, Printer's Address to the Reader, Blount's Address to the Reader, and chapter 1 sections I-V (ending on page 10).

John Wilmot Earl of Rochester, "A Satyr Against Reason & Mankind" (poem)

De Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, excerpt (dialog against the existence of God)

#### ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Attendance (20%).
2. Class participation OR responses (20%). The teaching assistants will take note of which students speak up in class, asking questions or supplying comments. Students who do so will receive credit for class participation. If you don't have a chance to participate in any given class, or if you prefer to listen rather than to speak, you may instead turn in periodic one-to-two page (double spaced) written comments expressing your own views on the discussion that occurred in the previous class. You should aim to either participate in discussion or turn in a written response at about half the classes, so a minimum of five times during the quarter. If you do it more often, great! But five times total is sufficient for full credit. If you are not certain whether you have spoken enough in class, ask a Teaching Fellow by e-mail.
3. First Draft of final project related to the theme. 30%
4. Final Draft of final project related to the theme. 30%
5. Optional Extra Credit Assignments (+4% each)

Written assignments must be in double-spaced in Times New Roman font, size 12, with standard margins. Students have six options for the final project:

### **Wikipedia Track**

Make a permanent contribution to the worldwide knowledge pool by expanding and improving a Wikipedia article about a person, text, event, issue, organization etc. related to the course readings. A class-specific Wikipedia portal will teach you the process and help instructors track your work.

**Two Shorter Academic Papers Track:** Two papers each 7-8 pages in length, double spaced, with footnotes (Chicago or ALA citation style). Papers must examine at least two authors from the syllabus, and must be analytic with a clear thesis. Use of secondary sources or examination of figures/works we did not read for class is optional. Bibliography is required only if you use sources not on the syllabus. This track has unique due dates different from other tracks.

**Longer Research Paper Track:** One long research paper, 15-20 pages in length, double spaced, with footnotes and bibliography (Chicago or ALA). Must use primary and secondary sources, and involve authors we have read, but additional figures, including more modern ones, may be included. One option is to investigate one of the other authors in the Popkin & Neto anthology. Also recommended: Pomponazzi, Marin Mersenne, La Mettrie, Montesquieu, Rousseau, or longer readings from Gassendi, Charles Blount, Hobbes, Bayle, Leibnitz, or de Sade.

**An Essay. No, I mean a real essay.** While we often use the word as a casual synonym for an academic paper, the essay proper is an art form, a meandering emotional and intellectual experience with persuasive effect, often without a formal thesis. The essay is intimately tied to the history of skepticism, pioneered by and named for the works of the father of modern skepticism Montaigne, and used by Bayle, Voltaire, Diderot, and others. Students may write such an essay as a final project. It must relate to questions of certainty and uncertainty. Unlike academic papers, for which clarity and grammar are the main writing concerns, an essay is an opportunity to practice high level craftsmanship, employing rhetoric, simile and metaphor, prose poetry, anecdote, personal confession, even humor. An essay must have footnotes only when it quotes or paraphrases other works. Essays should be ~15-20 double-spaced pages, but may be shorter and longer essays if (A) the length is appropriate/necessary to the essay's itinerary and (B) the student has clearly worked hard on the craftsmanship, both on the sentence-by-sentence level and the structural level. After all, a ten page essay beautifully polished can be more work than a 20 page research paper. For sample essays, see Montaigne's *Essays*, Voltaire's *Letters on England* and similar works, George Orwell's essays, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *A Soviet Heretic*, Rebecca Solnit's *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, or other great essayists, or go to the instructor's blog ExUrbe.com and look at samples, particularly "On Progress and Historical Change" or "On Crimes and Punishments and Beccaria" or "Machiavelli SPQF." If you prefer, you may write two shorter essays, due on the due dates for the Two Shorter Academic Papers track.

**Candide:** Read Voltaire's *Candide* and write a response, 12+ pages, footnotes optional. It may be a letter to Voltaire (in your own voice or the voice of an author we read, i.e. Lucretius to Voltaire etc.), an analytic paper, an essay, a sequel, etc. It must draw on course readings & themes.

### **Creative Assignment Track**

Students may propose a custom project, such as a piece of creative writing, a philosophical fable or dialog, a performance, laboratory-style research, a digital project, or writing a short portion of a larger project. Students must discuss proposals with instructors and receive approval by Week 4.

Except for the Two Shorter Academic Papers track, all projects require students to produce a first draft and a final draft. There are two different due dates for the first draft, Batch A and Batch B. These dates fall a week apart. Students will be divided into groups, and half turn in their drafts in Batch A, the others in Batch B. This will make it easier for instructors to examine and return drafts with comments in a timely manner. Students will be invited to sign up for their preferred batches, though if there is too much preference for one batch some students may not get their first choice. The earlier date gives you more time for polishing and revision, while the later gives you more time for initial research.

## ALTERNATE REQUIREMENTS

**Students taking this course for Classics credit** must identify themselves to the instructors within the first two weeks of the course, and complete two special requirements: (1) do some readings in Latin and/or Greek. Lucretius and Aristotle are the recommended authors. Students should choose one or the other and complete part of the reading in the original language, while reading the majority in translation. Students must turn in a short (two page double-spaced) written piece commenting on the experience of reading the work in the original. (2) Students must examine a Latin or Ancient Greek work in their research projects. Works may be classical (Cicero, Plato, Lactantius), or post-classical (Bacon, Duns Scotus, Erasmus) but the student must engage with the texts in Greek/Latin, though the use of an English translation to enable speedy mastery of long works is allowed (and recommended).

**Students in History of Science, Religious Studies, Renaissance Studies, or the KNOW program** may choose to design a customized assignment to better fit their special fields of study.

**Graduate students taking this course** who are working on larger seminar papers, MA theses, or other larger projects on topics related to the course themes may choose, instead of completing the writing assignments specified here, to work on those larger projects as their written assignments. Students who wish to take this option must discuss it with the instructor to work out details about length and date. The deadlines can be made flexible to accommodate the needs of concurrent study.

## EXTRA CREDIT:

Up to twice per quarter (any time before the last class session), you may complete this extra credit assignments and receive a bonus equivalent to up to 4% of the course grade: **Extra-Credit Assignment: Writing “Half and Half Again”**: This self-paced exercise for improving your writing skill is based on exercises used in professional creative writing workshops and journalism training programs. It is designed to teach you how to improve your writing skills on your own time, which can in turn improve your grades on future writing assignments (in this class and others), and give you writing skills which will be valuable lifelong. Take a paper, of at least four pages in length, which you have written for a different class (either in college or in High School) and rewrite it to make exactly the same arguments in half as many words. You must hand in both the original paper and the shortened version. For extra challenge (and an extra 4% bonus) wait two weeks, then rewrite the same paper a second time to be one quarter its original length. (If you are interested in further opportunities to develop writing skills, talk to me.)

## COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week 2 January 9 Introduction: Skeptical vs. Dogmatic Thought and Criteria of Truth

- Readings for this week: none.

Week 3 Jan 16 Classical Skepticism, Pre-Socratic and Academic

- Reading: Popkin & Neto selections: Plato, Pyrrho, the Academics, Sextus Empiricus

Week 4 Jan 23 Ancient Empiricism and the Epicureans

- Reading:
  - Epicurus, in *The Epicurus Reader*, read the ancient biography of Epicurus, the extant letters, the two ancient collections of maxims (*Diogenes Laertius* and the Vatican collection), and from the short fragments and testimonia (page 84) the fragments on logic and epistemology. Spend a couple minutes (no more than five) glancing over the testimony of Cicero section as well, to get a sense of what scholars who had Cicero but didn't have Lucretius or Epicurus had access to.
  - Lucretius (Loeb or Humphries) Book I 1-829 (on atomism), 951-end (on the cosmos), Book II 1-661 (on atomic motion), Book III 1-525 (on mind and soul), 670-870 (on the mortality of the soul), Book IV 178-823 (on the senses), Book V 564-end (on the origins of humanity and society), Book VI 1-239 (on weather).
- In class today you must choose which of the five assignment tracks you will undertake. If you wish to undertake the Wikipedia project you should create an account at this time.

Week 5 Jan 30 Aristotelianism and the Echoing Promise of Flawless Logic

- Reading:
  - Aristotle, selections TBD from *Categories*, *Topics* (Book 1 only), *Prior Analytics* (Book I chapters 1-7, 13, 23-31, Book II chapters 16-27). These are parts of the *Organon* and appear in *Basic Works of Aristotle* and in the Loeb.
  - William of Ockham, pages 2-62 (Knowledge/Science, Epistemology, logic) 76-8 (truth) 97-106 (on the knowability of God), 115-126 (Proofs of the existence of God) NOTE: this is a facing page edition, so this looks like a lot but is actually only about 40 pages of reading total. That said, it's dense, so take your time.
  - Popkin & Neto selections: Augustine
  - e-reserve: Anselm of Canterbury, Ontological Proof excerpt (15 pages)
  - e-reserve: Thomas Aquinas, Proofs of the Existence of God excerpt (15 pages)

Week 6 February 6 Montaigne, the Skeptical Crisis, "A Satyr Against Reason & Mankind"

- Reading:
  - Popkin & Neto selections: Erasmus & Gianfrancesco Pico
  - Montaigne, selections TBD from *The Essays: A selection*
- **Written Assignment:** For those doing the Two Shorter Papers Track (or writing two shorter essays), paper 1 (8 pages double spaced) is due today. For those doing other tracks, a one page proposal for your final project is due today.

Week 7 Feb 13 The "New Philosophy" Part 1: Bacon & Empiricism

- Reading:

- Bacon, *New Organon* (including the *Great Instauration*) 66-155 (Book 1 complete and Book 2 paragraphs 1-10), and *New Atlantis* 241-248 (arrival) and 260-268 (the House of Solomon) in Bacon, *Selected Philosophical Works*.
- Popkin & Neto selections: Gassendi
- **Written Assignment: Final Project Draft Batch A**

Week 8 Feb 20 The “New Philosophy” Part 2: Descartes & Deduction

- Reading:
  - Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, read *Meditations* I-VI (all) and THEN read the *Discourse on Method* sections 1-5 and the first paragraph of section 6. (Optional finish section 6 – it’s not very long).
  - Popkin & Neto selections: Locke, non-redundant Descartes
  - e-reserve: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpts Book 1 “Man” chapters 1-5, 7.
  - e-reserve: John Wilmot Earl of Rochester, “A Satyr Against Reason & Mankind”
- **Written Assignment: Final Project Draft Batch B**

Week 9 Feb 27 Voltaire’s eternal “But…” and the “Ambidextrous Bayle”

- Reading:
  - Popkin & Neto selections: Bayle, Leibnitz, Voltaire
  - Voltaire, first read *From the English Letters* the chapters “Innoculation” “Chancellor Bacon” and “Locke,” and from the Philosophical dictionary the entries on Adultery, Ancients and Moderns, Atoms, Authority, Beauty, Bees, Faith, Free Will, Intolerance, Sect, Theist; then read *Zadig* (complete), *Micromegas* (complete), *Story of a Good Brahman* (complete), *Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake* (complete); all these are in *The Portable Voltaire*.
    - If you have a different volume of Voltaire, read some selections of your choice from the *English Letters* (ideally including the sections on the Quakers and the Stock Exchange) and the *Philosophical Dictionary*.
  - e-reserve (google books): Charles Blount, *Anima Mundi or an Historical Narration of the Opinions of the Ancients concerning Man's Soul After This Life*, read Printer’s Address to the Reader, Blount’s Address to the Reader, and chapter 1 sections I-V (ending on page 10).
  - Optional reading (see final project options): Voltaire, *Candide* (complete)

Week 10 March 6 The Dark Enlightenment: Skepticism in Ethics and Human Nature

- Readings:
  - Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master* (Robert Loy trans), complete.
  - Diderot selections in Popkin & Neto
  - e-reserve: De Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir* short excerpt of philosophical discussion. NOTE: this philosophical dialog attacking the existence of God is part of a scene in which a young woman (Eugenie) has been sent by her father to receive an “education” in libertinism from two more veteran libertines (the man Dolmance and Madame de Saint-Ange). The dialog comes just after their first three-way sex scene, of which you can see the very last tidbit at the top of the first page of the PDF. De Sade’s sex scenes are very strange compared to modern pornography, dry, tedious, and Spartan consisting exclusively of dialog without

physical description. For who are curious about what the sex scenes are like, the sex scene that precedes this dialog appears as an optional PDF on the course reserves website, but it is not required, so only read it only if you want to.

### **Final Project due March 14<sup>th</sup>**

Final projects should be submitted by e-mail (except Wikipedia projects which are online). Undergraduates must submit their papers both to their Teaching Fellows and to the Professor. Assignments may be submitted after midnight, so long as they are in our inboxes by the time we wake up (i.e. 6 AM) on March 15<sup>th</sup>. For those doing the Two Shorter Papers Track, or writing two shorter essays, paper 2 is due at the same point.

### **COURSE POLICIES:**

**Laptop Policy:** Laptops may be used for notetaking in class, however laptop use is not allowed for students sitting in the last two rows of the classroom. This is because it is too tempting to vanish into the internet back there without noticing and miss out on course content.

**Absences and Latenesses:** Students who miss class without getting in touch with the instructors will lose points. Students who miss for a specific reason should get in contact to let us know, ideally in advance if possible. We are willing to give excused absences for a wide variety of absences including undocumented illness, travel for interviews or conferences, family events, and personal disruptions such as “My sister is giving an exciting concert in another city and I really want to go.” But we will not give credit for missed classes if you do not contact us.

Late assignments will receive a deduction of one grade level per day, i.e. one day late turns B+ into B, two days turns B+ to B- etc. However both the professor and the teaching assistants are empowered to give extensions without penalty if students make arrangements with us. Contacting us in advance with extension requests will always be better received and more likely to meet approval.

**Disability and Accessibility:** The Disability Services office offers many excellent resources, but it is not uncommon for students to have undocumented needs, especially related to intermittent or invisible disabilities (including physical and mental illness), or disabilities not yet officially certified. If you have any sort of disability-related needs, feel free to speak to the instructor even if you do not have documentation, or if your documentation offers some accommodations but not others. Professor Palmer is herself disabled (invisible disability) and happy to offer supplementary mentoring or to talk in office hours with any student with disability or with friends/family who have disability.