

# ROMAN PHILOSOPHIES

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## Course content

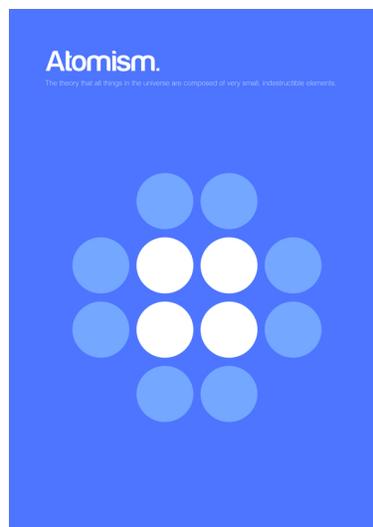
Supposedly, the Roman philosopher “Lucretius was driven mad by a love potion, and when, during the intervals of his insanity, he had written a number of books [of his magnum opus *On the Nature of Things*], which were later emended by Cicero, he killed himself by his own hand in the forty-fourth year of his life.” This is how St. Jerome depicted the *life*<sup>1</sup> of Lucretius and how he composed one of the most influential texts in the western world. His intention, which reflected most of Christian doctrine, was to completely erase Lucretius and the philosophy he expounded: Epicureanism. Despite St. Jerome’s best efforts, Lucretius’ work *lived on*, becoming perhaps the most influential texts written in the last two millennia. In this class we will read those texts written in those intervals of insanity during the 4<sup>th</sup>-Century BCE to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-Century CE in order to re-ignite that Roman philosophical spirit by not only studying these ancient thinkers but *living out their lives*.

To do this, we begin with a bold claim: Rome witnessed the birth of *philosophies*. While many scholars claim that philosophy began prior to Rome – typically citing Ancient Athens. This was where Socrates and Plato lived. Others cite modern-day Turkey as the birthplace of philosophy, where figures as Thales and Anaximander lived. While that may be true, *this class contends that philosophies, in the plural, begins in Rome*. In Rome, there was a distinct shift in the practice of philosophy. Rather promote a single way of life, such as the Socratic “good life,” Rome witnessed a variety of distinct forms of life. Roman philosophies were thereby defined by the spectrum of competing philosophical schools, rather than centered on a single dominant figure. Walking through Hellenistic Athens and Rome, one encountered an array of competing philosophical schools that cultivated their characteristic positions and practices in direct conversation and conflict with each other. We might call it a sort of *philosophical athleticism*.

<sup>1</sup> From Middle English *lif*, *hyf*, from Old English *līf* (“life, existence; life-time”), from Proto-Germanic *\*lībaq* (“life, body”), from *\*lībaną* (“to remain, stay, be left”), from PIE *\*leyp-* (“to stick, glue”; “fat or sticky substance”).

There were Epicureans, Stoics, skeptics, Cynics, Academics, Peripatetics, and others, each expressing a different take on what constitutes a meaningful art of living. In short, *the practices of philosophy in Rome expressed a multiplicity of divergent and rival philosophies*. The title of this course is ‘The Philosophies of Rome,’ not ‘Roman Philosophy,’ in order to highlight the vibrant plurality of philosophical schools that emerged and thrived in this singular period in western civilization. Since we want to focus on what is truly Roman in thought and in practice (the Cynics, Academics, and Peripatetics were active prior to Hellenic Athens and Rome), we will not engage all the schools, but will only focus on three. Epicureanism, Stoicism, and skepticism are the three most original, lasting, and vibrant philosophies in ancient Rome.

From the Epicurean emphasis on nurturing a sophisticated sensuality and the diagnosis of the uses and abuses of desire in the practice of a life full of pleasure, happiness, and affirmation, to the Stoic advocacy of the power of rationality in cultivating a life of true freedom and joy by striving to live in accord with nature, to the skeptic deployment of basically every possible mode of criticism in the practice of a near Sherlock Holmesian logical detection, these three schools embodied philosophical and ethical practices and questions that people still find enticing and invigorating today. This class seeks to reawaken the living fire that inspired each of these Roman schools of philosophy. The way we will do this is by writing our lives into another life.



## Texts

All text posted on Moodle. Every text must be printed off and brought to class. Failure to do so will count as an absence. Print off all readings ASAP in order to avoid printer backups or failures. This is completely your responsibility.

## Three Lives

Conceiving of the spirit of ancient philosophy as a “way of life” means that philosophy is more than an abstract, purely theoretical discipline, but is instead about the practice of philosophy *as* life. In the spirit of such a practice-oriented style, this class will not simply discourse *about* philosophy but will instead *practice* philosophy *in actu*. Concretely put, we will not simply read about Epicureanism, Stoicism, and skepticism from the comfortable distance of theoretical analysis, but take up these ancient schools of for a few weeks in January. To do this, we will spend about a week on each school, beginning with the Stoics. We will become Stoics, Epicureans, and skeptics – living, breathing, talking, and writing her or his life as a member of each school. By engaging in a veritable becoming-Stoic, becoming-Epicurean, and becoming-skeptic, we will bring the Roman philosophical world back to life, filled out by the context of our personal, public, and academic lives.

Inspired by Herman Hesse’s [\*The Glass Bead Game\*](#), the main project for this class is for each student to write three lives: a Stoic life, an Epicurean life, and a skeptical life. To do this, each student will write and perform

a narrative biography about him or herself were you to live as a proponent of each school. But the twist is that you will not live as a Stoic, etc. in your *own* life. Instead, you will take up the life of another sort of person and then attempt to imagine what it would mean to live as a Stoic, etc. in the context of *that* life. We will talk about which life you will choose to imagine, but here are some suggestions. You could put yourself in the life of an African-American slave, a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, a Syrian refugee, a prisoner of war (such as John Stockdale, who actually lived as a Stoic as a POW), the President of the USA, a Roman emperor, a Medieval knight. The point is that you are supposed to put yourself in the “skin” of that life and then describe what it would look and feel like to live according to Stoic, etc. principles in that life. Put differently, I ask you to imagine how you, if you were an emperor or a slave or what have you, would live if you are striving to be a good Stoic, Epicurean, or skeptic. Put another way, I ask you to put on the mask of such a life and strive to live that life *as* a Stoic, etc. would live. With that mask on, ask yourself: What would a Stoic, etc. do? There will be two main ways in which these lives are expressed: (1) written and (2) performative.

## Writing

The written part will consist of a 4-page narrative of each life. As we look at our three schools of roman philosophy, students will write three lives, totaling 12-pages. Lives are due on the following dates:

Stoic life is due *Jan. 11*

Epicurean life is due *Jan. 17*

Skeptic life is due *Jan. 23*

On the day after the final day of class, Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>, each student will email to the teacher all three lives, bound together into a single story consisting of three parts: a Stoic life, an Epicurean life, and a skeptic life. Let’s call it you *Book of Lives*. It should include a (a) one-page introduction, which will introduce the whole project and explain why you choose to write on this life, and (b) a one-page conclusion, which should reflect on the philosophical and ethical lessons you have learned while writing and performing these lives. Since it is worth 100 points/10% of the grade, you are encouraged to rewrite the life-writings. Total page number for your *Book of Lives*: 14.

The goal of each life-writing is to imagine and articulate the details of what it would mean to really live the life of a Stoic, etc. in the mask of the life you choose to live. The evaluation of these lives will thus proceed according to these criteria:

- (1) How successfully you express the specifics of the concepts and beliefs of each school in terms of the concrete life on which you chose to write?
  - a. Are you using the concepts and arguments expounded by that school (and citing the texts we read)?
- (2) Can you really grasp what a life would be like if you were to internalize these philosophical ideas, goals, presuppositions, beliefs, etc.?
  - a. Are you able to translate concepts into actions?
- (3) Are you demonstrating a deep and sophisticated understanding of each philosophical school? That is, are you paying special attention to what is unique about each school, that is, do you fully and deeply grasp what makes Stoicism *Stoicism* and not Epicureanism any other school of philosophy?
  - a. It is essential to be able to distinguish the schools even though there will be some overlap or resonances between them.

You must be careful about which life you choose because you will be stuck with this life all semester. This means that you will live the same life as a Stoic, as an Epicurean, and as a skeptic. For example, if you choose a medieval priest as your life, then you will imagine yourself as a priest living first as a Stoic, then as an Epicurean, and then as a skeptic. In short, you will live the same life three times, each time striving to live according to the principles of a single Roman school of philosophy. (Each life-writing is worth 200 points each, totaling 600 points/60% of the grade).

*Nota bene:* Philosophy is, in large part, about thinking. Thus grading philosophical work, the kind of work you will do in this class, is about assessing the *quality of your thinking*. Students often erroneously think that philosophy is just a matter of opinion giving. This is wrong. Philosophy is about thinking. Depending on the quality of thinking, philosophy is can be judged to be better or worse. Overall, we can judge the quality of thinking by means of arguments and analysis. High quality thinking (good philosophy) contains convincing arguments and careful, focused, and precise analysis; low quality thinking (poor philosophy) contains unconvincing and careless, unfocused, imprecise analysis. Good philosophy is not just a matter of effort; it is a matter of skill, aptitude, and ability. In sum, your grade will be based on the *quality of your thinking*.

## Performance

There will be three days of live performances (Jan.). To do this, you will divide into six groups, which means that every group will present on each of the three days. Each group will perform the lives that its group members choose on which to write. While I recommend that the groups “act out scenes,” other kinds of performances are welcome and encouraged. The point is that all of you should strive to be *creative* and *expressive* of the lives that you write. The evaluation will be on two fronts: (1) Degree of effort and creativity, and (2) the success of expressing or translating a philosophical life into a live presentation.

When you are not performing, you will still have an assignment: for every performance you witness, you must list *one* thing you learned from this performance about this school of philosophy. Write this down in your journal, along with the date, name of the performer, etc. If you are not performing (Worth 50 points each, totaling 100 points/10% of the grade).

## Philosophical Journal

Throughout the course of the semester, you must keep a journal of what we will call your *philosophical ruminations*. You should do a new entry for each class day that we discuss a new reading. Let’s make sure this is clear: if you are asked to read something for Tuesday, then you should do the reading and the journal entry before class. These entries will be our entryways into class discussions. You will be allowed to miss *two journal entries*, no questions asked. After that, points will begin to drop. Since we have eleven readings, you must do at least nine. (100 points/10% of the grade). Each entry should be a minimum of about a written page or 419 words, and should follow this format:

- (1) *Select a passage*
  - a. While reading our texts, try to remain sensitive to those passage in the readings that *speak to you*, that *grab you*, that *provoke a movement in your*. Mark these passages in the text (with a highlighter, pen or pencil, etc.) Please write directly onto the page of the text. After finishing the whole reading, you should copy down the most thought-provoking passage into your journal, including a citation from the text. Be sure to note down the page and section from which the passage arose.
- (2) *Ruminate on the passage*
  - a. Then you will ruminate on this passage. Etymologically, to ‘ruminate’ means “to chew the cud.” Cud is a portion of food that returns from the chewers stomach to the mouth in order to be chewed a second time. Like chewing on a cud, I ask you to “chew” on a passage until it becomes soft enough for you to mold it into various sophisticated concepts and ideas. Write down this process of “chewing on” the passage that struck you. Follow the movements of your thoughts as they changed and slowly became part of your body (just as chewing and eating turns things that are not-you into you).
- (3) *How does it show up in your life?*

- a. Once you have sat with and ‘chewed on’ a poignant passage for a while, then you should locate places, times, or events where Stoic, Epicurean, or skeptic ideas show up in your daily life. This is where you where philosophy gains traction in your everyday life. Pay attention to what you hear in the news, in your conversations with your friends and family, as you walk through campus, as you shop a grocery store or dine at a restaurant. Put yourself in the mind and body of the philosophical school we are engaging on that day.

## Participation

(1) We must be very clear about this: *in order to pass this class, you must participate regularly, enthusiastically, and respectfully.* You are allowed one unexcused absence. All unexcused absences beyond that are deducted 1% point off the final grade. All other absences require an official document justifying this absence. Notes from the health center that say “This does not excuse a class absence” (or something like that) do not count. Without such a document, you will be counted as absence and you will *not* be permitted to make-up the missed assignment. (2) this class requires everyone must participating regularly and enthusiastically. Philosophy, especially the Roman variety, demands continuous engagement. If you are not participating every day, you are not doing philosophy. (3) *You must bring the correct book to every class.* For every day you do not bring the book, in the edition listed on this syllabus, you will be counted as absent. You *must* have the paper edition of the text. (4) You must be on time to class. While unexpected things happen, if you are regularly late, you will be counted as absent for each day late. (5) **No phones and texting in the classroom.** (6) You are not excused from the final days of class because you have a plane ticket home. If you miss the last day, you lose points. (100 points/10% of the grade)

## Grade distribution and calculation table: Total possible points for this class; 1000 points.

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Possible Points</i>	<i>Your points</i>
Performances	100	
Epicurean Life	200	
Stoic Live	200	
Skeptic Life	200	
Final Three lives	100	
Journal	100	
Participation	100	
<i>Total</i>	<i>1000</i>	

*Grade Scale:* A = 92% to 100% A- = 90% to 91%  
 B+ = 88% to 89% B = 82% to 87% B- = 80% to 81%  
 C+ = 78% to 79% C = 72% to 77% C- = 70% to 71%  
 D+ = 68% to 69% D = 60% to 67%

*Note Bene:* There is a normal grade distribution in this class from “A-F.” A grade of “A” means your work is perfect, that is, a student has demonstrated a perfect understanding of the lessons and material and there is nothing more to learn. A grade of “B” means a student has demonstrated good grasp of the material, though there is more to learn. A grade of “C” means a student has demonstrated an average grasp of the material and there is much more to learn. A grade of “D” means a students has demonstrated a below average grasp of the material and there is a great deal more to learn. A grade of “F” means failure.

## Take your professor to lunch!

You get to take your professor to lunch (at Colonnades, Lakeside, of McEwan) for free (an Elon program). Anytime you me to join you and friends for lunch, let me know. Eating is another way to do philosophy.

### Daily class organization

1:30-1:40: Housework

1:40-2:30: Group work

2:30-2:40: Break I  
2:40-3:30: Whole class discussion  
3:30-3:40: Break II  
3:40-4:30: Exercises

## **Class Schedule**

- Jan. 3 Philosophy as a way of life  
1) Review Syllabus  
2) Discuss Hadot's "The Hellenistic Schools" from *What is Ancient Philosophy?*  
3) Divide into three schools and discuss Hadot's three chapters from *What is Ancient Philosophy?*
- Jan. 4 READ: (1) Pierre Hadot "Philosophy as a Way of Life-Ch11" (from *Philosophy as a Way of Life*); (2) Hadot "*Meditations as Spiritual Exercises*" (from *Inner Citadel*); and (3) John Sellars "The Function of Spiritual Exercises" (from *Art of Living*)  
Assignment: Develop a philosophical exercise for us to do in class
- Jan. 7 **GUEST LECTURE:**  
READ: Epictetus, "Enchiridion," & Foucault, "Self-writing, part 1"  
Recommended to read: Foucault, "Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lecture 15"  
Exercise: Bring out your preconceptions
- Jan. 8 READ: Seneca "On Anger" & Audre Lorde "Uses of Anger"  
Exercise: Meditation on Death
- Jan. 9 **GUEST LECTURE:**  
READ: Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*,  
Exercise: Prepare for Performance
- Jan. 10 **Performance of a Stoic Life**
- Jan. 11 READ: Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus" & "Letter to Herodotus" **& Stoic Life-writing due**  
Exercise: Memory palace (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh9B5UJbbRg>)
- Jan. 14 **GUEST LECTURE:**  
READ: Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Bk. I, &  
Exercise: Sorting desires and pleasures
- Jan. 15 READ: Lucretius, Bk. II & III  
Prepare for Performances
- Jan. 16 **Performance of an Epicurean Life**
- Jan. 17 READ: Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, Book I: pp. 2-33 **& Epicurean Life-writing due**  
Exercise: *About Time*'s "secret formula for happiness" or Taking down arguments
- Jan. 18 READ: Sextus, pp. 34-64  
Exercise: Prepare for Performances
- Jan. 21 **No Class: MLK Jr. Holiday**
- Jan. 22 **Performance of a Skeptic Life**
- Jan. 23 *Race in Ancient Rome and in 2019 USA* **& Skeptic Life-writing due**  
READ: (1) Alison C. Traweck, "Himmler's Antiquity," (2) McCoskey, "What Would James Baldwin Do?," (3) Whitmarsh, "Black Achilles," (& (4) Kennedy, "Why I Teach About Race in the Classical World"

<http://www.caitlingreen.org/2016/05/a-note-on-evidence-for-african-migrants.html?m=1>  
<http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/the-forum/2017/07/28/how-diverse-was-roman-britain/>

H. Eckardt (ed.) 2010. *Roman Diasporas: Archaeological Approaches to Mobility and Diversity in the Roman Empire*. *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Supplement 78.

H. Eckardt and G. Mundler 2016. 'Mobility, Migration and Diasporas in Roman Britain', in M. Millett, L. Revell and A. Moore (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Britain*. Oxford: 203-23.

<https://sarahemilybond.com/2017/09/10/hold-my-mead-a-bibliography-for-historians-hitting-back-at-white-supremacy/>

[https://acon.co/essays/when-homer-envisioned-achilles-did-he-see-a-black-man?utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_source=atom-feed](https://acon.co/essays/when-homer-envisioned-achilles-did-he-see-a-black-man?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=atom-feed)

## University Policies and Resources

### Elon Honor Code

Elon's honor pledge calls for a commitment to Elon's shared values of Honesty, Integrity, Respect and Responsibility. To be clear about what constitutes violations of these values; students should be familiar with code of conduct policies in the student handbook, including violations outlined at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/violations/default.xhtml>. Students with questions about the specific interpretation of these values and violations as they relate to this course should contact me immediately. Violations in academic-related areas will be documented in an incident report which will be maintained in the Office of Student Conduct, and may result in a lowering of the course grade and/or failure of the course with an Honor Code F. (In fact, my policy is that any violation of the honor code results in an immediate grade of "F" for the course, RJ.) Violations specifically covered by academic honor code policies include: plagiarism, cheating, lying, stealing and the facilitation of another's dishonesty. Multiple violations will normally result in a student's temporary suspension from the University.

### Elon Disabilities Services

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. For more information about Disabilities Services, please visit the website [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities\\_services.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/support/disabilities_services.xhtml).

### Elon Writing Center

Elon's Writing Center in the Center for Writing Excellence is staffed by trained peer-consultants who can help you with all of your writing projects (for any class or major and for any extracurricular, personal, or professional purposes), so take advantage of this excellent academic resource and include a visit to our Writing Center as part of your own writing process. In one-on-one, 45 minute sessions, our consultants will work with you on any kind of writing (such as research or analysis papers, PowerPoint or poster presentations, resumes, or job applications) at any stage of the writing process (such as understanding an assignment; brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing; developing a research question or starting your research; or writing in-text citations and bibliographies/works cited). We have two multimedia production studios so you can create and work with a consultant on your multimedia and visual texts (such as PowerPoint or Prezi presentations, videos, or websites). Visit our presentation practice room where you can easily record and critique yourself giving a presentation and get feedback from a consultant on your accompanying visuals. The main Writing Center, located in Belk Library, is open extensive hours: M-Th: 10am-10pm; Fri: 10am-4pm; Sun: 2pm-10pm. The Writing Center also staffs satellite Writing Centers in CREDE and in the Business School. If you have questions, please contact The Writing Center Director, Dr. Paula Rosinski at [prosinski@elon.edu](mailto:prosinski@elon.edu) or X5842. (<http://www.elon.edu/writingcenter>)

### Religious Holidays Policies

In supporting religious diversity, Elon has a policy and procedures for students who wish to observe religious holidays that are in conflict with the academic calendar, allowing students an excused absence. Students who wish to observe a holiday during the semester must complete the online Religious Observance Notification Form (RONF), available at the following website within the first two weeks of the semester: [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/religious\\_life/ReligiousHolidays.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/religious_life/ReligiousHolidays.xhtml). This policy does not apply during the final examination period. Students are required to make prior arrangements with the instructor for completion of any work missed during the absence. Once the completed RONF is received, the Truitt Center will confirm the excused absence with notification to the instructor and the appropriate academic dean, along with a copy to the student. Students may contact the Truitt Center staff with any questions (336-278-7729).

### Student Options Related to Enrollment in Your Course

**Enrollment:** Students should confirm their enrollment in this course through their On-Track account. Students who do not appear on the course roll or do not show the correct course/section listed on On-Track should consult with their instructor immediately.

#### Policies on Dropping or Withdrawing from this Course

- Students may drop a course during the designated drop/add period through their On-Track account. A course that is dropped during the designated drop/add period will not appear on the student's transcript or grade report.
- After the designated drop/add period, students may withdraw from a course without penalty through the first half of the semester, following dates published in the academic calendar. Withdrawing from a course during this period will result in a mark of "W" that will appear on the student's academic transcript. Students may withdraw by using the online process located at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/administration/registrar/DropAddClassesOnline.xhtml>  
NOTE: Students should not assume that they will be officially withdrawn from a course based on their failing to attend class or their notifying a faculty member of their intent to withdraw. The student has the responsibility for following the official process of withdrawing from a class. Students who do not properly withdraw from a course will receive a grade of F.
- Students may not withdraw from a course after the published deadline. Any exception to this policy is the responsibility of the appropriate academic dean's office. When granted, withdrawal from a course after this time will result in a grade of "W" or "F" depending on the student's grade at the time. For additional information on university course policies, students should consult their Academic Catalog: <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/academics/catalog/>