

PHIL 29200-02/29300-02
Knowledge in Plato's dialogues
Spring 2017

Gates-Blakes Hall 341
Tues/Thurs 1:30-3:30

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3-5PM, Stuart 209.

In this course, we will examine the discussions of knowledge (*epistēmē* in Greek) in Plato's dialogues. The course will center around a close reading of the *Theaetetus*, Plato's most sustained dialogue on the topic of knowledge, but we will also draw readings from the *Meno*, *Charmides*, *Sophist*, *Republic*, *Phaedo* and *Protagoras*. While knowledge will be our focus, we will find that Plato approaches the topic of knowledge obliquely, by theorizing a number of related concepts. These include insight, perception and belief, understanding, inquiry, teaching and learning, justification and expertise. Following Plato, we will consider each of these concepts in turn by reflecting on their treatment in the dialogues. Some of the questions we will ask are: Does Plato defend a theory of knowledge as justified true belief? How is perception related to knowledge in Plato's view? Why does Plato think there is a special problem about knowing negative statements? Why does Plato identify self-knowledge with the virtue of temperance? How does Plato view the relationship between knowledge and understanding? What consequences does Plato's view have for the nature of teaching and learning, and is this view of pedagogy attractive? If we have time, we will go on to look at the reception of some of these themes in Aristotle and the Stoics.

Course objectives

The aim of this course is threefold. First, it serves as a general introduction to close textual work in philosophy. Students will learn to formulate interpretations and test them against the text, reflect on the precise wording of statements, and consider when and how linguistic issues can have philosophical significance. Beyond this, students will gain a number of special skills for working with Plato's dialogues. This includes separating Plato's views from the views of his characters, becoming sensitive to Socratic irony, and reflecting on how the dialogical context can support or weigh against the interpretation of a given claim. Finally, the course will serve as an introduction to a number of live issues in epistemology. Students will become able to articulate important differences and relationships between concepts such as knowledge, belief, understanding, perception and insight.

Course requirements

No specific philosophical or linguistic background will be assumed. All texts will be read in English, and issues of translation will be discussed in a way that presupposes no special linguistic competence. Students who know Greek will, however, find opportunities to put their knowledge to use.

Assessment

Each student will be asked to give three brief presentations on the primary and secondary readings over the term of the course. The presentations should summarize the arguments presented in each of the assigned readings for that week and say whether they find these convincing. These presentations will form 15% of the grade and may provide a basis for paper topics.

The first paper, due mid-term, will be worth 35% of the grade and will ask students to compare the treatment of knowledge or some other broadly epistemic concept in two or more Platonic dialogues.

The second paper, assigned at the end of the term, will give students an opportunity to reflect more broadly on Plato's idea of knowledge and will be worth 50%.

Course schedule

All primary readings should be completed by students before class meetings. Secondary readings marked with (O) are optional.

- 1 **Introduction**
 - The dialogical frame of the *Theaetetus* (beginning to 151d).
 - Socrates' "what is it?" question.
 - 2 **Inquiry**
 - Teaching and learning.
 - The possibility of inquiry.
 - 3 **Perception I**
 - Perception and the flux theory.
 - Protagorean relativism.
 - 4 **Perception II**
 - Protagorean relativism evaluated.
 - The argument from memory.
 - 5 **Perception III**
 - Perception and being.
 - The perception theory refuted.
- Euthyphro* (5c-6e).
Grace Chapell, "Plato on Knowledge" (O).
- Meno*, (70a-80e).
Nicholas White, "Inquiry".
- Theaetetus* (151d - 160e).
Myles Burnyeat, "Conflicting Appearances", §I-IV.
- Theaetetus* (160e-169d).
Mi-Kyuong Lee, *Protagoras and relativism* (O).
- Theaetetus* (169d-187a).
Michael Frede, "Some observations on perception".

- 6 **Perception IV**
 – Perception and intellect. *Phaedo* (65a-c, 73c-75c).
 – The theory of recollection. *Republic* (479a-d).
 Meno (81a-86c).
 Dominic Scott, “Platonic Recollection”.
- 7 **Judgement I**
 – The problem of false judgement. *Theaetetus* (187b-195b).
 – The wax tablet model. Raphael Woolf, “A Shaggy Soul Story” (O).
- 8 **Judgement II**
 – The possibility of false judgement. *Sophist* (236c-241c, 262e-264b).
 Gail Fine, “False Belief” (O).
- 9 **Judgement III**
 – The aviary model. *Theaetetus* (195b-200d).
 – Having, acquiring and using Robert Hackforth, “The Aviary Theory” (O).
 knowledge.
- 10 **Judgement IV**
 – The divided line *Republic V* (474b to end).
 Gail Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*”.
- 11 **Justification I**
 – The juror analogy. *Theaetetus* (200d-208b).
 – Socrates’ dream. Myles Burnyeat, “Socrates and the Jury”.
 Alexander Nehamas, “*Episteme* and *Logos*” (O).
- 12 **Justification II**
 – The dream continued.
 – Letters and syllables.
- 13 **Justification III**
 – Tying down beliefs. *Meno* (86c to end).
 Whitney Schwab, “The Epistemology of the *Meno*” (O).
 Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge* (selections) (O).
- 14 **Thought**
 – The transparency view *Theaetetus* (208c to end).
 Raphael Woolf, “Plato and the Norms of Thought”.
- 15 **Self-Knowledge I**
 – Self-knowledge and virtue. *Charmides* (beginning-165a).
- 16 **Self-Knowledge II**
 – Knowledge of knowledge. *Charmides* (165a-end).
 Aryeh Kosman, “Self-knowledge and self-control” (O).

