

Plato's Epistemology

PHIL 8030 (CRN 92284): Seminar in Ancient Philosophy

Fall 2025 | W 4:30-7pm | 25 Park Place Rm 1618

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Office Hours: M 12:15-1pm and 2:45-4:15pm;
W 12:15-1pm
Please book a slot in advance via Calendly.
Other times available by appointment.

Course Description and Objectives

The central focus of this course will be the nature of *epistēmē* (knowledge?) and *doxa* (belief?) in Plato's dialogues. The backbone of the course will comprise careful reading and discussion of some core texts from Plato's work. In the first half of the course, we will explore Plato's strategy of defining *epistēmē* and *doxa* via their objects (with a focus on the nature and role of forms), some problems that confound inquiry, and the value of *epistēmē*. Our main texts will be the *Republic* and the *Meno*. In the second half of the course, we will turn to Plato's attempts to define *epistēmē* in the *Theaetetus*, focusing on its relationship to perception and to true *doxa*.

The overall aim of the course is to familiarize participants with some of the major interpretative debates surrounding Plato's epistemology and to prepare participants to make scholarly contributions to those debates. Participants will achieve this overall aim by engaging thoughtfully with the assigned readings. Thoughtful engagement includes careful reading of the material, submission of writing assignments, and in-class discussion. A secondary aim of the course is to help participants hone key professional skills. Participants will practice preparing and critical analyses of primary texts and will learn how to write and pitch a conference-length paper.

Required Texts

*****You must procure paper copies of these translations/editions of the books.*****

Note: These are the same translations as those in Cooper's *Collected Works*. If you'd like to have all the dialogues in one (much heavier) place, you can purchase that single volume instead.

- Plato's *Republic*, trans. Grube & Reeve (Hackett: 1992)
- Plato's *Meno*, trans. Grube (Hackett: 1980)
- Plato's *Theaetetus*, trans. Levett, rev. Burnyeat (Hackett: 1992)
- 2ndary literature will be posted on iCollege.

Course Requirements and Grading

We will accomplish the course objectives through the achievement of some more modest aims: the completion of reading and writing assignments and class participation. Graded components:

Assignments

	Final grade %
Attendance and participation (including Term Paper Bootcamp)	10%
2 commentaries (10% ea)	20%
Abstract for final paper (750 words) + on-time submission of draft to referee	15%
Referee report (1,500 words)	10%
Final paper (3,000-4,500 words)	45%

Grading Scale					
A+	98-100	B	83-86	C-	70-72
A	93-97	B-	80-82	D	60-69
A-	90-92	C+	77-79	F	0-59
B+	87-89	C	73-76		

Attendance and participation: Students are expected to attend each class session. Attending class is a precondition for participation. Good participation involves consistently making contributions to the ongoing discussion that genuinely engage with the topic and with one's interlocutors. These contributions will often be in the form of in-class questions, responses, etc. I will also count comments made in response to student submissions on the course Google docs as evidence of thoughtful participation.

Commentaries: Being able to identify the key claims of a passage or article; being able to articulate the structure of an argument or passage; and being able to raise thoughtful questions and criticisms are all essential skills for philosophers. At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up to write 2 commentaries on primary texts.

- Each piece of writing will be 400-600 words. **You must complete at least one by Oct 14.**
- Commentaries will briefly summarize and contextualize the passage. They will then raise/motivate 1 interpretative question about the passage and propose/defend 1 answer to that question, citing further textual evidence where relevant.
- You will post your writing to the designated board on iCollege and to our Google Doc by 11:59pm on the Monday before our class meets. Your peers will be invited to respond to your commentaries/critiques, and you should be prepared to discuss your writing in class.

Final paper and referee report: This essay is the culmination of your work in the course and will hopefully form the basis of a conference submission. In it you will develop an interpretation of a passage or (more broadly) of an issue from the primary texts assigned for the course. You'll explain the importance and interest of your view for our understanding of Plato's epistemology, and you'll address relevant alternative views from the secondary literature. This assignment has five main components.

- *Term Paper Bootcamp:* You'll brainstorm, present your paper ideas-in-progress in small groups, and make an action plan. Takes place Oct 29. **Failure to attend and/or participate will result in a lower participation grade** (you will lose 1/3 of your letter grade).
- *Final paper abstract:* Knowing how to write a clear, concise, and compelling abstract is useful both for helping you organize your own ideas in preparation for writing and for helping you successfully pitch papers for conferences or journals. Prior to writing your final paper, you will submit a 750-word abstract that introduces the topic of the paper, presents your thesis, and sketches your (planned) overall argument for that thesis. Due November 5.

- *Draft of final paper:* This should be a complete draft of your paper that works out in detail the argument you sketched in your abstract and engages with relevant alternative views from the secondary literature. It's ok if the draft is shorter than the final paper, but it should be at least 2,000 words. **Failure to submit your draft on time will result in a lower abstract grade** (you will lose 1/3 of your letter grade). Due November 21 to your peer referee.
 - Optional: if you would like comments on your draft from me, you must submit your draft to me by Nov 17 (if you opt for this, you can expect to receive less feedback on your final paper).
- *Referee report:* Each of you will write a report on one other author's draft paper as if you were reviewing the paper for a journal. I will provide more information about this assignment in class closer to the due date. Due December 3.
- *Final paper:* The final version of your paper should be revised in light of the referee report. Due December 12.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

Date	Topic	Assigned readings / Assignment due dates
Aug 27	The key terms: <i>epistēmē</i> and <i>doxa</i>	1. Course intro 2. Explanation of commentary/critique assignment 3. <i>Republic</i> 5.473d-480a (powers)
Sep 3	The "Two Worlds" debate	1. Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in <i>Republic</i> V-VII" (pp.85-95) 2. <i>Rep.</i> 6.504a-511e (sun/line)
Sep 10		1. <i>Rep.</i> 7. 514a-521b (cave) 2. Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in <i>Republic</i> V-VII" (pp.95-115)
Sep 17	Innate knowledge and inquiry	1. Moss, "Plato's 'Two-Worlds Epistemology'" 2. <i>Meno</i> 70a-80e (Meno's paradox)
Sep 24		1. <i>Meno</i> 81a-86c (recollection) 2. Dimas, "True Belief in the <i>Meno</i> "
Oct 1		1. Bronstein and Schwab, "Is Plato an Innatist in the <i>Meno</i> ?" 2. <i>Meno</i> 86c-96d (hypothesis)
Oct 8	<i>Epistēmē</i> as understanding	1. <i>Meno</i> 96d-100b (Road to Larissa, statues of Daedalus) 2. Schwab, "Explanation in the <i>Meno</i> "
Oct 15	The value of <i>epistēmē</i>	1. Bjelde, "The Stability of Knowledge" 2. <i>Theaetetus</i> 142a-160e (Protagorean relativism)
Oct 22	Knowledge and the senses	1. <i>Tht.</i> 160e-183c 2. Silverman, "Flux and Language in the <i>Theaetetus</i> "
Oct 29	Catch up/Term Paper Bootcamp (mandatory attendance)	
Nov 5		1. <i>Tht.</i> 183c-186e

* <i>JM colloquium</i> Nov 7		2. Cooper, “Plato on Sense Perception and Knowledge” (contrast Lorenz, “Belief and Reason”) Final paper abstract due Wed, Nov 5
Nov 12	<i>Epistēmē</i> as true belief (+ an account?)	1. <i>Tht.</i> 187a-201c (aviary and wax tablet) 2. Barton, “The <i>Theaetetus</i> on how we Think”
Nov 19		1. Burnyeat and Barnes, “Socrates and the Jury” 2. <i>Tht.</i> 201c-210a (end) (focus: 201d-206b) (Only for early comments) draft due to me Mon, Nov 17 draft due to referee Fri, Nov 21
Nov 24-28 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break		
Dec 3		1. Broadie, “The Knowledge Unacknowledged in the <i>Theaetetus</i> ” 3. Wrapping up Referee report due Wed, Dec 3
Final paper due Fri, Dec 12		

Course Policies

AI policy (TL;DR: the use of AI is prohibited in this course.)

- The use of artificial-intelligence (AI) tools—including but not limited to text generators, research assistants, or problem-solving systems—is strictly prohibited for every assignment in this course. All submitted work must be wholly your own, produced without AI assistance.
- **Submitting AI-generated or AI-assisted work constitutes academic misconduct** under the university’s [Policy on Academic Honesty](#) and will be prosecuted as such.
- If you are unsure whether an action constitutes AI use, ask me before proceeding.

Office hours

- Come and chat philosophy!
- To do so, please book a slot via Calendly at least 24 hours in advance. This is to ensure that students don’t have to wait in line to speak with me. You’re welcome to book multiple slots back-to-back if you think you’ll need the time—but please be mindful of your fellow students’ needs!
- I’ll assume you’re attending my office hours in person unless you email me to request an online meeting.

Attendance is required if you want to do well in this course.

Late assignments and extensions

- **Commentaries.** No extensions will be granted for these assignments (unless you have a documented emergency). Late submissions will not be accepted. It is your responsibility to make sure that the dates you sign up for do not conflict with anything else on your calendar.
- **Drafts and referee reports.** No extensions will be granted (unless you have a documented emergency). This is to ensure that you and your partner get an adequate amount of time to read each other’s papers and incorporate the feedback you receive. If you know that you will be very

busy in the days surrounding these deadlines, then you should hand in your report and/or draft earlier than the deadline.

- **Abstract/final paper.** Any extensions must be requested from me at least 48 hours prior to the assignment deadline. In general, extensions will be granted when we both agree that you have a legitimate reason for your request. Note, however, that turning in an abstract late will mean that it takes me longer to get you feedback on it (thus leaving you with less time to write your draft). Late assignments will be penalized by 3 percentage points per day late. Late assignments submitted more than 14 days past the deadline will not be accepted and you will receive an “F” on the relevant assignment.

Department of Philosophy: General Syllabus Statement: FALL 2025

Respect & Civility: Faculty and students in Philosophy courses commit to creating an intellectual environment that is respectful of students' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, regardless of their race, religion, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identification, ability status, socioeconomic status, national identity, or any other identity markers.

All students in this course should be treated with respect and dignity and provided with an equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed. Disagreement is part of philosophical discussion. But students should avoid language that is demeaning or stigmatizing, particularly when addressing other members of the class and responding to their views.

Students who wish to use a name other than what is available on the class roll or iCollege should use the Preferred Name Change form on PAWS to indicate their preference no later than the end of the first week of class.

- **This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.**
- The **withdrawal period** for a course with the possibility of receiving a "W" for **FALL 2025, Sept. 2nd till Oct. 24th, for the full semester**. A student may be awarded a **W** no more than 6 times in their career at Georgia State. After 6 W's, a withdrawal is recorded as a WF, which counts as an F in a GPA.
- **The customary penalty for any violation of academic honesty is an "F" in the course, which cannot be replaced by repeating the course or with a withdrawal.** See selections from the University Policy on Academic Honesty below. **Copying or using any material from the internet in any way without proper citation is a violation of the policy.**
- Students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the [Access and Accommodation Center \(AACE\)](#). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by AACE of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought.
- Students are responsible for confirming that they are attending the course section for which they are registered. Failure to do so may result in an F for the course.
- By University policy and to respect the confidentiality of all students, **final grades** may not be posted, emailed, or given out over the phone. To see your grades, use PAWS.
- Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University. Upon completing the course, **please take the time to fill out the online course evaluation on PAWS.**

Please subscribe to one of our department listservs for current information and events:

<https://philosophy.gsu.edu/listserve-form/>

For more information on the philosophy program and the value of philosophy courses visit:

<http://philosophy.gsu.edu>

For more information on GSU Code of Conduct visit:

<https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/>

For more information on student accommodation visit the AACE website:

<https://access.gsu.edu/>

For more information on assistance for students⁶ visit the Dean of Students website:

<https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/student-conduct/>

Policy on Academic Honesty, from the GSU Student Code of Conduct

As members of the academic community, students are expected to recognize and uphold standards of intellectual and academic integrity. The university assumes as a basic and minimum standard of conduct in academic matters that students be honest and that they submit for credit only the products of their own efforts. Both the ideals of scholarship and the need for fairness require that all dishonest work be rejected as a basis for academic credit. They also require that students refrain from any and all forms of dishonorable or unethical conduct related to their academic work.

The university's policy on academic honesty is published in the *Faculty Handbook* and *On Campus: The Student Handbook* and is available to all members of the university community. The policy represents a core value of the university, and all members of the university community are responsible for abiding by its tenets. Lack of knowledge of this policy is not an acceptable defense to any charge of academic dishonesty. All members of the academic community—students, faculty, and staff—are expected to report violations of these standards of academic conduct to the appropriate authorities. The procedures for such reporting are on file in the offices of the deans of each college, the office of the dean of students, and the office of the provost.

Definitions and Examples

The examples and definitions given below are intended to clarify the standards by which academic honesty and academically honorable conduct are to be judged. The list is merely illustrative of the kinds of infractions that may occur, and it is not intended to be exhaustive. Moreover, the definitions and examples suggest conditions under which unacceptable behavior of the indicated types normally occurs; however, there may be unusual cases that fall outside these conditions that also will be judged unacceptable by the academic community.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is presenting another person's work as one's own. Plagiarism includes any para-phrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work as one's own. Plagiarism frequently involves failure to acknowledge in the text, notes, or footnotes the quotation of the paragraphs, sentences, or even a few phrases written or spoken by someone else. The submission of research or completed papers or projects by someone else is plagiarism, as is the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else when that use is specifically forbidden by the faculty member. Failure to indicate the extent and nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. Any work, in whole or in part, taken from the Internet or other computer-based resource without properly referencing the source (for example, the URL) is considered plagiarism. A complete reference is required in order that all parties may locate and view the original source. Finally, there may be forms of plagiarism that are unique to an individual discipline or course, examples of which should be provided in advance by the faculty member. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly or creative indebtedness, and the consequences of violating this responsibility.

Multiple Submissions: It is a violation of academic honesty to submit substantial portions of the same work for credit more than once without the explicit consent of the faculty member(s) to whom the material is submitted for additional credit. In cases in which there is a natural development of research or knowledge in a sequence of courses, use of prior work may be desirable, even required; however, the student is responsible for indicating in writing, as a part of such use, that the current work submitted for credit is cumulative in nature.

Cheating on Examinations: Cheating on examinations involves giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include the use of notes, computer-based resources, texts, or "crib sheets" during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member), or sharing information with another student during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member). Other examples include intentionally allowing another student to view one's own examination and collaboration before or after an examination if such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the faculty member.

Unauthorized Collaboration: Submission for academic credit of a work product, or a part thereof, represented as its being one's own effort, which has been developed in substantial collaboration with another person or source or with a computer-based resource is a violation of academic honesty. It is also a violation of academic honesty knowingly to provide such assistance. Collaborative work specifically authorized by a faculty member is allowed.

Falsification: It is a violation of academic honesty to misrepresent material or fabricate information in an academic exercise, assignment or proceeding (e.g., false or misleading citation of sources, falsification of the results of experiments or computer data, false or misleading information in an academic context in order to gain an unfair advantage).