

Plato's Epistemology

PHIL 8030 (CRN 95169): Seminar in Ancient Philosophy

Fall 2020 | T 4:30-7pm | Langdale Hall Room 200

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Office: *virtual (webex)*
Office Hours: M 4-5:30pm, R 2-3:30pm, and
by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

The central focus of this course will be the nature of knowledge (*epistēmē*) and belief (*doxa*) 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 two-thirds of the course, we will explore some problems that confound the pursuit of knowledge, Plato's views about how knowledge is acquired (with a focus on recollection), and what the objects of knowledge and true belief are (with a focus on the nature and role of forms). Our main texts will be the *Charmides*, the *Meno* and selections from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In the final third of the course, we will turn to Plato's attempts to define knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, focusing on the relationship between knowledge and perception and the relationship between knowledge and true belief. Two of the general issues we will consider throughout the course will be whether there is a single theory of knowledge in the dialogues and how Plato's epistemology intersects with his ethics.

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 questions and 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 presenting comments on a paper and will learn how to write and pitch a conference-length paper.

Required Texts

- *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Hackett: 1997)
- Other reading assignments 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:

Assignment	Final grade %
Attendance and participation (including 10 <i>Discussion Questions</i>)	10%
Comments presentation and write-up (2 x 10%; presentation: 10-15 mins; write-up: about 1,500 words)	20%
Abstract for final paper (750 words)	5%
Draft of final paper (3,500-5,000 words)	10%
Referee report (1,500 words)	10%
Final paper (4,500-6,000) and revised abstract (750 words)	45%

Attendance and participation: Students are expected to attend each class session, and attendance and participation is worth 10% of the final grade. Attending class is a precondition for participation. Good participation involves making consistent contributions to the discussion that genuinely engage with the topic and with one's interlocutors. In order to meet the participation requirement, you must also submit *Discussion Questions* (see below).

IMPORTANT Per GSU policy, "If a student develops a fever, cough or shortness of breath they should not go to class and should notify their instructor immediately. The student will work with the instructor to develop a plan to complete the necessary course content, activities, and assessments in order to meet the course student learning outcomes."

Discussion questions: Our class will be run in a seminar format. In order to facilitate discussion, you must post 10 questions (approximately 200-300 words each—a little longer or shorter is ok) to the class discussion board over the course of the semester. Additional questions are always welcome, but you must post at least 10. Questions may focus on either primary texts or assigned secondary literature. Good questions come in lots of flavors. You might use your question to raise a problem for an interpretation of Plato or for what you take to be Plato's view; develop a suggestion for how a text should be interpreted; or explore a connection between the focus text and other texts we've discussed. You may also use your question to respond to another Discussion Question. Your posts will not receive a grade, but the quality of your posts (e.g. the thoughtfulness and depth of your engagement with the material) will factor into your overall grade for attendance and participation. Discussion questions must be posted by 12pm on the day our class meets. Late submissions will not count toward your 10-question requirement.

Comments presentations: Knowing how to present comments on someone else's paper is an important professional skill. You're providing a useful service—critical feedback on the author's work. Plus, it's a great way to develop a connection with another professional. In our course, you will present two sets of comments on two of the assigned articles from the secondary literature. Your presentations will each be 10-15 minutes long. They should include a brief summary of the article, followed by one or two well-developed criticisms of the article. Prior to your presentations, you will submit a written version of your comments (approximately 1,500 words). Write-ups are due at 11:59pm the day before our seminar meets; late write-ups will affect your presentation grade (see late policy below). Your presentations/comments will be graded on professionalism of presentation and quality of critical remarks. Sign-ups for presentations will be circulated early in the semester.

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 four main components.

- *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 4.
- *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 a little shorter than the final paper, but it should be at least 3,500 words. Due November 18.
- *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 2.
- *Final paper:* The final version of your paper should be revised in light of the referee report and comments from me. It should be submitted together with a (suitably revised) version of the original abstract. Due December 10.

Tentative Schedule of Topics and Readings

Note about seminar format: Our class meetings will generally be split into two parts. In the first half, we will discuss a piece of secondary literature that addresses a focus text (or texts) from the *previous week's* assigned primary text. In the second half, we'll work carefully through an assigned primary text, addressing relevant *Discussion Questions* and identifying questions and issues to be discussed in the first half of the following meeting. This format allows us to have two "takes" on our primary texts: a first readthrough unbiased by views to be discussed in secondary literature and a second readthrough that is more focused and that takes into account the assigned secondary literature.

Aug 25	Course introduction	Some problems with knowledge <i>Meno</i> 70a-87c
Sep 1	Focus: <i>Meno</i> 81a-87c Nehamas, "Meno's Paradox and Socrates as Teacher"	Knowledge vs. true belief (<i>doxa</i>), part I <i>Meno</i> 87c-100b (end)
Sep 8	Focus: <i>Meno</i> 96e1-98b5 (cf. 85b8-d1) Fine, "Knowledge and True Belief in the <i>Meno</i> " Schwab, "Explanation in the <i>Meno</i> "	Acquiring knowledge (recollection) <i>Phaedo</i> 73a-77a

Sep 15	Focus: <i>Phaedo</i> 73a-77a (+ selections from the <i>Phaedrus</i> , 249b-c) Scott, “Platonic Anamnesis Revisited”	The value of truth <i>Phaedo</i> 84c-118a (end)
Sep 22	Focus: 89d-90d Woolf, “Misology and Truth”	Knowledge vs. true belief (<i>doxa</i>), part II <i>Republic</i> 5.473d-480a; <i>Republic</i> 6.484a-504a
Sep 29	Focus: <i>Republic</i> 474c-480a (plus selections from Bk I) Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in <i>Republic</i> V-VII”	Smith, “The Powers of Comprehension”
Oct 6	Rethinking <i>doxa</i> as true belief Moss and Schwab, “The Birth of Belief” (focus on pp. 1-11 and 25-29)	Knowledge and the forms <i>Republic</i> 6.504a-513e; <i>Republic</i> 7.514a-536a
Oct 13	Focus: <i>Republic</i> 507a-513e Ferejohn, “Knowledge, Recollection and the Forms in <i>Republic</i> VII”	Knowledge is perception <i>Theaetetus</i> 142a-162a Suggested background: Chappell, “Plato on Knowledge in the <i>Theaetetus</i> ” (SEP)
Oct 20	Focus: <i>Theaetetus</i> 152a-160e Matthen, “Perception, Relativism, and Truth” Chappell, “Does Protagoras Refute Himself?”	<i>Theaetetus</i> 162a-186e
Oct 27	Focus: <i>Theaetetus</i> 183c-186e Cooper, “Plato on Sense Perception and Knowledge”	Knowledge is true belief <i>Theaetetus</i> 187a-201c Focus: <i>Theaetetus</i> 187e-200d Barton, “The <i>Theaetetus</i> on how we Think”
Nov 3	Focus: <i>Theaetetus</i> 200d-201c Burnyeat and Barnes, “Socrates and the Jury”	Knowledge is true belief with an account <i>Theaetetus</i> 201c-210a (end)
November 4, 11:59pm: abstract for final paper due via iCollege		
Nov 10	Focus: <i>Theaetetus</i> 201d-206b (end) Thaler, “Taking the Syllable Apart”	Why knowledge? <i>Charmides</i> 153a-176a
Nov 17	Focus: 158e-159a; 155c-d; 167c-168e McCabe, “Looking Inside Charmides’ Cloak”	Readers’ choice (we’ll decide together what to read/discuss)
Nov 18, 11:59pm: draft of final paper due (both to me and to your referee)		
Thanksgiving Break: Nov 23-28		
Dec 1	Readers’ choice (we’ll decide together what to read/discuss)	Wrap up
Dec 2, 11:59 pm: referee report due to back to author (and to me)		
Dec 10, 11:59pm: final paper + revised abstract due		

Course Policies

- **Late policy:** Late work that is unexcused will be penalized one letter grade per 24 hours. *Discussion Questions* submitted after 12pm on the day of our seminar will not count towards your 10 *Discussion Question* requirement and failure to submit at least 10 *Discussion Questions* will impact your participation grade. Your presentation grade for each presentation will be subject to a late penalty of at least one letter grade if you do not submit your presentation write-up on time (i.e. by 11:59pm on the day before our seminar meets). If you know you are going to miss a class or a deadline, please talk to me ahead of time and we will work something out.
- **Face coverings:** Georgia State University and the University System of Georgia have mandated a face covering policy. Students are required to wear an appropriate face covering while inside campus facilities (classrooms, hallways, elevators, labs and in all other public spaces) because six feet of social distancing may not always be possible. Face coverings will be worn in addition to and not as a substitute for social distancing.

Anyone not using a face covering when required will be asked to wear one or leave the area. Repeated refusal to comply with the requirement may result in discipline through the applicable conduct code for students. Reasonable accommodations may be made for those who are unable to wear a face covering for documented health reasons. To request an accommodation, start with the Access & Accommodations Center Welcome Form found at How to Connect.

- **Assigned seats:** On the first day of in-person class, students should sit only in seats indicated by a blue GSU “sit here” label. Instructors will then create a seating chart. Students should sit in their assigned seats for each in-person class session. If a student becomes ill, the seating chart will help identify those who may have been in close contact.
- **Student illness:** If a student develops a fever, cough or shortness of breath they should stay at home, not go to class or work, and stay away from other people. If a student becomes sick or is required to quarantine during the semester, they should notify their instructor as soon as possible. The student will work with the instructor to develop a plan to complete the necessary course content, activities, and assessments in order to meet the course student learning outcomes.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** GSU is home to a fantastically diverse student body, and our classrooms are spaces for respectful teaching and learning. Please use the names and pronouns preferred by students and faculty. Students who wish to use a name or pronoun other than what is available on the class roll may introduce themselves to the class using it, or they may contact the instructor via email.

Department of Philosophy

General Syllabus Statement Fall 2020

- This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.
- The **withdrawal** period begins via PAWS, **Wednesday, September 2nd -Tuesday, October 13th**. The **midpoint to receive a W** is **Tuesday, October 13th**. A student may be awarded a grade of "**W**" no more than 6 times in their careers at Georgia State. After **6 W's**, a withdrawal is recorded as a **WF** on the student's record. A **WF** counts as an **F** in a GPA. Please view the [calendar](#) for more dates and information.
- **The customary penalty for any violation of the academic honesty rules is an "F" in the course, which cannot be replaced by repeating the course.** See selections from the University Policy on Academic Honesty on the reverse of this sheet. **Copying or using any material from the internet without proper citation is a violation of the academic honesty rules.**
- Students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability must do so by registering with the Access and Accommodations Center (AACE) located in Student Center East, Suite 205. **Students may only be accommodated upon issuance of a signed Student Accommodation Letter through the AACE.** The signed Student Accommodation Letter may be submitted electronically to the course instructor or hand delivered by the student to all classes in which the student is seeking accommodations.
- 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 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.

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

1. Undergraduate Students: <http://philosophy.gsu.edu/undergraduate/listserv>
 2. Graduate Students: <http://philosophy.gsu.edu/graduate/listserv>
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For more information on the philosophy program and the value of philosophy courses visit:
<http://philosophy.gsu.edu>

Policy on Academic Honesty, from the GSU Catalog

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 paraphrasing 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 a 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.)