

Plato: Theories of Knowledge
Spring 2018, Phil 450-01

Dr. Krisanna Scheiter
Email: scheitek@union.edu
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday
2-3pm and by appointment

Time: 3:05-4:45pm
Classroom: Lamont 201
Office: Lamont 308

Course Description

What is knowledge? How do we come to have knowledge? How does knowledge differ from mere belief? Long before contemporary philosophers and cognitive neuroscientists tackled these questions Plato engaged in detailed discussions on perception, knowledge, and belief. On his view, we can only have knowledge about those things that are eternal and unchanging, but how can finite, transitory beings ever hope to obtain such knowledge? In this class, we will read the *Theaetetus* to see how Plato approaches these and other questions.

Learning Objectives for the Course

- Students demonstrate the ability to read and interpret texts in philosophy.
- Students demonstrate the ability to produce written and oral discourse appropriate to philosophy.
- Students participate effectively in critical discussions of philosophical issues.
- Students present analyses of the issues examined in conceptual, historical, evaluative, or normative studies in philosophy.

Required Texts

- Plato (2015). *Theaetetus and Sophist* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy). Translated by Christopher Rowe. Cambridge UP.
- Additional works will be available on *Nexus*.

Recommended Texts

- Miles Burnyeat (1992). *The Theaetetus of Plato*, with a translation of Plato's *Theaetetus* by MJ Levett, revised by M. Burnyeat. Hackett Publishing.
- Plato (1977). *Theaetetus*. Translation and Notes by John McDowell. Clarendon Plato Series. Clarendon Press.

Resources

Writing Center: The Writing Center (second floor of Schaffer Library) provides free one-on-one consultation, both by appointment and as available on a walk-in basis. I encourage you to visit the writing center for any and all writing assignments. <http://www.union.edu/Resources/Academic/writing/index.php>.

Accommodations: It is the policy of Union College to make reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please bring your accommodation ID card to your instructor's office hours as soon as possible. Your instructor will then discuss with you any necessary special arrangements. No accommodations will be provided to students who do not have an accommodation ID card from the Office of Student Support Services (x8785).

Assignments

5% Participation

25% First Short Paper

15% Nexus Posts

35% Final Research Paper

20% Class Presentations

Description of Assignments

Participation: This is a discussion-based course. Active student participation will be a central feature of the learning experience. In order to ensure successful participation, it is important that you attend to two main tasks:

- **Reading Assignments:** You should complete the assigned reading prior to the class for which they are assigned in order to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. If you have not read philosophy before, you may find the readings difficult at first. Don't give up! As you read try to identify core claims and arguments. Take notes, jotting down questions or critiques.
- **Class Discussion:** You should contribute to class discussions regularly and in a respectful manner, either by asking questions relating to the topic or contributing your own meaningful insights. Discussion will be based on the reading assignments. One way to prepare for class discussions is by trying to formulate and jot down your own questions while you read and bring those to class.

Nexus (Discussion Board): In order to get the maximum amount of points you must post by **11am** the morning of class for every reading. I will not count posts that are entered after 11am. **There is no way to make up missed posts.** If you do not post on the discussion board by 11am you will not receive any points for that post. You should post at least one paragraph (approx. 5 sentences) in response to the readings for that day. I will sometimes provide a question. You should try to answer the question. You may respond to your fellow students' posts on Nexus, but it must be clear from your post that you read the material. Each post is worth 15 points. I will take off points if the post does not demonstrate mastery of the readings. I will also take off points for substantial spelling and grammar mistakes so please read over your posts carefully. The discussion board is good practice for your exams.

Class Presentation: The last two days of class will be student presentations. Each student will give an oral presentation on their final research paper. The presentation should include a handout. The student should present the thesis of their paper at the beginning of the presentation and then present the argument, using text and argument to support their interpretation

Term Papers: There are two papers for the course. The first paper is a short paper (4-5 pages) on a topic that I will assign to the class. The second paper is a longer paper (12-15 pages) on a topic that the student chooses. The second paper must include at least 2 secondary sources beyond what we discuss in class. **You MUST have topic and secondary sources approved by me no later May 14.** Failure to do so will result in a late penalty on your final paper. I will provide you with a grading guideline and a guide to writing philosophy papers, as well as a description of all the requirements you must meet before turning in the paper.

Expectations and Classroom Policies

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of every class. You are permitted two unexcused absences (in which you do not have to notify me of your absence). Your participation grade will be penalized for every unexcused absence after the first three. Excused absences are ones that have been approved by me in advance of the class.

Email

- Please feel free to email me any time, but allow me 24 hours to respond.
- If you have questions about the class or the assignments please **check the syllabus** first before emailing.
- If you cannot find the information you need on the syllabus, then send me an email.
- If you have any questions about the content of the class or would simply like to discuss some philosophical thoughts of your own do not hesitate to come to my office hours or set up an appointment.

General Expectations

- Come to class prepared, on time, and with your books.
- Turn off your phone, no texting, no laptops unless absolutely necessary, no newspapers, no talking to one another unless it is part of class discussion, no sleeping.
- You are expected to pay attention and engage respectfully with your classmates.
- If you must use your laptop for note taking, please be aware that you may not use the Internet *for any purpose* during class and you may wish to disable it if you will be otherwise tempted. Failure to abide by this requirement will result in loss of the privilege to use your laptop in class.

Plagiarism

Students are expected to adhere to the Union College Academic Honor Code, which you can access at: www.union.edu/academic_depts/ethics/union/Honor%20Code.php

TOPICS AND READINGS

April 2: Introduction

I. KNOWLEDGE AND DEFINITION

April 4: Plato's *Meno* 70a-86d

April 9: Plato's *Meno* 86d-100b
Class Canceled (Make-up class TBD)

II. KNOWLEDGE IS PERCEPTION

April 11: Plato's *Theaetetus* 142a-151d

April 16: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 151e-160e

April 18: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 160e-168c

April 23: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 168c-177b

April 25: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 177b-186e

III. Knowledge is True Belief

April 30: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 187a-190e
First Paper Due by Midnight via TurnItIn on Nexus

May 2: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 190e-196c

May 7: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 196c-201c

IV. KNOWLEDGE IS TRUE BELIEF WITH AN ACCOUNT

- May 9: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 201c-206b
- May 14: Plato's *Theaetetus*, 206b-210d
Must have your paper topic and secondary sources approved by me by the end of office hours today.

VI. QUESTIONS ABOUT *THEAETETUS*

- May 16: Mi-Kyoung Lee, "The Secret Doctrine in Plato's *Theaetetus*"
- May 21: Gail Fine, "Plato's Refutation of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*"
- May 23: D.K. Modrak, "Perception and Judgment in the 'Theaetetus'"
- May 28: Gail Fine, "False Belief in the *Theaetetus*"
- May 30: Christopher Shields, "The Logos of 'Logos': *Theaetetus* 206c-210b"

V. STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

- June 4: Class Presentation
- June 6: Class Presentation

Final Paper Due Monday, June 11 by Midnight via TurnItIn on Nexus