

Ermioni Prokopaki

University of Chicago
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EMPLOYMENT

Postdoctoral Fellow, Humanities Teaching Fellowship
Department of Philosophy and the College
University of Chicago
Sep. 2023-Jun. 2025

Teaching Assistant and Instructor
Department of Philosophy
University of Chicago
Sep. 2018-Jun. 2022

EDUCATION

PhD, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago
Joint Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy
Thesis: Understanding the Threat of Relativism in the *Theaetetus* of Plato
Dissertation Committee: Gabriel Richardson Lear (Chair), Agnes Callard, Jason Bridges
Sep. 2016-Aug. 2023

BA, Vassar College
Major: Philosophy
Thesis: The Role of the Good in Plato's Method of Hypothesis
Aug. 2011-May 2015

RESEARCH INTERESTS

AOS: Ancient Greek Philosophy, Philosophy of Mind
AOC: History of Analytic Philosophy, Epistemology, Philosophy of Language, Ethics

UNDER REVIEW

"Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)"
"Understanding why the Dream Theory (*Theaetetus* 201d-202c) is Objectionable"

SHORT DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

My dissertation offers a novel interpretation of Plato's mature epistemology through a careful reading of the *Theaetetus*. I argue that Plato's engagement with relativism extends beyond his treatment of Protagoras' Measure Thesis ("Man is the measure of all things") and of what he takes to be Protagoras' theory that knowledge is perception. I show that the threat of relativism looms over even theories of knowledge presented as alternatives (e.g. true judgment, true judgment(s) with specifiable characteristics pertaining to form or content). Plato rejects that family of views due to their inability to sustain an account of knowledge that is appropriate to human life. The culprit turns out to be failure to recognize that human souls are characterized by a capacity that is teleologically organized towards truth, aiming to distinguish it from falsehood. I argue that knowledge describes the purposeful exercise of this capacity. The implication of the extended critique of Protagoreanism is that it falls to us to maintain the distinction between truth and falsehood, knowledge and ignorance, and thus avoid the threat of relativism.

REFEREED CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

- 2025 Journal of the History of Philosophy Summer Seminar, at UC San Diego
Topic: The Form of the Good in and after Plato
Instructor: Christopher Shields
- “Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Presented in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)”
XIV Symposium Platonicum, International Plato Society
- 2024 “Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Presented in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)”
47th Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop, University of Oklahoma
- “Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Presented in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)”
5th Canadian Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy, Toronto Metropolitan University
- 2023 “Understanding Why the Dream Theory (*Theaetetus* 201d–202c) is Objectionable”
46th Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop, University of Texas at Austin
- Comments on N. Howell-Whitaker’s paper on epistemology in the *Laws*
4th Annual Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop in Ancient Philosophy, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
- 2022 13th Munich Philosophical Masterclass, at Ludwig Maximilians Universität München,
Topic: Plato’s Bright Line – A seminar on J. Moss’ *Plato’s Epistemology*, OUP, 2021.
Instructor: Jessica Moss
- 2020 “Commensuration and Dialectic in the Divided Line”
Poetry, Philosophy, and Mathematics: Performance, Text, and External Representations in
Ancient Greek Cultural Practices, University of South Florida
- 2019 11th Ludwig Wittgenstein Summer School in Kirchberg-am-Wechsel, Austria, Organized
by the Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society
Topic: Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
Instructors: James Conant, Cora Diamond, Martin Gustafsson

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

- 2025 “Plato’s *Theaetetus* and the Early Wittgenstein on Falsehood”
Conference on Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and its legacy, Université de Strasbourg
- 2024 “Understanding the Puzzle of False Judgment Presented in the *Theaetetus* (187c-200d)”
Research Center for Greek Philosophy, Academy of Athens
- 2022 “Smoke & Mirrors: The Dream Theory in Plato’s *Theaetetus*”
Prof. J. Vlasits’ Course “Plato’s Epistemology,” University of Illinois at Chicago
- “Commensuration and Dialectic in the Divided Line”
Minorities and Philosophy Conference, University of Chicago

- 2019 “Commensuration and Dialectic in the Divided Line”
Conference on G. Lehman and M. Weinman’s *The Parthenon and Liberal Education*
(2018), University of Chicago

“Commensuration and Dialectic in the Divided Line”
Undergraduate “Philosophy Club,” University of Chicago

PRESENTATIONS AT U. OF CHICAGO WORKSHOPS

- 2022 “Relativism in Hiding: Why We Should Not Try to Salvage the Dream Theory”
Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop
- 2021 “The Dream Theory in Plato’s *Theaetetus*”
Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop
- “The Self-Refutation of Protagoras in Plato’s *Theaetetus*”
Theoretical Philosophy Workshop
- 2020 “The Puzzle of False Judgment in Plato’s *Theaetetus*”
German Philosophy Workshop
- “Models of Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*: the Case of Perception”
Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop
- 2018 “Dialectic, *Analogia*, and the Mathematics of the Divided Line”
Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop
- 2016 “The Method of Hypothesis: Mathematics & Dialectic”
Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop

RESPONDENT AT U. OF CHICAGO ANNUAL GRADUATE CONFERENCE

- 2019 Respondent to R. Brown’s paper on Plato’s *Phaedrus*
- 2018 Respondent to U. Bery’s paper on Plutarch’s moral philosophy
- 2017 Respondent to E. Schultz’s paper on Socratic *epagōgē*

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

As Postdoctoral Fellow

This is a two-year position, in which I teach in the Humanities Core Curriculum (required for all undergraduates) and courses of my own design, for a total of four courses per year.

- Autumn 2023, 2024 Greece & Rome: Texts, Traditions, Transformations I
This is a course in the Humanities Core with a focus on epic. We read Homer’s *Iliad*, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*, and Marlowe’s *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

- Winter 2024, 2025 Greece & Rome: Texts, Traditions, Transformations II
This is a course in the Humanities Core with a focus on tragedy. We read tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, as well as Seneca and Shakespeare. We also read Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe*. In Winter 24, I held two appointments to teach this course.
- Spring 2024 Mathematics in Plato
This is a seminar of my own design. We read *Meno*, *Republic* V-VII, *Statesman*, and excerpts from *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*, *Sophist*. The course investigates the extent to which philosophical practice bears affinity to mathematical practice for Plato. It has a special focus on the problem of incommensurability, the task of commensuration, and the use of models.
- Winter 2025 Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind
This is a course of my own design, which aims to introduce the students to some of the traditional questions and debates of the field while looking towards AI and the future. We begin with Descartes but our focus is on the 20th century. Readings include Searle, Nagel, Churchland, Sunday, McDowell, Anscombe, Ryle.
- Spring 2025 The *Republic* of Plato
This is a seminar of my own design, in which we read Plato's *Republic*, along with relevant secondary literature. The primary aim of this course is to clarify the unity of the political and epistemological goals of this text.
- Autumn 2024-
Spring 2025 Thesis Supervision: Mark Chen, on Aristotle's Mathematics

As Graduate Student, Instructor of Record

- Winter 2021 Plato's *Theaetetus*
This was a seminar for advanced Philosophy majors. In addition to a close reading of the text and the related scholarship, we studied the Dreyfus-McDowell debate on perception and Russell's Logical Atomism.

As Graduate Student, Teaching Assistant

My responsibilities included leading weekly discussion sections (for two groups of students, per course), grading, and holding regular office hours. Listed is also a summer course for high school students. I was responsible for grading, moderating group discussions, and holding office hours.

- Spring 2022 Mind, Brain, and Meaning
Instructors of Record: J. Bridges, C. Kennedy, L. Kay
This was a multidisciplinary course, cross-listed in the departments of Philosophy, Linguistics, and Psychology and co-taught by faculty from all three departments. I was the Philosophy Teaching Assistant.

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Winter 2022	Introduction to Ethics Instructor of Record: B. Callard
Summer 2021	Film and the Meaning of Life (for high school students) Instructor of Record: R. Hanlon
Autumn 2019	History of Philosophy I: Ancient Philosophy Instructor of Record: A. Brooks History of Analytic Philosophy Instructor of Record: B. Callard
Spring 2019	End of Life Instructors of Record: A. Ford, J. Lear This was a course that pursued the two meanings of ‘end’ with a focus on Aristotle, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. Other readings included Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Cora Diamond.

TEACHING CREDENTIALS

I have participated in a number of pedagogical workshops, geared primarily towards practices that promote Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity. I have also participated in workshops geared towards teaching Philosophy. I have also participated in student panels leading such workshops.

Department of Philosophy Pedagogy Certificate

Pedagogy Faculty Events, 2018, 2019, 2021
Pedagogy Alumni Events, 2018, 2019
Diversity & Inclusion Training Events, 2019, 2020
Departmental Course Assistant Event, 2020

Chicago Center for Teaching

Teaching @Chicago, 2018
Fundamentals of Teaching Four-Week Workshop (topic: Diversity & Inclusion), 2021
Course Design and College Teaching, Spring 2020
This was a quarter-length course taken for credit, Instructor of Record: C. Richardson,

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Coordinator

2021 Admitted Students Visiting Week

2018-2020 Theoretical Philosophy Workshop
I was the coordinator for the first two years of the Theoretical Philosophy Workshop. My role entailed scheduling presentations and reading groups, advertising, organizing social events, and moderating the meetings. I was able to maintain a majority of women presenters. I declined to coordinate the Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop in 2019-2020. I was invited to coordinate the Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy again in 2022-2023.

Minorities and Philosophy (MAP)

2018-2023 Member

I was a co-founding member of our MAP chapter. I was an official Mentor to a student through her graduation and have worked with many undergraduates on their senior theses and graduate school applications, outside of my official duties.

Committee Work

2019 Graduate student member of the committee outlining best mentoring practices

Referee

2017-2019 Annual Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Graduate Student Conference

Presenter

2021 Departmental event for new Teaching Assistants

Chair

2022 Central APA, Chicago

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2023 Humanities Division Conference Grant, University of Chicago

2019 Visiting Doctoral Fellow, Leipzig University

2015 Mitch Miller and Michael McCarthy Prize, Vassar College

Awarded for distinguished philosophical work and the promise of teaching

LANGUAGES

Ancient Greek (proficient, received High Pass on departmental exam)

Latin, German (competent)

Modern Greek, English (native)

GRADUATE LEVEL COURSEWORK (* indicates audit)

Listed below are the courses I have taken for credit or as auditor at the University of Chicago.

They are organized according to topic.

Preliminary Essay, Spring-Autumn 2018

Completion of this essay certifies that the student can advance to dissertation work. As such, it has an equivalent role as the MA Thesis or Qualifying Exams. It is written in the context of a two-quarter long workshop and is read by two faculty.

“Reinterpreting the Capacities Argument (*Republic* 5.476e-478e)”

Readers: Gabriel Richardson Lear, Agnes Callard

Ancient Greek Philosophy & Thought

Plato’s *Statesman*, Winter 2017, G. Lear

Topics in the Philosophy of Mathematics: Proof and Euclid, Winter 2017, K. Davey

Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Spring 2017, E. Asmis, Classics Department

Plato and Aristotle on Craft and Wisdom, Autumn 2017, G. Lear

Survey of Greek Literature: Prose, Winter 2018, H. Dik, Classics Department

*Aristotle's *Metaphysics* M-N, Spring 2018, E. Katz

*Socrates, Plato and Aristotle on Courage, Autumn 2018, A. Callard

*Changing, Resting, Living: Aristotle's Natural Philosophy, Winter 2019, A. Callard

*Aristotle's Friendship, Winter 2019, G. Lear

*Socratic Elenchus, Spring 2019, A. Callard

*Plato's *Timaeus*, Spring 2020, E. Fletcher

*Aristotle's *De Anima*, Spring 2020, M. Boyle

*The Ethics and Poetics of Mimesis, Autumn 2021, G. Lear-J. Lear

*Plato's *Philebus*, Winter 2022, J. Proios

*Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Winter 2022, A. Brooks

*Virtues of Citizenship, Spring 2023, G. Lear

History of Philosophy (other)

John Stuart Mill, Autumn 2016, M. Nussbaum

Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, Spring 2017, M. Boyle

The Philosophy of Gilbert Ryle, Spring 2017, M. Kremer

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Winter 2018, J. Bridges

*Kant's Transcendental Deduction and its Contemporary Reception, Spring 2018, J. Conant

*Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Autumn 2019, M. Kremer

*Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, Winter 2020, J. Bridges

*The Analytic Tradition, Spring 2020, J. Conant

*The Philosophy of Cora Diamond, Spring 2021, J. Conant

*The Philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe, Spring 2021, C. Vogler

*Wittgenstein's Treatment of Rule-Following in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* and *Philosophical Investigations*, Spring 2022, J. Conant

*The Philosophy of Language of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Autumn 2022, S. Bronzo

Theoretical Philosophy

First-Year Seminar (on the Myth of the Given), Autumn 2016-Winter 2017, D. Finkelstein

Naturalism, Autumn 2016, J. Bridges

Intermediate Logic, Winter 2017, A. Vasudevan

*Intro: Philosophy of Science, Winter 2017, T. Pashby

*Special Topics in the Philosophy of Mind: Imagination, Autumn 2017, M. Boyle-J. Lear

*Conceptual Change and the A Priori, Winter 2018, K. Davey

*The New Riddle of Induction, Spring 2018, A. Vasudevan

*Causation and Necessity, Winter 2019, J. Bridges

*Transparency & Reflection, Autumn 2020, M. Boyle

Practical Philosophy

Neo-Aristotelian Philosophical Anthropology, Autumn 2017, C. Vogler

*Habit, Skill, and Virtue, Winter 2020, M. Haase

*What is so Good about Virtue?, Spring 2021, A. Mueller

DISS. ABSTRACT: Understanding the Threat of Relativism in the *Theaetetus* of Plato

My dissertation on the *Theaetetus* is motivated by this question: Why is the text in which we expect to find Plato's mature epistemology centered around relativism and what is Plato's answer to it? The very posing of this question presupposes that relativism is the dialogue's primary topic and demonstrating that this is so is one of my principal tasks.

The first and longest part of the text is dedicated to the definition of knowledge as perception and is taken up in a critique of Protagoras, who states that all judgments are true, there is no such thing as falsehood, and disagreement is impossible. Protagoreanism stands for the idea that activities presupposing a distinction between knowledge and ignorance are unintelligible. The position is propped up by an account of perception, according to which perceptible reality is private to each perceptual episode. Generalized relativism follows on the assumption that all judgments are outcomes of private perceptual episodes.

The topic of relativism is ostensibly disposed of in the first part of the dialogue. Yet, Socrates and Theaetetus remain gripped by relativist commitments. Specifically, I argue, they fail to pursue their own insight that human psychic activity is teleologically organized with an aim to the truth. This prevents them from making sense of falsehood and from seeing that the distinction between the true and the false is one that human beings value. Consequently, the theories of knowledge that Socrates and Theaetetus consider come dangerously close to Protagoreanism. Hence, I conclude, the reason that the *Theaetetus* is centered around relativism is that its threat is pervasive and Plato's answer is to remind us that it is up to us to stand up for the value of truth.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the Self-Refutation of Protagoras (169d-171d). I argue that relativism seeks to threaten not only the concept of knowledge but a whole way of life that is organized around it. I show that relativism prevails only if we allow it to: we can preserve our life by continuously affirming the value of the distinction that the relativist seeks to undermine.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the Final Refutation of the first definition (184b-186e). I argue that the definition of knowledge as perception will be avoided only if we realize that our capacity for speaking the truth does not have the form of a capacity that can be ascribed to the body. Unlike those thoroughly receptive capacities, our capacity for speaking the truth is spontaneous and teleologically structured. The knowers are distinguished by their purposeful use of the capacity for truth. Doing so is to affirm that we wish our lives to be bound by the truth.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the False Judgment Digression (187c-200d). I argue that unless the soul's independent activity is conceived as teleologically organized with an aim to the truth, it will not be possible to account for falsehood. I show that Socrates and Theaetetus fail to make sense of falsehood because they revert to a conception of our capacity for speaking the truth that gives it the structure that is appropriate to the body. The only other option considered is one in which the capacity for truth is ineffectual.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the Dream Theory (201d-202c). I argue that epistemologies that do not make use of our capacity for teleological psychic activity devolve into Protagoreanism. Theories that rule out such activity altogether have to identify our capacity for thinking with perception and some of these views have to commit themselves to perceptual privacy. Theories that fail to place our capacity for truth at the core of knowledge obscure the value of knowledge.

In Chapter 5, I argue that cultivating the capacity for truth requires engagement with the Socratic Midwife (148e-151d). In doing so, one learns how to investigate justly and thus, how to maintain the distinction between truth and falsehood. I end with some reflections as to how it is that the exercise of this capacity makes it so that we determine our own world without falling into relativism.

REFERENCES

Gabriel Richardson Lear

Arthur and Joann Rasmussen Professor of Western Civilization
Department of Philosophy
Committee on Social Thought
University of Chicago
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Agnes Callard

Associate Professor of Philosophy
University of Chicago
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University of Santa Barbara
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