

Plato on Justice and Knowledge

Devin Henry

This course is a tale of two great works of philosophy: Plato's *Republic* and *Theaetetus*. The first is at once a work of political philosophy, moral psychology, and normative ethics. Its central aim is to answer the immoralist's challenge and show why it is always better to be just than unjust. The latter is a work of epistemology that investigates the nature and limitations of human knowledge. While many believe Plato's *Republic* to be among the greatest works of philosophy, the *Theaetetus* is by far one of the most influential. The famous Early Modern philosopher Berkeley found in its pages the central tenets of his own system of idealism, while the eighteenth-century moral theorist Richard Price lauded the *Theaetetus* for its refutation of the empiricist theories of knowledge of the Early Modern period. Wittgenstein found in it an expression of his own theory of Logical Atomism, once espoused by Bertrand Russell. The list of philosophers influenced by the *Theaetetus* goes on and on. The reason (as Myles Burnyeat puts it) is that, of all Plato's works, the *Theaetetus* has been the one that speaks most directly to the concerns of working philosophers throughout history.