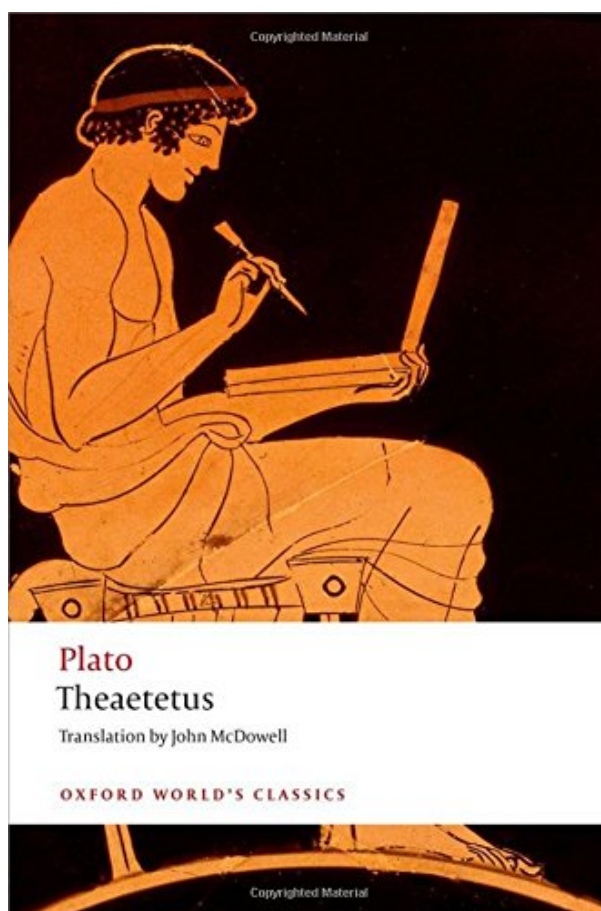
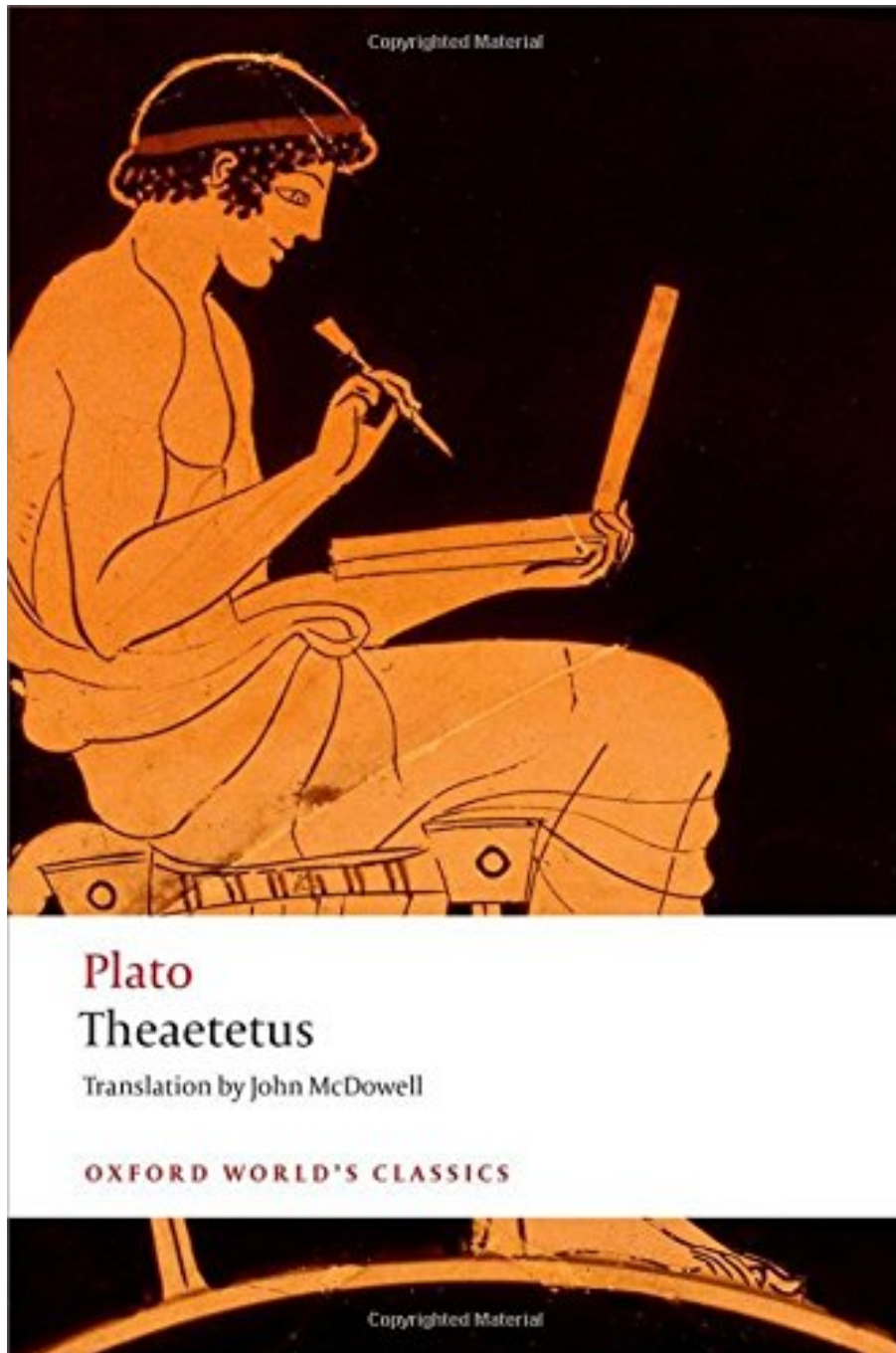


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Review

strongly recommended for undergraduates and anyone with a serious interest in Plato. Colin Leach, Classics for All

About the Author

John McDowell taught at University College, Oxford before moving to Pittsburgh in 1986. He was the John Locke Lecturer at the University of Oxford in 1991. His publications include *Mind and World* (1994), *Mind, Value, and Reality* (1998), and *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (1998), all Harvard University Press. His edition of Plato's *Theaetetus* was published in the Clarendon Plato series in 1973.

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'What exactly is knowledge?'

The Theaetetus is a seminal text in the philosophy of knowledge, and is acknowledged as one of Plato's finest works. Cast as a conversation between Socrates and a clever but modest student, Theaetetus, it explores one of the key issues in philosophy: what is knowledge? Though no definite answer is reached, the discussion is penetrating and wide-ranging, covering the claims of perception to be knowledge, the theory that all is in motion, and the perennially tempting idea that knowledge and truth are relative to different individuals or states. The inquirers go on to explore the connection between knowledge and true judgement, and the famous threefold definition of knowledge as justified true belief. Packed with subtle arguments, the dialogue is also a work of literary genius, with an unforgettable portrait of Socrates as a midwife of wisdom.

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Clarendon Plato Series: Theaetetus

By stephen liem

This is my second Clarendon series that I have bought. The first is Clarendon Aristotle Series (Nicomachean and Politics). Excellent translation and the reason why I bought and trust this series is because of line-by-line commentary that takes more than half of the book. Extremely useful. I do miss an interpretive essay that comes with other series. I just wished that there is an edition that has an extensive interpretive essay AND extensive line-by-line commentary like this one, that would have been a perfect one. But in the absence of such a book, this Clarendon Series is perfect enough.

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What is knowledge?

By Jordan Bell

Most of Plato's works are conversations in which Socrates tries to find a precise definition of some word that people assume they understand. For example, the Euthyphro is about "what is holiness?", the Charmides is about "what is temperance?", and the Republic is about "what is justice?" (and justifies why it is proper to be just). The Theaetetus is about "what is knowledge?" To benefit from reading Plato one should carefully choose the translation one uses and I like this one by McDowell. For a thorough study of the dialogue by someone who doesn't read Attic Greek, Cornford also wrote translations of the Theaetetus and the Sophist that are likely excellent like all Cornford's works, and there is a celebrated commentary on the Theaetetus by Burnyeat attached to Levett's translation.

Now professional philosophers like to play games about whether knowledge is justified true belief (look up the "Gettier problem"), similar to asking whether some particular action is right, like diverting a train to hit one man and thus save many, rather than working out a coherent view of what it means to know. In the Theaetetus Plato perhaps connects knowledge to his theory of Forms: in 186d, "So knowledge is located, not in our experiences, but in our reasoning about those things we mentioned; because it's possible, apparently, to grasp being and truth in the latter, but impossible in the former." A bold reading of this is that the objects of knowledge are not sensible objects but Forms. Plato also gives two metaphors for knowing, the "imprint-receiving piece of wax in our minds" (191) and a "sort of aviary for birds of every kind" (197). Plato certainly does not mean that these are true mechanical models of knowing, but using metaphors like these feels to me like cognitive science and neuroscience.

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What exactly is knowledge?

By HH

"The main aim of this volume is to provide for the needs of Greekless readers who wish to make a philosophical study of the Theaetetus." So writes McDowell in his Preface, and the result is a lively new rendering of the dialogue in modern conversational idiom, backed up by a detailed and subtle commentary. Though in this case McDowell's modest nevertheless ambitious. For, with its detailed analyses of perception and opinion/belief, the "Theaetetus" is arguably the most difficult of Plato's dialogues. Building on work by Ackrill and others, and rethinking the old problems in a fresh way, McDowell has made important contributions to the elucidation of Plato's argument. He suggests, for instance, a new interpretation of the

point of the "secret doctrine" attributed to Protagoras (152c). This is usually taken to be primarily concerned with the relational nature of perceptual qualities. McDowell makes a good case for taking its main point to be the substitution of "come to be" for "be" in perceptual judgments. This interpretation in its turn sheds light on the notorious puzzles about the dice (154b), and may well be right.

Space forbids me to discuss the many other interesting suggestions advanced in the Commentary. I shall merely conclude by recommending this edition as an important contribution to Platonic studies.

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