

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH – DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
PHIL4420: PLATOS ETHICS  
(Tuesday, Thursday, 10-11:20, MINS 037)

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Office Hours (MacKinnon 353): Tuesday & Thursday 2:30–3:20

**Also see “COA Standard Statements” on Courselink.**

An examination of three dialogues on the nature of virtue and the good life: *Protagoras*, *Meno*, *Philebus*.

Students will be responsible for four seminars or essays of about 12 pages each. The essays should be written as if they were seminars because the essay writer will also be a backup for the seminar in case the scheduled presenter can't make it.

The first priority should be a careful explication of the text. The primary objective is to understand Plato as fully as possible, so don't worry about criticizing what he says until you've given it as sympathetic a reading as possible. That doesn't mean you should read him uncritically, but only that you should start by giving him the benefit of the doubt. If his claims seem problematic, first investigate the possibility that the problem lies with your understanding of his arguments rather than with the arguments themselves. If you start by assuming that the problem is his, you won't have any incentive to probe more deeply, whereas if you start by assuming that he has an answer that you haven't discovered yet, you may discover one.

**Use at least two secondary sources but first work through the text on your own.** That way you'll be able to approach the commentaries with a point of view of your own. If you read the commentaries first you'll be coming to the text with preconceived ideas that color your reading.

The seminars needn't be anything more than essays read aloud. Even if you'd rather just speak from notes it's a good idea to write it out in detail and then reduce it to notes, rather than trying to flesh it out for the first time in class, because there are always going to be surprises. The grade will be based only on the content of the seminar (and response to questions) not on presentation, so you don't have to worry about giving any kind of performance.

**Seminars should work through the text in order**, so that it's easy for the audience to know where you are. Don't expect to read straight through to the end. It's better to be interrupted for questions and discussion.

**Essays are due at the beginning of the corresponding seminar** for obvious reasons. If you miss the deadline you'll have to choose a later topic. Regular attendance is important in seminar courses to ensure an adequate audience and to create continuity of discussion. Students who don't attend regularly will be assigned a final exam.

**RESOURCES ON RESERVE**

PROTAGORAS

Michael Stokes, *Plato's Socratic Conversations* [B395.S75]

C.C.W. Taylor, *Plato Protagoras* [B 382.A5 T2]

Jonathan Lavery, *Education, Conversion, and Plato's Protagoras* [TBA]

Larry Goldberg, *Commentary on Plato's Protagoras* [B 382.G65]

MENO



Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno* [B377 .S26x 2006]

Cristina Ionescu, *Plato's Meno: An Interpretation* [B377 .I56 2007]

Roslyn Weiss, *Virtue in the cave: moral inquiry in Plato's Meno* [B377 .W45 2001]<sup>1</sup>  
 Harold Tarrant, *Recollecting Plato's Meno* [B377 .T37 2005]  
 Jacob Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* [B 377.K55]  
 R. W. Sharples, *Plato: Meno* (translation & commentary) [B 377.A5 S45]

**PHILEBUS:**

E.E. Benitez, *Forms in Plato's Philebus* [B 381.B46]  
 H-G Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics ... Relating to the Philebus* [B 381.G3313 1991]  
 J.C.R. Gosling, *Plato Philebus* [PA 4279 P5 1975]  
 R. Hackforth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure* [B 381 A5 H3]  
 Cynthia Hampton, *Pleasure, Knowledge, and Being* [B 381.H35]

DATE	TEXT	SEMINAR	ESSAYS
JAN 9	ORGANIZATION		
11	LECTURE		
16	<i>PROTAGORAS</i> 309a–314e		
18	315a–320c		
23	320c–326e		
25	326e–334c		
30	334c–340a		
FEB 1	340a–347a		
6	347a–354e		
8	354e–362a		
13	<i>MENO</i> 70a–75c		
15	75c–80d		
20 & 22	 <b>WINTER BREAK</b> 		
27	80d–85c		
MAR 1	85c–89e		
6	89e–95b		
8	95b–100b		
13	<i>PHILEBUS</i> 11a–18a		
15	18a–25b		
20	25b–31b		
22	31b–38a		
27	38a–45d		
29	45d–53c		
APR 3	53c–60a		
5	60a–67b		

<sup>1</sup> Available electronically on Trellis at:

[http://trellis3.tug-libraries.on.ca/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=7&ti=1,7&Search\\_Arg=weiss%2C%20roslyn&SL=None&Search\\_Code=NAME\\_&CNT=25&PID=oyeGdUrsSX7LTyQARc-F-lqvo2WRs&SEQ=20130212143900&SID=2](http://trellis3.tug-libraries.on.ca/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?v1=7&ti=1,7&Search_Arg=weiss%2C%20roslyn&SL=None&Search_Code=NAME_&CNT=25&PID=oyeGdUrsSX7LTyQARc-F-lqvo2WRs&SEQ=20130212143900&SID=2)

Although the website says "Available only to Laurier users", I had no trouble accessing it. You can also try <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195140761.001.0001/acprof-9780195140767>.