

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
PHIL*6310 PLATO
Thursday 11:30-2:30 MCKN 346

K. Dorter

Winter 2019

Office hours: Monday 11:30-12:20, Wednesday 12:30-1:20 (353 MCKN) or by appointment

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Text: Plato, *Complete Works*, Hackett ISBN: 0-87220-349-2

The *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* are among Plato's most important dialogues both individually and as a group. The *Theaetetus* includes the first discussion of knowledge as justified true belief; the *Sophist* explores the possibility of falsity and the concept of Being (cf. Heidegger's commentary); and the *Statesman* introduces the concept of the golden mean. As a group they follow the *Parmenides*, in which a young Socrates explains his theory of forms to Parmenides, who apparently demolishes it with a series of refutations. The significance of this, and the way the trilogy responds to it, is a major issue for understanding Plato's philosophy as a whole.

Assignments: two expository seminars or essays of about 25 pages each. Regular attendance is important to give the person presenting the seminar an audience and to create continuity of discussion, and because there's no final exam. Students who don't attend regularly will have to write a final exam. The **essay** serves two functions: 1) As a backup in case the person scheduled to give the seminar is unavailable. 2) To provide a second person who studied the material carefully and can help forward the discussion. So obviously **the essay has to be finished by the beginning of class**. And otherwise you'd have the unfair advantage of hearing the seminar and discussion before writing your essay, unless you stayed away from class, which wouldn't be a good thing either. **If you miss the deadline you'll have to choose a later topic.**



Essays should be written as if they were seminars because the essay is the backup for the seminar. Conversely, 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 the seminar 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 surprises. The grade is 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.

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 you can. 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.

Work through the text on your own before you look at secondary sources. 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 colour your reading.

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

ASSIGNMENTS

	DATE	TEXT SELECTION	SEMINAR	ESSAY
1	Jan 10	Introduction <i>Parmenides</i> 126a-136a, <i>Theaetetus</i> 142a-151d		DORTER
2	17	<i>Theaetetus</i> 151d-168c (knowledge as perception)		
3	24	168c-186e (Socrates' refutation)		
4	31	187a-200d (knowledge as true judgement)		
5	Feb 7	201c-end (knowledge as true judgement + logos)		
6	14	<i>Sophist</i> 216a-231e (definitions 1-6)		DORTER
	21	 WINTER BREAK 		
7	28	232a-245e (falsity and reality)		
8	Mar 7	245e-253b (materialism and the forms)		
9	Mar 14	253b-end (resolution of the problem)		
10	21	<i>Statesman</i> 257a-268d (development of the problem)		
11	28	268d-289d (myth and discussion)		
12	Apr 4	289d-end (final definition)		

Consult at least **three** commentaries from the list below, available at the reserve desk. **One of them should be mine** since I want you to know what I think, **but you don't have to agree with it**. They're on 2-hour rather than 3-day reserve because multiple students sometimes want a book at the same time. Use the photocopier.

All three dialogues

Kenneth Dorter, *Form and Good in Plato's Eleatic Dialogues* [B 398.F57 D67]

Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Post-Socratic Dialogue: the return to the philosophy of nature* [B395 .K235 2013]

Theaetetus

Timothy Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus* [B386 .C43]

Gregory Kirk, *The pedagogy of wisdom: an interpretation of Plato's Theaetetus*

David Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: text and subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* [B386 .S43]

Paul Stern, *Knowledge and politics in Plato's Theaetetus* [B386 .S79 2008]

Sophist

William Cobb, *Plato's Sophist* [B384.A5 1990]

Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* [B384 .H4513]

Noburu Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist* [B384 .N68 1999]

Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* [B384 R67]

Statesman

Melissa Lane, *Method and politics in Plato's Statesman* [JC71.P314 L36 1998]

Mitchell Miller, *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman* [JC 71 P314 M54]

Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Statesman : the web of politics* [JC 71.P62 R67]

Kenneth Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato's Statesman* [JC71.P314 S295 2006]