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PHIL 461.01: Plato

Richard E. Walton

University of Montana - Missoula

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Philosophy 461: Plato
Spring 2004
R.E. Walton, Prof.

SYLLABUS

This course aims at laying a foundation for the reading of Plato, while treating a selection of the philosophical problems the Platonic dialogues raise. The choice of problems and the manner of their treatment shall be guided by the instructor's conviction that "...it is by a return to Plato's insights that the thought of the West has continually renewed itself..." and his further conviction that such a renewal is now eminently desirable. A serious attempt will then be made to extricate Plato from "Platonism," thereby to seize upon the living thrust of the Platonic Dialogues' philosophical substance.

Philosophy 461 is a first course in Plato intended for the student who has completed at least the first semester of a year-long survey of the history of philosophy, who has had a rigorous elementary logic course and an introductory course in ethical theory. Students whose preparation is deficient by this standard, but who can give evidence of the ability to manage the work of the course satisfactorily and profitably are encouraged to seek the instructor's permission to enroll. This applies particularly to students whose major is other than philosophy.

TEXTS:


John M. Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997).

-Various works on library reserve or the web

G.M.A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980 [1935])
[recommended text].

REQUIREMENTS:

Students should construe the course as an opportunity to read intensively certain basic works of Plato, along with a small portion of the immense secondary literature. It will be expected that students strike out on their own beyond the assigned reading, both in the dialogues and in the secondary material.

Each student will prepare a commentary on a small section of Platonic text. Portions of the commentary may be presented in class for discussion. (See *On Commentaries* for the commentary format; also see the list  of suggested passages.) The commentary is the principal writing task: it is what qualifies the course for the University's 'W' designation. Hence, commentaries will be prepared in close consultation with me and will undergo several revisions.

From time to time brief papers will be assigned on particular problems presented by the texts. These papers are to be 500-1000 words in length. Three topics will be assigned: students will do the first paper and either of the subsequent two. Graduate students will present a special report on an item from the secondary literature, or an additional dialogue, and will be expected to prepare a more extensive evaluation section of their commentaries than those offered by undergraduates.

There will be a final examination, cumulative in character, including both "objective" and essay questions. A study guide will be provided. Mid-term examinations will be given as necessary.

READING ASSIGNMENTS--MAJOR ITEMS:

Text	Week

[<i>Euthyphro</i> , <i>Apology</i> , <i>Crito</i> , <i>Symposium</i>] ⁽¹⁾	
John M. Cooper, "Introduction" in <i>Complete Works</i> , pp. vii-xxvi	I
Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates contra Socrates in Plato"	I
A.R. Lacey, "Our Knowledge of Socrates"	I
Paul Friedlander, "Eidos" in <i>Plato</i> , Vol. I ⁽²⁾	I
Plato, <i>VIIth Letter</i>	II-III
Philip Merlan, "Form and Content in Plato's Philosophy"	III
Christopher Gill, "The Death of Socrates"	IV
W.K.C. Guthrie, "What is a Sophist?"	IV
Plato, <i>Meno</i>	V-VI
A. Nehamas, "Meno's Paradox and Socrates as a Teacher"	VI
G. Santas, "The Socratic Paradoxes"	VI
Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>	VII-IX
Gregory Vlastos, "Reasons and Causes in the <i>Phaedo</i> "	IX
Plato, <i>Republic</i>	X-XIII
David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's <i>Republic</i> "	XIII
Gregory Vlastos, "Degrees of Reality in Plato"	XIII
Plato, <i>Theaetetus</i> or <i>Timaeus</i>	XIV-XV

1. These dialogues are assumed to have been read prior to beginning the course.
2. Copies of this and other secondary literature assigned readings on reserve in the Departmental Office.

FINAL EXAM: Wed., May 12, 10:10-12:00