

## Plato – A Bird’s Eye View

- Plato composed between 26 and 29 *Dialogues* considered genuine, comprising ~ 520,000 words in Greek. We will read ~ ¼ of this output.
  - The corpus contains 3 dialogues of contested authorship (†), 6 probably not by Plato (\*), and the *Letters* (at least one prob. authentic).
- The corpus can be organized and studied in several different ways.
  - Ancient scholars such as **Thrasylus** (I CE) and **Iamblichus** (III CE) organized the dialogues by **theme** and **pedagogical principles**.
  - The **Stephanus numbers** used today (e.g. 5D, 72E) refer to pp. and sections in the Renaissance ed. by **Henricus Stephanus** (1578 CE).
  - Many modern scholars such as **G. Vlastos** organize the dialogues according to P.’s hypothesized **development** (early, middle, late phases).

Title	Synopsis	Topics	Hypothesized Chronology (Brickhouse-Smith)	Total (Steph. pp.)	Auth	Word count (Gk)	Thrasylus	Cooper	Alt title (Thrasyll.)
1 Euthyphro	“On holiness.” On the day of his trial, Socrates examines a young man, Euthyphro, to discover the nature of holiness or reverence ( <i>to hosion</i> ). Socrates insists on the provision of a single, universal definition instead of the examples which E. has in mind. Euthyphro arrived in a state of confidence but departs in a state of <i>aporia</i> (puzzlement).	<b>Socratic definition (of “holiness”, to <i>hosion</i>), religion.</b> A key dialogue, especially since Geach ( <i>Monist</i> 50 [1966] 368-82), for Socrates’ method of inquiry and theory of definition, the “What is F” question, and the alleged “Socratic fallacy”. In addition to these methodological interests, the content of the discussion makes <i>Euth.</i> an essential source for the “religion” of Socrates.	1 - Early	14		5464	1.1	1	On holiness
2 Apology (Defense of Socrates)	S. stands accused of “corrupting the young and denying the gods” (24B). He defends his life, and by extension the philosopher’s way of life, before an Athenian jury prejudiced by long acquaintance with portrayals of S. as a “sophist” (capable of persuading an audience of a lie) and as a natural scientist (subverting traditional beliefs).	<b>Socratic method; Socrates versus the sophists.</b> The <i>Apology</i> is atypical in offering an explicit account and defense of Socrates’ own methods (from his own mouth), and explores his personal and philosophical motives. The historicity of the text (its faithfulness to the general outlines of the historical Socrates’ defence speech) is disputed. It is also a rare Platonic dialogue in that it lacks much “dialogue” (excepting the entertaining examination of Meletus, 24C-27D).	1 - Early	25		8854	1.2	2	Defense of Socrates
3 Phaedo	Socrates is met in prison by a circle of friends, including the narrator Phaedo (but excluding Plato himself) on the date of his death. Discussion centres on the psyche (soul), whose immortality Socrates aims to demonstrate against the doubts of his companions.	<b>Platonic forms; recollection; immortality of psyche.</b> A key dialogue for the introduction of the Platonic theory of forms, here described as an “hypothesis” that has been used in the past (referring back, perhaps, to previously published “Socratic” dialogues). The <i>Phaedo</i> ’s core is four arguments for the immortality of psyche: <b>(1)</b> from the cycling of opposites such as life and death; <b>(2)</b> from the theory of recollection (cf. <i>Meno</i> ); <b>(3)</b> from likeness of psyche to eternal entities; <b>(4)</b> from the nature of causality, requiring the full hypothesis of Forms. Some scholars note Pythagorean influences as a new feature of the <i>Phaedo</i> .	3 - Middle (or Early-Middle)	61		22633	1.4	4	On the psyche (soul)
4 Theaetetus	Two friends meet to read a book that records a long-ago conversation between Socrates, the mathematician Theodorus, and his brilliant and precocious pupil Theaetetus. Socrates explains his method to Theaetetus as a kind of intellectual “midwifery”, and offers a brief but famous account of the philosopher’s life and goals. The conversation turns to the nature of knowledge ( <i>epistēmē</i> ), and Socrates, acting as midwife, “delivers” Theaetetus of three possible definitions: <b>(1)</b> knowledge is perception; <b>(2)</b> knowledge is true belief; <b>(3)</b> knowledge is true belief with an account or explanation. All three are found wanting, not yet true “offspring”; Socrates encourages Th. to press on, and departs to face his trial. The dialogue is the first of a trilogy, followed by <i>Sophist</i> and <i>Statesman</i> .	<b>Epistemology; the philosophical life.</b> The <i>Theaetetus</i> represents a detailed and careful critique of several leading theories of knowledge, before “epistemology” had been circumscribed as a discipline. The argument against the first definition of knowledge articulates Plato’s reservations about the “materialist” theory of knowledge, and the second and third arguments take us into some of the densest and most exacting argument in the corpus, perhaps reflecting debates current in Plato’s own Academy. <i>Tht.</i> sets the tone for later Greek discussions of how we can know, and has remained vital in some modern discussions; Edmund Gettier’s influential problems (1963) are counter-examples to Plato’s third definition of knowledge as justified true belief; Wittgenstein famously remarked (in a letter of 1944) that he was working on the “same problems” as Plato here, and Peirce regarded <i>Tht.</i> as one of P.’s finest works.  We will encounter <i>Tht.</i> twice in the term: first for Socrates’ account of the philosopher’s life (172A-77C); and later for the central epistemological discussion (up to 210D).	4 - Middle-Late	68		23803	2.2	6	On knowledge

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5	<b>Gorgias</b>	Gorgias is a famous Sicilian sophist and orator, visiting Athens and staying at the home of Callicles. Socrates and his follower Chaerephon join the group, and S. debates successively with Gorgias, Polus, and their host Callicles. (1) S. and G. debate the value of rhetoric (does the persuasive speaker know what he’s talking about when he convinces assemblies and individuals about questions of right and wrong?) Gorgias is ashamed to deny that the sophist teaches goodness, but (2) Polus intervenes, granting that the rhetorician may not know what’s good, but still has terrific and deadly power, like a tyrant. In response to the conversation, Socrates suggests a paradox (it is better to suffer a wrong than inflict it, 475E) – therefore the tyrant has no real power – and Socrates also introduces his loyalty to “philosophy”, truth, and the importance of actions matching words (482B). (3) Callicles intervenes, refusing to grant that doing wrong is more shameful than suffering it (which Polus had granted), and issues a passionate speech in favour of the natural right of the stronger animal, shackled by social convention (introducing the celebrated contrast of nature and convention). The naturally powerful person aims only to satisfy his own appetites; a “philosopher” in Socrates’ sense is the very opposite, a weakling. But Socrates brings Callicles (kicking and screaming) to see that the satisfaction of appetites is like filling a leaky jar, not an end in itself (494A). (4) In conclusion – having finished the discussion with himself after Callicles stopped in a pique – Socrates presents the health of psyche and the good life as the true goal, and offers up a myth of the afterlife to support it.	<b>The philosopher versus the sophist; justice; rhetoric and the nature of persuasive speech; nature versus convention; Socratic moral paradoxes; eudaimonism.</b> One of Plato’s longest and most developed dialogues, the <i>Gorgias</i> sweeps across the core themes of Socratic practice and morality, the philosopher’s life, and the real essence of <i>logos</i> (speech, word, reason), a tool shared by the philosopher, the persuasive but amoral speaker and the tyrant. In content and style it looks backward to the “early” Socratic dialogues, and forward to the <i>Republic</i> . The detailed and tricky arguments, the sharp contrast between long speeches and brief back-and-forth debates, and the self-referential character of the conversation also have made the <i>Gorgias</i> a laboratory for understanding the style and method of Socrates and Plato.  Many modern readers, such as Nietzsche and Foucault, have sympathized with Callicles’ view of “natural right”, the “might makes right” argument similarly developed by Thrasymachus in <i>Republic I</i> . Socrates (and, we feel, Plato) is deeply invested in combating that view of power, morality and <i>logos</i> , and setting up the life of the philosopher as the genuine alternative.	1 - Early	80	27824	6.3	23	On rhetoric
6	<b>Protagoras</b>	Socrates and the young Hippocrates join a gathering of celebrated sophists and young men at the home of Callias: they have all gathered around Protagoras, a famous sophist and intellectual visiting from Thrace. Socrates quizzes Protagoras about how his teaching might improve Hippocrates; like Gorgias, Protagoras maintains that the sophist can teach excellence or virtue ( <i>areté</i> ), and Socrates pokes holes in that theory. Protagoras offers a long myth in response, but Socrates wants a question-and-answer conversation; they nearly part ways, but the audience gets them to compromise; they debate the nature of virtue, and Socrates suggests that virtue is really knowledge.	<b>The philosopher versus the sophist; Socratic ethics and teachability of virtue; virtue as knowledge.</b> Like the <i>Gorgias</i> , the <i>Protagoras</i> differentiates the Socratic philosopher from other kinds of professional intellectual, both in method (use of speech or reason, <i>logos</i> ) and moral outlook (posture toward virtue or excellence, <i>areté</i> ), using the teachability of virtue and the method of question-and-answer as wedges to make the distinction. The <i>Protagoras</i> offers a charming and complex characterization of the culture of professional educators in Athens; Protagoras himself is a particularly entertaining figure. (Protagoras was especially noted, then as now, for his doctrine that “the human is the measure of all things”, which is explored in the <i>Theaetetus</i> , and allegedly led to the burning of his books; Plato, in <i>Tht.</i> , reads this as a form of relativism).	1 - Early	53	18077	6.2	22	The sophists
7	<b>Laches</b>	A showy martial artist (“fighter in armour”) is in Athens, displaying his art and offering to educate young men. Two generals, Nicias and Laches, are invited to offer advice about whether boys will learn something good by mastering his technique; Socrates is also consulted, and the discussion swiftly becomes a quest for the definition of “courage” ( <i>andreia</i> ): staying at your post? mental endurance? knowledge of future goods and evils? The dialogue ends in uncertainty, but the boys will not be sent to the showman.	<b>Socratic definition (of “courage”, <i>andreia</i>); Socratic method and ethics.</b> The <i>Laches</i> is a short, classic “early” dialogue which searches for a universal definition; it contains a number of famous reflections on Socrates’s methods as perceived by his contemporaries, and it also seems to bring down to <i>aporia</i> a definition of courage offered in <i>Protagoras</i> (360D).	1 - Early	23	8021	5.3	19	On courage
8	<b>Charmides</b>	Socrates encounters Charmides, a boy praised for his physical handsomeness and mental acuity. A playful conversation, teeing off from Socrates’ promise to “charm” Charmides’ soul, winds around to the definition of self-control or sound-mindedness (rendering the one Greek word <i>sophrosunē</i> ) – which C. successively describes as quietness, modesty, minding your own business, and, following the Delphic Oracle, self-knowledge. The dialogue ends in uncertainty ( <i>aporia</i> ), but Charmides agrees to be charmed by Socrates in the future.	<b>Socratic definition (of “self-control”, <i>sophrosunē</i>); Socratic method and ethics.</b> The <i>Charmides</i> is treated as a classic “early” dialogue where Socrates tries to extract a universal definition of an ethical concept from an interlocutor, with indefinite, aporetic results. It is also richly developed from a literary perspective, and Socrates’ critique of some of the successive definitions of <i>sophrosunē</i> may represent Plato’s own reservations.	1 - Early	23	8410	5.2	18	On self-control

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9 <b>Meno</b>	Socrates and Meno aim to define virtue or excellence ( <i>areté</i> ). On the model of the “early” Socratic dialogues, the conversation brings M. into a condition of <i>aporia</i> . Meno questions Socrates’ search for definitions: “How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you did not know?” (80D, “Meno’s paradox”). This difficulty prompts Socrates to show, using mathematical figures, that the soul (psyche) holds recondite memories of realities it has not seen in this life – the Forms, and the “Theory of Recollection”. The discussion returns to virtue, and brings in Anytus, who would later be one of Socrates’ accusers on trial; Anytus is offended by Socrates’ willingness to question the virtue of prominent Athenians, and leaves in a huff. Socrates and Meno then endeavour to distinguish knowledge from true belief – because knowledge is true belief “tied down by an account ( <i>logos</i> ) of the reason why” (98A); and true knowledge is described as a great benefit.	<b>Epistemology (theory of recollection; Meno’s paradox; nature of knowledge); teachability of virtue; mathematics in Plato.</b> Meno’s paradox – in a nutshell, how can we learn what we don’t already know? – has been considered as a serious challenge to the project that Socrates is portrayed as pursuing in the “early”, Socratic dialogues; Plato’s famous theory of recollection, a kind of nativism about the Forms, is offered as a solution. The <i>Meno</i> explores many aspects of epistemology and ethics, closely intertwined throughout the text, which are also covered in other “early” dialogues. Its epistemological inquiry can be read in concert with the <i>Theaetetus</i> . The extended geometrical passage in the <i>Meno</i> (82B-87C) is an invaluable source for ancient Greek mathematics, and helps us to imagine how Plato and his colleagues in the Academy, including Euclid, might have envisaged axiomatic geometry as a model for philosophy.	2 - Early-Middle	30	10396	6.4	24	On virtue
10 <b>Symposium</b>	The dialogue has multiple dramatic frames: it is a report of a report of an eyewitness report. An evening party (symposium) at the house of the Athenian playwright Agathon turns into a discussion of Love. Each attendant – Phaedrus, Pausanias, the doctor Erixymachus, the comedian Aristophanes, the tragedian Agathon, and Socrates – has to deliver a speech on the subject. The dialogue seems to “ascend” towards the climactic speech of Socrates, itself describing an “ascent” toward true love and the ideal of Beauty. The young Alcibiades crashes the party and gives a final speech in praise of Socrates; the conversation continues (with revelry) all night, and Socrates rises in the morning to continue his daily routine.	<b>Love; beauty; Platonic aesthetics; the theory of Forms; the character of Socrates.</b> The dramatic frame and series of speeches in the <i>Symposium</i> represent one of Plato’s great literary creations. The ascent to the form of beauty described by Socrates is one of the fullest and most poetic accounts of the ascent to the Forms, and stresses that a form is not only an object of knowledge, but a source of value. The <i>Symposium</i> has also been read as a valuable source for contemporary Athenian sexual culture and contemporary attitudes towards homosexual and heterosexual attraction (see for example K. Dover, <i>Greek Homosexuality</i> ).	3 - Middle	51	17530	3.3	11	On the good
12 <b>Phaedrus</b>	Socrates meets Phaedrus just outside the city walls. Phaedrus, a “lover of ( <i>logoi</i> )”, is carrying a speech by the orator Lysias, which he reads to Socrates – L. argues that one should grant (erotic) favours to a “non-lover”, rather than to someone madly in love. Socrates is induced to offer a second speech on the same point; since S. has no “skill” but manages to improve on Lysias, he claims to be inspired. He stops halfway, declaring a “palinode” is needed to counter the mistakes of the first speeches – the palinode will express the virtue of the person who is madly in love. This leads Socrates, now divinely “inspired” by the local deities of the place, to give a famous speech detailing the fall of the immortal psyche and the value of true love for turning it back to the higher world. The dialogue then shifts to an examination of <i>logos</i> and the value of the written word, using the initial speeches as a laboratory.	<b>Love; beauty; rhetoric; immortality of psyche; Platonic writing and the character of Socrates.</b> The <i>Phaedrus</i> is one of Plato’s most beautifully and carefully constructed dialogues, and it deals with a theme similar to that of the <i>Symposium</i> using an even more complex structure. It has two sections and themes – first love (the only subject on which Socrates claims knowledge), then <i>logos</i> (speech, word, reason). The second section is often self-referential. During the first portion the speech of Socrates on the immortality of the soul offers the famous image of the immortal soul as a charioteer driving two horses (corresponding roughly to the tripartite soul of <i>Republic</i> 4) following in the train of the gods to obtain a vision of the truth above the heavens, but also able to fall to earth, where only love, philosophy, or music can redeem it; this is a key text of Platonic psychology. The second section’s doubts about the value of writing have been applied to Plato’s own compositions, but it is notoriously unclear how the Socrates of the <i>Phaedrus</i> would describe and value a work like the <i>Phaedrus</i> itself. <i>Phaedrus</i> closes with a prayer for affinity between the inside and outside of the soul.	4 - Middle-Late	52	17222	3.4	12	On love

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11 Republic	<p><b>Book 1.</b> Socrates discusses the true nature of <b>justice</b>, or fairness, with Cephalus and the hot-headed Thrasymachus, who maintains that “might makes right.” Various definitions are mooted. <b>Book 2.</b> The discussion begins in earnest between Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus, set off by the question whether truly just people are happier than the unjust (even if their communities criminalize the just and praise the unjust). Socrates suggests that he will use the <b>analogy of the city-state (polis)</b> as an image to describe the structure of the individual psyche, and illustrate why justice is always better for the psyche’s well-being. The origins and foundations of poleis and the right education of their <b>Guardians</b> are discussed, touching especially on poetry. <b>Book 3.</b> The education of guardians: poetry, physical exercise, etc.; their lives. The constitution of the best polis. <b>Book 4.</b> Constitution continued; justice in the polis. <b>The tripartite soul</b> (reason, passion, desire: <i>logos, thumos, epithumia</i>). <b>Book 5.</b> Philosophers as rulers; equality of men and women; forms of knowledge; <b>the Idea (or Form) of the Good.</b> <b>Book 6.</b> Degrees of belief and knowledge; <b>the simile of the divided line</b> (509D ff.). <b>Book 7.</b> The effects of education; <b>the allegory of the Cave</b> (514A ff.); the education of guardians. <b>Book 8.</b> How poleis decline: meritocracy &gt; timocracy &gt; oligarchy &gt; tyranny. <b>Book 9.</b> Poleis cont’d; conclusion that justice is always better than injustice. <b>Book 10.</b> Limitations of mimetic artwork (image-making); the immortality of psyche; benefits of justice for the living being; eternal value of justice in the next life (the Myth of Er).</p>	<p><b>Justice; Platonic “politics” (as applied to the internal structure of psyche); the philosopher’s life (esp. the Cave); Plato’s aesthetics (mimesis, poetry); epistemology (esp. the Divided Line); Theory of Forms; immortality of psyche.</b> The <i>Republic</i> (in Greek, <i>Politeia</i> or “constitution”) touches on almost every theme in Plato’s thought, and has often been regarded as Plato’s greatest masterpiece, although other dialogues (such as <i>Timaeus</i>) have at times been more influential and better known. Its unifying theme is the question whether it is better for an individual to be just or unjust. The theme is justice is introduced in Book 1, which functions as a kind of “overture” for the rest of the dialogue. In Book 2, Socrates proposes to tackle the question by “writing large” the individual psyche onto the structure of the polis, and examining that as a kind of “image” of the psyche, resulting in an image of the “ideal polis” (which is later said not to be a city that could really exist). The following books explore the ideal city (and so the ideal psyche), focusing on its organization (the tripartite psyche and its answering social structure) and the education of its most meritorious citizens and rulers (Guardians). These books contain some of Plato’s most famous metaphors and imagery, including the Cave (book 7) and the Divided Line (book 6), and the representation of the Good as the Sun of the intelligible world of the Forms. After the conclusion that justice is always better (Book 9), Book 10 – which returns to a theme of Books 2-3, the value of poetry and mimetic art – offers the famous Myth of Er describing the eternal life of the good person.</p> <p>Book 1 is structured somewhat like an “early” dialogue, and may (according to one theory) have originally stood alone as a dialogue.</p>	3 - Middle (book I may be early)	294	89359	8.2	30	On justice
13 Philebus	<p>Socrates, Philebus, and Protarchus discuss whether the true Good for living beings lies in pleasure or in knowledge. That discussion occasions a presentation of the dialectical method of collection and division, portrayed as a “divine gift.” The discussion concludes in agreement that knowledge is finer than pleasure, but there is something finer than both.</p>	<p><b>Plato’s “late” dialectic; the method of collection and division; Plato’s ethics and view of the good.</b> The <i>Philebus</i> is a key text for Plato’s later dialectic, the method of collection and division, and the application of this “divine” tool to the sphere of ethical problems that originally occupied Socrates (especially the nature of human happiness), with the expectation of exact, scientific precision (16C-17A). The extended discussion of the One and the Many, Limit and Unlimit, has suggested Pythagorean influence to many scholars.</p>	5 - Late	56	19054	3.2	10	On pleasure
14 Sophist	<p>Set dramatically one day after the <i>Theaetetus</i>, the <i>Sophist</i> also appears to be the first in an intended trilogy of dialogues, followed by the <i>Statesman</i> and the (unwritten) <i>Philosopher</i>. It also refers loosely back to <i>Parmenides</i>.</p> <p>The main speakers in <i>Sophist</i> are an unnamed “Eleatic stranger” and Theaetetus. Socrates is present, but does not lead the conversation. The dialogue initially appears to aim to define what a “sophist” is. Along the way, the dialectical method of division (<i>diairesis</i>) is introduced, and the fundamental concepts of later Platonic dialectic, the so-called “highest kinds” – Being, Not-Being, Sameness, Difference, Movement, Rest – are presented. At the end, an exact definition of the sophist is offered, as an outcome of the method’s application.</p>	<p><b>Semantics and predication; Plato’s “late” dialectic and ontology; the method of collection and division.</b> “The <i>Sophist</i> mainly deals with a problem that looks much the same as Russell’s [in “On Denoting”, 1905]. At 236ff., Plato expounds a difficulty concerning ‘that which is not’ (<i>to mé on</i>)... His contention was that we cannot speak or think of that which is not. Nonetheless, Plato emphasizes, certain things that we say and think do indeed seem to require us to use the phrase ‘that which is not’ – including even our own effort to say that we cannot speak or think of that which is not (238d-239b) Parmenides’ difficulty seems related to Russell’s problem about nonexistence. For example the statement, ‘That which is not cannot be spoken of,’ seems paradoxical in a way that is reminiscent of ‘Pegasus does not exist.’ [...] The two statements are not exactly parallel (the latter, unlike the former, tries to say explicitly that its alleged subject matter cannot be spoken of). Still, both appear to be caught up in much the same difficulty, which is roughly that of trying to speak about something that is, by hypothesis, not there at all.” –N. P. White, <i>Sophist</i> (Hackett, 1993), vii-ix.</p>	5 - Late	52	17414	2.3	7	On being

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15 <b>Parmenides</b>	Plato recounts a meeting of the young Socrates with the elder Parmenides (the great Eleatic monist) and Zeno (formulator of “Zeno’s paradoxes” of motion). Parmenides articulates a number of difficulties about the young Socrates’ formulation of the Theory of Forms, and goes on to offer a critical analysis of his own doctrine of the <i>one</i> .	<b>Plato’s “late” metaphysics and ontology; theory of forms.</b> The <i>Parmenides</i> is a difficult dialogue which has received a number of divergent interpretations over the history of Platonic exegesis. Socrates offers a theory of forms similar to the mature version found in <i>Republic</i> , etc.; Parmenides challenges the theory; a rich analysis of the “One” – what follows if “it is” and if “it is not” – may be designed to save the Forms. The dialogue may be a criticism and development of Plato’s earlier thought, or a “logical gymnastic”, or something else altogether. The later Neoplatonists read the <i>Parmenides</i> as a key to the real structure of Platonic metaphysics.	4 - Middle-Late	40	16434	3.1	9	On ideas
- <b>Crito</b>	A month after his trial, Socrates’ friend Crito tries to persuade him to escape imprisonment and execution. Socrates cross-examines and dissuades him.	<b>Socratic political thought; social contract theory.</b> S. argues that the Laws of Athens facilitated his existence and way of life, and as an adult his choice to remain in Athens represented a further (tacit) commitment to live under their jurisdiction; therefore S. must obey them now. An early version of the “social contract” argument associated with Hobbes.	1 - Early	11	4329	1.3	3	What is to be done
- <b>Cratylus</b>	Socrates encounters two acquaintances, Cratylus and Hermogenes. Cratylus believes that names refer to their holders by nature (intrinsically, essentially); Hermogenes holds that the correctness of names is a matter of human convention. Socrates explores challenges for both views, then encourages C. and H. to investigate further.	<b>Platonic philosophy of language; the “nature vs. nurture” debate.</b> The debate between Cratylus and Hermogenes is a close cousin of the modern debate between empiricist and nativist theories about how language is learned, what makes some grammatical constructs “correct”, and also how it is the case that names can successfully “refer” to objects of reference. Although the ancient discussion of these problems was constructed in the framework of the <i>Cratylus</i> , some features of the dialogue – especially Socrates’ long and seemingly playful tract of etymologies in the centre of the <i>Cratylus</i> – tended to deter modern interest until recently (but see e.g. D. Frede & B. Inwood, <i>Language and Learning</i> ch. 1-3).	2 - Early-Middle	57	19201	2.1	5	On the suitability of names
- <b>Statesman</b>	The <i>Statesman</i> is set as a sequel to <i>Sophist</i> . Socrates, another young student called Socrates, and the mathematician Theodorus (also known from <i>Theaetetus</i> ), all try to define the statesman. Real, genuine knowledge is shown to be essential to successful statesmanship.	<b>Political theory; later Platonic dialectical method and metaphysics.</b> One essential message of the <i>Statesman</i> , often repeated in Plato’s political writing, is that the true statesman has the best interest of the citizens at heart.	5 - Late	54	18592	2.4	8	On governance
- <b>Timaeus</b>	The <i>Timaeus</i> appears to be dramatically set one day after the <i>Republic</i> , or a speech by Socrates very similar to the <i>Republic</i> . Socrates wishes to see his ideal state “in action”, and his friends Critias, Timaeus, and Hermocrates propose to offer a speech in return. Critias promises the myth of Atlantis (postponed in full to the <i>Critias</i> ), where an ideal city similar to Socrates’ model (ancient Athens, long before Plato’s day) defeats a vast empire. But the main bulk of the dialogue is the speech of Timaeus, the Pythagorean philosopher, who offers a comprehensive account of the origins of the cosmos and its mathematical laws and proportions in the hands of a Demiurge or craftsman-creator.	<b>Platonic physics and “atomic” theory; cosmogony; theology; the Atlantis myth.</b> The influence of the <i>Timaeus</i> on ancient scientific thought in Greek and Latin, and on the middle ages, is immense; on purely historical terms, it is arguably Plato’s most influential text. Among its most important ideas are the Demiurge as creator (not ex nihilo, but of order from disorder); the distinction of reason and necessity; time as an image of eternity moving “according to number”; the mathematical “atomic units” of the cosmos; and the medical theory of the construction of the human being.	5 - Late	75	24104	8.3	31	On nature
- <b>Critias</b>	The sequel to the <i>Timaeus</i> , the speech of Critias contains the tale of Atlantis and its defeat by ancient Athens, an ideal city constructed on a model similar to the constitution of the <i>Republic</i> . The <i>Critias</i> was left unfinished, and the expected third dialogue ( <i>Hermocrates</i> ) is not extant.	<b>The Atlantis myth; reflections on the constitution of Republic.</b>	5 - Late	15	5040	8.4	32	The story of Atlantis
- <b>Lysis</b>	Socrates discusses the nature of friendship ( <i>philia</i> ) with the young Lysis. Several definitions are mooted – friendship is between like people (particularly good people); or between unlike people; or neither; or both – and the dialogue ends in friendly <i>aporia</i> .	<b>Friendship; Platonic ethics; Socratic definition (of friendship).</b>	1 - Early	20	7319	5.4	20	On friendship
- <b>Euthydemus</b>	Socrates watches the display of two brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysiodorus, who are expert sophists.	<b>The philosopher versus the sophist</b>	1 - Early	36	13030	6.1	21	On eristics

## Plato – A Bird’s Eye View

Title	Synopsis	Topics	Hypothesized Chronology (Brickhouse-Smith)	Total (Steph. pp.)	Auth Word count (Gk)	Thrasylus	Cooper	Alt title (Thrasyll.)
- <b>Hippias Minor</b>	Socrates challenges the sophist Hippias, who claims mastery of many arts, on the question which Homeric hero is “better”, Achilles or Odysseus. The conversation turns to the more general question <i>whether it is better to do wrong voluntarily or involuntarily</i> ; the argument (based on premises that Hippias accepts) appears to lead to the result that the voluntary wrongdoer (if he exists) would be better (376B), but neither Hippias nor Socrates are willing to accept this; likely there is a flaw somewhere in the premises accepted by Hippias.	<b>The philosopher versus the sophist; Socratic ethics</b>	1 - Early	13	4505	7.2	26	On falsehood
- <b>Ion</b>	Socrates meets the rhapsode (reciter and interpreter of Homer) Ion, recently returned to Athens. Ion holds that his expertise in Homer qualifies him to offer expertise on any of the subjects that Homer describes; instead, Socrates shows him, his apparent “knowledge” (and Homer’s) is divine inspiration, not skill.	<b>Inspiration; Plato’s literary theory and aesthetics.</b>	1 - Early	12	4091	7.3	27	On the Iliad
- <b>Menexenus</b>	The dialogue serves to frame a funeral oration ascribed to Aspasia, which reflects (and in some respects satirizes) the famous funeral oration given by the Athenian statesman and general Pericles in Thucydides’ history.	The <i>Menexenus</i> is hardly a “dialogue” in the ordinary sense, and its purpose is unclear. Charles Kahn ( <i>Class. Philolog.</i> 58.4, 1963) sets out some of the riddles of the dialogue. It is now generally regarded as genuine, though some scholars once regarded it as spurious.	2 - Early-Middle	15	4908	7.4	28	The funeral oration
- <b>Laws</b>	On the longest day of the year on the island of Crete, several visitors – an Athenian, a Spartan, and a Cretan – walk on a pilgrimage to the Cave of Zeus, mirroring the traditional pilgrimage of the king Minos. During this day, the strangers discuss the best laws for a new city, to be called Magnesia, and in the process cover a vast array of topics across the entire sweep of Plato’s thought.	<b>Plato’s political and ethical philosophy and theology; most topics in Plato’s philosophy as a whole.</b> The <i>Laws</i> is traditionally held to be the last dialogue that Plato composed. It is also the longest of his surviving works. In the course of exploring the constitution of Magnesia, the three strangers cover many themes in educational theory, psychology, the philosophy of religion, political philosophy, legislation and legal philosophy, and theology. According to one common interpretation, the <i>Republic</i> offers P’s ideal utopian constitution, and the <i>Laws</i> offers the best constitution that he thought could be realized in practice; but there are various difficulties with this view.	5 - Late	345	106298	9.2	34	On lawgiving
- <b>First Alcibiades</b>	Socrates and the famous youth (and future general) Alcibiades have their first conversation, in which they discuss self-knowledge and the nature of the human being.	<b>Self-knowledge; relationship of psyche and body.</b> The centre of the <i>Alcibiades I</i> , according to one common view, is the Socratic argument that the human being is the soul (psyche) alone, which uses the body as an “instrument” ( <i>organon</i> ). Around the central section of the dialogue, however, many themes from throughout many of Plato’s early, middle, and late dialogues are treated in the context of Socrates’ first discussion with his most famous pupil. The combination of elements from across Plato’s oeuvre, and various stylistic difficulties, have led some scholars (since the nineteenth century) to doubt the authenticity of <i>Alcibiades</i> ; but in antiquity its authorship was never doubted, and it was frequently (from about the third century CE) read as the first book of Platonic philosophy, containing the whole “as if in a seed” (so Iamblichus).	Uncertain	32 †	11317	4.1	13	On the nature of the human
- <b>Hippias Major</b>	Socrates, in conversation with Hippias (a sophist from Elis), attempts to define the beautiful ( <i>to kalon</i> ), which in Greek can also be rendered the <i>fine</i> or the <i>noble</i> . Notably, Hippias’ answers contain a series of category errors. Socrates’ answers (attributed to an alterego, called the “questioner” or “asker”), seem stronger, but the dialogue ends in <i>aporia</i> .	<b>Socratic definition (of the “beautiful”, to kalon).</b>	1 - Early	23 †	8911	7.1	25	On beauty
- <b>Clitophon</b>	Clitophon is a follower of Thrasymachus, Socrates’ antagonist in <i>Republic</i> 1 (where Clitophon also makes a brief appearance). Clitophon offers a vigorous criticism of Socrates and questions his methods. The short dialogue does not contain Socrates’ reply, but it can be read as a kind of prologue to <i>Republic</i> 1.	<b>Socrates’ methods; justice</b> (if the dialogue is by Plato). The authorship of <i>Clit.</i> has been questioned since Marsilio Ficino in the fifteenth century, but the balance of scholars today (e.g., S. R. Slings) support its authenticity.	Uncertain	4 †	1575	8.1	29	An introduction
- <b>Second Alcibiades</b>	Socrates and Alcibiades consider whether it is safe to pray without knowing whether the ends requested are good or bad.	The <i>Alcibiades II</i> is generally regarded as authored by someone other than Plato, perhaps in the third or second century BCE.	Uncertain	13 *	4422	4.2	14	On prayer
- <b>Hipparchus</b>	Socrates, in conversation with an anonymous interlocutor, discusses the definition of greed; the historical tyrant Hipparchus is examined as an example.	The <i>Hipparchus</i> is probably not by Plato.	Uncertain	7 *	2426	4.3	15	The lover of gain

