



The Dialogues of Plato - [These are Plato's known dialogues. Many of these frequently feature Socrates and are an important part of the Socratic dialogues.] [Annotated & illustrated]

Plato

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[Early Dialogues]

Socrates figures in all of these, and they are considered the most faithful representations of the historical Socrates; hence they are also called the Socratic dialogues. Most of them consist of Socrates discussing a subject, often an ethical one (friendship, piety) with a friend or with someone presumed to be an expert on it. Through a series of questions he will show that apparently they don't understand it at all. It is left to the reader to figure out if "he" really understands "it". This makes these dialogues "indirect" teachings. This period also includes several pieces surrounding the trial and execution of Socrates.

- The Apology
- Crito
- Charmides, or Temperance
- Laches; or Courage
- Lysis; or Friendship
- Euthyphro
- Menexenus
- Lesser Hippias
- Ion

The following are variously considered transitional or middle period dialogues:

- Gorgias
- Protagoras
- Meno

[Middle Dialogues]

Late in the early dialogues Plato's Socrates actually begins supplying answers to some of the questions he asks, or putting forth positive doctrines. This is generally seen as the first appearance of Plato's own views. The first of these, that goodness is wisdom and that no one does evil willingly, was perhaps Socrates' own view. What becomes most prominent in the middle dialogues is the idea that knowledge comes of grasping unchanging forms or essences, paired with the attempts to investigate such essences. The immortality of the soul, and specific doctrines about justice, truth, and beauty, begin appearing here. The Symposium and the Republic are considered the centrepieces of Plato's middle period.

- Euthydemus
- Cratylus
- Phaedo
- Phaedrus
- Symposium
- The Republic
- Theaetetus
- Parmenides

[Late Dialogues]

The Parmenides presents a series of criticisms of the theory of Forms which are widely taken to indicate Plato's abandonment of the doctrine. Some recent publications (e.g., Meinwald [1991]) have challenged this characterisation. In most of the remaining dialogues the theory is either absent or at least appears under a different guise in discussions about kinds or classes of things (the Timaeus may be an important, and hence controversially placed, exception). Socrates is either absent or a minor figure in the discussion. An apparently new method for doing dialectic known as "collection and division" is also featured, most notably in the Sophist and Statesman, explicitly for the first time in the Phaedrus, and possibly in the Philebus. A basic description of collection and division would go as follows: interlocutors attempt to discern the similarities and differences among things in order to get clear idea about what they in fact are. One understanding, suggested in some passages of the Sophist, is that this is what philosophy is always in the business of doing, and is doing even in the early dialogues.

The late dialogues are also an important place to look for Plato's mature thought on most of the issues dealt with in the earlier dialogues. There is much work still to be done by scholars on the working out of what these views are. The later works are agreed to be difficult and challenging pieces of philosophy. On the whole they are more sober and logical than earlier works, but may hold out the promise of steps towards a solution to problems which were systematically laid out in prior works.

- Sophist
- Statesman
- Philebus
- Timaeus
- Critias
- Laws

The following works are generally agreed to be doubtful works of Plato:

- The First Alcibiades
- The Second Alcibiades
- Epinomis
- Eryxias
- The Seventh Letter

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