Plato’s later dialogues include much of his most brilliant and fascinating -- but difficult -- philosophical work. Many of these dialogues deal with basic questions of metaphysics, epistemology and science: what is knowledge? (Theaetetus) How is the cosmos to be explained (Timaeus)? What are the most basic kinds of entity (Philebus)? Others are complex exercises in philosophical method (Parmenides, Sophist). Recurrent themes include the relation between language and thought (Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Seventh Letter); dialectic as the method of ‘collection and division’ (Phaedrus, Sophist, Statesman, Philebus); the nature of the soul (Timaeus, Laws); and various analyses of the most fundamental principles of reality (Sophist, Philebus, Timaeus). Some of these dialogues, most notably the Timaeus, reaffirm ideas from Plato’s earlier works, and the ‘theory of Forms’ in particular. But more often Plato avoids using the theory when we might expect it (Theatetus), or even challenges it (Parmenides). These works take nothing for granted: in them we see Plato at work at the height of his powers, and many of them remain models of philosophical argument and innovation.

The aim of the course is to provide a good grasp of at least some of these major works and the philosophical puzzles they raise, while enabling students to improve their analytical and writing skills.

Prerequisites:

The prerequisite for the course is PHL200Y; students will be presumed to have passed this course, and thus to have a general grasp of Plato’s works and views in the context of Greek philosophy as a whole. Students are also required to have completed three half-courses in philosophy. These prerequisites will not be enforced, but students who lack them can expect to do poorly. This course is not designed as a breadth or general interest course; students who have read Plato only in the context of non-philosophy courses (e.g. POL100Y) should be aware that philosophy courses require distinctive skills.
Texts:

Plato, Complete Works, ed. J.M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997)

The text is available at the University of Toronto Bookstore. Any further readings will be available as photocopies.

Evaluation:

Short paper (four pages; due February 12; topics distributed January 15): 25%
Paper (six pages; due March 25; topics distributed February 26): 35%
Final exam: 35%
Participation: 5%

Regular class attendance is a course requirement. Questions will be assigned a week ahead of time to guide each week’s reading; students are expected to think through answers to them for discussion in class. (Questions will also be posted on the course Blackboard website as Announcements.)

Papers must be submitted in hard copy on the date due at the start of class. Late papers will be accepted with the following lateness penalty: one letter grade will be deducted for the first day of lateness (i.e., a B+ becomes a B), and a further grade for every day or two days late after that (i.e., a B+ paper submitted two or three days late becomes a B-, and four or five days late becomes a C+). No paper will be accepted more than five days late (except in cases of medical emergency, with a University medical certificate, or other approved grounds for an extension). All students are expected to be familiar with the rules and regulations of the Faculty of Arts and Science, available at http://www.artsandscience.utoronto.ca/ofr/calendar/rules.htm, according to which it is an offence to represent as one's own any idea or expression of an idea the work of another, i.e. to commit plagiarism. Any plagiarism will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Tentative Schedule:

For each week, the ‘main readings’ are those we will focus on in class discussions; the ‘background readings’ will help to make sense of them. (NB that background readings are also required readings, and may turn up on the exam.)

Week 1 (Jan. 8): Introduction & Review

Week 2 (Jan. 15): A Challenge and a New Beginning
Main Reading: Parmenides to 137b
Background Readings: Phaedo 73a-77a, 96a-103c, Republic 473c-480a
Week 3 (Jan. 22): The Theaetetus: What Knowledge Could Not Be
Main Reading: Theaetetus to 186e

Week 4 (Jan. 29): The Theaetetus: Knowledge, Belief and Truth
Main Reading: Theaetetus to 201c
Background Readings: Parmenides fragments [handout], Euthydemus 283d-8a, Cratylus 385b-d, 428d-33b

Week 5 (Feb. 5): Results of the Theaetetus
Main Reading: Theaetetus 201c-210d
Background Reading: Meno 96d-100b

Week 6 (Feb. 12): Collection and Division
Main Readings: Sophist to 232b, 264b-8d, Phaedrus 259e-272b, Philebus 13e-19b

(Feb. 19): Reading Week, no class

Week 7 (Feb. 26): The Sophist: Not-Being and False Statement
Main Reading: Sophist (all)

Week 8 (March 4): The Sophist cont’d
Main Reading: Sophist (all)

Week 9 (March 11): The Timaeus: Basic Principles of Reality
Main Reading: Timaeus, esp. 27b-56e, 68e-77c
Background Reading: Phaedo 96a-103c

Week 10 (March 18): No class

Week 11 (March 25): The Timaeus cont’d and Plato’s Later Theory of the Soul
Main Reading: Timaeus 27b-77c
Background Reading: Sophist 245e-9d

Week 12 (April 1): Plato on First Principles
Main Readings: Philebus 23c-31a, unwritten doctrines [handout]

Week 13 (April 8): Dialectic, Writing and the Forms
Main Reading: Seventh Letter, esp. 340b-5c
Background Reading: Phaedrus 274b-9c