

Oh, how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day.
Thy commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my
meditation.
I understand more than the aged, for I keep thy precepts.
I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep thy word.
I do not turn aside from thy ordinances, for thou hast taught me.
How sweet are thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

—*Psalms 119: 97-104*

Political Science 7990/7981
Political Theory: Interpretation & Analysis
Fall 2021

Laws are not the only object of study of the political scientist, but it is hard to imagine the systematic study of politics without attention to laws, if only because laws aim to bring order to political society and, in the words of the preamble to the United States Constitution, to “establish justice.” In this course we will introduce political theory through a study of two of the greatest works in the genre devoted to the analysis of laws—one ancient, one modern—then will consider a third text, not unlike the others, that speaks more particularly to American democracy.

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Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30-3:00
Fridays, 9:00-10:00, and by appointment

Books available for purchase:

- Thomas Pangle, trans., *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago) [ISBN 9780226671109]
- Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, & Harold S. Stone (Cambridge) [ISBN 9780521369749]
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield & Delba Winthrop (Chicago) [ISBN 9780226805368]

Course requirements:

- Attendance at all class sessions and participation in discussions [10%; if required to isolate or quarantine, join via Zoom as indicated on Moodle]
- Three 500-word papers on the assigned reading, one on each author, due before class (& read aloud) [30%]
- Research paper, 20-25 pages, on a topic approved by the instructor (topic due 11/12; preliminary presentation on 11/29 or 12/1; final paper due 12/9) [60%]

Grading scale: A+ (98%-100%), A (93%-97%), A- (90%-92%)
B+ (88%-90%), B (83%-87%), B- (80%-82%), etc.

SYLLABUS:**I. Plato's *Laws***

- Wed., 8/25 Plato, *Minos*
- Wed., 9/1 Plato, *Laws*, books I-III
- Wed., 9/8 *Laws*, books IV-VI
- Wed., 9/15 *Laws*, books VII-IX
- Wed., 9/22 *Laws*, books X-XII

II. Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*

- Wed., 9/29 Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, preface, books I-X
- Wed., 10/6 *Spirit of the Laws*, books XI-XIX
- Wed., 10/13 *Spirit of the Laws*, books XX-XXVI
- Wed., 10/20 *Spirit of the Laws*, books XXVII-XXXI

III. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

- Wed., 10/27 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, v. I, introduction – pt. 2, ch. 4 (pp. 1-186)
- Wed., 11/3 *Democracy in America*, introduction, v. I, pt. 2, ch. 5 – 10 (pp. 187-396)
- Wed., 11/10 *Democracy in America*, introduction, v. II, notice, pt. 1-2 (pp. 399-532)
- Wed., 11/17 *Democracy in America*, introduction, v. II, pt. 3-4 (pp. 535-676)

IV. Workshop: Presentation of Research

- Mon., 11/29 Presenting:
- Wed., 12/1 Presenting:
- Thurs., 12/9 PAPERS DUE