

Government 382M, Unique 38925
Plato's *Laws*
Lorraine Pangle
Spring 2012

Class: MW 2-3:30, Batts 1.104

Office: Mezes 3.134

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Office hrs: F 1:30-3:30 and by app't

1:30-2:30 individual consultation

2:30-3:30 open discussion

Course Description:

This seminar will proceed through a close reading of Plato's *Laws* as an account of the best attainable political regime. We will examine the communal, republican way of life depicted there as perhaps the most compelling ancient alternative to modern liberal conceptions of the just society, and also as it contrasts with the philosophic life of Socrates and the Athenian Stranger. We will examine the idea of the rule of law as an attempt to govern life by reason and contrast ancient and modern understandings of the proper aims and limits of law. Should laws be framed so as to teach virtue and not merely to restrain citizens from harming one another? What type of education and way of life is best for the happiness of male and female citizens, for the cultivation of political leadership, and for philosophy? What are the obstacles in human nature that prevent society as a whole from being able to live according to rational principles as Socratic philosophy understands them? What would a truly rational penal code look like, and why can it never be implemented? What is the proper relation of religion to government, and how does Plato's exploration of piety in the *Laws* shed light on the most basic questions of philosophy?

Prerequisites:

Graduate standing or permission of the instructor

Course Requirements and Grading Policy:

5 bi-weekly 1-2 page papers (maximum 500 words) on topics to be given out the previous week, due at the beginning of class on Monday, Jan. 23 *and* any four of the following five Mondays: Feb. 6, Feb. 20, March 5, March 26, and April 9: 5% each.

5 bi-weekly question sets (maximum 200 words), elucidating a few of the most important problems in a section of the text not yet discussed in class, and submitted by e-mail before 7 am on either Monday, Jan. 30 or Wednesday, Feb. 1

and either Monday or Wednesday of four of the following five weeks: the weeks of Feb. 13, Feb. 27, March 19, April 2, and April 16: 5% each.

Greek option: students with one year or more of Greek may meet weekly and translate passages from the texts we are studying in lieu of half of the short assignments. For these students, one short paper will be due Jan. 23, a second paper either Feb. 6 or Feb. 20, and a third paper either March 5 or March 26. One question set will be due on either Monday or Wednesday the week of Jan. 30 or Feb. 13, and a second question set the week of Feb. 27, March 19, or April 2.

No late short papers or question sets will be accepted.

Term paper of 10-15 pages on a topic of your choosing, due in my office Monday, May 14 by 5 pm: 35%. Extensions will be granted only in cases of documented illness and equivalent emergencies.

Class Participation: 15%.

Texts:

Plato's *Laws*, trans. Pangle (Chicago). ISBN 978-0226671109. Required.

Platonis, *Opera*, Volume V, J. Burnet, ed. (Oxford Classical Texts). ISBN 978-0198145462. Recommended for all students who know any Greek.

Strauss, Leo, *The Argument and Action of Plato's Laws* (Chicago). ISBN 978-0226776989. Recommended.

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.