

André Laks

Spring seminar: Plato's *Laws*.

In spite of a remarkable increase in scholarly production over the last twenty years, the *Laws*, Plato's last and longest dialogue, remains a relatively unfamiliar work. Thus, it is appropriate to navigate through the whole dialogue rather than to focus on some particular book(s). This does not mean sacrificing close reading of manageable textual units, on the contrary. For it so happens that, given the peculiar way in which the *Laws* is composed, which we will analyze, it makes sense to read the work anthologically, as Plato himself recommends to proceed in certain circumstances. The main passages we will consider are listed below (with additional references to other dialogues that we will consider). The headings for the six sessions are indicative and do not include all that will be discussed. Given that topics overlap in many passages, we will also have to talk, among other, about justice, goods and happiness, theology and religion.

The bibliography that follows is general. I shall provide more specifically related to each of the sessions before the spring break.

Week 1 : General introduction

The place of the *Laws* in Plato's corpus. Doctrinal change vs change of perspective. General plan of the *Laws*. The reception of Plato's *Laws* : introduction to the Ancients/Moderns divide and to its actuality.

Laws 1. 624a1-650b10 (The aim of legislation)

Laws 8.809b1-812b3 (Anthological reading)

Laws 10. 890e6-891a; *Phaedrus* 274b6-278b6 (Writing)

Week 2 : Second best and third cities

Laws 5.739a-740a (City for gods, city for man. 'Private' property)

Laws 8.835c1-842a10 (Sexual relationships)

Laws 9.874e7-875d6 (Corruption by power)

Politicus 293e-302b (Law as second best)

Republic 5.472a8-473e3 (Possibility of the just city)

Week 3 : Mixtures and means

Laws 3.683c8-701c4 (History of Doric cities)

Laws 6.712b4-715a5 (Classification of constitutions)

Laws 6.772e2-774a3 (Marriage)

Politicus 305d5-311c (Political weaving)

Philebus 23c1-27c2 (Fourfold ontological division)

Week 4 : Persuasion and obedience, threat and punishment

Laws 4.718a6-723b2 and 9.857c1-e7 (Medecine and legislation 2 : the theory of preambles)

Laws 4.715e7-718a + 5.726a-737d5 (General preamble)

Laws 10.893b4-896d9 or 899d3 (Preamble to the law about atheism)

Laws 9. 860c4-864c9, esp. 863a7-864b7 (Voluntary and involuntary injustice)

Politicus 293a6-e9 (Medicine and legislation 1)

Week 5 : Psychology

Laws 1.644d-645c; 7.803c2-8 (Puppets)

Laws 3.689a-b (Soul and city)

Laws 9.863a3-c12 (Injustice and damage)

Laws 9.9.874e7-875d6 (Knowledge and power)

Laws 10. 896e8-897b5 (cf. 896c5-d3) (Principle of movement)

Timaeus 69c5-d6; 70a6-7;72d, 77b3-6 (Mortal kind of soul)

Philebus 39a1- 40c6 (The painter in the soul)

(*Republic* 4.435b9-436b6; 6. 504a4-d8; 4.439c2-444a9)

Republic 8.554c11-d3; 9.571d6-572b1; 10. 603a1-2

Republic 9.580d10-581a1

Republic 10.608d2-612a6)

Week 6 : Plato on time and 'history'.

Laws 3 (Origin of cities and history of Doric cities)

Laws 4. 713a6-714b2 (Time of Cronos)

Politicus 268d-274e (The myth)

Timaeus 19b3-27c8 (+*Critias*)

(*Republic* 8-9)

General bibliography.

Translations.

We will use T. Griffith's translation:

Plato, *The Laws*, edited by M. Schofield and translated by T. Griffith, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Cf. also T. Saunders' translation (Penguin, 1970) in *Plato's Complete Works*, ed. J. M. Cooper, Hackett 1997.

Commentaries

The authoritative running commentary is in German:

K. Schöpsdau, *Platon. Nomoi*. Vol. 1 (Munich 1994) : Buch 1-3; vol. 2 (2003) : Buch 2-7; vol. 3 (2011): Buch 8-12.

England's older, classical commentary is still helpful:

E. B. England, *The Laws of Plato*, 2 vol., Manchester 1921 (repr. New York 1976)

Greek Text

J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 5 Oxford 1907 (Oxford Classical Texts).

E. des Places, A. Diès, L. Gernet, *Les Lois*, Tomes XI and XII (in four volumes) in Platon, *Œuvres complètes*, Collection des Universités de France, Paris 1951-1965.

General studies

The most comprehensive account in

G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City. A Historical Interpretation of the 'Laws'*, Princeton 1960

Introductory studies, overviews, collections of articles.

- Bartels, M., *Plato's Pragmatic Project. A reading of Plato's Laws*, 2017
- Bobonich, Ch. (ed.), *A Critical Guide to Plato's Laws*, 2010
- Bobonich, Ch., *Plato's Utopia Recast. His Later Ethics and Politics*, 2002
- Brisson, L., Scolnicov, S., (eds.), *Plato's Laws : From Theory into Practice*, 2003
- Hentschke, A. B., *Politik und Philosophie bei Platon und Aristoteles. Die Stellung der 'Nomoi' im platonischen Gesamtwerk und die politische Theorie des Aristoteles*, 1971
- Horn, Ch. (ed.) *Platon. Nomoi*, 2011
- Laks, A., "The Laws", in Schofield, M. and Rowe, Ch., *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, 2000
- Laks, A., *Médiation et Coercition. Pour une lecture des Lois de Platon*, 2005
- Lisi, F. (ed.), *Plato's Laws and its Historical significance*, 2001
- Lisi, F., *Einheit und Vielheit des platonischen Nomos-Begriffs*, 1985
- Saunders, T. J., *Plato's Penal Code. Tradition, Controversy and Reform in Greek Penology*, 1991 (1994²)
- Schofield, M., *Plato : Political Philosophy*, 2006
- Stalley, R. F., *An Introduction to Plato's Laws*, 1983.