

GVPT 842  
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Spring 2006  
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### Man and the State: Montesquieu, Subtle Law-giver of Modern Politics

Charles Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) commands our attention for at least three reasons. First, he is fundamental for an appreciation of the modern enterprise, not least because of the respect in which he was held by the founders of the American republic. His teaching has added importance today insofar as he is primarily responsible for the early success of the commercial republic, precisely the regime the US has emulated and that now seems so fraught with difficulty.

Still, the deep core of Montesquieu's teaching is the way his penetrating examination of the rise and fall of the Roman republic prepares his encyclopedic explanation of what characterizes law or laws. What Montesquieu has to say about these two themes merits careful study.

The goal of this course is to look closely at his two fundamental writings, namely, *Spirit of the Laws* and *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and of their Decadence*, as well as, albeit less closely, his light-hearted – but ever so pointed – *Persian Letters*. Hopefully, we will be able to let out rather rapid reading of it stimulate our thinking as we discuss the other two writings in detail. Stated simply, these works of Montesquieu provide one of the best introductions to modern politics.

The readings for the course are difficult and will sometimes be quite long. Nonetheless, I expect students to be prepared to participate intelligently in discussion at each class. To do so, it will be necessary to read the assigned material, take notes, and organize on paper the general lines of argument in the readings – tasks that will demand at least 9 hours of effort for each class.

Students desiring credit are to write two papers. One, to be presented or handed in at the beginning of one of class sessions 2-14, should provide a critical analysis of the material for that session in about 1750-2000 words (7-8 double-spaced pages). The other, of 3500-3750 words in length (14-15 double-spaced pages), should offer a comprehensive statement of Montesquieu's teaching or some central point that arises in it. It is due on May 17, that is, one week after the last class. Students should, by all means, take advantage of office hours both to become acquainted with me and to discuss any problems that arise.

The short paper will count for 40% of the grade, the long paper for 50%, and intelligent contribution to class discussion for 10%.

For the record:

1. The UMD Code of Academic Integrity will be enforced. In short, no cheating. Questions? See <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html>
2. Students with disabilities should see the instructor. Their needs will be accommodated.
3. The UMD policy of respecting the religious observances of students will be followed.

## READING SCHEDULE

Class 1, January 25 Introduction plus Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 1-43

Class 2, February 1 Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 44-161

Class 3, February 8 Montesquieu, *Considerations*, Chaps. 1-11

**NOTE WELL: NO CLASS FEBRUARY 15 OR FEBRUARY 22**

Class 4, March 1 Montesquieu, *Considerations*, Chaps. 12-23

Class 5, March 8 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 1, Books 1-5

Class 6, March 15 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Parts 1-2, Books 6-10

**NOTE WELL: SPRING BREAK MARCH 20-26**

Class 7, March 29 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 2, Books 11-13

Class 8, April 5 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 3, Books 14-19

Class 9, April 12 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 4, Books 20-21

Class 10, April 19 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Parts 4-5, Books 22-24

Class 11, April 26 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Parts 5-6, Books 25-27

Class 12, May 3 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 6, Books 28-29

Class 13, May 10 Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, Part 6, Books 30-31

**MAY 17, SECOND PAPER DUE**

Books to order

Charles Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *On the Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1989), ISBN: 0-52136-974-6, (paper) \$24.00.

Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, trans. David Lowenthal (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), ISBN: 0-87220-496-0, (paper) \$14.95.

Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*, trans. with introduction, George R. Healy (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), ISBN: 0-87220-490-1, (paper) \$11.95.