**Plato’s Cretan State**

**Instructor: Chloe Balla**

**Course description:**

Why does the Athenian philosopher Plato set his final dialogue, the *Laws*, on the island of Crete? Focusing on Plato’s account of his second best city, Magnesia, the new colony that is supposedly established on the island of Crete,this course introduces the students to a series of major themes and ideas that are developed throughout the platonic dialogues, ranging from moral psychology and political theory to theology, natural science, to the educational role of art, the importance of persuasion and the value but also the constraints of philosophical explanation. Special attention will be given to the contrast between different political cultures (reflected in the author’s choice to present his text in the form of a dialogue between representatives of different city-states (Athens, Sparta and Cnossos), and respectively different lawcodes but also virtues, as well as to the invocation of divine authority (reflected in the fact that the dialogue is supposed to take place in the course of a pilgrimage to the cave of Zeus on Mount Ida, from which King Minos allegedly received his laws).

**Weekly schedule:**

Week 1 **Platonic utopias: Opening remarks and course overview**

Week 2 **Plato on legislation: from the *Crito* to the *Laws***

Week 3 **Why on Crete? Writing, laws and gods**.

Week 4 **The walk from Cnossos towards Zeus’ cave: Human *versus* divine perspective**

Week 5 **Drinking parties and the unity of virtues**

Week 6 **Humans as puppets: The anthropology of the *Laws***

Week 7 **Theorizing constitutions and the foundations of the Cretan colony**

Week 8 **On persuasion: The legislative preambles**

Week 9 **The preamble on marriage: a tribute to Diotima**

Week 10 **On art and education**

Week 11 **The relevance of natural science**

Week 12 **Student presentations**

Week 13 **Student presentations**

**Evaluation:** Student evaluation will be based on the following three criteria:

* 20% of the final mark will depend on middle-term quizzes, to assess student progress and understanding of the course content. Quizzes will take place in weeks 4 and 8.
* 30% of the final mark will be based on a 15-min oral presentation of topics related to the course. Essay topics will be chosen by week 3 in consultation with the course convener, while presentations will take place in weeks 12 and 13.
* 50% of the final mark will be based on an end-of-term written essay of 3.500 words

**Selected bibliography**

Primary text:

Recommended translation of Plato’s text: *Plato: Laws*, edited by M. Schofield, trans. by T. Griffith, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Secondary readings:

Balot, Ryan, 2024. *Tragedy, Philosophy, and Political Education in Plato’s* Laws. Oxford University Press, 2024.

Bobonich, Christopher, ed., 2010. *Plato’s* Laws: *A critical guide*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Morrow, Glenn, 1993. *Plato’s Cretan City. A Historical Interpretation of the* Laws. Princeton University Press, 1993.

Schofield, Malcolm, 2006. *Plato. Political Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2006. ed. 1999.