The Rise of the West: Intellectual History

Course Description:

The course will provide a survey of the intellectual history of the "Western Civilization" from its roots in ancient Greece and Rome through the 16th century. The course will specifically track the development of the ideas that defined, justified, and regulated the relationship of an individual both to their communities, either secular or spiritual, and the outsiders. Throughout the course, students will familiarize themselves with the ideas of “just war,” state and politics, cosmopolitanism, the role of education and philosophy in shaping the Western intellectual milestones such as the birth of Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Reformation. The course has three main goals: first, to familiarize students with intellectual traditions that shaped the early history of the West and their significance for understanding the world today; second, to give students a basic grounding in the idea of historical interpretation and argumentation; third, to improve students’ analytical skills and the ability to express their ideas through writing.

Attendance Policy:

Attendance is mandatory. Participation is 20% of the final grade the maximum allowed per Yale College regulations. No dean’s excuses could be offered during the summer. If a student has multiple absences, it may be necessary for the dean to impose a cut restriction. Any further absences might result in the student’s involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please do the assigned readings before lecture and be prepared to discuss them in section. One of the valuable, transferable skills you should be developing is active reading and skimming: identify key passages, read those first, then read for evidence and reasoning to the degree possible or necessary for written assignments.

Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism is not permissible in any form. Please be sure to review Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy in the Yale Student Handbook. You can find a fuller discussion of using sources and avoiding plagiarism on the Writing Center Website (https://ctl.yale.edu/writing/using-sources).

Grading:

Participation: 20%
Midterm: 20%
Final Essay Outline: 10%
Final Essay: 25%
Final Exam: 25%

Assignments:

Final Essay: The final essay should analyze one of the following themes: The Social Fabric, Us and the Others, Sources of Authority, Corporations and Individuals, Rediscovery of Antiquity and the Birth of Modernity. Please submit a one-page outline of the essay by the end of the third week. This outline should have a short bibliography of the primary and secondary sources you will utilize and your argument. The final paper is due Friday, 5:00 PM, Week 4.

All reading materials will be provided.

The Social Fabric:

Week 1. Session 1: The Heroic Age: Homer and The Odyssey
Lecture: Being a Human in the Homeric World
Readings:

Concepts: Polis, Strangers, Guests, Friends, Xenia, Homecoming

Week 1. Session 2: Athenian Democracy in Theory and Practice
Lecture: From Polis to Cosmopolis: Ways to Be Political
Readings:

Concepts: Sophists and Sophism, democracy, paideia, freedom (“eleutheria”)

Us and the Others:

Week 2. Session 1: War and Peace in Ancient Rome
Lecture: At Home and Abroad: Expansion, Soldiers and Citizens
Readings:
- Excerpts from the Book 1 of The Aeneid by Virgil

Concepts: the concept of “just wars,” hostis, imperialism, ideas of republic, pietas, “mos maiorum” (“the code of elders”).
Week 2. Session 2: The Birth of Christianity
Lecture: From an Illegal Sect to Imperial Institution
Readings:
Concepts: Judaism and messiah, evangelia, platonism, Scriptures, heresies

Sources of Authority:

Week 3. Session 1. The Shaping of a New Worldview
Lecture: Augustine and a New Worldview
Readings:
- Augustine on “Just War” (Excerpts provided)
- Augustine on “Free Will” (Excerpts provided)
- Augustine on St. Paul (Excerpts provided)
Concepts: predestination, free will, determinism, church tradition

Week 3. Session 2. Social and Political Structures of Christian Europe
Lecture: Sources of Authority: Secular and Spiritual
Readings:
Concepts: regnum, sacerdotium, the metaphor of two swords, the crusades

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Corporations and Individualism:

Week 4. Session 1: The Medieval City: A New Polis?
Lecture: The Medieval City: “Liberty, Not Equality!”
Readings:
- Picturing Legal Transactions. Visual sources provided.
Concepts: corporation, guild, town laws

Week 4. Session 2. The Scholasticism and the Birth of Universities
Lecture: Rediscovery of Aristotle and the Scholastic Method.
Readings:
Concepts: scholasticism, Aristotelianism, trivium and quadrivium, university corporation
Rediscovery of Antiquity and The Birth of Modernity:

Week 5. Session 1. The Renaissance
Lecture: The New Ways of Reading Ancient Texts
Readings:

Concepts: The Renaissance, rediscovery of antiquity, humanism, studia humanitatis

Week 5. Session 2 The Reformation: Back to the Scripture!
Lecture: Luther and the Return to Scripture
Readings:
- A Commentary of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, in *Martin Luther. Selections From his Writings*,
- The Bondage of the Will, 1525 (Selections), in *Martin Luther. Selections From his Writings*,

Concepts: free will, grace, predestination, the Reformation

Final Exam: TBD