In the first half of this course, we explore the ancient foundations of traditional western culture by examining the political and social institutions, religious beliefs and value systems of the Israelites, Greeks, Romans and early Christians. We then turn to the radical challenges to this traditional culture, embodied above all in western Christianity, in the areas of the economy, politics, religion and morality that arose over the course of the 19th century, challenges that continue to reverberate to this day. At the heart of the course, then, will be “conversations” both among the Ancients (Israelites, Greeks and Romans) and between the Ancients and their 19th century defenders and challengers. At the same time, we will also engage in another kind of conversation, between ourselves in the 21st century and all of these figures from the western past, trying to determine which of their insights are still of relevance to us today.

Course requirements: The requirements of this course are: 1) Weekly attendance and participation in recitation sections (15% of grade). 2) Weekly one-page response papers (double-spaced, standard font and margins), to be handed in to your preceptor by 5pm each Thursday. The papers should not be summaries of the week’s reading, but rather should identify an idea or argument in the reading that has surprised, perplexed, or inspired you. The papers will be graded check, check plus or check minus (25% of grade). 3) An in-class midterm on March 22 (25% of grade). 4) A one hour fifty minute final exam on May 5 (35% of grade).

Professor Ertman’s office is at 269 Mercer Street, Room 420. His telephone number is 998-8359 and his e-mail Thomas.Ertman@nyu.edu. His office hours are Thursday 1-2 and by appointment.

All books for the course have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore.
I.  ANCIENT ISRAEL I

Lecture Topics

1. (Jan. 18) Course Introduction
2. (Jan. 20) Who wrote the Hebrew Bible, when and why?

Required Reading


II.  ANCIENT ISRAEL II

Lecture Topics

1. (Jan. 25) Monotheism, Law and Society among the Ancient Israelites
2. (Jan. 27) Monotheism, Law and Society among the Ancient Israelites

Required Reading


III.  THE ANCIENT GREEKS I

Lecture Topics

1. (Feb. 1) Homer and Archaic Greece
2. (Feb. 3) Homer’s “Iliad”

Required Reading

Homer, The Iliad, trans. Robert Fagles, Books 1, 9, 16, 18-20, 22-24 (= pp. 77-98, 251-275, 412-441, 467-519, 541-614).

IV.  THE ANCIENT GREEKS II

Lecture Topics

1. (Feb. 8) Society and Democracy in Periclean Athens
2. (Feb. 10) Thucydides’ “The Peloponnesian War”

Required Reading

V. THE ANCIENT GREEKS III

Lecture Topics
1. (Feb. 15) Philosophy in Ancient Greece: Socrates and Plato
2. (Feb. 17) Plato’s “Symposium”

Required Reading
Plato, The Trial and Death of Socrates, complete; Symposium, trans. Waterfield, complete.

VI. THE ROMANS AND THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY I

Lecture Topics
1. (Feb. 22) Republican and Imperial Rome
2. (Feb. 24) Virgil’s “Aeneid”

Required Reading

VII. THE ROMANS AND THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY II

Lecture Topics
1. (Mar. 1) Who wrote the Christian Bible, when and why?
2. (Mar. 3) The Emergence of Christianity

Required Reading

VIII. THE ROMANS AND THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY III

Lecture Topics
1. (Mar. 8) The Spread and Consolidation of Christianity
2. (Mar. 10) Augustine’s “Confessions”

Required Reading
Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. Chadwick, Books 1-9 (=pp. 3-178).

IX. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORDER I
Lecture Topics

1. (Mar. 22) **In-class Midterm**
2. (Mar. 24) The Theory of Economic Liberalism: Adam Smith’s “Wealth of Nations”

Required Reading


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**X. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORDER II**

Lecture Topics

1. (March 29) Liberal Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution
2. (March 31) Marx’s Theory of Society and History

Required Reading


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**XI. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORDER III**

Lecture Topics

1. (April 5) Political Liberalization and Democratization
2. (April 7) J.S. Mill’s “On Liberty”

Required Reading


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**XII. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ORDER I**

Lecture Topics

1. (April 12) Science and Religion in the early 19th Century
2. (April 14) The Darwinian Challenge

Required Reading


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**XIII. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ORDER II**

Lecture Topics

1. (April 19) Friedrich Nietzsche and the Ancient Greeks
2. (April 21) Nietzsche’s Challenge to Christian Morality

Required Reading

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals (Oxford edition), complete (=pp. 3-136).

XIV. THE 19TH CENTURY: CHALLENGES TO THE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ORDER III

Lecture Topics

1. (April 26) Freud’s Theory of Mind
2. (April 28) Freud’s Social Theory
3. (May 3) Concluding Thoughts and Review

Required Reading

Sigmund Freud, Civilizations and its Discontents (Norton edition), complete (=pp. 10-112)