

Western Civilization
Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00-3:15 in McIver 28

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:30-4:30; Wednesdays 11:00-12:00 & 12:45-1:45; or by appointment. I'm available many other times, and I encourage you to come see me if you're having trouble, want to clarify things, or just want to talk.

This course is an introduction to some of the major events, people, and themes in Western civilization from its Middle Eastern beginnings through the pivotal seventeenth century. That history is of course so rich that many lifetimes could be devoted to its study; hence we'll need to be selective, and focus on a restricted range of topics. The theme I've chosen as a connecting thread through many of those topics is the issue of *authority*: Where does it lie? What is its source? Why is it ever challenged? How does conflict between competing authorities get resolved? Such questions apply to all kinds of authority, whether political, religious, philosophical, or scientific. Alongside that principal theme, we'll also try to pass in review as many of the generally recognized major episodes in Western history in our time period as feasible, since one purpose of this class is to give students a degree of cultural literacy, a basic familiarity with the major events, people, and themes within the scope of the course. Sometimes that familiarity will be simple name recognition.

One very good textbook—one I used to use—identified the following major themes of Western civilization (Kagan, xxvi):

- The capacity of Western civilization from the time of the Greeks to the present to transform itself through self-criticism.
- The development in the West of political freedom, constitutional government, and concern for the rule of law and individual rights.
- The shifting relations among religion, society, and the state.
- The development of science and technology and their expanding impact on Western thought, social institutions, and everyday life.
- The major religious and intellectual currents that have shaped Western culture.

The required text for the course is Thomas F. X. Noble *et al.*, *Western Civilization: The Continuing Experiment*, 4th ed. (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), Vol. 1, "To 1715," referred to as "Noble" in the syllabus. Additional required or recommended readings from other secondary sources, available on e-Reserves via Blackboard (about which more presently), are from Thomas H. Greer and Gavin Lewis, *A Brief History of the Western World*, 8th ed. (Wadsworth, 2002); Mark Kishlansky *et al.*, *Civilization in the West*, 6th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2006), Vol. 1; Donald Kagan *et al.*, *The Western Heritage*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), Vol. 1; David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); G. E. R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970); Marvin Perry *et al.*, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics & Society*, 6th ed., (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), Vol. 1; and Dennis Sherman and Joyce Salisbury, *The West in the World* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006), Vol. 1. The selections from Greer, Lindberg, and

Perry span several assignments, hence it will be most efficient if you print them out in their entirety once and for all. The entries of the form “[ca. 19 pp.]” in the syllabus indicate the approximate number of page-equivalents of reading.

For many of the topics I’ve also assigned required (but always short) *supplementary reading* from primary sources also available on e-Reserves via Blackboard. *Be guided by the questions on the syllabus as to what important points you should be looking for in the readings.* Although these readings won’t necessarily be discussed separately in class, they provide very important additional information and shouldn’t be ignored! I suggest you print them out for easier reading (and underlining). (Note: *Primary* sources are documents that date from the period in question; *secondary* sources are modern historians’ accounts or analyses of what they think happened. Thus the ancient Greek historian Polybius counts as a primary source *for us*.)

It is very important to have done the assigned reading before the relevant class! You will get much more out of both the text and the lecture if you do so, especially if you then, as you should, review the text after the lecture—to pick out the high points, to clarify the meaning of important people, events, or ideas, and to get an overview of the relative importance of different aspects of the reading. *If you want to learn the material, it is never sufficient to read the text only once!* Make a habit of studying the *maps* and *time lines* scattered through the text—*i.e.*, really give them your attention! Repeated exposure is one of the keys to learning the material.

It has traditionally been reckoned that students should expect to spend around three hours outside of class for each hour of class time. Hence in this class if you’re *not* devoting around eight hours a week to reading and studying, you’re probably not going to do well.

I’ve regularly included in the syllabus lists of items to *emphasize* or *deemphasize* in the reading selections: read these ahead of time and apportion your energies accordingly. For every unit I will hand out a sheet of important terms, names, and dates as an aid to following the lecture. You won’t be expected to remember all of them—I’ll do my best to indicate which are the more important—but you should make sure you understand them and recognize their significance. If any of the names or terms are still unclear to you, go back to the text or lecture notes and clarify things. If you *actively exploit* the various *strategies* I’ve suggested, you should find it much easier to assimilate the material! As with physical exercises, just reading about them won’t make you stronger: you have to do them, and keep doing them.

Keep in mind that the only way to do well in a class like this—which means the only way to begin to learn history—is to read carefully and with attention while you *actively try to understand the details*, even if, in the end, all the details won’t matter—*i.e.*, you won’t be responsible for them. Even if your goal is to understand the larger issues and not necessarily to remember all the details, *you cannot effectively grasp those larger points without having at least worked through the details.* Many of those details you’ll be getting from the readings, others I’ll be giving you in class. The lectures are also intended to explain the issues and to draw your attention to what I consider the most important matters. It will *not* be possible for me to go over *everything* of importance to the class in the lectures. You will not do well in this class if you slight either the lectures or the readings. If you miss a class, get someone else’s notes. *Feel free to ask questions at any time.*

I will regularly make available via Blackboard cleaned-up copies of my lecture notes.

Although these notes are somewhat schematic—I don't write down everything I say in class—they should help you focus on the important points and major names and dates.

Aside from presenting a certain number of details and general points, the larger purpose of this class is to encourage you to develop a realistic and insight-producing attitude towards the study of history. For example, although we, as later-comers on the historical stage, know how the story came out, and hence can tailor what we look at in the past in accordance with the story we want to tell about how the past developed towards the present, *it is absolutely essential always to keep in mind that things didn't have to turn out the way they did.* There's no inevitability or long-term goal-directedness to history (as there isn't to Darwinian evolution, either!). It's important to understand the *contingent* nature of history: things might have been otherwise. But we can still (we hope) make sense of what in fact happened.

A closely related point is the realization that neither institutions nor peoples nor anything else has an "essence" that determines the role it plays in history. To cite a prominent and important example, it is fundamentally misguided to try to identify some supposed essential quality of (say) Christianity or Islam which has determined its course throughout history. All such traditions embrace a wide variety of sometimes conflicting possibilities, and the ones that come to the fore at any given time depend on the particular circumstances. In this regard it is more useful to think of religious traditions as providing an array of *cultural resources* that people can pick and choose from according to their needs and purposes than it is to think of them as being an unproblematic "influence" on those who come into their field of force. The same can be said with regard to (say) the Greeks, Germans, Americans, or Western civilization in general. Nor is the subject matter of "Western Civ" something that's unproblematically "given." What we decide to include in "history" is ours to decide, and what gets included or excluded has changed over time and in accordance with different people's different interests. (Note my selection or exclusion of particular sections of the text. And I chose the text.) Having said that, it's also useful to recognize that, in actual fact, there's been reasonable consensus for many decades as to what belongs to "Western Civ." (Try comparing a few texts and you'll quickly see what I mean.) Hence one of the chief purposes of this course is to expose students to what legions of historians have decided belongs to our *living* history, the history we continue to tell ourselves about ourselves. The past influences the present both through the direct impact of the events themselves as well as through people's ongoing recollection of the meaning of past events. Think of the American Civil War!

There will be three exams, each worth a third of your raw final grade. The final will be cumulative, though weighted in favor of the last block of material. I will take attendance. More than three absences will be considered excessive; after six absences I may, at my discretion, drop you from the roll. Some adjustment may be made to your raw final grade in accordance with attendance and class participation—up to a full letter grade, though usually much less. In practical terms, unless you have excessive absences, you will not do worse than the calculated raw final grade. I expect students to have read and understood the section of the *Policies for Students* handbook (or the equivalent on-line version) relating to the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy. Submission of written work implies your acceptance of its provisions. I take vigorous action against all cases of suspected cheating or plagiarism. *Students who miss the first two classes will be dropped from the roll.*

A few words about **Blackboard**, UNCG's online course management system. You can access it from the UNCG homepage by clicking "Current Students" on the horizontal yellow bar,

then “Blackboard” under the blue list of “Resources.” Most of you will already have been exposed to Blackboard at one or another orientation session for incoming students. If not, you can familiarize yourself with it via the Blackboard Online Student Orientation at <http://www.uncg.edu/aas/itc/bborient/>. If you have specific problems—say with logging in or printing—you should call the Help Desk at 6-TECH (*i.e.*, 68324) on a University phone. In order to gain access to Blackboard you will first need to have activated your student account. If you haven’t, go to <https://blackboard.uncg.edu/webapps/login>. Scroll to the bottom of the page, and click on “Haven’t activated your UNCG computer account?” and follow the instructions from there. What you need to know for this course is relatively simple. “Course Information” contains the syllabus and (as they become relevant) study guides and other handouts (*except diagrams and maps*). “Assignments” reproduces the syllabus with clickable links to the other-than-textbook readings. “e-Reserves” is a list of all such additional readings, arranged alphabetically by title. (Hence there are two ways you can access the readings on e-Reserves.) “Lecture Notes” will contain cleaned-up copies of the notes I lecture from, made available soon after the relevant lecture(s). *Since I always elaborate on items sometimes merely mentioned in the notes, they don’t replace the lectures themselves!* “Announcements” will alert you to things like changes in test dates (unlikely!) or cancellation of a class (also unlikely); you should check it regularly just in case.

Student Learning Goals

By the end of the semester, students will have a knowledge and understanding of:

- Some of the major events, people, and themes in Western civilization.
- In particular, the development of social and political institutions, especially as those have interacted with contemporaneous religious systems.
- The significance of the Western philosophical and scientific tradition, especially as represented by the events of the Scientific Revolution.
- The diverse and interconnected ways in which people have respected or challenged authority in the different spheres of culture (politics, religion, philosophy, science).
- The contingent nature of history and the role of cultural resources

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Exams

August 16: **Introduction**

August 18: **Unit 1. Mesopotamian Civilization:** Noble, 11-21, 39-49 (*omit* boxed readings on 14-15, 20, and 43); *strongly recommended:* Kishlansky, *Civilization in the West*, 9-17, especially the section on religion (13-14) [*ca.* 16 + 6 pp.]

emphasize: achievements of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and Persians; political, social, and religious institutions; Hammurabi’s code; development of writing, mathematics, and science (especially astronomy)

deemphasize: dynastic details (e.g., which group conquered whom and ruled when)

August 23: **Unit 2. Greek Society:** Noble, 57-65, 69-81, 85-93, 105-119, 121-124 (*omit* boxed readings on 90, 116, and 118) [*ca.* 33 pp.]

emphasize: social and political institutions after the Homeric age; contrasts between Sparta and Athens; Hellenistic world

deemphasize: Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations; details of Persian and Peloponnesian wars and of Alexander's conquests

August 25: **Unit 3. Early Greek Thought and Culture:** Noble, 81-85, 93-96, 98-103; Perry, *Western Civilization, Pt. A*, 75-82 [*ca.* 15 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* (*ca.* 430-410 B.C.). Note Thucydides' skepticism and his realization of how hard it can be to discover the truth.

optional supplementary reading: Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science, Pt. A*, 25-35, 43-45 (Presocratics); Lloyd, *Early Greek Science, Pt. A* (Presocratics), **Pt. B** (Hippocratic medicine)

emphasize: differences between Mesopotamian and Greek religion, society, and culture; significance of the Greek tradition of (natural) philosophy (which lay at the base of later Western science)

deemphasize: poetry, sculpture, architecture, and drama

August 30: **Unit 4. Plato, Aristotle, and Their Successors:** Noble, 96-98, 128-131; Perry, *Western Civilization, Pt. A*, 82-90, **Pt. C**, 412-413 [*ca.* 14 pp.]

optional supplementary reading: Lindberg, *Beginnings of Western Science, Pt. A*, 35-43 (Plato), **Pt. B** (Aristotle); Lloyd, *Early Greek Science, Pt. C* (Plato), **Pt. D** (Aristotle)

emphasize: Plato's theory of ideas (also called "forms"); differences between Plato's and Aristotle's conception of scientific knowledge; Aristotle's cosmology; Stoicism

deemphasize: Aristotle's ethics

September 1: buffer day; no new reading

September 6: **Unit 5. Roman Republic:** Noble, 137-167 (*omit* boxed readings on 147, 164, and 166) [*ca.* 20 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Polybius, *Histories* (2nd cent. B.C.) Try to get a sense of how Roman Republican institutions functioned. How was authority determined?

emphasize: Roman political institutions and how they evolved; Roman religion; gradual expansion of Roman territorial control; Rome's exposure to Greek culture; the fall of the republic and Caesar's rise to power; Octavian's triumph

deemphasize: Etruscans; details of Punic Wars; details of 2nd-century-B.C. politics (the Gracchi; Marius and Sulla)

September 8: **Unit 6. Roman Empire:** Noble, 167-168, 173-188, 190, 199-201, 203-211 (*omit* boxed readings on 187 and 189); *recommended:* Greer, *Brief History of the Western World*, 149-158 [*ca.* 22 + 8 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Cicero, *On the Laws* (*ca.* 50 B.C.). What ultimate sources of authority does Cicero recognize? What is “natural law” or “the law of nature”?

emphasize: continuities and discontinuities in the transition from republic to empire; Stoicism; Roman law; Augustus’ consolidation of power; expansion of Roman power, culture, and citizenship; reasons for the empire’s decline; division of the empire; Diocletian’s and Constantine’s reigns

deemphasize: details of succession of emperors

September 13 & 15: **Unit 7. Hebrews and Christians:** Noble, 50-56, 131-133, 191-198; 211-217, 230-234; *review* 207-210 (*omit* boxed readings on 216 and 233); Greer, *Brief History of the Western World*, 155-158 [*ca.* 24 pp.]

required supplementary reading: (1) *Exodus* (probably 8th-7th cent. B.C.). What are some of the similarities and differences between the laws laid down in *Exodus* and in Hammurabi’s code? (2) Tertullian, *Prescriptions against Heretics* (*ca.* 200 A.D.). What is Tertullian’s answer to his question, “What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?”

emphasize: evolution of Jewish religion and its relationship to Christianity; rise and spread of Christianity within the Roman empire; consolidation of Christian belief and authority; Constantine’s role; split between Rome and Byzantium (later Constantinople); papal primacy
deemphasize: monasticism

September 20: buffer day; no new reading; Study Guide for First Exam handed out

September 22: FIRST EXAM

September 27: **Unit 8. Devolution of the Roman Empire:** Noble, 217-230, 234-237 (*omit* boxed reading on 220); *recommended:* Greer, *Brief History of the Western World*, 158-161 [*ca.* 11 + 4 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Justinian, *Digest* (530-533). On what was the authority of Roman law grounded?

emphasize: barbarian invasions; continuities and discontinuities in the “fall of Rome” after 476 A.D.; the Byzantine Empire as successor to the Eastern Roman Empire; codification of Roman law in the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (“Body of Civil Law,” consisting of the Institutes, Digest, and Code); differences between Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity; preservation of Greek learning by Byzantines

September 29: **Unit 9. Early Medieval Europe:** Noble, 239-240, 247-271; 318-324 (*omit* boxed

readings on 249, 256, and 270); *recommended*: Kagan, *Western Heritage*, **Pt. A**, 221-224 (feudalism) and Sherman, *West in the World*, 234-240 (Charlemagne; *omit* boxed reading on 239) [*ca.* 21 + 8 pp.]

emphasize: conflict between king and powerful local noblemen, between centralized and diffused authority; Charlemagne's importance; relationship between Papacy and secular authority; power relationships in feudal society

deemphasize: details of Frankish kings and Carolingian kingdoms

October 4 & 6: **Unit 10. High Middle Ages**: Noble, 283-303, 306-313, 327-333; Kagan, *Western Heritage*, **Pt. B**, 232-234 [*ca.* 21 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Pope Gregory VII, "Letter to the Bishop of Metz" (1081). How does Pope Gregory claim authority over secular rulers? What kind of rhetorical language does he employ?

emphasize: beginnings of nation-states in France and Britain; relation between Empire and Papacy; Cluniac reforms; founding of Franciscan and Dominican orders; investiture controversy; significance of Crusades; consolidation of Church doctrine

deemphasize: details of Germanic emperors and Crusades; details of English, French, and German history

October 11: Fall Break

October 13 & 18: **Unit 11. Corporate Society, Towns, and Universities**: Noble, 275-283, 324-327, 33-340, 348-349 (*omit* boxed readings on 325 and 336); Kagan, *Western Heritage*, **Pt. C**, 271-276 (*omit* boxed reading on 274); Perry, *Western Civilization*, **Pt. B**, 259-273 (*omit* profile on 266-267) [*ca.* 29 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa against the Gentiles* (1259-1264). What roles does Aquinas assign to reason and to faith in the search for truth?

emphasize: corporate nature of medieval society; role of clergy; importance of towns and merchants; schools and universities; revival of Roman law; tension between philosophy and theology; issue of faith *vs.* reason

deemphasize: technological innovation; details of medieval science

October 20: **Unit 12. Late Middle Ages**: Noble, 355-379, 385-388 (*omit* boxed readings on 265 and 373); Kagan, *Western Heritage*, **Pt. D**, 303-306 [*ca.* 23 pp.]

required supplementary reading: (1) Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* (1302). On what does Pope Boniface VIII base the claimed power and authority of the Church? How does he differ in some regards from Pope Gregory? (2) John Wycliffe, "Propositions [theses] condemned by a Church synod at London (1382) and by the Council of Constance (1415)." What does Wycliffe object to with the Church? How does he threaten Church authority?

emphasize: strengths and weaknesses of the Papacy; popes *vs.* kings; popes *vs.* councils;

consolidation of French, English, and Spanish monarchies; political fragmentation of the German “Holy Roman Empire”
deemphasize: details of Hundred Years’ War; most of the popes and kings; Italian politics; Black Death; trade and agriculture

October 25: buffer day; no new reading; might show some images relating to the next class

October 27: **Unit 13. Renaissance**: Noble, 393-425 (*omit* boxed readings on 407 and 412) [*ca.* 25 pp.]; Study Guide and optional Extra Credit Exercise in connection with the Second Exam handed out

emphasize: significance of the Renaissance; its classical and progressive aspects; revival of Platonism and of Greek learning in general; innovations of Renaissance art; political involvements of the popes; impact of printing
deemphasize: politics of Italian city-states; literature

November 1: SECOND EXAM

November 3: **Unit 14. Reformation and Counter-Reformation**: Noble, 461-493 (*omit* boxed readings on 472, 476, 484, and 489) [*ca.* 22 pp.]

required supplementary reading: (1) Martin Luther, *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* (1517). How does Luther challenge the authority of the Church? Compare the arguments of Wycliffe and his followers. (2) Parliament, “The Act of Supremacy” (1534). By what authority was the king head of the Church of England? (3) *Canons and Decrees of the Sacred, Ecumenical, and General Tridentine Council* (1564). How did the Church respond to the Protestant challenge to its authority? On what did the Catholic Church ground its authority?

emphasize: causes and consequences of the Protestant Reformation; sale of indulgences; Luther’s challenge to Roman Catholicism; Calvin’s impact; Catholic Counter-Reformation; importance of the Council of Trent
deemphasize: Peasants’ Revolt; Swiss Reformation; Anabaptists and other radicals; details of the English Reformation and Elizabethan settlement; Scandinavia and Eastern Europe

November 8: **Unit 15. England and France in the Seventeenth Century**: Noble, 513-528, 539-553 [*ca.* 23 pp.]

emphasize: absolute vs. limited monarchies; differences between English and French political developments; importance of political institutions; weaknesses of England’s Stuart kings; rise of Parliament’s power; significance of English Civil War; consolidation of royal power under Louis XIII and Louis XIV; relationship between church and state
deemphasize: details of English Civil War; details of Louis XIV’s military exploits; Thirty Years’ War

November 10: buffer day; no new reading

November 15: **Unit 16. English Political Philosophy: Hobbes and Locke**: Noble, 596-598; Kagan,

Western Heritage, Pt. E, 458-464 (omit boxed reading on 459) [ca. 7 pp.]

emphasize: Hobbes' and Locke's political philosophies and their connection with English political events; Locke's epistemology; religious toleration

November 17: **Unit 17. Scientific Revolution: The Structure of the Heavens**: Noble, 573-583, 587 (bottom of page)-589 (omit boxed reading on 582); Perry, *Western Civilization*, Pt. C, 411-420; review Perry, Pt. B, 262-264 [ca. 17 pp.]

emphasize: the nature of the Copernican challenge to astronomy, physics, religion, and common sense; relative strengths and weaknesses of the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems; Galileo's and Kepler's contributions; nature and significance of the so-called Newtonian Synthesis

deemphasize: Renaissance Neo-Platonism; Hermetic tradition and magic; Galileo's physics

November 22: **Unit 18. Scientific Revolution: Religious Aspects**: Noble, 582, 593-596 [ca. 3 pp]

required supplementary reading: Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina Concerning the Use of Biblical Quotations in Matters of Science" (1615). What sources of authority does Galileo accept or reject, and where? What can you infer about his religious beliefs? How good do you think Galileo's argument was in the "Letter"? Compare Galileo's position to Aquinas'.

emphasize: nature and significance of Galileo's conflict with the Catholic Church; relationship between science and religion ca. 1700; how science was transformed; ideological aspects of the new conception of science; the authority of science

November 24: Thanksgiving

November 29: **Unit 19. Scientific Revolution: Philosophical Aspects**: Noble, 583-587; Kagan, *Western Heritage*, Pt. F, 455-458 (omit boxed reading on 458); Perry, *Western Civilization*, Pt. C, 422-424 [ca. 10 pp.]

required supplementary reading: Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620). What is Bacon's image of scientific knowledge? What guarantees its validity?

emphasize: Bacon's image of science; Descartes' importance to seventeenth-century science; mechanical philosophy (or worldview); empiricism vs. rationalism

deemphasize: Pascal; Giordano Bruno; Spinoza

December 1: final reflections; review for final; course evaluation; Study Guide for the Final Exam handed out

Friday, December 9: FINAL EXAM, 3:30-6:30