

PHIL 288R: Culture and Civilization

John Felice Rome Center

Spring 2025

Dr. Francesco Mariani (he/him/his)

Email: fmariani@luc.edu

Mon. & Wed. | 5:15 - 6:30 p.m.

Office Hours: Wed. 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

(by appointment)

Course Description

The course is designed as an immersion in the history of European and Western culture and civilization. Tracing a trajectory from Greek tragic thought to the present day, following some of the key passages in modernity and the history of thought, the course aims to provide students with a dynamic and evolutionary map of some of the ideas, principles, values and worldviews that have contributed to shaping Western civilization. Inspired by the method of the History of Ideas, the course aims - through an interplay of differences and similarities, continuity and discontinuity - to identify some characters (historical or literary) who have plastically exemplified the emergence of ideas, values and problems that have had a fundamental influence on the history of this culture. The characters included in the course, from Antigone to homo oeconomicus, are thus considered not only in their historical contingency, but also as bearers of ideas and worldviews that have performatively modified and shaped our reality. Each of these characters, then, helps us to grasp, the deeper dynamics that have characterized Western civilization and the conflict of ideas and claims of which our present is the still unfolding result. Each section represents not only a historical phase of Western culture (the ancient age, early modernity and the Renaissance, late modernity, the contemporary age) but a critical passage in which previously unreflectively accepted ideas are first perceived as problematic. The course is structured in 4 sections.

I) Truth and Law. The first section aims to illuminate the emergence of truth and justice as “critical problems” in the ancient world. With Antigone, Socrates and Plato, in the transition between tragic and philosophical thought, it will be possible to see the conflict between the claims each of them represents.

II) Reality and Utopia. The second section will highlight the conflict between two fundamental worldviews in the Renaissance. Through a comparison of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Moro's *Utopia*, the ideal and material conflict of modern humanism between aspirations for a new form of society and the inherent limitations of that age will be highlighted.

III) Progress and Crisis. With Kant, Nietzsche, and Freud, the clash between opposing worldviews and between two historical phases of late European modernity will emerge: on the one hand, the idea of progress as the engine of history and a philosophy that sees humanity proceeding toward its final stage; on the other hand, the beginning of the crisis of European civilization and the values on which it had been founded and with which it had identified itself.

IV) Justice and Equality. The last section will allow us to take a look at the contemporary world, highlighting the contrast between the highest socio-political aspirations of the second half of the 20th century and the rise of the homo oeconomicus model. To this end, we will compare the idea of justice represented by M.L. King with the analysis of contemporary neoliberalism offered by Wendy Brown and Judith Butler.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of some of the main philosophical theories that have been proposed and advocated throughout the history of European and Western civilization, paying special attention to their cultural and political context. More precisely, they should be able to analyze, compare and contrast views on topics such as human nature, knowledge, justice and legality, the nature of political power, the relation between the individual and society, the role of dominant ideas in the contemporary world. The course will also enable students to:

- (a) distinguish alternative and often conflicting paradigms on human nature, justice, truth, the relationship between the individual and the community;
- (b) look for and appreciate the reasons given in support of the different views, to assess the forcefulness of the challenge that each poses for the others;
- (c) grasp the historical and ideal nature of any philosophical conception of Western civilization;
- (d) identify in the different philosophical conceptions the point of balance between historical material elements, on the one hand, and theoretical and spiritual, on the other hand;
- (e) engage in dialogue with great philosophers, paying close attention to their meaning, their reasons, their concerns, their vision;
- (f) insert their own reflections into the dialogue;

Required Texts/Materials

Assigned and supplementary readings posted on Sakai;
Sophocles, *Antigone* (available online)
Plato, *The Apology of Socrates* (available online)
M.L. King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (available online)

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student.

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one absence.
- For all classes meeting twice a week, students cannot incur more than two absences.

This course meets twice a week, thus a total of two absences will be permitted. **Absences beyond these will result in 1% lowering of the final course grade**, for every absence after the “approved limit”. Attendance is mandatory in class including on all scheduled Friday class days. The collective health of the JFRC is everyone’s responsibility. Do not attend class if you are ill.

Assessment Components

• Midterm Exam (in-class test)	35 %
• Final Exam (take-home paper)	35 %
• Participation	15 %
• Presentation	15 %

Grading

94-100: A
90-93: A-
87-89: B+
84-86: B
80-83: B-
77-79: C+
74-76: C
70-73: C-
67-69: D+
60-66: D
59 or lower: F

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty (use of AI included) are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago’s guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola’s standards here: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml.

You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

Assignments and Final Examination Policy

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor. As per the JFRC academic policies, students who miss any scheduled exam or quiz, including a final exam at the assigned hours will not be permitted to sit for a make-up examination without approval of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Permission is given rarely and only for grave reason; travel is not considered a grave reason. Make-up exams will only be given for documented absences.

Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, the first week of classes.

Title IX

The University's Title IX policies are published within the Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation. Loyola is fully compliant with Title IX and related laws and regulations but considers them to be a minimum standard for ensuring a safe and inclusive University environment. To raise any concern or conflict of interest regarding the Title IX Coordinator, or to report any misconduct or discrimination committed by the Title IX Coordinator, contact the Vice President for Human Resources/Chief Human Resources Officer, at (312) 915-6175 or HR-WTC@luc.edu. For all other concerns related to Title IX and/or sexual misconduct, please contact the Title IX Coordinator.

DEI

In line with Loyola's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, students are expected to embrace and contribute to a learning environment that is open, welcoming, and aims for mutual understanding. As members of the JFRC community, we strive to create a safe and inclusive environment that encourages the expression of diverse opinions. Both students and faculty have a responsibility to convey respect when interacting with others and to honor the dignity of all community members.

Course Schedule:

Friday Class Days: February 7, March 21

Date	Topic(s)	Text/Assignment
Mon. 1/20	Introduction to the course	
Wed. 1/22	Before Antigone: Oedipus, a tragic truth	<i>Oedipus the King</i> (excerpts)
Mon. 1/27	Antigone between truth and law	<i>Antigone</i> (full text)
Wed. 1/29	Antigone between human and divine law	" " (selected passages)
Mon. 2/3	Socrates and the origin of critical thinking	<i>The Apology of Socrates</i> (full text)
Fri. 2/7	Socrates between truth and justice	" " (selected passages)
Mon. 2/10	Socrates: parrhesia and eudaimonia	Foucault (<i>Discourse and Truth</i> , excerpts)



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Wed. 2/12	Plato's response: truth	<i>The Republic</i> (excerpts)
Mon. 2/17	Plato's response: justice	<i>The Republic</i> (excerpts)
Wed. 2/19	Moro and the idea of Utopia	<i>Utopia</i> (excerpts)
Mon. 2/24	Machiavelli's realism	<i>The Prince</i> (Chap. 15-18)
Wed. 2/26	Machiavelli and politics: "virtù e fortuna"	<i>The Prince</i> (Chap. 5-25)
Mon. 3/3	General review	
Wed. 3/5	Midterm exam	
Mon. 3/17	Kant's two worlds	<i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> (excerpts)
Wed. 3/19	Kant, progress and the philosophy of history	<i>Idea for a Universal History</i> (Part I)
Fri. 3/21	The deconstruction of European civilization	Ricoeur (<i>Freud and Philosophy</i> , excerpts)
Mon. 3/24	Nietzsche, the birth of tragedy, perspectivism	<i>The Gay Science</i> (The Madman)
Wed. 3/26	Nietzsche and the crisis: "nihilism"	<i>The Twilights of the Idols</i> (The problem of Socrates, ...)
Mon. 3/31	Student presentations	
Wed. 4/2	Freud and the end of an illusion	<i>Thoughts for the Times on War</i>
Mon. 4/7	Freud and the problems of civilization	<i>Civilization and its Discontents</i> (excerpts)
Wed. 4/9	M.L. King: justice and disobedience	<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i>
Mon. 4/14	After King: from social justice to neoliberal ethics	Butler (<i>Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly</i> , Introd. and Chap. 6)
Wed. 4/16	Homo oeconomicus and neoliberalism	Brown (<i>Undoing the Demons</i> , excerpts)
Wed. 4/23	Student presentations	
Mon. 4/28 – Wed. 4/30	Final exam	