

World Civilizations I
Essay Prompt
Due April 21 through TurnItIn.com on Canvas

In a 4-5 page essay, with your name only in the upper right-hand corner, with a title, double-spaced, written within normal margins, in 12 point Times New Roman font, answer one of the following questions. Be sure to structure your essay this way, based on two opposing answers to the question.

1. Introduction explaining the question and stating which side you take.
2. Defend the side you disagree with (2-3 paragraphs).
3. Have a transition explaining why you disagree (1 paragraph).
4. Refute it with support from the side you do agree with (2-3 paragraphs).

Option 1 – What is Happiness and the Good Life?

To be human is to be always haunted by the question: “How should I live?” We cannot avoid that question; to live is to answer it. To avoid answering it whimsically or poorly, it is wise of us to look to the great minds of the past for guidance – to avoid their errors, imitate their wisdom, and find a way to apply them to our own life. We are, after all, products of our time, and we tend to live as our surrounding culture commands us. So what guidance might we find on discerning happiness and the good life from the ancient writers from *before* our time, who devoted their whole minds to these subjects? How might we understand them in light of how Christians are expected to live, especially in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, or passages like Acts 2? In answering that question, explain the arguments from two of the following sources we studied in class, and support all major claims with quotes.

- Honor – Pericles’ Funeral Oration
- Philosophy – Plato, *The Cave*
- Pleasure – Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*
- Morality – Epictetus, *Discourses*
- Virtue – Cicero, *On Duties*

Option 2 – “What is Truth”: Can Revelation and Reason Mix?

Christian faith comes with a set of doctrines and truths that are unique to itself – truths about God, human nature, and the world that they could not have known unless they had been revealed. For some Christians like Tertullian, the faith is so perfect and complete that it left no room for anything outside of itself; once we had the Answer, there was no question to ask. To import philosophy into faith was give into temptation, and to corrupt it into heresy. But others Christians saw things differently: as Clement of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas later saw it, all truth is God’s truth, meaning that faith and reason were not only compatible, but *meant* for each other, combining into a beautiful harmony. So who was right? How should we understand the dispute in light of John 1, or Paul’s ministry in Athens? In answering that question, explain the arguments from two of the following sources we studied in class, one from each side, and support all major claims with quotes.

No

- Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*

Yes

- Clement of Alexandria, *On Philosophy*
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*

Option 3 – Faith vs. Power: Can Christians do Politics?

Early Christians were characterized by their meekness and humility, living lives – and often dying deaths – that made them citizens of the Kingdom of God above all else. Living in the world only meant torment and persecution for the faith as the Martyrdom of Perpetua showed – or worse, the hijacking of faith for political reasons, as appeared in the Investiture Controversy. But at other times, the circumstances were different: powerful leaders like Constantine and Charlemagne became devoted Christians and sought to use their power faithfully. Others like Saint Augustine saw the need for Christian citizens to devote themselves to political life as wise stewards: Christians should love their country and care for it with patriotic devotion, and in that, attune the City of Man to the City of God. So who is right? Jesus told us to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” – but once Caesar becomes a Christian, what does *he* owe to God? In answering that question, explain the arguments from two of the following sources we studied in class, one from each side, and support all major claims with quotes.

Not of this World

- Martyrdom of Perpetua
- Pope Gregory VII, Investiture Controversy

Redeeming the World

- Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*
- Augustine, *City of God*
- Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*

Citations

Be sure to cite the source you are quoting from – not *Western Heritage*. You only need to state it in the text and give the page number. (For example, Tertullian asks in his Prescription Against Heretics, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” (322).

Essay Checklist

Here are some things to check on in your essay:

- ___ Title
- ___ 12 point Times New Roman Font
- ___ Name only in the upper right hand corner
- ___ Normal Margins
- ___ Double Spaced
- ___ Grammar: There are no run-on sentences, fragments, missing words, punctuation, etc., and words are rightly chosen for your intended meaning.

Here are some questions to ask:

- ___ Have I reflected and carefully thought through my paper?
- ___ Is my introduction clear, and does it outline the question I am addressing, the meaning of that question and the direction of my paper?
- ___ Have I avoided annoying phrases (e.g., “All throughout history,” “Since the beginning of time,” etc.)?
- ___ Are each of my body paragraphs clear and thoughtful, addressing the questions outlined in the prompt?
- ___ Do my paragraphs connect to each other and build on one another?
- ___ Is my conclusion clear, does it reflect on the meaning of what has been established in the body paragraphs?

Here are some annoying phrases to avoid:

- Avoid grandiose introductions: “Since the beginning of time...”
- Avoid stating basic facts. “Socrates was the father of Western philosophy...” or “The Middle Ages began in the year 1000 and ended in 1400.”
- Avoid individualizing statements. “They stood for what they believed in.” or “The author believed...”
- Avoid dictionary definitions. “According to Webster’s Dictionary...”
- Avoid relativistic conclusions. “Both sides are interesting, but it’s all just a matter of opinion.” or “The good life is how you choose to live it.”