

University of Rome Tor Vergata
Undergraduate Degree (B.A.) in Global Governance

Course Syllabus
Foundations of European Thought
6 CFU
Prof. Lorenzo Perilli

Course description and topics

Europe has its own peculiar identity and complexity. Through the ages, some fundamental issues contributed to the birth and development of what is now regarded as a common assumption – for instance science, democracy, law and more – which indeed require a deeper understanding in order for us to be able to tackle with problems that need to be correctly interpreted before they can be solved. This is all the more valid in a global world, at a time when comparison among different cultures and civilizations is an inescapable turning-point. In the Western world, a paramount watershed was the awareness of the acceptance of the principle of causality, in a physical and mechanical sense, and consequently of the principle of individual responsibility, and of the existence of a demarcation of nature from what we use to call supernatural. On the other hand, this also presupposes the parallel development of tools of logical arguments and modes of demonstration. The class will focus on the birth and first development of notions such as those of democracy as a political system, the method of scientific research, the introduction of law and legal systems, the role of religion in society and its competitiveness towards rational thought, the circulation of knowledge, the idea of progress. We shall also see how these first steps have influenced and still influence our own thought and actions.

Learning objectives

To provide students a common background about the origin and development of the most important features peculiar to European thought, and to give them the intellectual instruments to better understand the issues which make Europe different from, or similar to, other cultures. Students will gain knowledge of the foundations and conceptual base of western political systems (democracy), science, law, philosophy, ethics, and other issues, in their mutual relation.

Readings

Bibliography includes among other:

C. Ginzburg, *Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm*, in «Theory and Society», Vol. 7, No. 3 (May, 1979), pp. 273-288; M. Finley, *Democracy ancient and modern*, London 1985; Z. Bauman, *Europe. An unfinished adventure*, Cambridge 2004; selected pages from E.R. Dodds, *The ancient concept of progress*, Oxford 1973; E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley 1951; G.E.R. Lloyd–N. Sivin, *The way and the word. Science and medicine in ancient China and Greece*, Yale 2003 R.B. Onians, *The origins of European thought*, Cambridge 1957. Further bibliography and other material will be made available at the beginning of the class.