Overview: This essay asks you to respond to various theorizations of “civilization.” You will choose one of the topics below, then refine that topic into a specific question that you will answer using appropriate evidence from the assigned texts. Your first paragraph should state clearly both the problem/question you are answering and your thesis.

Length: 3-5 pages, typed, double-spaced.

Citation: Use MLA format.

Requirements:

Thesis. Your essay must be governed by a thesis that (a) responds directly to the essay topic, (b) is arguable, and (c) is stated at the end of the first paragraph having clearly defined all the central terms.

Textual Support. Your thesis must be supported by major interpretive claims (topic sentences) that are supported by at least one appropriate quote or allusion per body paragraph. Your ability to select, interpret, and apply the appropriate textual evidence is key to doing well with the essay.

Reasoning. You must consistently use and apply logical reasoning in developing your thesis.

Writing. Your essay must be written well. There should be no awkward sentences, rough transitions between paragraphs, incoherent paragraphs, extraneous information/unnecessary sentences, typos, or stylistic errors.

Topics: Choose one of the topics below.

1. Explain, analyze, and evaluate Marcuse’s claim that “Freud’s theoretical conception itself seems to refute his consistent denial of the historical possibility of a non-repressive civilization . . .”? (“Introduction” to Eros and Civilization, p. 5)

2. Though Poster says the “structure of desire” shaped by the “oneiric assemblages of child and machine” might be difficult to characterize, he does see this structure as fundamentally different from the Oedipal child of Freud’s analysis. What are these key differences between this child Poster describes and the child described by Freud? What are the implications of this new kind of child for the relationship between the twenty-first-century individual and civilization?

3. Explain, analyze, and evaluate Freud’s claim that “whether one has killed one’s father or has abstained from doing so is not really the decisive thing. One is bound to feel guilty in either case, for the sense of guilt is an expression of the conflict due to ambivalence, of the external struggle
between Eros and the instinct of destruction or death.” (Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 95)

4. Explain, analyze, and evaluate one of Freud’s arguments for the prevalence of aggression as a threat to civilization.

5. Compare (and contrast) the view of civilization represented in Prometheus Bound, Genesis, and/or The Epic of Gilgamesh with Freud’s understanding of civilization.

6. Using the texts we have studied so far, write an essay in which you explain, analyze, and evaluate my claim that our attitude towards civilization is one of ambivalence.

7. Explain, analyze, and evaluate Freud’s understanding of the “Pleasure Principle” (as it is presented in Civilization and Its Discontents). This analysis needs to be relatively complete. You should, at the very least, study every mention of the Pleasure Principle in the book.

8. Explain, analyze, and evaluate the understanding of marriage presented in Civilization and Its Discontents. You may also want to compare that understanding with the views on women and marriage presented in the mythological texts.

9. Explain, analyze, and evaluate Marcuse’s characterization of Freud’s position as arguing for the idea that “the history of man is the history of his repression.” (Eros and Civilization, Chapter 1)

10. Poster begins his essay by citing Judith Butler’s assertion that the “body is configured in practices.” Compare this idea to Freud’s understanding of the body.

11. How does Freud’s understanding of the origins of civilization compare to the origin story/stories presented in the “Trickster” myths?