

POL S 404: Topics in Political Philosophy

Historical Progress in Political Theory

Instructor: Will Kujala (wkujala@ualberta.ca)

Live Class Meetings Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1-2:30 Pm Edmonton Time

Office Hours (via Google Meet): Wednesday 1-4 pm and by appointment (Please schedule 1 on 1 meetings at <https://calendly.com/wkujala>)

Any errors or corrections to this syllabus will be announced on eclass.

This course examines the idea of historical progress in political theory. Put simply, the idea of historical progress is that the history of humanity admits of a movement toward a more rational, free, and peaceful condition. This idea is ubiquitous. It is present in our political discourse (e.g. conservative vs. progressive); it is foundational to social science (not least the study of ‘international development’ and developmental psychology; and it works as a central justification for various political projects. It guides the exasperated declaration that “It’s 2020! How is *this* still happening?” At the same time, there has long been a growing skepticism about the value of ‘progress,’ either as a political principle or as a description of how things are. The question of violence is key to this skepticism. Given the apparently senseless violence that characterizes our contemporary world and populates the historical record, how can we speak of progress? In this course, we will first examine this problem as it emerges in some of the central ‘progressive’ thinkers in Western political thought: Kant, Hegel, and Marx. All three attempted to grapple with the question of how to think about the relationship between violence and historical progress and proposed very different answers. Second, we will read some important twentieth century critics of the idea of progress, who saw it as first and foremost a *legitimation* of violence in various forms—war, totalitarianism, and colonialism.

Our central goal is to read these thinkers in order to gain critical purchase on the ever-prevalent language of progress today. When we employ the language of progress, development, and historical purpose (as we often do!) what baggage does it carry? Is the language of progress ultimately worth salvaging or should we attempt to think about politics without it? Is this even *possible*, that is, do we have a choice in the matter at all?

Territorial Statement: The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

Important Dates (SUMMER 2020):

First Day of Classes: Monday, July 6

Add/Delete Date: Thursday, July 9

50% Withdrawal Date: Monday, July 20

Withdrawal Date: Wednesday, August 5

Last Day of Classes: Wednesday, August 12

Final Exam Period: Thursday, August 13 – Friday, August 14

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should have improved their ability to:

- a) Explain the emergence of ideas of historical progress in relation to problems of political violence
- b) Evaluate the ways in which ideas of progress are defended, criticized, and employed by scholars in the social sciences and humanities in contemporary debates about reconciliation, development, political violence, and climate change
- c) Interpret and reconstruct the arguments of often difficult and opaque texts
- d) Write about political philosophy in concise and conversational ways

Books:

I will make scans or PDFs available of every text and upload them on eClass. I recommend you print them if possible. You are of course welcome to purchase or use your own print version.

Course Format:

This course is online. However, the course will involve live sessions starting at 1 p.m. on **Tuesdays** and **Thursdays** in **Google Meet**. Of course, I understand the difficulty of holding to a live session commitment under conditions where we might be working from home, with family, friends, and other important things happening in our immediate vicinity. However, this course is basically defined as a seminar course. Credit in it is supposed to imply that you have participated in a series of *discussions* about advanced material in a given subject. Therefore, I do require attendance in live sessions. However, I will not use all three hours of ‘class time’ for live seminars, nor will they constitute the whole of one’s participation grade. Instead, we will use the first 1.5 hours, split into two blocks of 40 minutes to collectively work through the material.

Reading/Meeting Schedule

Part I: Philosophies of Progress:

Week 1: Kant and the Problem of Progress

- ❖ July 7: Constantin Fasolt, *The Limits of History*, 1-16 (optional) and Immanuel Kant, “Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”
- ❖ July 9: “The Conflict of the Faculties,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*.
- ❖ I know this is the first week and I haven’t given much notice—if you can’t or do not wish to read Fasolt that’s fine, just try and have Kant’s two essays read for class and forum discussion on July 9.

Week 2: Hegel, Violence, and the ‘Logic’ of History

- ❖ July 14: G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* 12-27, 40-42.
- ❖ July 16: G.W.F. Hegel, “The Division of History,” and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 3-16.

Week 3: Marx and Capital's Violence

- ❖ July 21: Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, chapter 25.
- ❖ July 23: Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, chapters 26 and 32; Aime Cesaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez"

Part II: The Politics of Progress in the 20th Century

Week 4: History's 'Bad Side'—Total War and Totalitarianism

- ❖ July 28: Hannah Arendt, "Ideology and Terror." **FIRST OP-ED DUE 4 PM via eclass**
- ❖
- ❖ July 30: Theodor Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 1-7, 49-59

Week 5: In the Waiting Room of History: Anticolonialism and the Limits of Progress

- ❖ August 4: Frantz Fanon, "On Violence," in *Wretched of the Earth*, 1-43
- ❖ August 6: Amilcar Cabral, "Presuppositions and Objectives of National Liberation in Relation to Social Structure," in *Unity and Struggle*, 119-137.

Week 6: Race and Progress in North America

- ❖ August 11: Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress*, 1-29 **SECOND OP-ED DUE 4 PM via eclass**
- ❖ August 13: Optional Review session and paper Q&A

Course Requirements/Assessments (see explanations below):

Requirement	Weighting	Due Date
Forum Posts	20%	Ongoing
Seminar Participation	10%	Ongoing
Editorial Articles	20% x 2	July 21, August 6
Analytic Paper	30%	August 20

Ongoing: Forum posts and responses (20% of total grade)

Each week, some students will be assigned to pose questions about the text, and other students will be expected to respond to them. Grading is based on the *quality* of one's posts (do they demonstrate a competent understanding or attempt to understand the text, and do you convey their ideas clearly?), and on the *relevance* of one's responses (that is, do they answer the question, or advance the discussion? Or are they odd, deflecting, or conversation stopping?). You will be assigned to one of two forum groups

alphabetically. Students assigned to ask questions or make posts must make **one** such post. Students assigned to **respond** must make 2 responses or comments. **You are expected to make your post for the week by Thursdays at 6pm, and respond by 6 pm on the following Monday.**

Ongoing: Live seminar participation (10% of total grade)

The criteria for this element are the same as an in-person seminar: the frequency, quality, and preparedness of participation in class. The expectation is that at the time of the seminar you will have read the texts and have them with you, and attend each session.

Editorial Articles (2 x 20% each): due IN ECLASS July 28 and August 11 at 6pm Edmonton Time

In this writing assignment, you will write an op-ed pitched at a general, but ‘educated’ (by university or the school of hard knocks) audience. An op-ed (or editorial article) is of course an expression of your personal views, and I do not expect you to suspend them or remain totally ‘objective.’ On the contrary, I want you to defend your views as *your* views. However, in the op-ed, you will act as an informed reader of the texts in class by ***showing how one key concept or claim in one author’s text relates to a single concrete issue or problem in contemporary political life***, preferably one you personally care about. This is the meat of the assignment, that is supposed to evaluate your ability to connect otherwise abstract ideas to the terrain of ‘real life.’ You can also, of course, argue for their irrelevance or wrongness if you wish.

The word limit for this assignment is 1000 words. You can write less, or slightly more, but part of the challenge of the assignment is to get your point across as succinctly and concisely as possible, without failing to mention obvious points or objections to your ideas.

Critical Analysis Paper (30% of Final Grade), due IN ECLASS August 20 at 6 pm Edmonton Time

This paper should be 8-10 pages, double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12pt. It should contain a critical evaluation of the ideas in the course and/or their practical implications. A good paper should:

1. Have a clear, narrow, and arguable *thesis*, or central claim.
2. Defend this claim with *evidence*—textual passages, logical inference, or empirical data
3. Organize the author’s ideas in a clear and logical fashion, avoiding superfluous information or repetition.

The first is an *interpretive or analytic paper*. In this version, your task will be to make an argument about the meaning, claims, or central concepts about something we have read in relation to questions of historical progress and/or political violence. This is not a summary. You will make a claim and defend it with evidence from the text, against possible objections to your reading. You should consult me about your topic.

The second is an *application* paper. If the above sounds odious, you can think about the implications of what an author says about the problem of historical progress for a concrete issue. This can be thought of as an extension of the op-ed that leans much more heavily on the philosophical text rather than one’s own personal views. Further, your issue will be one of social scientific import rather than one suitable to an op-ed. For example, you might ask how Kant’s thinking on history and progress might support or reject a certain approach to studying international organizations, but not why Kant can help us criticize China or the US’s behaviour on the UN Security Council in a given moment.

For either type of paper, you should schedule a 5-15 minute meeting with me before August 5 to discuss your paper topic. The topic is not restricted to the exact issues we confront each week, but needs to touch on the question of historical progress and political theory (or political science of course). The goal of the meeting is to refine an idea or topic you already have, not to invent one together in five minutes.

Grading Rubric:

Grades in this course are calculated and given in percentage form, but these percentages will be converted into a letter grade, the percentage grade from all requirements providing the final letter grade for the course. The conversion is done according to the following rubric:

Percentage	Letter	Grade Point on 4.0 Scale
91-100	A+	4.0
86-90	A	4.0
80-85	A-	3.7
76-79	B+	3.3
70-75	B	3.0
	B-	2.7
65-69	C+	2.3
60-64	C	2.0
55-60	C-	1.7
53-55	D+	1.3
50-52	D	1.0
0-49	F	0

Important Information:

Recording of Lectures: Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the content author(s) or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

Access to Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material

This class has not been offered before. Grading rubrics and assignment guides will be uploaded to eClass in the “announcements” section.

Late Policy on Assignments:

Late assignments without an excusable reason or agreed-upon extension will have 10% deducted per full day. The critical analysis paper is akin to a final exam and extensions are not available. Excused late critical analysis papers will result in a grade of IN, but unexcused will simply not be graded. Excusable reasons for

late assignments include: severe and sudden illness; a serious family emergency; religious observation. One should expect the unexpected and start assignments early.

Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components

Attendance in the live sessions on Google Meet (1-2:30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays) is a required component of this course, as is participation in them. See the following regarding excusable absences:

- Absences stemming from incapacitating illness, severe domestic affliction, or religious reasons are generally excusable under the [University's Duty to Accommodate Procedure](#). To address the course component missed – exams or papers – as a result, consult the *University Calendar's* [Attendance \(23.3\)](#) and [Examinations \(23.5\)](#) sections. All other accommodation requests covered by the Duty to Accommodate Procedure should be discussed with the instructor(s) as soon as the student is able, having regard to the underlying circumstance.
- In all cases, instructors may request adequate documentation to substantiate the reason for the absence at their discretion, which in the Faculty of Arts is a completed [Request for Deferral of Term Examinations and/or Term Work](#). Although a medical note cannot be required, if a student chooses to provide a medical note, the *University of Alberta Medical Statement* Form may be downloaded from the Online Services section of www.registraroffice.ualberta.ca.
- Students who miss final exams must apply for a deferred final exam from the Faculty in which they are registered. **Instructors cannot grant deferred final examinations.** Arts students should read ["I Missed My Final Exam, Now What?"](#) if there is a possibility of missing the final exam.
- At the discretion of your instructors, penalties may be waived in the case of other genuine, documentable emergencies or life problems. **Arrange pleasure, celebratory, or extracurricular events around assignment due dates.**

Bases of assessment:

Exam and paper grades are always evaluated using a combination of absolute measures of achievement and relative performance across all students in the course. *The Faculty of Arts recommends that the class average for 400-level Arts courses fall in a range around the Faculty historical average grades of 2.98-3.58.*

Appealing a Grade: Students may appeal their grade for a particular assignment or exam at least one class day after they have received their grade (i.e., not the day they have received the graded assignment back). The process begins with taking up the issue with me. If our discussion of your grade does not resolve the issue, it can be forwarded to the Undergraduate Chair of the Political Science Departments (Dr. Judith Garber (jgarber@ualberta.ca)). After this, you must consult the Faculty of Arts procedures for grade appeals.

Academic Integrity: "The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid

any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University."

All forms of dishonesty are unacceptable at the University. Any offence will be reported to the Associate Dean of Arts who will determine the disciplinary action to be taken. Cheating, plagiarism and misrepresentation of facts are serious offences. Anyone who engages in these practices will receive [at minimum](#) a grade of zero for the exam or paper in question and no opportunity will be given to replace the grade or redistribute the weights. As well, in the Faculty of arts the sanction for **cheating** on any examination will include **a disciplinary failing grade (NO EXCEPTIONS)** and senior students should expect a period of suspension or expulsion from the University of Alberta.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CODE OF STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

30.3.2(1) Plagiarism

No Student shall submit the words, ideas, images or data of another person as the Student's own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, project, assignment, presentation or poster in a course or program of study.

30.3.2(2) Cheating

30.3.2(2) a No Student shall in the course of an examination or other similar activity, obtain or attempt to obtain information from another Student or other unauthorized source, give or attempt to give information to another Student, or use, attempt to use or possess for the purposes of use any unauthorized material.

30.3.2(2) b No Student shall represent or attempt to represent him or herself as another or have or attempt to have himself or herself represented by another in the taking of an examination, preparation of a paper or other similar activity. See also misrepresentation in 30.3.6 (4).

30.3.2(2) c No Student shall represent another's substantial editorial or compositional assistance on an assignment as the Student's own work.

30.3.2(2) d No Student shall submit in any course or program of study, without the written approval of the course Instructor, all or a substantial portion of any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project, assignment, presentation or poster for which credit has previously been obtained by the Student or which has been or is being submitted by the Student in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.

30.3.2(2) e No Student shall submit in any course or program of study any academic writing, essay, thesis, report, project, assignment, presentation or poster containing a statement of fact known by the Student to be false or a reference to a source the Student knows to contain fabricated claims (unless acknowledged by the Student), or a fabricated reference to a source.

30.3.6(4) Misrepresentation of Facts

No Student shall misrepresent pertinent facts to any member of the University community for the purpose of obtaining academic or other advantage. See also 30.3.2(2) b, c, d and e.

30.3.6(5) Participation in an Offence

No Student shall counsel or encourage or knowingly aid or assist, directly or indirectly, another person in the commission of any offence under this Code.

Learning and Working Environment:

The University, Faculty, and Department are committed to ensuring that all students, faculty, and staff are able to study and work in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination or harassment. The University does not tolerate behavior that undermines that environment, as laid out in its [*Discrimination, Harassment, and Duty to Accommodate Policy*](#) and [*Sexual Violence Policy*](#).

University of Alberta Sexual Violence Policy:

As defined in the policy, **sexual violence** is any sexual act or act of a sexual nature, or act targeting sexuality, whether physical or psychological, committed without consent. **Sexual violence** is a complex and serious problem in society and on university campuses. Sexual violence can affect individuals of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations, as well as those from all ages, abilities, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. Through this policy, the University of Alberta recognizes its responsibility to reduce sexual violence in the University community. The university aims to do so by fostering a culture of **consent** and support through education, training and policy. The University recognizes the possible effects of trauma on those who have experienced sexual violence and supports the efforts of individuals to seek support and recover. To read the policy in more detail, visit: <https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Policies/Sexual-Violence-Policy.pdf>.

Accessibility Resources: Students with disabilities or special needs that might interfere with their performance should contact the professor at the beginning of the course with the appropriate documentation. Every effort will be made to accommodate such students, but in all cases prior arrangements must be made to ensure that any special needs can be met in a timely fashion and in such a way that the rest of the class is not put at an unfair advantage. Students requiring special support or services should be registered with the office of Accessibility Resources: www.ualberta.ca/arrec. This is particularly important for students requiring special arrangements. Once you have registered with AR, it is your responsibility to provide the instructor with a 'Letter of Introduction' and, if necessary, an 'Exam Instruction and Authorization' form.

Feeling Overwhelmed? (In need of student, social, financial, or security services?): The Student Distress Centre listens, offers support, supplies information, and provides services:

- Call: 780-492-HELP [4357]
- Drop in: 030-N in the SUB
- Web: www.su.ualberta.ca/sdc
- Chat: www.campuscrisischat.com

Learning and Writing Support: Students looking to improve their essay writing and study habits are encouraged to visit the Academic Success Centre. The ASC exists to help students maximize their

educational experience. The writing resources staff provide workshops and one-on-one sessions with students for a small fee. See www.ualberta.ca/current-students/academic-success-centre/index.html.