

**Selected Themes in Political Theory: Progress**  
**Political Science 613**  
**Course Syllabus**  
**Winter 2024**

**(Tentative version – please check MyCourses for the official syllabus.)**

**Course Professor:** Catherine Lu

**Course description**

This graduate seminar in Political Theory examines the concept of progress. What is progress? This course explores some of the history of Western political thought as well as contemporary writings to understand theories of progress, and how they are connected to theories of human nature, history, civilization, morality, empire, revolution, freedom, democracy, politics, and tragedy. Questions that will be explored include the following: Is progress possible? What can progress mean, given the relentless and ongoing moral and political horrors that so many are confronting in our time? Who are the agents of progress? Can progress be measured? How can progress be made and unmade? What are the barriers to progress? Does progress require hope?

The general objectives of the course include developing the ability to evaluate political and philosophical arguments critically, and improving the skills of communicating normative and interpretative arguments in oral discussion and written work.

**Course requirements (Tentative: Please check official course syllabus in January for course requirements and description of assignments.)**

*Method of evaluation:* Your course grade will be assessed as follows:

<b>Course Assignments</b>	<b>Course grade percentage</b>
Seminar participation (best 8 out of 11)	25%
Weekly discussion notes (best 5)	10%
Oral seminar lead	15%
Research Paper Proposal	10%
Oral presentation of paper proposal	15%
Peer review of oral presentations	5%
Research paper	20%

**University and Course Policies**

1. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

2. McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)).

3. In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

4. As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](mailto:514-398-6009), 514-398-6009, (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) to receive further information and assistance. However, *please remember that the OSD has no authority to approve changes to course assignment due dates, to devise alternative assignments, or to waive course requirements.*

### Course schedule

1. Introduction (Jan 5)

Lu, "[Progress, Decolonization, and Global Justice: A Tragic View](#)," *International Affairs* 99, 1 (January 2023): 141-159.

2. Human Nature and Progress (Jan 12)

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*

Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

3. History and Progress (Jan 19)

Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*

Kant, *Perpetual Peace*

4. Civilization and Progress (Jan 26)

J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (chapters 1-4, 6, 8, 16, 18)

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*

J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism* (selections)

5. Morality and Progress (Feb 2)

Philip Kitcher, *Moral Progress* (Oxford University Press, 2021), plus commentaries

6. Empire and Progress (Feb 9)

Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton University Press), selected chapters.

7. Revolution and Progress (Feb 16)

Anna Julia Cooper, *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutionists: L'attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la révolution*, edited and translated by Frances Richardson Keller, reprinted Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, selections.

Lea Ypi, "On Revolution in Kant and Marx." *Political Theory*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2014, pp. 262–87. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24571401>

8. Freedom and Progress (Feb 23)

Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South, with an Introduction*, Mary Helen Washington (ed.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, selections.

Saidye Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), selections.

9 Democracy and Progress (March 1)

Partha Chatterjee, *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today* (Columbia University Press, 2020), selections

Inés Valdez, *Democracy and Empire: Labour, Nature and the Reproduction of Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), selections.

Reading Break

10. Politics and Progress (March 15)

Judith Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton University Press, 1957/2020).

11. Tragedy and Progress (March 22)

Henrik Ibsen, *The Wild Duck*.

Weeks 12 and 13: Student paper proposal presentations (March 29 and April 5)