

**POLS 4190: Special Topics in Theory/Methods:
Moral Progress**

University of Georgia, Department of Political Science

Fall 2021

T TR 9:35-10:50am

Baldwin 102

Instructor: Harrison Frye

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Office Hours: T TR 2-3pm and by appointment

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We often hear about “the right side of history,” or Martin Luther King Jr.’s declaration that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” (a paraphrase of a minister, Theodore Parker), but we don’t often stop to think through the set of assumptions that operate behind these statements: (i) there is such a thing as moral progress, (ii) that we are currently making such progress, and (iii) such progress is inevitable or, at the very least, a natural tendency. This course seeks to critically scrutinize these assumptions. To get at these issues, we will look at three separate questions.

- What is moral progress?
- If moral progress does happen, how does it occur?
- Should we be skeptical about the prospects of moral progress?

The syllabus describes (1) course objectives, (2) course materials, (3) grades and assignments, (4) rules and requirements, and (5) a course schedule.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

1. Course Objectives

- Sharpen analytical thinking and debating skills.
- Understand the nature of moral progress.
- Practice engaging with viewpoints different than one’s own.
- Confront difficult moral questions about the way we organize our social life.
- Come to understand one’s personal values better.

2. Course Materials

The following books will be available for purchase from the UGA bookstore.

- Appiah, K. A. 2010. *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*, W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 978-0393340525
- Persson I. & J. Savulescu. 2012. *Unfit for the Future: The Need for Moral Enhancement*, Oxford University Press, ISBN: 978-0198707929

All other readings will be available on eLC.

3. Assignments and Grading

The following components will make up your grade in this course:

1. Reading Quizzes (20%)
2. 3 Papers (80% - equally weighted)

Participation:

Participation does not appear as a formal portion of your total grade. That being said, participation is a key element of succeeding in the class. Exceptional participation can result in a boost of your final grade by a third of a letter grade.

Reading Quizzes:

There will be 9 quizzes based on the reading administered randomly throughout the semester at the beginning of class. No make-ups will be administered – so it is important to be on time! These quizzes will ask you to write a few sentences in response to a question about the reading for that day. The questions will not be trick questions, but track main features of the readings.

To prepare for such quizzes, it is a good idea to write notes for each reading. Include in these notes information such as: What is/are the main claim(s) in this reading? How does the author support this/these claim(s)? Are there any key examples/cases? What are these examples/cases supposed to do for the author?

These quizzes will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Your letter grade for this part of your total grade will be based on the number of passes as follows:

7-9 Passes: A

6 "" : A-

5 "" : B+

4 "" : B

2-3 "" : C+

1 "" : D+

Papers

There will be three (3) papers due throughout the course. Deadlines under important dates and class schedule. These papers will have a 1500-word limit. The purpose of these papers is to give you an opportunity for you to advance an argument related to the course material. Good writing is good thinking, and my hope is that you will improve both through these assignments.

More details available on the assignments page on eLC.

Revision Policy

You can always re-write a paper in response to my comments for a different grade. You must get revisions back to me within two (2) weeks of receiving my comments. The only exception to this policy is the third paper. If you wish to get comments for the third paper and have an opportunity to revise, please get me that paper by December 2 at 5pm.

4. Rules and Requirements

Academic Freedom and Respect:

We will be talking about controversial issues in this course. I expect students to disagree with each other, as well as with me. To that end, it is important to have an open, civil environment to explore and express a variety of positions. The point is to learn something from one another, not to “win.” This requires each of us to engage respectfully with one another, especially when we disagree.

Electronic Devices:

There is good evidence that electronic devices significantly distract from learning. I do not ban laptops because I understand that some people might have very good reasons to use them. That being said, unless you have a very good reason, I recommend not using laptops. From my own experience, not having laptops makes time in classroom more engaging and valuable.

Academic Integrity:

UGA Student Honor Code: "I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others." A Culture of Honesty, the University's policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found at www.uga.edu/ovpi.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated on any assignment. YOU are responsible for knowing and following the honor code and all rules of academic integrity.

Late Work:

Papers submitted past the deadline will incur a penalty of a third of a letter grade for each 24-hour period the paper is late. If you need an extension for any foreseeable reason, please let me know at least 48 hours before the due date of the assignment.

Emergencies do happen. I will accommodate any that should come up. NB: Computer problems do not count as an emergency. Back up early and often. I recommend using a cloud service such as Dropbox or Google Drive.

Important Dates:

Fall Semester Begins – August 18

Add/Drop – August 18-24

Paper 1 Due – October 7

Withdrawal Date – October 25

Fall Break – October 29

Paper 2 Due – November 4

Thanksgiving Break – November 24-26

Classes End – December 7 (no class due to Friday schedule)

Paper 3 Due – December 17 (December 2 if you want comments)

5. Course Schedule

Readings marked with a * are available on eLC

August 19 – Introduction

No reading.

Part I: The Idea of Progress

August 24 – A View from the Enlightenment

*Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?”

*Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”

August 26 – Moral Progress after Darwin

*Dale Jamieson, “Is There Progress in Morality?”

August 31 – Moral Progress and Moral Concepts

*Michele Moody-Adams, “The Idea of Moral Progress”

September 2 – Broadening the Inquiry

*Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell, “A Typology of Moral Progress”

September 7 – Inclusivist Progress

*Allen Buchanan and Russell Powell, “Toward a Naturalistic Theory of Moral Progress”

September 9 – Liberalism and Progress

*Michael Huemer, “A Liberal Realist Answer to Debunking the Skeptics: The Empirical Case for Realism”

(optional) *Michael Huemer, “Debunking Leftward Progress”

Part II: Mechanisms of Progress

(i) Honor and Social Norms

September 14 – Honor and Violence

K. A. Appiah, *The Honor Code*, Preface & Chapter 1

September 16 – Footbinding

Appiah, *The Honor Code*, Chapter 2

September 21 – Footbinding, cont.

*Gerry Mackie, “Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account”

September 23 – Slavery and Abolition

Appiah, *The Honor Code*, Chapters 3 & 5

September 28 – Slavery and Abolition, cont.

*Elizabeth Anderson, “Social Movements, Experiments in Living, and Moral Progress: Case Studies from Britain’s Abolition of Slavery”

September 30 – Progress through Shaming

*Katharina Berndt Rasmussen and Nicolas Olsson Yaouzis, “#MeToo, Social Norms, and Sanctions”

October 5 – The Limits of Shame

*Harrison Frye, “The Problem of Public Shaming”

October 7 – Paper 1 Due

Use class time for writing.

(ii) Law as Vehicle for Progress

October 12 – Freedom and Progress

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*J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1

October 14 – Freedom and Progress, cont.

*J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 2

October 19 – Freedom and Progress, concluded

*J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3

October 21 – Class Cancelled

No class.

October 26 – Morality and Law

*Patrick Devlin, “The Enforcement of Morals”

*H. L. A. Hart, “Immorality and Treason”

October 28 – Morality and Law, Cont.

*Anthony Kennedy, Majority Opinion, “*Obergefell vs. Hodges*”

*John Roberts, Dissent, “*Obergefell vs. Hodges*”

November 2 – The Limits of Law

*Jacob Barrett and Gerald Gaus, “Law, Norms, and Public Justification: The Limits of Law as an Instrument of Reform”

November 4 – Paper 2 Due

Use class time for writing.

Part III: The Future of Progress

November 9 – The Classic Skeptic

*J. J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*

November 11 – Economic Progress

*John Maynard Keynes, “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren?”

*Tyler Cowen, “Why Hasn’t Economic Progress Lowered Work Hours More?”

November 16 – Against Progress

*Patrick Deneen, “Unsustainable Liberalism”

November 18 – Unfit for the Future

Persson & Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future*, Chapters 1 & 2

November 23 – Unfit for the Future, cont.

Persson & Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future*, Chapters 4-7

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November 24-26 - Thanksgiving Break

No Class

November 30 - Unfit for the Future, concluded

Persson & Savulescu, *Unfit for the Future*, Chapters 8 & 10

December 2 - A Review and Conclusion

No Reading (Deadline for Paper 3 *if* you want comments and the opportunity to revise the paper before the December 17th final deadline)

Final Paper Due December 17 at 5pm.