

Hegelian Historicism and its Critics

Course Description: Hegel’s philosophy of history is one of the most influential and controversial features of his work. Hegel famously writes in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of World History* that his goal is to “eliminate the contingent” (LPWH 28). He tells us that, instead, philosophical comprehension of history allows us to see that it unfolds rationally and with necessity according to an “ultimate design” in which “all the ills of the world, including the existence of evil” are “reduced to a subordinate position and transcended altogether” (ibid.; 42-3). Such claims have been seen by generations of philosophers as both theoretically implausible and deeply politically suspect. It seems obvious that the particular shape that history has taken is contingent and that any claim about insight into a grand “design” is a piece of philosophical hubris. Moreover, any justificatory claim about the shape of human history seems to legitimate historical and ongoing practices of domination and oppression. Philosophers who are sympathetic to Hegel have thus often tried to deflate these claims and reconstruct a more palatable Hegelian approach to theorizing about history.

This course provides an overview of the historicist dimensions of Hegel’s work, including its historical background and some of its most recent receptions, transformations, and critics. We will explore questions about the nature of progress, about the role that historical analysis plays in justifying or critiquing contemporary political and social practices, and about the contingency or necessity of historical change. Throughout, we will focus on the question of what, if anything, can be redeemed in Hegelian historicism.

Assignments & Grade Composition:

Participation: 20%

All students are expected to attend and participate regularly and respectfully.

Paper Proposal: 10%

Students must turn in a 1-page single-space proposal for their research paper.

Research Paper: 70%

Students will write a well-researched final paper of 15-20 pages on a topic that engages directly with the primary text(s).

CALCULATION OF COURSE GRADE:

A+	=	98-100			
A	=	93-97	C+	=	77-79
A -	=	90-92	C	=	73-76
B+	=	87-89	C -	=	70-72
B	=	83-86	D	=	60-69
B -	=	80-82	F	=	59 and below

Schedule of Readings:

Historical Background

Week 1

Johann Gottfried von Herder: *This too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*

Week 2

Kant: "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim"

Kant: "Conjectural Beginning of Human History"

Hegel and History

Week 3

Hegel: Excerpt from *Phenomenology of Spirit* ("True Spirit")

Week 4

Hegel: Excerpt from *Phenomenology of Spirit* ("Alienated Spirit")

Week 5

Hegel: Excerpt from *Phenomenology of Spirit* ("Spirit Certain of Itself")

Week 6

Hegel: *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Prefaces and "Its General Concept")

Week 7

Hegel: *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ("The realization of Spirit in History")

Week 8

Hegel: *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ("The Course of World History" and "The Natural Context or the Geographical Basis of World History")

Week 9

Hegel: *Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ("The Phases of World History")

Contemporary Hegelian Historicism

Week 10

Axel Honneth: *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (Chapters 1-3)

Week 11

Rahel Jaeggi: *Critique of Forms of Life* (Part IV)

Week 12'

Robert Brandom: *A Spirit of Trust* (Chapters 13 and 16)

Critiques of Historicism

Week 13

Dipesh Chakrabarty: *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Introduction, Chapter 2, Epilogue)

Week 14

Anibal Quijano: “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”

Week 15

Amy Allen: *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Chapters 1, 3, 6)