

POSC 4500 Contemporary Political Thought

123 Long – TTH 9:30-10:45

Professor Danny Frost

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Office: 230I Brackett Hall

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How should we organize the political order? Who is a full member of the political community? How should we address pressing practical problems such as racial injustice, euthanasia, global poverty, and war? In this course we address important questions from political thought with focus on contemporary issues and authors. We begin by discussing essential concepts and various “isms” of political philosophy (socialism, liberalism, conservatism, etc.). We then discuss practical problems and proposed ways of addressing them.

This course will be taught as a Clemson Thinks² course. Clemson Thinks² courses are intended to help students develop critical thinking skills that can be used across the curriculum. We will spend time learning about the elements of thought, intellectual standards, and intellectual traits that lead to good thinking. We will apply insights about critical thinking to the subject matter and we will reflect on our own thinking processes throughout the semester. In-class and out-of-class assignments will be designed to help students develop critical thinking skills, including identifying and summarizing arguments, analyzing and evaluating arguments, and developing arguments on the topics we study in class. Students will take a critical thinking pretest and posttest to measure critical thinking skills. When students leave the course, they will have significant artifacts (such as the pro-and-con paper and their Moot Court briefs/opinions) that can demonstrate their critical thinking abilities.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will identify and summarize arguments in course readings.
2. Students will identify assumptions of arguments.
3. Students will articulate arguments on both sides of an issue.
4. Students will analyze and evaluate arguments.
5. Student will develop well-reasoned arguments in response to arguments found in readings and articulate them clearly in course papers.

Required texts:

- *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*. Ed. Robert E. Goodin and Philip Petit.
- Additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Assignments:

1. Take the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) pretest (during first week of classes) and posttest (during last week of classes). You will not be graded on your performance on the test, but you will be graded on whether you complete it. Instructions about how to take the class will be announced in class.
2. Short paper: Identify five assumptions in a course reading. Discuss whether you think the assumptions are reasonable or not. Defend your views. Two pages (all page assignments are double-spaced).
3. Arguing Pro and Con: Choose a topic that have studied that you have a strong opinion on. Write two pages defending your opinion and two pages defending the opposing position, but do not state which opinion is your own. Make each position as strong as it can be.
4. Term paper: Choose one political theory (liberalism, socialism, etc.) and explain its strengths and weaknesses. Then show how it would address at least two practical political problems. You can draw from the practical problems we discuss in class or you can find others (but clear them with me before you start writing). Respond to counterarguments. Eight pages.
5. In-class debates: Periodically throughout the course we will hold in-class debates. Students will be graded individually for their contributions.
6. In-class presentations: students will describe the course material, make an argument about it, and raise critical questions for class discussion.
7. Various in-class assignments to develop critical thinking.

In-Class Assignments:

Students will participate in many in-class assignments, including short writing assignments and debates (as observers). Most in-class assignments will be given full credit if they are completed. Two in-class assignments will be dropped from each student's final grade. If a student has an excused absence on the day of an in-class assignment, that student may make-up the in-class assignment by writing a 1-page, single-spaced argumentative paper on a topic we discuss in class within one week of the absence. Students wishing to exercise this option should speak with me.

In-class writing assignments may include listing questions about the course readings; generating arguments for or against an idea and then discussing those arguments with

other students; “SEE-I” exercises (explained in class); summarizing the main points of the discussion; quizzes on the course material; and so forth.

During in-class debates, students who are not assigned to participate in the debate are required to write down two questions for each side and record the top two or three arguments given by each side in favor of their position. These papers will be handed in at the end of class.

Debates:

Each student is required to participate in debates. The dates for the debates are listed in the syllabus and the topics of and participants in the debates will be announced a few days prior to the debate.

On the day of the debate the participants will bring a one-page paper that lists four or more arguments that can be made in favor of or against the proposition to be debated (the papers will be submitted to me after the debate and will be included as part of your debate performance). The arguments need not be more than one or two sentences in length, but can be longer. Students will then be randomly assigned into two teams: one in favor of and one against the proposition. The teams will confer for a few minutes to discuss what each person will say in their opening statement. Each participant will then have two minutes to make arguments for their position. After that we will open the floor for further discussion. The “judges” (students who not on a side of the issue) will vote on which side made the best case for their position.

Debate participants are graded individually rather than as a team. All participants can receive full credit if they merit it.

Criteria for All Written Work:

All papers and written portions of exams will be graded on three criteria: 1) demonstration of mastery of course materials, 2) persuasive argumentation, and 3) clear and coherent writing.

1) Demonstration of mastery of course materials: To receive a high grade on a written assignment, a student’s paper must demonstrate awareness of the major positions and arguments regarding the issue. It must be clear that you have read and comprehended what is at stake in the controversy. The paper must also focus on the most important facts and issues and not get sidetracked with trivial or less-important matters. Doing this requires an exercise of judgment – you cannot include all facts and arguments, and so you must select those that you think are most important in describing and resolving the issue. Arguments in the paper must draw upon the student’s knowledge of course material.

2) Persuasive argumentation: argumentation is the currency of legal discourse. In any good student paper there must be a clear thesis that is defended with rigorous and persuasive justifications. Provide evidence, legal and otherwise, that supports your claim(s). You must present opposing positions clearly and charitably in their strongest form, but also show why they are insufficient or lacking. There must be no “straw-man” attacks on opposing positions.

3) Clear and coherent writing: connected to (2), the writing in your paper should clearly and cohesively work to prove your thesis. Your writing should be easy to follow, with one idea leading to another in a clear and coherent fashion. The selection of facts, issues, and arguments in the paper should clearly work to prove the thesis. The paper should be coherent in that all parts work to prove the thesis. There should be no disjointed points or arguments that do not connect with the main argument of the paper.

Attendance and Participation:

I welcome questions, concerns, rebuttals, requests for clarification, etc. A question or comment from a student demonstrates that that student cares enough about the material to think about its meaning and implications. Please participate!

Attendance will be recorded, but students will not be graded for attendance. In-class assignments, of course, are graded.

Grading:

The mid-term exam will count for 10% of the final grade; the final exam 20%; taking the CCTST pretest (2%) and posttest (3%); short paper 5%; in-class assignments 10%; debates 10%; in-class presentations 10%; the pro-and-con paper 10%; and term paper 20%. Final grades will be awarded as follows: A = 90-100, B = 80-89, C = 70-79, D = 60-69, F = 0-59.

Exams can be made-up only under exceptional circumstances. Late work will be assessed a 10% penalty for each day it is late.

Laptop Policy

As a general matter, laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices are not allowed in class. In my experience, too many students forgo the legitimate in-class uses of such devices and instead use them to check Facebook, news websites, or do other things that distract themselves and others from the class discussion. You are unlikely to learn much about Constitutional law if your attention is focused on the internet.

If you feel that you must take notes on a laptop or other device, please submit a signed, hand-written note to me which reads: “I hereby promise that I will use my laptop (or other device) ONLY for note-taking purposes while I am in Professor Frost’s class. If I break this promise, I agree to be assessed a penalty or extra work at Professor Frost’s discretion.”

Please note that even if you do use a laptop to take notes, you must still bring paper to class in order to complete in-class assignments. These assignments must be handed in at the end of class.

Academic Integrity:

Clemson University’s official statement on academic integrity reads: “As members of the Clemson University community, we have inherited Thomas Green Clemson’s vision of this institution as a ‘high seminary of learning.’ Fundamental to this vision is a mutual commitment to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of others. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of a Clemson degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form.”

If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please visit Clemson’s website on academic integrity: <http://www.clemson.edu/academics/academic-integrity/index.html>.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who need accommodations should make an appointment with Dr. Arlene Stewart, Director of Disability Services, to discuss specific needs within the first month of classes. Students should present an Academic Accommodation Letter from Student Disability Services when they meet with instructors. Student Disability Services is located in Suite 239 Academic Success Building (656-6848; sds-l@clemson.edu). Please be aware that accommodations are not retroactive and the new Academic Accommodation Letters must be presented each semester. I am happy to provide accommodations that are in accordance with University regulations.

If the Professor is Late:

In the event that the professor is late to class, wait in class until ten minutes after the scheduled start time. If the professor does not appear within ten minutes, class is officially canceled for that day.

Tentative Reading Assignments and Class Schedule (subject to change, as announced in class). Page assignments are from Goodin and Petit (GP), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*

Jan 7 Intro – no readings

Jan 12 Critical Thinking and Personhood I

Singer – “All Animals Are Equal”

Lee and George, *Body-Self Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics*, pp. 81-94 (52-65 are optional)

Jan 14 Critical Thinking and Personhood II

Smith, *What Is a Person?* pp. 42-78

Jan 19 Liberty

GP pp. 369-397 (Berlin and Taylor)

Jan 21 Equality

GP pp. 451-461 (Williams), 484-500 (Walzer)

Jan 26 Rights and DEBATE 1

GP pp. 281-287 (Hart), 301-313 (Shue)

Jan 28 Liberalism

GP pp. 185-200 (Rawls), 289-301 (Dworkin)

Feb 2 Libertarianism

GP pp. 201-228 (Nozick), 416-423 (Cohen critique)

Friedman – “The Role of Government in a Free Society”

Feb 4 Communitarianism and DEBATE 2

GP pp. 239-247 (Sandel)

Taylor – “Atomism”

Feb 9 Conservatism and SHORT PAPER DUE

Oakeshott - "Rationalism in Politics"

Sowell - *A Conflict of Visions*, cha. 2.

Feb 11 Contemporary Natural Law theory

George – "Natural Law, God, and Human Dignity"

George and Deaver - "Clash of Orthodoxies" exchange.

Feb 16 MIDTERM

Feb 18 Socialism and DEBATE 3

Self, "Socialism"

Feb 23 Anarchism

Sylvan, "Anarchism"

Feb 25 Public Reason I and DEBATE 4

Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited"

Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, pp. 63-91

March 1 Public Reason II

Macedo, "In Defense of Liberal Public Reason: Are Abortion and Slavery Hard Cases?"

George, "Public Reason and Political Conflict: Abortion and Homosexuality"

March 3 Difference and oppression and PRO AND CON PAPER DUE

GP pp. 501-521 (Minow)

Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism"

March 8 Group rights and preferential treatment and DEBATE 5

GP 327-343 (Kymlicka), 549-565 (Wasserstrom)

March 10 Reparations for injustice

GP pp. 264-278 (Waldon)

Coates, "[The Case for Reparations](#)"

Williamson, "[The Case against Reparations](#)"

Optional: Coates, "[The Case for American History](#)" – reply to Williamson

March 15, 17 SPRING BREAK

March 22 Affirmative Action

Briefs for Fisher v. Texas (II)

March 24 Microaggressions, free speech, and the university and DEBATE 6

Lukianoff and Haidt, "[The Coddling of the American Mind](#)"

University of California handout on recognizing microaggressions

Marcuse, "[Repressive Tolerance](#)," selections

Other readings TBA

March 29 Feminism

Saul – *Feminism: Issues and Arguments*, pp. 5-44

Other readings TBA

March 31 Freedom of Conscience

George – *Conscience and Its Enemies*, pp. 106-114, 156-164

ACOG – "[The Limits of Conscientious Refusal in Reproductive Medicine](#)"

Briefs for *Storman's v. Weisman*

April 5 Reproductive Rights vs. Free Exercise of Religion and DEBATE 7

Briefs from *Zubik v. Burwell*

April 7 Marriage

Girgis, George, and Anderson – “What is Marriage?”

Brake – “Minimal Marriage”

Obergefell v. Hodges (majority opinion)

April 12 Euthanasia and DEBATE 8

Philosopher’s brief for *Washington v. Glucksburg*

Anderson, [brief against euthanasia](#)

Other readings TBA

April 14 War

GP pp. 670-672 (Luban)

Walzer – *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 22-47

McMahon – “The Ethics of Killing in War”, pp. 22-23, 26-33

April 19 TAKE THE CCTST TEST IN-CLASS and TERM PAPER DUE

April 21 Global Poverty

GP pp. 710-720 (Pogge)

Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cha. 10.

Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, pp. 3-12 (the rest is optional)

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, April 27, 8:00 AM