

POSC 4500 Contemporary Political Thought

Brackett 322 – TTH 9:30-10:45

Professor Danny Frost

Spring 2016

Office: 230I Brackett Hall

Office hours: Monday 1-3, Wednesday 9-11

Phone: 864-656-1097

dfrost@clemson.edu

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. Student will learn key concepts and ideas in contemporary political thought.
2. Students will articulate arguments on both sides of an issue.
3. Students will analyze and evaluate arguments.
4. Student will develop well-reasoned arguments in response to arguments found in readings and articulate them clearly in course papers.

Required texts:

- *Justice: A Reader*. Ed. Michael J. Sandel.
- Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools* (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2014). [CT]
- Additional readings will be available on Canvas.

Assessment:

1. Exams (30%): Two exams will be given during the semester: a midterm (10%) and a final (20%). The exams will require you to demonstrate your understanding of the course material and make arguments on a side of a controversy. The final exam is cumulative.
2. Take the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST) (5%) 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.
3. Arguing Pro and Con (10%): Choose a topic we study 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. Short paper (10%): compare and contrast two of the political ideologies we discuss in class (liberalism, libertarianism, socialism, etc.). Accurately describe the aims of each and then make an argument about which is the better theory. Three pages.
5. Term paper (20%): Details announced in class. Eight pages.
6. In-class debates (5%): Periodically throughout the course we will hold in-class debates. Students will be graded individually for their contributions.
7. In-class presentations (10%): students will describe the course material, make an argument about it, and raise critical questions for class discussion.
8. In-class assignments (5%): in-class assignments are designed to help students understand and engage with the course material.
9. In-class participation (5%): student should make thoughtful and relevant comments to contribute to classroom discussion.

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.

In-Class Presentations:

At least once during the semester each student will make an in-class presentation. During this presentation the student should briefly summarize the major points from the reading and then raise (at least five) critical questions for discussion. Do not ask mere factual questions; assume the other students have done the reading and are ready to discuss it. Rather, identify contestable features of the readings and subject them to critical examination: was the author’s argument persuasive? Did it respond to relevant counter-arguments? Is there another reasonable way to resolve the dilemma? Is there something the author is missing or discounting? Do the principles discussed

have application to other controversies? Raise questions that engage the most important parts of the reading and that can lead to robust classroom discussion.

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:

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.

Emergency Guidelines from Clemson University Police Department (Please Read)

All students and employees should be familiar with the following guidelines. For additional information about safety see <http://www.clemson.edu/cusafety/preparedness/>.

Evacuation:

- When evacuating buildings, do not use elevators as they may lose power, stranding riders.
- Familiarize yourself with the locations of stairwells and exits.
- Individuals needing assistance evacuating should move to a stairwell away from the hazard, dial 911, and provide the Dispatcher with their exact location and what they need regarding evacuation.
- When evacuating follow the instructions provided by Public Safety personnel to reach a safe place.
- To seek “Tornado Safer Places,” get to the lowest level of the building time allows, stay away from areas with windows and glass, and put as many walls as you can between yourself and the outside. In public buildings, bathrooms typically have an additional wall.

Active Shooter:

- Always call 911 as soon as you possibly can.
- Run away from the area, if it is safe to do so, time allows and the gunman is not nearby.
- Hide if the gunman is too close to your location. Find a safer place, lock and barricade doors, turn lights out and cell phones off or to vibrate.
- Fight. As a last resort, resolve to fight the intruder with everything you have at your disposal.

A short video prepared and presented by the Department of Homeland Security can be found at the following link: dhs.gov/video/options-consideration-active-shooter-preparedness-video.

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).

Jan 12 Intro – no readings TAKE THE CCTST TEST WITHIN ONE WEEK

Jan 17 Critical Thinking and Moral Incoherence I

Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition*, pp. 19-59

CT: 2-7

Jan 19 Critical Thinking and Moral Incoherence II

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 1-22

CT: 8-10, 13-15

Jan 24 Public Reason I

Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” pp. 765-783

Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, pp. 63-77

Jan 26 Public Reason II and DEBATE 1

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

George, “Public Reason and Political Conflict: Abortion and Homosexuality”

Jan 31 Utilitarianism

Kymlica, “Utilitarianism”

Bentham, “Principles of Morals and Legislation,” in *Justice*, pp. 9-14

Feb 2 Deontology

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "[Deontological Ethics](#)" (you must be within the Clemson network to access this page)

Feb 7 Virtue Ethics

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "[Virtue Ethics](#)" (you must be within the Clemson network to access this page)

Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *Justice*, pp. 295-299

Feb 9 Power

Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, selections

Foucault, "Truth and Power," pp. 111-113, 118-119, 122-123, 131-133

Feb 14 Liberty and DEBATE 2

Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty"

Feb 16 Personhood

Singer – "All Animals Are Equal"

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

Feb 21 MIDTERM

Feb 23 Rights

Glendon – *Rights Talk*, pp. 1-17

Taylor – "Atomism"

Feb 28 Autonomy and Neutrality

Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 473-504

"Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy", sections 1 and 3.1-3.2, in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/> (you must be within the Clemson network to access this page)

March 2 Liberalism

Rawls: *A Theory of Justice*, in *Justice*, pp. 203-226

March 7 Libertarianism

Justice, pp. 49-83

March 9 Difference and oppression and DEBATE 3

Young – *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, selections

Fish, “Boutique Multiculturalism”

March 14 Feminism

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

Sommers, “What ‘Lean In’ Misunderstands About Gender Differences”;
“How to Get More Women (and Men) to Call Themselves Feminists”

March 16 Conservatism

Oakeshott - “Rationalism in Politics”

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

March 21, 23 SPRING BREAK

March 28 Communitarianism

Justice, pp. 315-334

March 30 Socialism

Newman – *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 6-46

April 4 War

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

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

April 6 Global Poverty

Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cha. 10.

Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, pp. 3-22, 151-176 (the rest is optional)

April 11 Domestic Poverty and DEBATE 4

House Budget Committee, “The War on Poverty: 50 Years Later”, pp. 3-10

Rector and Sheffield, “The War on Poverty After 50 Years”

POTUS Council of Economic Advisors, “The War on Poverty 50 Years Later: A Progress Report”, pp. 2-6, 26-37

April 13 Paternalism

Thaler and Sunstein – *Nudge* , pp. 1-6, 236-241

Mill, *On Liberty* (selections)

George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies*, pp. 91-105

April 18 Antidiscrimination Law and Civil Liberties

Koppelman, *Antidiscrimination Law and Social Equality*, pp. 1-12

University of California handout on recognizing microaggressions

David Bernstein, *You Can't Say That!* pp. 1-10

April 20 Affirmative Action

Justice, pp. 237-255

April 25 TAKE THE CCTST TEST IN-CLASS and TERM PAPER DUE

April 27 Euthanasia

Philosopher’s brief for *Washington v. Glucksburg*

Anderson, [brief against euthanasia](#)

Maynard, [“My Right to Death With Dignity at 29”](#)

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, May 3, 8:00 AM