

FFC 100 – Dangerous Ideas

INSTRUCTORS: Professor Erik Kimbrough (ekimbrou@chapman.edu) and Professor Brennan McDavid (mcdavid@chapman.edu)

COURSE MEETINGS: TR 10-11:15 – WH 220

OFFICE HOURS: We will have joint office hours by request. Try to give us some notice, but we will usually be available before and after class.

PREREQUISITES: None

COURSE COMMUNICATIONS: The vast majority of classroom communications will take place through email (typically via the dedicated course Canvas site). **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING SURE THAT YOU RECEIVE THESE COMMUNICATIONS.** We are a team, so if you email one of us, email both of us.

Description: In 399 BC, Socrates was sentenced to die by drinking hemlock because he dared to challenge the traditional beliefs of Athens. In 1859, John Stuart Mill summoned Socrates' ghost by waging a vehement defense of free speech on the grounds that coercing silence "is robbing the human race." Across history we see examples of dissenters, gadflies, heretics, and revolutionaries in figures as prominent and heralded as Martin Luther, Galileo, Karl Marx, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, and Salman Rushdie. Yet we so often reserve our approval of their dissidence only once the dust has cleared and we can see with distance and with clear eyes the moral superiority of victors. That is, we approve dissent only if we are already convinced that it is in the name of moral progress. In this course, we will force such patterns of thought to a halt. By engaging each week with a contentious and perhaps intractable—perhaps, in some cases, even *unspeakable*—issue that is salient and pressing in our society today, we will force ourselves to assess dissenting voices *before* the dust has settled. Our method of approach will be rigid and rigorous: we will reconstruct the *arguments* and assess the *quality of evidence* relied upon by parties wading into these debates with their dangerous ideas.

Course Schedule (subject to change, assignments updated as we go):

Date	Readings	Assignment
27-Aug	(In class) the preface to John Stuart Mill's "Of Liberty of Thought and Discussion" in <i>On Liberty</i>	Introductions and entrance survey
29-Aug	Remainder of "Of Liberty of Thought and Discussion"	Argument Map
	Module 1: Meritocracy	
3-Sep	Wooldridge Intro & Ch. 1-3	Argument Map
5-Sep	Wooldridge Ch. 10-12	
10-Sep	DeBoer Intro & Ch. 1-2	Argument Map
12-Sep	DeBoer Ch. 3 & 6	
17-Sep	Alexander 2021 , Hymowitz 2021	Data Workshop
19-Sep	DeBoer and Callard Discussion	Debate Club 1
	Module 2: Colonialism	

24-Sep	Robinson 2017, Acemoglu 2017	Argument Map
26-Sep	Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001	Data Workshop
1-Oct	Marein 2020, Moreno-Lazaro 2024	Brian Marein visit
3-Oct	Feyrer and Sacerdote 2009, Easterly and Levine 2016	Argument Map
8-Oct	Feir et al. 2024	
10-Oct	Smith and Roberts Discussion	Debate Club 2
	Module 3: Voting	
15-Oct	Brookings 2020	Argument Map
17-Oct	Brennan? Or Jones podcast?	
22-Oct	Gelman, Silver and Edlin 2012	Data Workshop
24-Oct	Library Skills Session	Meet in Library
29-Oct	Caplan 2024 , Caplan 2007	Argument Map
31-Oct	Landemore and Brennan Discussion	Debate Club 3
	Module 4: Transwomen in sport	
5-Nov	Ivy and Noah 2022 (video); Ivy 2021	Argument map
7-Nov	Armstrong and Thompson 2023 (youtube or podcast Ivy 2023 Christiansen 2023)	
12-Nov	Lawford-Smith 2022 Lawford-Smith 2022	Holly Lawford-Smith Visit
14-Nov	Dembroff 2021	
19-Nov	SCOTUS 2024	
21-Nov	"Debate: Is Sex Binary?"	Debate Club 4
3-Dec	"What does 'unbiased' mean in the digital world?"	Square table discussion
5-Dec	Plato's <i>Apology</i>	Square table discussion

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Acemoglu, Daron. 2017. "The Economic Impact of Colonialism" *VoxEU*. URL: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/economic-impact-colonialism>

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. 2001. "The colonial origins of comparative development: An empirical investigation." *American Economic Review*, 91(5), 1369-1401.

Alexander, Scott. 2021. "Book Review: The Cult of Smart." *Astral Codex Ten*. URL: <https://www.astralcodexten.com/p/book-review-the-cult-of-smart>

Brookings Institution. 2020. "Preamble to Lift Every Voice: The Urgency of Universal Civic Duty Voting." URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/lift-every-voice-the-urgency-of-universal-civic-duty-voting/>

Callard, Agnes and Fredrik DeBoer. "Meritocracy." URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suVPWvtbsJ8>

Caplan, Bryan. "The Myth of the Rational Voter: Executive Summary." URL: <https://www.issueab.org/resources/2808/2808.pdf>

- Caplan, Bryan. "How Much Revenue Could You Raise with a Poll Tax?" URL: <https://www.betonit.ai/p/how-much-revenue-could-you-raise>
- DeBoer, Fredrik. 2021. *The Cult of Smart: How Our Broken Education System Perpetuates Social Injustice*. All Points Books: New York.
- Dembroff, Robin. 2021. "Escaping the Natural Attitude about Gender." *Philosophical Studies*.
- Dept. of Education vs. Louisiana. 603 U. S. ____ (2024)
- Easterly, W. and Levine, R., 2016. "The European origins of economic development." *Journal of Economic Growth*, 21, pp.225-257.
- Feir, D.L., Gillezeau, R. and Jones, M.E., 2024. "The slaughter of the bison and reversal of fortunes on the Great Plains." *Review of Economic Studies*, 91(3), pp.1634-1670.
- Feyrer, J. and Sacerdote, B., 2009. "Colonialism and modern income: islands as natural experiments." *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 91(2), pp.245-262.
- Gelman, A., Silver, N. and Edlin, A., 2012. "What is the probability your vote will make a difference?" *Economic Inquiry*, 50(2), pp.321-326.
- Hymowitz, Kay S. 2021. "Crucible of Talents: Can the Meritocracy Survive?" URL: <https://www.city-journal.org/article/crucible-of-the-talents>
- Ivy, Veronica. 2021. "If 'Ifs' and 'Buts' Were Candy and Nuts: The Failure of Arguments Against Trans and Intersex Women's Full and Equal Inclusion in Women's Sport". *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (2). pp. 1 - 38.
- Ivy, Veronica. 2022. "Trans Women are Women, Sport is a Human Right." *Journal of Olympic Studies* 4 (2): pp. 3-19.
- Jones, Garrett and Garrett Petersen. 2020. "Ten Percent Less Democracy." *The Economics Detective Podcast*. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVrypaExhkY>
- Landemore, Helene and Jason Brennan. "Debating Democracy." URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZr8joOF4MQ>
- Lawford-Smith, Holly. 2022. *Sex Matters: Essays in Gender-Critical Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Marein, B., 2020. "Economic development in Puerto Rico after US annexation: Anthropometric evidence." *Economics & Human Biology*, 38, p.100892.
- Moreno-Lázaro, J., 2024. *Did the US annexation of Puerto Rico in 1898 increase the biological standard of living of its population? A first anthropometric approach* (No. 2404). Asociación Española de Historia Económica.
- Robinson, Nathan J., 2017. "A Quick Reminder of Why Colonialism Was Bad." *Current Affairs*. URL: <https://www.currentaffairs.org/news/2017/09/a-quick-reminder-of-why-colonialism-was-bad>
- Smith, Noah and Russell Roberts. 2024. "Can a Nation Plunder Its Way to Wealth?" *EconTalk*. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJctvnB9_Kk
- Wooldridge, Adrian. 2021. *The Aristocracy of Merit: How Meritocracy Made the Modern World*. Skyhorse Publishing: New York

Williamson, Chris and Seth Stephens-Davidowitz. 2024. "The Hidden Statistics that Rule the NBA". *Modern Wisdom*. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGqnxPKHDc>

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Identify the components of argumentation (premises and conclusions), or else their absence, in written and oral polemics.
- Reconstruct and map the structure of arguments in contemporary academic and popular writing.
- Identify the type of evidence relied upon, the source of that evidence, and the quality of both type and source in contemporary academic and popular writing.
- Assess the merit of arguments to a debate with fairminded appeal to argumentative form and quality of evidence.
- Articulate the positions of historical defenders and critics of free and open inquiry.
- Defend the value or disvalue of engaging both orthodox and heterodox opinions in academic settings, public settings, and in private.
- Defend the value or disvalue of open inquiry and free speech, pertaining both to inquiry in general and to particular topics.

Grading:

Because of the interactive nature of the class, attendance is an essential component. Excessive "tardies" constitute absences; three absences may result in failure (Undergraduate Catalog, "Academic Policies and Procedures.") Please keep this in mind. Missed in-class work cannot be made up.

1. Participation in Class Discussion, In-Class Experiments, and Debates [30%]

Class discussion provides an opportunity for students to explore questions about moral development. Through this shared inquiry, students gain experience reading for meaning and communicating complex ideas; thinking reflectively about an interpretive problem; and supporting and testing thoughts through dialogue with peers. Class discussion fosters the flexibility of mind to consider problems from multiple perspectives and the ability to analyze ideas critically. Students must enter the discussion with specific questions generated by the texts as well as a desire to probe and reevaluate ideas. It is essential that students bring texts and questions to each class session. Also includes grades based on participation in in-class experiments.

2. Argument Maps [25%]

3. Data Work [25%]

4. Final Oral Examination [20%]

Academic Integrity:

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the university Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity at www.chapman.edu/academics/academicintegrity/index.aspx.

Chapman University's Students with Disabilities Policy:

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services. If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification

procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized.

Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516-4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure, or for information and to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for accommodation has been granted, you are encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Equity and Diversity Statement:

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in [Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#). Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the [Dean of Students](#) and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.