

DWC 202: POLARIZATION

Instructors

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Class time: WF 8:30 - 10:20

Course Description

America is divided. Why? Should it be? If not, can we fix it?

Required texts

- *Four texts on Socrates*, tr. T. West (1993, Cornell University Press).
- Bejan, *Mere Civility* (2017, Harvard)
- Grant, *Think Again* (2021, Penguin)
- Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (2012, Vintage)
- Matsuda et al., *Words that Wound* (1993, Routledge)

Assignments

Weekly reflections (15%): For most Fridays, there is a 500-word reflection due at 5pm. The purpose of the reflection is to encourage thinking more generally about themes of the course and how to connect them to everyday life. Reflections can be posted to Canvas.

Argument analysis (10%): On two different occasions, you will be asked to analyze the arguments and rhetorical strategy of an ideologically-motivated podcast episode. A rubric will be provided later in the semester.

Opposition interview (10%): During the semester, we will ask you to interview a fellow student not enrolled in this course concerning their belief about a topic *on which you disagree*. You will submit a transcript of the interview. The interview should cover what the person believes, how they came to that belief, and why they believe what they believe.

Short paper (20%): You will submit one short (3 - 4 pg.) paper on the meaning of political equality and the tension between moral commitments and political equality.

Adversarial paper (20%): You will partner up with another person in class to write a joint paper on a topic *on which you disagree*. Each person will write a main argument, a response to the other person's argument, and a rebuttal to their objection.

Final exam (25%): There will be a cumulative written exam at the end of the semester.

Schedule

Introduction

- 1/17 *Syllabus day / Introductions*
- 1/19 *Dissatisfaction*
Haidt, “Why the past 10 years of American life have been uniquely stupid”
Plato, *Apology* (in *Four Texts on Socrates*)
- 1/24 *Disagreement*
Stephens, “The dying art of disagreement”
Warren, “America has a scorn problem”
Blixt, “Cancel culture and responsibility”

Unit 1: Morality

- 1/26 *Morality and reason*
Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (chs. 1 & 4)
- 1/31 *Moral pluralism*
Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (chs. 7 & 8)
- 2/2 *Sources of disagreement*
Sullivan, “Is there still room for debate?”
MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (chs. 1 & 15)
- 2/7 *Morality and disagreement*
Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (chs. 9 - 12)

Unit 2: Freedom

- 2/9 *Freedom and faction*
Aristotle, *Politics* (Bk. 7)
Madison, *Federalist* 10
- 2/14 *Democratic freedom (I)*
Hobbes, *De cive* (chs. 5 & 7)
Hume, “Of civil liberty”
- 2/16 *Democratic freedom (II)*
Rousseau, *The social contract* (1.7 - 8, 4.3)

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (“On the use that Americans make of association in civil life”)

2/21 *Liberalism*

Berlin, “Two concepts of liberty”

Taylor, “What’s wrong with negative liberty?”

Unit 3: Equality

2/23 *Conceptions of civil equality*

Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789 and 1793 edition)

Constitution of the Year 1795 (France)

The Constitution of the United States, 1787

The Instructions of Catherine II to the Legislative Commission of 1767

2/28 *Equality and the public good*

Bolivar, “Letter from Jamaica” (1815)

Zapata, “Plan de Ayala” (1914)

3/1 *Equality and free speech*

Matsuda et al., *Words that wound* (ch. 2)

Mill, *On Liberty* (ch. 2)

Milton, *Areopagitica*

3/6 *Free speech and free inquiry*

Matsuda et al., *Words that wound* (ch. 3)

Cato’s letters, No. 15 and 32

Snyder, “When DEI measures crush free speech”

3 / 8 *Turning toward civility*

Matsuda et al., *Words that wound* (ch. 5)

Douglass, “A plea for freedom of speech”

Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia” (Query 17)

Lenin, “Party organization and party literature”

3/13 *Spring break*

3/15 *Spring break*

Unit 4: Civility

3/20 *Political manners*

Bejan, *Mere civility* (Introduction and ch. 2)
De Jouvenal, "Manners and politics"

3/22 *Civility and protest*

Bejan, *Mere civility* (ch. 3)

Haass, "Remain civil"

Romano, "In an uncivil age, calls for 'civility' are about squashing effective protest"

3/27 *Civility and respect*

Bejan, *Mere civility* (ch. 4)

Talisso, *Sustaining Democracy* (ch. 3)

3/29 *Good Friday*

4/3 *Monday schedule; No class*

Unit 5: The psychology of polarization

4 / 5 *The state of the union*

Edsall, "How could human nature have become this polarized?"

Mounk, "Republicans don't understand Democrats – and Democrats don't understand Republicans"

Goldberg, "Too many Americans have lost faith in Democracy"

4/10 *Polarization and methodological individualism*

Grant, *Think again* (Chs. 1 - 4)

4/12 *Why engage your enemy?*

Grant, *Think again* (Chs. 5 - 7)

4/17 *Bringing home the bacon*

Grant, *Think again* (Chs. 8 - 9)

Unit 6: Current issues

4/19 **OPEN**

4/24 **OPEN**

4/26 **OPEN**

5/1 **OPEN**

5/3 *The path forward?*

King, "The birth of a new age"

Garvey, *Message to the people* (excerpt) OR Hampton, "It's a class struggle!"