

How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization
Ethics 203 / Political Science 208

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“Truth, not victory.” –unknown

“I am human, and I consider nothing human is alien to me.” –Terence

“He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that.” –J.S. Mill

“We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

–Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural

“I don’t want you to be safe ideologically. I don’t want you to be safe emotionally. I want you to be strong. That’s different. I’m not going to take the weights out of the gym. That’s the whole point of the gym.” –Van Jones

Synopsis

Americans today live in a time of deep political polarization, cultural tribalism, and self-segregation. Those with whom we have deep disagreements, assuming we interact with them at all, are often viewed as not just wrong but as irrational, immoral, even contemptible. What are the causes and costs of these trends? What remedies might exist? Are there habits of mind that we might cultivate to build better citizens and a healthier democracy?

Ground Rules

Together, we will build a community of trust and friendship amid political disagreement. Following the principles below will help guide us along the way.

- **The Principle of Freedom:** Duke University’s Mission Statement affirms its foundational commitment to promoting “an intellectual environment built on a commitment to free and open inquiry,” which encompasses academic freedom and free speech. These rights are sacrosanct in this class and are possessed by faculty and students alike. With the aim of advancing and deepening everyone’s understanding of the issues addressed in the course, students are urged to speak their minds, explore ideas and arguments, play devil’s advocate, and engage in civil but robust discussions. There is no thought or language policing. Students are expected to do business in the proper currency of intellectual discourse—a currency consisting of reasons, evidence, and arguments—but no ideas or positions are out of bounds.
- **The Principle of Charity:** When approaching a new idea, attempt to understand the idea sympathetically and in its most persuasive form. When you then critique the idea, focus on

the argument itself, not the person who said it. Do not attribute bad motives for other's beliefs, which they do not think they have. When disagreeing, work towards unity and towards keeping the conversation going. This means we do not cancel each other in this class. Rather than "calling out," we will "call in," which should be apparent in both the content and tone of our comments.

- **The Principle of Humility:** Acknowledge the weaknesses in your own arguments and privilege the pursuit of truth over "winning" the argument. Remember that we are all fallible and all of us surely hold beliefs that are wrong, though we don't know which ones. Keep your mind open to learning new things from authors and fellow classmates whose ideas you don't share.

Schedule

Thursday, January 21

Getting to know each other. Review of the syllabus.

Tuesday, January 26

The University and Free Inquiry

Gary Saul Morson and Morton Schapiro, "Break the Silence," *Persuasion*

Various, "Advice for Students in A Time of Strife," *First Things*

Cornel West and Robert George, "Trust Seeking, Democracy, and the Freedom of Thought and Expression"

Jonathan Zimmerman, "College Campuses Should Not be Safe Spaces," *Chronicle of Higher Education*

William Deresiewicz, "On Political Correctness: Power, Class, and the New Campus Religion," *The American Scholar*

Thursday, January 28

Cancel Culture

Sam Leith, "In Defense of Wokeness," *Spectator*

Ross Douthat, "10 Theses About Cancel Culture," *New York Times*

David Blixt, "'Cancel Culture' and Responsibility," *Medium*

Loretta Ross, "I'm a Black Feminist. I Think Call-Out Culture is Toxic," *The New York Times*

Jessica Bennett, "What if Instead of Calling People Out, We Called Them In?" *The New York Times*

Steven Pinker, 2020 CBC interview

Ross Douthat, "The Ghost of Woodrow Wilson," *New York Times*

Anne Applebaum, "The New Puritans," *The Atlantic*

Erica Komisar, "Cancel Culture's Mental Health Toll," *Wall Street Journal*

Zaid Jilani, "The End of 'Cancel Culture?'," *Persuasion*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "It is Obscene"

Tuesday, February 2

Can We Still Disagree?

Various, “A Letter on Justice and Open Debate,” *Harper’s Magazine*
Michael Roth, “Anxiety About Wokeness Is Intellectual Weakness,” *New York Times*
Trevor Phillips, “The March of Wokeism is an All-Pervasive New Oppression,” *The Times*
Andrew Sullivan, “Is There Still Room for Debate?” *New York Magazine*
Robert George, “On Critics and Bullies,” Heterodox Academy, “Defend Academic Freedom, Even When You Disagree,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*
John McWhorter, “Our Oppressive Moment,” *Quillette*
Molly Worthen, “Is There a Way to Dial Down the Political Hatred?” *New York Times*
Mark Twain, “The Privilege of the Grave,” *New Yorker*
Michael Powell, “Inside a Battle Over Race, Class, and Power at Smith College,” *New York Times*

Thursday, February 4 **The State of Our Polarized Democracy**

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, *Think Again (excerpt)*
Thomas Edsall, “How Could Human Nature Have Become This Polarized?” *New York Times*
“62% of Americans Say They Have Political Views They’re Afraid to Share,” 2020 Cato Institute Study
Yascha Mounk, “Republicans Don’t Understand Democrats—And Democrats Don’t Understand Republicans,” *The Atlantic*
Neal Rothschild, “Young Dems More Likely to Despise the Other Party,” *Axios*
Amanda Ripley, et al, “U.S. Counties Vary by Their Degree of Partisan Prejudice,” *The Atlantic*
Amanda Ripley, “The Least Politically Prejudiced Place in America,” *The Atlantic*
Nicholas Goldberg, “Too Many Americans Have Lost Faith in Democracy,” *Las Vegas Sun*
David Brooks, “Here’s the Mindset That’s Tearing Us Apart,” *New York Times*

Tuesday, February 9 **How to Think**

Alan Jacobs, *How to Think*, Introduction, Chapters 1-4, and Afterword.
Adam Grant, “The Science of Changing Someone Else’s Mind,” *The New York Times*

Thursday, February 11 **America**

Amy Chua, *Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations*, (excerpts)

Tuesday, February 16 **Being Wrong**

Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*, (excerpts)

Thursday, February 18 **Liberty, Dissent, and the Value of Intellectual Diversity**

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Introduction, Parts II-III
Michael Paulsen, “The Uneasy Case for Intellectual Diversity,” *Harvard Journal of Law and*

Public Policy

“Should We Tolerate Evil Ideas?” Robert George

Tuesday, February 23

Lost Trust in Institutions

Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build*, (excerpts)

Thursday, February 25

Why We’re Polarized

Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized*, (excerpts)

Stephen Metcalf, “Ezra Klein’s *Why We’re Polarized* and the Drawbacks of Explainer Journalism,” *New Yorker*

Osita Nwanevu, “We’re Not Polarized Enough,” *Vox*

Tuesday, March 2

Love, Contempt, and Friendship Across Ideological Lines

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, Chapters 1-3, Book XI, Chapter 6.

Jennifer Senior, “The Ginsburg-Scalia Act Was Not a Farce,” *New York Times*

Arthur Brooks, *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt*, 2019, Introduction and Chapter 1, pp. 80-85, Chapters 3-5, 8-9

Tuesday, March 16

Case Study: Duke and China

Readings TBD

Thursday, March 18

Case Study: Google and James Damore

James Damore, “Google’s Ideological Echo Chamber”

James Damore, “Why I Was Fired at Google,” *Wall Street Journal*

Susan Wojcicki, “Response to the Controversial Google Anti-Diversity Memo” Sundar Pichai, “Our Words Matter” (email to Google staff)

Peter Singer, “Why Google Was Wrong,” *New York Daily News*

Tuesday, March 23

**Case Study: Race, Discrimination, and College Admissions
(with Professor Peter Arcidiacono)**

Anemona Hartocollis, “Does Harvard Admissions Discriminate?” *The New York Times* Camille

Caldera, “The Harvard Admissions Lawsuit Decision,” *The Harvard Crimson* Editorial Board, “Harvard’s Legal Discrimination,” *Wall Street Journal*

Genevieve Bonadies Torres, “Affirmative Action in Higher Education: Relevance for Today’s Racial Justice Battlefields,” *ABA Magazine*

Melissa Korn, “Yale Discriminated by Race in Undergraduate Admissions, Justice Department Says,” *Wall Street Journal*

Thursday, March 25

Case Study: Abolishing the Police

Duke's Black Coalition Against Policing Demands

Jason Riley, "No, Police Racism Isn't an Epidemic," *Wall Street Journal*

Roland Fryer, Jr., "What the Data Say About Police," *Wall Street Journal*

Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," *The New York Times*

"How Defunding the Police Is Working Out in Seattle," Vice News

"What the Police Really Believe," *Vox*

"What Does it Mean to Defund the Police?" *The Guardian*

Robin Kelley, "What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?" *The New York Times*

Matin Kaste, "Why Police Departments Have A Hard Time Recruiting Blacks," NPR (All Things Considered)

Astead Herndon, "How a Pledge to Dismantle the Minneapolis Police Collapsed," *The New York Times*

Nellie Bowles, "Abolish the Police? Those Who Survived the Chaos in Seattle Aren't So Sure," *The New York Times*

"Minneapolis violence surges as police officers leave department in droves," *Washington Post*

Tuesday, March 30

Case Study: Israel

Readings TBD

Thursday, April 1

Case Study: Pronouns

"Why Pronouns Matter," *Seventeen*

Lane Patriquin, "Why It's Important to Oppose Jordan Peterson's Views on Gender Pronouns"

Jordan Peterson, "Free Speech & the Right to Offend"

Bostock v. Georgia Amicus Brief, Islamic Religious Freedom Institute

Tuesday, April 6

**Case Study: Transgenderism and Female Sport
(with Professor Doriane Coleman)**

CBC video, "Do Transgender Athletes Have an Unfair Advantage in Sports?"

Kathleen Megan, "Transgender Sports Debate Polarizes Women's Advocates"

Shana Medley, "Banning Trans Girls from School Sports Is Neither Feminist nor Legal"

Vox, "The Problem with Sex Testing in Sports"

Doriane Lambelet Coleman, "Comparing Athletic Performances"

Doriane Lambelet Coleman, "Oral Testimony re: H.R. 5, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary"

Doriane Coleman, "Sex, Sport, and Why Track and Field's New Rules on Intersex Athletes Are Essential," *New York Times*

Thursday, April 8

Case Study: What is Race?

AP Says It will Capitalize Black but not white

Amy Harmon, "BIPOC or POC? Equity or Equality? The Debate Over Language on the Left,"

New York Times

Sandra Garcia, "Where did BIPOC Come From?"

India Census

UK Census

US Census, by Race

Tuesday, April 13 and 15th

Case Study: Racism, Racial Inequality, and CRT

Keith Lawrence and Terry Keleher, "Structural Racism," Race and Public Policy Conference

Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *Journal of Critical Pedagogy*

Michael Powell, "'White Supremacy' Once Meant David Duke and the Klan. Now It Refers to Much More," *The New York Times*

Daniel Bergner, "'White Fragility' is Everywhere. But Does Antiracism Training Work?" *The New York Times*

Friedersdorf, "The Black Lives Matter Has an Unintended Consequence"

Gabrielle Clark vs. Democracy Prep brief

Jilani, "White People Don't have a Monopoly on Hatred"

Shelby Steele, "The Inauthenticity Behind Black Lives Matter," *Wall Street Journal*

Inaya Folarin Iman, "We Need to Abolish Race," *Spiked*

Glen Loury, "Why Does Racial Inequality Persist?" *Manhattan Institute*

Glen Loury, "Race and Equality," *City Journal*

Shelby Steele, *What Killed Michael Brown?*, documentary (online through Duke library)

Bari Weiss, "The Miseducation of America's Elites," *City Journal*

Ta-Nehisi Coates, Testimony Before Congress Coleman Hughes, Testimony Before Congress

Julianne Malveaux and Coleman Hughes, Munk Debate

Thursday, April 15

Case Study: Abolishing Greek Life

Ezra Marcus, "The War on Frats," *The New York Times*

Abolish Duke IFC & Panhel "Open letter: It's Time to Abolish IFC and Panhel," *The Chronicle*

Jared Bauman, "How Abolish Greek Life Gets It Wrong," *Vanderbilt Hustler*

Walker et. al, "Greek Organization Membership and Collegiate Outcomes at an Elite, Private University," *Research in Higher Education*

Tuesday, April 20

Case Study: Abortion

David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster (selection)*

Mehdi Hasan, "Being Pro-Life Doesn't Make Me Any Less of a Lefty," *New Statesman*

Rebecca Traister, "Let's Just Say It: Women Matter More than Fetuses Do," *New Republic*

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*

Rebecca Peters, *Trust Women*, selection

Sidney Callahan, "Abortion and the Sexual Agenda: A Case for Pro-life Feminism"

Richard Neuhaus, “We Shall Not Weary,” *First Things*

Obianuju Ekeocha, “An African Woman’s Open Letter to Melina Gates”

Robert George, “The Wrong of Abortion” in Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics

Caitlyn Flanagan, “The Dishonesty of the Abortion Debate,” *The Atlantic*

Tish Harrison Warren, “Why the Feminist Movement Needs Pro-Life People,” *New York Times*

John Shields, “A Hard but Real Compromise Is Possible on Abortion,” *New York Times*

Embryo Ownership and Liability (with Professor Kathryn Bradley)

Readings TBD

Thursday, April 22

The Beloved Community of MLK

“The Power of Nonviolence,” 1957

“Loving Your Enemies,” 1957

“I Have a Dream,” 1963.

