

Dangerous Ideas

Fall 2026 Syllabus

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

COURSE MEETINGS: MW 2:30-3:45pm - WH 220

OFFICE HOURS: 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.

Module Questions

- **Module 1: Prediction Markets:** Are prediction markets epistemic institutions, financial exchanges, or gambling dressed up as information aggregation?
- **Module 2: Marriage:** Is marriage an outdated patriarchal institution, or one of the most important anti-poverty institutions we have?
- **Module 3: Abortion:** Did overturning Roe ultimately weaken abortion rights, or force them onto more democratic and durable ground?
- **Module 4: Kinship and Development:** Are existing development policies effective, or are they compromised by the existing cultural patterns in target communities?

Required Texts, Cases, and Listening Assignments

Foundational reading

- Mill, John Stuart. 1859. On Liberty. Chapter 2: 'Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion.' Any unabridged edition is acceptable.

Prediction markets

- Wolfers, Justin, and Eric Zitzewitz. 2004. 'Prediction Markets.' Journal of Economic Perspectives 18(2): 107-126.
- Hayek, F. A. 1945. 'The Use of Knowledge in Society.' American Economic Review 35(4): 519-530.

- Hanson, Robin. 'Futarchy: Vote Values, But Bet Beliefs.' George Mason University. Manifesto.
- FrenFlow. 2026. 'How Accurate Is Polymarket? What the Data Actually Shows.' June 15.
<https://www.frenflow.com/blog/how-accurate-is-polymarket>
- Atanasov, Pavel, Phillip Rescober, Eric Stone, Samuel A. Swift, Emile Servan-Schreiber, Philip E. Tetlock, Lyle Ungar, and Barbara Mellers. 2017. 'Distilling the Wisdom of Crowds: Prediction Markets vs. Prediction Polls.' *Management Science* 63(3): 691-706.
- 'Who Gets to Regulate Prediction Markets?' A map of the regulatory landscape. Course document, distributed on Canvas.
- Planet Money (NPR). 2026. 'How Kalshi Convinced Regulators Prediction Markets Are Not Gambling.' April 17.
<https://www.npr.org/2026/04/17/nx-s1-5789382/kalshi-polymarket-prediction-market-ceo-tarek-mansour>
- Better Markets. 2026. "'Prediction Markets,' Gambling, the CFTC & Regulation: Facts, Fiction & The Law.'
<https://bettermarkets.org/analysis/prediction-markets-gambling-the-cftc-regulation-facts-fiction-the-law/>
- Akey, Pat, Vincent Grégoire, Nicolas Harvie, and Charles Martineau. 2026. 'Who Wins and Who Loses in Prediction Markets? Evidence from Polymarket.' CEPR Discussion Paper No. 21615. [Explore Akey et al.'s findings](#)

Marriage

- Kearney, Melissa S. 2023. *The Two-Parent Privilege: How Americans Stopped Getting Married and Started Falling Behind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chambers, Clare. 2017. *Against Marriage: An Egalitarian Defence of the Marriage-Free State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Selected public Instagram posts from Ballerina Farm [@ballerinafarm], Estee Williams [@esteecwilliams], and Mrs. Midwest [@mrs.midwest]. Specific posts will be distributed on Canvas two weeks before discussion to avoid link rot.

Abortion

- 'From Roe to Dobbs: A Legal Timeline.' One-page orientation for the abortion unit. Course document, distributed on Canvas.
- *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). Excerpts: the Court's framing of the question, the three historical justifications for abortion laws, the privacy holding, fetal personhood and when life begins, the compelling-interest analysis, and the trimester framework; Rehnquist, J., dissenting, in full.
- Ginsburg, Ruth Bader. 1985. 'Some Thoughts on Autonomy and Equality in Relation to *Roe v. Wade*.' *North Carolina Law Review* 63: 375-386.
- *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022). Excerpts: majority opinion (the holding, the history-and-tradition test, stare decisis, and the return of the issue to elected representatives); Roberts, C.J., concurring in the judgment; joint dissent of Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan, JJ.
- National Constitution Center. 2022, August 10. 'The Dobbs v. Jackson Case - Part 4.' *We the People* podcast, with Mary Ziegler and O. Carter Snead. constitutioncenter.org
- KFF. 2026, March 24. 'The Status of Abortion-Related State Ballot Initiatives Since Dobbs.' [KFF Ballot-initiative Tracker](#)
- Ziegler, Mary. 2026, January 20. '2026 Abortion-Related Ballot Measures.' *State Court Report*. statecourtreport.org
- Douthat, Ross. 2022, November 12. 'What the Pro-Life Movement Lost and Won.' *New York Times*.
- 'Pro-Life Politics After Dobbs.' 2024, June 1. *First Things*. Symposium; contributors include Michael F. Burbidge, R. Albert Mohler Jr., Adeline A. Allen, Carl R. Trueman, David Novak, Robert P. George, O. Carter Snead, Ryan T. Anderson, Mollie Ziegler Hemingway, Marjorie Dannenfelser, and R. R. Reno. firstthings.com
- Society of Family Planning. 2026. #WeCount Report, April 2022-December 2025. Check for the most recent report before class. societyfp.org/research/wecount
- Springer, Lilly. 2026. 'Downstream Effects of Post-Dobbs Abortion Bans: Birth Rates and WIC.' *Economic Inquiry* 64(3): 830-843.

- Gallup. 'Abortion.' Historical trends in U.S. abortion attitudes. news.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx

Kinship and development

- Banerjee, Abhijit, Esther Duflo, Rachel Glennerster, and Cynthia Kinnan. 2015. 'The Miracle of Microfinance? Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation.' *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 7(1): 22-53.
- Banerjee, Abhijit and Russell Roberts. EconTalk. <https://www.econtalk.org/banerjee-on-poverty-and-poor-economics/>
- Baird, Sarah, Craig McIntosh, and Berk Özler. 2011. 'Cash or Condition? Evidence from a Cash Transfer Experiment.' *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126(4): 1709-1753.
- Duflo, Esther. 2012. 'Women Empowerment and Economic Development.' *Journal of Economic Literature* 50(4): 1051-1079.
- Field, Erica. 2007. 'Entitled to Work: Urban Property Rights and Labor Supply in Peru.' *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 122(4): 1561-1602.
- Agarwal, Bina. 1997. "'Bargaining" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household.' *Feminist Economics* 3(1): 1-51.
- Bandiera, Oriana, Niklas Buehren, Robin Burgess, Markus Goldstein, Selim Gulesci, Imran Rasul, and Munshi Sulaiman. 2020. 'Women's Empowerment in Action: Evidence from a Randomized Control Trial in Africa.' *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 12(1): 210-259.
- de Mel, Suresh, David McKenzie, and Christopher Woodruff. 2014. 'Business Training and Female Enterprise Start-up, Growth, and Dynamics: Experimental Evidence from Sri Lanka.' *Journal of Development Economics* 106: 199-210.
- Bahrami-Rad, Duman. 2021. 'Keeping It in the Family: Female Inheritance, Inmarriage, and the Status of Women.' *Journal of Development Economics* 153: 102714.
- Bahrami-Rad, Duman. 2019, May 24. 'Female Inheritance: A Key to Women's Empowerment or Another Lock on Their Freedom?' *VoxDev*. <https://voxddev.org/topic/institutions-political-economy/female-inheritance-key-womens-empowerment-or-another-lock>

Course Schedule

Date	Readings	Assignments Due
24-Aug	In class: preface to John Stuart Mill's 'Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion' in On Liberty; course introduction	
26-Aug	Remainder of Mill, 'Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion'	Argument Map
Module 1: Prediction Markets		
31-Aug	Wolfers & Zitzewitz 2004; Hayek 1945; Hanson, 'Futarchy: Vote Values, But Bet Beliefs'	Argument Map
2-Sep	The social-value case: FrenFlow 2026 (how accurate is Polymarket?); Atanasov et al. 2017 (markets vs. prediction polls)	Data Workshop
7-Sep	Labor Day - no class	
9-Sep	Akey et al. 2026 (Explore Akey et al.'s findings)	
14-Sep	The regulatory landscape: 'Who Gets to Regulate Prediction Markets?' (course document); Planet Money podcast (Kalshi and the CFTC); Better Markets, 'Prediction Markets, Gambling, the CFTC & Regulation'	
16-Sep	Resolution: That prediction markets should be legalized broadly because their social value as information institutions outweighs their gambling-like harms.	Debate Club 1
Module 2: Marriage		
21-Sep	Kearney, The Two-Parent Privilege, Preface and Ch. 1-3	Argument Map
23-Sep	Chambers, Introduction and Ch. 1-3	
28-Sep	Kearney, Ch. 4-7	Data Workshop
30-Sep	Chambers, Ch. 4-6	
5-Oct	Tradwife culture: selected public Instagram posts; Chambers, Conclusion. Kearney, Ch. 8.	
7-Oct	Resolution: That the decline of marriage is a major cause of social inequality, and public policy should try to reverse it.	Debate Club 2
Module 3: Abortion		
12-Oct	'From Roe to Dobbs: A Legal Timeline' (course document); Roe v. Wade, excerpts (privacy holding; Rehnquist dissent); Ginsburg 1985	
14-Oct	Dobbs, excerpts (majority; Roberts concurrence; joint dissent). Listen first: NCC 'The Dobbs v. Jackson Case - Part 4' (Ziegler and Snead)	
19-Oct	KFF Ballot-initiative Tracker ; Ziegler 2026	Argument Map
21-Oct	Douthat 2022; First Things symposium, 'Pro-Life Politics After Dobbs' 2024	
26-Oct	Society of Family Planning #WeCount report; Springer 2026; Gallup abortion attitudes trends	Data Workshop
28-Oct	Resolution: That in the long run, overturning Roe will strengthen abortion rights by forcing them onto democratic and state-constitutional foundations.	Debate Club 3
Module 4: Kinship and Development		
2-Nov	Banerjee et al. 2015; EconTalk Podcast (Roberts and Banerjee)	Argument Map
4-Nov	Baird, McIntosh & Özler 2011; Duflo 2012, selections	
9-Nov	Field 2007; Agarwal 1997	
11-Nov	Bandiera et al. 2020; de Mel, McKenzie & Woodruff 2014	Data Workshop
16-Nov	Bahrami-Rad 2021; Bahrami-Rad 2019 VoxDev summary; Akbari et al. 2019	
18-Nov	Resolution: That development policy should aim to disrupt kinship structures on the way to improving economic outcomes.	Debate Club 4
Wrapping Up: Dangerous Ideas		
30-Nov	Course synthesis: dangerous ideas after Mill; what makes an idea worth platforming, debating, or excluding?	
2-Dec	Closing discussion and final oral examination preparation	

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

1. Participation in Class Discussion and Debates [25%] - The purpose of this course is for you to develop skills of listening, seeking clarification, and articulating your viewpoint in difficult conversations. You cannot develop these skills if you do not participate in class each and every time that we meet. You will be given a 1 or a 0 for each class, the former if you contribute to the class discussion and the latter if you do not.

2. Argument Maps [25%] - You will complete argument maps (visualizations of how premises and conclusions fit together in specific assigned readings) using the software MindMup. These maps will be completed in small groups.

3. Data Workshops [25%] - For each module, you will complete a data workshop in which you apply basic statistical ideas to understand an important aspect of the debate. These will involve a mix of in-class and take-home work.

4. Final Oral Examination [25%] - In lieu of a traditional final exam, we will meet as a group during the assigned final examination period for an oral final examination. During the examination each student will be asked to respond to questions posed by the professors that reflect the course objectives. Questions will be developed over the course of the semester and will draw on questions raised during class discussion and in the texts. The goal of the assessment is for students to demonstrate in a conversational setting that they have critically reflected on the ideas and material covered in the course over the semester. The questions posed to each student will be selected through a random process that still provides the students some control over the questions they get asked.

Grading Scale

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D: 65-70

F: 0-64

If you are still reading at this point, we really appreciate your attention to detail. To prove that to you, you can have 2 bonus points on the final exam if you send us a picture of an adorable dog or cat by midnight on Friday of the first week of class.

Chapman University's Academic Integrity Policy *required statement*

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 review the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity.

Chapman University's Students with Disabilities Policy *required statement*

Students who seek an accommodation of a disability or medical condition to participate in the class must contact the Office of Disability Services and follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s) of any granted accommodations. This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized. Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516-4520 or DS@chapman.edu if you have questions regarding this process, or for information and to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive.
<https://www.chapman.edu/students/health-and-safety/disability-services/policy.aspx>

Chapman University's Anti-Discrimination Policy *required statement*

Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity, including of backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy. Please review the full description of the 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.