

Christianity and Social Justice

Political Science 300, Section A, TR 1:00-2:15pm

DAV 307

Instructor: Professor Russell Arben Fox

Office and Office Hours: Davis 313; MTRF 3:00pm-4:30pm and by appointment

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The Topic:

This course is designed to introduce you to the wide range of social issues that can be connected with the ideal of “justice.” Moreover, it will do so in connection with the Christian tradition—both as a source of insight into the meaning of justice, and how to realize it, as well as a rival to it. Hence, this course will involve the study of particular ideas, their application, and criticisms of them. It satisfies the Perspectives general education credit for Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Most of us think of justice in fairly simple terms: it means, we suppose, setting things right, giving people what they deserve, apportioning what individuals or their actions merit. But all of those above terms can be contested: what is “right,” after all, and who decided it was in the first place? Why do some people “deserve” more than others, or is that ever the case? Are their different types of “merit,” or should the whole notion of “earning” a certain outcome be abandoned in certain circumstances? These are hard questions, and you will not be expected in this class to come to a mastery of them—political and moral thinkers have struggled with these issues for millennia. However, you will be expected to develop at least tentative opinions about them, through doing your reading, attending lectures, taking notes, and thinking hard about what you learn. You will also be expected to put those thoughts down on paper, in the form of several short writing assignments which you will be asked to turn in throughout the semester.

As this is a Christian university, and as a great deal of the popular understanding of justice in the Western world has been informed by the long legacy of Christian thought and practice as well, it seems entirely appropriate to use Christian arguments about “social justice” (meaning just relations within society, not between individuals or in general) as a hook upon which to hang our observations, debates, and inquiries. However, we will not be approaching this issue by way of the direct examination of Christian texts. Rather, we will divide the semester roughly in half. The first half will look at the concept of justice abstractly, as a secular philosophy (one which is relevant to both liberal and conservative political arguments). The second section will consider how the notion of justice as expressed in the Bible and in Christianity generally might be seen to apply to both diagnosing and responding to social problems today, particularly the terrible problem of poverty both in the United States and in many less-developed nations around the world.

The Instructor:

That’s me. My name, office phone number and office e-mail are included at the top of this sheet. Please make use of my office hours if you have a question or concern, or send me an e-mail message.

The Reading:

There are four required books for this course, each of which primarily relate to one of the three main segments of the course. They are:

Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009)—hereafter “*Justice*”

Justice: A Reader, Michael J. Sandel, ed. (Oxford, 2007)—hereafter “*JAC*”

Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Thomas Nelson, 2005)—hereafter “*RCAH*”

Ronald J. Sider, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America* (Baker Books, 2007)—hereafter “*JG*”

There will also be several reading that you will find posted on Moodle and which you will be expected to read throughout the class, as they come up during the semester. These readings (identified in the schedule by their authors) are taken from the following books and collections, in alphabetical order:

Aristotle, “Types of Justice,” from *Justice: An Anthology*, Louis P. Pojman, ed. (Pearson, 2006); Friedrich Hayek, “The Mirage of Social Justice,” from *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, Jerry Z. Muller, ed. (Princeton University Press, 1997); David Hume, “Of Justice,” from *Social Justice*, Matthew Clayton, Andrew Williams, eds. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Russell Kirk, “The Problem of Social Justice,” from *Ideological Voices: An Anthology in Modern Political Ideas*, Paul Schumaker, Dwight C. Kiel, Thomas W. Heilke, eds. (McGraw Hill, 1997); John Locke, “Of Property,” from *Social Justice*, Matthew Clayton, Andrew Williams, eds. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Stephen Nathanson, “Three Views,” “The Case for Libertarian Capitalism,” and “Socialism and the Critique of Capitalism,” from *Economic Justice* (Pearson, 1998); and Plato, “Justice as Harmony in the Soul and State,” from *Justice: An Anthology*, Louis P. Pojman, ed. (Pearson, 2006).

The Schedule:

Follow this schedule closely. Every class period has some sort of reading assignment which you should complete before coming to class.

Tuesday, August 24—first day of class; course introduction

Thursday, August 26—*Justice*, 3-30; moral dilemmas and justice

Tuesday, August 31—Plato and Aristotle readings; classical secular approaches to justice

Thursday, September 2—professor attending a professional conference; no class

Tuesday, September 7—Locke and Hume readings; modern secular approaches to justice (questions for first response paper handed out)

Thursday, September 9—professor attending a professional conference; no class

Tuesday, September 14—*Justice*, 31-57, and *JAR*, 3-14; utilitarianism and justice

Thursday, September 16—*Justice*, 58-74, and *JAR*, 60-71; libertarianism and justice

Tuesday, September 21—*JAR*, 127-156; the debate between utilitarianism and libertarianism (first response paper due)

Thursday, September 23—*Justice*, 140-166, and *JAR*, 203-221; egalitarianism and justice

Tuesday, September 28—*JAR*, 223-235; the debate between libertarianism and egalitarianism (questions for second response paper handed out)

Thursday, September 30—*Justice*, 184-207, and *JAR*, 301-313; virtue, merit, desert, and justice

Tuesday, October 5–*Justice*, 244-269, and *JAR*, 328-342; communitarianism and justice
Thursday, October 7–*JAR*, 343-377; the debate between egalitarianism and communitarianism
(questions for third response paper handed out)

Tuesday, October 12–Kirk and Hayek readings; conservatism and social justice
(second response paper due)
Thursday, October 14–midterm examination

Tuesday, October 19–Nathanson reading; the particulars of economic justice
(third response paper due)
Thursday, October 21–fall break; no class

Tuesday, October 26–*RCAH*, 1-38, and *JG*, 31-56; poverty and affluence in America and the world
Thursday, October 28–*RCAH*, 41-88; the Biblical definition of and responses to poverty
(questions for fourth response paper handed out)

Tuesday, November 2–*RCAH*, 89-118; the Bible on social evil and social justice
Thursday, November 4–*RCAH*, 133-179; the structures of poverty and wealth

Tuesday, November 9–*RCAH*, 183-217; personal responses to poverty
Thursday, November 11–*RCAH*, 219-267; structural responses to poverty
(fourth response paper due)

Tuesday, November 16–*JG*, 93-118, combined response to poverty in the United States
(questions for fifth response paper handed out)
Thursday, November 18–*JG*, 121-150; jobs and justice

Tuesday, November 23–*JG*, 151-171; families and justice
Thursday, November 25–Thanksgiving Day holiday; no class

Tuesday, November 30–*JG*, 225-252; welfare and justice
(fifth response paper due)
Thursday, December 2–*JG*, 253-289; other issues of justice confronting the poor

Tuesday, December 7–professor attending a professional conference; no class
Thursday, December 9–last day of class; course review

Tuesday, December 14, 1:00pm–final examination

The Grades:

Grading in this course will follow a strict 100-point scale:

91 - 100	= A
81 - 90	= B
71 - 80	= C
60 - 70	= D
59 and below	= let's not talk about that, shall we?

In calculating the grades, however, I throw in a 10-point margin for error, as the following scale shows:

Midterm exam	25 points
Response papers	50 points (50 points each)
Final exam	35 points
Total:	110 points

So, while grades will be distributed according to the 100-point scale listed above, there is actually 110 points possible in this class. Therefore, it is technically possible to, for example, blow off all the response papers entirely and still earn a respectable C. I wouldn't recommend trying that though! This margin exists to provide cover for those inevitable bad days and mistakes that plague us all. Don't abuse it.

The *response papers* are five medium-length critical essays (about 4-6 pages in length, typed, double-spaced) that you will write over this semester. Four times this semester, as indicated on the class schedule, I will hand out in class a couple of brief questions relevant to some interesting or controversial point for discussion which came up in that day's assigned reading. You will choose **ONE** of those questions, and write a critical response to it, to be turned in two weeks later. No library or outside research will be necessary; this will solely be a test of your ability to think about, analyze, and write carefully and succinctly about a particular topic, and then express an opinion about it. These response papers will be worth up to 10 points each; please note that **late essays are UNACCEPTABLE, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies that you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for, or scheduling conflicts which you work out with me MORE THAN A WEEK in advance.** Use every writing resource available to you in working on these papers, as **spelling, grammar, format, and internal structure will all most DEFINITELY count.**

The *midterm examination* will include a multiple choice section (fifteen questions of which you will choose to answer ten, worth 1 point each, for a total of 10 possible points), a short answer section (ten questions of which you choose to answer five, worth 2 points each, for a total of 10 possible points), and an essay question (worth a possible 5 points, for an overall total of 25 points for the exam). The exam will only address material that we will have covered in the previous section of the course. The multiple choice questions will deal with the relatively few specific names, places, and dates which I have emphasized as significant for this course. The short answer questions will be fairly specific, only requiring a sentence or two to answer. The essay question will likely require two or three paragraphs to adequately answer the question. The *final examination* will differ only in that, in addition to the first essay question, there will be a longer, 10-point question, which will be *comprehensive*. As with the writing assignments, please note that **exams CANNOT be made up, the SOLE exception being for hospital stays or other emergencies which you can provide SIGNED DOCUMENTATION for, or scheduling conflicts which you work out with me MORE THAN A WEEK in advance.**

Four Declarations:

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, accommodations may be made for any student who notifies me of their needs. **It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention**, as I am not allowed to ask about such matters. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations should talk to me in order to work out the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency.

I am sympathetic to those who suffer any sort of family emergency and/or tragedy during this semester, and I am frequently open to working out alternative ways of completing assignments when responsibilities prevent you from attending class and so forth. That being said, it must be understood that **life goes on**, and so does this course. Funerals or prolonged hospital stays for loved ones, while clearly and properly demanding of one's time and energy, are **NOT** an acceptable excuse for ignoring class expectations, policies, or grading; if it appears you must make a choice between family obligations and class assignments, **please inform me as soon as possible**, rather than simply assuming that I will be understanding and let things slide out of sympathy after the fact, because I probably won't.

The instructor (again, that's me) reserves the right, for the sake of maintaining class discipline and making certain an environment conducive to hearing and participating in the lectures and discussion, to either take away for the duration of the class any cell phones, Ipods, Blackberries, pagers, or any other kind of electronic communications or text-messaging device. I **REALLY** don't want to have to enforce this, because doing so is embarrassing and a hassle, but I will if I have to, for the sake of those students who are trying to follow along and get something out of class. Let's make it easy: simply turn off your cell phones, or turn them to silent, while in the classroom, and if you have an important call you somehow can't wait a half-hour or before returning, just politely excuse yourself.

It should go without saying that **ANY** sort of academic dishonesty is detrimental to both your own education and my ability to fairly and sympathetically administer and grade this class. Hence, **any cheating, plagiarism, fabrication or falsification of data or communications, or other general malfeasance that I verify will potentially result in an automatic ZERO ("0") for the assignment or test in question, depending on the gravity of the offense**. In order to enforce this policy, I reserve the right to take whatever steps I deem appropriate, including banning cell phones and other electronic implements during test-taking, changing the wording or deadlines of assignments (with due notice), and so forth. You're grown-ups by now, so you consider the odds, and the consequences. If you feel you need more guidance or specifications on this policy, see the attached **HONOR CODE** sheet.