

Christianity and Social Justice

**Political Science 250, Section A, MWF 11:00-11:50am
Davis 109B**

Instructor: Professor Russell Arben Fox

Office and Office Hours: Davis 313; TRF 3:00pm-5:00pm and by appointment

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The Course Description:

This course deals with two topics: the notion of 'justice' in both social and political matters, and the contribution which the Christian tradition has historically made and continues to make in regards to the pursuit of justice in those same social and political matters. The focus will be on familiarizing students with the perspectives and tools (ranging from the economic to the philosophical) necessary for them to better formulate a definition of justice, consider whatever value Christian ideas may provide to assessing any number of social and political problems (including but not limited to poverty, education, the environment, and more), and thereby craft just responses to them. Part of this will involve introducing students to hands-on, local issues relevant to understanding what a just economy, lifestyle, and community may be. As such, the outcomes of this course are both theoretical and practical.

The University Mission Statement:

The mission of Friends University, a Christian university of Quaker heritage, is to equip students to honor God and serve others by integrating their intellectual, spiritual, and professional lives.

The General Education Outcome Category:

This course satisfies the Personal and Social Responsibility general education outcome requirement, which is defined as follows:

*Students will be able to develop and apply a combination of **knowledge** and **skills** to demonstrate an understanding of social responsibility and ethical behaviour. Furthermore, students will be able to **act** on this understanding of social responsibility and ethical behaviour to others in one's local, national, or global **community**, and contribute positively via leadership, **collaboration**, or other direct action.*

For this course, this outcome requirement will be broken down as follows:

Knowledge: *Define and analyze a real-world problem from an ethical perspective.* This element of the outcome requirement will be measured through standard examinations (multiple-choice, short answer, and essay, based mostly upon the readings in the Pojman textbook, for the first examination, and from the Skillen textbook, for the second examination) that will assess your mastery of the assigned information about the different notions of justice, and the different applications of those notions, in diverse contexts.

Skills: *Situate the problem in the context of other contemporary problems.* This element of the outcome requirement will be measured through multiple short writing assignments (based upon questions taken, at different times during the semester, from all three textbooks, and which will be graded according to the appropriate rubric) that will assess your awareness of the problems

confronting those who seek to understand what would be the just response to a particular political issue, and how those political issues are connected.

Action, Collaboration, and Community: *Describe how the project meaningfully serves a community (e.g., local, national, global) within an ethical framework, Participate meaningfully in the project, and Present and communicate the project and ethical framework.* These elements of the outcome requirements will be measured through the students involvement with a presentation, project, event, or organization that is in one way or another connected to a struggle over the meaning and implementation of justice in regards to some political issue within our local, state, or national community. This involvement will be assessed through both individual and group written responses (which will be graded according to the appropriate rubric), and also through presentations—again, both individual and group—which the student will give to class which provide their personal opinion about, and take questions about, their involvement.

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 three required books for this course. They are:

Louis P. Pojman, *Justice* (Pearson, 2006)

Glenn Tinder, *The Political Meaning of Christianity* (HarperCollins, 1989)

James W. Skillen, *In Pursuit of Justice* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)

There will also be several reading that you will find posted on Moodle and be expected to read throughout the class, as they come up during the semester.

The Schedule:

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

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

Friday, August 26—Pojman, 1-14; the basic terms of justice

Monday, August 29—Pojman, 16-31; justice as desert

Wednesday, August 31—Plato, Moodle file; justice as harmony

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

Monday, September 5—Labor Day holiday; no class

Wednesday, September 7—Hobbes, Moodle file; justice as a contract
(Response paper questions handed out)

Friday, September 9—Hume, Moodle file; justice as convention

Monday, September 12—Pojman, 33-43; liberty and justice

Wednesday, September 14—Pojman, 44-56; fairness and justice

(Response papers due)

Friday, September 16–Pojman, 58-73; particularity and justice

Monday, September 19–Pojman, 92-107; justice and universal rights

Wednesday, September 21–professor giving local presentation; no class

Friday, September 23–Barry, Moodle file; defending universal justice

Monday, September 26–Walzer, Moodle file; against universal justice

Wednesday, September 28–Hayek, Moodle file; against social justice

Friday, September 30–catch-up and review day

(any remaining first Justice activity papers must be turned in)

Monday, October 3–midterm examination #1

Wednesday, October 5–Heschel, Moodle file; Biblical conceptions of justice

Friday, October 7–Burghardt, Moodle file; Catholic conceptions of justice

Monday, October 10–Keller, Moodle file; Protestant conceptions of justice

(Response paper questions handed out)

Wednesday, October 12–Skillen, 1-17; Christian-democratic approaches to social justice

Friday, October 14–Fall Break; no class

Monday, October 17–Skillen, 19-40; Christianity and civil society

(Response papers due)

Wednesday, October 19–Skillen, 41-58; Christianity and human progress

Friday, October 21–Skillen, 59-75; Christian-democratic approaches to welfare

Monday, October 24–Skillen, 77-92; Christian-democratic approaches to racial justice

Wednesday, October 26–Skillen, 93-109; Christian-democratic approaches to education

Friday, October 28–Skillen, 111-127; Christian-democratic approaches nature

Monday, October 31–Hayek, Kim, Light, Moodle files; Christian-democratic approaches to the city

(Response papers questions handed out)

Wednesday, November 2–Skillen, 129-146; Christian-democratic approaches to democratic politics

Friday, November 4–catch-up and review day

(any remaining second Justice activity papers must be turned in)

Monday, November 7–midterm examination #2

(Response papers due)

Wednesday, November 9–election postmortem

Friday, November 11–Tinder, 7-25; prophecy and individuality

Monday, November 14–Tinder, 26-52; the individual in Christianity

Wednesday, November 16–Tinder, 53-73; community, justice, and hope

Friday, November 18–Tinder, 73-99; the individual, the church, and hope

Monday, November 21–Tinder, 101-125; individuality, community, and liberty

Wednesday, November 23–Thanksgiving holiday break; no class

Friday, November 27–Thanksgiving holiday break; no class

Monday, November 28–Tinder, 125-149; tolerance and the power of the state

Wednesday, November 30–Tinder, 151-172; society and radical justice
(Response paper questions handed out)

Friday, December 2–Tinder, 172-195; inequality, capitalism, and society

Monday, December 5–Tinder, 197-211; politics and civil disobedience

Wednesday, December 7–Tinder, 211-243; mediation, suffering, and the world
(Response papers due)

Friday, December 9–last day of class; course conclusion

(any remaining third Justice activity papers must be turned in)

Tuesday, December 13, 10:00am–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 #1	20 points
Midterm exam #2	20 points
Response papers	20 points (up to 5 points each)
Justice activities reflection papers	15 points (up to 5 points each)
Justice activities presentations	10 points (up to 5 points each)
Final exam	25 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 short writing assignments (about 4 pages in length, typed, double-spaced) that you will write over this semester. You will be expected to write **FOUR** responses. Four times this semester I will hand out in class a specific question on the reading material assigned for that day; you will have a week to formulate your ideas, write a response to the question I ask, and turn the results into me. No research will be necessary or expected, and the only sources which should be cited in these response are the page number for quotations from the reading material which the question I have handed out is about. The questions will not be analytic research questions, but rather straightforward response ones: making use of what you have learned in the class from the reading and the lectures, give me what you think to be an informed answer to what I have asked. These response papers will be worth up to 5 points each (based on the attached rubric); 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.**

Justice activities reflection papers and presentations are a series of short papers (about 3 pages in length, typed, double-spaced) that will be written and handed in following the students participation in or attendance at events, presentations, or organizations that involve themselves in or discuss an issue relevant to the question of social justice, and then also the students presentation of those papers. The presentations will be expected to take no more than five minutes, should involve a brief description of the event, organization, or activity, and need to make reference to the conclusions formed or the feelings had by the students following their involvement, as described in their papers. The plan is that the presentations **WILL** take place on the same day that the papers are handed in—this can take place on any class day—though if multiple students all turn in papers at once, I may elect to spread out their presentations over a couple of class periods. At least **ONE** paper must be turned in by Friday, September 30, and Friday, November 4. If you miss these deadlines than the missed opportunity to turn in a papers **CANNOT BE MADE UP.** I will make students aware of speakers, demonstrations, organizations, and activities throughout the class, as well as open up the class to input regarding such activities regularly. While students will have the opportunity to write three Justice activity responses, they will only be expected to provide presentations on **TWO** of them, meaning that they could either put it off when they had one of their first papers in, or get the assignment completed and not have to present their final paper. The papers will be worth up to 5 points each (based on the attached rubric). Also, **ONE** of the three papers is expected to be **collaborative**, meaning that more than one student attended or participated in the same activity or event, and they worked together on the written response and will give the presentation together. The other **TWO** papers will have to be individual work. Once again, 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* and *final examinations* will be made up of multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and essay questions. The specific make-up of each exam will vary based on the content of the previous section of the course. 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.**

The Declarations and Warnings:

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.

For the sake of maintaining class discipline and making certain an environment conducive to hearing and participating in the lectures and discussion exists for all students in the class, **both individually and collectively**, there will be **NO** laptops allowed in this classroom without explicit arrangements being made with me in accordance with university access policies. Moreover, I reserve the right to either take away for the duration of the class cell phones, iPods, or any other kind of electronic communications or text-messaging device, or ask those who have such to leave the classroom. I **REALLY** don't want to have to enforce this, because doing so is 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 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 other general malfeasance that I verify will result in an automatic ZERO ("0") for the assignment or test in question, and potentially the ENTIRE COURSE, 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 deadlines of assignments (with due notice), and so forth. You're grown-ups by now, so you consider the consequences. If you feel you need more guidance or specifications on this policy, please just check the Friends University **HONOR CODE** online.