

Patterns and Practice of Christian Justice

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Spring 2009
Schlegel 326
894-2284

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly. . . (Micah 6:8)

Course description:

This course begins with a challenge and a problem. The challenge, posed here by Micah, is to do justice. The problem is the “seeming abstractness, instability and variety of the ideals of justice.”¹ What, then, does “justice” mean, and what are the prospects for “doing justly” in society? This course proposes one main goal through its investigation of both philosophical and theological theories of justice, namely, to examine the resources of Christianity for brokering social justice in a broken society.

Objectives:

1. Historical dialogue. You will evaluate three philosophical approaches to justice that are forms of liberalism, with three approaches that are forms of Christian theology and assess each approach.
2. Ethical Reflection. You will “try on” each theory and discern the principles, traditions, authoritative sources, and moral norms that inform its understanding of justice and how to do it well. How do philosophical and theological commitments inform our moral behavior?
3. Social commentary. You will investigate the ideals and patterns of justice in society, paying particular attention to the contributions of Christian claims and insights to public policy discussions.

Requirements:

1. Preparation and participation. You are expected to read the assigned material, attend class regularly and participate regularly in the class discussion. Your participation should be thoughtful and informed, reflecting your engagement of the materials under review. (10%)
2. Essay exam. A classroom essay examination will be administered after the completion of Part One of the class schedule. (30%)
3. Group presentation. You will be assigned to one of three work groups on a current issue of social justice. The purpose of the group presentation is to illuminate faithful and just responses to the issue that affirm theological particularity and can guide public policy. The work group will meet outside of class throughout the semester and will present in a class session. (30%)
4. Final essay. You will write a ten-page position paper, on a social justice issue that intertwines the charge from Micah 6:8, with the pedagogical model of dialogue, reflection and commentary outlined in the course objectives. In other words, what does it mean to you “to do justly” in reference to terrorism, gay marriage, or the cloning of human embryos, for example? How do you consult Christian tradition(s) for moral guidance about justice? {Students in advanced degree programs will consult with the instructor early in the course about appropriate additional work.} (30%)

Required Texts:

Duncan B. Forrester, Christian Justice and Public Policy (1997)
Stanley Grenz, editor, Beyond Foundationalism (2001)
Virginia Held, editor, Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics (1995)
Karen Lebacqz, Six Theories of Justice (1986)

¹ Hugo A. Bedau, editor, Justice and Equality (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1971), 1

Class Schedule:

February 5: Introduction to the course

Section I: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context

February 10: Theology in the Postmodern Situation
Reading:
Grenz, chapters 1 & 2

February 12: Theology's Sources
Reading:
Grenz, chapter 3

February 17: Theology's Sources
Reading:
Grenz, chapter 4

February 19: Theology's Sources
Reading:
Grenz, chapter 5

February 24: Theology's Focal Motifs
Reading:
Grenz, chapter 6

February 26: Theology's Focal Motifs
Reading:
Grenz, chapters 7 & 8

Section II: A Survey of Six Influential Theories of Justice

March 3: Three Liberal Alternatives
Reading:
Lebacqz, chapters 1 & 2

March 5: Liberal and Theological Alternatives
Reading:
Lebacqz, chapters 3 & 4

March 10: Three Theological Alternatives
Reading:
Lebacqz, chapters 5 & 6, conclusion

Section III: Christian Justice and Public Policy

March 12: Justice in Dispute
Reading:
Forrester, chapters 1 & 2

March 17: Policies and Practices
Reading:
Forrester, chapters 3 & 4

RESEARCH AND STUDY WEEK (3/23-3/27)

- March 31: Theories and Theologies
Reading:
Forrester, chapters 5 & 6
- April 2: Theologies and Theological Fragments
Reading:
Forrester, chapters 7 & 8
- April 7: Theological Fragments
Reading:
Forrester, chapters 9, 10, & 11

Section IV: Justice and Care

- April 14: Delineations of Care
Reading:
Held, chapters 1, 2, & 3
- April 16: Doubts and Reservations
Reading:
Held, chapters 4 & 5
- April 21: Extensions and Affirmations
Reading:
Held, chapters 6 & 7
- April 23: Moral Epistemologies
Reading:
Held, chapters 8 & 9
- April 28: New Integrations
Reading:
Held, chapters 10 & 11

Section V: Student Presentations

- April 30: Group 1
4:30-5:05
- Group 2
5:10-5:45
- May 5: Group 3
4:30-5:05
- Group 4
5:10-5:45

Section VI: Conclusion

- May 7: Final Matters