

RLGS 2401 Social Justice in a Global Context:

Theory and Practice



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Summary

Topics will include ideas and theories of social justice, beginning with the ancient Hebrews and Greeks and running up through the modern era. The religious sources of these ideas, drawn primarily from the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will be profiled. Emphasis will be placed on “foundational issues”, such as the nature of justice itself, general theories of justice, the historical relationship between religious authority and secular law, the conflict between “is” and “ought” (i.e., cultural values versus categorical obligations), voluntary charity and enforced political mandates, theory and practice of human rights. This course will be a “hybrid course,” as defined by the university’s Center for Teaching and Learning, that will meet for the most part in a regular classroom and the other half through online collaboration and presentations which will involve some customized work directly with the instructor.

Course Objectives

- To acquire a relatively sophisticated understanding of the relationship between philosophical theories of justice, particularly as they are informed by religious traditions and theological views, and “social justice” per se.
- To understand what social justice means in a global context.
- To provide a deeper understanding of how theories of social justice function in specific social and cultural contexts.

Learning Outcomes

- To acquire a relatively sophisticated understanding of the relationship between theories of justice and social justice, particularly as they are informed by religious traditions and theological views as well as philosophical, political, and legal perspectives.
- To understand what social justice means in an international context with special attention to global issues of immigration, human trafficking, refugees, etc.
- To provide a deeper understanding of how theories of social justice function in specific social and cultural contexts
- To demonstrate the ability to create in written, oral or any other performance medium (e.g., art, music, dance, etc.) or interpret (e.g., critical analysis) texts, ideas, or artifacts.
- To identify and analyze the connections between texts, ideas, or cultural artifacts and the human experience.

Texts

Title	Author	Publisher	Date of Publication	ISBN
<i>A Brief History of Social Justice</i>	David Johnston	Wiley-Blackwell	2011	10:1405155779
<i>Principles of Social Justice</i>	David Miller	Harvard University Press	2001	10:067400714X
<i>Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry</i>	Michael Ignatieff	Princeton University Press	2003	10:0691114749
<i>Justice and Rights: Christian and Muslim Perspectives</i>	Michael Igrave	Georgetown University Press	2009	10:1589014898
<i>Debating Immigration</i>	Carol Swain	Cambridge University Press	2007	10:0521698669

Outline and Readings

In Class

Week I. The Problem of Justice I. Read: Johnston, first half.

Week II. The Problem of Justice II. Read: Johnston, second half.

Week III. The Religious Framework for the Theory of Social Justice: Jewish Origins, Christian, Islamic. Read Igrave.

Week IV. Types and Applications of Justice I: Contemporary Analytical Perspectives. Read: Miller, first half

WEEK V. Types and Applications of Justice II: Contemporary Analytical Perspectives. Read: Miller, second half.

Online

WEEK VI. Justice, Human Rights, and Human Dignity. Read: Handout.

WEEK VII. The Notion of “Human Rights” and the International Policy Mandate. Read: Ignatieff.

WEEK VIII. Immigration and the Global Humanitarian Mandate. Read Swain.

WEEK IX. Summary and Review.

WEEK X. Presentation of Online Projects.

Assignments

- 1) **Participation.** Participation for this course is defined as a) regular class attendance and participation in in-class discussions b) active involvement in and significant contribution to study groups c) posting and blogging on Blackboard as specified for the online portion of the course (weeks 6-10).
- 2) *Online collaborative research project* based on readings, discussions, and the study of social justice in action. Students will be required in the collaborative deliberations to develop both a profile and social critique of how these social justice theories work in terms of the cultural, political, and social characteristics of a particular culture, or national demography. Students will meet at least one hour per week outside of class for conversations, or on a discussion board, regarding this collaborative work. The collaborative work will involve (1) at least one visit to a social justice site that is either physically present in the Denver area, or for which key personnel can be accessed easily and communicated with through social media and/or digital communications (2) a write-up and presentation using online resources and/or multi-media to the other students in the class. For a more detailed description of this assignment, see below.
- 3) *Two short papers.* The two papers should summarize and critique the theories of justice to date as presented in the assigned readings and during class sessions. The first paper is due no later than Tuesday, February 5 at 11 p.m. The second paper is due no later than Tuesday, March 5 at 11 p.m. EACH paper should be between 700 and 1000 words.
- 4) *Take-home final examination* (to be distributed the last week of class).

Grading

The grade will be distributed as follows: participation (20%) research project (20%), short papers (30%), final examination (30%).

Online collaborative research project

Students will be assigned to study groups in the class the first week. They must meet physically during the first week – either right after class or no later than the weekend – to discuss and organize a strategy for the project. A discussion forum on Blackboard will be provided for each group.

During the first two weeks, but absolutely NO LATER THAN January 23, students will agree on a general topic relating to social justice in a global context that they wish to investigate. The topic should be chosen from following options: immigration, human trafficking; factory labor and working conditions; climate change or other global environmental issues; religious liberty and/or freedom of speech; human rights; genocide; ethnic, gender and gender identity, or religious oppression and discrimination; taxation, distribution of wealth, and other forms of economic justice. If a group wants to choose a topic that does not fit into the foregoing list, they should do the following: write an approximately 500-word proposal emailed to the instructor no later than April 3 that (1) names and describes in familiar terminology the topic (2) lists and explains the basic and relevant issues of social justice in a global context implied by the topic (3) summarizes what organizations, institutions, and resources are available to investigate the topic completely and critically.

After they have chosen a topic, or had a proposal approved by the instructor, students will next select a “focus organization” (preferably a non-profit one) that addresses in some way, either exclusively or in part, the specific issue. Preferably, the organization should be a local one for which students can conduct a site visit. But if there is no organization in Denver, or metropolitan area, that deals with the issue, students may communicate through social and digital media directly with key personnel from the group. Simply accessing the website is not sufficient. A direct relationship with a key person must be established, and that person must agree in writing (e.g., through email) to work with the group.

During the week of March 11-15, students will make presentations on the Blackboard course container of their project. Each group will be assigned a specific day when the presentation has to go up.

The presentation must consist of an 800-1200 word report in the blog section of the Blackboard course container that addresses in a detailed way the following questions: 1) how does this topic qualify as an issue of “social justice in a global context”? 2) what forms of reasoning and rhetoric, as well as policy strategies, do advocates and activists regarding this issue generally employ as a whole to “do justice” in a global context 3) what philosophical, ethical, religious, and other theoretical resources drawn from the course material would *you yourself* draw upon to do justice in a similar context? 4) what would be your basic theoretical rationale to accomplish your aims in 3?

Finally, the group must also post in the course container a group discussion, reacting to each other’s written presentation and responding conversationally to all of the 4 questions listed in the previous paragraph. The discussion can either be a video or an audio recording. It should not be written.

Online Segment of the Course

This course is defined as a “hybrid course,” meaning that part of the course meets in class, and part is conducted solely online. The online portion is conducted through Blackboard and follows certain protocols and expectations set by the university’s Center for Teaching and Learning, which oversees digital instruction.

The first five weeks the class will meet at the specified class hour, beginning Wednesday at 4 p.m. From week 6 onward (or starting officially on the morning of Monday, February 11) the course will be solely online, and there will be no further face-to-face class meetings with the instructor. Students, however, still have the option of meeting for their study groups with each other in person, although they are still responsible for all the requirements on Blackboard stipulated for the online section.

A detailed outline and set of instructions for the online portion will be distributed electronically toward the end of April.

The technology requirements for completing the online portion are as follows:

- Access to a Broadband internet connection
- A browser compatible with the latest university version of Blackboard
- A functioning soundboard and audio software
- Skype software on your device with a user account