

*****DRAFT*****

Politics 2538A

Social Justice: The Just Society

Fall 2026

Tuesdays 1:30-3:20

Instructor:

Dr Elizabeth Finneron-Burns (efinnero@uwo.ca)

Office Hours: TBD

Course Outline

This course explores the question: what makes a society just? Must a society ensure equality in order to be just? What kind and for whom? The course attempts to answer these questions in the context of contemporary political issues including racism, sexism, global justice, historic injustice, immigration, and climate change. The focus will be on developing an understanding of the different answers to these questions, but also how to develop your own views of these matters: what do *you* think and, more importantly *why*? The emphasis throughout the course will be on critical review of the arguments provided in the readings and lectures.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- i. Understand and critically analyse key arguments with regard to theories of justice and equality
- ii. Read, understand, analyse, and evaluate academic literature in political theory.
- iii. Formulate your own considered opinions about various contemporary issues in political theory.

Course material will be delivered via lectures and readings. The lectures and readings are intended to complement each other. Lectures will sometimes reinforce what is discussed in the readings, and sometimes go beyond it. Likewise, readings may go into more depth about a topic than was possible to cover in the lectures. For that reason, it is essential that students both attend lectures *and* do the readings.

This year I will be offering students the opportunity to follow the course in a choice of two modalities. I will post pre-recorded videos and also give the lecture in person during class time on Tuesdays. You are welcome to follow the material solely online, solely in person, or both (but hopefully not neither!). Any time remaining at the end of the in person lectures will be for an optional discussion period where you can ask questions and/or discuss the material with your peers. Coming to the in person lecture does not commit you to staying for the discussion.

If you choose to attend the in-person lecture, please do so actively and politely to avoid distracting me and your fellow classmates. This means you should not (these are just a few examples from the last few years):

- Use your laptop for non-class-related purposes--it is distracting to others trying to pay attention. This includes:
 - doing crossword puzzles/wordle/etc
 - online shopping
 - scrolling social media
 - watching YouTube videos
 - doing work for another course
- Use your phone to text or scroll instagram, Twitter, etc.
- Watch TikTok videos
- Loudly show your neighbour the TikTok video you're watching
- Watch Netflix
- Read a novel
- Whisper/talk/giggle to your friends

I understand it's hard to pay attention for long periods of time, but you will not absorb the lecture material by osmosis simply by your body being present in the room. If you are not going to actively listen to the lecture, you might as well stay at home and watch the video.

Textbook

Katherine Smits, *Applying Political Theory*

Textbook is available at the UWO Bookstore and a free e-copy is available through the library.

Assessments

Tests (40% and 50%) - October 27 and December exam period

Multiple choice and/or short answer tests based on the readings and lectures. The midterm will cover material from September 22 - October 20 (inclusive). **The midterm is designated as ineligible for the absence without documentation.** The final will take place in the December exam period and cover material from November 3 - December 8 (inclusive).

All requests to write the make-up exam must go through academic counselling only and be for medical or compassionate reasons and not for workload or time management issues. **If you are accommodated by academic counselling, you do not need to email me because instructors are sent an automatic notification.**

Students with a formal accommodation to write the exam separately and/or with longer time must register with Accessible Education as soon as possible. If you miss their registration deadline, you will have to write the exam with the rest of the class where it will not be possible to provide any accommodations (private rooms, breaks, extra time, etc.).

Reflection Exercise (10%) - due December 6th at 11:59pm. There is no late penalty, but no assignments will be accepted after December 8th at 9am. Because this assessment

includes a flexible deadline, it is ineligible for the absence without documentation. This assessment can be submitted at any point during the term--you do not have to wait until December to submit it. In fact, you are encouraged to do so as soon as you know what topic you want to cover.

You will reflect on an issue or question about which you have changed your mind due to learning more about political theory. You can pick any topic/question covered in the course. It could be that you have come to completely change your opinion, or maybe you have the same opinion but for different reasons. Either way, in the assignment, you should:

1. Explain what opinion you held before and why;
2. Explain how it has changed and why;
3. Give specific examples from the course material (lectures, readings, etc.) and why you found it persuasive enough to change your view.

Your reflection can take a variety of formats so be creative (if you want to - essays are also fine). Previous students have done:

1. A 250-500 word essay
2. A short video or audio presentation
3. A get ready with me video
4. A cartoon
5. A meme
6. A podcast

If you choose to do a cartoon or meme, AI can be used to generate the pictures/artwork, but the ideas/text must be your own.

Missed/Late Work

If you miss an exam (including a make up exam), you will receive 0% unless you have received consideration from academic counselling. If you are accommodated by academic counselling, you do not need to email me because instructors are sent an automatic notification from the counsellors.

Students who miss the make up exam (with approval of academic counselling) will write a cumulative final exam worth 90% of their mark.

Having the “flexibility with assignment deadlines” accommodation does not apply to the date you write the tests.

All make up and extension requests must be made through Academic Counselling.

Grade 'Bumps' & Extra Credit

I understand that many of you are seeking high marks to gain entry into Ivey, law school, graduate school, or for scholarships. However, I do not provide grade bumps, make-up work, or extra credit. Final grades reflect the work completed during the semester and these requests are not fair to those students who accept their grade and are competing for the same opportunities.

Grade Adjustments

In order to ensure that comparable standards are applied in political science courses, the Department may require instructors to adjust final marks to conform to Departmental guidelines. Departmental policy is that final marks ending in 0.45 will be rounded up to the nearest whole number--e.g., a student earning 70.45% will receive a final mark of 71% and a student earning 70.44% will receive a final mark of 70%.

Inclusivity

The course tackles topics that may be controversial and personal to some students. Members of this class are from a variety of different academic backgrounds, races, religions, etc., so whilst robust debate is encouraged, it must be done respectfully. If there are circumstances that might affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss strategies to accommodate your needs. This includes discussing whether some topics on the syllabus are particularly sensitive for you.

Email Etiquette

I do my best to respond to emails in a timely way, despite the high volume I receive. However, I do not always check my email in the evenings or on the weekends. You are welcome to email me at your convenience, but should not expect a response during those times (but there might be a welcome surprise if I do check and am able to respond at that time). You're strongly advised not to wait until the night before an assignment/exam to email with questions. If I have not responded within 48 business hours, feel free to send me a nudge with the following caveat. Due to the high volume of emails involved in a large course like this, I don't respond to emails that:

1. Ask questions that are answered in this syllabus (e.g., "can I use an undocumented absence on the midterm?").
2. Ask questions that were already explained in a course-wide email (e.g., "I know you emailed saying that there is an extension on the assignment but I just wanted to check that there's an extension on the assignment").
3. Request grade bumps or extra credit (e.g., "I need an 80% average to get into Ivey, so would you consider rounding my mark up by 2%?")

Please also include POLISCI 2538 in the subject line so I know to which course you are referring since I teach over 200 students in more than one class each term.

SCHEDULE

September 15 – Intro to the Course

September 22 - Who gets justice?

No readings.

September 29 - Global poverty & inequality

Applying Political Theory, ch. 11

James Christensen, *Global Justice*, ch. 3 and 4

October 6 - Immigration & Refugees

James Christensen, *Global Justice*, ch. 6

Ethics and World Politics, ch. 20

October 13 - READING WEEK

October 20 - Just war?

James Christensen, *Global Justice*, ch. 9

Applying Political Theory, ch. 12

October 27 – Midterm Test

November 3 – Crime and Punishment

Catriona McKinnon, *Issues in Political Theory*, ch. 3

Introducing Political Philosophy: A Policy-Driven Approach, ch. 11

November 10 – Race & racism

Tommie Shelby, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ch. 18

Applying Political Theory, ch. 4

November 17– Sex & sexism

Debra Satz, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ch. 19

Applying Political Theory, ch. 5

November 24 – Animals and the Environment

Axel Gosseries, *What is Intergenerational Justice?* Ch. 4

Will Abel, Elizabeth Kahn, Andrew Walton & Tom Parr, *Introducing Political Philosophy: A Policy-Driven Approach*, ch. 12

December 1 – Future Generations & Reparations for Past Injustices

Jeff Spinner-Halev, *Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ch. 17

Axel Gosseries, *What is Intergenerational Justice?* ch. 3

December 8 – Multiculturalism, Religion & Politics

Applying Political Theory, ch. 3

This is Political Philosophy, ch. 9