**PHIL 354 Economic Justice Position Paper Assignment #1**

**Due date:** Friday, October 19, by email, by 10AM.

**Basic assignment:** Write a 6-9 page paper (double-spaced, one-inch margins, normal type size) explaining and defending your own conception of economic justice. You might think of it as a manifesto – but a well-reasoned one, with a minimum of vague slogans and with as much clear and careful thinking as you can pack in.

**Some guidelines:**

1. This is not a research paper. You do not need to read anything but the assigned class readings.

2. I am asking you to express your own personal opinion (something you may have been taught to regard as too subjective or as inappropriate for academic work). But I am also asking you to subject your opinion to a careful, critical examination before you express it. You may find that your opinion changes in the course of this examination. In particular, I want you to examine carefully the arguments and reasons offered by those whose opinions are opposed to your own, and to show in your paper that you have given those reasons and arguments a fair hearing. (See also #5 below.)

3. Be sure to present reasons in support of your position, not just a list of policies or principles you support. Try to find reasons that will have some chance of persuading those who disagree with you. (In other words, avoid "preaching to the choir", i.e., giving reasons that will only seem like good reasons to those who already agree with you.) This is hard. Do the best you can.

4. Focus on the issues or topics that are most important to you. But this is not supposed to be a paper on a specific issue (like living wages or health care). It is supposed to be an explanation and defense of your overall political position (like conservatism or liberalism or libertarianism or whatever). You may want to explain your position, in part, by explaining how it would address some of the issues of the day. But don’t neglect to explain the basic principles or values that lead you to approach those issues in the way that you do.

5. Devote a significant portion of your paper to considering and responding to political perspectives opposed to your own, as represented in the class readings so far. For example, if you are a modern ‘welfare-state’ liberal, then explain and respond to the concerns and objections that would be raised by a libertarian like Nozick. If you are a utilitarian, respond to the concerns and objections that would be raised by critics of that view like Rawls and Nozick. And so on. If space is in short supply, pick the one or two or three objections that you think are most important or challenging to your view, and focus on them. A thorough answer to one objection is better than superficial, unconvincing answers to several.

6. I will be evaluating your paper primarily by assessing how clearly you state your position and the reasoning behind it; how aware you are of the variety of possible alternatives and objections to your position that might come from other political perspectives; how accurately you have explained the arguments of those who disagree with you; and how cogent and thorough your replies to those arguments are. I will not be judging your paper on the basis of my opinion about the correctness of your position.