



Social Sciences Stream

The Social Sciences and the Christian World View (Friday)

Trust (Saturday)

Friday 16 (all day) and Saturday 17 March 2018 (morning through lunchtime)

Christopher Cox Room, New College, Holywell Street, Oxford

Senior convener: [Donald Hay](#) (Economics, Jesus College)

Student co-conveners: [Jieun Baek](#) (Public Policy), [Yi He](#) (Politics)

What does it mean to be human? How should societies be structured? How should we situate our Christian worldview within a pluralistic society?

How can postgraduates, postdocs, and academics at the University of Oxford approach philosophy and theology as Christians? What does it mean to respond to a Christian vocation and to honour God in university life?

The Social Sciences Stream is one of five disciplinary streams that make up Seeking Wisdom, the spring conference of Developing a Christian Mind. It includes law, business, and all other subjects in the University of Oxford Social Sciences Division. Past attendees are encouraged to come, listen to new talks, and take part in discussion with new attendees.

Friday March 16th

The Social Sciences and the Christian World View

Three sessions with break out groups to discuss the issues

9:00 am **Registration begins at New College in the North Undercroft with coffee & tea**

Three sessions with break out groups to discuss the issues

9:30 am **Social Scientific and Christian Understandings of Human Beings in Society** ([Donald Hay](#), Jesus College)

Comparing and contrasting Christian anthropology with evolutionary psychology, rational choice theory, and social theory

[PowerPoint slides available here](#)

[Outline available here](#)

11:00 am **Coffee & tea**

11.30 am **Social Ethics in the Social Sciences: Theological and Secular Approaches** ([Tom Simpson](#), Blavatnik School and Wadham)

In this session we explore the broad issue of how society should be structured. By the 'structure of society' is meant those laws and policies that govern how people interact with each other. The task of social science is avowedly descriptive, aiming to identify and understand how people interact. But it seldom stops there; accurate description is a precursor to intervention and change, through such policies. We address three questions. First, in what way does the practice of social science have implicit commitments about the way society should be structured? Second, is there a Christian view on how society should be structured, and if so, what is it? Third, what are the dominant secular proposals about how society should be structured, and what should a Christian make of them?

1:00 pm **Lunch in the Hall**

2:00 pm **Religion, Politics, and Pluralism** ([Paul Billingham](#), Christ Church, and [Steven Firmin](#), Lady Margaret Hall)

The session will be focused around two central themes, *respect* and *integrity*:

1. How do we show respect to our fellow citizens and colleagues in a pluralistic context, particularly when those citizens share different moral and religious commitments?
2. How do we maintain our theological integrity while also seeking to live peacefully with diverse citizens?

The session will be structured around two talks, **Rawlsian public reason** and **Religious responses**.

3:45 pm **Coffee & tea**

4:15 pm **The Challenges of Graduate Study in the Social Sciences**

Four current DPhil students reflect on their experiences as researchers in diverse areas of the Social Sciences: [Samuel Bruce](#) (Politics and International Relations), [Yeajin Yoon](#) (Public Policy), Luna Wang (Sociology), and [Yi He](#) (Politics) who will moderate the discussion.

The following events are joint with all streams at New College.

5:30 pm **Prayer in the Chapel**

6:00 pm **Drinks at the Bar**

6:45 pm **Dinner in the Hall**

Saturday March 17th

Trust

The programme for the whole morning is a round table on aspects of Trust in the Social Sciences, chaired by [Timothy Endicott](#) (former Dean of the Law School). Those contributing will be [Nigel Biggar](#) (Theology), [Grant Blank](#) (Oxford Internet Institute), [Ewan McKendrick](#) (Law), [Tom Simpson](#) (Philosophy and Public Policy), and [Stuart White](#) (Politics).

9:00 am **Registration begins at New College in the North Undercroft with coffee & tea**

9:15 am **First session begins**

11:00 am **Coffee & tea break**

1:00 pm **Lunch in the Hall**

Social scientists to sit together to continue the discussion over lunch

The second day of the DCM Social Science stream usually explores a topic that would be of interest across a range of social science disciplines. The proposal for 2018 is the subject of **trust**. Lack of trust in social institutions of all kinds is a common theme in the media. So it is widely reported that the public no longer trust the banks, other financial institutions, corporations, politicians, the police, the media, services provided by national and local government, and institutions of civil society such as the churches. Distrust of supra national institutions such as the European Commission, the UN, the IMF and the World Bank has also flourished in recent years.

Lack of trust can take two forms. One form is directed at individuals. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 it was commonplace to distrust bankers. Politicians have been distrusted for many

years, the complaint being that they are more interested in enhancing their influence and power than in governing justly for the public good. The complaint is that those involved in organizations are motivated by greed or power rather than service. The second form is a distrust of an institution itself. The electorate may believe that their particular democratic electoral system does not reliably deliver a fair result in an election: for example, where minority parties have received a significant number of votes, but a first past the post system fails to deliver any elected representatives. It is also alleged that corporations and financial institutions are so constituted and governed under the relevant company law that they cannot be trusted to treat employees, customers and suppliers fairly, since they are committed to pursuing only the interests of their shareholders.

The issue of trust has also generated a debate on what constitutes trust. Broadly speaking there are two variants of 'trust' as characteristics of social interactions. The first is where a person or an institution behaves in a 'trustworthy' manner because it is in their interests to do so. Thus a firm may be trusted in a market situation because it knows that the continuation of its business would be at risk if it were to be found to be cheating on its customers. 'Repeat' business is a very powerful tool for keeping the supplier on a path of rectitude. The danger of damaging a brand by 'bad behaviour' is a constant corrective. A problem arises where an institution or person believes that they can 'get away with it' to their own gain, thus trading corruptly on their reputation. This appears to have been commonplace in the financial sector before the crisis. If this is the motive for trustworthy behaviour then those with whom they interact must be wary if the social or market environment changes. The second variant (sometimes termed 'strong trust') is where the person or institution is trustworthy without any incentives to be so. In such instances, behaving well may bring real disadvantages or losses – finances or power – but those with responsibility for the institution have an integrity which will not allow them to deviate from a trustworthy course of action. Those with whom they trade or interact socially will be right to trust them whatever the situation.

It is worth noting that the absence of trust involves real costs for society. Socially worthwhile interactions may not take place if there is no trust between parties. This is probably most evident in markets, where the need to hedge complex transactions around with carefully (and expensively) drafted contracts is a cost that may put off the participants who cannot otherwise trust each other. At a much simpler level, a customer may not purchase a good or service simply because he cannot trust the supplier. In government a programme may not be instituted because the authorities do not believe that the potential beneficiaries can be trusted to tell truth about their circumstances. More seriously citizens may be disinclined to vote if they don't trust the candidates on offer, or if they think the electoral system is biased against their interests.

The question then arises as to how trust can be restored once it has been lost. Trust can be lost as the result of just one act that is perceived to be untrustworthy, but is much more difficult to rebuild thereafter. The lack of trust, and the challenge of rebuilding it, is compounded if there have been many such acts over a period of time. That seems to be the situation in which we find ourselves currently. There are three main routes to rebuilding trust. The first is regulation to proscribe untrustworthy behaviour, and to uncover it, for example by an audit process. If effective, this route can only build the first variant of trust identified above, though it may also have an educative role, signalling to the persons involved what constitutes trustworthy behaviour. The problem with regulation is that it is seldom fully effective, since once the audit

rules are in place, the persons or institutions involved can seek to circumvent them by fair means or foul. Indeed that approach may sometimes be written into the common understanding of the rules: business taxation is a case in point, where firms hire expertise to enable them to find loopholes in the tax regime, and that is widely believed in the business community to be the appropriate response. The idea that a firm has a 'responsibility' to pay taxes 'fairly' is regarded as laughable.

The second route involves structural change, possibly involving legislation, especially where the public lack of trust applies to institutions. For example, if the electoral system is seen to be failing to provide a fair system of representation, then electoral reform may help.

The third route to rebuilding trust is the most difficult to achieve, since it requires people to develop the virtue of being trustworthy. That is, in any interaction with others they genuinely seek the good of the others, and refrain from exploiting any position of power – either power conferred by their role or status, or power arising from having superior knowledge or capacity for structuring the interaction to suit their own purposes.

No doubt the loss of trust in communities and how it can be rebuilt has attracted some theological analysis. The fallenness of humanity is one reason to doubt that trust can characterise social interactions generally. The loss of trust between God and humanity, and between human beings is a key theme of the first chapters of Genesis. Lack of trust underlies the social and economic rules of the Mosaic Law, in their detailed regulation of the community of Israel. Trust should in principle underlie relationships within the New Testament community, if its members are truly motivated by the principle of agape.

Donald Hay
January 2018

[Register here](#)

Reading Suggestions

Christian and Social Scientific Understandings of Human Beings in Society

C. BEED, C. BEED (1999), 'A Christian Perspective on Neoclassical Choice Theory', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 26, no 4, 501-520

A. BIELER (French original 1961, English translation 2005), *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, WCC, Geneva, Switzerland, Chapter III sections 1-3

D. M. BUSS (1999), *Evolutionary Psychology*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston

J. ELSTER (1985), 'The Nature and Scope of Rational Choice Explanations' in E. LePORE, B. MCLAUGHLIN eds. *Actions and Events*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

S.T. EMLLEN (1995), 'An Evolutionary Theory of the Family', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 92(18), 8092-9

R. H. FRANK (1988), *Passions within Reasons: the Strategic Role of the Emotions*, WWNorton, New York.

D. GREEN, I. SHAPIRO (1994), *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, Yale University Press

R. GIBBONS (1997), 'An Introduction to Applicable Game Theory', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 11, no 1, 127-149

I. HACKING (1999), *The Social Construction of What?*, Harvard UP

R. LAYARD (2006), *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, Penguin, London, 2006

S. PINKER (2002), *The Blank Slate: the Modern Denial of Human Nature*, Allen Lane, London

A. K. SEN (1976-7), 'Rational Fools: a Critique of the Behavioural Foundations of Economic Theory', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 6, 317-344

C. SMITH (2003), *Moral, Believing Animals*, OUP

C. SMITH (2010), *What Is a Person?* University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, Chapter 1

R. TRIGG (1999), *Ideas of Human Nature: an Historical Introduction*, Blackwells, Oxford

E. O. WILSON (1999), *Consilience*, Abacus Books, London

[A written up version of the lecture is available on the DCM website at <http://www.oxfordchristianmind.org/resources/articles/>

Donald Hay, *What Does It Mean to Be Human? Christian and Social Scientific Understandings of Human Beings in Society.*]

Christian Theological Traditions and Political Life

R. BAUCKHAM, *The Bible in Politics* (2nd ed., SPCK, 2010)

R. BENNE, "Christians and Government" in G. Meilaender and W. Werpehowski, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (OUP, 2005).

N. BIGGAR, *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2011).

N. BIGGAR & L. HOGAN (eds), *Religious Voices in Public Places* (OUP, 2009)

L. BRETHERTON, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Wiley Blackwell, 2009)

L. BRETHERTON, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (CUP, 2015).

- J. BURNSIDE, *God, Justice and Society*, OUP, Oxford, 2011
- J. CHAPLIN, "Government", in *The New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. D.J. Atkinson and David Field, London: IVP, 1995.
- J. CHAPLIN, *Talking God: The Legitimacy of Religious Public Reasoning* (Theos, 2008, accessible free at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/>)
- D. FERGUSSON, *Church, State and Civil Society* (CUP, 2005)
- G. FORSTER, *The Contested Public Square: The Crisis of Christianity and Politics* (IVP, 2008).
- D. KOYZIS, *Political Visions & Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies* (IVP, 2003)
- C. MATHEWES, *A Theology of Public Life* (CUP, 2008)
- A. MCGRATH (ed), *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Blackwell, 1995), articles on 'Kingdom of God: Political and Social Theology' (R. Preston), 'Social Questions' (D. Forrester), and 'War and Peace' (O'Donovan)
- O.M.T. O'DONOVAN, *The Desire of the Nations* (CUP, 1996)
- O.M.T. O'DONOVAN, *The Ways of Judgment* (Eerdmans, 2005)
- O.M.T. & J.L. O'DONOVAN (eds), *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Eerdmans, 1999).
- J. RAWLS, 'Idea of Public Reason Revisited', originally published in *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64(3) (1997): republished in the expanded edition of his *Political Liberalism* (2005), and in *The Law of Peoples* (1999).
- N. SPENCER & J. CHAPLIN (eds), *God & Government* (SPCK, 2009)
- J. WITTE JR. & F.S. ALEXANDER (eds), *The Teachings of Modern Roman Catholicism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (Columbia University Press, 2007)
- J. WITTE JR. & F.S. ALEXANDER (eds), *The Teachings of Modern Protestantism on Law, Politics, and Human Nature* (Columbia University Press, 2007)
- N. WOLTERSTORFF, *The Mighty and the Almighty: An Essay in Political Theology* (CUP, 2012)

Social Ethics: Theological and Secular Approaches, and the Basis for Social and Economic Policy

S. ALKIRE (2002), *Valuing Freedoms. Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction*, OUP, New York and Oxford

J. ATHERTON (1994), *Social Christianity: a Reader*, SPCK, London

BENEDICT XVI (2009), *Caritas in Veritate: on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth* (Papal Encyclical)

A. BIELER (French original 1961, English translation 2005), *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, WCC, Geneva, Switzerland, Chapter IV sections 1-3, and Chapter V

T. BURCHARDT (2007), 'Welfare: what for?', chapter 3 in J. HILLS, J. LE GRAND, D. PIACHAUD, *Making Social Policy Work*, Policy Press, University of Bristol.

C. E. CURRAN (2002), *Catholic Social Teaching: 1891 to the Present*, Georgetown University Press

J. FINNIS (1981) *Natural Law and Natural Rights*

A. HARTROPP (2007), *What is Economic Justice? Biblical and Secular Perspectives Contrasted*, Paternoster Theological Monographs, Milton Keynes and Colorado Springs.

D. A. HAY (1989), *Economics Today: a Christian Critique*, Apollos, IVP, Leicester (especially chapter 3, section 2; and chapter 4, section 4)

D. HOLLENBACH (2002), *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* Cambridge.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE (2005), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington DC

PAUL VI AND THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1965), *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Catholic Truth Society, London

A.K.SEN (2009), *The Idea of Justice*, Allen Lane, London

A.K.SEN, B. WILLIAMS (1982) *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, CUP, Cambridge

C. SMITH (2010), *What Is a Person?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, Chapters 7, 8

WILLIAM TEMPLE (1942), *Christianity and Social Order*, Penguin (reissued in 1976 by SPCK and other publishers)

C.J.H. WRIGHT (2004) *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, IVP, Leicester (especially Part One)

[A written up version of a lecture on this topic is available on the DCM website:

[Donald Hay](#), *Social and Economic Ethics and the Basis for Public Policy*]

[No session in 2018, so for reference only]

Epistemology, Science and Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences: How Do You Do 'Good' Social Science?

C. BEED, C. BEED (2006), *Alternatives to Economics: Christian Socio Economic Perspectives*, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland (to be read very selectively, especially chapters 9, 10, 11, 13)

S. DOW (2002), *Economic Methodology: an Inquiry*, OUP, Oxford, especially chapters 3-6

D. A. HAY (1989), *Economics Today: a Christian Critique*, Apollos, IVP, Leicester (Chapter 3, section 1, and references)

F. A. HAYEK (1967), 'The Theory of Complex Phenomena', in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*, University of Chicago Press, pp 22-48

H. KINCAID (1990), 'Defending Laws in the Social Sciences', *Philosophy of Social Science*, vol 20, pp 56-83. [For a fuller account of his views, see H. KINCAID (1996), *Philosophical Foundations of Social Science*, CUP, Cambridge]

A. MACINTYRE (1981), *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London (chapters 7, 8)

L. McINTYRE (1993), 'Complexity and Social Scientific Laws', *Sythese*, vol 97. [For a fuller account of his views, see L. McINTYRE (1996), *Laws and Explanation in the Social Sciences: defending a science of human behaviour*, Westview, Boulder, Colorado]

C. SMITH (2010), *What Is a Person?*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, Chapters 3-7

[For a wide selection of classic readings in philosophy of social science, see M. MARTIN, L. McINTYRE (1994) eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, MIT Press]

[A very preliminary written up version of a DCM lecture on this topic is available on the DCM website: *Donald Hay, Epistemology and Methodology in the Social Sciences*]

Author: Ard Louis and colleagues

Date: March 16-17, 2018

Event organizer: Senior convener: Donald Hay (Economics, Jesus College)

Event topic: Developing a Christian Mind: Seeking Wisdom

Location: Oxford

Country: UK

Participants: University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes postgraduates, postdocs, and academic staff

Language: English