

# Public Justice for All

an annotated bibliography of the works of  
James W Skillen  
1967-2006

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## Introduction

Since his first published article in 1967, Jim Skillen has continued to write and publish. The pace of production has not slackened as the years have passed. 2007 will mark the 40th anniversary of his initial publication, "The Nature of Man in Karl Jaspers". Skillen was an undergraduate at Wheaton College from 1962-1966, and this essay, giving his Wheaton College affiliation, appeared in the May 1967 edition of *Dialogue*, the journal of Phi Sigma Tau, the national honor society for philosophy. He was then 22 and a student at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Thus this annotated bibliography begins at 1967 and lists Skillen's publications up until 2006. This is a record of his work and the bibliography is still very much a "work in progress". As long as Skillen keeps writing and publishing, there will be further items to add. But there is also other material that is not included here which means that this bibliography cannot, as yet, claim to be a complete listing. This is a list of 336 items. This introduction describes what it includes in overall terms. But first a brief word is called for to explain what has been left out.

There is a major group of articles not listed here and they are easy to identify. Among them are many of Skillen's sharpest contributions. I am referring to his regular essays, on a variety of topics, for *Public Justice Report*, the publication of the **Center for Public Justice**. He has been *PJR*'s editor and major contributor ever since its first edition. From 1977 until 1997, *PJR* was published 10 times per year, and a conservative guesstimate of at least 2 Skillen contributions per issue would mean something like 400 more items to be eventually included in any complete listing of his works. For *PJR* he also wrote the regular column, "The Testimony", in which biblical texts were expounded and decisive biblical teaching about governance and justice explained. Some of these have already been collected together in *A Covenant to Keep: Meditations on the Biblical Theme of Justice* (2000) (see No.283). It is possible that further collections of this kind will again appear in the future.

In recent times, since 1998, *PJR* has been published 4 times per year, and so this would mean a more restrained output of about 80 more items over that time. We should not forget, however, that in that same period a bi-weekly *Capital Commentary*, has also appeared (and so more items, say 150, will have to be added to any complete list).

So where does this leave this bibliography as a reliable source of Skillen's contribution? The works listed here are all or most of Skillen's major publications apart from those published in *Public Justice Report* and *Capital Commentary*. My educated guess would be that this bibliography represents at least 2/3rds of all of his published writings, keeping in mind that no major theme from his total output is absent from the works cited here. Skillen's political philosophy and contribution to public policy is clearly on display in this listing which includes: longer works, books, chapters, journal articles and so forth. Many, or maybe most, of these works have been written as part of the research expected of him from the **Center for Public Justice**.

Perhaps there is a filing cabinet somewhere in the Skillen basement which contains other works, unpublished articles, drafts, plans, rough outlines of books, other unpublished collations, biblical studies, student publications, essays and other projects from student times.

Here we suggest that the scholar who would use this list to investigate Skillen's contribution, keep in mind the complex relationship between the writer and the **Center**. This annotated list is made available to assist those who would investigate Skillen's contribution to political science and the **Center's** contribution to public policy. The annotations provide a descriptive commentary that, if taken together, can give an indication of how Skillen's *theoretical* perspective has sharpened the **Center's** public policies and civic education. So there is Skillen's contribution to political science and there is also the contribution of the **Center** to public debate and public policy research. These are two facets of this bibliography which cannot easily be separated, although they need to be properly distinguished. Clearly the **Center** has provided Skillen with a context in which he has been encouraged to creatively unfold his political theory. He has done so in a way that is not only comprehensive and detailed in a scientific sense but his work has also been fruitful in its contribution to public policy debate and promoting public justice. This important nexus will have to be explored in greater depth by those who will take up this indispensable work and develop it. Whether in the promotion of a reformational political science or in the development of the public policies for which the **Center** has tried to make its name, the contribution of Jim Skillen will require careful and sustained analysis. This bibliography has been compiled to facilitate that kind of critical reflection.

It is almost superfluous to say that we are dealing here with a writer who has published an enormous amount of material. And there may be important facets of Skillen's contribution that only come to light after a close and critical examination of his "in-house" **Center for Public Justice** publications. But the researcher who peruses this bibliography will be introduced, without too much difficulty, to an adequate and representative sample of the Skillen output in all of its modes: theoretical, educative, public policy and *belles lettres*. These are his major publications, and so this listing deals with analysis and commentary that has been written to extend the work within, but also beyond, **CPJ's** support base.

William Temple characterised the Christian church as being in existence to serve those who are not (yet) its members. Likewise **CPJ**, as a Christian political association exists to provide a service to those who are already politically involved and to do so with a distinctive public policy stance that promotes public justice. And so it is useful to consider this bibliography as a list of works that have been directed outwards in a variety of ways, to a variety of settings, within and beyond **CPJ's** own supporting circle. Indeed the bibliography begins with (at least) six works that were written before Skillen became involved with the association that would, from 1981, provide him with the position he has now filled for 25 years. That association began in 1972 (see No. 7) with Skillen, the youthful political scientist, examining the political problems that confronted a group who had recently joined together to form a Christian political association. Then, as a post-graduate student, he brought something from his own independent research to those with whom he would join in promoting public justice.

At this point it may be useful to sketch how Skillen stands in relation to many and varied strands of American evangelical Christianity. He was born in 1944. He was a student of Wheaton College (1962-66) before he went on to Westminster Theological Seminary (1967-69). Graduate study in philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam (1969-70) followed, and on return to the United States he completed Masters and Doctoral programmes at Duke University, to be granted the PhD in political science in 1974.

Wheaton College was a centre of evangelical education. When Skillen was a Wheaton undergraduate the perspectives of Francis Schaeffer and John Howard Yoder were beginning to make a profound impact upon evangelical reflection, and the rising generation of evangelical leadership. By turning the attention of evangelicals to politics and culture, Schaeffer and Yoder counter-balanced the regnant evangelical view of Carl F H Henry that had prevailed since his 1947 publication *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Arthur Holmes was Skillen's philosophy teacher. At Westminster, Skillen was encouraged by Robert Knudsen to extend his studies of the Kuyperian neo-Calvinist tradition and in particular of the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd. This was to continue with his Free University studies. And then, when he returned to the United States, he enrolled as a higher degree candidate at Duke University, where the highly respected Christian political scientist, John Hallowell, would become his supervisor.

If we consider Skillen's evangelical background we find that when he was born in Colorado, his parents were employed as home missionaries with the American Baptists. He has recalled how, as a youngster, he was drawn without church or family pressure to profess his faith in Christ. As he matured, presbyterian and reformed influences from his Scots-Irish ancestry seem to have taken on greater significance. In 1966 he married Doreen whose family were involved in the Brethren in Christ, the denomination that supports Messiah College. He was to work as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Messiah from 1973-75.

From this brief biographical sketch we might surmise that we are dealing with an American Christian who has had to find his own place midstream, with many diverging and converging currents. And from the annotated bibliography it will become clear that Skillen has maintained a scholarly dialogue with thinkers from a variety of evangelical traditions. The annotations will show, again and again, how Skillen has set himself to work with, and not simply against, the various strands, the warp and the woof, of American evangelicalism. Beyond that, the bibliography also shows a concerted effort to reach out further to other currents in American Christianity. So in this respect it is a record of a biblically-grounded ecumenical effort to remind Christians of their responsibility for public justice. There are reports of exchanges with many Christian scholars whose writings have a bearing upon political reflection. Some of them include: José Míguez Bonino, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Mary Ann Glendon, Bob Goudzwaard, Stephen Monsma, Richard Mouw, Richard John Neuhaus, Leslie Newbigin, Reinhold Niebuhr, Oliver O'Donovan, Corwin Smidt, Nicholas Wolterstorff, N T Wright, Bernard Zylstra. It will also be evident that Skillen has put a high priority upon keeping abreast of latest developments in anabaptist or "radical reformation" scholarship as variously expounded by Ron Sider, John Howard Yoder, Jim Wallis and, more recently, Richard Hays *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* 1996 (see No. 289).

In his doctoral dissertation (see No. 12) Skillen laid the groundwork for his subsequent creative interaction with contemporary political thinkers, whether they be of Christian or humanist, of socialist, liberal or conservative persuasion. In that work he delved deeply into the history of western thought and presented a creative schematic overview of the historical unfolding of the relationship between Christianity and politics. His dissertation was titled *The Development of Calvinistic Political Theory in the Netherlands, with Special Reference to the Thought of Herman Dooyeweerd*. It traced the development of Dooyeweerd's Christian political theory in detail and explored Dooyeweerd's view of his philosophy's historical background. By exploring reformational thinking in this way, Skillen not only presented a coherent explanation of how Calvinism responded to the legacy of Western

Christendom but also of how neo-calvinism had begun to develop a critical orientation to the rise of modern humanism. On this foundation Skillen has formed his political theory, as well as becoming a leading interpreter of Dooyeweerd's political philosophy (No. 321).

And so, this is part of the explanation for why Jim Skillen has also been well placed to contribute to the surging American evangelical interest in Abraham Kuyper's "world-view". But further, he has been one of a small number of English-speaking scholars who have explored the legacy of Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) for political theory. Within the circle of Daniel Elazar's Center for the Study of Federalism, at Temple University, Skillen has contributed to renewed reflection on the "covenantal" tradition in political thought by drawing attention to how the views of Althusius have been developed in the 19th and 20th centuries by an emergent neo-Calvinist tradition of political theory. It is in this neo-calvinist tradition that Skillen has decisively located his own work (No. 245).

There are other ways in which the foundational research of his doctoral dissertation has been tested by Skillen's subsequent engagement with contemporary political reflection, not least when the foundations of the modern political order have been subjected to radical critique. His appreciation of the "neoclassical" perspective of Eric Vögelin dates from his days as a doctoral student. John Hallowell was the editor of Vögelin's *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (1975) and as Vögelin has become better more known, particularly among English-speaking scholars, Skillen has been able to draw attention to his distinctive views in various places (see Nos. 12, 84, 124, 184, 284).

Skillen's doctoral confrontation with Augustinian and post-Augustinian reflection as part of the background of any historical understanding of Christianity in the West, has enabled him to creatively tease out substantial differences between evangelicals in their approaches to social life (see Nos 40 and 60). The dissertation had examined developments in medieval philosophy and that has provided a platform from which he has contributed to discussion about the Roman Catholic teaching of subsidiarity, of natural law and the common good (Nos 208, 251 and 330). More recently, in the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attack, he has extended his historical investigations to explore the relationship of Islam to Christianity in both its Western and Eastern forms (No. 329).

But it would be wrong to give the impression that this ability to interact with the kaleidoscopic variety of contemporary political philosophy was achieved by his dissertation studies or that he has subsequently done all the spade-work for this as a lone scholar. Much of what he has put forward has come out of long-term co-operation with various scholars: with Rockne McCarthy in education policy, the critique of civil religion and pluralist philosophy (see Nos. 51, 58, 62, 76, 208); with Ted Malloch in just-war theory defense, the nuclear threat and land policy (see Nos. 77, 78, 92, 94); with Stanley Carlson-Thies in the analysis of Dutch pluralistic politics and principled pluralist welfare reform (see Nos. 73, 225, 244, 275); with Richard A Baer Jr on education policy (see Nos 183, 201); Keith J Pavlischek on just war and the analysis of the contemporary pacifist movements (see No. 299); and with Jerry Herbert and Joshua Good on civic education programmes (see No 298). There are numerous other examples of cooperative research as well.

The Annotated Bibliography has 78,000 words, a small book in its own right. My initial aim for this work, as bibliographer, had been to produce a listing of the major theoretical articles with a short description of each. But as the list grew, and

as I expanded my reading beyond “academic” items specifically concerned with political philosophy, political science and public policy, I came across significant number of articles that were more “educative” than “theoretical” in character. I would use the term “educative”, rather than “popular”, because even when they are short pieces these writings require considerable mental effort. They are carefully crafted attempts at challenging some of the taken-for-granted knots in America’s everyday political life, the ambiguities that arise in public debate in the US, the polity that seems determined to regularly rediscover its true self on the global stage. And so, there is a wealth of material here to assess, including Skillen’s early exposure of the idolatrous religious vision that has given birth to the “America first” doctrine (Nos 11, 67, 329). It is also inspiring to follow the creative and persistent way in which Skillen and the **Center for Public Justice** have engaged in political education for US citizens and others over the entire range of political issues.

Early on, as a doctoral student, and then as a college professor of political science, Skillen wrote creative pieces that demonstrate how he had been challenged by a neo-calvinistic or “reformational” approach to political science. These articles had a clear “pre-philosophical” intention of encouraging readers to develop a broad political sensitivity to the full range of human responsibility. Since God has restored the human race through Jesus Christ, all of our life comes under His rule and the disciples of Jesus are now called to proclaim that restoration as good news in all of the many responsibilities in which God calls us to serve Him and each other. These articles imply that the biblical teaching of God’s patient rule in Christ has a decisive impact upon the way Christians should view **all** things. That theme has persisted but its earliest articulations can be found in his contributions to *Vanguard* - 11 times (from 1971-1980, a journal which was subsequently discontinued) as well as the *International Reformed Bulletin* - 3 times (from 1971-1977 which was also discontinued). Over the years Skillen has continued to publish articles in *The Banner* - 16 items (from 1980-2006, the denominational magazine of the CRCNA), *Eternity* - 10 items (between 1979 and 1988), and *Third Way* (UK) - 11 items (between 1984 and 1992). The magazine for which he has contributed most articles has been the *Christian Legal Society Quarterly* - over 30 items - and this contribution was made between 1983 and 1994. There are other academic journals in which his writing has consistently appeared over the years - *Christian Scholar’s Review* (8 items), *Philosophia Reformata* (6), *Calvin Theological Review* (9), *Pro Rege* (10) - as well as various Christian magazines - *Christianity Today*, *Prism*, *Reformed Journal* (later *Reformed Perspectives*), *Christian Century*.

Most of Skillen’s writings, in one way or another, are about politics. Many are about current political issues and suggest “principled pluralist” perspectives to evaluate current public policy.

As I suggested above, Skillen’s writings have a strong civic education motif, which aims to encourage and strengthen citizen involvement in public life. There is persistent support for “Christians organizing for political service” (No. 57) but also for Christian students seeking to develop a “public justice” perspective in their studies. Among the chapters of published symposia, books and articles which review contemporary political theory and philosophy there are other publications which advance an approach to political science that is “reformational” and biblically based (Nos. 15, 20, 153, 302, 321).

So what has motivated this pile of politically-oriented writings? Taken together, as one collection, they are Skillen’s reflections about **governance**. Politics can be

characterised as one human response to God's rule over all of life, to God's governance. Human governance is always partial and limited; God's governance is total, it is over all and unlimited. And if a political viewpoint is to rightly understand the limits of the Government's task, it will need some understanding of how the political community is structured, it will need to be able to relate specific political responsibilities to all the other responsibilities we have in marriages, in families, in work, and in associations, in churches, in friendships and so on, in all other domains in which citizens are also engaged. Human authority is such that each of its spheres mutually presuppose and limit each other. Even a military coup, which may proceed unjustly in denial of its lawful authority, cannot go forward without a redefinition of the limits of its power. To be limited in our human tasks is also to recognise our responsibilities. There are limits. A marriage, though lawfully registered, is not a state department; a faith community, though composed of people who are also citizens, is something which is qualitatively different from a political community of citizens and public officials. The Minister for Education is not the principal of the national school system, and it is not an act of treason to support a netball team which is opposed to another team captained by the President's daughter.

This collection of political writings contains repeated discussion of the political significance of marriage and family life, of schools and farms, of military power and the market place, of welfare and religion, of national government and international law, of healthy communities and our bodies. It does so with a strong American emphasis, which is to be expected, but the overall value of this collection reaches beyond any provincial American application.

In brief then, we can say that these writings are about the task of government in the political community (the state) which is, at root, but one way in which we as the human race respond to God's generation to generation rule over all of our life. To repeat, politics is given to us so that we can look after our neighbours with justice. Politics is about the way a public legal order is established, maintained and developed by duly appointed magistrates, public officials and law enforcement agents. Human social life is diverse and the distinctive integrity of various human responsibilities, institutions and relationships, all need to be respected and allowed to develop in their own way, according to their own character.

Skillen's writings show that he has a diverse involvement in "politics", as a political scientist, as a political educator, and as a director of a public policy research facility. Add that to his own responsibility as a citizen in his local neighbourhood, and we begin to sense something of the incredible complexity of the human vocation which, quite obviously, inspires him. It can be said that Jim Skillen seeks to **do justice** to this state of affairs in which human agents in societies like his own sometimes have a difficult job juggling all the different "hats" they are called upon to wear. He only occasionally refers to his family and married life, but when he does it is as if he has exegeted his domestic experience in order to learn more about his own limits on the domestic front, as well as facing up to a freshly realized dimension of his own public involvement. And here we recall Skillen's repeated statement that "public justice" is a God-given norm that if followed leads us on the path of blessedness. "Public justice" is nothing other than a calling, a path on which the human community is called to walk in humility.

If those advocating "public justice" begin to talk as if it is merely a brilliant idea, devised by an elite group of Christians, then they are in danger of turning down a dead end. Skillen has repeatedly warned against the impatience that breeds

political idolatry, as if Christian citizens by means of their own collective moral power are called to set things right. Under such impatience, even if there are repeated appeals to "public justice", the true significance of God's norms for political life will have been lost. One might put all the efforts of one's lifetime into setting up a thinktank that would grow a new elite of Christian "public intellectuals", but to assume that norms only come into play when a majority of humans recognise them, or when certain language is formally attached to legislation, is to accept that a normative path is something we create for ourselves. A normative path is what God creates; humans can only form their response along that path. And indeed many seem to live as if public justice is merely the creature of a programme of social construction that has been undertaken by the "good guys". Public justice is then twisted to become the historical "values" that have arisen from what our heroic ancestors (the ones we choose selectively to remember and honour) have decided concerning what "ought" to be. A critical analysis of Skillen's writings on "public justice" will provide a well-developed refutation of, and perhaps also provide the ground-work for an equally critical and systematic confrontation with, the social constructionist dogma.

Public justice is a call to humility; it is integral to the calling of **every citizen** to pursue justice. And in that sense Jim Skillen's writings are aimed not so much at the "man in the street" but to those who would serve their fellow citizens with public justice, in whatever domain that service be rendered. Public justice is a normative principle that binds citizens and government together in a political community with a task; the pursuit of public justice, the forming of a just public-legal order, is that task. In that sense "public justice" can never become the possession or property of some or other professional elite. It is a path on which professions are called to serve their own communities and, more and more, their neighbours around the world. Political scientists, and all other scientific specialists in many and varied intellectual pursuits, have their own peculiar professional contributions to make which should also enhance public life and promote justice everywhere. But that also requires the development of a social concept that gives due regard to all of the diverse sciences and how they relate to the distinct social responsibilities that constitute our lives at home and abroad. And at that point we have come to the conclusion of our introduction.

Jim Skillen's writings are part of his persistent pursuit of a renewed Christian contribution that challenges a political culture that has turned away from the Lord God. His writings are characterised by a consistent effort to avoid "skeptical negativism" (No. 39) by encouraging his readers to see their citizenship in global terms and as an integral facet of their service to God and neighbour.

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