

TOPICS IN ETHICS AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: EQUALITY

1% of US citizens have 40% of the nation's wealth. The bottom 80% only have 7% of the nation's wealth. One American family is as wealthy as the bottom 40% of Americans put together. Should we be concerned about this? If so, why? In this course we will consider the notion of equality from several different angles: economic, historical, psychological, political, and ethical. We will read short stories, vignettes, political manifestos, and some outstanding works of contemporary philosophy. We will have special guests. You will develop your own answers to the following questions among others. Why should we care about equality? Does equality matter for its own sake, or only instrumentally? What sort of inequalities should we care about? Should we equalise wealth, or resources, or opportunities for welfare, or something else? Does caring about equality mean that you cannot privilege your family and friends?

CONTACT

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Office Hours: by appointment

We meet Mondays and Wednesday through fall term 3.30 until 4.45.

PREREQUISITES

This is an upper-level undergraduate class. You are expected to have already taken Ethics (PHIL-UA 40), The Nature of Values (PHIL-UA 41), or Political Philosophy (PHIL-UA 45).

COURSE TEXTS

We'll be reading quite a bit of Branko Milanovic's *The Haves and the Have-Nots*, Joseph Stiglitz's *The Price of Inequality*, G.A. Cohen's *Why Not Socialism*, and Joseph Carens' *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*. Copies of the first two are in the local bookstore. I will make the third and fourth available online. The rest of the articles, chapters, and videos will be available online or through the course website. As an optional extra, you might look at the chapter on equality in Adam Swift's excellent *Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians*.

READING

After the second week, the readings will be short. You should read each piece a few times. Read once, quickly, to get the structure of the argument, the main claims, and the conclusion(s). Read a second time to study the argument more carefully, to formulate the argument in your own words, to think up your own examples to illustrate the main claims, and to think of counterexamples to these claims. Read a third time to soak up any remaining details. Some excellent reading advice can be found online here:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

Required reading is required, and your manifest understanding of the reading will partly determine your grade for participation. The optional reading is optional. You are welcome to read anything else that interests you. Feel free to ask me for further reading suggestions. In general, the more you read, the better a sense you will have of the strengths and weaknesses of prominent views in any given topic, and of typical forms of argument in the area.

WRITING

An important goal of this course is for you to further develop your skills in philosophical writing. I will distribute a guide to writing philosophical essays in the first class. Please also read Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*, and Jim Pryor's Guide to writing philosophy papers:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

ASSESSMENT

Your grade will be a function of your participation in class (15%) and your grades for three essays. The first essay (20%) will be 1000 words long. The second essay (25%) will be 1000 words long. The third (40%) will be 1500 words long. This is not a lot of words, and that is deliberate: I want you to practice writing precisely and concisely.

POLICIES

The course will adhere throughout to all binding NYU policies, including with respect to Attendance and Academic Integrity:

<http://bulletin.cas.nyu.edu/page/academic.policies#ATTENDANCE>

<http://bulletin.cas.nyu.edu/page/academic.policies#STANDARDS>

TOPICS

There are several parts to the course. We start by looking at the history and economics of inequality, and in particular the relationship between inequality and capitalism. The remaining sessions until fall break will look at different accounts of *what* we think should be equalised. Most ethical theories, perhaps all, are egalitarian in some respect. After fall break we have three weeks looking at key issues: whether equality is a final or merely instrumental value; whether egalitarians should be ethically impartial; and what exactly is the relationship between gender and equality. Then we will move on to look at the prospects for egalitarianism, by closely considering the conception of market socialism proposed by Joseph Carens. This proposal depends on some theses about incentives; we will examine some recent psychological literature on this topic. We end with two cases studies: equality in health, and equality in education.

Wednesday 4 Sep: Introduction and Summary

- Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion*, Part One: 'Falling Behind and Falling Apart: The Bottom Billion.'
- A.B. Atkinson, 'The Distribution of Income in the UK and OECD countries in the Twentieth Century.'
- In advance of class, find one datum about equality or inequality which meets these three conditions:
 - It comes from a reputable source,
 - It is surprising,
 - And you doubt anyone else in class will come up with it.

Optional:

- Branco Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have Nots*, vignette 3.1: 'Where in the Global Income Distribution Are You?'
- Tony Atkinson, 'Where is Inequality Headed?' available online here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCrHTnF9X5Q>

Monday 9 Sep: History

- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto.' Available online here: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>
- Branco Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have Nots*, vignette 2.1, 'Why Was Marx Led Astray?'

Wednesday 11 Sep: History: **Visit by Julia Ott**, Professor of the History of Capitalism at the New School

Read:

- Julia Ott, '...How Labour Should Think about the Debt Question.'

Monday 16 Sep: Economics

- Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, chapters one, 'America's 1% Problem' and three, 'Markets and Inequality'
- Branco Milanovic, *The Haves and Have Nots*. Read another three or four vignettes, whichever catch your eye.

Optional:

- Paul Krugman and Tony Atkinson in conversation:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l6E3mUNW70>

Wednesday 18 Sep: Economics

- Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, chapter ten, 'The Distribution of Income.'

Monday 23 September: Equality of What?

- Ronald Dworkin, 'What is Equality Part 2: Equality of Resources'

Optional:

- W. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pp. 76-90 (Summary of Dworkin)

Wednesday 25 September: Equality of What?

- G.A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice'

Monday 30 September: Equality of What?

- a. Allen Wood, 'Marx on Equality' (manuscript discussing the slogan, 'from each according to her abilities to each according to her needs')

Wednesday 2 October: Equality of What?

- Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, selections

Monday 7 October: Status Egalitarianism

- Elizabeth Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?'

Wednesday 9 October: Status Egalitarianism versus Luck Egalitarianism,

With guest lecturers Daniel Wodak and Adam Lerner (Princeton)

- Elizabeth Anderson, 'The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians'

Optional:

- Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, selections

FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER: FIRST PAPER DUE

FALL BREAK

Wednesday 16 October: Is equality a final or merely instrumental value?

- Derek Parfit, 'Equality and Priority'
- Kurt Vonnegut, 'Harrison Bergeron'

Optional:

- Prioritarianism, special issue of *Utilitas*, vol. 24, september 2012

Monday 21 October: continued

- Larry Temkin, 'Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection'

Optional:

- George Saunders, 'The Semplica Girl Diaries.'

Wednesday 23 October: Equality and Partiality

- Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, chapter two, 'Equality and its Implications.'
- Susan Mendus, 'The Magic in the Pronoun "My"' (selections)

Monday 28 October: Special Round-Table Discussion with

Will MacAskill, President of 80,000 hours, D.Phil candidate at Oxford University, and Research Associate at the Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics. Cf. <http://80000hours.org/>

Frank Sica, Managing Partner, Tailwind Capital, and former President of Soros Private Funds Management. Cf. <http://www.forbes.com/profile/frank-sica/>

Wednesday 30 October: Equality and Gender

- Carole Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, selections
- Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care*, selections

Optional:

- Susan Muller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, selections

FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER: SECOND PAPER DUE

Monday November 4: Socialism continued:

- G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*

Wednesday November 6: Market Socialism?

- Bertell Ollman, 'Market Economy: Advantages and Disadvantages.' Online here: http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/china_speech2.php
- Branco Milanovic, vignette 1.5: 'Was Socialism Egalitarian?'

Optional:

- Bertell Ollman, *Market Socialism, The Debate Among Socialists*, chapter 4: 'Market Mystification in Capitalist and Market Socialist Societies.' Online here: http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/docs/ms_ch04.php

Monday November 11: Utopian Politico-Economic Theory

- Joseph Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*, preface and chapter one.

Wednesday November 13: continued

- Joseph Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*, chapter two 'Logically Necessary Prerequisites.'

Monday November 18: Psychological literature on Incentives:

- Dan Pink, 'The Puzzle of Motivation' (Ted talk):
http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pink_on_motivation.html
- Paul Piff, 'Having Less, Giving More: The influence of social class on pro-social behaviour.'

Optional:

- Somewhat polemical discussion of Paul Piff's results:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=luqGrz-Y_Lc

Wednesday November 20: continued

- Joseph Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market*, chapter three 'Empirically Necessary Prerequisites,' and chapter four, 'Implications.'

Monday November 25:

- Erik Olin Wright, *Real Utopias*, selections

Optional:

- Erik Olin Wright, 'Transforming Capitalism Through Real Utopias,' lecture at Glasgow University 2013: <http://vimeo.com/62082297>

Wednesday November 27: **Day Off** to get an early start on Thanksgiving

Optional Topical Reading:

- Paula Gunn Allen, 'How The West Was Really Won.'

December 2: Health Inequality

- Thomas Pogge, "Testing Our Drugs on the Poor Abroad" in Jennifer S. Hawkins and Ezekiel J. Emanuel, *Exploitation and Developing Countries: The Ethics of Clinical Research*, 2008*

Optional:

- Schlomi Segall, 'Is Health (Really) Special? Health Policy between Rawlsian and Luck Egalitarian Justice

December 4: Health Inequality

- Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, selections

Optional:

- Michael Marmot (Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health), 'Global Inequalities – Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy.'

Available here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTni72CPeoA>

December 9: Education

- Adam Swift and Harry Brighouse, 'Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods.'
- Sean Reardon, 'No Rich Child Left Behind' (NY Times, 27 April 2013)

Optional:

- Sean Reardon, 'The Widening Income Achievement Gap,'

December 11: Education: Massive Open Online Courses

- The San Jose letter to Michael Sandel

Optional

- Chronicle piece by Jennifer Morton:
<http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2013/07/29/unequal-classrooms-what-online-education-cannot-teach/>

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER: FINAL PAPER DUE
