

EQUALITY: WHETHER AND WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

UNC Chapel Hill
PHIL 170.001 / 170.002
Social Ethics and Political Thought

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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? What kind of institutions would we need to promote important kinds of equality?

OUTLINE

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.
- Next, background: we consider general theories of well-being, justice, freedom, and equality.
- Next we consider questions of *what* should be equalised (if anything).
- Next we turn to think about equality of status, what this amounts to, and challenges to its implementation. Here we will study work by Sally Haslanger. Professor Haslanger will join us via skype for a discussion of her work.
- Then we move on to consider various alternatives to egalitarian ethical theories, and address the question whether equality matters for its own sake.
- Then we read a new book by Erik Olin Wright, a socialist sociologist, which addresses practical questions regarding the implementation of egalitarian ideals. Afterwards Professor Wright will join us via skype for a discussion of his book.
- We end with two case studies: equality in education and equality in health.

COURSE TEXT AND OTHER TEXTS

We'll be reading three chapters of Adam Swift's *Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians*. I recommend you get hold of a copy. The third edition is best but you could definitely get away with the first or second edition. For a more advanced introduction to many of the issues we'll discuss, check out Will Kymlicka's *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. I also recommend you buy Branco Milanovic's *The Haves and the Have Nots*. It consists of many short vignettes. Leave it on the back of your toilet. There are some more background readings below.

There is an asterisk on the syllabus next to the texts that cannot be found online, which I'll upload to the course website. Everything else you can find with a quick google. Familiarise yourselves with philpapers.org and jstor.org.

PREPARATION

Everything on this syllabus has been carefully chosen. I expect you to read everything, and read it carefully. Your understanding of all the reading will be assessed in the test at the end of term. 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 three factors: two essays and one test. The first essay (5 pages) is worth 30%, the test is worth 30%, and the second essay (7 pages) is worth 40%. There will also be various writing exercises throughout the term. These are not graded but your enthusiastic participation will dramatically affect the quality of your essays.

POLICIES

All students are expected to abide by all binding UNC policies, in particular with respect to attendance and the UNC honor code: <http://honor.unc.edu>

READING

The following list of readings is provisional. I will likely move things around a little in response to your interest. So do let me know what does and does not interest you as we go along. I have tried to keep Fridays free from reading. We'll aim to use Fridays for discussion as often as possible. Use any spare time to rethink and reread earlier material.

Topic

Reading

Background Reading:

Branco Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have Nots*

Ursula Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*

Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

Kurt Vonnegut, 'Harrison Bergeron'

Milton Friedman, 'Capitalism and Freedom'

20-Aug Background

Joseph Stiglitz, *Inequality Is Not Inevitable* (NY Times)

Optional:

Atkinson, Piketty, Saez, 'Top Incomes in the Long Run of History'

Atkinson, "Where is Inequality Headed" (youtube)

22-Aug Background

Martin O'Neill, 'The Facts of Inequality'

25-Aug Economics

Thomas Piketty, *Capital* (selections)*

27-Aug Economics

Piketty, cont

Optional: T. Lemieux. *The changing nature of wage inequality*

Day Off on 1 Sep

3-Sep	Well-Being	J.S. Mill, selections on hedonism*
5-Sep	Well-Being	Thomas Hurka, 'The Best Things in Life' (selections)*
8-Sep	Justice	chapter in Adam Swift, 'Beginner's Guide...' (course reader)
10-Sep	Liberty	chapter in Adam Swift, 'Beginner's Guide...' (course reader)
12-Sep	Equality	chapter in Adam Swift, 'Beginner's Guide...' (course reader)
15-Sep	Equality of What?	Onora O'Neill & Edward Nell, 'Justice Under Socialism'
17-Sep	Equality of What?	G.A. Cohen, 'On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice' Optional: G.A. Cohen, 'Why Not Socialism?'
22-Sep	Equality of What?	Clare Chambers, 'Each Outcome is Another Opportunity'
24-Sep	Equality of What?	Anne Philips, 'Really Equal: Opportunities and Autonomy' Optional: Lord Bauer, 'The Grail of Equality'
29-Sep	Equality of What?	Anderson, 'What is the Point of Equality?'
1-Oct	Status Equality	Sally Haslanger, 'But Mom, Crop Tops are Cute...'
6-Oct	Status Equality	Sally Haslanger, 'Gender and Race, What Are They?'
8-Oct	Status Equality	Sally Haslanger, 'Oppressions, Racial and Other' for more resources: http://sallyhaslanger.weebly.com/gender-equity.html
10-Oct		Conversation with Sally Haslanger
13-Oct	Animal Ethics	Guest Lecture by Amanda MacAskill: Animal Ethics
15-Oct	Alt. Theories	Sufficientarianism: Liam Shields, 'The Prospects for Sufficientarianism' Consequentialism: Julia Driver, 'Contemporary Consequentialism'

Fall Break

20-Oct	Levelling Down?	Prioritarianism: Derek Parfit, 'Equality and Priority'
22-Oct	Levelling Down?	Larry Temkin, 'Equality, Priority, and the Levelling Down Objection'
27-Oct	Equality & Markets	Anne Philips, 'Egalitarians and the Market: dangerous ideals'
29-Oct	Equality & Markets	Jessica Flanigan, 'Inequality and Markets in Bodily Services'
3-Nov	Real Utopia?	Erik Olin Wright, <i>Envisioning Real Utopias</i> . Available here: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ERU.htm
5-Nov	Real Utopia?	Real Utopias, cont
10-Nov	Real Utopia?	Real Utopias, cont
12-Nov	Real Utopia?	Real Utopias, cont
14-Nov		Conversation with Erik Olin Wright
17-Nov	Health	Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, <i>The Spirit Level</i> , selections* Optional: Thomas Pogge, 'Testing Our Drugs on the Poor Abroad'
19-Nov	Education	Swift & Brighouse, 'Equality, Priority, and Positional Goods'
24-Nov	Education, cont	Jennifer Morton, 'Unequal Classrooms...' Optional Topical Reading: Paula Gunn Allen, 'How the West was really won'
	Thanksgiving Day Off on 26th	
1-Dec	Revision/Catch Up	
3-Dec	Revision/Catch Up	
