

TRADITIONS OF INQUIRY:
EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY

SPEA V450

Spring 2016

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4 – 5:15 p.m.
PV 273

Canvas address: <https://iu.instructure.com/courses/1515200>

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Course Objectives

This course seeks to use insights from both the humanities and the social sciences to engage students in exploring an important topic in public affairs. The topic for this semester will be: Equality and Inequality.

By some estimates, the top 1 percent of Americans hold 50 percent of the nation's wealth, a figure unmatched since the Great Depression. Moreover, numerous studies claim that children who grow up in wealthier homes are more likely to get better educations and jobs than children whose homes are less advantaged. But surveys also indicate that a majority of Americans oppose redistributive policies and believe that advancement is linked to hard work. What explains this apparent contradiction?

In the 1830's, in *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that a powerful new idea was sweeping the world and required a new way of thinking about political life: the idea, as the Declaration of Independence put it, was "that all men are created equal."

But what do "equality" – and its opposite, "inequality" – really mean? Should they be measured in terms of opportunities? Or results? In what areas of life are they relevant? Rights? Money? Status, or something else? How important are they, compared to other possible goals of public policy, such as reducing poverty or promoting excellence in school, the arts or other fields? Does inequality require intervention or compensation for past injustices? What could – and should – government do to foster greater equality (or protect justifiable kinds of inequalities)? What are the trade-offs between pursuing equality and other valued aspects of political life, such as liberty?

This course will examine these very questions. It will be devoted to studying how a variety of political thinkers understood the idea of equality in the past and think about it now. It will also examine what social scientists have to say about the current state of equality in the United States and the world. Not least importantly, it will look at different viewpoints about the challenges makers of public policy face in their efforts to increase equality.

There is no expectation that students will end this course convinced that more or less equality is desirable, or that public policy should – or should not – be used to foster it. One semester is hardly enough to settle disputes that have been raging for millennia! But the students should expect to understand the contours of these debates, be familiar with important arguments on various sides of them, and be prepared to apply the insights they have gained to their own careers, as both students of public policy and practitioners.

This course will count for credit toward the Certification in Applied Research and Inquiry in Public Affairs, a SPEA program for students throughout Indiana University who are seeking courses that bring together the liberal arts and the study of public affairs.

Course Readings

The first part of the course will be devoted to examining the concepts of equality and inequality, as understood by a variety of Western political philosophers throughout history. Most of their writings will be found in *Equality: Selected Readings*, Pojman and Westmoreland, eds., but the instructor will also post on Canvas additional works deemed worth reading and discussing. These readings do not exhaust the perspectives on equality within Western culture, let alone in other cultures. Students who would like to read more about or by particular authors or on particular topics (Western or non-Western) should not hesitate to ask the instructor for recommendations. In addition, students can explore ideas about equality and inequality not covered in the readings (e.g., Confucian thinking about equality) in a term paper, if they wish.

After spring break, the course will examine the challenges of measuring equality and inequality. The principal means of doing so will be by reading and discussing a recent book on these topics, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality*, by Angus Deaton, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2015. While other scholars (e.g. Thomas Piketty) will use different methods (and perhaps reach different conclusions), this book is not only written by a highly regarded researcher, but also uses multiple methods (and multiple countries) in his analysis. Although we will be discussing his conclusions, the real aim of this part of the course is to learn how to research complex concepts like equality and inequality empirically.

The final portion of the course involves looking at how to draw policy implications from an understanding – conceptual and empirical – of the state of equality (or inequality). To do this, we will read and discuss in tandem two recent books that examine – and deplore -- the same phenomenon: the disparity in life-chances between people who grow up in middle-income circumstances and those who come from lower-income backgrounds. One of the authors – Robert Putnam – is a liberal or progressive in his political leanings; the other – Charles Murray – is a conservative or libertarian. Although we will discuss the merits of their analyses and policy recommendations, our main goal will be to understand how and why more or less the same “facts” can lead to quite different ideas about what should be done.

Students interested in looking at the history of the concept of equality (and inequality), in contrast to the meanings of the concepts themselves, will find the following two books useful:

Martin van Creveld, *Equality: The Impossible Quest*, Castalia House, 2015. Available via Kindle.

Sanford A. Lakoff, *Equality in Political Philosophy*, Harvard, 1964. Out of print, but used copies available.

Course Requirements

This course will be conducted as a seminar. Therefore, it is essential for all students to attend class and participate in the discussions. For every three absences, a student’s course grade will be reduced by one level (e.g., from A to A-), unless the student has provided satisfactory written explanations for being unable to attend class, signed by an appropriate person (e.g., doctor, advisor, coach etc.)

Students have the choice of taking a final exam or submitting a research paper at least ten pages in length. The exam will be given out on the last day of classes and due one week later. Students who choose to submit a research paper in lieu of taking the final exam must decide — and obtain the instructor’s approval of a topic that is related to the ideas examined in this course — before spring break. The term paper will be due on the same day the final exam is due. Drafts of the paper must be reviewed with the teaching

assistant at least one week before the paper is due. Further details will be provided separately.

All students in the class will take a “mid-term” examination. It will be due at the last class before spring break (March 10) and require students to reflect critically on the concepts of equality and inequality as they have come to understand them after completing the conceptual readings and discussion that make up the first part of this course. The instructor will provide a series of questions to guide this reflection.

The course has been divided into seven topics, each three or four classes in length. For each one, the instructor will pose a proposition with at least two sides to it. During the final class for each topic, four or five students should be prepared to take sides on and debate the proposition (and other class members to ask questions or make comments). Before the next class, student-debaters will then be expected to submit written statements (2-3 pages in length) of their positions, modified or changed in light of their oral presentations and subsequent discussion.

All students are required to address one proposition from the first five topics and one from the final two. Students can sign up for the topics they wish to address under Pages on Canvas. Students should make these choices before class on January 19, or the instructor will assign students to particular topics.

Students will also be expected to participate in a class blog in which they will identify and post clippings from newspapers, magazines or other publications that deal with the topics of equality or inequality. Clippings may be about discussions and debates occurring in the United States or in other countries, but must have been published after the first day of this class. Students should explain what they find relevant and interesting for the study of equality and inequality in the clipping, and other students are encouraged to comment. Students who post at least eight clippings will receive an “A” for this requirement, with reduced grades for fewer clippings.

Grading

The grade each student receives in this class will reflect a balanced appreciation of the totality of his or her work. However, the various course requirements will count approximately as follows:

- Class participation – 10 percent
- Clippings – 10 percent
- Mid-term – 25 percent
- Position papers (2) – 20 percent
- Term Paper/Final Exam – 35 percent

While the instructor encourages students to discuss the course, exchange ideas, and critique each other’s work as much as they desire, he also expects that all work

submitted for grading will be done in a manner consistent with the university's rules on plagiarism. A link to IU's academic policies will be found on Canvas.

This class has a teaching assistant, Colin Ashwood, an MPA student who served with Teach for America before coming to SPEA. His role is primarily to assist students with written assignments. As you are preparing position papers or thinking about doing a term paper, I would encourage you to avail yourself of Colin's assistance.

Students who have special needs that might affect their participation in this class should alert the instructor to them. He will try to make appropriate accommodations or direct students to IU resources that might be helpful to them. Information about the Writing Center is posted on Canvas.

Course Schedule

January 12, 14

Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., "Harrison Bergeron," in Louis P. Pojman and Robert Westmoreland, *Equality: Selected Readings* (henceforth, P&W).

Alexis deTocqueville, "Introduction," *Democracy in America*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/815/815-h/815-h.htm>

The Declaration of Independence, http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

Recommended: Reflections and Conversation on "Harrison Bergeron," *What So Proudly We Hail* videos. <https://vimeo.com/37781337>

RESOLVED: Harrison Bergeron deserved to be punished.

January 19, 21, 26 Topic One: What Is Equality and Why Should We Care?

“Introduction” and “Part II” from P&W.

Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal,” from P&W, 261-273.

Amartya Sen, “Equality of What?” Uploaded on Canvas.

William Letwin, “The Case against Equality,” Uploaded on Canvas.

Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” <https://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>

Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill these Rights,” Commencement Address at Howard University, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>

RESOLVED: The Civil Rights laws did not do enough to achieve equality.

January 28
February 2, 4

Topic Two: Classical Ideas about Equality

“Part I” from P&W

“The Parable of the Talents,” The Bible, Matthew 25: 14-30, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+25%3A14-30&version=ESV>

“Maimonides’ Eight Levels of Charity,” *The Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity*, 10:7-14. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/45907/jewish/Eight-Levels-of-Charity.htm

Plato, *The Republic*, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/republic/#H4>. (This is a very good synopsis. Those interested in the full text will easily find it on the Internet or in the library.)

Louis Rougier, “Philosophical Origins of the Idea of Natural Equality,” *Modern Age*, Winter 1974. Uploaded on Canvas.

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, 1848. <http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/seneca.html>

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Address to the Legislature of New York, 1854. http://www.sojust.net/speeches/stanton_ny_legislature.html

Emma Goldman, "Women's Suffrage," *Anarchism and other Essays*, 1911. http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/goldman/aando/suffrage.html

History of Equal Rights Amendment <http://www.ushistory.org/us/57c.asp>

RESOLVED: The U.S. Constitution should contain an "equal rights amendment."

February 9, 11, 16

Topic Three: Equality under the Law

"Part III" and Wallace Matson, "Justice: A Funeral Oration," from P&W.

Isaiah Berlin, "Equality," Uploaded on Canvas.

Nathan Glazer, "In Defence of Preference," *The New Republic*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Intelligence² Debates: "The Equal Protection Clause Forbids Preferences in State University Admissions." Transcript uploaded on Canvas. To watch broadcast, <http://intelligencesquaredus.org/debates/past-debates/item/1406-the-equal-protection-clause-forbids-racial-preferences-in-state-university-admissions>

Geoffrey Marshall, "Equality under the Law." Uploaded on Canvas.

Transcript of U. S. Supreme Court hearing, *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin et. al.*, December 9, 2015. Uploaded on Canvas. (Skim).

RESOLVED: Universities and colleges should admit students solely on the basis of merit.

February 18, 23, 25

Topic Four: Equal Opportunity

“Part IV:” Richard J. Arneson, “Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare;” and Eric Rakowski, “A Critique of Welfare Egalitarianism,” from P&W.

Daniel Bell, “On Meritocracy and Equality,” *The Public Interest*. Uploaded on Canvas.

John Roemer, “Equality and Responsibility,” *Boston Review*. Uploaded on Canvas.

James S. Coleman, “Equal School or Equal Students?” *The Public Interest*. Uploaded on Canvas.

RESOLVED: Equal opportunity requires treating some people more (or less) equally than others.

March 1, 3, 8

Topic Five: Equality of Outcomes

“Part V” from P&W.

Robert Nisbet, “The Pursuit of Equality,” *The Public Interest*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Irving Kristol, “On Equality” and “What is Social Justice?” Uploaded on Canvas.

Christopher Jencks, “Macro vs. Micro Stories about Inequality,” video from *Inequality Reexamined*. Uploaded to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XehA7amixo>

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Equalizing Educational Opportunity: In Whose Benefit?” *The Public Interest*. Upload on Canvas.

Anne Phillips, “Defending Equality of Outcome,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*. Uploaded on Canvas.

T. H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class.” Uploaded on Canvas.

RESOLVED: All students in this class should receive the same

grade.

March 10 Mid-Term Reflection

Papers Due

March 22, 24, 29, 31 Topic Six: Measuring Equality and Inequality

Angus Deaton, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth and the Origins of Inequality*

Thomas Piketty and Emanuel Saez, "Income Inequality in the United States 1913- 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Anthony Atkinson, Thomas Piketty and Emanuel Saez, "Top Incomes in the Long Run of History," *Journal of Economic Literature*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Drew deSilver, "Global Inequality: How the U. S. Compares," Pew Research Center (using OECD data). Uploaded on Canvas.

Matthew Luttig, "The Structure of Inequality and Americans' Attitudes Toward Redistribution," *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Uploaded on Canvas.

John Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, *World Happiness Report 2015*. Uploaded on Canvas.

RESOLVED: The world is becoming happier and more equal.

April 5 No class

April 8 Lecture by Robert Woodson, President of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. <http://www.cneonline.org/woodson-biography/> Details to come.

April 7, 12, 14, 19 Topic Seven: What Should be Done?

Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America*

Robert Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*.

RESOLVED: The next President of the United States should take steps, such as ..., to address the problems Murray and Putnam identify.

April 21, 26, 28

Contemporary Debates

“Inequality: What Causes It, Why it Matters, What Can be Done,” *Foreign Affairs* (special section), January/February 2016. Uploaded on Canvas.

“The Science of Inequality,” *Science* (special section), May 23, 2014. Uploaded on Canvas.

James Piereson, “The Redistribution Fallacy,” *Commentary*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Scott Winship, “Overstating the Costs of Inequality,” *National Affairs*. Uploaded on Canvas.

Peter Wehner and Robert P. Beschel, Jr., “How to Think about Inequality,” *National Affairs*. Uploaded on Canvas.

