

Philosophy 205: Philosophy of Inequality
AC Wagner Correctional Facility, Spring 2015

Course Syllabus

Instructors:

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Course Aims:

Human beings stand in unequal relationships with one another: we are unequal in our talents and abilities, our needs, participation in social institutions, access to opportunities, possession of goods and influence. There are numerous factors that explain and reinforce these unequal relationships including facts about our birth, luck over the course of our lives, our own actions, and large and small-scale social, political and economic forces. When are these unequal relationships morally problematic and why? What is the appropriate response to these various forms of inequality?

The overarching aim of this course is to have students think critically about the nature and moral significance of inequality. To achieve this aim, we will consider various theoretical approaches to inequality and ask whether and to what extent these can help us better understand particular cases of unequal relationships. In the first section of the course, we consider the case of unequal relationships between the rich and poor. We ask how various theories explain the root causes of economic inequality, why and to what extent economic inequality is a moral problem and how we ought to respond. In the second section, we consider the case of unequal social relationships, in particular, inequality amongst different racial groups and different genders. Again, we look at how various factors cause and perpetuate inequalities amongst these groups, how we could try to rectify these inequalities. In the third section of the course we ask how the value of equality should be weighed against other values like freedom, welfare and justice. Throughout the course, students will develop their own philosophical abilities by reconstructing the arguments of others, and formulating and defending sophisticated arguments of their own

The readings for this course are extremely varied, and include excerpts from works of philosophy, pieces of literature, journalism, psychology, economic analyses and court proceedings. Throughout the course, our goal is to explore philosophical positions through their implications for concrete issues in the real world. By doing so, we hope to better understand both abstract theories and practical questions about inequality.

Assignments and Grading:

- Worksheets -10%
- Short argument analysis - 15%
- Debate and written review - 15%
- Long Essay - 25%
- Final Exam - 25%
- In-class Participation - 10%

Readings:

All readings are from the following texts, which you will be given:

- PHI205 Course Reader (2015)
- Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do About It*
- Plato, *Republic*

You will get much more out of each class if you do the readings ahead of time. Some readings are designated as "Supplementary": these are optional, but will also be helpful.

Course Schedule and Readings

i) Monday, February 2: Course Overview

- *Topics:* Equality of what and why does it matter?

Section 1: Economic Inequality

i) Wednesday, February 4: Economic Inequality

- *Topics:* The causes and effects of economic inequality in America
- *Readings:* Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, chapter 1

ii) Monday, February 9: Luck Egalitarianism

- *Topics:* Equality as equal outcomes vs. equal opportunity
- *Readings:* Dworkin, "What is Equality? Equality of Welfare", p. 185-188; 228-240

iii) Wednesday, February 11: Socialism

- *Topics:* Equality as equal opportunity: socialism vs. capitalism
- *Readings:* Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, Chapters 1-3

Monday, February 16: NO CLASS – PRESIDENT'S DAY

iv) Wednesday, February 18: Communism

- *Topics:* Equality as equal ownership of the means of production: communism vs. socialism; objections to both socialism and communism
- *Readings:* excerpts from *The Communist Manifesto*

v) Monday, February 23: Methodological Interlude – Analyzing Arguments

- *Topics*: What is an argument? Analyzing the validity and soundness of arguments.
- *Readings*: *A Rulebook for Arguments* chapters I and VI; Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy”

vi) Wednesday, February 25: Democratic Equality

- *Topics*: Equality as equality in social relationships: the theory of “democratic equality”
- *Readings*: Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?” p. 312 -321
- *Supplementary Readings*: the remainder of Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”

Section 2: Non-Economic Inequality

i) Monday, March 2: Interpersonal Oppression: the Oppressed

SHORT ARGUMENT ANALYSIS DUE

- *Topics*: What oppression looks like: the many and subtle ways of being unequal
- *Readings*: Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, ch 1 and 2; Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own”, ch 2

ii) Wednesday, March 4: Interpersonal Oppression: the Oppressor

- *Topics*: What being an oppressor looks like: psychology, language, micro-aggression
- *Readings*: McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack”; Vega, “Students See Many Slights as Racial Microaggressions”, Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, ch 8

iii) Monday, March 9: Interpersonal Oppression: Psychology and Responses

- *Topics*: Everyday changes that can address oppressive social relationships
- *Readings*: Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, ch 9.

iv) Wednesday, March 11: Methodological Interlude – Developing Arguments

- *Topics*: How do you build a philosophical argument?
- *Readings*: *A Rulebook for Arguments* chapters VII and VIII; Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”

v) Monday, March 16: Societal Oppression: a History of Legal Oppression

- *Topics*: How legal politics create and reinforce social inequality
- *Readings*: Coates, “The Case for Reparations”, *Atlantic* 2014

vi) Wednesday, March 18: Societal Oppression: Contemporary Legal Oppression

- *Topics*: Inequality and democratic participation
- *Readings*: p. 180-200, p. 208-217 from Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch 5
- *Supplementary Readings*: the rest of Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, ch 5

vii) Monday, March 23: Societal Oppression: Education and Segregation

- *Topics*: How the distribution of educational resources affect inequality
- *Readings*: Justice Warren *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* 1954

viii) Wednesday, March 25: Societal Oppression: Integration & Affirmative Action

- *Topics*: Segregation, Integration and Affirmative Action
- *Readings*: Anderson, “Segregation and Social Inequality”, p. 1-7

Section 3: The Limits and Significance of Equality

i) Monday, March 30: Office Hours to discuss long papers; debate preparation

ii) Wednesday, April 1: In-class Debate

- *Readings*: *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Chapter IX

iii) Monday, April 6: Equality vs. Well-Being

- *Topics*: Socially-enforced inequality and the “leveling-down” objection
 - *Readings*: Kurt Vonnegut, *Harrison Bergeron*
- DEBATE SUMMARY DUE**

iv) Wednesday, April 8: Equality vs. Justice I

- *Topics*: Socially-enforced inequality as necessary for a just state
- *Readings*: excerpts from Plato, *The Republic*

v) Monday, April 13: Equality vs. Justice II

- *Topics*: Socially-enforced inequality as necessary for a just state
 - *Readings*: excerpts from Plato, *The Republic*
- LONG ESSAY DUE**

vi) Wednesday, April 15: Equality vs. Liberty I

- *Topics*: Equality as a barrier to freedom
- *Readings*: Nozick, *Anarchy, State, Utopia*, p. 160-164, 290-292

vii) Monday, April 20: Equality vs. Liberty II

- *Topics*: Balancing the value of equality with the value of freedom
- *Readings*: Otsuka, p. 1-9 “How to be a Libertarian without being an Inegalitarian”

viii) Wednesday, April 22: Equality amongst Whom?

- *Topics*: Do we have a responsibility to address inequality across countries?
- *Readings*: Warburton, “Cosmopolitans”, *Aeon* 2013

Section 4: Final Exam

i) Monday, April 27: Office Hours to discuss assessments and exam preparation

ii) Wednesday, April 29: Course Overview and Exam Preparation

- *Topics*: Course Overview. Final questions on revisions and the exit essay.

iii) Monday, May 6:

- *Assignments Due*: **EXIT ESSAY** (in class) and **Final Revisions**.

iv) Wednesday, May 8

- *Assignments Due*: **MAKE-UP EXIT ESSAY** (in class) and **Final Revisions**.

Assignments

Assignment I: Short Argument Analysis (March 2)

You will be assigned a short argumentative passage from either Dworkin, Cohen or Plato. In at least one page,

- Identify the conclusion of the argument and write it in your own words. Remember, this should be a full sentence.
- Identify the premises and write each of them in your own words. Be sure to write these in full sentences.
- Write a paragraph responding to the argument. Do the premises seem true to you? Do the premises support the conclusion?

Assignment II: Debate (April 1 and April 6)

You will be assigned to a team to argue for or against a topic related to section two of the course. For example, the topic could be: “That universities should use quotas in admissions to create more diverse student bodies.” One side will argue that universities should do this; the other will argue that they shouldn’t. The debates will be held on April 1. On April 6, you will provide a summary of the debate, in which you:

- Identify the best argument for your side of the topic. In a paragraph, identify the conclusion of the argument and the premises that support this conclusion.
- Identify the best argument for the alternative side of the topic. In a paragraph, identify the conclusion of the argument and the premises that support this conclusion.
- Write a paragraph responding to the best argument for the alternative side of the topic. Do the premises seem true to you? Do the premises support the conclusion?

Assignment III: Long Essay (April 13)

You will be given a choice of three topics. (For example: “True equality cannot be achieved within a capitalist economy.”) You will pick one topic, and argue for or against the topic, drawing on material from the first and second sections of the course (as well as other sources, and your own experiences, if you wish). In at least three pages, you must:

- Provide at least two detailed arguments for your side of the topic. For each argument, make sure that you clearly identify the conclusion and the premises that support this conclusion, and defend these premises.
- Anticipate and respond to objections to each argument.

Revisions

We will consider, and remark, revisions on Assignments I-III. These revisions must be submitted by the final class.

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

THE PRICE OF INEQUALITY

HOW TODAY'S DIVIDED SOCIETY
ENDANGERS OUR FUTURE