

R. Miller  
lectures MW, 2:30-3:20  
sections F  
115 Rockefeller

EQUALITY, LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY  
PHIL 1930/GOVT 2935/ SOC 2930

In the United States, as throughout the world, many people worry about the extent of economic inequality, the state of democracy, threats of intrusion on liberty, and divisions among fellow-citizens. On all of these topics, facts, explanations and policies are disputed. In addition to their disagreements about facts, causes and consequences, people debate what moral standards to apply. For example, measures to reduce economic inequality that some support are, for others, threats to liberty or attempts to impose a morally meaningless pattern. Some regard abortion rights as a victory for liberty, others as a license for immoral killing. Immigration restrictions are, for some, an important expression of patriotic concern, while others take them to be, at best, unjustified exclusion of people seeking honest self-advancement. The economic inequality that has long been part of American economic life is hard to reconcile with democratic values for some, entirely compatible for others. "Equality, Liberty and Democracy" will investigate both the best current social-scientific descriptions of the inequalities, differences and power relations that some find troubling and the leading debates in political philosophy over the moral standards to be used in deciding what justice requires. We will mostly consider aspects of American society, but international comparisons and questions of how to respond to foreign political and economic burdens will also play a role. **There is a detailed schedule of topics and readings at the end of this syllabus.**

Readings:

Readings will be posted in the Contents section of our Blackboard site, except for those taken from the one book that is a required purchase. This is:  
John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, revised edition (Harvard) -- i.e., the edition which appeared in 1999, but incorporates revisions that Rawls made in 1975.  
It is on sale for the course at the Campus Store.

Format: When we meet as a whole class on Mondays and Wednesdays, lectures will be interspersed with class discussions. Still, inevitably, the Friday discussion sections will be the most important opportunity for students to exchange views, questions and arguments. These are an essential and required part of the course.

There will be a Discussion Board on our topics and readings. In addition, I would be very grateful for suggestions and comments concerning the course, and will set up a Discussion Board forum for such help (with an option of anonymity.)

Course requirements:

- 1.) Written work will consist of three papers, 5-7 pages in length, and a final exam. In each paper, you will be asked to write on one of a list of questions, distributed at least 10 days in advance. The first paper is due March 4, the second April 10, and the third May 6
- 2.) Students are expected to attend lectures and sections, having done the reading assigned in the syllabus.
- 3.) The written work will be weighted as follows to arrive at a "benchmark" grade: 20% for each paper, 25% for the final exam, 15% for the quality and frequency of participation in class, section and Discussion Board discussions.

Office hours:

My office hours are M, 4:00-5:00 and by appointment, 329 Goldwin Smith. My e-address is [rwm5@cornell.edu](mailto:rwm5@cornell.edu).

Course schedule:

**Nearly all assignments from articles will be excerpts. Of course, this is true of all assignments from books, as well.** Since readings from Rawls' book, *A Theory of Justice*, will be directly from this required purchase, I have specified assignments from it in detail, below. Otherwise, I have mostly postponed specification until the readings are posted in our Blackboard site.

1/21: Introduction

1/23 (section): A discussion of our initial judgments of major current inequalities in the United States

I. Economic Inequality

1/26: Economic inequality and its recent trend. Dennis Gilbert, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*.

1/28: Causing and reducing inequality -- and the moral question of whether equality matters. Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, "Winner-Take-All Politics;" Suzanne Mettler, *Degrees of Inequality*; Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal."

1/30 (section): To what extent should we try to reduce economic inequality?

2/2: Poverty: facts and concepts. Stanley Eitzen and Kelly Smith, *Experiencing Poverty*; John Iceland, *Poverty in America*, ch. 3; Amartya Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking."

2/4: Utilitarianism: A first moral standard. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch. 2.

2/6 (section): Should the greatest happiness principle guide public policy?

2/9: Equality of opportunity: facts and concepts. Miles Corak, "Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity and Intergenerational Mobility."

2/11: Equality and social justice: John Rawls' Justice as Fairness. In *A Theory of Justice*, sections are the basic, small units of the book. E.g., sec. 1 = pp. 3-6. For the first assignment, please read sections 1-3, 11-14, and 26, EXCEPT for the following parts, which are *not* assigned, p. 58 (top, "At this point...") to the start of first full paragraph on p. 62, p. 65 bottom ("THE DIFFERENCE PRINCIPLE..." to the start of the last paragraph on p. 67, p 70 ("CHAIN CONNECTION ...")- to the start of the first full paragraph on p. 72. Basically, this is a license to skip discussions of graphs that few find illuminating, which are not important in the book as a whole.

2/13 (section): How promising is Rawls' approach as a way of judging economic inequality?

[2/16: February Break]

2/18: Completing the arguments for Rawls' principles. *A Theory of Justice*, secs. 29, 33, 82.

2/20 (section): How powerful is Rawls' argument for his principles of justice?

II. The Claims of Liberty

2/23: Libertarianism: Robert Nozick. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, pp. ix, 30-33, 149-64, 167-82. [Topics for first paper distributed.]

2/25: The libertarian critique of Rawls. Nozick, "Distributive Justice;" Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* pp. xiii-xvi, sec 17. We are using parts of Nozick's article for copyright-related reasons. They appear in his book as well. The brief Rawls assignment elaborates some points that are especially relevant to his controversy with Nozick.

2/27 (section): How do you judge the Rawls/Nozick controversy? (Optional reading: Richard Miller, "Political Choice and Mutual Concern.")

3/2: The morality of abortion: John Noonan, "An Almost Absolute Value in History;" Judith Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion and Infanticide."

3/4: The legality of abortion. Supreme Court, *Roe v. Wade*; Dworkin, "Roe in Danger." [First paper due.]

3/6 (section): To what extent should women be free to have abortions?

III. The Significance of Difference: Nationality, Race and Class

3/9: Immigration: Open the gates? Orn Bodvarson and Hendrik Van den Berg, *The Economics of Immigration*; Joseph Carens, "Migration and Morality: A liberal egalitarian perspective;" Michael Dummett, *On Immigration and Refugees*.

3/11: Immigration and the claims of nationality. David Miller, "Immigration: The Case for Limits;" Miller, *On Nationality*.

- 3/13 (section): To what extent are immigration restrictions morally justifiable?
- 3/16: Does race still matter? Bertrand and Mullainathan, "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?"; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Devah Pager, "Race, Crime and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration."
- 3/18: Race and public policy. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*; Harris, *Profiles of Injustice*; *Bakke v. UC Board of Regents*.
- 3/20 (section): How important is race today? What should be done to counter racial disadvantages?  
[Topics for second paper distributed.]
- 3/23: Exploitation. Allen Wood, "Exploitation."
- 3/25: Reproducing class differences: Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*
- 3/27: (section): Is there anything to the idea of an exploited working class?  
[Spring Break]

#### IV. Debating Democracy

- 4/6: Democracy: A classic defense and current worries. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861); Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy*.
- 4/8: Does equality of political influence matter? Ronald Dworkin, "What Is Equality? Part 4: Political Equality."
- 4/10 (section): Should we care about equality of political influence as such? [Second paper due.]
- 4/13: Democracy as a way of life. Walt Whitman, "Mannahatta," Preface to *Leaves of Grass* (1855) (excerpt); Elizabeth Anderson, "Democracy: Instrumental vs. Non-Instrumental Value;"
- 4/15: Political equality and corporate power. Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Economic Democracy*.
- 4/17 (section): What changes, if any, do democratic values require in economic life?

#### VI. Global Questions

- 4/20: Is democracy a universal human right? China People's Republic of China, White Paper, *Human Rights in China*; Thomas Christiano, "A Non-Instrumental Argument for a Human Right to Democracy"
- 4/22: Intervention and the promotion of democracy. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (excerpt); Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (2002), ch. 5.
- 4/24 (section): Should democracy be promoted everywhere? [Topics for third paper distributed.]
- 4/27: Global poverty. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality."
- 4/29: Global inequality. Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice*; Moellendorf, "Why Global Inequality Matters;" David Miller, "Against Global Egalitarianism."
- 5/1 (section): What political duties do people in developed countries have to help the global poor?

#### VII. Equality, Liberty and Community

- 5/4: Equality and status. Elizabeth Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?"
- 5/6: Solidarity and Individualism. G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*; Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*. [Third paper due.]