What role should the reduction of economic inequality play in the laws and policies of a just society? This question continues to be central to both political philosophy and principled political argument. The current phase of Anglophone political philosophy began with John Rawls’ book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), an argument for a conception of justice consisting of a demanding principle of economic equality combined with a guarantee of civil and political liberty. Rawls took utilitarianism, with its pursuit of maximum welfare regardless of distribution, to be the main alternative. But soon, Robert Nozick, in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1973) offered an utterly different challenge, arguing that the proper appreciation of individuals’ right to freedom excludes taking from the better-off to help the worst-off. We will start with a detailed examination of the arguments about equality and freedom in these two books. (No prior acquaintance with either will be presupposed, so this seminar is an appropriate first course in political philosophy.) Then we will pursue the philosophical discussion of equality as a political ideal to the present day. This discussion includes efforts to replace the demand for equality with more moderate concerns to alleviate neediness, construals of the proper valuing of liberty as requiring aid to the disadvantaged, arguments for standards of equality more demanding than Rawls’ own, efforts to reframe the debate in terms of ties of community, the quality of life or social status, investigations of exploitation and desert, and arguments for the global extrapolation of egalitarian justice (which Rawls himself strenuously resisted). There is a tentative sequence of classes, topics and readings at the end of this syllabus. What we consider after looking at the initial debate between Rawls and Nozick will depend on the interests of participants in the seminar.

**Books:**
1.) Please buy the following books:

*A Theory of Justice* and *Anarchy, State and Utopia* are on sale for the course at the Campus Store. I have asked them to order *Political Liberalism*. If this does not arrive by the first assignment from the book, I will post the assigned pages in our Blackboard site.

2.) While it is not a required purchase and assigned pages will be posted online, you might consider buying one more book by Rawls, also on sale at the Campus Store, *Justice as Fairness*. This book is based on hand-outs Rawls distributed in a course on political justice in the 1980s. It clarifies and further develops arguments of *A Theory of Justice*, and sometimes suggests changes in emphasis or openness to new alternatives.
3.) If we decide to go with the relevant classes, late in the course, I will ask you to buy a little book by G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (2009).

4.) The rest of our readings will be posted in the Course Documents section of our Blackboard site, phil6430. For copyright-related reasons, it has a password, which I will announce in class.

**Course Requirements:**

1. **Discussion Board contributions:** At the end of every class, I will ask two or three people to take on the task of each contributing two or three questions or brief comments about next week’s readings to the Discussion Board on the course website. I will ask for volunteers (pressuring/assigning as a last resort), with the understanding that this assignment rotates. Of course, in addition to those who are delegated, everyone is welcome to contribute. The contributions must be posted by 8:00 PM on Wednesday, so that everyone has a chance to read them.

2. **Attendance and participation.** Everyone is expected to take part in discussions at each meeting of the seminar on the basis of knowledge of the readings and the Discussion Board contributions. I will sometimes ask people to make brief presentations on a topic, either solo or paired with someone advancing an opposing view.

3. **Short paper:** A short paper, of from six to eight pages double spaced, will be due at class on March 17. I will hand out a list of topics, concerned with Rawls’ and Nozick’s debate over equality and liberty, on February 24. If you would like to work on another topic in this general sphere, let’s talk about it. But this is not meant as a major project, just as a help in getting a sound grasp of this formative controversy.

4. **Term paper:** On March 17, I will distribute a description of diverse alternative topics and readings that could provide the basis for a fine term paper. If you would like to write on a topic substantially different from any on the list, consult with me first, to get approval and talk tactics. A draft is to be submitted by April 28. It will be returned ungraded, with comments, by May 5. The final version, revised in light of the comments, will be due May 19. You should aim for about 15 pages, double spaced.

My weighing of factors contributing to the final grade will be, approximately: term paper 60%; participation (including Discussion Board postings), 20%; short paper, 20%.

**Contact information:**

My e-mail is rwm5@cornell.edu. My office is 329 Goldwin Smith. My office hours are MW, 4:00-5:00.

**Tentative schedule:**

Through our class on March 10, this schedule involves Rawls’ and Nozick’s classic opposed arguments. We will definitely cover this material, though the actual course of our discussions might lead to a somewhat different pace or add a few reading assignments. So this part of the schedule is not very tentative. The rest of the schedule is what seems best to me now. It is subject to change in light of the interests of participants in the seminar and needs that arise in our discussions.

1/27: Debating equality – Introductory discussion and preview
I. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*
2/3: The elements of justice as fairness -- ATJ, pp. xvii-xviii, xi-xvi [i.e., the start of the original preface and, then, the preface to the revised edition], secs. 1-4, 11, pp. 62 (In the system of natural liberty ...")-65, secs.13-17, 24, 26. Sections are the basic, small units of the book. E.g., sec. 1 = pp. 3-6. Don’t worry if the discussions of graphs captioned “The Difference Principle” (pp. 65-67) and “Chain Connection” (pp. 70f.) don’t strike you as helpful. Few find them illuminating, and these representations are not important in the book as a whole. If you have time, a peek ahead to sec. 27 would be useful. An illuminating optional reading is Thomas Nagel, “Rawls on Justice”, *Philosophical Review* 82 (1973): 220-34. This proved to be the most influential of the initial reviews.

2/10: For equality and against utilitarianism – ATJ, secs. 27-30, 5; Harsanyi, “Can the Maximin Principle Serve as a Basis for Morality?”, *American Political Science Review* 69 (1975): 564-606; Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (excerpts) (pp. 94-104, 116-20, 126-33 [stopping at the middle,”... gain from its policies.”]) The secs. from ATJ complete the derivation of Rawls’ conception of justice from the original position and end with Rawls’ critique of classical utilitarianism. Harsanyi’s article is an influential argument that a commitment to maximize average utility is, instead, the right outcome of the original position. The assignment includes Rawls’ attempt to reply to Harsanyi’s challenge, and important discussions of the significance of the difference principle and equality in general. A further relevant reading from ATJ, optional but recommended, is section 49.

2/17: The priority of liberty -- ATJ, secs. 31-33, 39- 40, 82; Daniels, “Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty,” Daniels, ed. *Reading Rawls* (1975); Rawls, *Political Liberalism* [hereafter, “PL”], pp. 299-330, 357-61. Daniels argues that Rawls gives too little weight to economic equality, through failure to appreciate its connection with his grounds for insisting on equal civil and political liberties. In the assignment from PL (in a chapter reproducing a 1982 essay), Rawls tries to take account of Daniels’ concerns, clarifies the priority of liberty and presents new arguments for it.

II. NOZICK, *ANARCHY, STATE AND UTOPIA*

III. FROM LIBERTY AND EQUALITY TO AUTONOMY AND SUFFICIENCY
One important response to the Rawls-Nozick debate has been the attempt to create an ideal of justice including important truths in both of their approaches, but moderating strong claims that they seem to make. This often involves deriving rights to non-interference from the value of autonomy and replacing demands for equality with insistence that people be brought to a threshold of adequacy or equal social status.

book in this apparently strange order, you will first encounter Raz’s central general claim that political justice is mainly a matter of the proper valuing of autonomy, then his use of this claim against libertarian emphasis on non-interference, and then, his criticism of the excesses of egalitarianism. Frankfurt expands this attack on equality.

week of 3/31. (I will be out of town on 3/31. So we will have to reschedule for earlier in the week.): The sufficiency of equal status -- Elizabeth Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?” Ethics 109 (1999): 287-337; Richard Arneson, “Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism,” Ethics 110 (2000): 339-49. Anderson takes the proper demands of equality to be fulfilled when people have equal status in their society. She develops this position (which she takes to be faithful to Rawls’ intentions) in opposition to the view that equality demands the elimination of burdens of brute bad luck. Arneson, a leading luck-egalitarian, modifies his position a bit in response and then digs in his heels. 4/7: Political justice and the relief of need -- Peter Singer “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” Philosophy & Public Affairs 1 (1975): 229-43; Richard Miller, “Beneficence, Duty and Distance,” Philosophy & Public Affairs 32 (2004): 357-83; David Copp, “The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living,” Social Philosophy and Policy 9 (1992): 231-61. Whatever their views of equality, most people agree with Raz and Frankfurt that there is a duty to relieve the burdens of those in need. But how much must be done by those above the threshold to help those below it? Where should the threshold be set? Singer and Miller defend different assessments of how much must be given up to relieve dire needs. Copp contributes to the important, under-discussed topic of where the threshold of neediness, should be set. Two other revealing contributions to this topic are Amartya Sen, “Poor, Relatively Speaking,” Oxford Economic Papers 35 (1983): 153-69; Alfred Marshall, “The Future of the Working Classes (originally, 1873), Memorials of Alfred Marshall (London: Macmillan, 1925), pp.101-118. I will, at least, post them as supplementary readings. If we decide to have a separate class on this topic, they would be natural assigned readings.

IV. EXPANDING EQUALITY
While some have tried to moderate the opposition to economic inequality in Rawls’ conception of justice, others have argued that Rawls does not go far enough. Sometimes this charge of a failure of nerve involves a call for a more stringently egalitarian social ideal. Sometimes, the strengthening of Rawlsian equality is geographic, an extrapolation to the world at large of the principles that Rawls confined to relationships among fellow-citizens. 4/14: A More Radical Egalitarianism – G.A. Cohen, Rescuing Justice and Equality (2008), pp. 1-11; Cohen, “Incentives, Equality and Community” (1991); Cohen, Rescuing, pp. 151-61 (top); Cohen, Why Not Socialism? (2009), pp. 1-34 [don’t worry, the pages are very small]. Cohen presents the basics of his strong egalitarianism, criticizes Rawls for favoring an indefensibly weak construal of the difference principle, and then argues that even the stronger version does not fully capture the role of equality in justice. The latter point is driven home through a parable dominating his final book. Cohen’s criticisms of Rawls have generated lots of interesting critical responses, including Andrew Williams, “Incentives, Inequality and Publicity,” Philosophy & Public Affairs 27 (1998: 226-48). If people would like, we could expand the discussion of Cohen’s work to more than one class.
week of 4/21 (I will be out of town Thursday, so we will have to schedule a class earlier in the week.): Globalizing equality: Charles Beitz, “Justice and International Relations,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 4 (1975): 360-89; Richard Miller, “Rawls and Global Justice” *The Monist* (Summer 2011). Beitz argues that the original position should be extended worldwide and that a global version of Rawls’ principles of domestic justice results. I argue that these claims are not valid and are not required by a commitment to Rawls’ fundamental arguments concerning domestic justice.

V. RELATIONSHIPS OF EQUALITY
Sometimes the aspiration to reduce inequality derives from a moral ideal of appropriate human relationships, for example, an ideal of community or non-exploitive economic relations. We might conclude by looking at these relational approaches in more detail.


More, or Different: At a number of points, I have indicated topics that could easily extend to an additional class, though this would squeeze out others. Some topics that did not make it onto this tentative schedule are: desert (where David Miller, David Schmidtz and George Sher have made important contributions); justice as mutual benefit (i.e., David Gauthier’s version of contractualism and its consequences for economic justice); the compatibility of the requirements of tolerance that Rawls advances in *Political Liberalism* with egalitarian demands (Rawls, Gerald Gaus, Joseph Chan). I will use a Discussion Board forum and times set aside in class to discuss whether to make changes. Please feel free to e-mail me directly as well.