

Capitalism, Inequality, and Justice

(Abridged Syllabus)

Note to the reader: this syllabus is for an intermediate lecture course.

Course Description

As of last year, the 26 richest people in the world had as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the global population.¹ In this course, we will consider why inequalities of wealth and income matter, and whether they can be justified. We will discuss philosophical ideas and theories from across the political spectrum, ask what role the government should play in determining how resources are distributed in our society, and consider how questions about race, gender, and nationality intersect with questions about economic justice. Note: this is an intermediate-level philosophy course; students are expected to have taken at least one prior course in philosophy.

Assignments and Grading

You must complete *all* required assignments in order to pass this course. Your grade will be determined as follows:

- 15%: Participation
- 10%: Reading quizzes
- 20%: First paper (1500-1800 words)
- 25%: Second paper (1500-1800 words)
- 30%: Third paper (1500-1800 words)

Schedule and Readings

1. Wed 9/2 Introduction

- Dan Ariely, "[Wealth Inequality in Motion](#)" (video)
- Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, "Three Children and a Flute: An Illustration" (pages 12–15)
- Amia Srinivasan, "[Questions for Free-Market Moralists](#)" (*The New York Times*)

2. Mon 9/7 No Class (Labor Day)

Unit 1: Poverty and Charity

3. Wed 9/9 Saving a Child

- Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, Chapter I ("Saving a Child")

4. Mon 9/14 Is Charity Sufficient?

- Andrew Kuper, "More than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the 'Singer Solution'"

¹Larry Elliot, "World's 26 Richest People Own As Much As Poorest 50%, Says Oxfam" (*The Guardian*).

Unit 2: Capitalism and Socialism

5. **Wed 9/16 Is Inequality Necessary for Liberty?**
 - Milton Friedman, “The Relation Between Economic Freedom and Political Freedom”
6. **Mon 9/21 Why Not Socialism?**
 - G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (essay)
7. **Wed 9/23 Why Not Capitalism?**
 - Jason Brennan, *Why Not Capitalism?* (essay)

Unit 3: What’s So Bad About Inequality?

8. **Mon 9/28 Is Inequality Bad in Itself?**
 - Derek Parfit, “Equality or Priority?”
9. **Wed 9/30 Does Money Make Us Happy?**
 - Kahneman et al., “Would You Be Happier If You Were Richer? A Focusing Illusion”
 - Diener et al., “Wealth and Happiness Across the World: Material Prosperity Predicts Life Evaluation, Whereas Psychological Prosperity Predicts Positive Feeling” (abstract only)
10. **Mon 10/5 Should We Care About Inequality or Poverty?** *Paper 1 due*
 - Frank Jackson, *Inequality* (essay)

Unit 4: Equality of Opportunity

11. **Wed 10/7 Why Equality of Opportunity?**
 - Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters*, Chapters 4 (“Why Equal Opportunity?”) and 5 (“Education”)
12. **Mon 10/12 No Class (Indigenous People’s Day)**
13. **Wed 10/14 Is Merit a Myth?**
 - Iris Marion Young, “Affirmative Action and the Myth of Merit”
 - Emily Badger et al., “[Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys](#)” (*The New York Times*)
14. **Mon 10/19 What Is Race? What is Gender?**
 - Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”
15. **Wed 10/21 Inequality and Parenting**
 - Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “Legitimate Parental Partiality”

Unit 5: Does Redistribution Violate Our Rights?

16. **Mon 10/26 Rights as Side Constraints**
 - Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pages 28–42 and 45–51
 - John Harris, “The Survival Lottery”
17. **Wed 10/28 The Wilt Chamberlain and Self-Ownership Arguments**
 - Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pages 149–164 and 167–174
 - William Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pages 102–110
18. **Mon 11/2 Owning Property**
 - Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pages 174–182
 - William Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, pages 110–121
19. **Wed 11/4 Libertarianism and the Case for Reparations**
 - Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations”

Unit 6: Beyond Equality of Opportunity

20. **Mon 11/9 Justice as Fairness I** *Paper 2 due*
 - John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, excerpts from sections 1–4, 11–13, 17, 24, 26 and 29.
21. **Wed 11/11 Justice as Fairness II**
 - John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sections 43–44 and 47–48
 - William Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, pages 53–75
22. **Mon 11/16 Justice and Gender I**
 - Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, Chapters I (“Introduction: Justice and Gender”) and V (“Justice as Fairness: For Whom?”)
23. **Wed 11/18 Justice and Gender II**
 - Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Chapter I (“Introduction: Feminism and International Development”)
24. **Mon 11/23 Justice and the Ghetto Poor**
 - Tommie Shelby, “Justice, Deviancy, and the Dark Ghetto”
25. **Wed 11/25 Justice and Immigration**
 - Joseph Carens, “Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders”
26. **Mon 11/30 No Class (Thanksgiving Recess)**
27. **Wed 12/2 Conclusion** *Paper 3 due*
 - No readings