This seminar deals with a most fundamental question of political philosophy (and of day-to-day politics), the meaning of equality. However, it will concentrate on a particular context in which the concept of equality is central, namely the definition of right and left. It will be a working assumption of this seminar that the right-left distinction is still operative in our politics and that it rotates around conflicting definitions of equality. Of course, equality is an empty concept unless we specify equality of what. For us the “what” consists of many things:

1. Equality with regard to the distribution of rights, income and assets
2. Equality of life chances,
3. Equality with regard to the requisites and resources for directing one’s life freely according to one’s own reason,
4. Equality of citizenship, especially with regard to “membership” in a polity and the freedom to participate in influencing political decisions vs inequality of membership and decision-making.
5. Equality of power and political resources to influence decisions.
6. Equality of treatment by the political order and by others.
7. Equality of respect and dignity.

We will be examining the whole range of these meanings as we go along.

As for what equality means in understanding present-day political commitments, we will go back to a rather traditional way of defining the spectrum of political positions: Specifically, as we move right, politics aims at transferring inequalities of circumstance or endowment to the distribution of economic, political and social goods. Those on the right also seeks to translate these inequalities into access to political influence, political resources, and the distribution of life chances. As we move left, politics aims toward greater equality in all these dimensions—economic, political, and social goods, and proponents on the left explicitly seek to translate these equalities into access to political influence, political resources, and the distribution of life chances. Often, though not always, left and right take opposed positions on whether the market should be considered a mechanism for such distribution. Somewhere between these positions is the whole debate on merit and desert and whether it makes sense to distribute fundamental goods on this basis. Hopefully, we will spend a good part of the seminar debating both the meaning of equality and whether right and left should be understood in its terms.

**Booklist:**
- Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (Yale)
- Branko Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have-Not* (Basic Books)
I. Egalitarianism as concept—what do we mean by equality?
   a. Stuart White, *Equality*, ch. 1

Recommended:

A short exercise 4-5 pages (to be assigned) on how far you would want things equalized based on reading White and Williams due as an attached file on Monday, September 12.

II. Egalitarianism based on status, power, and citizenship. Democracy, Political Equality and the Market—Political Notions of Equality and Inequality.

A. Political equality defined:
   Stuart White, *Equality*, ch. 2.

B. Political equality vs. the Market.


   Recommended:
   David Miller, “Equality and Justice,” ch. 11 of *Principles of Social Justice*. (Blackboard)
   Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right: The Significance of a Political Distinction*
   Alain Noël Jean-Philippe Thérien *Left and Right in Global Politics*
   Arthur Rosenberg, *Democracy and Socialism*

D. Political Equality and Effective Participation vs. Pluralism
   Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, chs. 1, 2, 6, 8,* 9,* 12-14, 15-16, 18 (251-253), 20-21, 22-23*

Paper on political equality and social justice, approximately 8 pages due Wednesday, October 19 in HuB16 (political science contact office) by 3 pm. Note date.
III. Justice-driven notions of equality and inequality: Analytical approaches.

A. Liberal Left Egalitarianism and Justice—the problem of desert vs equality of primary goods.

John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*
1. (The Principles of Justice) sections
   a) 1-3, 5 10-15; (equality)16-17, 48, 67;
   b) (The original position) 4, 20-26, 29;
   c) (Equality of liberty) 31-33 36-37 (Political Justice, Political Constitutions, and Equality of Political Participation and its limits).

2. (Justice, Equality and Political Economy) 41-43, (attack on merit as basis for economic distribution) 48
Recommended:
Stuart White *Equality* ch. 5 “Equality and Incentives”

B. Meritocracy and Inequality


Second paper on Rawls’s notion of equality vs Meritocracy due in Hu B16 by 3pm on Friday, November 11th.

C. Luck Egalitarianism and its problems

Recommended:
Recommended:

IV. Adequacy of Marx and Rawls as defense of Equality: Equality as an Ethos.

G. A. Cohen, *If You’re an Egalitarian, Why are you so Rich*, chs 1-3 (pp. 1-57); chs. 6-10 (101-179)

V. A Right Response:

Inequality and Contract:

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy State and Utopia* pp. 149-183 (on Blackboard)
Recommended:
Friedrich von Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* v.2 “Social or Distributive
VII. Problems of Inequality: Inequality of Income and Wealth:

Branko Milanovic, *The Haves and the Have-Nots*

1. Essay I “Unequal People,” pp. 1-32 (read entire essay)*
   *Vignette 1.5 (Was Socialism Egalitarian?) pp. 53-60.
   *Vignette 1.7 (“Who Gains from Fiscal Redistribution”) pp. 60-68.
   Vignette 1.8 (“Can Several Countries Exist in One?”) pp. 74-77.

   Essay II “Unequal Nations,” pp. 95-108* (read entire essay)*
   Vignette 2.1 (“Was Marx Lead Astray?”)
   *Vignette 2.2 (“How Unequal is Today’s World?”) pp. 115-119, *Vignette 2.3 (“How Much Your Income is Determined at Birth”) pp. 120-123.

3. Essay III “Unequal World: Inequality Among Citizens of the World” pp. 149-155 (read entire essay)*
   *Vignette 3.6 (“Income Inequality and the Global Financial Crises”) pp. 193-197.

*Read especially carefully. Crucial to arguments about income and wealth inequality! Hint: there is an important thread of argument running through Essay 2, Vignettes 2.1-Vignettes 2.3 and 3.1. What is it? It has something to do with one’s income and luck.


VIII. Summing Up


The topics for the last paper—a take home final—will be handed out on the last day of class, May 7th.

Course Requirements

I. Each member of the seminar will have to give at least one presentation on the readings on a question that I will pose. I will select volunteers from week to week. Your presentation should have at least three components: 1) it should lay out the core underlying assumptions of the argument you are discussing; 2) it should discuss how the argument fits in with the theme of the course as well as arguments we have already discussed—does it attack, refute, complement previous arguments; 3) and it should critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of the argument both conceptually and empirically. This last requirement means that you should present your own argument on the strength or weakness of the one we are reading. On occasion we may have two presentations with each person taking opposite sides of an issue.
II. There will be a series of four papers and one short exercise at the beginning and three 6-8 pages a piece in which you will be asked to clarify some problem in the readings. I will assign the topics and the papers as we go along.

1. A short 4 page exercise on how you far you would press equality due in class on Monday, September 12.
2. The first larger paper of approximately 8 pages on political equality and social justice will be due Wednesday, October 19 in HuB16 by 3 pm.
3. Second larger paper of approximately 8 pages on Rawls’s notion of equality vs Meritocracy will be due in Hu B16 by 3pm on Friday, November 11th.
4. The topics for the last paper—a take home final—on problems of luck egalitarianism, its critics, the right defense of inequality egalitarianism and income inequality will be handed out on the last day of class. Thursday, December 8th.- In lieu of the assigned topics for the final, I will be happy to allow students to forge their own topic going more deeply into one of the questions of the course. But you must discuss this option with me in advance—at least three weeks before the end of the semester.

On occasion, I will bring in articles on concrete problems of inequality or on policies to overcome it. These articles will serve to provoke discussion and allow us to examine the meaning of the arguments we are reading for evaluating concrete social and political problems. On the day when I bring in these articles, I may ask you to write a one page reaction paper for the following session. The purpose of these reaction papers will be to stimulate discussion. These papers will count in the participation category.

Grading will be as follows:
The first exercise will be 10% of the grade.
Each of the other papers will count 25% with 15% for participation, presentations, and possible reaction papers. Participation, I know, is a relative matter as some of you are very loquacious and others quiet and reflective. So I will judge this 15% liberally—each person can engage relative to their style and temperament. But ideally we all will find much to discuss and a high grade in this area could very well be a collective good in which all can share.

Each member of the seminar will have a chance to rewrite the first two papers as long as the rewrite is handed in by the end of the week in which the paper is returned. Grades for rewrites will be averaged in with the first version but there will be a bias in favor of the improved grade.

Blackboard
I will put the readings on Blackboard.

Office Hours
I shall have office hours uptown on Tu, Th in HU B16 from Tu Th 1:15-2:15 but I could meet you after class at or before class if necessary. I also will be available in Milne 204 from 2-3:30pm on Wednesdays or by appointment. I can be reached at 442-5277 or at pbreiner@albany.edu

Some Useful Overviews of Recent Debates on Equality:

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism means to pass off someone else’s work as your own. *Please be warned that should I find you have plagiarized, you will receive an immediate E in the course and further actions will be taken, including sending your case before a university committee.*