

## **Social Structure, Public Policy, and Ethics**

80-136

Instructor: Daniel Malinsky

Email: malinsky@cmu.edu

Office: Doherty 4301A

Office hours: Wednesday after class & by appt

Grader: Konstantin (Kasey) Genin

Email: kgenin@andrew.cmu.edu

### BACKGROUND:

This is an introductory-level course with no prerequisites.

### DESCRIPTION:

This course examines topics in public policy and social organization from the perspective of ethics (a.k.a. moral philosophy). Specifically, we will focus on social inequality along several dimensions: wealth, race, and gender. We begin with a theoretical look at the ideal of equality and criticisms of that ideal. What, if anything, are we morally obligated to equalize in society, specifically as a matter of government policy and institutional arrangement? What kinds of inequality should we tolerate? In the second part of the course, we will examine the relationship between market-based distribution of goods (e.g., wealth, employment) and ethical concerns. Following that, we turn our attention to racial inequality and in particular one important source of inequality and unfreedom in the United States: the practice of incarceration. Then we turn to gender inequality and examine arguments that concern the gendered division of labor, family roles, and vulnerability to violence. Throughout we will highlight and critically examine the moral commitments, as well as empirical assumptions, underlying political policy positions. We will examine the extent to which abstract philosophical thinking on the subject of equality can be useful in the arena of public policy.

### OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Read and analyze difficult philosophical texts
- Summarize and reconstruct normative arguments, and identify empirical presuppositions
- Compare viewpoints from different political ideologies
- Formulate your own ideas and arguments concerning controversial policy topics

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

There will be reading assigned for every Monday and Wednesday meeting. It is **MANDATORY** that you complete this reading in full before the class. You are expected to contribute to class discussion. There will be a short writing assignment due every Friday meeting. (Note exceptions to this schedule in the first two weeks, due to some class cancellations.) Your task will be to

respond to a question prompt, related to the week's readings, in short essay form (i.e., several paragraphs). I expect approximately one page single-spaced. (A bit less or more is fine; the length is not important. The content is important! No more than two pages, please.) Sometimes I will ask you to simply summarize some aspect of the reading, or to make a comparison between different viewpoints. More often I will ask you to analyze an author's argument, criticize it, or explain why you agree. These assignments are designed to keep you continuously engaged with the material, thinking critically about what you read throughout the semester. There will be no midterm, and no final exam. Your class participation and the written assignments will constitute the entirety of your grade.

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

Class participation: 25%

Writing assignments: 75%

The writing assignments will be graded on a 10-point scale. The lowest grade will be dropped, so 10 short "essays" will make up 75% of your grade. We will discuss some successful example responses in class, and you will receive feedback on your writing so you know how to improve. More details concerning the writing assignments, including a grading rubric, will be distributed separately. All reading material will be made available online, on Blackboard.

#### COURSE POLICIES:

##### *Missing class and late assignments*

I recognize that occasional problems associated with illness, family emergencies, job interviews, other professors, etc. will inevitably lead to legitimate conflicts over your time. If you expect that you will be unable to turn in an assignment on time, or must be absent from a class meeting, please notify me (either in class or via email) in advance and we can agree on a reasonable accommodation. Otherwise, your grade will be penalized.

##### *Cheating and Plagiarism*

It is the responsibility of each student to be aware of the university policies on academic integrity, including the policies on cheating and plagiarism. This information is available at <http://www.cmu.edu/academic-integrity>.

##### *Technology*

Internet-connected devices can be a major source of distraction in class to you and your fellow classmates. On the other hand, I want you to bring the reading to class with you, and since the readings are all online, it may be inconvenient (and wasteful) to require you to print them out. These considerations must be weighed against each other. To begin, I will permit the use of laptops and tablets in the classroom. If these devices become too much of a distraction -- if they inhibit class discussion and reduce participation -- they will no longer be permitted.

SCHEDULE:

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Wednesday 01/18	Introduction	
Friday 1/20	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Monday 1/23	Equality and morality	G.A. Cohen, "On the currency of egalitarian justice"
Wednesday 1/25		Amartya Sen, "Utilitarianism and welfarism"
Friday 1/27		John Kekes, <i>The Illusions of Egalitarianism</i> (excerpts)
Monday 1/30	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Wednesday 2/1		Elizabeth Anderson, "What is the point of equality?"
Friday 2/3		<b>Writing Assignment #1</b>
Monday 2/6		Friedrich Hayek, "Equality, value, and merit"
Wednesday 2/8		G.A. Cohen, "Freedom and poverty"
Friday 2/10		<b>Writing Assignment #2</b>
Monday 2/13		Anne Phillips, "Defending equality of outcome"
Wednesday 2/15		Kai Nielson, "Radical egalitarian justice: justice as equality"
Friday 2/17		<b>Writing Assignment #3</b>
Monday 2/20	Economics and distribution	Allen Buchanan, <i>Ethics, Efficiency, and the Market</i> (excerpts)

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Wednesday 2/22		Allen Buchanan, <i>Ethics, Efficiency, and the Market</i> (excerpts)
Friday 2/24		<b>Writing Assignment #4</b>
Monday 2/27		Deborah Satz, “Liberalism, economic freedom, and the limits of markets”
Wednesday 3/1		Richard Arneson, “Is work special? Justice and the distribution of employment”
Friday 3/3		<b>Writing Assignment #5</b>
Monday 3/6		Lane Kenworthy, <i>Egalitarian Capitalism</i> (excerpts)
Wednesday 3/8		Fabien Pfeffer and Robert Schoeni, “How wealth inequality shapes our future”
Friday 3/10-Friday 3/17	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Monday 3/20	Race and incarceration	Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> (excerpts)
Wednesday 3/22		Michelle Alexander, <i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> (excerpts)
Friday 3/24		<b>Writing Assignment #6</b>
Monday 3/27		Gwen Rubenstein and Debbie Mukamal, “Welfare and housing -- denial of benefits to drug offenders” and Marc Mauer, “Mass imprisonment and disappearing voters”

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Wednesday 3/29		Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Black family in the age of mass incarceration”
Friday 3/31		<b>Writing Assignment #7</b>
Monday 4/3		Angela Davis, <i>Are prisons obsolete?</i> (excerpts)
Wednesday 4/5		Angela Davis, <i>Are prisons obsolete?</i> (excerpts)
Friday 4/7		<b>Writing Assignment #8</b>
Monday 4/10	More theory: oppression	Iris Marion Young, “Five faces of oppression”
Wednesday 4/12	More theory: needs	Nancy Fraser, “Talking about needs”
Friday 4/14		<b>Writing Assignment #9</b>
Monday 4/17	Gender inequality	Hadas Mandel and Michael Shalev, “How welfare states shape the gender pay gap”
Wednesday 4/19		Gillian Lester, “A defense of paid family leave” (part 1)
Friday 4/21	NO CLASS	NO CLASS
Monday 4/24		Gillian Lester, “A defense of paid family leave” (part 2)
Wednesday 4/26		Nancy Fraser, “After the family wage”
Friday 4/28		<b>Writing Assignment #10</b>
Monday 5/1		Martha Nussbaum, “Sex, laws, and inequality: what India can teach the United States”

Date	Topic	Assignment Due
Wednesday 5/3		Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex”
Friday 5/5		<b>Writing Assignment #11</b>