PS 506: Is Inequality Good?
Economic Inequality and Political Theory

Term: Fall 2015  
Day/time: T & Th, 2:30pm-3:45pm  
Location: Van Hise 222  
Email: mschwarze@wisc.edu

Instructor: Dr. Michelle A. Schwarze  
Office: 222 North Hall (2nd Floor)  
Temp. Office: 407 North Hall (4th Floor)  
Office hours: T 12:00pm-2:00pm and by appointment

Course Description
Is economic inequality good? In contemporary America, it seems odd to phrase a question about any kind of inequality this way, as the answer seems obvious: no! How could inequality seem appropriate in a democratic society fully committed (at least in word if not in deed) to equality, especially when extreme economic inequality and some types of racial and social inequality seem to so powerfully and perversely affect our political life? Yet our contemporary economic system is characterized by both some types of inequality and the recognition and expansion of certain rights or liberties (whether political or economic). Indeed, countries like the U.S., in which there has been an increasing economic inequality in recent years, are also those in which political liberties for women and some minorities has continued to be expanded. The recent Supreme Court decision this summer in Obergefell v. Hodges is one notable example.

In order to better understand the conditions, if any, under which economic inequality has been justified in political theory over the last few centuries – that is, the conditions under which economic inequality could be considered “good” – we will investigate the following questions, among others, in this class:

1) What do we mean by “good”? Is this a material or immaterial good? Is it a political, economic, or social one?
2) What do we mean by “wealth”? In what does wealth consist?
3) Good for whom? Is this inequality good for the individual person, or for society as a whole?
4) Who judges? Who decides whether this inequality is good or not?

Course Materials
Required texts:


Highly recommended:


Course Expectations & Policies

In order to achieve the goals of this course, there are a few things you must do.

1. You will need to complete the readings assigned for each day before class begins in order to prepare and submit your discussion questions and participate in our seminar discussion (more on these in the assignments section below). Be sure to also bring the relevant readings to class each day (which may mean printing them out).

2. You will need to complete your assignments on time, as I will accept no late work without an approved accommodation prior to the due date. Accommodations will be made for those students who have documented proof of an emergency.

3. You will also need to actively participate in seminar discussion. You should expect our class discussions to provide you with an opportunity to thoughtfully participate and respectfully engage with both the course content and your peers’ contributions. To ensure that these fruitful discussions are possible, I ask that you are courteous to your peers—to turn off cell phones and end conversation before class begins and not use your laptops for anything besides notes.

A successful course requires some things of me as well. Given that you may have questions about the subject, material, assignments, or college generally during the semester, I will be available during weekly office hours, by personal appointment and through email to answer them. I strongly encourage you to use my office hours to come discuss substantive questions or to bring in paper outlines for review.
If you email me, be sure to:
1. Address me like someone you may ask for a letter of recommendation some day rather than someone to whom you are sending a text message.
2. Expect a 24-hour response time.
3. Restrict your questions to those regarding format or logistics. I believe it is far more valuable for you to ask substantive questions in person—whether in class or during office hours—so I can give you a comprehensive response and ensure you understand what we have discussed.

I am firmly committed to ensuring equal learning access for all and therefore encourage individuals with disabilities to participate in the McBurney Center’s available programs and activities. If you need an accommodation, you should contact the center at (608) 263-2741 or mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu to obtain documentation for your specific needs. You must do so by the end of Week 2 and you must contact me in advance to make appropriate arrangements for papers, etc.

Finally, I strictly adhere to the UW Academic Misconduct Process and will report all incidents of academic misconduct the Dean of Students Office, as it is a prerequisite for maintaining academic integrity in our course. To avoid plagiarism, be sure to use either text-specific (e.g., citations to part, section, chapter and paragraph number of Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) or APSA-style citations unless otherwise stated (http://www.apsanet.org/files/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf).

Assignments & Grading
Your grade will be calculated according to your score(s) on assignments in the six following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short paper [&amp; optional rewrite]</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your grade will assigned according to the following grading scale:

- A ≥ 93.5
- AB = 87.5-93.4
- B = 82.5-87.4
- BC = 77.5-82.4
- C = 69.5-77.4
- D = 60-69.4
- F ≤ 59.9
Short paper

Your first assignment will be a one-page single-spaced (12 pt. Times New Roman font) response paper designed to allow you to critically engage with our texts and to develop your writing skills. You will be given a paper prompt at the end of Week 2. This assignment is designed to help you learn how to read carefully by giving you an opportunity to evaluate some of our texts under a close lens. I will provide you with a grading rubric and written feedback when I return your work.

But I also want to give you the opportunity to improve. David Hume, when reflecting on the quality of his own work, emphasized a particularly important part of the learning process: “A man who is free from mistakes can pretend to no praises except from the justness of his understanding. But a man who corrects his mistakes shows at once the justness of his understanding and the candour and ingenuity of his temper” (T App.1). I couldn’t agree more with Hume’s claim and therefore want to reward those of you who are interested in exercising your candor and ingenuity in this class. To do so, I allow all students the option to resubmit one-page papers. I will only include the higher score of the two submitted papers in your grade, so no student will be penalized for resubmission.

Midterm exam

Your midterm exam will be held on Tuesday, October 13th from 2:30pm-3:45pm in 482 Van Hise. The exam will cover all material assigned from Weeks 1-7. It will consist of identification questions (IDs) and a short essay.

Final paper and presentation

Your final paper (7-10 double-spaced pages, 12 pt. Times New Roman font), due Thursday, December 3rd, will require you to develop an argument in response to Bellamy’s utopian, egalitarian vision in Looking Backward: 2000-1887, which you will be responsible for reading on your own over the course of the semester.

You will also be required to give a 15-minute presentation on your final paper to the class at the end of the semester. By doing so, you will have the opportunity to cultivate your ability to present your research concisely and cogently. I will provide a handout with more information about your final paper and presentation at the end of Week 4.

Participation

Your participation grade will be calculated based on two things: 1) daily discussion questions submitted online through Learn@UW and discussed at the outset of each class in your daily discussion groups and 2) the quantity and quality of your participation in class. You will be expected to submit one discussion question on Learn@UW by no later than 12pm on the day of each class. I will not evaluate the content of these questions, but they should either be a clarification question or a substantive question on the assigned readings that you think would be useful to discuss in class. At the beginning of each class, you will meet in pre-assigned groups to discuss these questions and pick one to pose to the entire class.
**Class Schedule**

***Over the course of the semester, you will need to read Bellamy’s Looking Backward on your own.***

**Week 1**

9/3: Class canceled. (APSA Meeting)

**Week 2**


**SHORT PAPER PROMPT GIVEN**

DUE: SYLLABUS AGREEMENT [on Learn@UW]

**Week 3**

9/15: Hume, “Of the Jealousy of Trade” (pgs. 327-331), Hume, “Of Public Credit” (pgs. 349-365); Voltaire, “Equality”*, Frankfurt, “Economic Inequality is Not Immoral” [available on Learn@UW]
    *Make sure to read Rousseau’s notes (found on pg. 119-151)!

**Week 4**

9/22: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part I (pgs. 65-90)*  
    *Make sure to read Rousseau’s notes (found on pg. 119-151)!
9/24: Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, Part II (pgs. 91-117)*; Gourevitch, “Police Work” [available on Learn@UW]  
    *Make sure to read Rousseau’s notes (found on pg. 119-151)!

**FINAL PAPER + PRESENTATION PROMPT GIVEN**

**Week 5**

9/29: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book I, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, Book II, Chapter 7, 10 (pgs. 163-166, 171-178, 190-194, 197-199)

DUE: SHORT PAPER

10/1: Class canceled.

**Week 6**


**Week 7**

10/13: **MIDTERM EXAM 2:30pm-3:45pm**

**Week 8**

**DUE: OPTIONAL REWRITE**

**Week 9**
10/27: Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (pgs. 25-52), Selections from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (pgs. 67-81)
10/29: Marx, Selections from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (pgs. 80-108)

**Week 10**
11/3: Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, “Preliminary Remarks” (pgs. 6-18), Book II, Chapter I (pgs. 85-97)
11/5: Class canceled.

**Week 11**

**Week 12**

**Week 13**
11/24: Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, Introduction, Chapters I-III, V (pgs. 7-50, 63-70)
11/26: No class. Happy Thanksgiving!

**Week 14**
12/1: Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, Chapters VIII-X (pgs. 97-131)
12/3: Rawls, “Justice as Fairness”**

**DUE: FINAL PAPER**

**Week 15**
12/8: Student Presentations
12/10: Student Presentations

**Week 16**
12/15: Wrap-up
Enjoy your winter break!