Course Description & Objectives

Economic inequality is a topic that dominates contemporary political debate. Yet long before Bernie Sanders opined about the moral injustice of economic inequality theorists in the eighteenth and nineteenth century grappled with the political and moral meaning of rapid shifts in production, the distribution of wealth, and education. For some, these shifts held enormous promise for improving the material and psychological well-being of all and especially of the least well-off, while others were wary of the moral and political consequences associated with commercial development. Economic inequality in particular seemed inextricably linked to commercial progress, and that inequality often (or always) had pernicious psychological, moral, and political consequences according to some.

The purpose of this seminar is to explore the arguments made for and against commercial society in spite of (or sometimes as a result of) the economic inequality it fosters. Is economic inequality necessarily unjust, or do certain conditions need to hold for it to violate principles of justice or legitimacy? Does economic inequality lead to political instability or personal unhappiness? Does it lead to political inequality? Should we treat all economic inequality equally? We will address these as well as related questions by reading and analyzing primary texts in modern political theory and the history of economic thought. As this class contains a number of non-specialists, however, we will often pair these historical analyses with contemporary issues. My hope is that doing so will also allow us to explore the contemporary relevance of these thinkers and the historical nature of the question we are addressing.

Required Texts


**Course Expectations & Policies**

As this is a graduate seminar, I expect you to complete the readings assigned for each week prior to our class meeting, to take notes on your readings, to prepare and submit your weekly discussion questions on time (more on this in the section below), and to actively participate in our seminar discussion. Active participation requires you bring the relevant readings to class each day (which may mean printing them beforehand) and that you respectfully engage with both the course content and your peers’ contributions.

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 or those students who have documented evidence of learning disabilities. 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 must 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**

For those graduate students enrolled in the 3-credit course for a letter grade (i.e. POL 931), your grade will be calculated according to your score(s) on assignments in the following categories. More detail on each of these requirements is provided below. Incompletes will only be assigned under extraordinary circumstances.
Short paper & optional rewrite (25%) + Seminar paper (30%) + Discussion questions (15%) + Participation (30%) = Final Grade (100%)

Note: Auditors or those students enrolled in POL 900 are only required to attend class, participate, and submit weekly discussion questions.

Short paper: You will be required to write a one-page single-spaced response paper (12 pt. Times New Roman font) designed to allow you to critically engage with primary texts by Week 4 (9/27). You will receive a short paper prompt by the end of Week 2.

But I want to give you the opportunity to improve as well. 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).

To reward those of you who are interested in exercising your candor and ingenuity, I allow all students the option to resubmit one-page papers by Week 6 (10/11). I will only include the higher score of the two submitted papers in your grade, so no student will be penalized for resubmission.

Seminar paper: You will be required to write an 8500-10000 word (12 pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced) seminar paper on a topic of your choice related to the course theme. This assignment will need to be completed in three stages: first, you will need to meet with me to discuss your paper proposal; second, you will need to submit a 500 word paper abstract by Week 9 (11/1); and, third, you will need to submit your final paper by no later than Week 14 (12/6). Ideally, this paper would serve as a first draft of a paper to present at an academic conference or to send out for publication.

Discussion questions: Each week, each student must submit a discussion question on that week’s assigned readings by no later than Tuesday at 10:00am to our shared Google Doc on the Canvas course site (available through Learn@UW). This question may ask to clarify something from the reading(s), it may be analytic, or it may be synthetic. Each student will be responsible for reading all of the discussion questions submitted prior to that week’s class meeting.

Participation: Participation in any course, but especially in a graduate seminar, is paramount to the course’s success. I expect you to be in class each week on time, unless you have notified me otherwise. As mentioned above, I also expect you to actively participate in each class. I make a point of attempting to ensure relatively equal participation from all students.
Schedule

Week 1 (9/6): Should We Care About Economic Inequality? What are Its Political Consequences?
- Piketty, selections from *Capital in the 21st Century*
- Acemoglu and Robinson, “The Rise and Decline of General Laws of Capitalism” [available on Learn@UW]

Week 2 (9/13): Early Justifications for Commercial Development & Wealth Accumulation
- Hume, *Essays*, “Of Commerce” (pgs. 253-267); “Of Refinement in the Arts” (pgs. 268-280); “Of the Jealousy of Trade” (pgs. 327-331); “Of Public Credit” (pgs. 349-365)

Week 3 (9/20): Early Justifications for Wealth Accumulation, Continued
- Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, Part Two, Chapter 1, “Montesquieu” [available on Learn@UW]

Week 4 (9/27): The Social and Psychological Consequences of Wealth Inequality
- Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality* (all; make sure to read Rousseau’s notes on pgs. 119-151!)

DUE: SHORT PAPER

Week 5 (10/4): Political Solutions to Economic Inequality?
- Rousseau, *The Major Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, selections from *The Social Contract* (Book I, Chapters 1-3, 5-8; Book II, Chapter 7, 10 (pgs. 163-166, 171-178, 190-194, 197-199)
- Neuhouser, “Rousseau’s Critique of Economic Inequality” [available on Learn@UW]

Week 6 (10/11): The Moral and Historical Foundations for Economic Inequality
- Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section 1, Chapters 1-5, Part I, Section 2, Chapters 3-5, Part I, Section 3, Chapters 1-3, Part II, Section 1, Chapter 5, Part II, Section 2, Chapters 1-3, Part II, Section 3, Introduction, Chapters 2-3, Part III, Section 1 (there is only 1 section), Chapter 2, selections from Chapter 3 (paragraphs 30-41), selections from Chapter 5 (paragraphs 5-10), selection from Chapter 6 (paragraphs 6-7), Part IV, Section 1 (there is only 1 section) Chapters 1-2, Part VI, selections from Section 3 (paragraphs 31-46) (pgs. 9-26, 34-43, 43-66, 92-93, 97-108, 113-134, 149-154, 164-169, 172-174, 179-193, 253-259)
- Rasmussen, “Adam Smith on What is Wrong with Economic Inequality” [available on Learn@UW]

**DUE: OPTIONAL REWRITE**

**Week 7 (10/18): The Historical and Religious Grounds for Economic Inequality**
- Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, selections from *Early Draft of Wealth of Nations* [available on Learn@UW]
- Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Volume 1, “Introduction and Plan of Work” [Note: Smith’s introduction, not the general introduction!], Book 1, Chapters 1-2, 8, selections from Chapter 9 (paragraphs 14-24), 10 Part II (i.e. I.x.c), Book III, Chapter 1, selections from Chapter 2 (paragraphs 1-12), Chapter 4, (pgs. 10-12, 13-30, 82-104, 111-115, 135-159, 376-380, 381-390, 411-427)
- Pitts, “Irony in Adam Smith’s Global History” [available on Learn@UW]
- Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, “Adam Smith and the End of a Vision” (pgs. 100-113)

**Week 8 (10/25): Economic Growth and Solutions to Economic Inequality**
- Herzog, “The Normative Stakes of Economic Growth; Or, Why Adam Smith Does Not Rely on ‘Trickle Down’” [available on Learn@UW]

**Week 9 (11/1) The Historical and Religious Grounds for Capitalism**
- Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*, “On the Jewish Question” (pgs. 25-52); selections from *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (pgs. 67-108)

**DUE: SEMINAR PAPER ABSTRACT**

**Week 10 (11/8) Capitalism and Accumulation**
- Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*, selections from *Capital, Vol. 1*
  - “From the Afterword to Second German Edition”; Part I “Commodities and Money” (all); Part II “The Transformation of Money into Capital” (all); Part III, Chapter VII, Section 2 “The Production of Surplus Value”; Chapter X, Section 2 “The Greed for Surplus-Labour. Manufacturer and Boyard”; Part IV (all); Part V (all); Part VIII (all) (pgs. 299-302, 302-329, 329-343, 351-361, 364-367, 376-417, 417-431, 431-438)
- Marx, *Marx-Engels Reader*, *Capital, Vol. 3*, “Classes” (pgs. 441-442)
Week 11 (11/15) Capitalism, Socialism, and Cooperative Ownership

Week 12 (11/22): No class.

Week 13 (11/29) Economic Inequality as a Social (and Political?) Good
- Frankfurt, “Economic Inequality is Not Immoral” [available on Learn@UW]
- Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, Chapters VIII-X (pgs. 97-131)

Week 14 (12/6) Economic Inequality and Social Justice
- Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical” [available on Learn@UW]
- Sen, “Social Justice and the Distribution of Income” [available on Learn@UW]
- Nozick, selections from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Part II “Beyond the Minimal State?” [available on Learn@UW]

**DUE: SEMINAR PAPER**

Week 15 (12/13) A Contemporary Solution to Economic—and Racial—Inequality
- Wilson, *The Bridge Over the Racial Divide: Rising Inequality and Coalition Politics* (all)

[Optional] Book Workshop, Schwarze, *Violent Passions and Liberal Citizenship* (Friday, 12/16)