

**Distributive Justice Today**  
*Syllabus, July 2010*

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This module examines some of the central debates about distributive justice that have taken place in Anglo-American political philosophy since the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. Rawls's work has stimulated responses from the right, most notably from Robert Nozick, a libertarian, as well as from the left, including authors like G. A. Cohen, feminists like Susan Okin and other liberal egalitarians like Ronald Dworkin and Amartya Sen.

These responses can be organized via three main debates. The first concerns the search for the correct *principles* of distributive justice. For example, is it important to distribute benefits equally or is all that matters that people have enough? The second, known as the debate on “the *currency* of justice”, concerns what should be distributed equally (or according to whatever turns out to be the right principle or combination of principles) in a just society. Is it *primary goods*, as Rawls argues, or *resources*, as Dworkin advocates? Is it *welfare*, as Cohen believes, or is it what Sen describes as *capabilities* and *functionings*?

The third and more extensive debate in distributive justice concerns the *scope* of application of whatever combination of principles and currencies turns out to be correct. Many employ the term “distributive justice” as if it was coextensive with social justice. However, those terms aren't equivalent. One important reason is that discussing the ethics of distribution is relevant at both micro- and macro-levels. For example, Cohen has argued that those principles should apply all the way down to *individuals* and even specific actions, including those concerning occupational choice. He appeals to the feminist slogan “the personal is political” which those concerned with gender equality have also employed to argue in favor of including the family as a legitimate site for distributive justice. Distributive justice, thus, has sub-social applications. It also has supra-social applications, as it can also apply across countries, generations, and even species.

## **I. Introduction.**

## **II. Equality or Priority?**

Derek Parfit, "Equality or Priority?", *The Ideal of Equality* ed. Matthew Clayton and Andrew Williams (Palgrave MacMillan 2002)

Larry Temkin, *Inequality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Ch. 9.

Michael Otsuka and Alex Voorhoeve, "Why it Matters if Some are Worse Off than Others" *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (2009)

## **III. Equality or Sufficiency?**

Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal", *Ethics* (1987)

Paula Casal, "Why Sufficiency is Not Enough", *Ethics* (2007)

## **IV. Equality of what?**

Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Harvard University Press, 2000), Chs. 1 and 2.

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) Appendix I "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best"

Amartya Sen "Equality of What?" in <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/> and *Equal Freedom* ed. Steve Darwall (University of Michigan, 1995)

G. A. Cohen "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice", *Ethics* (1989)

## **V. The rejection of distributive justice**

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, (Basic Books, 1974) Ch.7

## **VI. The egalitarian ethos**

G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality*  
and <http://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/>

## **VII. Justice within the family**

Susan Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (Basic Books, 1989)

## **VIII. International and global justice**

Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Polity, 2008)

Hillel Steiner, “Just Taxation and International Redistribution”  
*NOMOS XXXVII* (1999)

Paula Casal “Global Taxes on Natural Resources” with replies from  
Pogge and Steiner”, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* (2011)

## **IX. Inter-generational distributive justice**

Axel Gosseries and Lucas Meyer, *Intergenerational Justice* (Oxford  
University Press, 2009)

## **X. Justice across species**

Peter Vallentyne, “Of Mice and Men: Equality and Animals”,  
*Egalitarianism* ed. Nils Holtug and Kasper Lippert Rasmussen  
(Oxford University Press, 2007)

## **Assessment**

The following criteria will be taken into account for the final assessment:

- a) Presentations and comments of the discussants (20%)
- b) Participation during the sessions (credit will be given for the quality of comments) (10%)
- c) Students should hand in a Paper (max. 5000 words) (70%)