

The Philosophy of the Welfare State: Rawls and His Critics  
K20.1466, spring 2008  
Justin P. Holt, jh129@nyu.edu  
Monday and Wednesday: 11:00-12:15  
Office Hours: Monday 1:00-2:00 and by appointment  
Office: room 506 at 715 Broadway

Are the outcomes of capitalist exchanges fair or unfair? Is capitalism supportive or detrimental to democratic virtues? Does the welfare state rectify the problems of capitalism or exacerbate them? John Rawls' work *A Theory of Justice* has greatly shaped these considerations of the welfare state. His theory refined many of the debates concerning the fairness of capitalist economic outcomes and the effects capital accumulation has on democratic virtues. According to Rawls, the welfare state in some form was necessary for capitalism to have morally acceptable outcomes. But, critics of Rawls have called into question welfare state interventions, many finding them economically inefficient and detrimental to democratic virtues. Other critics have founds Rawls' theory to be too limited in its impact, thereby supporting more extensive interventions into capital accumulation. In this course we will try to answer questions about the morality of capitalist accumulation by studying theoretical conceptions of Rawls' work and the responses of his critics. The main texts of Rawls' critics we will consider are Nozick's *Distributive Justice*, Dworkin's *What is Equality*, and Cohen's *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. These theoretical conceptions will be contrasted with the case studies contained in Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

#### Required Readings\*

Cohen, G.A. *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1995.

Daniels, Norman, editor. *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies on Rawls' A Theory of Justice*. Stanford University Press, 1989.

Dworkin, Ronald. "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 10, no. 3. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1981. (cp), (j)

Dworkin, Ronald. "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 10, no. 4. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1981. (cp), (j)

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1990.

Nozick, Robert. "Distributive Justice." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 3, no. 1. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1973. (cp), (j)

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999.

\* Note: All texts have been ordered at the New York University bookstore. Students should use the editions cited above. All of these texts are on reserve at the library.

(cp) Note: These readings are in the course packet.

(j) Note: These reading are available on JSTOR.

## Suggested Readings

- Christensen, Kimberly. "Empty Bellies, Empty Promises: Welfare Reform in the Nineties." In *Political Economy and Conetmporary Capitalism: Radical Perspectives on Economic Theory and Policy*. Edited by Ron Baiman, Heather Boushey, and Dawn Saunders. M.E. Sharpe, 2000.
- Ginsburg, Helen. *Full Employment and Public Policy: The United States and Sweden*. Lexington Books, D.C. Heath and Company, 1983.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta, editor. *Why We Need a New Welfare State*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Goodin, Robert E., Bruce Headey, Ruud Muffels, Henk-Jan Dirven. *The Real Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Hausman, Daniel M. and Michael S. Mcpherson. *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Mishel, Lawrence, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegrett. *The State of Working America 2006/2007 [or 2004/2005]*. Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Okin, Susan Moller. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. Basic Books, 1989.
- Rescher, Nicholas. *Distributive Justice: A Constructive Critique of the Utilitarian Theory of Distribution*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1966.
- Rodgers, Harrell R. *American Poverty in a New Era of Reform*. Second Edition. M.E. Sharpe, 2005.
- Schweickart, David. *Against Capitalism*. Westview Press, Colorado, 1996.
- Shaikh, Anwar, and E. Ahmet Tonak. "The Rise and Fall of the U.S. Welfare State." In *Political Economy and Conetmporary Capitalism: Radical Perspectives on Economic Theory and Policy*. Edited by Ron Baiman, Heather Boushey, and Dawn Saunders. M.E. Sharpe, 2000.
- Shue, Henry. *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affulence, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Truitt, Willis H. *Marxist Ethics: A Short Exposition*. International Publishers, New York, 2005.

In addition, students interested in current data on poverty, income, and unemployment should use the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau web pages: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) and [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Two important publications are "The Employment Situation" published the first Friday of each month by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States*, published each year by the Census. For international data, see *Employment Outlook* and *Economic Outlook* both published yearly by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, at [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

## **Course Requirements**

In this course I will use a contract grading system. A contract grading system entails the fulfilling of certain conditions for a certain grade.

### **Conditions for a final grade of B:**

- 1) Attendance: You can be absent a total of three classes.
- 2) Lateness: If you are late beyond one minute you are considered absent.
- 3) Papers: The written work for this course is a 3000- to 4000-word term paper on a topic of your choice relevant to the course. Your term paper should be a genuine attempt to address the paper topic. All papers must be handed in by 6pm on Friday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. Papers are due in my mailbox. A 300-word description of your topic is due no later than Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>. No late papers are accepted. There are no extensions for papers. Papers must be typed and double-spaced.
- 4) Class Participation: This class is a seminar so regular participation is required. A seminar class won't work if you don't participate in discussions. Each day of class students will come prepared to discuss the text assigned to be read by that day. Being prepared to discuss the text entails bringing questions about the text to class. In addition, almost every day a certain student will give a seminar presentation. All students are required to give at least one seminar presentation. What is required in a seminar presentation is listed below.

### **Conditions for a final grade of A:**

In addition to the above conditions for a grade of B, a grade of A requires you to put forth more effort in seminar discussions and your writing. This does not mean simply dominating the seminar discussions, but rather, examining the text and trying to formulate your own ideas about what it means, coming to class prepared to present these ideas, and perhaps most importantly, being able to clearly and sensibly support your presentations and papers. Other examples of putting forth more effort are: helping to illustrate points to your classmates or tying together their ideas, taking unpopular or "devil's advocate" positions (when they can be properly supported), or using outside sources in papers. In general, I'm asking you to care about how well the class runs for both you and your classmates.

### **Conditions for a final grade of C:**

If you do not participate regularly, do not make a genuine attempt in addressing the topic of your term paper, are not prepared for class, or are absent from class four times you will receive a grade of C.

### **Conditions for a final grade of F:**

If you do not participate regularly, do not turn in your term paper, are not prepared for class, or are absent from class five times you will receive a grade of F.

## **Requirements for seminar presentations**

Seminar presentations are to be short overviews of the arguments and topics of the readings to be discussed the day of the presentation. Presentations should emphasize the structure, reasoning, and conclusions of the readings. Students are encouraged to critique the arguments and topics of the readings after providing an adequate overview. Students may read a written presentation if they wish and/or use handouts. Seminar presentations must be at least five minutes but no longer than ten minutes. Students are to hand in a 150-300 word presentation abstract during class the day of their presentation.

## **Note on plagiarism:**

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the dean. If you have any questions regarding what is considered plagiarism please ask me.

### **Schedule of Readings:**

1/23: No readings

1/28: Esping-Andersen, chapters 1-4

1/30: Esping-Andersen, chapters 1-4

2/4: Esping-Andersen, chapters 6-9

2/6: Esping-Andersen, chapters 6-9

2/11: Rawls, sections 1-5

2/13: Rawls, sections 11-17

2/18: no class

2/20: Rawls, sections 24-30

2/25: Rawls, sections 41-50

2/27: Rawls, sections 41-50

3/3: Rawls, sections 78-87

3/5: Rawls, sections 78-87

3/10: Daniels, chapter 1

3/12: Daniels, chapter 8

3/17: no class

3/19: no class

3/24: Daniels, chapter 9

3/26: Daniels, chapter 10

3/31: Daniels, chapter 11

4/2: Daniels, chapter 14

4/7: Nozick, "Distributive Justice."

4/9: Nozick, "Distributive Justice."

4/14: Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare."

4/16: Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare."

4/21: Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources."

4/23: Dworkin, "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources."

4/28: Cohen, chapters 1 and 2

4/30: Cohen, chapters 3 and 4

5/5: Cohen, chapters 9 and 10