

**Instructor:** Prof. Kristin Voigt (Philosophy & Institute for Health and Social Policy)  
**Office hours:** Fridays, 11:30-12:30 (Zoom link on myCourses) and by appointment  
**Email:** kristin.voigt@mcgill.ca

## **PHIL 644: Relational equality (Fall 2021)**

### **Course description:**

Equality is a central value in contemporary political philosophy but its precise meaning and requirements remain the subject of intense debate. In response to the so-called 'luck egalitarian' approaches that dominated the post-Rawlsian debate of the 1980s and 1990s, *relational* egalitarians challenged the central assumption of these approaches, that equality is essentially about patterns of distribution. Relational egalitarians argued that the central concern of equality is how individuals, or citizens, relate to one another: equality requires equal concern and respect. While equality, thus understood, is a compelling idea, the precise requirements of relational equality remain underspecified. Different relational egalitarians have spelt out the idea in very different ways, some focusing on interpersonal relationships, others on institutions; some regarding equality as involving certain forms of treatments, while others see it as requiring particular attitudes. Similarly, what precisely relational equality might require in the real world is far from obvious.

The course begins with an introduction to luck egalitarianism (the main target of many relational egalitarians) and the distinction between distributive and relational theories of equality. It then introduces students to a number of different accounts of what relational equality might require. The course also introduces students to questions about the practical implications of relational equality, for example when it comes to democratic institutions, commemoration, and racial profiling.

**Class time:** Mondays, 8:30 – 11:30 am. (We will discuss how best to structure the time slot.) First class: 13 September 2021

**Location:** Leacock 517

**Course materials:** All readings will be available through myCourses. I will also make available additional materials that are relevant to the topics we're discussing throughout the course.

**Prerequisites:** This is a graduate-level philosophy class, open to graduate students and undergraduates in U3 or higher. I will assume familiarity with basic debates in contemporary political philosophy and the methodologies of analytical and normative philosophy. This also includes skills such as engaging in philosophical arguments and writing philosophical papers. Students should have taken at least one introductory and one higher-level course in contemporary political philosophy. (For undergraduates, there is a form to fill out and a requirement that you have a CGPA of 3.3 or higher.) If you are at all unsure whether you meet the prerequisites, please contact me before registering for the class.

**Assignment and evaluation:** Grades for this class are based on four elements:

- (1) **Reading reflections** (5%). Each week (starting in week 2), you must submit reflections on the required readings of the respective week. This assignment must be emailed to me ([kristin.voigt@mcgill.ca](mailto:kristin.voigt@mcgill.ca)) by **9 am on the Friday** preceding our class (please use 'reading reflections' or similar as the subject line so I can distinguish these emails from other inquiries). The first set of reading reflections is due at 9 am on 17 September.

The assignment is:

After completing the required readings, write brief responses to the following 3 questions:

1. What are the main claims of the reading (1-2 sentences for each assigned item)?
2. What did you find surprising or interesting? Why? (1-2 sentences)
3. What did you find confusing? Why? (1-2 sentences)

Your responses will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis, and your grade will be calculated as the total number of passes out of 11 (max 100%). Failure to submit your reading questions or late submission will count as a Fail.

- (2) **Response paper** (35%). Short response paper (up to 3,000 words), discussing one of the book chapters/articles assigned for the course. This assignment can be submitted at any point during the semester but must be submitted **within two weeks** of the day that the piece you are responding to was discussed in class (by 6 pm).
- (3) **Final paper proposal** (15%), up to 1,500 words. **Due 11 pm on 21 November.**
- (4) **Final paper** (45%), up to 6,000 words. **Due 11 pm on 6 December.**

#### **Some notes regarding assignments:**

- (1) Reading reflections form part of the assessment but they also help me identify any particular interests you might have that you'd like to discuss in class, and any concerns or questions that should be addressed.
- (2) The purpose of the response paper is for you to begin thinking critically about the arguments presented, for example by identifying possible inconsistencies, problems or omissions in the author's argument. There is no set 'recipe' for this type of paper and different approaches will work. Keep exposition of the overall argument in the article/chapter you're discussing concise so as to leave yourself enough room to develop your own argument.
- (3) The final paper is a research paper on a topic of your choice that engages with themes and arguments discussed during the course. You are encouraged to consult with me about possible topics/questions. I will provide feedback on the final paper proposal, in which you should set out the questions you want to address in your final paper and provide an outline/summary of how you will proceed. You are very welcome to discuss possible ideas with me ahead of the proposal deadline.
- (4) The final paper can draw on your response paper. For example, your response papers may identify a particular problem with an argument that the author does not address; your final paper could then discuss the problem in more detail, consider possible responses the author might give, etc.
- (5) If appropriate, the final paper may also go beyond the readings assigned in class. Additional relevant readings will be provided on myCourses and I am happy to provide further reading

suggestions. So as to identify the topics you would like to write about, please look over all the readings early on in the course.

- (6) Writing is an important aspect of the course and I am happy to read drafts and outlines and to provide feedback (but bear in mind that turnaround may be longer if we're close to a deadline). If you'd like comments on a draft, it's best to agree on a timeline with me in advance. It's easiest if you email me a Word document so I can add comments directly in the file.
- (7) I will provide more details in class on how to approach your written work for this course. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you are unclear about anything.

**Submission of work:** All work must be submitted via email to [kristin.voigt@mcgill.ca](mailto:kristin.voigt@mcgill.ca), as an MS Word or Apple Pages file. Please do not leave submissions in my departmental or IHSP mailboxes as I don't check them frequently.

**Late submissions:** Late submissions incur a grade penalty. Essays turned in late without an extension will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B to a B-) per calendar day of lateness. Submission of corrupted files or files that cannot be opened do not count as submission of your work. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

**Language policy:** In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

**Academic integrity:** McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

**Access:** If you have a disability, please feel free to contact me to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you could also contact the [Office for Students with Disabilities](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd) ([www.mcgill.ca/osd](http://www.mcgill.ca/osd)) at 514-398-6009 to make them aware of any requirements you may have.

## Schedule and readings

### 13 September Introduction to course

Recommended readings: Voigt, Oxford Research Encyclopedia entry on Relational Egalitarianism; and/or Rekha Nath, Relational egalitarianism, *Philosophy Compass* 2020.

### 20 September Background: distributive approaches to equality

- Richard Arneson (1989), 'Equality and equal opportunity for welfare', *Phil Studies* 56(1).
- G. A. Cohen (1989), 'On the currency of egalitarian justice', *Ethics* 99(4).

### 27 September What is relational equality?

- Elizabeth Anderson (1999), 'What is the point of equality?', *Ethics* 109(2).
- Samuel Scheffler (2003), 'What is egalitarianism?', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 31(1).

### 4 October Distributive vs. relational approaches – and why value relational equality?

- Miklosi, Z. (2018). Varieties of relational egalitarianism. In D. Sobel, P. Vallentyne, & S. Wall (Eds.), *Oxford studies in political philosophy, volume 4* (pp. 110–140). OUP.
- Elford, G. (2017). Relational equality and distribution. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 109(4).

### 14 October Relational equality and interpersonal relationships

[note: Thursday not Monday because of Thanksgiving break; please submit reading reflections by Wednesday, 9 am]

- Scheffler, S. (2015). The practice of equality. In C. Fourie, F. Schuppert, & I. Wallimann-Helmer (Eds.), *Social equality: On what it means to be equals* (pp. 21–44). OUP.
- Tomlin, P. (2014). What is the point of egalitarian social relationships? In A. Kaufman (Ed.), *Distributive justice and access to advantage* (pp. 151–179). CUP.

### 18 October Relational inequality, social norms and interpersonal relationships

- McTernan, Emily (2018). Microaggressions, equality, and social practices. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 26(3), 261–281.
- Liebow, Nabina (2021). Microaggressions: A Relational Analysis of Harm. *Autonomy and Equality: Relational Approaches*, ed. Natalie Stoljar & Kristin Voigt (Routledge).

### 25 October Relational inequality and self-regarding attitudes

- Schemmel, C. (2019). Real self-respect and its social bases. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 49(5), 628–651.
- Natalie Stoljar & Kristin Voigt (2021). Regarding oneself as an equal.

**1 November**                    **What do egalitarian institutions express?**

- Schemmel, C. (2012). Distributive and relational equality. *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, 11(2), 123–148.
- Anne-Sofie Greisen Hojlund (2021). What Should Egalitarian Policies Express? The Case of Paternalism. *Journal of Political Philosophy*. In press.

**8 November**                    **Relational equality and commemoration**

- Schulz, J. (2018). Must Rhodes fall? The significant of commemoration in the struggle for relations of respect. *Journal of Political Philosophy*.
- Bell, M. (2021). Against Simple Removal: A Defence of Defacement as a Response to Racist Monuments. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*.

**15 November**                    **Relational equality and education**

- Elizabeth Anderson (2007). Fair opportunity in education: A democratic equality perspective. *Ethics* 117,4 (2007): 595–622.
- Kirsty Macfarlane (2018). Education, Sufficiency, and the Relational Egalitarian Ideal. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*.

**22 November**                    **Relational equality and racial profiling**

- Adam Omar Hosein (2018), Racial Profiling and a Reasonable Sense of Inferior Political Status, *Journal of Political Philosophy*.
- Natalie Stoljar (2021), Racial profiling as pejorative discrimination, in *Procedural Justice and Relational Theory*, ed. D. Meyerson, Catriona Mackenzie & Therese MacDermott (Routledge).

**29 November**                    **Presentations of plans for final paper**

In this class, you will present your ideas for the final paper and get feedback from your peers. The presentation is not graded; this is an opportunity for you to test your paper plans and engage constructively with each other's arguments and ideas.

**6 December**                    **Final class: What's the scope of relational equality? RE and global justice**

- Christian Schemmel (2007), 'On the usefulness of luck egalitarian arguments for global justice. *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric*, 1(1).
- Rekha Nath (2014), 'Equal standing in the global community', *The Monist* 94(4).