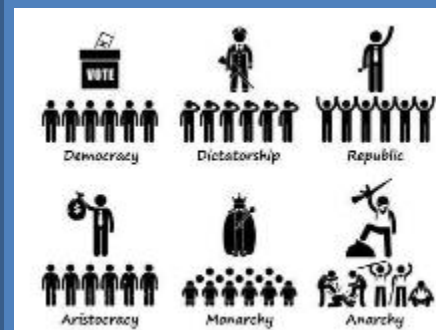
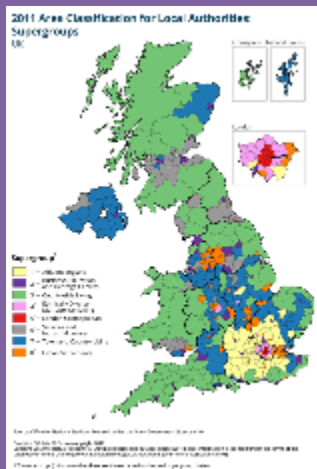




ECED7001: Political Influences in Inequality & Diversity

Theme 2: An Introduction to Political Theory – Key Concepts

Part 2

Liberty

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary tells us that liberty is;

1. Exemption or release from captivity, bondage or slavery
2. Exemption or freedom from arbitrary, despotic, or autocratic rule or control
3. The condition of being able to act in any desired way without restraint; power to do what one likes
4. Free opportunity, range, or scope to do something, and
5. A privilege or exceptional right granted to a subject by the sovereign power.

But a dictionary can only give us the way in which a word is used and does not explore the contradictions.

Liberty

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5. A privilege or exceptional right granted to a subject by the sovereign power.

Can you see any contradictions in the definitions above?



Liberty

- Political Theory is concerned with the liberty or freedom of individuals from state action
- ...it is a fundamental concern of liberal political philosophy
- Defending individuals against the state and church
- But also defending individuals' liberty from the actions of other individuals
- This dichotomy has given rise to the concepts of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty
- This division of liberty can be traced back to the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Negative Liberty

- The concept of 'negative' liberty is closely linked to the idea of libertarianism that we have already looked at
- It relates to the freedom of the individual from being constrained by an over oppressive state
- It grew out of the struggle of 'liberalism' to defend the rights of individuals against authoritarian monarchs and governments (e.g. the American and French Revolutions)
- It has at its centre the principle that the 'state' should be prevented from having too much control of individual freedoms

Can you think of any examples for current political debate?



Positive Liberty

- 'Positive' liberty refers more to the ability of individuals to act and to take control of life
- It is often taken to mean the ability to achieve self-realisation, self-determination or self-actualisation (e.g. Maslow)
- In this sense it can be seen to be related to the concepts of 'autonomy' and 'agency'
- Proponents argue that, as some people are prevented from achieving their potential by ill-health, disability or prejudice the state needs to intervene in order to guarantee their liberty
- Some, such as Isaiah Berlin, have argued that, even in a democracy, this can still lead to inequality if the needs of the majority are considered as superior to those of minority groups

Individual Autonomy

- Smit (2016) defines 'Individual Autonomy' as:

...'the ability of individuals to act freely as agents, making their own decisions and shaping their own lives'.

How does autonomy as a concept relate to liberty?



Is positive liberty necessary for autonomy?



Individual Autonomy

- This lies at the heart of much contemporary political debate
- Freedom from oppression, freedom of choice, freedom of action
- There may well be legislation that allows me to choose which school to send my children to....
- There may also be a number of schools from which to choose....
- But, if one can't afford to pay the fees, what freedom of action / autonomy does one have?

Individual Autonomy

- However, one can also lack autonomy because of emotional and psychological barriers within the individual themselves
- They can be placed there by others or be the result of experience and socialisation



1. Liberty and Autonomy

Equality

- A fundamental **normative** concept of modern politics and related to the concepts of legal and distributive justice that we have already discussed.
- The concept of equality was again a key feature of the ‘liberal’, ‘enlightenment’ rebellion against hierarchical and absolutist rulers
- For example, [The American Declaration of Independence](#)
- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

What strikes you about the statement above?



Equality

- Equality can be seen to be made up of four interrelated concepts, the first of which is;
- **Equal consideration within a scheme of (moral) decision-making**, N.B. this concept has links with Utilitarianism
- In this sense equality means that access to a good or service is open to everyone equally
- However, this does not guarantee equality of access

Why might this be the case?



Equality

- Equality can be seen to be made up of four interrelated concepts, the second of which is;
- **Even-handed treatment**
- In this sense equality means that cases that are alike are treated in a similar way
- This has links to **equity**
- However, this does not guarantee that people in a similar situation will receive equal treatment (i.e. it is only contingent on those in a position of power or responsibility recognising the similarity)

Why might this be the case?



- This can result in indirect discrimination

Equality

- Equality can be seen to be made up of four interrelated concepts, the third of which is;
- **Equality in distribution**
- In this sense equality means that cases that equality is achieved by distributing a good or service equally to everyone
- This has links with the concept of 'universalism' in welfare for example
- Examples would include the state pension and free access for all to the NHS
- This type of equality is most often used when little is known about the circumstances of individuals

Why might this be the case?



Equality

- Equality can be seen to be made up of four interrelated concepts, the fourth of which is;
- **Equality in outcome.**
- ‘The claim that equal treatment requires that persons should end up in the same conditions, taking account of their situation before distribution and adjusting the amount to be distributed to each accordingly’.
- This may be compared with equal opportunity, which requires that individuals should be equally placed with respect to opportunities to compete for a good or service

Why might this be the case?



Equality of Opportunity

- As we have seen in our discussions, some people have been disadvantaged by social values and customs
- For many years there was no legislation in place to protect different groups from discrimination or unfair employment practices
- Governments began to introduce protection from the 1970s onwards
- In 2010 the UK Government passed the Equality Act to try to ensure equality for all.
- This act brought together over 116 different pieces of legislation which sought to establish equality for different groups

Equality of Opportunity

- the Equal Pay Act 1970
- the Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- the Race Relations Act 1976
- the Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- the Equality Act 2006, Part 2
- the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

Equality of Opportunity

- UK Governments have continued to try to address such issues as the under-representation of women, people from ethnic minorities and people with disability in employment and particularly in positions of responsibility. For example;
- Women on Boards (2011)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31710/11-745-women-on-boards.pdf [Accessed 01/02/2022]
- Ethnic Minority Employment Stake Holder Group (no Date)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ethnic-minority-employment-stakeholder-group> [Accessed 01/02/2022]
- Employing disabled people and people with health conditions (2020)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions> [Accessed 01/02/2022]

Equity

- We have already seen that equity is linked to the concept of equality being **even handed treatment**
- In this sense it relates to the idea that two people doing a similar job should get similar rates of pay for doing that work
- It also relates to the expectation that two people who have committed similar crimes will receive similar punishments from the justice system

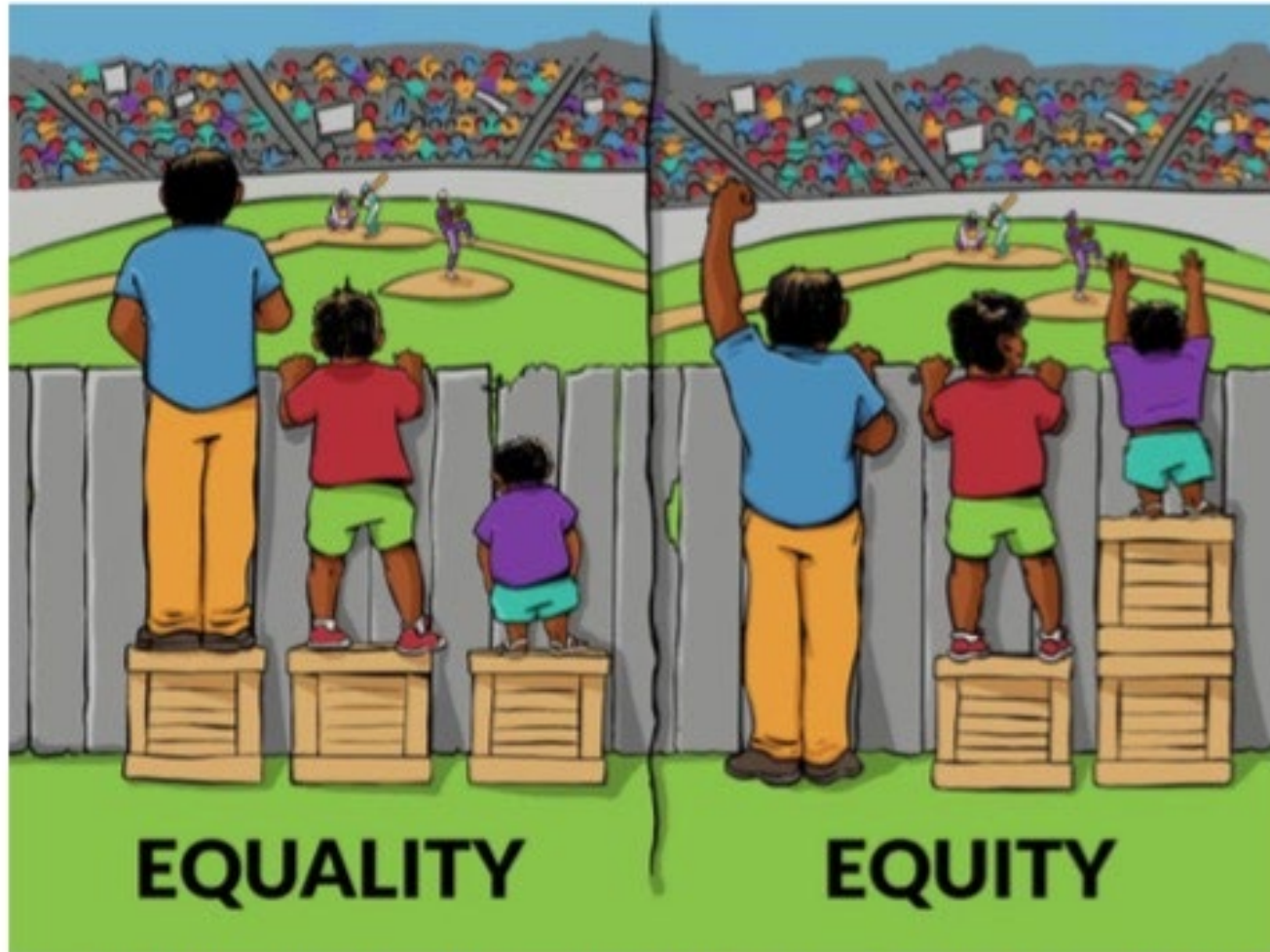
Can you think of examples of situations where this is not the case?



Equity

- However, equity has another sense from an 'older meaning of equity referred to the need to modify the consequences of a strict application of the law to avoid unfair or unconscionable outcomes' (Brown *et al*, 2018)
- George Frederickson, (2015) has argued that this interpretation of equity places a responsibility on those in government not to assume that person A is the same as person B
- In this sense **equity** can be seen to be an attempt to address the inequalities set up by the **even handed treatment** approach to equality that we have looked at previously
- It places the focus on the individual rather than on a 'one size fits all' approach

Equity vs. Equality



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