

Interrogations for Equality Seminar

Session 3. Class & Economic Inequality

September 17, 2009

Ben Kilbarger

I like Glaser's "Class as a Normative Category". I'm interested to hear others' thoughts on the metrics of hierarchy, and if this is really an exhaustive list of what egalitarians should be trying to make (more) equal. Political theorizing often seems like disconnected conceptual alphabet soup, and I like the way Glaser attempts to give structure to a mess of really important, but often poorly contextualized concepts.

While his remarks are very helpfully clarifying (at least to me, but I confess a penchant for systematization), I find myself wondering about the concepts themselves. This is a broad metaphysical/practical question that underlies a lot of our discussions in the course (not just his paper or this week). Just what, for example, is *race*? I feel like everyone has their own favored definition, and most of us are quick to insist that it's a *social construct*. But oughtn't we just get rid of it, then? Or do we plan to use it until such time as it's not useful anymore, and then do away with it? In defining it, are we trying to get at what it actually *is*, or use it in the way it's historically been used so that we can work toward eradicating the ill effects that have followed from its use? And then we'll ditch it for good? I'm similarly confused about *class*. Why does Glaser talk about standard-of-living class as opposed to standard-of-living simpliciter? What do we gain with this class talk?

My worry, more refined, is that we sometimes seem a bit schizoid about these kind of terms. We want to insist that they're constructs, and then we want them to do a whole lot of normative work. Really they don't amount to anything, *really*, but we want to use them to do all kinds of work, and they're really important in lots of other ways, but harmful in others, and really, *really* they don't amount to anything in the world, actually, except that they do and they're really really important and we've got to focus on them. Less snarkily: what's the metaphysical status of terms like class, race, gender, and how should that status inform their use in our (construed broadly, as in, all people) ongoing discussion about equality?

Gina Schouten

Glaser argues that "...distribution strata enjoy an egalitarian-normative priority over differentiator categories" (Class as a Normative Category, 4). That is, he distinguishes between social differentiators (such as race and gender), and distribution strata (standard-of-living class, status group, and power position), and argues that the latter three distribution strata exhaust the types of hierarchies that are objectionable on egalitarian grounds, while the former group contains criteria according to which individuals are differentiated in these hierarchies. The social differentiators matter, Glaser argues, only insofar as they serve to channel individuals into hierarchies based on the distribution strata of class, status, and power. Glaser's reason for limiting the distribution strata of egalitarian interest to class, status, and power is that "...these

categories get as close as we can to naming the goods whose unequal distribution egalitarians believe to detract from human flourishing” (2).

I have some concerns about the suggestion that egalitarians need only be interested in race and gender insofar as race and gender serve as differentiators that filter individuals into class, status, and power hierarchies. It seems to me that race and gender can affect human flourishing directly, and not merely as mediated by the three proposed distribution strata. For example, we might think that blacks experience their race, and women their gender, as something which marks them inescapably and profoundly, whereas whites and men are able to experience their lives as raceless and genderless. In other words, there may be an inequality in the extent to which members of different races and genders experience their membership in those groups as a differentiator, independently of the role that membership plays in sorting them into class, status, and power positions. And it seems at least initially plausible to think that those inequalities in “genderedness” and “racedness” might affect human flourishing.

Furthermore, if race and gender membership can affect flourishing in a way that it unmediated by class, status, and power, then it starts to look like the metrics of reducibility, eliminability, and transitivity might no longer serve to differentiate race and gender from the three distribution strata that Glaser identifies. With regard to reducibility: Contrary to what Glaser says, “genderedness” and “racedness” might be metrics across which egalitarians should seek to equalize individuals. With regard to eliminability: It seems reasonable to think that egalitarians should in fact seek to eliminate race and gender, as well as class, power, and status differences. And with regard to transitivity: If “genderedness” and “racedness” affect flourishing directly, then it is plausible to think that egalitarians should work to equalize individuals across those dimensions *not just* for the sake of equalizing them with respect to class, status and power; in addition, the equalization of individuals with respect to “genderedness” and “racedness” ought to be sought as an end in itself.

Justin Lonsbury

Glaser’s discussion of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) reminded me of Paulo Freire’s insight that oppressed groups internalize visions of their oppressors, leading to a perpetuation of oppressive relationships rather than their amelioration. If poor blacks seek only to emulate the rich, or at least those who have achieved more wealth through new business opportunities, creating a new South African BEE-geoisie will do little to remove class divisions that perpetuate unequal access to resources. Internalizing images of the new black capitalists as successful black people will also narrow visions of what is possible and deflate movements to achieve a more egalitarian order. Glaser does a fine job of discussing non-economic reasons why egalitarians might support the BEE, and I agree with him that a lot of empirical work needs to be done to judge the extent to which the expanded South African business class can create trickle down opportunities and inspiration for poor groups.

Glaser’s discussion of the BEE also reminded me of urban school districts’ efforts to build fancy magnet schools designed according to what “successful” whites deem important. Justifications for these schools are much like those offered for the BEE. Unfortunately, those who remain unsuccessful under magnetized systems are harshly judged based on a twisted combination of neoliberal and neoconservative ideals. A supposedly shared vision of what success looks like along with the presence of opportunity for a select few creates the same sorts

of expectations for everyone, and those who are unable to take advantage of new “opportunities” are thought to have made poor choices and/or shown poor work ethic, and therefore deserve their lot in life. This is where Glaser’s breakdown of differentiators and distribution strata is helpful. It is far more useful for those seeking justice and a more egalitarian world to build programs around the distributional strata rather than differentiators, as the latter are much more likely to lead to well-intentioned policies that generate ugly, unintended consequences.

Lastly, reading Glaser’s articles brought to mind Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, more specifically the shifting nature of what is and is not considered culturally important. As blacks gain economic capital, and even educational capital, those who are the entrenched cultural elite are likely to shift what is considered high-class knowledge. This could have implications as far as engagement in politics goes, as those who are excluded from the cultural elite are less likely to feel entitled or worthy enough to engage in political dialog and policy making. This, again, confirms Glaser’s point that it is necessary to view class as a normative category, thereby paying just as much attention to status and power as material possessions. It also suggests that income and wealth leveling may have to happen *long before* gains in status and power may take place. It could take *generations* before distribution strata could be meaningfully leveled. I worry that people are not going to be patient enough to see if a radical redistribution of wealth would eventually do this.

Kevin Cunningham

Daryl Glaser presents a framework for understanding egalitarianism. He argues that social goods can be divided between those that lie in distribution strata and those that are social differentiators. The former class deserve priority for the egalitarian; differences between standards-of-living, status groups, and power positions form the locus of social inequality. Social differentiators create inequality insofar as they track the classes of the distribution strata. So, when being of a given ethnicity becomes associated with unequal standards-of-living, it matters to the egalitarian. This framework seems a very plausible way to understand how these social goods are related.

Glaser also argues that the individual is the unit of normative importance. Racial inequality per se is not a bad thing (indeed, there is value in human diversity). Interpersonal inequality (class, power, status) is bad because it harms the individuals that suffer as a result. When racial inequality hooks onto such distributive inequalities, it becomes a concern for the egalitarian. Analogously, a species per se might not have moral worth. Is there really value in the fact that humans exist? However, the members of a given species are morally relevant. The importance of the group is result of the importance of the individuals that compose it.

During class, I hope that Professor Glaser will have a chance to speak about the specific policies of BEE. How does this government program promote greater involvement of blacks in business? Coming from an American perspective, such state intervention in private business in order to promote a social goal seems extraordinary. I’m curious about the actual policies, and how such actions square with an egalitarian program.

David Calnitsky

On Glaser: I liked the Glaser pieces. But I think that in assessing n-BEE the egalitarian yardstick is the wrong yardstick to use in the first place. That is, despite appealing implicitly or explicitly to egalitarian norms in its rhetoric, I think it would be wrong to assume that n-BEE actually had egalitarian ends. To me, it seems that n-BEE has basic bourgeois rights and freedoms as an end rather than some kind of egalitarian economic effect. From a *liberal* rather than egalitarian perspective I think certainly are reasons to support n-BEE: it combats discrimination and helps to build a society where blacks are representing proportionately in each class fraction. It's clear though that these policies can leave unchanged the structure of economic inequality.

The only way I could think of answering Glaser's original question about whether or not egalitarians should support n-BEE is a little convoluted: egalitarians should support n-BEE because it reveals more starkly the fundamental inequalities of capitalism, decoupling those inequalities from race, and clarifying perhaps that inequalities are rooted in an economic system that is indifferent to race, rather than in a racist political system.

It seems to me that the universalization of bourgeois rights does not fundamentally challenge capitalist economic relations and the inequalities produced. That's why struggles around gender and race (if they are liberal struggles, and if *ceteris paribus*) don't butt up against the interests of capital in the way struggles around class often do. That however is not to say that those struggles are in some way less important, it's just to say that the barriers to them aren't structurally embedded in the economy. Though Glaser doesn't discuss it, these are the reasons why I would assume n-BEE as a policy was favored over strong egalitarian policies.

As an aside, ignoring the barriers to policies like strong egalitarianism (I know it's really not Glaser's project, but I think it's latent somewhere in there) seems to be a big gap in some of the literature on equality so far. I think that was particularly problematic in the Stears piece, which outlined the four philosophical ideals of equality. Especially with that piece—and especially if we're serious about nonideal theory—talking about equality and inequality sometimes seems to me to be a detour in understanding real human social difference. It ignores the social and economic relations which currently produce that inequality, it ignores the problem of the social reproduction of the ideal regime of greater equality (whichever it may be), and similarly it ignores the problem of whether or not the old inequalities (which presumably are rooted in those social and economic relations) will reassert themselves.

On Roemer: In response to Roemer's argument in section III that "*every* commodity (not just labor power) is exploited under capitalism," it's worth looking at another corn model. Imagine a corn-model economy wherein workers live on air. There's clearly surplus labor. And if more corn is produced than is used up as seed input, then there's a positive corn surplus, and positive surplus value as well. So here you could say that surplus value exists because of surplus labor *or* because of the productivity of corn, but labor has no privileged status. But then imagine the possibility of negative surpluses, ie, if there is a harvest failure and less corn is produced than was used up as seed input, then there's a negative surplus of corn and negative profit. However, there's still positive surplus labor. All of the sudden the two value bases or numeraires give different results regarding the existence of a surplus. (For full disclosure I picked up this idea, if I stated it correctly, talking with an economist Andrew Kliman; he has similar critiques in his last book on Marxian economics.)

Jeffrey Grigg

In “Should an Egalitarian Support Black Economic Empowerment,” Daryl Glaser states, “While adopting a permissive approach to difference, liberal egalitarians oppose hierarchy for placing the ‘different’ in an unequal relationship with each other” (117). This statement includes or implies many of the issues I would like to consider in Glaser’s essays this week.

First, there is a distinction to be made between “difference” and “hierarchy.” As we have discussed before, there are many potential differences, but only some of them are socially consequential. It appears that Glaser takes an even stronger stance in “Class as a Normative Category” by articulating at least two types of socially consequential differences: Social Differentiators and Distribution Strata, and that the items in the second category serve as metrics for the social consequences of the first. That is, Social Differentiators are consequential to the extent that they bring out differences that can be revealed in terms of Distribution Strata. Glaser claims that standard of living, status, and power are the only features that are hierarchical by definition, and that a focus on race in gender in particular as a descriptive features of “interpersonal inequality... represents a category error” (3). One way of thinking about this may be that according to Glaser’s definitions the Social Differentiators would still exist even in the absence of inequality but that the Distribution Strata would not exist—much less be socially consequential or salient—in a world without inequality.

Does this distinction rely on an essentialist definition of race and gender (see, for example “we can say what their race and gender is” [6])? How might a more explicit view of the social construction of race and gender influence this framework? For example, if one understands gender to exist only if there are social consequences (that is, they are not just “differences,” as some say sex could be), then does that understanding make this particular Social Differentiator more consequential? Alternatively, are there ways to understand social consequences that are not hierarchical? (And still be concerned about them on egalitarian grounds, perhaps not). I can’t yet meet my own challenge, but I am not quite ready to accept that Social Differentiators have less warrant for concern on their own terms than I was previously inclined to believe, and that they matter largely—and even wholly—to the extent to which they are related to distributive metrics (even though one could have a binary, rather than distributive, hierarchy).

I’ll grant that the Distribution Strata are metrics and the other categories are not, which I take to be one of Glaser’s points. But that seems like a minimal level of agreement. It seems that there are more important matters at stake, such as the basic level of concern one should direct to particular features of social life. Understanding the importance of one in terms of the degree to which it can be measured with another still seems problematic to me. For example, given the high correlation between the three elements in the Distributive Strata (which the sociologists in the room can talk more about, I suppose), are we to say then that only standard of living truly matters?

Alex Hyun

In “Should an Egalitarian Support Black Economic Empowerment?” Daryl Glaser mentions three ways in which n-BEE might have indirect economic-distributional benefits that would attract a strong egalitarian: (1) n-BEE employers might hire and train more blacks than white employers would, (2) n-BEE producers might be more likely to provide goods and services to

poor black consumers, and (3) n-BEE might tap entrepreneurial talent present in the black community, and this would “contribute to overall economic growth in a way that expands the economic pie including the portion of pie available to the poor.”

I was thinking that perhaps we can add a fourth possible benefit to this list. N-BEE is meant to create an elite of rich black businessmen, perhaps numbering in the thousands. It seems plausible that, out of the same racial solidarity that plausibly motivates (1) and (2), the members of this wealthy elite would be inclined to donate a substantial amount of money to charities that would benefit poor black people. Very likely, they would be more inclined to donate to these charities than their Caucasian counterparts. This is because people are generally more inclined to give charity to groups of people they identify with (I couldn't find statistics to support this claim, but from experience, it seems true to me); and surely the newly-wealthy black businessmen identify with poor blacks much more than whites do. In this way, n-BEE may indirectly lead to a more egalitarian distribution of wealth. This may be a minor point (it depends on how much the black elite actually donates), but it might significantly contribute to the cumulative case for thinking that n-BEE has substantial indirect economic egalitarian benefits. Whether it does or not is, like (1), (2), and (3), a matter of empirical investigation.

Kelly Robbins

I agree that it is a thus-far unsubstantiated empirical claim that n-BEE contributes to the stability of the South African social order. However, as I read it you also conclude that it is not in the theory itself that the social order n-BEE attempts to stabilize is a (sufficiently) progressive one (n-BEE, 188). But it seems to me that precisely this is a part of, or the premise behind, n-BEE as a theory. N-BEE is specifically designed to promote a post-apartheid inclusion of (some) blacks in the market. This is progressive when compared with apartheid, and the stabilization of this level of inclusion (of a few among the elites) could be deemed a necessary step along the path to a more progressive social order. If this is convincing, and empirical findings substantiate the claim that n-BEE does in fact stabilize inclusion of blacks among the elites, then it seems egalitarians will have a strong reason to endorse n-BEE as sufficiently progressive for a limited time period.

The additional level of complexity that I am trying to push for here is basically an appreciation of the political long-term. So, analogously to what I am suggesting above: a strong egalitarian might have good reason (assuming the policy was effective) to support a policy that directs twice as much money to the schools in black neighborhoods than in white neighborhoods, for ten years after the end of apartheid. The reasoning might be that to protect a post-apartheid democratic system from devolving back into apartheid, a drastic increase in the basic education of the black majority is necessary. This is not merely redressing the historical inequalities in education, it is a measure designed to protect the in-this-context progressive social order.

Paul Hanselman

How does Glaser's framework add to or sharpen our understanding for an egalitarian agenda for empirical research?

Let's grant that the schema developed in the 2009 paper is insightful (which I think it is, but which certainly merits discussion in and of itself). The social theoretical bit is intuitive and elegant, especially as captured by the bold text in the figure on page 3 (social arrangements -> social differentiation -> distribution strata). However, the consequences I'm most interested in relate to the empirical questions that necessarily follow. One role for empirical work is to populate and describe the list of extant social arrangements/distinctions as well as to generalize about the psychological and interactional constraints limiting the plausible forms of these conditions. (By contrast, the determination of the distribution strata seems more rooted in normative judgments, but still bears the imprint of sociological—especially Weberian—as inquiry; is that a fair reading?). Another role is belied by the deceptive simplicity of those little red arrows in the figure, representing the maintenance of social distinctions (left arrow) and the impact of those distinctions on the stuff we claim to care about (right arrow). Presumably, understanding these linkages is the key to achieving ultimate distributional goals, though this may only become concrete in the context of specific distinctions, settings, or problems. A final role suggested by the discussions of BEE is the evaluation of specific policy outcomes on the ground, particularly in light of limited resources for which zero-sum type tradeoffs are common.

I'd also be interested in contrasting the treatment of race in this egalitarian project with Charles Mills' from last weekend. A surface reading is that Mills is arguing to centralize race in a particular way while Glaser is doing the opposite. Even though this seems completely wrong, it might be helpful to explore various reasons why.

Justin Horn

Glaser argues for the importance of class as a normative category, and holds that we ought to give considerations of class a privileged place in our thinking about equality. His argument for this relies on a distinction between social differentiators and distribution strata. Distribution strata are those types of goods with which egalitarians are (or ought to be) primarily concerned when it comes to distribution. Social differentiators are categories on the basis of which people are assigned different quantities of the goods that comprise the distribution strata (as, for example, when people are granted diminished social status on the basis of race).

I think there is a good deal of plausibility to much of what Glaser has to say about this. If we are going to think clearly about what kinds of equality are morally important, it seems we need to make a distinction between goods to be distributed and the factors determining that distribution. Furthermore, it is intuitive that those factors which together constitute "standard of living" are genuine goods, while race and gender are not.

Still, I wonder if Glaser's account relies on an unduly narrow notion of "class." Glaser conceives of (the normatively important sense of) class solely in terms of economic goods, such as income, free time, and conditions of work. Yet I wonder whether this conception of class misleads us as

to the way class really operates. It seems fairly clear that class functions also as a social differentiator, in that the distribution of status and power depend heavily on class. In this respect, class is very similar to race and gender.

In order to emphasize the normative distinctiveness of class, Glaser downplays the way in which class distinctions create inequalities in areas other than just standard of living. This leaves me wondering whether Glaser faces a dilemma in this respect: he can work with a concept of class that is most useful and defensible, or he can preserve the notion that class has special normative importance. I'm not sure he can do both.

Tatiana Alfonso

Daryl Glaser states in his article “Class as a Normative Category: Egalitarian Reasons to Take It Seriously”, that “Class” must be a central category in an egalitarian project. He uses a definition of class based on the standard of living. In that definition an egalitarian project is concerned with the inequality in the access of people to three basic goods: socio-economic resources; status or esteem; and power. The normative goal of an egalitarian is the achievement of equality between persons in respect of those three goods. As far as he is interested in measuring the differences of individuals’ allocation in the hierarchies of class, status and power, he needs to use a category of stratification. Therefore, other criteria of difference, as race, gender, sexual orientation, are not central in the egalitarian project because they are not able to show the difference between individuals. They are categories which reflect the position of a particular group in the society, but ignore the differences between individuals.

This emphasis of Glaser in the metrics of hierarchy for an egalitarian project is supported with three arguments about the differences between class, status and power on one hand, and other social differentiators as gender and race on the other hand. However, the assumptions of two of those arguments can be controversial.

The first argument states that egalitarians seek equality between persons and the categories “race” and “gender” do not explain differences between persons which are included in those groups. Then, those categories are not useful to measure interpersonal inequality. The egalitarians do not seek people equal in their race-ness, gender-ness, etc. However, this argument ignores the interaction between race, gender or ethnicity with power and status. Power and status are not determined exclusively by the standard of living among the individuals. The other differentiators (race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc) influence the standard of living results. The argument also assumes that egalitarians are not committed with equality in terms of civil rights (for example political participation), which is an important outcome of the other differentiators. For example, gender as a category, is not able to explain the stratification differences between women. But it is useful to explain and to measure the extent of the political participation of women in a society, issue which an egalitarian project could (or at least, should) be concerned with. These manifestations of inequality can be explained with collective categories as race, gender and ethnicity, and not with individual categories coming from the distribution in stratification.

The second argument states that power, status and standard of living are differences that must be eliminated in an egalitarian normative project. Glaser asserts that the assimilation is not a

defensible goal of the egalitarians, and then race, gender or ethnic differences are not supposed to be eliminated. In that sense, they are not part of the normative project of an egalitarian. To support this statement, Glaser declares that some differences are “literally not eliminable when viewed in biological terms”. That kind of explanation is always risky. The author is not assuming that gender or race differences are biological, but he is appealing to the biological irreducibility in which the differences are based to neglect their importance in a normative egalitarian project. That kind of statement is always risky because it is on the bases of every ideology of oppression which is morally unacceptable (just like he mentions). On the other hand, the argument is supported making comparisons with other differentiators as “able-bodiedness”. In that case, the conclusion is just the opposite: “egalitarians should aim not to render the disabled ‘able’, but to increase their living standard, status and power; (...), to prevent the translation of natural bodily difference into social hierarchy”. I do not find enough arguments in the article for the different treatment of a category like gender, and this category relative to disabilities. Even if we accept the “biological irreducibility” of gender, why the disabilities are different? That social category also refers to a particular group of people, and it also has a strong relation with a physical (or mental) fact. Why is the disability differentiator useful to understand the positions of the individuals in the metrics of hierarchy?

Finally, I would like to ask about the methodology to construct this model of distribution strata, social differentiators and social arrangements that Glaser presents in the article. I assume that the model is not based only in the case of South Africa, but it is applicable to other experiences of inequality. The Black Economic Empowerment -BEE- policy is oriented to eliminate the social and economic consequences of the apartheid regime, and that is not able to create a “strong egalitarianism”, defined as substantive material equality between individuals. The model is validated in the case of that particular policy because it is attacking a particular and historical exclusion, based on race. The experience seems to show that attacking the social differentiator is not enough for the egalitarian project because the differences on class, power and status are not included, but reproduced inside of the racial group. However, the history and features of the apartheid regime were particular and the histories of inequality based on race in other regions are different. The question is, if it is possible to apply the same model to experiences in which the segregation and exclusion are results of the combination of social differentiators, class, power and status. Just to “kick the tires”, the question is if the model and arguments are going to work in a society in which you are not able to separate clearly the inequality based on race of the inequality based on class. How would the model work in other contexts of inequality?

Paul Gibbons

- 1) Is one empirical failing of BEE is that a very few did very well, but didn't trickle down. A few joined the elite, while millions more were untouched?
 - a. There are dozens of empowerment type schemes in Britain, but (I believe) the poorest, least educated and least motivated just don't apply – they seem to lift the top of a particular group – a cohort that might have helped themselves anyway.
- 2) Microfinance is hailed as one solution to broad-based economic empowerment? Do programs such as that suffer from the same critique as for BEE?

- 3) One critique of BEE could be its effect on black solidarity. If beneficiaries primary identification was once 'black', they now perhaps identify more strongly as 'business people' or along class lines... the effect of this could be that they are no more likely to help the group which they have now left, because their identification with this group has weakened
- 4) Is your critique aimed more at the tool ('empowerment') or more at targeting race while ignoring class in addressing inequality. Or, more broadly, 'you cannot achieve egalitarian ends through capitalist means'?
- 5) Is a broad conclusion that even when race and class are highly correlated, targeting racial groups for 'empowerment' or redress ignore the greatest predictor of inequality?

General (naive) questions on Marxism

1. Does Marxism make the presumption of a zero-sum game? That is, capitalist' gain is always worker's loss (and vice versa).
 2. What does a Marxist say to rightward shifts in Pareto curve (increasing the whole pie) that Capitalism would say that it provides? (I guess that even if both were better off, the moral concerns regarding distribution would remain.)
 3. Does Marxism distinguish between micro scale capitalism and Capitalism – starting with ideal assumption that 100 members of a community had equal access to resources. Would the choice of some to invest, start enterprises and hire workers necessitate domination and exploitation?
 4. Are certain (say democratic) structural relationships between capitalists and workers a) corrective of the broader ills, b) thus potentially morally sound (job and product creation)?
 5. Is all lending economic slavery? What about microfinance?
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Eunhee Han

“Exploitation conceived of as the unequal exchange of labors should be replaced with exploitation conceived of as the distributional consequences of unjust inequality in the distribution of productive assets and resources (Roemer, 1985, p.650).” Class analysis seems focuses on the role of assets in perpetuating social and economic inequality by transferring economic resources from one generation to another. Two big questions come to my mind. First, I wonder about relationship between income/wage inequality and asset inequality: which one is fundamental in explaining unjust inequality of material resources power, status? Which causes which? In addition, how to measure productive assets? Does class analysis also relies on measures based on the consumption model such as net worth and financial assets in empirical studies? My second question revolves around how to redress the inequality of productive asset and resources. Glaser (2007)'s analysis on the “Black Economic Empowerment” in South Africa, a social policy to regress the inequality productive assets and recourses across races, provides an analytical statement on race and class from the egalitarian perspective. However, many empirical questions still remain. Does the BEE reduce asset inequality between races? If so, how much? Does the BEE encourage/discourage building other type of human capabilities among Black

adolescents (e.g. higher education or professional degree)? Does the BEE affect well-being of the White poor? What other intended/unintended consequences?

Noel Howlett

Glaser seems to argue that on both economic and non-economic grounds, the policy of what he terms n-BEE is not highly defensible to strong egalitarians. I agree with his general claim on this point. I struggle however to understand fully his claims about self-esteem, and how it may be effected by n-BEE.

As I read him, Glaser seems to be saying in the part of the paper where he considers self-esteem that the strong egalitarian may find reason to applaud n-BEE because it has the potential to contribute broadly to the sense of self-esteem felt by some individuals. By identifying with economically powerful blacks, poor blacks may be able to “bask in the reflected glory of rich [blacks]” (pg 115). Glaser goes on to find this problematic for a variety of reasons, and I agree with the problems he points out. I am left however still curious about a couple of points.

One of Glaser’s claims from early in the paper is that there are inherent problems with n-BEE for the strong egalitarian because n-BEE incorrectly focuses on race over class. In his discussion of self-esteem however, Glaser largely ignores issues of impact he describes on inter-racial class relations. Glaser, I think, correctly points to the increased self-esteem for poor blacks in particular connecting in some ways with (newly) rich blacks. However, what impact might this have on the class coherence in the lower classes? Might this new connection actually negatively impact the relations between poor whites and poor blacks as poor blacks now see themselves as somehow not connected to poor whites and vice versa? This is especially disconcerting based on Glaser’s claims in the Class as a Normative Category piece and I wonder why this notion didn’t get more play in this particular piece.

Glaser makes the claim that strong egalitarians may endorse some inequality that is directed at helping the most disadvantaged. According to my understanding, the most disadvantaged in this case would be the poor, black citizen. If this is correct, I wonder what sorts of tipping points are at work in this argument. What sort of cumulative advantage must the poor black see in order for the strong egalitarian to support the policy? What sorts of other egalitarian concerns might be overridden by the interest in benefiting the most disadvantaged?

In the end I find Glaser’s arguments convincing, but I am left wondering about the importance I place on self-esteem since I find an argument that benefiting the least advantaged/most disadvantaged in this regard to a) be offsetting to some degree of objections to other aspects of a policy and b) to have potential to bring about some of the other egalitarian aims of the BEE policy.

Catherine Willis

The central argument of the Glaser 2007 seems to be that a policy of racial equality that does not reduce class inequality is a misguided strategy for those who wish to pursue egalitarianism. The example of the n-BEE however, seems to conflate the issues of 1) policy goal and 2) quality of policy. Despite the fact that n-BEE is sold as an egalitarian policy, it is not clear what the actual motivations were in designing the policy (patronage, belief that racial equality is the ideal, preservation of political power, etc.); it is after all, common to appeal to specific ideals (to a varying degree of accuracy) in selling policy. If n-BEE was in fact designed with the goal of supporting the creation of an egalitarian society, it is certainly a faulty policy. If this was not the goal, the policy may in fact be quite successful. I point out this distinction because I think that it is necessary to take this into account when thinking of the political project that follow from this analysis: do we spend time 1) convincing politicians that we want an egalitarian society and they need to work for us to get it, or 2) if there is consensus on 1, then deciding policies to achieve this.

Can social differentiators remain salient even once we have equality across them? In the seminar last week we discussed the question of whether eliminating class could eliminate race as a social differentiator, which is not unrelated to this week's readings.

The following example, although it doesn't deal with race and is not an example of egalitarian society, would lead us to believe that somehow we still need to look at social differentiators beyond equality of power, esteem and livelihood.

In Quebec, the income difference between anglophones and francophones has largely vanished since the 1970's. There remains a small difference between both groups: anglophones have a slightly higher income; if we control for education, there is a wage gap in the favor of francophones. It is much harder for me to conceptualize how to measure power and esteem. However, there is still much social differentiation along the lines of heritage (constructed or actual), as well as language culture and politics (which are not easily dissociated). (This research was done by David Albouy, reported on <http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/editorial/story.html?id=d93339c8-fc8d-4faa-9593-b505a13802ec>). In this case social differentiation still matters, although perhaps not only for reasons of equality. It is hard for me to envision how livelihood equality would rectify this situation.

J. Edward Connery

In "Should an Egalitarian Support Black Economic Empowerment," Professor Glaser makes the argument that interpersonal, individual equality is the primary concern of the egalitarian. Groups, in this case races, do not exist as real persons and have no "subjective lives of their own distinguishable from the subjective lives of their members." (pp 107, 109) This argument is used to demonstrate the weaknesses of narrow Black Economic Empowerment. The focus on the individual is central to his argument and is compelling. It seems that the thrust of Glaser's position rests in the fact that worrying about equity among groups is inconsequential

without attention to the equality of the individual because groups themselves are “fictitious” and carry no moral weight in determining whether a society is truly egalitarian. Group membership, therefore, is secondary to the question of the individual experience of (in)equality and (in)justice.

This being the case, I cannot help but consider whether this argument could also be a case against some (though probably not all) forms of affirmative action or reparations. If group membership is morally arbitrary and the importance of equality rests at the individual level, could the case be made that affirmative action – for example, in hiring practices – is a morally arbitrary introduction of race (or any other group identifier) into a decision that should, in fact, rest on a question of individual justice. Could one make a reasonable argument that an individual is not necessarily deserving of unique consideration under a policy aimed as righting past wrongs simply because of membership in a group? As Glaser considers later in the piece, there are those from outside an oppressed group who, especially as time passes, neither perpetrated inter-group injustices nor personally benefited from them. One might conversely argue that there are those inside an oppressed group who, themselves, might not have suffered personal injustice. (Of course this seems unlikely but it is not impossible – especially from a material, standard of living perspective.) If it is unjust to punish the non-benefiting, non-perpetrating members of a morally fictitious group that was largely privileged in the past (p111), is there ever the risk of unjustly benefiting the unharmed member of an equally fictitious group that was largely underprivileged or oppressed in the past? That is, can race alone ever be just grounds for the redistribution of resources in programs such as affirmative action or reparations?

It would seem, particularly in light of Glaser’s “Class as a Normative Category,” that the answer must be no. If race (or any other arbitrary group) is introduced as a factor in determining interpersonal, individual-level equality or justice, then the true egalitarian would be forced to object. And yet, there is something about this argument – essentially the “reverse discrimination” position – that I find suspect and incomplete. Is this, perhaps, a place where non-ideal theory must trump ideal theory on the grounds that groups (however morally arbitrary) have been so central to modern social orders that they cannot be ignored in the process of considering how to improve the balance of justice and equity? It would seem then, that there is a line. On one side of the line group identity cannot be denied and must be considered in the course of rectifying what has gone before. On the other side of the line, group identity could be used (at best) for a morally arbitrary or ambiguous redistribution or (at worst) actual reverse discrimination. Where, though, is the line? Does the “maximin” framework really provide a just criterion for establishing the point at which we cross over from just reparations to unjust reversal of roles?

Miriam Thangaraj

I agree with Glaser that inter-personal equality, as measured in terms of power, status and standards of living is a great societal ideal to strive for. However, I am not quite comfortable with his argument that the efforts to achieve inter-group equality are “socially regressive” and counter to the achievement of inter-personal equality; particularly when he agrees that inter-group equality is a necessary (if insufficient) condition for inter-personal equality, and that group consciousness is often the basis of mobilization.

For one, I take issue with the application of a decidedly liberal framework that is focused on the individual as the most appropriate starting point, when the society in question is

fundamentally organized along group-based attributes. To use Charles Mills' (from last week) phrase, this in fact presupposes an "ontology of atomic individuals", a notion that he challenges specifically with respect to race, additionally claiming that liberalism does not endorse 'descriptive individualism, rather, moral individualism. Given a history of racial injustice, the central concern should be the end of race-based oppression/domination.

The liberal individual has a 'status' in society, but little sense of 'identity'...? (And clearly, "standards of living *class*" does not imply any class consciousness.) Identity, deriving from group membership, may be directly linked to 'power'; the understanding of self-determination is mediated by group membership – a point that Glaser concedes in his *Politikon* piece, but quickly dismisses as being offset by intra-group dynamics. However, I think Glaser consistently underestimates the symbolic value of BEE; for instance, the untouchables in India converted to Buddhism or Christianity in significant numbers even though it resulted in little change in their economic conditions, and could even leave their social status worse off.

Wright's piece speaks of the "fate of individuals" being shaped by the trajectory of the social system as a whole, and that a (racial) structure of social positions must be recognized as distinct from the individuals who fill those positions. (Contrast Glaser's causal model, of social arrangements underlying the specific social differentiators that result in distributions of status, power and standards of living, with Wright's "recursive dynamic macro model") Thus, BEE, even if narrowly construed, has a place in attempting to bring about equality by moving the race-based social structure in a direction that empowers the disadvantaged group.

On another note, in a post-apartheid democratic society, where individuals enjoy, in principle, equal participation, can it be argued that BEE is supportable as all individuals can equally influence the workings of BEE through the political process?

Piko Ewoodzie

Daryl Glaser provides the answer to two very important questions as one thinks about equality. 1) what exactly do we want equally distributed? and 2) among who do we want these things distributed? He writes "...you will seek equality between persons in respect of some combination of three human goods: socioeconomic resources; status or esteem, including self-esteem; and power..." It is unclear if his definition of personhood is a universal one or one that is bounded by states and nations. However, it is clear that he does not seek equality among races, or among genders, but among persons. With this, I agree. Also, his list of things that we want equally distributed provides the end we should have in mind. (It is conceivable that more could be added to this list). Because of these three things, it seems, even to Glaser, that racial or gender inequality take a back seat to class inequality. But this need not be the case. It is without a doubt that the elimination of class differences would also get rid of many other forms of inequality (not just racial inequality), it is also true that it would not get rid of it all. And for our purposes, getting rid of class inequality would not be the end of it because there are two other things, power and status, that we hope to distribute equally. How does one approach the distribution of these two other things? With the distinction between social differentiators and distribution strata, Glaser does an excellent job of separating what should really be our final goal from things that seem to have served as distractions (ie. Obsession with racial inequality has

distracted us from equality among persons). I want to suggest that they are not distractions at all, and further, I don't think it is necessary to make interpersonal equality more morally important than racial inequality. As Glaser recognizes, racial equality is a means to interpersonal equality and because such "differentiators have a distinct and perhaps privileged relationship with political mobilization against inequality," I think it is important to not belittle the significance of the differentiators.