Thinking about equality, inequality and fairness

October 16, 2006

Film #2: “An Inconvenient Truth”
7:00 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, October 17 & 18
125 Ag Hall
1450 Linden Drive
The idea of “social injustice”

An inequality is unjust when:
(a) the inequality is unfair, and
(b) something could in principle be done to eliminate the unfairness.
Three Cases of Possible Injustice

Case 1. A police chief will only hire personal relatives – sons, daughters, cousins – as police officers.

Case 2. A small shop-owner is only willing to have his son or daughter become a co-owner of the store.

Case 3. In one of the richest countries in the world, there are millions of people, children and adults, who live in desperate poverty.
**FAIR PLAY vs FAIR SHARES**

**Fair play** =
**moral judgment about procedures not outcomes.**
“Fairness” means “equal playing field” -- no discrimination, no special privileges, etc. Result = high levels of inequalities of outcomes are fair so long as the outcomes were obtained through equal opportunity.

**Fair share** =
**moral judgment about outcomes, not just procedures.**
“Fairness” means everyone is entitled to a share of society’s resources sufficient to live a dignified, flourishing life (i.e. to have enough to be able to participate fully in the exercise of rights and liberties, to be able to exercise and develop one’s talents).
A Pragmatic Argument = an argument that focuses on practical consequences rather than social justice as such.

| Thesis 1 | Inequality ➔ incentives ➔ people work harder ➔ prosperity ➔ ultimately benefits the poor |
| Thesis 2 | Greater inequality ➔ greater incentives ➔ greater prosperity ➔ greater benefits for the poor |
| Thesis 3 | Reducing inequality ➔ reduces incentives ➔ harms the poor |

Practical Policy = tax cuts for the very rich; “trickle down” economics
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Criticisms of the Pragmatic Argument for Inequality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the difference between an “incentive” and “extortion”?</td>
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<td>• If a robber holds a gun to your head and says “your money or your life”, is paying the robber an “incentive” for not shooting you?</td>
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<td>• Elites always claim that privilege is necessary as an incentive, but this can just be an exercise of power</td>
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<td>2. “Excess Inequality” = more inequality than is really needed for incentives</td>
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The Pragmatic Argument against high levels of economic inequality

Thesis 1: High Inequality ➔ resentment and conflict ➔ erodes community and cooperation ➔ lowers productivity ➔ reduces prosperity

Thesis 2: High inequality ➔ concentrations of wealth ➔ concentrations of power ➔ erodes democracy
The Concept of “Exploitation”:

The Saga of

Li’l Abner & the Shmoo
AND NOW, P.U., WE'RE COMING TO A SPOT WHERE FOLKS ARE SO IGNORANT, THEY'D NEVER DREAM OF ASKING FOR MORE THAN WE'RE WILLING TO PAY!!

- AND THEY'LL NEVER GET RICH ON THAT-EH? CHUCKLE!!

HERE, THEY HAVEN'T BEEN SPOILED BY THAT SILLY FAD OF WORKING A MERE 8-HOUR DAY!!
These miserable rats are in such desperate need that they'll work a good, old-fashioned 16-hour day!!

You're a bright boy!!—How did you find such a splendid spot to move our factory?

Statistics show that there're more undernourished people in Dogpatch than anyplace!! Those are the kind I like to deal with!! They're so grateful—bless 'em!!
(- PSST!- THESE POOR, IGNORANT WRETCHES WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR THE CHANCE TO WORK 16 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK, FOR $7.00 A WEEK. THEY'VE NEVER HEARD OF ANYTHING BETTER — AND (CHUCKLE!) WE'LL NEVER TELL 'EM!!-)

(- OH! — YOU'RE A BRIGHT LAD!! — THE BOARD MAY WELL GIVE YOU A $500,000.00 BONUS, AGAIN THIS YEAR!! — BUT-- HMM—MAYBE WE CAN PAY 'EM EVEN LESS!!— QUESTION ONE OF 'EM!!?—)
How would you like to earn $7.00 a week?
D-did yo' say $7.00 fo' jest one week?
Er-no-I said 'six'!!

Sigh?--Thet woulda bin a tremenjus fort-choon--B.S.
?-?-What do you mean--B.S.?

Befo' shmooes.
ONLY EIGHTEEN HOURS O' HARD LABOR A DAY—ONLY SEVEN DAYS A WEEK—AN’ YO’D PAY US SIX DOLLARS, FO’ JEST THET?

THET WOULDA BIN A MIGHTY JUICY PROP-O-ZISHUN—B.S.

MEANIN’ "BEFORE SHMOS"!!
But nobody whut's got shmoos hasn't work any more - an' anybody kin have 'em fo' free?

Shmoos does every-thing!!

Everything?? Ho! Ho?? - I suppose they provide you with the necessities of life - milk, butter, eggs, meat -

Stop laughing, you fool!! LOOK!!
GREAT SCOTT, P.U.!! - DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THE SHMOO MEANS? - NOBODY'LL HAVE TO WORK HARD ANY MORE!!

BUT, WHO'LL DO THE LONG, DREARY, BACK-BREAKING LABOR AT OUR CANNING FACTORIES?

NOBODY - AND WHAT'S WORSE, NOBODY'LL NEED OUR CANNED STUFF ANY MORE!!! THE SHMOO PROVIDES ALL TYPES OF FOOD - FRESH AND (50¢) FREE!!

FREE FOOD FOR EVERYBODY? THAT'S HORRIBLE!
THE SHMOO MUST GO! — IT'S EITHER IT — OR US! — THANK HEAVENS ITS SINISTER INFLUENCE HASN'T SPREAD YET!!

BLAST YOU, WORMLEY!! WHY ARE YOU STOPPING?

BECAUSE I'VE QUIT!! — I SNUCK A BRACE OF SHMOOS, UNDER MY COAT, IN DOG-PATCH!! — NOW, I'VE GOT A WHOLE HERD OF 'EM!! I'LL NEVER HAVE TO TAKE YOUR GUFF ANYMORE, P.U.!!
(*) I'll forget the shmoo menace by taking 'choo-choo' to dinner—that poor show girl has been unemployed so long she'll even go out with me—for a square meal!!*)

OH? I'd love to go to dinner with (ugh!?)—you, honey-pot?!!
-I'll get you a big steak, and---

You can take that steak, and slap your own fat face with it? There's good shmoos tonight!!
## Rank ordering of Preferences of Different Classes for the Fate of the Shmoos

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<th>Capitalist Class (the rich)</th>
<th>Working Class (the poor)</th>
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<td>1. Only capitalists get shmoos</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Destroy the shmoos</td>
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Three Criteria for Defining “Exploitation”

(a) Inverse Interdependent Well-being Principle

*The material well-being of the advantaged group of people causally depends upon the material deprivations of the disadvantaged.*

(b) The Exclusion Principle

*The causal relation in (a) involves the exclusion of the disadvantaged group from access to certain important productive resources controlled by the advantaged group.*

(c) The Labor Effort Control Principle

(also called “appropriation principle”)

*The causal mechanism which translates (b) exclusion into (a) differential well-being involves the control over the labor effort and the profits from that effort of the disadvantaged group by those who control these productive resources.*

Non-exploitative Oppression = (a) + (b)
Exploitation = (a) + (b) + (c)