

## Democracy and Inequality

**Dr. Melissa Williams**

Professor and Founding Director of the Centre for  
Ethics at the University of Toronto

May 29, 2017

9:00am – 4:30pm

### **Workshop Outline**

Does economic inequality threaten democracy? The era of globalization has reduced inequality between countries while increasing inequality within countries. Meanwhile, democratic societies have become polarized, and populist forces – from Brexit to Trump and Le Pen – have destabilized party systems. In some contexts, such as Hungary and Turkey, democracy is giving way to autocracy. Are these upheavals in existing democracies related to growing inequality?

In this workshop, we will turn first to political theory to explore the question of what sort of equality democracy requires. Does it entail equal status, equal opportunity, equal power over decisions, or some other form of equality? To what extent are these forms of equality consistent with economic inequality?

From there, we will turn to empirical social science to examine the relationship between economic inequality and the challenges now confronting Western democracies. Does economic inequality generate political inequality? Is it connected to political polarization and populist nationalism? Does the structure of inequality matter for the quality of our democracies? If we're concerned about inequality, should we be focused on the worst-off members of society, or should we be focused on the middle class?

Finally, if we think inequality is a problem for healthy democracy, what can and should we do about it? The final session of the workshop will explore some of the options.

### **Required Readings**

Jane Mansbridge, "The Limits of Friendship," in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (eds.), *Participation in Politics* (New York: Liber-Atherton, 1975). <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EEF877>

Facundo Alvaredo et al., "Global Inequality Dynamics: New Findings from WID.World," Working Paper 23119 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2017).

<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EEF878>

Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash," Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper, August 2016.

<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EEF879>

Nancy Fraser, "The End of Progressive Neoliberalism," *Dissent* 64 (2): 130-34 (Spring 2017).

<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EEF87A>





### **Recommended Readings**

Nancy Fraser, "Mapping the Feminist Imagination: From Redistribution to Recognition to Representation,"  
*Constellations* 12(3): 295-307 (2005).

Keith Banting and John Myles, "Framing the New Inequality: The Politics of Income Redistribution in Canada,"  
in David A. Green, W. Craig Riddell, and France St-Hilaire (eds.), *Income Inequality: The Canadian Story*  
(Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2015).