

# POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

## Rejecting Meritocracy

### Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

### Reading

Hayek, F. A. (2006). Equality, Value, and Merit. [Chapter 6]. In *The Constitution of Liberty* (pp. 75–89). London: Routledge. (Original work from 1960.)

### Questions

1. What does Friedrich Hayek mean by “value” and by “merit”? Why does he believe that these concepts are extremely different from each other?
2. Today, we typically call a society where power and/or economic goods are distributed according to merit a meritocracy. In response to this idea, Hayek contends two things, “[1] in a free system it is neither desirable nor practicable that material rewards should be made generally to correspond to what men recognize as merit and [2] that it is an essential characteristic of a free society that an individual's position should not necessarily depend on the views that his fellows hold about the merit he has acquired” (p. 82). Hayek then spends several sections defending these two points.

What is Hayek's argument to justify these two claims?

3. In the last section, Hayek considers the view that “membership in a particular community or nation entails the individual to a particular material standard that is determined by the general wealth of the group to which he belongs” (p. 88). So, for example, a Qatari (regardless of their position within society) might contend that they are entitled to an extremely high standard of living because the Qatar, as a whole, is the wealthiest country on the planet.

What is Hayek's argument rejecting this view?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.