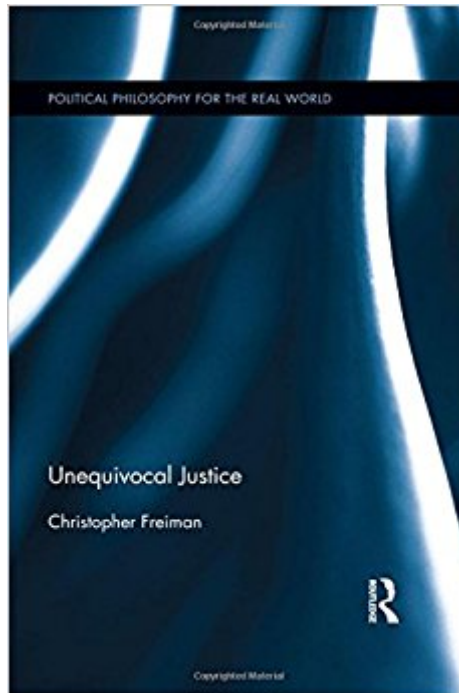




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Unequivocal Justice (Political Philosophy For The Real World)



Synopsis

Unequivocal Justice challenges the prevailing view within political philosophy that broadly free market regimes are inconsistent with the basic principles of liberal egalitarian justice. Freiman argues that the liberal egalitarian rejection of free market regimes rests on a crucial methodological mistake. Liberal egalitarians regularly assume an ideal "public interest" model of political behavior and a nonideal "private interest" model of behavior in the market and civil society. Freiman argues that this asymmetrical application of behavioral assumptions biases the analysis and undercuts ideal theoretical treatments of every major liberal egalitarian principle, including political liberty, economic sufficiency, fair opportunity, and social equality. This book reexamines the institutional implications of each of these principles in nonideal conditions, making novel philosophical use of political psychology and public choice economics along the way.

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Customer Reviews

"Unequivocal Justice, with its delightful and engaging prose, is a devastating critique of the dominant arguments and methods in political philosophy. It shows that almost everything Rawls and other left-liberals have said about institutions over the past 50 years is not merely wrong, but incoherent. It shouldâ•if philosophers have any intellectual integrityâ•change the field forever."â•Jason Brennan, Georgetown University, USA

Christopher Freiman is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the College of William & Mary. His work has appeared in venues such as the Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Philosophical Studies, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, The Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy, Politics, Philosophy, and Economics, and The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy.

Liberal egalitarianism is the dominant view in contemporary political philosophy. Take John Rawls. Rawls's theory of justice has been extraordinarily influential. Rawls thinks that justice requires the protection of basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity, and limits on economic inequalities. But, in addition to offering a philosophical theory of justice, Rawls and other liberal egalitarians propose institutions and public policies too. They tend to favor large-scale state redistribution of income and wealth, and extensive regulation of markets. In this concise and well-written book, Christopher Freiman offers a devastating critique of liberal egalitarian institutional analysis. Freiman shows that liberal egalitarians have double standards when it comes to markets. They assume that public officials are impartial and morally motivated, while market actors are selfish and prone to corruption. Philosophers assume that market actors act badly and public officials will do the right thing. But there is no good reason to make these assumptions. And, once we abandon this double standard, egalitarian arguments against libertarian institutions crumble. The basic idea is this: once we compare free market to state institutions on the assumption that people behave roughly the same in both domains, the case for free markets looks better. Here is an example. Liberal egalitarians argue that states should redistribute income and decrease inequality in order to protect the fair value of political liberty. They worry that, if there is a great deal of inequality, then rich people will use their resources to shape the political process. Fair enough. But why is state redistribution the answer to this problem? If rich people can corrupt the political process, then empowering the state to redistribute more income will give people even greater incentive to distort the political process for their own ends. After all, people will have greater incentive to capture the state if it controls more resources. So, the egalitarian solution only works if we think that state actors are more just and impartial than private ones. And, since that's likely false, redistribution isn't necessarily a good policy. Freiman doesn't claim that libertarian institutional proposals are better than egalitarian ones. Instead, Freiman thinks we need a great deal of empirical evidence to decide one way or the other. We can't rule out libertarian (or egalitarian) policies a priori. To sum up, this is very clear and well-argued book. It's also fun and easy to read, at least for those with some background in political philosophy. The downside is the absurd cost of the book. Like other academic monographs, this is too expensive--the publisher

should find a way to lower the price!

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