

Why Does Inequality Matter?¹

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Why should we be concerned with *inequality*—with the difference between what some have and what others have—rather than simply with making the poor better off? Inequality is not always objectionable. But it can be objectionable, and when it is the reasons for this vary. Some cases (such as 2, 3, 4, and 5 below) economic inequality is objectionable because of its consequences. In other cases (such as 1 and 6) inequality is objectionable because of the institutions or policies that produce it.

Objections to inequality include:

1. Unequal provision of benefits owed to all (Examples: education, sanitation, street paving, access to medical care)
2. Inequality of status (Examples: racism, sexism, but also discrimination against the poor, and excessive “meritocratic” attitudes.)
3. Unacceptable degree of control of some by others
4. Interference with equality of opportunity
5. Interference with the fairness of political institutions
6. Unjustifiability of the features of an economic system that produce unequal income and wealth

¹ A summary of points discussed at length in Scanlon, *Why Does Inequality Matter?* (Oxford University Press, 2018)