**CC0003 / Ethics and Civics in a Multicultural World**

**Sem 1 AY21-22**

**Case Study for Week 09: Criticisms of Meritocracy**

**Reference:**

Brandon Yip Zhen Yuan, “Understanding the four critiques of Singapore’s meritocracy” *Today* (15 July 2021).

URL:

<https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/understanding-four-critiques-singapores-meritocracy>

**Summary of Case Details:**

Meritocracy basically proportionally rewards citizens in terms of what society perceives as their merit. Four distinct criticisms of meritocracy are advanced in this article.

The first critique may be known as the socio-economic inequity critique. Specifically, the educational system unfairly privileges individuals who come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Individuals from higher socio-economic backgrounds benefit from the system not because they are actually more capable than counterparts from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but simply because their parents have been able to provide conducive home environments, or pay for tuition classes.

The second critique may be known as the narrow definition of merit critique. Specifically, the educational system provides too narrow a definition of merit, which denotes academic ability. More specifically, the ability to pass examinations is one of the many important skills to be developed and credited, but may not be particularly useful in the working environment.

The third critique may be known as the narrow definition of rewards critique. This criticism specifically looks at the types of rewards that the meritocratic system assigns to individuals. For instance, the system may perpetuate a certain socio-economic achievement (e.g. entry into elite institutions) as more significant than other achievements.

The final critique may be known as the narrativist Critique. Specifically, meritocracy promotes a national narrative that over-simplifies the complexity of peoples’ lives and the prominence of this narrative forces conformity on society in an adverse manner.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Based on your reading of Sandel’s critique of merit, how might Sandel critique Singapore’s meritocratic system?
2. What, in your view, are the most significant arguments for and against meritocracy?
3. Should the Singapore government adjust the system of meritocracy? Why or why not?