

GES1041 / GESS1029

Inequality in Singapore

LECTURE 2

DARYL OOI

Week 2: Do poor people like oats?

Required readings:

- *Mohammad Maliki Osman. 2018. 'This is what helping families looks like'. *The Straits Times*, 27 June.
<https://msfcaresblog.com/2018/06/27/this-is-what-helping-families-looks-like/>
- *Donald Low. 2014. 'The four myths of inequality in Singapore'. In Donald Low & Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh, *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*. Singapore: NUS Press.
<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3361828> (e-book available)

Supplementary resources:

- 12th Singapore Children's Society Lecture: Teo You-Yenn. 2018. 'Growing up in an unequal society'.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9G5nKnpTWA>
- Social Service podcast: 'The minimum wage, the Progressive Wage Model, and low-wage labour in Singapore' (A conversation with Prof. Linda Lim)
<https://socialservice.sg/2020/07/23/the-minimum-wage-the-progressive-wage-model-and-low-wage-labour-in-singapore-a-conversation-with-prof-linda-lim/>
- Irene Ng. 2020. 'Self-reliant wealth and trickle-down welfare'. In *Navigating Differences: Integration in Singapore*. ISEAS Publishing. <https://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b4216108> (e-book available)
- Teo You-Yenn. 2017. *This is What Inequality Looks Like*. Singapore: Ethos Books. Chapters on 'Needs, wants, dignity' and 'Dignity is like clean air'.
<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3796741>
- Tan Ern Ser and Tan Min Wei. 2016. 'Two stories on class in Singapore'. In *Managing Diversity in Singapore: Policies and Prospects*. London: Imperial College Press.
<http://linc.nus.edu.sg/record=b3583640> (e-book available)

Overview

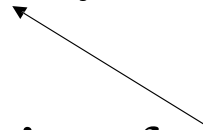
1. **Review of Lecture 1: moral norms and clusters**
2. Analysis: moral values and social structures
3. Exercise: 'The mobile Singaporean'
4. Journal Entry 1: prompts and rubrics

Three related aspects of ethics

1. **Normativity** of ethics

2. **Reciprocity** of norms

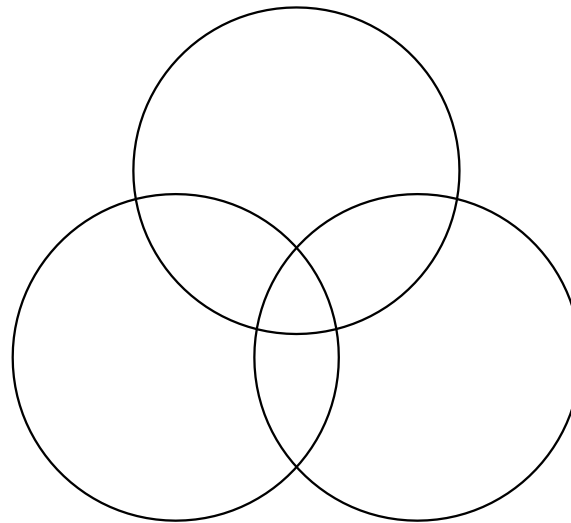
3. **Multiplicity** of relations



Three moral clusters

Person-centred values
 \approx the good owed to a person

Calculations of **well-being**
 \approx what's good for a person



Virtues of character
 \approx the good in a person

Exercise: ‘Good for the poor’

‘I know that some people may genuinely enjoy oats even as this particular community worker and I both think oats are like sawdust. I mention oats because they are often included in donated rations. For, while many people will agree with me that oats taste unpleasant, and although oats are not a particularly common part of most Singaporeans’ diets, some corporate donors have apparently deemed that they are “good for the poor.” Embedded in this “oats are good for you” orientation is an imagining of aid recipients as inherently different from donors, and as needing to be steered in certain directions. Conversely, aid givers are cast as superior in making choices, including for others. The assumption that aid recipients will not make “good” choices is embedded in donor preferences for giving food rations over vouchers, or for giving vouchers over cash. How we imagine people— their capacities, values, and moral worth—shapes how we treat them.’

(Teo 2017)

Three uses of moral clusters

1. To identify **neglected values**
 - Moral attention and imagination
 - Moral dialogue
2. To clarify **moral conflicts**
 - Within clusters
 - Between clusters
3. To raise **new questions**
 - Individual and social dimensions
 - Distribution of well-being
 - Ways to cultivate virtues

What values are important in Singapore?





Overview

1. Review of Lecture 1: moral norms and clusters
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4. Journal Entry 1: suggestions and rubric

‘The self-reliant Singaporean’

- **Self-reliance and social support:** ‘Self-reliance is highly valorized as a trait Singaporeans should strive to maintain. It is defined around continuous employment and lifelong savings; self-reliance is about accumulating money from employment to pay for housing, healthcare, and education. Self-reliance is about not relying on the state or on society for these needs.’ (Teo 2017)
- **Hidden dependence:** ‘While people who are employed are working outside the home, there are people who are doing housework, running errands, caring for children and the elderly. People doing wage work are highly dependent on people doing unpaid labor.’
- **Public goods:** ‘The long-term consequences of public goods being channeled through those who are employed is to create a situation in which one kind of dependence – that of wage earners on caregivers – is completely obscured.’

Overview

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The Mobile Singaporean

- **Equality of opportunity and social mobility:** ‘What about the claim that equality of opportunity ensures social mobility and so governments need not worry about rising income or wealth inequality? Again, while this has some intuitive appeal, it is not borne out by empirical evidence. Countries that are more unequal, such as the US, also tend to be less mobile (as measured by how much of a person’s income is predicted by his parents’ income) than countries that are more equal, such as Canada or the welfare states of northern Europe.’ (Low 2014)
- **Equality of opportunity and equality of outcome:** ‘Why should this be? It turns out that equality of opportunity cannot be easily separated from equality of outcomes. Unequal resources easily translate into unequal access to opportunities, say to quality education. Families with more resources have greater means to ensure that their children have a better education. A more unequal society therefore finds it harder to achieve genuine equality of opportunity and social mobility than a more equal one.’

Overview

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4. **Journal Entry 1: suggestions and rubric**

Journal entries (20%)

- Experiment in ethical reflection
 - Basis for tutorial dialogues
 - Basis for group projects
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- 500-word entries due in Weeks 3, 5, 7, 9
 - Maximum 5 points for each entry
 - Bring to tutorials
 - Submit in LumiNUS Quiz by Friday 2359

Prompts on inequality

- Which passage in our readings on inequality moved or frustrated you most? Write about its ethical significance.
- Write about an incident that sparked your concern about the growing inequality in Singapore. How would you make sense of that experience?
- Reflect on a value that is important to you. How does that value relate to, contribute, or help uncover neglected aspects of inequality?
- Imagine a more fruitful dialogue between Teo (2017) and Osman (2018).

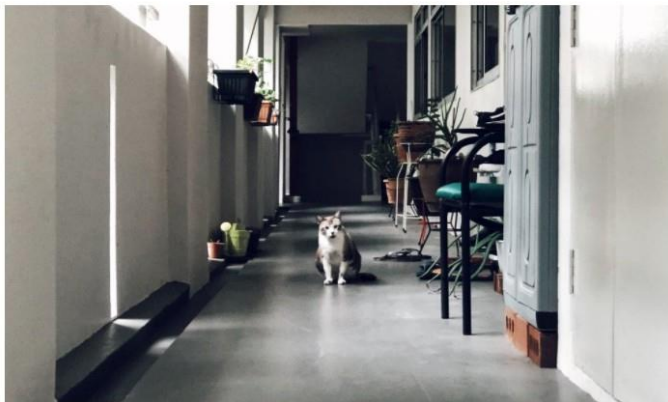
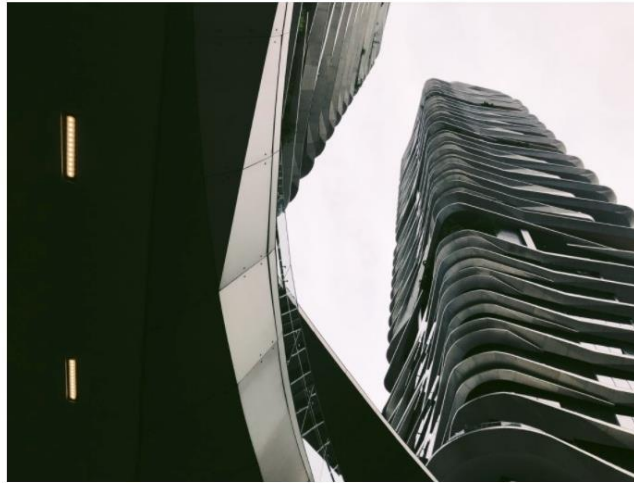
Assessment Rubrics

1. <i>Ethical meaning</i>	Addresses a <u>moral value, problem, or conflict</u> on inequality
2. <i>Singapore context</i>	Addresses an aspect of inequality <u>in Singapore</u>
3. <i>Personal perspective</i>	Assesses a <u>personal view, choice, or relationship</u>
4. <i>Social perspective</i>	Assesses a <u>social space, structure, or policy</u>
5. <i>Bonus</i>	Uses a more original approach or resource to illuminate inequality



‘When a 30-something’s business dries up because of the pandemic, he switches from his white-collar world to being a food deliveryman. Riding a bicycle to HDB rental blocks and plush condominiums with their tight security, closed doors and separate lifts for delivery people, Yusof Abdul Hamid sees **two different worlds in Singapore**. He shares his remarkable story and pictures of the class divide with Yeo Boon Ping.’

<https://sgsoap.sg/recipes/the-two-sides-of-singapore-as-seen-by-a-food-delivery-rider>



<https://www.ricemedia.co/culture-people-two-sides-singapore-food-delivery-rider/>



‘In terms of financial security or freedom, delivering food is not it. Going a step beyond that, I fail to see how this can be a ... long-term thing you could do where you feel fulfilment, enjoyment.

This is not to knock people who are doing this full time. If this is your job, this is your job. You have to hustle, and now I know what it feels like.

The job gets very exhausting because it’s a cycle of negativity. Can you imagine if you never feel satisfied with your job? You’re always tired. You always feel like you’re not earning enough.

You always feel people don’t respect you. You always feel invisible.

Maybe I’m saying this from the perspective of someone who knows a different life, was from an upper-middle-class background, and I’m forced to experience this.’



N
SINGAPOREANS
LEFT BEHIND

<https://www.facebook.com/No-Singaporeans-Left-Behind-1703496076595132/>

IF I AM A **SINGAPOREAN**, WHY AM I LEFT FAR BEHIND?

While most of us have financial security, job stability and family support, there are others who are struggling with unemployment, homelessness, poor health and nutrition and the lack of family support.

Join the conversation at
f singaporeansleftbehind



CARE 
center for culture-centered approach
for research and education

Week 2 Online activities

1. Word cloud

https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/bi5a0AWJtHmeVNVw05mG0/respond

2. MCQ

https://PollEv.com/multiple_choice_polls/upJH1suHBaRWTtoayju01M/respond

3. Q&A

<https://PollEv.com/discourses/ZYyp4gcybLOEi2WQiWTmk/respond>

Thank you.

Instructor

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Tutor

Nicholas Loo nick.loo@nus.edu.sg

Zoom hours

Fri 12pm-1.30pm (via LumiNUS Conferencing)