
The Expressive Functions of Pay

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A COMMENTARY ON Jeffrey Moriarty (2016), “Is ‘Equal Pay For Equal Work’ Merely a Principle of Nondiscrimination?”, *Econ & Phil* 32(3): 435–461, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266267115000383>

ABSTRACT

Jeffrey Moriarty argues that unequal pay for employees who do the same work is not necessarily wrong, but can be wrong if it is discriminatory or deceptive. Moriarty does this in part by stressing that pay should be considered primarily as a price for labor and therefore that our views on price discrimination and unequal pay should mirror each other. In this critique, I argue that Moriarty fails to adequately account for the expressive functions of pay. A pluralist view of pay reveals otherwise overlooked normative concerns regarding pay and cautions against adopting too strong of an analytical connection between price discrimination and unequal pay.

IN AN INTRIGUING article, Jeffrey Moriarty (2016) assesses the common demand for ‘equal pay for equal work’. While this mantra has historically been invoked in opposition to discrimination based on membership in traditionally protected categories, Moriarty asks a different question: is paying different wages to individuals who do the same work morally problematic even if it is not wrongfully discriminatory? On Moriarty’s (2016: 436)² view “nondiscriminatory unequal pay for equal work” (hereinafter NUPEW) is not intrinsically wrong.

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² Hereinafter, parenthetical references not otherwise attributed to are to Moriarty (2016).