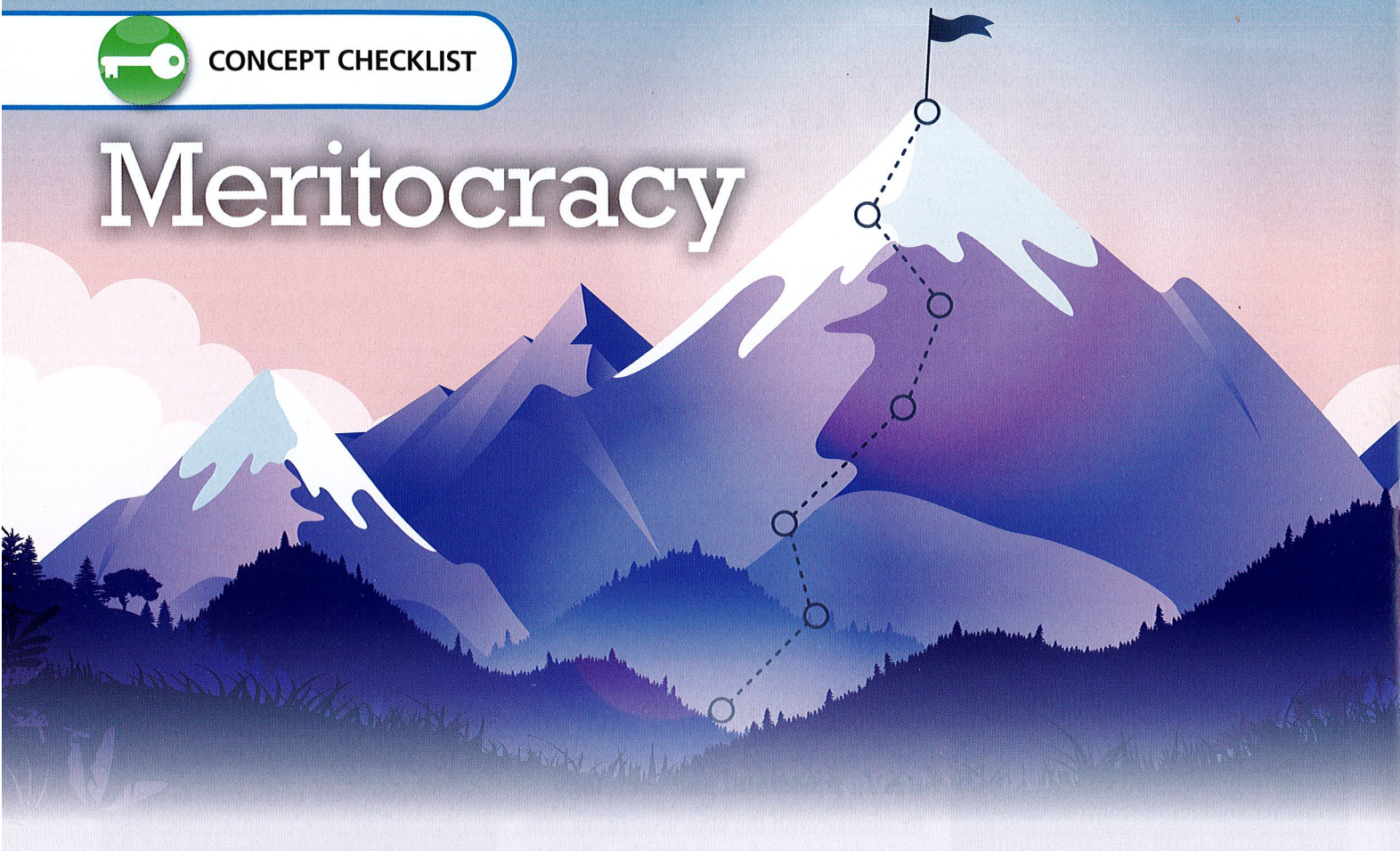


# Meritocracy



**What does it mean?** The concept 'meritocracy' first appeared in a book by the sociologist Michael Young entitled *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958). In a meritocracy, power and privilege are obtained by those who earn them, rather than being a result of inherited wealth and social class. Young used the formula 'IQ + Effort = Merit'. While a meritocracy is now widely regarded as something positive and desirable, Young's book was a dystopian satire, and he envisaged that a meritocracy would actually perpetuate inequalities, and would result in a society divided into a small 'merited' elite and a disenfranchised underclass.

**Why is it important?** What has been called the 'myth of meritocracy' suggests that upward social mobility can be achieved through one's own talent and efforts, unhampered by existing inequalities of class, ethnicity, gender and power. Many argue that this is simply unattainable under a system of neoliberal free market capitalism. For some, meritocracy is a dangerous concept, as it allows those in positions of wealth and power to believe that they have justly earned them, while causing the 'have-nots' to believe that they too deserve their lower position in society, through a lack of talent, education and hard work. Belief in a meritocracy can blind people to the structural inequalities that exist under capitalism.

**What issues and debates surround this topic?**

- To what extent have those at the top of society gained their position purely through their own abilities and efforts?
- Many who accepted the belief in meritocracy, yet failed to make progress despite their hard work, now feel anger and frustration. How might such a response be fuelling the growth of right-wing populist political movements?
- How can we ensure that those with less access to opportunity can still feel a sense of self-worth and lead fulfilling lives?

**How can I check I have understood this concept?** Yale law professor Daniel Markovits wrote: 'Meritocracy has become precisely what it was invented to combat: a mechanism for the dynastic transmission of wealth and privilege across the generations.' To what extent does the evidence support this view? It is highly recommended that you watch the following YouTube clips. The first is by Michael Sandel, a philosopher at Harvard. In the second, Richard Reeves gives a very short resumé of Young's book, highlighting its dystopian theme.  
[www.tinyurl.com/2p8d2x8p](http://www.tinyurl.com/2p8d2x8p)  
[www.tinyurl.com/yck47tx](http://www.tinyurl.com/yck47tx)

Joan Garrod

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# Ageism



**What does it mean?** Ageism refers to the stereotyping of, and discrimination against, a person or group on the basis of their age. While ageism is often thought of as something affecting only older people, it is also used against young people. Ageist language and behaviour are found in many areas of life, including health and social care, the workplace, the legal system, politics, technology and the media.

**Why is it important?** A report published by the UN World Health Organization in March 2021 found that ageism is a global problem. It results in huge personal and economic costs, both to individuals and to societies. Among older people, ageism is associated with poorer physical and mental health, increased social isolation and loneliness, financial insecurity, decreasing quality of life and premature death. For younger people, ageism is often found in the workplace and the housing market, and in politics where they often have difficulty getting their views heard and taken note of.

**What issues and debates surround this topic?**

- Ageism is often used to deny or restrict medical treatments for older people.
- It can intersect with and exacerbate other forms of disadvantage based on gender, ethnicity and disability.
- Particularly in the case of older people, ageist stereotypes affect the ways that people see themselves, leading to lack of confidence and depression.

**How can I check I have understood this concept?**

- The WHO report urges all countries to use evidence-based strategies, improve data collection and research and to work together to combat ageism. How might this be achieved? What obstacles might stand in the way?
- Read the summary of the WHO report at: [www.tinyurl.com/2p98s9rw](http://www.tinyurl.com/2p98s9rw).
- Watch a short clip about combatting ageism: [www.tinyurl.com/mtmsdkc2](http://www.tinyurl.com/mtmsdkc2).
- Read about ageism towards young people from the European Youth Forum at: [www.tinyurl.com/y3yhuwzf](http://www.tinyurl.com/y3yhuwzf).

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