

**Cornell University/University of Edinburgh**  
**A Conference on**  
**Relativity, Inequality and Public Policy**  
**Edinburgh, Scotland, June 5-7, 2009**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

In economics, “relativity” is the idea that it is position relative to others that motivates behavior and determines individual and therefore social wellbeing. This idea has distinguished pedigree, going back in modern times to Duesenberry’s relative income hypothesis, and even further back to Adam Smith’s claim that “a creditable day-laborer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt.”

However, in the last two decades research has accelerated on relative concerns and their interactions with inequality, and their implications for public policy. Conventional welfare economics with interdependent preferences has progressed alongside new departures in theoretical and experimental behavioral economics, and in the economics of happiness. Progressivity in taxation can be seen in a new light if inequality interacts with relativity to produce socially inefficient outcomes. At the same time, the debate between paternalism and libertarianism is also sharpened if people have feelings of envy towards their fellow beings because of their relative positions in society.

With this background, Cornell University and the University of Edinburgh are hosting a major international conference – “Relativity, Inequality and Public Policy” – to take stock of where we stand and to highlight the open questions. The conference will be held on June 5-7, 2009, in Edinburgh, Scotland, on the main campus of the University of Edinburgh in the centre of this historic city.

The conference organizers are Ed Hopkins, University of Edinburgh, and Ravi Kanbur, Cornell University.

Speakers at the conference include: **Richard Easterlin, Robert Frank, Carol Graham, Ed McCaffery, Andrew Oswald, Matthew Rabin, Imran Rasul, Aldo Rustichini, Bernard Van Praag, Lise Vesterlund and Shlomo Yitzhaki.**

The organizers invite submissions of completed papers or substantial abstracts (5-7 pages), by November 30, 2008. Decisions will be communicated by January 31, 2009. Final versions of accepted papers will be due by May 1, 2009.

Submissions should be sent to Ravi Kanbur at [sk145@cornell.edu](mailto:sk145@cornell.edu).

The conference will meet the travel and accommodation costs of one author per paper selected.