

PHIL 6600: Social & Political Philosophy

Poverty: Ethical & Normative Debates

University of Guelph
Department of Philosophy
FALL 2017
Tuesdays 2:30-5:20 MACK 346
(Philosophy seminar room)

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PHIL 6600 (Social & Political Philosophy)

Poverty: Ethical & Normative Debates

Course description

In recent decades, political philosophers and ethicists have grappled with problems of global poverty and inequality. Much of this debate has centered on the question of whether the affluent have any moral duties to impoverished people outside their borders — especially those living in severe poverty, in poor countries (or the ‘Global South’). We take up this question, first posed by Peter Singer nearly fifty years ago, in the context of debates the nature and scope of poverty duties. However, the course also seeks to push past this familiar, and possibly outdated, framing of the ethical challenges of deprivation. To this end, we engage more broadly with the following questions: What does poverty actually consist in — needs deprivation alone, or also social exclusion, political powerlessness, and other harms irreducible to material scarcity? How is it best measured? How might our understanding of what severe deprivation is, and what causes it, shape our account of poverty obligations? Insofar as such duties exist, are they best seen as beneficence-based, or as contribution-based (i.e., owing to direct or indirect responsibility for contributing to global poverty)? How might differing conceptions of what poverty is, and what drives it, shape our view of who or what are the best (most capable, most responsible?) *agents* of justice with regard to poverty alleviation? And how might individual and collective agents be morally motivated to take up their poverty-reduction obligations?

The course does not provide a comprehensive overview of all of the main philosophical approaches to global poverty today. It does, however, survey a range of important ethical approaches, including those that frame poverty reduction in terms of (Utilitarian or Kantian/deontological) moral obligations/duties, and those that stress the need to transform the social power relations that underpin deprivation and inequality. Among the perspectives we will survey are those of “Effective Altruism,” the Capabilities Approach, and that of “poverty reduction from below” (grassroots and poor-led social movements).

Class Format

This is a graduate-level seminar course, which means it is discussion-based. As such, it is essential that you come to class prepared to discuss and reflect on the readings. In addition to contributing regularly to class discussions, each student will take responsibility for introducing the readings for one class. A sign-up sheet will be circulated in the first class.

Course Requirements

You are required to attend and participate in class meetings, lead seminar one class (circulating discussion questions in advance), and to write one final paper of 15-20 pages. If you do need to miss a class, you must make sure you do the reading you missed. An extended (2 pg) reflection piece on the readings missed is required within one week of the missed class.

Course Assessment

Class participation (contributions to discussion): **15%**
 10 one-page response/reflection pieces* (due by noon on Tuesday): **15%**
 In-class presentation introducing the readings** (10-15 minutes): **10%**
 1-2 page research paper proposal plus annotated bibliography*** due Fri. Oct. 20: **15%**
 Final research paper (7000-8000 words, or 17-20 pp.): **45%** (due Dec. 15)

**short response pieces should engage with one (or more) of the readings for that day. They will be graded together as a dossier at the end of the course; I will give you written feedback on your first one, and then, at the end of the course, I will give comments on your dossier as a whole.*

***your presentation is part overview, part critical analysis. When it is your week to present, you will send out suggested discussion questions to the class on the Sunday evening. I am happy to give you feedback on these questions if you give me enough lead time.*

****the paper proposal should outline the main question or problem to be taken up, explain its importance, and give some context. The annotated bibliography should provide short descriptions of the sources (minimum of 5 articles or chapters, or else 2-3 books).*

Course objectives: to introduce students contemporary philosophical debates about poverty and its alleviation; to develop their analytical and critical reasoning skills; and to improve their ability to write philosophical papers.

Learning outcomes: Knowledge/overview of current ethical debates about poverty; improved skills in critical reasoning; and greater capacity to read and analyze texts in normative political philosophy and ethics.

Prerequisites: an undergraduate degree in the humanities or social sciences, preferably including some philosophy background (or a background in relevant discipline, like political science or sociology).

Readings

The weekly reading assignment is around 60-100 pages — typically three articles or chapters, except for the weeks when we are reading Nussbaum's book. Please plan your time accordingly.

All of the readings are available on our course page on ARES, the university's electronic course reserve system. Please bring the readings to class in an easily accessible form, in PDF format on your desktop or paper copy, as we will frequently refer back to them during our discussion. One book assigned for the class, Martha Nussbaum's *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard 2011) is also available at the university bookstore.

Please note: I have added several supplementary readings on our ARES site that you may find useful, including *additional* writings by authors whose works we are reading. Please take care to ensure you are doing the correct readings each week as it can be a bit confusing. It will be clearer if you order the ARES readings by authors' last names (click "sort by" + "save order" at the top).

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Sept. 12 **The contours of the ethical debate about poverty**

Reading:

1. Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* vol. 1, no. 3 (1972): 229-243.
2. Scott Wisor, "Against shallow ponds: an argument against Peter Singer's approach to global poverty," *Journal of Global Ethics* vol. 7, no. 1 (2011): 19-32.
3. Elizabeth Ashford, "Obligations of Justice and Beneficence to Aid the Severely Poor," in *Giving Well: the Ethics of Philanthropy*, eds. P. Illingworth et al. (2011), pp. 26-45.

Sept. 19 **Contested definitions of poverty**

1. Amartya Sen, Ch. 1 "Poverty and Entitlements" (pp. 1-8) and Ch. 2 "Concepts of Poverty" (pp. 9-23) in Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (1981).
2. Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi, Ruhi Saith, and Frances Stewart, "Does it Matter that we do not Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches," *Oxford Development Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2003): 243-274.
3. Scott Wisor, *Measuring Global Poverty: Towards a Pro-Poor Approach* (2012): "Introducing Poverty Measurement," pp. 3-21, and "A Pro-Poor Methodology," pp. 37-56.

Sept. 26 **Effective Altruism**

Reading:

1. Peter Singer, "Precis: The Most Good You Can Do," *Journal of Global Ethics* vol. 12, no. 2 (2016): 132-136.
2. Violetta Igneski, "Living a Meaningful and Ethical Life in the Face of Great Need: Responding to Singer's The Most Good You Can Do," *Journal of Global Ethics* vol. 12, no. 2 (2016): 147-53.
3. Iason Gabriel, "Effective Altruism and its Critics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 34, no. 4 (2017): 457-473.
4. <http://bostonreview.net/forum/peter-singer-logic-effective-altruism> please read short commentaries by Acemoglu, Deaton, MacFarquar, Rubenstein, Saunders-Hastings, and Tumber
5. Website on Effective Altruism: <http://www.givewell.org/about/givewell-overview> (also see their blog within this site)

Oct. 3 **The Moral Demands of Affluence**

Reading:

1. Garrett Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (2004), ch. 1 (“The Life-Saving Analogy,” pp. 7-15), ch. 2 (“An Argument from Beneficence,” pp. 16-33) and ch. 11 (“Overview,” pp. 189-204).
2. Judith Lichtenberg, *Distant Strangers* (2014), chapter 2 (pp. 19-46).
3. Gillian Brock, “Global Poverty, Decent Work, and Remedial Responsibilities: What the Developed World Owes to the Developing World and Why,” in *Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights*, ed. D. T. Meyers (2014), pp. 119-145.

Oct. 10 **Fall study break** (no class/class rescheduled to Thurs. Nov. 30 per calendar)

Oct. 17 **From a Frame of Redistribution to a Frame of Justice?**

Reading:

1. Nancy Fraser, ch. 2, “Reframing Justice in a Globalized World” in *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (2009), pp. 12-29.
2. Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility Across Borders,” in *Responsibility for Justice* (2011), Ch. 5 (pp. 123-151).
3. Simon Caney, “Responding to Global Injustice: On the Right of Resistance,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2015): 51-73.

1-2 page research paper proposal plus annotated bibliography*** due Fri. Oct. 20: **15%**

Oct. 24 **Poverty and Rights**

Reading:

1. Arjun Sengupta, “Poverty Eradication and Human Rights,” Ch. 13 in *Freedom From Poverty as Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?*, ed. T. Pogge (2007), pp. 323-344.
2. Elizabeth Ashford, “Severe Poverty as a Systematic Rights Violation,” Ch. 7 in *Cosmopolitanism Versus Non-Cosmopolitanism*, ed. G. Brock (2013), pp. 129-155.
3. Onora O’Neill, “Rights, obligations, and world hunger,” in O’Neill, *Justice Across Boundaries: Whose Obligations?* (2016), pp. 29-42.

Oct. 31 **The Capability Approach: Nussbaum**

Reading:

1. Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard, 2011), preface & ch’s 1-4 (pp. ix-100).

Nov. 7 **The Capability Approach: Nussbaum continued**

Reading:

1. Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard, 2011), ch.’s 5-8 & Conclusion & Postscript (pp. 101-189).

- Nov. 14 **Non-material harms of poverty: social exclusion, shame, disempowerment**
Reading:
1. Nancy Fraser, "Injustice at Intersecting Scales: On 'Social Exclusion' and the 'Global Poor'," *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2010): 363-371.
 2. Gottfried Schweiger, "Recognition Theory and Global Poverty," *Journal of Ethics*, vol. 10, No. 3 (2014): 267-273.
 3. Claudia Card, "Surviving Poverty," in *Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights*, ed. D. T. Meyers (2014), pp. 21-42.
- Nov. 21 **The agency of the global poor**
Reading:
1. Onora O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," *Metaphilosophy* vol. 32 (2001): 180-95.
 2. Monique Deveaux, "The Global Poor as Agents of Justice," *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2015): 125-50.
 3. John Dryzek, "Democratic Agents of Justice," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 4 (2015): 361-384.
- Nov. 28 **Countering the domination of the poor**
Reading:
1. Neera Chanchoke, "Realising Justice," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2013): 305-320
 2. Rainer Forst, "Transnational Justice and Non-Domination: A Discourse-Theoretical Approach," in *Domination and Global Political Justice*, eds. B. Buckinx et al. (2015), pp. 88-110.
 3. Sam Hickey and Sarah Bracking, "Exploring the Politics of Chronic Poverty: From Representation to a Politics of Justice?" *World Development*, vol. 33, no. 6: 851-865.
- Nov. 30 **Global justice from below?**
 (Thurs.) *Reading:*
1. Anthony Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Global Poverty," *Development and Change* vol. 38, no. 5 (2007): 793-818.
 2. Arjun Appadurai, "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Public Culture* vol. 14, no. 1 (2002): 21-47.

Final research paper (7000-8000 words, or 17-20 pp.): 45% (due Dec. 15)
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Important university notes and policies

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <mail.uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. [See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.](#)

Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the fortieth class day (**Friday, 3 November 2017**); two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of the add period in the second semester. The regulations and procedures for [Dropping Courses](#) are available in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance, and not later than the 40th Class Day.

[For more information see the SAS web site.](#)

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities that involve, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. [The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar](#)

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in

any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

[The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.](#)

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.