

PHIL 860: RESEARCH SEMINAR IN MORAL THEORY: THE MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF POVERTY

INSTRUCTOR: Jennifer M. Morton [REDACTED]
DATE/TIME: Wednesdays 2:00-4.30pm
LOCATION: [REDACTED]
STUDENT 'DROP IN' ZOOM HOURS: W 7.00pm-8.00pm, F 12-1pm
[REDACTED] or phone calls by appt.
COURSE DISTRIBUTION CATEGORY: Value

COURSE OBJECTIVES (What this course will aim to enable you to do):

- To enrich your approach to research projects in moral theory, political philosophy, epistemology, decision theory, and potentially other areas through engagement with social science research on poverty.
- To write a high-quality, empirically-engaged, original research paper that satisfies the value component of your graduate coursework.
- To develop important professional skills—critically engaging with a philosophy paper, giving constructive feedback to peers, presenting a paper idea, and so forth; in addition to those fundamental skills, we will also focus on how to draw on social science research as a philosopher and how to write a research paper that is philosophical, yet informed by empirical evidence.

All coursework for this class has been designed to help you meet these course objectives.

COVID NOTICE: Due to the COVID pandemic, this course will be held online to allow us to maintain social distancing and minimize the possibility that any of us (or our loved ones) will get sick or that we will inadvertently get other members of our community sick. For this class to work well, it will require a lot of flexibility, patience, and empathy from all of us. This class will be taught **synchronously** meaning that I expect that you will attend the class if you **can**. (See the section entitled Zoom expectations below for more information.) The vibrancy of the class discussion is paramount for you to get the most out of this class. However, these are challenging circumstances for everyone, so I will work with you on a case-by-case basis if you are unable to attend class for whatever reason. But please do keep me informed of any challenges you will have in attending class (slow internet connection, time zone issues, etc.) as soon as possible, so that we can settle on a plan together early in the term. At minimum, if you miss a class, you will be responsible for a phone or zoom conversation with me to discuss the course material. If you do fall ill or face another unexpected challenge, e-mail, call, or text me. The sooner I know, the easier it will be for us to work on a plan to deal with it together.

DESCRIPTION: In this course, we will consider whether poverty should play a role in how we assess an agent's moral psychology. In the Victorian era, poverty was seen as a fitting consequence of the profligate and irresponsible nature of the poor. The poor were thought to be less intelligent, less able to control their impulses, and more subject to vices than those who were better off. Fortunately, this way of understanding poverty has fallen out of favor, but a lacuna has been left in its stead. Should the fact that an agent lives in poverty be relevant to our assessment of her moral psychology?

Social scientists have suggested that at least some of the desires, beliefs, and deliberation of those who are in poverty are distinct and that this plays a causal role in their condition, not as a natural consequence of the poor's failed character, but rather because poverty can itself lead to attitudes and

reasoning that are counterproductive. This phenomenon is often referred to as a poverty trap. Understanding poverty traps requires, as economist Esther Duflo notes, “a theory of how poverty influences decision-making, not only affecting the constraints, but by changing the decision-making process itself” (Duflo, 2006, p. 376). I take this to be a project not only for social scientists, but for philosophers interested in human agency.

In this course, we will think through the philosophical side of this debate. Though the focus of the course will be on poverty, we will also discuss how different dimensions of oppression (race and gender) play a role in an agent’s moral psychology. The course will be divided into three sections looking at— desires/preferences, beliefs, and reasoning. In section I, we will look at a subsection of the voluminous literature on adaptive preferences (e.g. Elster, Cudd, Nussbaum, Khader, etc.) and at some of the economics and social science literature on ‘poverty traps’ (e.g. Duflo, Appadurai). In Section II, we will turn to recent debates in epistemology on moral encroachment and race (e.g. Rima Basu, Mark Schroeder, Sarah Moss) and some empirical work on stereotype threat and implicit bias. And in Section III, we will engage with work on deliberation and poverty (e.g. Mullainathan and Shafir, Duflo, Morton). This course is interdisciplinary in nature. Students from other departments are welcome, though I will assume some familiarity with core concepts in moral and political philosophy.

PREREQUISITES: This is a class for graduate students. I welcome auditors, but make sure that when you do come to class, you have done the reading and are prepared to discuss it.

ASSESSMENTS:

- Participation 10%
- Journal of Research Ideas 10%
- Abstract & Bibliography 10%
- Individual Presentation 10%
- Draft & Referee Report on Peer’s Work 10%
- Final Paper 50%

PARTICIPATION: How well (or badly) this course goes will depend on every person in this class taking ownership for the course. This means that I expect all of you to contribute to the discussion in some way. Talking in seminar is only one way to participate in the discussion, others include e-mailing me with questions you’d like to see discussed before class, listening to others respectfully, helping a classmate make a point, continuing the discussion with your fellow students outside of class, and sending me an e-mail or coming to office hours when the class discussion sparks an idea that you want to discuss. The topics we will discuss in this class might be difficult at times. Please be respectful and mindful that some people in the class will have had difficult experiences related to topics in the class. If you are fortunate not to have had experiences of this sort, embrace epistemic humility and intellectual curiosity.

ZOOM EXPECTATIONS: The success of our Zoom classes depends on all of us being **active participants** in the class. To facilitate this, please try to abide by the following norms:

1. Make sure that you display your preferred name and pronouns.
2. Be engaged; ask questions via chat (private or public), raise your hand, use the clap button when you like a point, participate in polls, etc.
3. If your circumstances allow, keep video on.

4. If you are not talking, mute your audio.
5. Be on time and be ready to participate.
6. Keep in mind that I will be recording the sessions so you and other students can access them later.
7. Avoid disruptions during Zoom sessions if possible. But if your roommate, pet, or sibling walk into your room while you are Zooming, do not sweat it. Life happens! Deal with the disruption and turn your focus back to the class as soon as possible.

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IDEAS: Throughout this course I want you to keep a weekly journal (a google document shared with me) in which you write down research/paper ideas generated by the readings. The shape this takes will vary from week to week. Some weeks you might just write two questions; at other times, you might write a paragraph or a paper outline. This is up to you. I will periodically comment on your journal. This document is meant to help you with come up with a research topic for your final paper, but also to serve as a repository for future research ideas. Use it that way. If something we read leads you to think about something in another class, then write about that.

ABSTRACT & BIBLIOGRAPHY: By **October 7th**, you must turn in a 300-500 word paper abstract & bibliography. You should think of the abstract on the model of the conference submission. It should lay out your argument and give the reader a clear sense of the literature with which you will be in conversation. The best abstracts are concise, direct, and leave the reader wanting to read more of your paper (and, thus, accept your paper for presentation). The final paper might (probably, will) deviate from the abstract. That is totally fine. The goal of this assignment is to keep you on track and to practice writing a fantastic abstract.

PRESENTATION: Excellent philosophical research is the result of a long process of writing and rewriting on the basis of feedback. One of the most important ways through which you will receive such feedback is the conference presentation. Preparing for a presentation is a great opportunity for you to think carefully about the main ideas of your paper, finesse the best way to communicate them to an audience, and anticipate objections or critical feedback. Do not be surprised if, as you work on your presentation, you realize that you need to change your argument or radically rewrite your paper. This is a critical part of the process. You should have a **presentation** and a **paper draft** ready by **November 4th**. During the presentation, you will receive feedback from your peers about the ideas in the paper. You will have to be quick on your feet to respond to the concerns brought up by your peers. Often, the response you offer in the moment will be unsatisfactory. The question will nag at you. That is to be expected. As you rewrite, the paper will get better. You will iterate this process many times. One day, you feel fairly confident that the paper can withstand the critical pressure of its audience and you will send it off (or turn it in).

REFEREE REPORT: Another important philosophical skill that you will practice is giving constructive, incisive feedback. You will do so on the basis of a peer's paper draft and presentation. I will review your report and pass it on (anonymized) to your peer. Your report should be written like a professional referee report in which you summarize the main argument, suggest areas of improvement, and place the paper in a broader assessment of the literature (to the best of your abilities).

CLASS GUESTS: I have secured zoom visits from a few of the philosophers with whose work we will be engaging. This is an excellent opportunity for you to engage philosophically at a high-level and establish

contact with philosophers at other institutions. Take advantage of this opportunity! This is a crucial part of being a professional philosopher.

FINAL PAPER: Your final term paper should be an original, well-argued essay in value theory (broadly conceived) that draws on material from this class. The topic is up to you, but, ideally, you will try to incorporate some empirical work. By this point in the class you will have received a lot of feedback from me and from your peers. You will also have rewritten the paper several times in response to that feedback. If you stick to these steps, the final state of the paper writing process will involve finessing and tightening your argument. I strongly discourage incompletes or late submissions (for your own good—they add up!). If you must take an incomplete for this class, you **must** turn in a well-developed draft by the final due date, **November 19th**.

READINGS: On the next space, you will see a schedule of readings for the term. I have divided them into ‘core’ readings—those you will be expected to have read carefully for seminar—and optional recommended readings—those you should turn to if you are interested in digging into the topic of the seminar further. In addition, if you would like to do some more background reading on what we will be discussing this course, I highly recommend the following books:

- Banerjee, Abhijit V., Abhijit Banerjee, and Esther Duflo. *Poor economics: A radical rethinking of the way to fight global poverty*. Public Affairs, 2011.
- Desmond, Matthew. *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Broadway Books, 2016.
- Lareau, Annette. *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Univ of California Press, 2011.
- Mullainathan, Sendhil, and Eldar Shafir. *Scarcity: Why having too little means so much*. Macmillan, 2013.
- Wilson, William Julius. *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy*. University of Chicago Press, 2012 & *When work disappears: The world of the new urban poor*. Vintage, 2011.

HONOR CODE: All students are expected to follow the guidelines of the UNC honor code. If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/honor-system>. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Always cite any resource that you use. **Do not reuse papers written for other classes.**

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES & SERVICE: UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES: CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short- or long-term needs. Go to their website: www.caps.unc.edu to learn more.

MODIFICATIONS TO SYLLABUS: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedules.

Date	Topic	Reading/Writing
Aug 12	Introduction to the Seminar	Morton, Jennifer, "The Moral Psychology of Poverty" Naraya, Deepa, <u>The Voices of the Poor</u> , Chapter 2
Aug 19	What is Poverty?	Townsend, Peter, "The Meaning of Poverty" Sen, Amartya, "Poor Relatively Speaking" Wright, Erik Olin, "The Class Analysis of Poverty" <i>Recommended: Duflo & Banerjee, <u>Poor Economics</u> Chapter 1; Walker, Robert, <u>The Shame of Poverty</u> Chapter 1</i>
Aug 26	Adaptive Preferences	Elster, Jon, "Sour grapes: Utilitarianism and the genesis of wants" Nussbaum, Martha "Adaptive Preference and Women's Option" <i>Recommended: Bruckner, Donald, "In Defense of Adaptive Preferences;" Terlazzo, Rosa, "Conceptualizing Adaptive Preferences Respectfully: An Indirectly Substantive Account"</i>
Sep 2	Adaptive Preferences continued Class Visitor: Serene Khader (CUNY)	Khader, Serene, "Empowerment through Subordination?" Appadurai, Arjun, "The Capacity to Aspire?" <i>Recommended: Khader, Serene, "Adaptive Preferences and Choices: Are Adaptive Preferences Autonomy Deficits?"</i>
Sep 9	Shame Class Visitor: Krista Thomason (Swarthmore College)	Thomason, Krista, <u>Naked</u> Chapter 3 Walker, Robert, <u>The Shame of Poverty</u> Chapter 3 On the Media Podcast (Scarlet E episode 1 "Why?") <i>Recommended: Thomason, Krista, <u>Naked</u> Chapter 1; Ci, Jiwei, "Agency and Other Stakes of Poverty"</i>
Sept 16	Rationality	Duflo, Esther, "Poor, But Rational?" Elster, Jon, "Rational Choice" <i>Recommended: Duflo, Esther, <u>Tanner Lecture #1</u></i>
Sep 23	Inequality vs. Poverty	Payne, Keith, selections from <u>The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die</u> Frankfurt, Harry, "Equality as a Moral Ideal" Anderson, Elizabeth, "What is the point of equality?" Casal, Paula, "Why Sufficiency is not enough"
Sep 30	Scarcity	LSE Report, "How Poverty Affects Decision-Making Processes" Morton, Jennifer, "Reasoning Under Scarcity" <i>Recommended: Shah, Shafir & Mullainathan, "Some Consequences of Having Too Little"</i>
Oct 7	Abstract & Bibliography Due	
	Risk	Buchak, Lara, <u>Risk and Rationality</u> Chapter 1 Haushofer, Johannes and Ernst Fehr, "On the psychology of poverty" <i>Recommended: Duflo & Banerjee, <u>Poor Economics</u> Chapter 6; Richard H. Thaler and Eric J. Johnson, "Gambling with the House Money and Trying to Break Even: The Effects of Prior Outcomes on Risky Choice"</i>
Oct 14	Race	Wilson, William Julius, "Being Poor, Black, and American" Boxill, Bernard, "The Underclass and the Race/Class Issue" On the Media Podcast (Scarlet E episode 2 "40 Acres")

		Recommended: Bannerji, Himani "Building from Marx: Reflections on Class and Race; Gould, Mark, "Race and Theory: Culture, Poverty, and Adaptation in Wilson and Ogbu;" Massey, Douglas, "American Apartheid and the Urban Underclass;" Fordham & Ogbu, "Black students' school success: Coping with the 'burden of 'acting white;'" Lee, Jennifer, "Tiger Kids and The Success Frame;"
Oct 21	Hope & Faith	Preston-Roedder, Ryan, "Three Varieties of Faith" Lybbert, Travis J., and Bruce Wydick. "Poverty, aspirations, and the economics of hope." Recommended: Duflo, Esther, Tanner Lecture 2: Hope as Capability Bovens, Luc, "The Value of Hope" Pettit, Philip, "Hope and its place in the mind"
Oct 28	Moral/Pragmatic Encroachment Class Visitor: Rima Basu (Tentative Date)	Basu, Rima, "A Tale of Two Doctrines: Moral Encroachment & Doxastic Wronging" Morton, Jennifer "Resisting Pessimism Traps" [Work in Progress] Recommended: Basu & Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging" Morton & Paul, "Grit"
Nov 4	Presentations & Draft Due	
Nov 11	Class Choice	TBD by class
Nov 19	Final Paper Due	