

PHIL-379-301 Topics in Political Philosophy: Poverty

INSTRUCTOR: Professor Jennifer M. Morton
EMAIL: jmmorton@sas.upenn.edu
DATE/TIME: M/W 12:00-1.30 PM
LOCATION: Cohen 203 **VIRTUAL:** <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/96040696324>
SEMESTER: Spring 2022
OFFICE HOURS: M/W 9:00AM-10:00AM
OFFICE LOCATION: Cohen 426 **VIRTUAL:** <https://upenn.zoom.us/j/94486523967>

COURSE OBJECTIVES (What will you be able to do when you complete this course):

1. Write an in-depth, polished interdisciplinary paper that digs deep into a question concerning poverty. The argument of your paper will be philosophical, but I will encourage you to draw from empirical research as well. Your paper will present a clear and compelling argument. It will consider objections and address them.
2. You will be able to critically analyze and discuss poverty by drawing from concepts and research in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. You will be able to distinguish between normative and empirical research on poverty. You will be able to knowledgeably discuss questions such as: What is poverty? What makes poverty unjust (if anything)? What are poverty traps? What role do the poor play in their own poverty? How do gender and race relate to poverty? Are policies that aim to help people escape poverty paternalistic? Who is obligated to help the poor?

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

COVID NOTICE: I'm very excited to be back in the classroom with all of you. However, I expect this semester will not be entirely 'normal.' We will follow the university's guidance regarding mode of teaching, mask-wearing, etc. I expect that some of you will be touched by this pandemic during this semester, whether health-wise, financially, or psychologically. Do not hesitate to reach out and tell me what you need. Your physical and mental health is a priority. I will do my best to connect you to resources and to be flexible about class expectations. I have an unvaccinated child at home, so I'm also bracing myself for what the term will bring. We are all in this together. There might be times when we have to meet online to keep us all safe. I will only resort to this when circumstances absolutely demand it. If we keep lines of communication open and we all remain flexible, we will have a great semester.

COURSE REQUISITES (This is what I will be evaluating when I come up with the final grade):

Group Discussion Kick-Offs (2)	20%
Paper Research Plan (1 page)	5%
Paper Background Research (3-5 pages)	5%
Paper Argument (3 pages)	5%
Paper Objections and Response (2 pages)	5%
Individual Paper Presentation	10%
Draft & Final Paper Peer Review	5%
Final Paper (10-12 pages)	35%
Participation (Including Group Work, Class Participation, Office Hours)	10%

PAPER: You will write a 10-12 page (3,500-4,500 word) polished, well-argued research final paper for this class. You will be doing research for this paper throughout the term. You will start by coming up with a plan for the question you want to address in the paper and the research you will be conducting. You will then write a 3–5-page paper of your research findings. After that, you will write a 3-page draft of your paper argument. You will also consider objections to your paper and respond to these (2 pages). The final two steps will be a paper presentation to the class and a draft/peer review. You will receive feedback from me at every stage of this process. Every stage will also be graded as pass/fail. That means that by the time you put everything together for the final paper, you will have written every part of the paper and received feedback from me (and a peer) at every stage.

LATE POLICY: If an emergency requires that you turn in a paper late, the best approach is to contact me well in advance and settle on a new due date. You will not be penalized for turning in a paper late if you do this. However, if you turn in a paper late without clearing it with me first, then I will be unable to offer you feedback on your paper.

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. Each week, you will see reading questions. Everyone should arrive to class ready to answer those questions. Keep in mind that talking in class 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 coming to office hours when the class discussion sparks an idea that you want to discuss. Some of the topics we will discuss in this class might be emotionally challenging for some of your peers. Please be respectful and mindful of that fact and listen closely to each other. We will have a great class if we all embrace epistemic humility and intellectual curiosity.

ELECTRONICS: I encourage you to put your phone and electronics away during class when we meet in person. Look, I get it. I am also tethered to my devices and feel the wave of anxiety when I can't check Instagram or Twitter, but this is a space in which you to get to form intellectual community with your peers IRL. Your devices will be waiting for you when you're done with class, but this opportunity will not be. Of course, if you must pull out your laptop to look at a reading or take a few notes, you can do so. However, you will lose that privilege if you are using them for non-course-related reasons (e.g., news, social media, shopping). If there is an emergency situation and your phone must be on/visible, step outside to use your device so that you don't disturb class.

GROUP DISCUSSION KICK-OFF: Part of taking ownership over the course (see above Participation) depends on you occasionally taking the reins of leading class. To that end, you will kick off the discussion with one or two other students **twice** during the semester. You will arrange with me beforehand when you will do this. I expect you to come ready with questions to guide the discussion and creative pedagogical techniques to engage your peers.

READING: All readings will be available on Canvas.

GRADING: I favor grading that encourages engagement with the class material and not one that causes you to focus on your grades. If you put an honest effort and do all of the work for this class, you will get a **good** grade. However, I reserve As for **exceptional** work. This approach allows me to balance rewarding excellence while assuaging the worry that you might get a low grade despite doing the work.

- A Exceptional & Outstanding Work—Completed all assignments and far exceeded expectations, participated actively in class, engaged with the material in novel and creative ways, wrote an exceptional final paper
- A- Excellent Work—Completed all assignments and exceeded expectations, participated actively in class, deeply engaged with the material throughout the semester, wrote an excellent final paper.
- B+ Very good, consistent work—Completed all assignments and sometimes surpassed expectations, participated actively in class, engaged with the material, wrote a very good final paper.
- B Good, consistent work—Completed most assignments and met expectations, participation in class was consistent, engagement with material remained superficial, final paper met expectations but did not exceed them.
- B- Uneven, sometimes good work—You missed a few assignments but overall completed most of the work, class participation was solid but not consistent, engagement with material sometimes flagged, final paper met expectations.
- C+ Uneven work—Missed a few assignments, didn't participate in class consistently, had many absences, and the final paper read as rushed and not well-thought-out.
- C Missed critical assignments, didn't fully engage with the course material, other students, or the instructor. Only barely exceeded minimal course expectations. The final paper did not meet expectations.
- C- Barely met expectations, inconsistent engagement with the course, turned in a final paper that fell below expectations.
- D-F Failed to meet minimum expectations for the course.

HONOR CODE: All students are expected to follow the guidelines of Penn's Code of Academic Integrity . In particular, students are expected to refrain from "lying, cheating, or stealing" in an academic context (but it's also probably good to avoid doing these things in general). If you are unsure about which actions violate that honor code, please consult <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity>. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Always cite any resource that you use (including friends with whom you have worked if cooperation is permitted on an assignment). Do not reuse papers written for other classes. The internet has made it easier than ever before to catch this sort of thing, so (moral reasons aside) it is not a particularly wise idea.

BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT: It is important to me that you have the resources you need to be able to focus on learning in this course – this includes both the necessary academic materials as well as taking care of your day-to-day needs. Students experiencing difficulty affording the course materials should reach out to the Penn First Plus office (pennfirstplus@upenn.edu). Students who are struggling to afford sufficient food to eat every day and/or lack a safe and suitable space to live should contact Student Intervention Services (vpul-sisteam@pobox.upenn.edu). Students may also wish to contact their Financial Aid Counselor or Academic Advisor about these concerns. You are welcome to notify me if any of these challenges are affecting your success in this course, as long as you are comfortable doing so – I may have resources to support you.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT: The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. To contact the Weingarten Center, call 215-573-9235. The office is located in Stouffer Commons at 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300.

DISABILITY SERVICES: The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from Disability Services. Students can contact Disability Services and make appointments to discuss and/or request accommodations by calling 215-573-9235.

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		Plan for the Day
W	1/12	Introduction: McMillan Cottom, Tressie "The Logic of Stupid Poor People"
M	1/17	MLK No Class
W	1/19	Townsend, Peter, "The Meaning of Poverty"
Reading Questions		Does Townsend offer a clear definition of poverty? Is Townsend's definition of poverty adequate (does it pick out most intuitive cases of poverty)? What do you think Townsend thinks a definition of poverty is useful for?
		Look at the discussion of the price of tea. What is Townsend's argument in the part of the paper? Reconstruct it as carefully and clearly as you can.
Discussion Leaders		
M	1/24	Sen, Amartya, "Poor Relatively Speaking"
Reading Questions		What is Sen's critique of Townsend? Does it succeed?
		Does Sen offer a clear definition of poverty? What is it?
Discussion Leaders		
W	1/26	Walker, Robert "Poverty, Shame, and Stigma?"
Reading Questions		According to Walker, what is the difference between stigma and shame? How are they related? Does poverty make one susceptible to either or both? How so?
		Is the state ever justified in using stigma and shame to encourage certain behavior? Come up with a justification on behalf of the state for the uses of shame and stigma described by Walker (even if you disagree that it is ever permissible).
Discussion Leaders		
M	1/31	Ci, Jiwei, "Agency and Other Stakes of Poverty"
Reading Questions		According to Ci, what is the difference between agency and status poverty? Which is worse? Why? What is the role of a society's culture in poverty?
		Evaluate Ci's argument. What are the strengths and weaknesses? How could the argument be improved?
Discussion Leaders		Emma Sondergaard Jensen, Alex Moon
W	2/2	Wright, Erik Olin, "The Class Analysis of Poverty"
Reading Questions		To what system is poverty essential? Why?
		What is the relationship between exploitation and poverty?
Discussion Leaders		Kara Cloud, Yunong Niu
Assignment		Paper Research Plan (1 page)
M	2/7	Banerjee Abhijit & Esther Duflo, <u>Poor Economics</u> , Introduction & Chapter 1
Reading Questions		What is a poverty trap according to the authors?
		What is a randomized control trial (RCT)? How do the authors propose to use RCTs to research poverty? Do you think doing so is ethical? Why or why not?
Discussion Leaders		
W	2/9	Elster, Jon, "Sour grapes: Utilitarianism and the genesis of wants"
Reading Questions		According to Elster, what are adaptive preferences? How does he distinguish them from other kinds of transformations that our preferences might undergo?

		Look through the reading for last week (Banerjee & Duflo), can you find examples of adaptive preferences there? Make the case for your analysis.
Discussion Leaders		
M	2/14	Banerjee Abhijit & Esther Duflo, <u>Poor Economics</u> , Chapters 4 & 5
Reading Questions		How do the poor make education decisions according to Banerjee and Duflo? What factors influence their decision making?
		How do the poor make decisions about family size according to the authors? What factors influence their decision making? What did you find surprising about these chapters?
Discussion Leaders		
W	2/16	Nussbaum, Martha, "Adaptive Preferences and Women's Options"
Reading Questions		What is Nussbaum's argument against Elster's way of thinking about adaptive preferences? Does it succeed? Apply Nussbaum's view to last class's readings.
		According to Nussbaum, what are the two unsatisfactory extremes that a theory of adaptive preferences might fall prey to? Explain each clearly.
Discussion Leaders		Yunong Niu, Douilton Ho
M	2/21	Appadurai, Arjun, "The Capacity to Aspire?"
Reading Questions		Is the phenomenon described by Appadurai a case of adaptive preferences? Make the case for an affirmative and the case for a negative answer to this question.
		According to Appadurai, the poor suffer from a deficit of ambition. What does this mean? How does he think this happens?
Discussion Leaders		Emma Sondergaard Jensen, Aranya Ram
W	2/23	Khader, Serene, "Empowerment through self-subordination?"
Reading Questions		According to Khader, why do anti-poverty programs often fail to empower women? What is the self-subordination social recognition paradox? Develop a critique of Khader.
		How do Khader and Nussbaum's views compare? Can you think of any key differences?
Discussion Leaders		Treasure Brown, Aranya Ram
M	2/28	Banerjee Abhijit & Esther Duflo, <u>Poor Economics</u> , Chapters 6 & 9
Reading Questions		Why don't the poor want insurance according to the authors? How should we think about the way in which risk is being distributed in the scenarios described in this chapter?
		What is the "paradox" of the poor and business according to the authors? Do you think their analysis is correct? Why or why not?
Assignment		Paper Background Research (3-5 pages)
3/2		Class Canceled [Seybert Lecture instead]
Spring break		
M	3/14	Elliot, Andrea, "Invisible Child" (NY Times)
Reading Questions		What struck you most about Dasani's story? Did her story reflect some of the themes we discussed in class in the first half of the term?
Discussion Leaders		Alex Moon, Douilton Ho
W	3/16	Elliot, Andrea, "When Dasani Left Home" (NY Times)
Reading Questions		What does the Hershey experience tell you about the way in which Dasani has been shaped by poverty? How do you see the factors we have discussed thus far (e.g. poverty traps, adaptive preferences, etc.) playing a role in this story?

Discussion Leaders	Anna Fighera, Treasure Brown,	
M	3/21	Young, Iris Marion, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice"
Reading Questions	What kind of political responsibility does Young identify? Think back to <u>Poor Economics</u> , can you find examples of political responsibility in that text?	
Discussion Leaders		
W	3/23	Wenar, Leif, "Responsibility and Severe Poverty"
Reading Questions	What is the principle that we should use in figuring out who is responsible for alleviating poverty? What cases does Wenar use in support of this analysis?	
Discussion Leaders	Mitz, Kara	
M	3/28	Brock, Gillian, "Global Poverty, Decent Work, and Remedial Responsibilities" [Zoom Class]
Reading Questions	Do our obligations to aid the poor depend on our causal role in contributing to unjust systems that give rise to poverty? Why or Why not?	
Discussion Leaders		
W	3/30	Class Canceled [Online Activity]
Assignment	Paper Argument (3 pages)	
M	4/4	World Bank Report Overview
Reading Questions	How should these findings influence how we have been thinking/discussing poverty thus far in this course?	
Discussion Leaders	Cezanne	
W	4/6	Schilbach, Schofield, & Mullainathan, "The Psychological Lives of the Poor"
Reading Questions	What do the authors mean by bandwidth? How do they theorize poverty affects bandwidth?	
Discussion Leaders	Anna Fighera	
M	4/11	Duflo, Esther, Tanner Lectures (Lecture I)
Reading Questions	According to Duflo, why is it important that we consider the environment in evaluating choices?	
	Why does Duflo think that worries about paternalism are misplaced when we are discussing the world's poor?	
Assignment	Paper Objections & Replies (2 pages)	
W	4/13	Duflo, Esther, Tanner Lectures (Lecture II)
Reading Questions	According to Duflo, hope is a capability. Go back to Sen/Nussbaum on capabilities. How does Duflo's understanding of hope fit with those views?	
	What factors enable hope? Which ones hinder it?	
Discussion Leaders		
M	4/18	Presentations
W	4/20	Draft Due/In Class Peer Review
M	4/25	TBA
W	4/27	Final Class: Final Paper Due