

## **Applied Ethics (PHIL10017): Semester 2 (2024-25)**

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**Course secretary:** Catriona Keay ([ppls.phil@ed.ac.uk](mailto:ppls.phil@ed.ac.uk))

**Seminar schedule:** Mondays 16:10-16:00, DSB 1.20

**Tutorial schedule:** 01 – Tuesdays 16:10-17:00, 7 George Sq, S1

02 – Tuesdays 17:10-18:00, 7 George Sq, S37

**Office:** 40 George Square, 13.13

**Office hours:** In person: Wednesdays 10:00-11:00

Online: Tuesdays 13:30-14:30 (Zoom info on Learn)

### **Course description**

‘Applied ethics’ has no canonically accepted definition, but typically denotes the empirically informed, “bottom up” investigation of particular moral problems, puzzles, and controversies. The objectives of applied ethics may be personal (to inform our ethical choices in ‘everyday’ or professional contexts) or sociopolitical (to identify ethically defensible practices, principles, or laws).

This particular iteration of Applied Ethics will focus on ethical questions related to *poverty and inequality*. Among the issues we will investigate:

- How poverty is best defined
- Conceptualizing the injustice of poverty, especially in relation to egalitarian conceptions of justice
- Rival explanations of poverty, including recent research on poverty’s effects on agency and moral development
- Approaches to the alleviation of global poverty
- Individuals’ moral duties to relieve or address poverty
- Gendered and racial dimensions of poverty

### **Learning outcomes**

This course will provide students many opportunities to practice the fundamental skills of philosophical inquiry, including the extraction, expression, and evaluation of arguments articulated in philosophical texts; the crafting of compelling and convincing philosophical prose; and the development of their own informed point of view on philosophical issues. In addition, by the conclusion of the course, students should be able to

1. outline influential positions and arguments concerning the nature of poverty, as well as its moral and political significance;
2. outline influential positions and argument concerning the moral significance of economic inequality;
3. critically assess these positions and arguments, drawing their own reasoned conclusions about their defensibility;
4. relate philosophical disputes regarding poverty and inequality to central disputes in moral and political philosophy;
5. participate more meaningfully in larger societal conversations concerning poverty and inequality.

## Assessment

- First midterm essay, 35% of course mark (1,500 words): due via Learn, Thursday 6 Feb, 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 23 Jan
- Second midterm essay, 35% of course mark (1,500 words): due via Learn, Thursday 27 Feb, 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 23 Jan
- Final revised essay, 30% of course mark (2,500 words): due via Learn, Thursday 17 April, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by 4 Mar.

## PPLS Skills Centre

PPLS has a Skills Centre that provides assistance to philosophy students with their academic work, including their written assessments. You are encouraged to make appointments with Centre staff to assist you. You may make up to two appointments per month with Skills Centre staff. More information here: <https://skillscentre.ppls.ed.ac.uk/>

## Course readings and schedule

Course readings can be accessed via the Library Resource List on the course Learn page.

As you likely know by now, reading philosophy can often be challenging. Here are some resources students report they've found useful in improving their reading experience (but feel free to contact me for more guidance about reading):

- <https://www.blogs.ppls.ed.ac.uk/2017/02/28/read-philosophy-step-step-guide-confused-students/>
- <https://philosophy.arizona.edu/sites/philosophy.arizona.edu/files/Rosati%2C%20How%20to%20Read%20a%20Philosophical%20Article%20or%20Book.pdf>
- <http://melissajacquart.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-to-Read-Philosophy-Handout.pdf>

The readings below are divided into **core** and **secondary**. The core readings lay out the main issues associated with the particular topic and articulate main positions. The secondary readings are often more difficult, operating at later points in the philosophical dialectic. I expect each of you to make at least one good faith effort to read the *core* readings for each week. Move on to the secondary readings only if you have good reason to think you've comprehended the core readings satisfactorily. Engaging with the secondary readings may also be helpful in developing your final revised essay (see above).

1      13 Jan

Conceptualizing poverty I: Absolute vs. relative; consumption and capabilities

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Laderchi et al, "Does it Matter that we do not Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches" (pp. 243-57)</li><li>• Shaw, "Poverty: Absolute or Relative?"</li><li>• Kamishima, "Capabilities and Poverty"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wolff et al, "A Philosophical Review of Poverty," pp. 3-27</li></ul>

2      Jan 20

## Conceptualizing poverty II: Agency, exclusion, and power

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laderchi et al, “Does it Matter that we do not Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches,” pp. 257-60, 262-69</li> <li>• Ci, “Agency and the Stakes of Poverty”</li> <li>• Calder, “Social Exclusion and Poverty”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holder, “Entitled to a Good Life Without Qualification: How Poverty Wrongs Those Experiencing It”</li> <li>• Deveaux, “Philosophical Misframings of Poverty”</li> <li>• Lötter, “Poverty and Human Dignity”</li> </ul>

3 Jan 27

### Inequality and (relative) poverty

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal,” pp. 21-24, 32-37</li> <li>• Parfit, “Equality and Priority”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James, “Money as a Currency of Justice”</li> </ul>

4 3 Feb

### Poverty, inequality, and democracy

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lötter, “Poverty as Threat to Democratic Values”</li> <li>• Osborne, “The Political Psychology of Inequality”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kriekhaus et al, “Economic Inequality and Democratic Support”</li> <li>• Ross, “Is Democracy Good for the Poor?”</li> </ul>

5 10 Feb

### Moral psychology and poverty

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shafir and Mullainathan, <i>Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much</i> (excerpt)</li> <li>• Lybbert and Wydick, “Poverty, Aspirations, and the Economics of Hope,” pp. 709-26</li> <li>• Morton, “A Moral Psychology of Poverty?”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duflo, 2012 Tanner Lectures, #1</li> <li>• Fell and Hewstone, “Psychological Perspectives on Poverty”</li> <li>• Morton, “Trapped in the Present: Poverty and the Undermining of Prospective Agency”</li> </ul>

**17 Feb: flexible learning week** (no seminar or tutorials, office hours as usual)

6 24 Feb

### Explaining poverty

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vu, “The Influence of Social Science Theories on the Conceptualization of Poverty in Social Welfare”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wright, “The Class Analysis of Poverty”</li> <li>• Blank, “Selecting Among Anti-Poverty Policies: Can an Economist be Both Critical and Caring?”</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zheng, “A Job for Philosophers: Causality, Responsibility, and Explaining Social Inequality”</li> </ul>	
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7 3 Mar

Gendered and racial dimensions of poverty

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christensen, “Feminization of Poverty: Causes and Implications”</li> <li>• Murphy, “Gender and Poverty”</li> <li>• Shelby, “Prisons of the Forgotten: Ghettos and Economic Injustice”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bessiere &amp; Gollac, <i>Gender of Capital</i>: intro, pp. 31-70</li> <li>• Cholbi, “Why Racialized Poverty Matters — and the Way Forward”</li> <li>• Nussbaum, <i>Women and Human Development</i>, “Introduction: Feminism and International Development”</li> </ul>

8 10 Mar

Individual duties to address poverty and inequality

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collins, “Duties and Poverty”</li> <li>• Allais, “What Properly Belongs to Me: Kant on Giving to Beggars”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singer, <i>Precis</i>, <i>The Most Good You Can Do</i></li> <li>• O’Neill, “Rights, Obligations, and World Hunger”</li> <li>• Timmerman, “Sometimes There is Nothing Wrong With Letting a Child Drown”</li> <li>• Murphy, “The Demands of Beneficence”</li> <li>• Berkey, “Utilitarianism and Poverty”</li> </ul>

9 17 Mar

Wealth limitations and intergenerational transfers

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brassington, “On Rights of Inheritance and Bequest”</li> <li>• Robeyns, “Having Too Much”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White, “Moral Objections to Inheritance Tax”</li> <li>• Lam, “The Invisible Hand from the Grave”</li> </ul>

10 24 Mar

Global responses to poverty: Development and migration

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fang, “Global Justice and Poverty”</li> <li>• Keleher, “Development Policy and Poverty”</li> <li>• Van der Brossen &amp; Brennan, <i>In Defense of Openness</i>, chapter 1-2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mancilla, “What the Old Right of Necessity Can Do for the Contemporary Global Poor”</li> <li>• Pearse, “The Problems with Development Aid”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oberman, “Poverty and Immigration Policy”</li> </ul>
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11 31 Mar

Course recap and roundtable

<b>Core</b> readings	<b>Secondary</b> readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gans, “The Positive Functions of Poverty”</li> </ul>	