Redefining Poverty: An Agential Theory

Poverty has traditionally been conceived of as a state of deprivation. To be poor is to lack something essential to human flourishing. How that something is conceived—in terms of welfare, resources, or capabilities—and how it is measured—in absolute terms or relative to a social standard—has been the subject of much debate within development circles. Though many philosophers have written about our obligations to the poor, relatively little philosophical attention has been devoted to thinking of poverty as a phenomenon ripe for philosophical analysis. In this paper, Professor Morton puts forward a theory of poverty rooted in the philosophy of action. Morton argues that to be poor is to be in a context in which an agent’s capacity for long-term deliberation and planning is systemically undermined by rational pressure to engage in efficient short-term deliberation. In other words, to be poor is to constantly turn one’s mind to the immediate satisfaction of current needs and desires at the expense of deliberating about the pursuit of long-term projects and ends one deeply values.

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Fri, Sep 16
3:00-5:00 PM
Women’s Studies Lounge, 821 Mazur Hall, Main Campus