

THE FUND FOR AMERICAN STUDIES:
THE INSTITUTE ON PHILANTHROPY AND VOLUNTARY SERVICE

GOVT 472.10: The Ethics and Values of Philanthropy
Course Syllabus, Summer 2010

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Course Description

The theme of this course is, adapting a motto from development economist William Easterly: “Just asking that aid actually help.”

The course examines both domestic and international giving, and in each we will examine arguments and evidence both about *why* and about *how* we should help. The word “philanthropy” does not have exactly the same meaning as “charitable giving,” the former suggesting larger gifts or more systematic giving. But the topic we are interested in is *giving*, which prompts questions like:

- When and under what circumstances should I give?
- To whom should I give?
- For what purposes should I give?
- How should I give?

We will read works defending various positions, we will examine the reasons the authors give defending their positions, and we will evaluate the soundness of the positions. We will also consider the American tradition of philanthropy, which is almost unique in the modern world.

We begin the course with a review of some central elements of moral theory, political theory, and the principles of the American Founding. We then consider a handful of classic sources on the topics of markets, money-making, and responsibility to others. Next we move to the topic of domestic philanthropic giving, charity, and aid. In the final part of the course we turn our attention to international and overseas aid.

Throughout the course we will ask not only about *intentions* and *plans* but also about *results*. Our starting premise is that the primary purpose of philanthropy and aid is to help their recipients. A corollary of this premise is that if some kinds of giving do not actually help—or if they actually make things worse—then these count as reasons to reconsider that kind of giving.

The Western part of the world has a great deal of wealth; indeed, our level of wealth is unprecedented in the history of the world. Thus the good we can do is considerable. But the damage that wrongheaded programs or policies can do is considerable as well. We thus owe it to the potential recipients of our aid, to the potential donors, and to ourselves to work through the complexities involved carefully and conscientiously.

Required Books and Materials

Note: Where they are not available online, the books listed below are available in every research library, or for purchase from any online book store. Many of them are available in discounted used copies as well. Required readings not listed below will be available either as handouts.

1. Brooks, Arthur. *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—And How We Can Get More of It*. Basic Books, 2008.
2. Carnegie, Andrew. *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Writings*. Penguin Classics, 2006.
3. Friedman, Milton. “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits” (1970). Available here: <http://www.colorado.edu/studentgroups/libertarians/issues/friedman-soc-resp-business.html>.
4. Jefferson, Thomas. First Inaugural Address. Available here: <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres16.html>.
5. Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government* (1690). Available here: http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php&title=763.
6. Otteson, James. *Actual Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
7. Otteson, James, ed. *Adam Smith: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Imprint Academic, 2004.
8. Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. “The Four Freedoms” (1941). Available here: <http://americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm>.
9. Singer, Peter. *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty*. Random House, 2009.
10. Sumner, William Graham. “The Forgotten Man” (1883). Available here: http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1654&chapter=108194&layout=html&Itemid=27.
11. Washington, George. Farewell Address. Available here: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp.

Course Requirements

1. You must attend every class, each time having read the assigned materials and prepared to discuss it.
2. There will be a mid-term and a final examination.
3. You have to write a final paper on an assigned topic. This will be due shortly after the last class meets. Details will be forthcoming.

Tentative Course Schedule

Note: The schedule below is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in advance.

Week One, June 7–10: Foundations

1. Review of moral and political theory: deontology vs. utilitarianism; Rawls vs. Nozick.
2. The American Founding: Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, chaps. 2, 4, 5 (§§25–37), 7, 9, and 19 (§§211–229); Washington's Farewell Address; and Jefferson's First Inaugural Address.
3. Albert Jay Nock, "On Doing the Right Thing" (handout).
4. Judgment based on freedom and responsibility: Otteson, *Actual Ethics*, chap. 1.

Week Two, June 14–17: Classic Sources

1. Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations* (SPW, 42–50, 69–75, 91–102, 143–6, and 166–73).
2. Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," parts I and II, and "The Advantages of Poverty."
3. William Graham Sumner, "The Forgotten Man" (1883).
4. Mid-term examination.

Week Three, June 21–24: Domestic Aid

1. Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits."
2. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "The Four Freedoms" (1941).
3. Brooks, *Gross National Happiness*, Introduction, chaps. 7 and 8, and Conclusion.

Week Four, June 28–29: International Aid

1. Singer, *The Life You Can Save*, chaps. 1–3 and 8–10.
2. Otteson, *Actual Ethics*, chaps 4 and 5.
3. Easterly, "Can't Take It Anymore?" (handout).
4. Final examination.