

Phil 1200
Notes #6: World hunger, Singer

Peter Singer: Influential professor of ethics at Princeton. Advocates utilitarianism. About the article:

The basic issue:

Many people are suffering/dying of starvation, disease, and other hardships in the Third World. We have many luxuries. We could assist them by giving up these luxuries, but we choose not to.
Q: what is the correct moral assessment of our decision?

Singer's position:

- We (each, individually) have a *positive obligation* to give money to help people in the Third World.
- There is no morally significant difference between killing and allowing to die one whom one could easily save.
- How much money should one give away? How much would be required to save everyone one can? (Lots.)
- Singer thinks that *any* reasonable moral theory will have to agree with this.

The argument for the obligation to assist:

1. If we can prevent something very bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do so.
2. Absolute poverty is very bad.
3. We can prevent some absolute poverty without sacrificing anything of comparable significance.
4. Therefore, we ought to do so.

The Shallow Pond example: (supports (1))

You are walking to class, when you notice a small child drowning in a shallow pond. You could wade in and save the child, but if you did so, you would waste some of your time and get your clothes muddy. Therefore, you decide to just walk on by.

What would be the appropriate moral assessment of this decision? Isn't this comparable to refusing to assist the people in the Third World?

Possible differences in the 3rd-World charity case:

- It is uncertain that my money will really save the people in the 3rd world.
- There are so many starving people in the 3rd world, and it's impossible to save all of them.
- There are other people who could help. If everyone gave, it would not be necessary for me to give very much.
- People in the 3rd world have such bad lives that it's hardly worth preserving them.
- Sending food will just cause them to increase the population, until the same level of starvation is restored.

Phil. 1200

Notes #7: Please don't feed the poor; Garrett Hardin

Review from last time: Singer's view of obligations to the poor. The shallow pond. The argument for the obligation to assist.

The lifeboat analogy:

- The lifeboat has room for 60 people. There are 50 people in it. There are 100 people in the water. Should we let more people on?
- The Christian / Marxist ethics lead to "complete justice, complete catastrophe": i.e., everyone is equal, and everyone drowns. This is worse than letting 100 people drown.

Multiplying the rich and the poor:

- People in the poor countries reproduce much faster than people in rich countries.
- Therefore, if we agree to assist the poor, we will find ourselves supporting more and more of them (exponentially) as time goes on.
- [Note: why does Hardin not ask why these countries are poor, or what could be done to make them not-poor? Singer doesn't consider this either.]

The tragedy of the commons:

- When grazing land is owned privately, each farmer cares for his own land.
Reason: *He receives both the costs and the benefits of his action.*
- When land is held in common, everyone overgrazes and destroys the land.
Reason:
 - *Each receives the benefit of his own grazing, but only a fraction of the costs.*
 - A system of voluntary restraint requires unanimous compliance.
- Important concepts from economics:
 - *Positive externalities:* Benefits of an action that the agent does not receive; benefits he confers on others that he can't/doesn't charge them for.
 - *Negative externalities:* Harms of an action that the agent doesn't bear; harms he inflicts on others that he doesn't have to pay for.
 - The problem with externalities: Actions with positive externalities that 'should' be performed often aren't. Actions with negative externalities that 'should not' be performed often are.

The world food bank:

- This is a proposal for countries around the world to share food. Countries with surpluses contribute; countries with famines withdraw.
- Problem: this is a tragedy-of-the-commons situation.
 - Countries will have no incentive to plan ahead to avert or be able to deal with emergencies on their own.
 - These countries will continue to expand their populations, creating ever greater strain on the contributing countries.
 - This will continue til everyone is poor.
 - Also, the increased population will destroy the natural environment.

Against immigration:

- Immigration increases our population. This will “speed up the destruction of the environment of the rich countries.”
- Also, we’ll run out of land/resources.

Conclusion:

- Sharing your own resources would be fine. But we have to think of *posterity*: the future will be worse if we share everything.
- About Hardin’s moral perspective:
 - He grants the *altruistic* ethic.
 - But he argues that the best way to help humanity is *not* to give to the poor.

Phil. 1200

Notes #8: Criticisms of altruism; Ayn Rand

Review: Hardin's moral stance. His argument against helping the poor; the alleged consequences of this. The tragedy of the commons. Positive/negative externalities.

Ayn Rand (1905-1982): famous novelist and popular philosopher, author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*; started a philosophical movement called "objectivism," which now has clubs on various college campuses and other places around the country.

I. Background moral issue: egoism vs. altruism

- *Ethical egoism:* The right action is the action that best serves one's own interests.
- *Ethical altruism:* The right action is the action that best serves everyone's interests overall (counting everyone's interests equally).
- *Comments:*
 - Most people hold a view in between these.
 - Don't confuse ethical egoism w/ psychological egoism. Psychological egoism: the view that everyone is selfish.
- Rand's view: ethical egoism.

II. Rand's argument against altruism: altruism is irrational

First version:

1. Altruism implies that sacrifice of your interests is good.
2. Sacrifice = giving up something of greater value (to you) for the sake of something of lesser value (to you).
3. It is irrational to give up a greater value for a lesser value.
4. Therefore, altruism is irrational.

Second version:

1. Altruism holds that one should not be selfish.
2. Pursuing your values is selfish.
3. So altruism holds that you shouldn't pursue what you value.
4. It is irrational to not pursue what you value.
5. Therefore, altruism is irrational.

Rand's theory of value:

- All values derive from the need for living things to act to sustain their lives.
- An organism's *values* (what is good for it) are the things that serve its life. This is the sole source of the concept of "value".
- Therefore, the 'good' action is always the action that serves your own life.

III. When should we help others?

- She is *not* saying you shouldn't help anyone. Rather, it is rational to help the people you care about personally.
 - We should give help in proportion to someone's personal importance to us: starting with self, then moving to family, lovers, friends, then to other people.
- Strangers should receive only occasional charity, in emergencies. Why:
 - Because you have a general feeling of goodwill towards other humans, because they are of the same species as yourself.
- By the same token, you should not expect anyone else to sacrifice for you.

Phil. 1200
Notes #9: Marxism

To Discuss Today:

Intuitive motivations for criticizing capitalism
Marx's attack on capitalism
The Labor Theory of Value
The theory of 'surplus value'
The theory of 'exploitation'

Why study Marxism?

For historical reasons:
Marx was the most influential political philosopher in history.
~ 1/3 of the world lived under Marxist regimes in the late 20th century
85-100 million people killed by Marxist regimes
Central to 20th century geopolitics: the cold war, etc.
There are still Marxists around today
Many other thinkers are *influenced* by Marx and Marxian ideas.
Q: Did he have a valid criticism of capitalism?

Background: why people oppose capitalism?

Capitalist countries have large *economic inequality*
(statistics: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html>)
Workers get low incomes.
Capitalists get high incomes.
But the workers are doing all the work!
This looks unjust.
Question: How do the capitalists get so much money? Why do the workers get so much less?

The Theory of "Alienation":

What are wages:
Wages are the price of "labor power."
The nature of labor:
Labor = the worker's "life-activity"
Worker sells it in order to live.
So he is like a slave: he "belongs ... to the capitalist class."
Alienation:
Worker does not consider his labor as a part of his life.
The product of his labor belongs to the capitalist.
Hence, the worker's labor is "alienated": His own life activity comes to be something foreign

The Theory of "Exploitation":

Some background economic concepts:
Use-value vs. exchange-value
Capital: physical goods used in producing more goods.

‘Capitalists’: People who own a lot of capital.

The labor theory of value:

The price of goods on the market is determined by the *socially necessary labor cost* of the good.

The price of labor:

Wages are determined by “the cost of existence and reproduction of the worker.”

“Surplus value”:

The difference between (a) the amount of labor required to keep the worker alive and (b) the amount of labor the worker can perform. Or:

The difference between (a) the price of labor, and (b) the price of the *goods* produced by the laborer.

The theory of “exploitation”:

The capitalist gets the surplus value.

Then he uses it to get more capital & increase his power over the workers.

Example: the worker and the farm-owner.

In sum:

LTV → Subsistence-level wages → Theory of Surplus Value → Theory of Exploitation

Q: Where do capitalists get their wealth?

A: Purely from (a) already owning capital, and (b) extracting the ‘surplus value’ from the workers.

Marxist Economics: Effects of Mechanization & Division of Labor

What is the effect of *the growth of capital*?

“Increases the competition between the capitalists”

→ Capitalists seek to raise productive power & lower labor costs

→ Increasing mechanization.

Effect of mechanization:

→ Capitalist must sell more

→ Lower prices

Other capitalists introduce the same machines.

→ All are forced, by competition, to lower their prices “below its new cost of production”.

Later:

“This law is none other than that which, within the fluctuations of trade periods, necessarily *levels out* the price of a commodity to its *cost of production*.” (213)

“Thus, the capitalist will have won nothing by his own exertions but the obligation to supply more in the same labor time ...” (214)

Effect on workers:

Workers compete with each other.

“Therefore, as labour becomes more unsatisfying, more repulsive, competition increases and wages decrease.”

Mechanization → more workers are discharged → They can’t find new jobs (215)

Also, women and children must work

Capitalist class shrinks, workers increase.

“The working class gains recruits from the *higher strata of society* also; a mass of petty industrialists and small rentiers are hurled down into its ranks...” (216)

In sum:

Mechanization & Division of labor → Everyone is continually worse off.

Selected incoherences:

Wages are decreasing *and* prices of consumer goods are decreasing.

Productivity is increasing, *but* workers and capitalists are worse off.

Wages are at the minimum level (determined by LTV), *and* then they decrease more.

New jobs require unskilled labor, *and* workers are put out of work and can't find jobs in new areas.

Capitalists are forced to sell *below* cost of production. And they sell *at* cost of production.

Capitalists extract surplus value from workers, *but* they only sell products at cost.

Phil. 1200

Notes #10: Marx vs. Mainstream Economics

To Discuss Today:

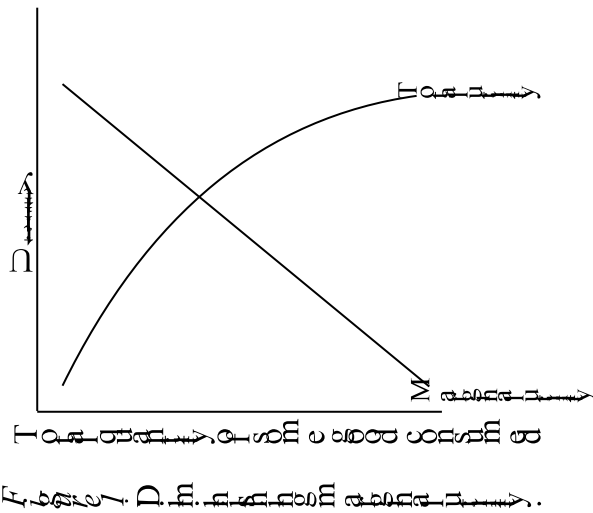
- Standard economics: price theory
- Contrast with Marxist economics
- Why are capitalists rich?

1. Basic assumptions of economics

The assumption of instrumental rationality
Economics studies the nature and consequences of instrumental rationality.

2. The law of diminishing marginal utility

- Important concepts:
- Utility
 - Marginal vs. total utility
- Diminishing marginal utility. Examples:
- Orange juice
 - Money



3. Demand curves slope downwards

- What is a 'demand curve'?
- "price = marginal utility of consumption"
- Demand curve mirrors marginal utility curve.

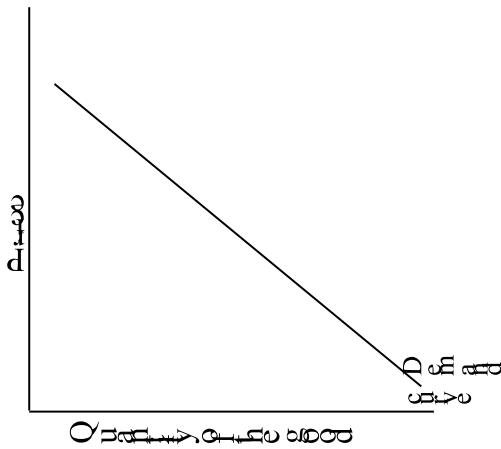


Figure 2: A demand curve.

“Demand curves slope downwards”:

For individual consumers

For society

4. Supply curves slope upwards

What is a “supply curve”?

The principle of increasing marginal costs of production

“price = marginal cost of production”

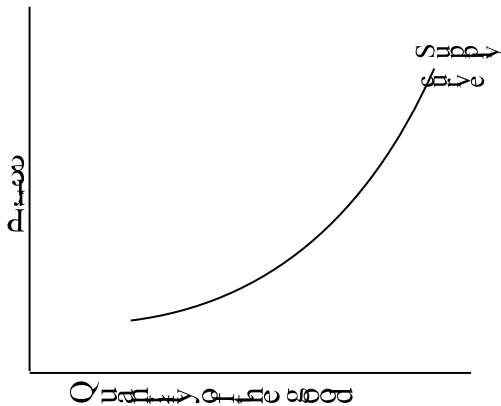


Figure 3: A supply curve.

Supply curves slope upwards

For individual producers

For society

5. Prices

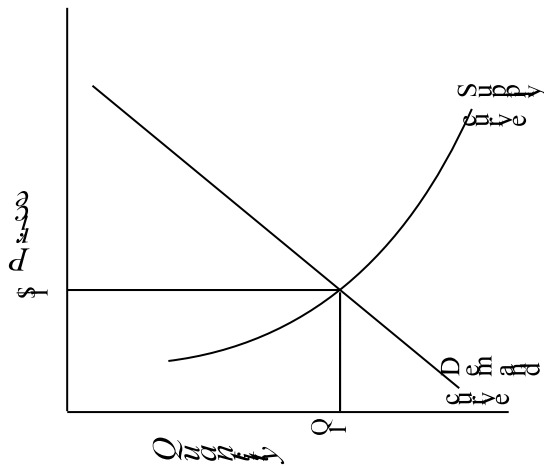


Figure 4. The market price is determined by the interaction of supply and demand curves.

6. What is price theory good for?

Enables qualitative predictions about utility of various policies, e.g.:

Rent control.

Tariffs.

Minimum wage laws.

Capital gains tax rates.

Gives a response to Marx's theories.

7. Marxism vs. Price Theory:

The basis of 'costs' & 'benefits':

Marx: cost = (socially necessary) quantity of labor. Has a physical basis.

Price Theory: cost = disutility. Has a psychological basis.

The mathematical form of 'production costs':

Marx: Cost of production represented by a number.

Price Theory: Distinguish *marginal cost* from average cost. Cost of production represented by a *curve*.

What determines prices?

Marx: Prices determined by labor costs.

Price Theory: Prices determined by supply *and* demand *curves*. Both determined by human desires.

Difference between workers' & businessmen's sources of income:

Marx: Two classes of people: capitalists & workers. Their income is determined by different explanations.

Price Theory: No theoretically significant distinction. All income is a price; all prices

determined by the same mechanism.

Why are capitalists so rich?

Marx: Capitalist wealth is surplus value expropriated from workers. Capitalists do not produce value.

Price Theory: Everyone is paid the marginal utility of their labor. Activity of capitalists has high marginal value.

Phil. 1200

Notes #11: Distributive Justice, Rawls

Important concepts:

- **Distributive Justice:** Justice in the distribution of goods/wealth.
- **End-state conceptions of distributive justice:** Say there is some overall pattern of distribution we should aim at. Justice is a matter of closeness to the desired pattern. Examples:
 - Perfect equality
 - Distribution in accordance with need
 - Distribution in accordance with desert/merit
- **Historical conceptions of distributive justice:** Say that whether a person is entitled to some bit of wealth depends on the process by which he got it. Justice is a matter of following the right rules in acquiring property.

Ideas in Rawls' Theory of Justice:

- **The Original Position:** A hypothetical situation in which the future members of a society meet to agree upon the general political principles to govern their society. Features of the OP:
 - The "*Veil of Ignorance*": no one knows what their position in the society will be. In fact, they know no personal information about themselves (including the life plans/values they are going to have).
 - They have access to all relevant information about the society. Also, they are intelligent and make no errors in reasoning.
 - They will choose political principles on the basis of self-interest.
- **Rawls' Two Principles of Justice:**
 - First principle:* "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."
 - Second principle (the "Difference Principle"):* Social and economic inequalities are allowed only to the extent that they benefit those who are worst-off.
 - How might this happen? Perhaps if more productive people are rewarded with more wealth, then the society as a whole will be richer, so much so that even the (relatively) poor will be better off.

Rawls' Overall Argument:

1. What would be chosen in the Original Position is just.
 - Why? Because the OP is set up in such a way as to guarantee a fair outcome. The parties start in a position of equality, and no one can unfairly privilege himself, since no one knows their position in the society.
2. Rawls' Two Principles of justice would be chosen in the Original Position.
3. Therefore, Rawls' Two Principles are just (and so should be adopted).

Why Choose the Two Principles?

- a) The first principle would be chosen because the parties don't know what their plans and values will be; therefore, it makes sense to secure the most liberty possible, to allow for pursuing whatever goals they will have.
- b) Why would the second principle be chosen? Two lines of reasoning:

First:

- First, there would be a natural default assumption of equality. Unless there was some special reason for privileging someone, people would accept an even division of the wealth.
- But obviously, it would be acceptable to allow some inequality *if* doing so benefitted everyone. (It would not be acceptable otherwise, since those *not* benefitted would not agree to the distribution.)
- Inequalities obviously benefit the people who get more. They benefit *everyone* only if they benefit those who get *less*.
- Therefore, the parties would agree to allow economic inequalities (only) to the extent that they benefitted those worst off.

Second:

- For very poor people, money means a lot. Some minimum level of income is necessary for anyone to have a decent life.
- For the wealthy, money has less importance; if they lose some of their money, it won't prevent them from having a decent life.
- The parties in the Original Position would be more afraid of winding up poor, than they would be eager to wind up rich. They would want to minimize their risk of winding up badly off. (Rawls has them put an absolute priority on this, i.e., they *only* look at what the worst possible outcome is, and try to improve that.)
- Therefore, they would choose the system that maximizes the position of the poorest people.

Objections:

- Is premise (1) true?
 - What if people have rights to their property? The OP gives the 'society' a right to decide how to redistribute people's property.
 - Nozick's example: what if grades in a class were distributed according to a similar procedure? Is there reason to think that the resulting distribution would be correct?
- Is premise (2) true?

Some people say that the parties should choose *utilitarianism*: that everything should be arranged to maximize overall social welfare (no special attention given to the worst off).

Phil. 1200

Notes #12: Nozick, the Entitlement Theory

The entitlement theory of distributive justice:

The entitlement theory needs three rules (or kinds of rule):

(1) *A principle of acquisition.*

One may claim previously-unowned items provided one is using them and there is enough left over for others.

(2) *A principle of transfer.*

Property can be transferred from one person to another by mutual consent.

(3) *A principle of rectification of injustices.*

What to do when someone violates one of these rules. Generally, the offender has to pay back the victim.

• Entitlement theory is *historical*.

Nozick's arguments against end-state theories of dist. justice:

Argument #1:

1. Forced labor is wrong.
2. End-state theories sanction forced labor.
 - a. People get money through labor.
 - b. Hence, forcing them to give their money to others is like forcing them to labor for the benefit of those others.
3. So end-state theories are wrong.

Argument #2:

1. No one can own another person, even partially.
2. End-state theories imply that people can (partially) own other people.
 - a. Ownership of x = the right to decide how x is used.
 - b. End-state theories give you a right to the fruits of others' labor.
 - c. This is a right to decide what use other people are put to.
3. So end-state theories are wrong.

Argument #3:

1. People have a right to be free from (unprovoked) coercion.
2. End-state theories require violations of this right.
 - a. Redistribution must be imposed forcibly.
 - b. Taxpayers have not violated anyone's rights just by being around and having money.
 - c. So, such redistribution is unprovoked coercion.
3. Therefore, end-state theories are wrong.

Phil. 1200
Review, Unit 2

Know these concepts:

Ethical egoism vs. altruism
Surplus Value
Exploitation
Utility
Marginal utility
The Original Position
Distributive Justice
 Historical conception
 End-state conceptions

These examples & what they are supposed to show:

the 'Tragedy of the Commons'
Singer's Shallow Pond

Know these principles:

Labor Theory of Value
Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility
Demand curves slope downwards
Supply curves slope upwards
Price theory: what determines the market price
Rawls' 2 principles of justice, esp. the second one
The Entitlement Theory of Dist. Justice:
 Pr. of Acquisition
 Pr. of Transfer
 Pr. of Rectification

Be familiar with these arguments:

Singer's argument for the obligation to assist
Hardin's reason for opposing food aid
Why Rand says altruism is irrational (what it means to
 'sacrifice' or be 'selfish', etc.)
How modern price theory undermines the theory of
 Exploitation
Rawls main argument for adopting his 2 Principles.
How wealth-redistribution might be like forced labor or
 slavery
 + how it might violate individuals' rights (which rights?)

Know the main positions of these people:

Singer
Hardin
Rand
Marx
Rawls
Nozick