



KS Basic Needs and Public Policy

University of Graz | Department of Philosophy | Winter Term 2019

Time:	Thursday, 15:15 – 16:45
Venue:	SR 34.K1, Attemsgasse 25/K, 8010 Graz
Lecturer:	Dr. Thomas Pözlner, MA
E-mail:	thomas.poelzler@uni-graz.at
Phone:	+43 316 380 - 7307
Office:	Attemsgasse 25/II, 8010 Graz
Office hours:	By appointment

Description

In their theories political philosophers sometimes refer to basic needs. They assume that before any other duty can apply we ought to ensure that persons are sufficiently provided with water, food, shelter, etc. But what could such an approach look like in practice (when it comes to concrete public policy decisions)? This is the question that this seminar will focus on. First, we will investigate what can plausibly be understood by basic needs. Then we will turn to the question of how to measure the satisfaction of these needs. Which social indicators should be used for that purpose (e.g., gross domestic product, life expectancy or level of education)? Which social and economic circumstances promote basic needs satisfaction? Can different cultures' level of basic needs satisfaction be understood and measured in the same way? Etc. Finally, we will also compare needs-based theories' practical feasibility with the feasibility of alternative approaches, in particular the so called capability approach.

Aims

Having completed the course, students should be able to:

- name several definitions of the concept of basic needs and discuss their specific advantages and disadvantages;
- list and explain common indicators for measuring quality of life;
- critically reflect on the relation between these indicators and basic needs satisfaction;

- discuss the question of the cultural and historic universality of basic needs and their satisfiers;
- list and analyze advantages and disadvantages of needs-based theories in the context of public policy (also in comparison to alternative theories).

Schedule and Topics

10/03/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: **Preliminary Discussion**

Defining Basic Needs

10/10/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: David Braybrooke: The Concept of Needs in Normative Use Applied to Social Policy: Basic Account

10/17/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Thomas Pözlner: What Are Basic Needs? An Empirical Investigation of Folk Intuitions

The Problem of Relativism

10/24/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Len Doyal and Ian Gough: Relativism and the Problem of Human Need

10/31/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Allister McGregor et al.: Needs, Wants and Goals: Wellbeing, Quality of Life and Public Policy

Measuring Basic Needs Satisfaction: Rough Proposals

11/07/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Norman Hicks and Paul Streeten: Indicators of Development: The Search for a Basic Needs Yardstick

11/14/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Robert Costanza et al.: Quality of Life: An Approach Integrating Opportunities, Human Needs, and Subjective Well-Being

Measuring Basic Needs Satisfaction: The Doyal/Gough Theory I

11/21/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Len Doyal and Ian Gough: Measuring Needs Satisfaction

11/28/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: Len Doyal and Ian Gough: Physical Health and Autonomy / Intermediate Needs

12/12/2019, 15:15 – 16:45: **Discussion of Seminar Paper Proposals**

Measuring Basic Needs Satisfaction: The Doyal/Gough Theory II

01/09/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Len Doyal and Ian Gough: Societal Preconditions for Optimising Need-Satisfaction

01/16/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Len Doyal and Ian Gough: Towards a Political Economy of Need-Satisfaction

Alternatives to Basic Needs

01/23/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: Amartya Sen: Equality of What?

01/30/2020, 15:15 – 16:45: **Final Discussion**

All texts can be downloaded at the course's Moodle page (moodle.uni-graz.at).

Assessment

Seminar Paper

Your seminar paper should answer a specific and interesting research question relating to basic needs and public policy. For example, you may compare the arguments of two or more authors, criticize the arguments of a particular author, or defend a thesis of your own. You can choose your research question freely. Make sure that your paper involves sound arguments that support your answer to this question.

The language of your seminar paper should be clear, simple and intelligible. Its structure should be logical and aid understanding. In particular, you should motivate and explicitly state your research question in an introductory section, and summarize your thesis and most important arguments in a concluding section.

Your seminar paper should be between 2.000 and 4.000 words (excluding title page, contents, footnotes, bibliography, etc.), and engage with at least three relevant sources. These sources can be texts that we discussed in class, additional texts provided on the course's Moodle page or texts that you researched yourself.

Your seminar paper must be submitted via Moodle by February 29, 2020. The paper's grade will be primarily based on the following criteria: (1) the appropriateness of your research question, (2) the soundness and relevance of your arguments, (3) your compliance with the rules of academic writing (citation, style, etc.), (4) the clarity, succinctness and intelligibility of your language, and (5) the adequacy of your paper's structure.

Further recommendations for writing a philosophy seminar paper can be found at: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

Comments/Questions

In our course we will discuss eleven texts. For at least eight of these texts you should formulate a comment or question that we may then consider in class. Your contributions should either address how to understand certain aspects of the text or evaluate them. For example, you may ask how an author uses a certain key concept, or whether a particular argument is based on a problematic tacit assumption. Your comments/questions should be less than ten sentences. For each session they should be submitted via Moodle by Wednesday, 23:55. Please submit the comments/questions as text (not files) and start them with your full name (e.g., "Thomas Pözlner: ...").

Class Participation

Please do all readings and actively participate in our discussions; for example, ask questions, raise objections or point out interconnections.

General Policies

Attendance

In order to complete the course in a regular way you must not be absent from more than three of our fourteen sessions. In case you miss four or five sessions I ask for an explanation (e.g., doctor's confirmation) and some compensatory task (e.g., a longer seminar paper or additional comments/questions). In case you miss six or more sessions you cannot successfully complete the course.

Deadlines

Late submissions of seminar papers and comments/questions will not be considered.

Academic Honesty

Violations of academic honesty (e.g., using others' ideas without citing them) will automatically lead to a negative assessment of the seminar paper or comment/question in which they occur.

Discussion Rules

For our course to succeed it is essential that we treat each other politely and with respect (even when our opinions on some matter diverge).

Laptops, Smartphones, etc.

Please limit the use of electronic devices as much as possible (except for note-taking).