

Seminar on Poverty and the Poor
Center for Christian-Jewish Learning

1. Title.

Poverty and the poor between justice and charity: An interreligious and inter-disciplinary exploration

2. Goals.

Through this seminar, we aim to understand better how notions of poverty, charity and justice have developed in the Christian, the Jewish, and the Muslim traditions. In doing so, we hope to examine not only arenas of cooperation — be they actual and historical or something to work toward — but also how this cooperation might be (or have been) theorized within each tradition and between them. Better insight here may allow us to shed more light not only on contemporary efforts to deal with the problem of poverty, but also equally contemporary efforts to build a culture of mutual recognition and appreciation across religions and cultures.

3. Orientation.

The seminar will be:

(a) Inter-religious. The group will be run by and actively seek participation on the part, of practitioners of each of the three Abrahamic faiths while also welcoming participation on the part of individuals adhering to other faiths or, indeed, to no faith at all.

(b) Inter-disciplinary. A seminar of this sort naturally lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach, spanning, as it does, at least the fields of history, philosophy, theology, and law — if not several others as well. Thus will a diverse base of knowledge and experience be actively sought out; participation across disciplines will be encouraged. To grasp adequately the issues that concern us, a pluralistic approach is necessary.

(c) Theoretically oriented. It is our aim not simply to document, but to understand. This means comprehending how ideas involving poverty and the poor were organized within a definite material and historical framework.

4. 2016-2017 Seminar.

This year's seminar will aim at two goals. First, selecting and analyzing the most relevant theoretical accounts on poverty and the poor that each faith has produced, while also teasing out their possible theoretical connections. Second, uncovering significant instances of inter-religious cooperation in dealing with problem of poverty, meeting the needs of the poor, or advancing the discourse on social and economic justice. The latter goal, we expect, will be best achieved by drawing on the expertise of historians we hope to invite to address the group.

In brief, we aim at initiating an investigation intended to uncover theoretical accounts and historical instances of work on behalf of the poor on the basis of which fruitful interreligious dialogue and analysis can be further undertaken.

5. Organization of the workshop's sessions.

(a) The seminar will be cooperatively led by individuals hailing from the three aforementioned traditions: (i) Hayyim Rothman, doctoral candidate in philosophy at BC; (ii) Martín Bernales, doctoral candidate in philosophy; (iii) an adherent of the Islamic faith yet to be confirmed.

(b) It will gather between 8-10 people (PhD students, students of professional schools, and Faculty members) who are working on something related to poverty, justice, or charity and can significantly contribute to a cooperative research project.

(c) Each session will begin with two presentations offered by workshop members. We will devote six sessions to philosophical and theological accounts of poverty and the poor and two sessions to instances of cooperation.

(d) The group will meet once a month during the academic year 2016-2017 for sessions lasting 2 hours. The meetings will take place the last Friday of every month during the mornings. The first four sessions will be introductory in character; one session per focus-tradition, and one on early philosophical accounts on poverty. The remainder — excluding guest lectures — will deal with one thematic element or historical moment from an inter-traditional standpoint. Each of these sessions will be lead by a pair of participants so that each participant ends up leading two sessions.

(e) We would like to invite two guest speakers over the course of the year so as to better familiarize ourselves with significant historical instances of cooperation, as well as with the theological and philosophical texts under discussion.