

The Capability Approach

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

FALL 2024

UPDATED 2024 AUGUST 21

TERM: 2024 Fall
 MEETINGS: Wednesdays 11:30 to 2:30 p.m.
 INSTRUCTOR: Jay Drydyk
 OFFICE/HOURS: Wednesdays 2:30 to 4:00 or online by appointment
 PHONE: Please use email instead.
 EMAIL: jay.drydyk@carleton.ca

Which inequalities matter for social and global justice? Twenty years ago in the policy world and the philosophical world it was assumed that these were largely inequalities of income and wealth. The capability approach blew up this complacent assumption by reviving the Aristotelian argument that money is not intrinsically valuable because it is only a means to human well-being and flourishing. The inequality that should concern us, then, is that people are unequally free to live well. Around this basic concept the capability approach developed methodologies for measuring injustices as unequal capabilities for doing well and being well in many dimensions of life, including health, education, culture, social relations, and political participation. This allows the varied shapes of injustice to be recognized with unprecedented clarity and detail. This seminar will focus first on central concepts and methods of the capability approach as developed by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and others. Then we will consider implications of capability approach for global justice, disability, empowerment, non-human life, and for charting a course of economic and social development in the face of our multiple environmental crises – of climate, biodiversity, and other vital resources. Other philosophical issues will include: the interface between democracy, philosophy, and justice; the comparative importance of objective well-being (living well) and subjective well-being (happiness); and alternatives to ideal theorizing about a perfectly just society (or world).

READINGS: available in digital format on *Ares*.

ASSIGNMENTS	WEIGHT
Presentation. Each student in 4100 will present some of the readings for one of the classes, after a consultation meeting with instructor prior to that class, which will clarify the questions to be discussed. Readings for each week will be allocated among the students who have volunteered for that week.	10
Research proposal. This written assignment of around 250 words has three components: (a) A succinct statement of the research question you would like to address in your final paper for this course, and what you think a plausible answer might be. (b) A list of the top 3 articles or book chapters that you will work with in addressing this question. For each one, write a sentence or two about how it might relate to your question – e.g., does it argue for or against the ‘plausible answer’ you are exploring? (c) A few more sentences about how your paper will contribute – e.g., which larger debate does it relate to, and which side does it support? <i>Due in written form by 11:55 p.m. on Sunday, October 27, and presented in class October 30.</i>	10
Seminar paper (1500 words). State your main arguments for the answer you propose to your research question. This can be the question discussed in your research proposal, or it can be a new question. You are advised to consult with the instructor in case you decide to work on a new question. <i>Due 11:55 p.m. on the Monday night before the date on which you present your paper for discussion in class.</i> (Presentation dates are November 27 and December 4.)	20
Final paper (target length 16 pages or 4000 words including reference list) <i>due no later than December 22.</i> This paper will normally be based on your seminar paper and may include portions of your discussion paper and your seminar paper.	40
Participation (including attendance)	20

COURSE CALENDAR

PART I: BASIC CAPABILITY CONCEPTS

Week 2 September 4	<p><i>Introduction to the course</i> <i>Starting point: demanding and measuring human development</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mahbub ul Haq, <i>Reflections on Human Development</i> I, II, and IV, pp. 3-23, 46-66. • <i>Human Development Report 2020</i>, pp. 343-365. <p><i>Go to BrightSpace to sign up for (a) your reading presentation and (b) your seminar presentation.</i></p>
Week 2 September 11	<p><i>Capability concepts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingrid Robeyns, <i>Well-Being, Freedom, and Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined</i>, Chapter 1, pp. 7-18. • Martha Nussbaum, <i>Creating Capabilities</i>, Preface + Chapters 1-2, pp. ix-45.
Week 3 September 18	<p><i>What is the currency of justice? What are its dimensions?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G.A. Cohen, Equality of What? On Welfare, Goods, and Capability, in <i>The Quality of Life</i>, pp. 9-29. • Amartya Sen, Capability and well-being, in <i>The Quality of Life</i>, pp. 30-53. • Giulia Greco, Jolene Skordis-Worrall, Bryan Mkandawire, and Anne Mills, What is a good life? Selecting capabilities to assess women's quality of life in rural Malawi, pp. 69-78.
Week 4 September 25	<p><i>Capability and dignity I – NO CLASS – Watch conference panel instead</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martha Nussbaum, In defense of universal values, in <i>Women and Human Development</i>, Chapter 1, pp. 34-110. <p><i>The class will not meet this week. Instead, you will have access to a session of the 2024 International Conference of the Human Development and Capability Association, taking place in Kolkata, India. The class will meet the following week to discuss the three presentations in this session, plus one more.</i></p>
Week 5 October 2	<p><i>Capability and dignity II – In-class discussion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Krushil Watene and Roger Merino, Indigenous Peoples; Self-Determination, Decolonization, and Indigenous Philosophies, in <i>Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics</i>, pp. 134-47. <p>Also review the following presentations, to prepare for discussion in class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jay Drydyk • Lori Keleher • Asha Mukherjee • Corey McKibbin

PART II: APPLICATIONS TO EXPLORE

Week 6 October 9	<p><i>Disability, nationality, species membership, and empowerment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martha Nussbaum, Beyond the social contract: Toward global justice, in <i>Tanner Lectures on Human Values 2002-03</i>, pp. 415-507. • Karie Cross Riddle, Empowerment: Participatory development and the problem of cooptation, in <i>Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics</i>, pp. 171-182.
Week 7 October 16	<p><i>Sustainability and environmental justice</i></p> <p><i>Human Development Report 2020, The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene</i>, Overview (optional), pp. 1-15; Chapters 1-3, pp. 17-93.</p>

FALL BREAK

Week 8 October 30	<i>Present research proposals</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: research proposals of the other students • Be prepared to present your proposal orally in class (5 minutes)
Week 9 November 6	<i>Lists, agency, and democracy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Crocker, <i>Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy</i>, pp. 185-214, 297-302, 338-345.
Week 10 November 13	<i>Subjective well-being</i> From <i>Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebecca Gutwald, Well-being: Happiness, desires, goods, and needs, pp. 55-67. • Milena Nikolova, Happiness: Using subjective well-being metrics to gauge development, pp. 82-92. • Serene Khader, Adaptive preferences: Accounting for deflated expectations, pp. 93-100.
Week 11 November 20	<i>Justice beyond ideal theory</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amartya Sen, What do we want from a theory of justice? pp. 215–38. • Laura Valentini, A paradigm shift in theorizing about justice? A critique of Sen, pp. 297-315.
November 24	<i>Upload and circulate seminar papers</i> <i>Upload your seminar paper and email it to the class before 11:55pm Sunday, November 24 if you are scheduled to present it on November 27.</i>
Week 12 November 27	<i>Seminar papers [up to 7 slots for presentations]</i> <i>The author of each seminar paper will give a short presentation summarizing the purpose of the paper and how that purpose was achieved. Everyone else will be prepared to give helpful comments and questions for improving the paper, developing it into the final research paper for the course. Expect 5 minutes presentation followed by 20 minutes of discussion for each paper.</i> <i>Be prepared to comment on other students' seminar papers.</i>
December 1	<i>Upload and circulate seminar papers</i> <i>Upload your seminar paper and email it to the class before 11:55pm Sunday, December 1 if you are scheduled to present it on December 4.</i>
Week 13 December 4	<i>Seminar papers [up to 7 slots for presentations]</i> <i>Be prepared to comment on other students' seminar papers.</i>
December 22	<i>University deadline for the final paper</i>

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES.

This course will enable students to become familiar with:

- (1) The capability approach and its implications for philosophy of social and global justice.
- (2) The human development approach to value-based goals for economic and social change.
- (3) Applications of those two approaches.
- (4) Philosophical debates and issues concerning those two approaches.

In addition, the course will enable students to:

- (5) Present and explain key points in philosophical literature to peers.
- (6) Formulate research questions on (1), (2), (3), (4), or related topics.
- (7) Develop arguments and perspectives on those questions in writing, defending them against objections.
- (8) Comment helpfully on research proposals, arguments, and perspectives of other students.

Sources of required readings, in ARES course reserves

Cohen, G.A. 1993. "Equality of what? On welfare, goods, and capabilities." In *The Quality of Life*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, pp. 9-29. Oxford University Press. [Note to librarians: this plus the Sen chapter together make up less than 10% of the book.]

Crocker, David A. Crocker, David A. 2008. *Ethics of Global Development; Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 185-214, 297-302, 338-345. [Librarians note: these three excerpts together make up less than 10% of the book.]

Greco, Giulia, Jolene Skordis-Worrall, Bryan Mkandawire, and Anne Mills, What is a good life? Selecting capabilities to assess women's quality of life in rural Malawi, pp. 69-78. *Social Science & Medicine* 130 (2015): 69-78.

Haq, Mahbub ul. 1995. *Reflections on Human Development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters I, II, and IV, pp. 3-23, 46-66. Book online @CU library.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2000. *Women and Human Development; The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1, pp. 34-110.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2003. "Beyond the social contract: Toward global justice." *Tanner Lectures on Human Values 2002-03*, pp. 415-507. Open access: https://www.tannerlectures.utah.edu/resources/documents/a-to-z/n/nussbaum_2003.pdf.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2011. *Creating Capabilities*. Harvard University Press. Book online @CU library.

Robeyns, Ingrid. 2017. *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice; The Capability Approach Re-Examined*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers. Book online @CU library.

Routledge Handbook of Development Ethics, edited by Jay Drydyk and Lori Keleher. Oxford and New York: Routledge. 2019. Book online @CU library.

- Rebecca Gutwald, "Well-being: Happiness, desires, goods, and needs," pp. 55-67.
- Serene Khader, "Adaptive preferences: Accounting for deflated expectations," pp. 93-100.
- Milena Nikolova, "Happiness: Using subjective well-being metrics to gauge development," pp. 82-92.
- Karie Cross Riddle, "Empowerment: Participatory development and the problem of cooptation," pp. 171-182.
- Krushil Watene and Roger Merino, "Indigenous Peoples; Self-Determination, Decolonization, and Indigenous Philosophies," pp. 134-47.

Sen, Amartya. 1993. "Capabilities and Well-Being." In *The Quality of Life*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, 30-53. Oxford University Press. [Note to librarians: this plus the Cohen chapter together make up less than 10% of the book.]

Sen, Amartya. 2006. "What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 103 (5): 215-38.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2020. *Human Development Report 2020; The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. New York: United Nations. Open access: <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr2020.pdf>.

Valentini, Laura. 2011. "A paradigm shift in theorizing about justice? A critique of Sen." *Economics & Philosophy* 27 (3): 297-315.

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2024-25)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 4	Classes start.
Sept. 17	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 14	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 21-25	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 22	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 6	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 9-21	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 21	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 6	Classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 17	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 17-21	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 8	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 11-26	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 18	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 26	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
520-2735