

Edward Hadas – notes and links for lecture on Poverty in the UK, Blackfriars Poverty in Britain Group,
13.1.18

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/opinion/is-special-education-racist.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/9fe37816-ffa4-11e8-aebf-99e208d3e521> graph on causes of homelessness

https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/22/uk-to-tackle-loneliness-crisis-with-115m-cash-injection?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWFuVG9kYXlVS19XZWVrZW5kLTE4MTlyMg%3D%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUK&CMP=GTUK_email grants for “loneliness”

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)31869-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)31869-X/fulltext) (socially excluded have very poor health)

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/looking-beyond-re-offending-criminal-records-and-poverty> (criminals are poor)

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT> Maternal mortality - UK has relatively slow decline

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's: thou art a lady;
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!
You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
King Lear Act 2, Scene 4.

A. Thinking about poverty:

Two types

1. Absolute: “our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous” - not so!
Nourishing food, decent clothes, warmth... education, electricity, phones, internet... do jobs count?
[Ignore the UK official measure]
2. Relative: We are social creatures so this is genuine: In money, in consumption, in social position-
but what is the relevant society? (Gated community, North Oxford, the UK, the world)

Two aspects that income measures fail to catch

3. Poverty of opportunity: to prosper, to surpass our parents – from the womb or before;
“meritocracy” is not necessarily an answer
4. Poverty of security: unemployment, sudden costs (U.S. healthcare), family breakdown, debts – not
always visible in current statistics

Social and spiritual poverty

5. Poverty of despair: “give me that patience... a poor old man...As full of grief as age; wretched in
both”: Depression, “loneliness”, drink, drugs, disenchantment, disability, mental illness: neither the
cause nor the most significant manifestations are economic, but despair increases poverty and vice
versa
6. Poverty of dignity: Consider the prostitute, the wage slave, the stigma of food banks, the stifled
bureaucrat (?) – often the “poor of dignity” are economically fine (in both consumption and labour)

B. Three centuries of poverty in Britain

1. We are not in the 19th century – the new industrial proletariat, the unregulated factory and city.

There are very few descendants of the old poor. Those who do live with genuine want, wretched ignorance and rampant disease are likely to be *migrants* or suffering from some variety of *despair*.

2. But we are not in the 20th century – the well-functioning welfare state, the well-defined family, the clear borders of trade and migration (the success of these was always exaggerated). The welfare net is porous (migrants and the isolated); despair creates both economic and social poverty; isolation is much easier to fall into and probably harder to get out of.

3. We are in the 21st century: There is something new: Economic expectations breed feeling of economic poverty. The more we are willing to think of ourselves as poor, the more poverty will be found

C. Causes of British poverty:

1. The poor themselves, but what made them so?

2. The economy – wages, job creation, also sticky housing, expensive healthcare (US), poor education, maybe economic shocks (globalisation and automation)

3. The government – bad welfare systems (money and services), other policies (taxation, programmes, minimum wage...), conscious or unconscious malice (universal credit, JSA sanctions)

4. The society – Back to the poverty and “deaths of despair” (Anne Case and Angus Deaton): broken families, broken neighbourhoods and broken values. These produce crime, pornography, gambling, substance abuse, racism, sexism (also against single mothers), which create and often are amplified by poverty. For Christians, societies suffer from the loss of faith, hope and charity;

D. Cures of British poverty

1. At the economic source: better wages, jobs, regulation, education: e.g:

Resolution foundation: *Setting the record straight: The 2.7 million extra jobs created since 2008:*

“lower-income and disadvantaged groups have been the main beneficiaries of Britain’s job boom.

...People with low qualifications account for almost half of the jobs growth, while people with a disability account for a third of the rise.” This will have decreased relative poverty significantly.

2. As the welfare flows: higher government benefits, higher pay and status in social services and caring professions. The years of welfare “austerity” will have increased poverty to the extent that the system was diminished. So these two forces have pointed in opposite directions in recent years.

3. As the government rules: taxes, wages rules, housing programmes. (The last is very significant in the UK .

3. As the society goes: personal charity, institutional support, family support, religious support.

E. Cautions on interpreting the evidence

1. Description of “economic poverty” may well miss the worst part of people’s lives

2. Economic poverty measurement is often impossible, always difficult (inadequate data; so many dimensions; much of it is a matter of perception by both the “poor” and by the “non-poor”

3. So judgements of reality and degree of poverty in the UK are rightly disputed

4. Warning: seemingly clear signs (e.g. homelessness and food banks) may not be accurate indicators of general trends

5. National comparisons are very difficult (but the U.S. stands out)

F. The British situation and trends