

# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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## Defending Economic & Social Rights

### Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

### Comment

Economic and social rights may be understood as rights to certain goods and services, such as job opportunities, healthcare, and education. While libertarians like Robert Nozick would undoubtedly agree that all people equally possess a general right to liberty and freedom, they would almost certainly deny that anyone possesses more particular rights to goods and services. In this article, James Nickel seeks to defend economic and social rights from such hostility.

### Reading

Nickel, J. W. (2005, July). Poverty and rights. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 55(220), 385–402.

### Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. Why is James Nickel dissatisfied with more traditional understandings of economic and social rights as being either “too minimal” (2005, p. 387) or too “excessively grandiose” (2005, p. 387)?
2. What is the “Vance” conception of economic and social rights? Why does Nickel argue this is better than the traditional understandings?
3. How does Nickel justify economic and social rights using the Vance conception?
4. What are “linkage arguments” (Nickel, 2005, p. 395), and how might such arguments be used against libertarians to justify economic and social rights?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.