

Ontological Poverty and Our Attitude Towards the Impoverished, Dependent, and Disabled

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This talk proposes ontological poverty (i.e. vivid and persistent awareness of the implications of our own creatureliness) as a fundamental lens through which all poverty should be seen. It argues that helping rooted in awareness of one's own ontological poverty authentically lifts and "incorporates" the one helped and facilitates a mutuality which makes explicit the gifts received by both helper and helped. Helping rooted in wrongheaded views of personal autonomy, on the other hand, actually exacerbates the loneliness of the "poor" and of those who help them. The intellectual poverty of the cognitively disabled will be discussed as the first of myriad applications of the principles articulated.