



# *Sustainability and Global Justice*

Ethics: The Environment

Summer 2012, Laura Guidry-Grimes

# World Poverty

- Absolute vs. relative poverty
  - Relative: standard based on comparisons with others who are better off
  - Absolute/extreme: standard based on basic human needs
    - Can affect many areas of a person's development, functioning, and life prospects



# World Poverty

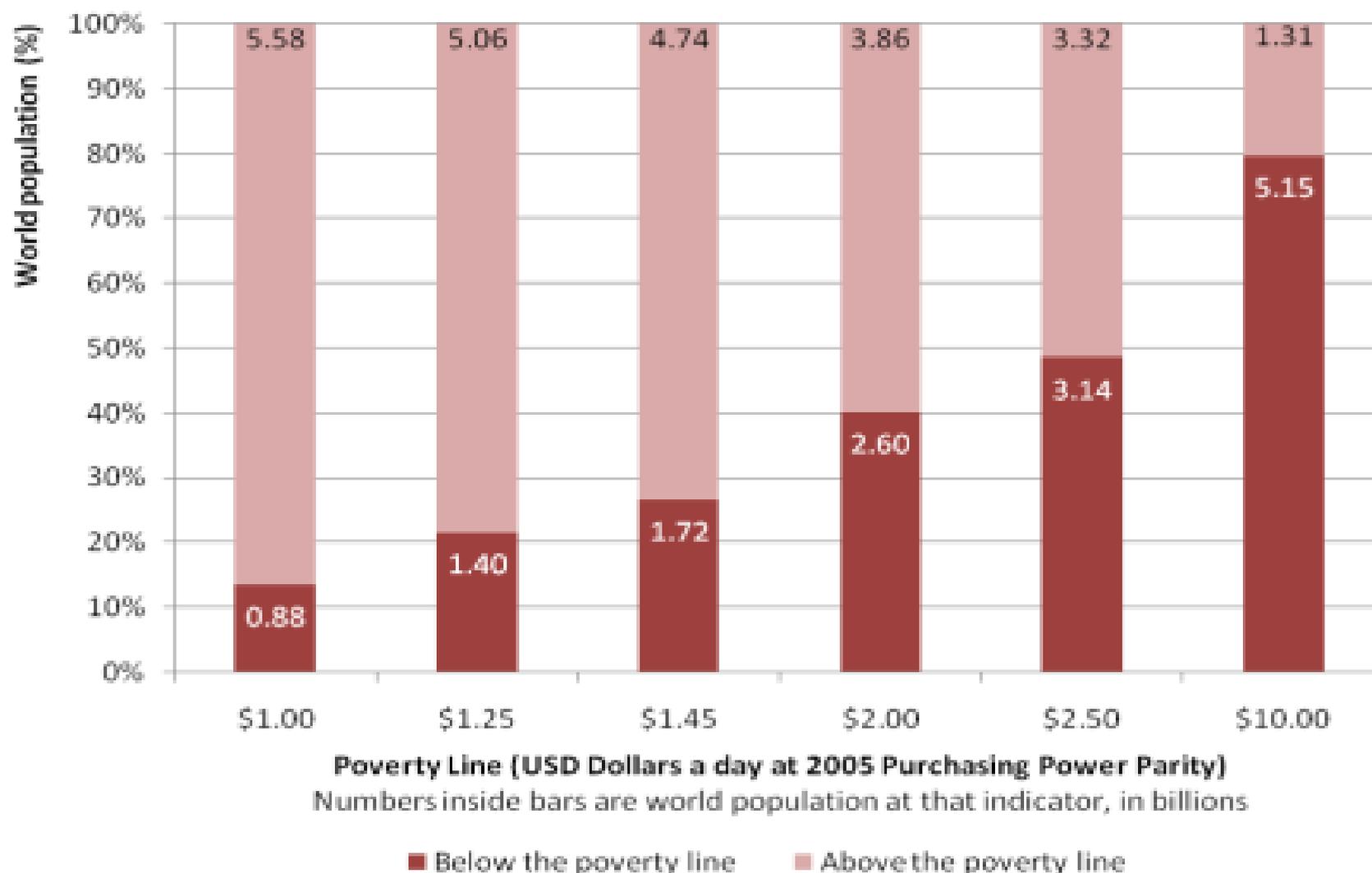
- 925 million hungry as of 2010
- The poorest 40% of the world's population has 5% of the world's income; the richest 20% has 75% of the world's income.
- 22,000 children die each day due to poverty.
- The rich countries have repeatedly promised to give \$210 billion (0.7% of their incomes) in official development assistance, but only give \$69 billion

# World Poverty

- Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.25/day as of 2005 (% of population)
  - Europe & Central Asia: 3.7%
  - Latin America & Caribbean: 8.1%
  - South Asia: 40.3%
  - Sub-Saharan Africa: 50.9%



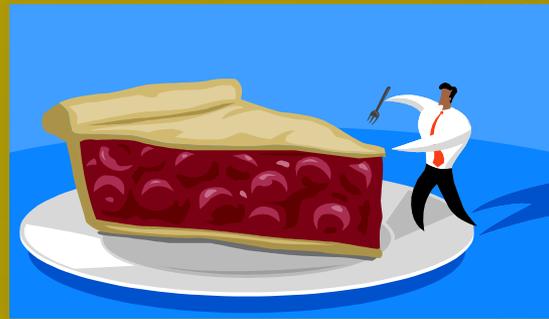
## Percent of people in the world at different poverty levels, 2005



Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2008

# People Who Benefit from Affluence...

- Diminishing returns of marginal utility
  - “If ‘utility’ has anything to do with happiness, above the poverty line the long-term utility of money is almost zero” (qtd. in Sagoff 216)



- “Flowers for Algernon” worry
  - How can we turn to a life of simplicity after adjusting our expectations and conceptions of the good life based on a life of affluence?

# Understanding Overconsumption

- Relationship with nature
- Priorities in daily living and long-term goals
- Conception of the good life
- Conception of human progress
- Identifying causes of global poverty and hunger
- Understanding ourselves in relation to distant others—in place or time



“When we make the price come out right, we rescue economic theory but not necessarily the environment” (Sagoff 217)

# Duties to Future Generations

- Universalism as solution to bridging the gap?
  - “place and time do not provide a morally relevant basis on which to differentiate the weight to be given to the interests of different people” (Barry 490)
  - Fundamental equality of all human beings
    - Corresponding principles: equal rights, responsibility, vital interests, mutual advantage
- Distributive injustice as *one type* of wrong-doing

# What Is Sustainability?

- “there is some X whose value should be maintained, in as far as it lies within our power to do so, into the indefinite future” (Barry 491)

- X should be distributed among every head of the population

- What is X (what matters)?

- Utility (preference satisfaction)?

- Chance at (our conception of) the good life?

- Equal opportunity at conceiving of and attaining the good life?



# What Is Sustainability?

- Function of population and resources
- Sustainability as necessary *and* sufficient for intergenerational justice
  - necessary: “unless people in the future can be held responsible for the situation that they find themselves in, they should not be worse off than we are” (Barry 493)
  - sufficient: Can we really expect more of a generation?



# Discussion Questions

- Does Milbrath only offer fortune cookie wisdom?
- What might be problematic about viewing quality of life as subjective experience?
- What might be some philosophical challenges in establishing duties to future generations?
- Barry argues that utility as a grounding for sustainability fails. How do you think a utilitarian could respond?



Freeganism – reasons for and against?

DEBATE!



*Questions? Comments?*