

Abstract

The paper constructs a case for arguing that poverty researchers need not worry about inequality (as poverty researchers). It reviews conceptualisations of poverty as essentially relational, a particular reflection of prevailing inequalities. In this approach, people are in poverty because they are *less well off than others* along important dimensions of wellbeing. As against this view, the paper constructs a case for studying poverty as non-relational. In this approach, people are in poverty because they are *worse off than they might have been* along important dimensions of wellbeing. The argument is developed in the space of justice, and by reference to prioritarian approaches. Some implications of adopting a prioritarian perspective on poverty are briefly discussed. A Note discusses counterparts to this argument in poverty analysis.

Keywords: poverty, inequality, priority, sufficiency

Armando Barrientos is Professor of Poverty and Social Justice, and Research Director of the Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, The University of Manchester.

Acknowledgements: The paper benefited from comments by Maia Green, Sam Hickey, David Hulme, Casilda Lasso de la Vega and Miguel Niño-Zarazúa. Because I failed to take all the advice given, I am responsible in full for all remaining errors.