

**PHILOSOPHY 835: SEMINAR IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES ABOUT STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE**

**Fall 2024; R 2-4:50pm; Baker 145C**

**Professor:**

Danielle Wenner (she/her/Dr)

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**Office Hours:**

Baker 145L, **Tuesdays 12:30-1:30pm** or by appointment

***Course Description & Learning Objectives***

Political philosophy in the late 20th and early 21st century has largely been dominated by Rawlsian political liberalism. However in recent years, growing attention has been paid to twin challenges to this paradigm. First, the work of Iris Marion Young demonstrated Rawlsian liberalism's inability to adequately account for structural injustice – injustice due not primarily to the structure of formal state institutions, but rather to a widely distributed causal network comprised not only of policies, but also individual and institutional actions, constraints generated by the structure of various markets, diverse tastes and interests of individuals, the persistence of social norms, and other informal features of our daily lives. And second, the growing awareness that Rawls's focus on ideal theory leaves political philosophy ill-equipped to theorize about some of the most pressing political issues that arise in a globalized world characterized by this kind of structural injustice.

This course aims to provide students with graduate-level familiarity with contemporary political philosophy as it engages these topics. We'll begin with an introduction to Rawlsian political liberalism and the challenges to it from Young's framework of structural injustice and the non-ideal turn in political theory. From there, we will spend the bulk of the semester engaging contemporary work (~the last 10 years) on the nature of structural injustice and responsibility to address it. What constitutes a social structure in the relevant sense? Why and how does structural injustice put pressure on Rawlsian liberalism? What constitutes contributing to injustice, and when does benefiting from injustice become complicity? What are the limitations of Young's framework, and how might it be modified or improved? How should we conceptualize responsibility for structural injustice under global capitalism, and how should that responsibility be distributed?

***Important Dates***

Oct 7: Final drop deadline

Oct 14-18: No class; Fall Break

Oct 23: Mid-semester grades turned in

Nov. 17: Conference Paper Deadline

Nov. 21: In-Class Presentations

Nov 28: No class; Thanksgiving Break

Dec 5: Last class

Dec. 14: Final Paper Deadline (grades due Dec. 18)

## **Course Requirements**

### Five Short Responses – 8% each, 40% total

*Each student will complete five written responses to individual readings of their choice. Responses should be 3-4 double spaced pages (~900-1200 words) and should seek to do three things: (1) Identify the main thesis(es) of the reading. What claim(s) is the author attempting to defend? (2) Reconstruct the argument offered in support of the thesis(es). What reason(s) does the author provide the reader for believing the thesis(es) to be true? (3) Raise a critical point about the reading. What is a weakness or limitation of the argument and/or how might the argument be strengthened? Here you might point out a false assumption, offer a counter-example, discuss problematic consequences of the author's view, highlight logical features of the author's argument, or offer independent/new arguments in support of the author's thesis.*

*No response pieces will be accepted during weeks 1-5. Responses should be submitted directly to me **via email** no later than **the night before the class in which a reading is to be discussed** (Wednesday night).*

### Two Discussion Leads – 5% each, 10% total

*Each student will be responsible for leading class discussion twice during the semester. Students may **not** lead discussion on Sept. 12 or Sept 26.*

### Conference Paper & In-Class Presentation – 20%

*Each student will write a conference-length (3000 words) paper critically engaging with a topic relevant to the course. The conference paper may be a more fully developed version of a short response paper, or an independent work. All paper topics must be approved by me in advance. The conference paper will be presented in class in week 12 (November 21). Papers must be distributed to all members of the group **by Sunday night (November 17)**. Participants are expected to read each other's papers and come to class ready to give constructive feedback.*

### Conference Paper Re-Write – 25%

*A revision of your presented paper in light of our group discussion and my written comments. Final papers are due **December 18**.*

### Attendance & Class Participation – 10%

*Students should attend each class having closely read the assigned material for the day and ready to engage in detailed discussion and critical assessment of those materials. **Do not attend class if you are feeling unwell. If you are visibly sick while in class, you will be asked to leave.***

## CLASS POLICIES

Late short response pieces are not accepted. I have a zero-tolerance policy for cheating: any student found to have plagiarized on any assignment will receive a failing grade for the entire course, and all available institutional penalties will be sought.

These are strange and difficult times. If you encounter unexpected difficulties – of any kind – during this semester that you think will impact your ability to complete the work, please talk to me **sooner rather than later**. I will work with you to find a solution.

*If you wish to request an accommodation due to a documented disability, please notify me and contact Disability Resources at: [access@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:access@andrew.cmu.edu) or 412-268-2013 as soon as possible.*

### Outline of Topics & Tentative Schedule of Readings

#### **Part I: Rawlsian Liberalism and Two Challenges**

This section of the course is intended to provide us all with sufficient shared background understanding of core features of Rawlsian liberalism as well as the twin challenges to that project from non-ideal theory and structural injustice.

<b>Aug. 29</b>	John Rawls. (1971). <i>A Theory of Justice</i> . Cambridge, Harvard University Press. ch. 1, §§1-6
<b>Sept. 5</b>	<i>Theory of Justice</i> ch. 2, §§11-17 Charles Mills. (2005). "Ideal Theory as Ideology," <i>Hypatia</i> <b>20</b> (3):165-184.
<b>Sept. 12</b>	<i>Theory of Justice</i> ch. 3 <b>*this is a long reading</b> Laura Valentini (2009). "On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory." <i>Journal of Political Philosophy</i> <b>17</b> (3): 332-355.
<b>Sept. 19</b>	Michael Goodhart. (2018). <i>Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World</i> . Oxford, Oxford University Press. ch. 1 Iris Marion Young. (1990). "Displacing the Distributive Paradigm," <i>Justice and the Politics of Difference</i> . Princeton, Princeton University Press. ch. 1
<b>Sept. 26</b>	<i>Responsibility for Justice</i> chs. 1, 2, & 4

## Part II: Social Structures and their Reproduction

What are we doing when we give social structural explanations? How should we understand social structures, and how do actions function to reproduce them?

<b>Oct. 3</b>	Sally Haslanger. (2016). "What is a (social) structural explanation?" <i>Philosophical Studies</i> <b>173</b> : 113-130. Sally Haslanger. (2024). "Agency Under Structural Constraints in Social Systems," <i>What is Structural Injustice?</i> eds. J. Browne & M. McKeown. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 48-64.
<b>Oct. 10</b>	Alasia Nuti. (2019). <i>Injustice and the Reproduction of History: Structural Inequalities, Gender and Redress</i> . Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. chs. 2-3.

## OCT. 17: NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

## Part III: Responsibility for Structural Injustice

What makes structural injustice unjust? Whose responsibility is it to address this injustice, and why? What kind of responsibility is responsibility to address structural injustice?

<b>Oct. 24</b>	Maeve McKeown. (2018). "Iris Marion Young's 'Social Connection Model' of Responsibility: Clarifying the Meaning of Connection." <i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i> <b>49</b> (3): 484-502. David Estlund. (2024). "What's Unjust about Structural Injustice?" <i>Ethics</i> <b>134</b> (3): 333-359.
<b>Oct. 31</b>	Christian Barry and Kate MacDonald. (2016). "How should we conceive of individual consumer responsibility to address labour injustices?" <i>Global Justice and International Labour Rights</i> , eds. Y. Dahan, H. Lerner, and F. Milman-Sivan. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 92-118. Robin Zheng. (2019). "What Kind of Responsibility Do We Have for Fighting Injustice? A Moral-Theoretic Perspective on the Social Connections Model." <i>Critical Horizons</i> <b>20</b> (2): 109-126.
<b>Nov. 7</b>	Henning Hahn. (2009). "The global consequence of participatory responsibility." <i>Journal of Global Ethics</i> <b>5</b> (1): 43-56. Christian Neuhäuser. (2014). "Structural Injustice and the Distribution of Forward-Looking Responsibility." <i>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</i> . <b>XXXVIII</b> : 232-251.
<b>Nov. 14</b>	Corwin Aragon and Alison Jaggar. (2018). "Agency, Complicity, and the Responsibility to Resist Structural Injustice," <i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i> <b>49</b> (3): 439-460. Robin Zheng. (2018). "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice." <i>Ethical Theory &amp; Moral Practice</i> <b>21</b> (4): 869-885.

<b>Nov. 21</b>	<b>IN-CLASS CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS</b> Conference Papers are to be distributed to the entire group no later than Sunday, November 17. Please come to class having read each other's papers.
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**Part IV: Power and Structural Injustice**

What is the relationship between power and responsibility for structural injustice? How should we understand the nature of the relevant power relationships? Are there different types of structural injustice? **We will not meet in Week 13 due to Thanksgiving Break. The readings listed here are what we would have read if we had a full 14 meetings. You are encouraged but not required to read them on your own.**

<b>Nov. 28</b>	<b>NO MEETING, THANKSGIVING BREAK</b> Clarissa Hayward & Steven Lukes. (2008). "Nobody to shoot? Power, structure, and agency: A dialogue." <i>Journal of Power</i> 1(1): 5-20. Maeve McKeown. (2024). "Pure, Avoidable, and Deliberate Structural Injustice," <i>What is Structural Injustice?</i> eds. J. Browne & M. McKeown. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 65-84. Maeve McKeown. (2024). <i>With Power Comes Responsibility: The Politics of Structural Injustice</i> . New York, Bloomsbury Academic, ch. 3.
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**Part V: Theories of Social Change**

Addressing structural injustice will obviously require social change. But what is social change, and how is it best brought about?

<b>Dec. 5</b>	David Jenkins. (2019). "Understanding and fighting structural injustice." <i>Journal of Social Philosophy</i> 52: 569-586. Robin Zheng. (2022). "Theorizing Social Change." <i>Philosophy Compass</i> 17:e12815.
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