

Structural injustice: race, class, and gender in political theory

Name of Instructor: Zsolt Kapelner
kapelner_zsolt@phd.ceu.edu
Department of Political Science
Central European University

MA Programme in Political Science

Winter Semester 2021–22
Class meetings: Tuesday 15:40–17:20
Office hours: by appointment

Introduction

This course examines the concept of structural injustice. This concept popularized by the work of Iris Marion Young is increasingly used in various areas of political theory. For many, it has proven to be an exceptionally good analytical tool to tackle phenomena hitherto undertheorized and insufficiently understood. For others, however, the concept is ambiguous, and its use raises more questions than it answers. In this course you will learn what structural injustice means, and how it can be used to reflect on gender inequalities, racialised or class hierarchies, colonialism or even climate change. You will be able to critically reflect on these issues using the concept of structural injustice, and also explore ideas about responsibility for unjust social structures, and opportunities for resistance. Assessment will be based on course participation and written assignments.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyse the concept of structural injustice as used in contemporary political theory and distinguish it from other concepts, such as interactional injustice
- Analyse the concept of social structure and its normative significance
- Understand basic issues regarding collective responsibility and individual responsibility as they pertain to the problem of structural injustice
- Understand the main challenges regarding resisting structural injustice
- Understand the significance of the concept of structural injustice for the philosophical analysis of gender inequalities, racial injustice, global injustice, colonialism, class structures, and climate change.

Course requirements and assessment

Attendance and active class-room participation (30%)

- Attendance is compulsory, students should notify the instructor if they have to miss a class (save for emergency situations, clearly), and should not miss more than 10% of classes.
- Students should prepare for each class by
 - Reading the mandatory reading(s) carefully
 - Submitting **2 discussion questions** of maximum 100 words each
- Students can choose to give a presentation about one topic to boost their participation scores, but this assignment is **optional**

Please keep in mind that in this class we will discuss topics, such as sexism and racism, which are not only subject to heated debate, but with which some of your classmates may have upsetting experiences too. Please always proceed in discussing these sensitive matters in a respectful way, keeping in mind the diversity of opinions and experiences regarding them.

Essay proposal (25%)

The Essay Proposal is a short plan for your final essay. It should include:

- A title
- A clear thesis statement for or against which you argue
- A brief plan for the argument
- A preliminary bibliography of at least 5 items of which only 2 can be mandatory readings listed below

The deadline for the essay proposal is **Week 6**. The word count (bibliography excluded) is **500 words**.

Final paper (45%)

The majority of your grade is determined by your final paper. The final paper is an argumentative essay in social or political philosophy defending a clear and concise thesis statement. The paper should be **3,000 words** with footnotes and bibliography **included** (no more than 15% excess will be tolerated).

A successful paper will present the results of independent research conducted by the student in a paper that complies with academic standards in terms of argumentation, structure, the use of resources and citations, and academic style. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated.

The final paper should be submitted by the departmental deadline.

Resources for writing:

If you don't have much experience with writing philosophy papers or if you don't know where to start, take a look at the following resources:

- **Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper:**
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- **Some Guidelines on Writing a Good Political Philosophy Paper :**
<https://web.stanford.edu/class/cs182/handouts/WritingGuidelinesPhilosophyPaper2021.pdf>

Course programme

Description: The course has two parts: in the first 4 sessions we survey major conceptual problems regarding structural injustice, and then in the rest of the term we apply these conceptual tools to the more concrete examples of gender and racial inequalities, global injustice, colonialism, capitalism, and climate change.

Week 1 – Introduction: the concept of structural injustice

This session introduces the concept of structural injustice through the work of Iris Marion Young, differentiates it from interactional injustice, and sets the agenda for the rest of the course.

Required reading: Iris Marion Young, “Political Responsibility and Structural Injustice.” Lindley Lecture on Philosophy. Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas. <URL=<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/12416>>

Recommended readings:

- Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011. Ch. 4.
- Maeve McKeown, “Structural injustice.” *Philosophy Compass*, 16(7), e12757. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12757>
- Kirun Sankran, ““Structural Injustice” as an analytical tool.” *Philosophy Compass*, e12780. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12780>
- Sally Haslanger, “What is a (social) structural explanation?” *Philosophical Studies* 173 (1):113-130. 2016.

Week 2 – Who is responsible for structural injustice?

A major question in the literature on structural injustice is that of responsibility: who is responsible for the existence of unjust social structures, and who should do something about them? As we will see, the answer is far from obvious.

Required reading: Christian Neuhäuser, “Structural Injustice and the Distribution of Forward-Looking Responsibility,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2014): 232–51.

Recommended readings:

- Andrea Sangiovanni, “Structural Injustice and Individual Responsibility.” *Jornal of Social Philosophy* 49(3): 461–483. 2018.
- Michael Goodhart, “Interpreting Responsibility Politically,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2017): 173–95.
- Robing Zheng, “What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice” *Ethical Theory Moral Practice* (2018) 21:869–885.
- Tracy Isaacs, *Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts*. Oxford University Press. 2011.

Week 3 – Resisting structural injustice I.

In this and the next session we discuss the question of what exactly should be done about structural injustice, how we may go about dismantling it.

Required reading: Clarissa Rile Hayward, “Responsibility and Ignorance: On Dismantling Structural Injustice.” *The Journal of Politics* 79(2) Published online January 19, 2017.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/688355>

Recommended readings:

- Charles Mills, “White Ignorance.” In *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. Oxford University Press. 2017.
- Michael Doan, “Resisting Structural Epistemic Injustice.” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4 (4) (2018).
- Jugov, Tamara & Ypi, Lea (2019). Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed. *Journal of Social Philosophy* 50 (1):7-27.

Week 4 – Resisting structural injustice II.

We turn to the question of what role direct action may play in resisting structural injustice, and what moral dilemmas it gives rise to.

Required reading: Madison Powers and Ruth Faden, *Structural Injustice: Power, Advantage, and Human Rights*. Chapter 8: Resistance to Injustice. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2019. 235–270.

Recommended readings:

- John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. §55–59.
- Candice Delmas, *A Duty to Resist: When Disobedience Should Be Uncivil*. Oxford University Press. 2018.
- Kasper Lipper-Rasmussen, “Pogge, poverty, and war.” *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*. 2017;16(4):446-469.
- Christopher J. Finlay, *Terrorism and the Right to Resist*. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

Week 5 – Gender inequality as structural injustice

We begin the second half of the course where we turn from more abstract, theoretical issues to particular forms of structural injustice. We start by considering gender inequality as a form of structural injustice.

Required reading: Serena Parekh, “Getting to the Root of Gender Inequality: Structural Injustice and Political Responsibility” *Hypatia* 26 (4):672-689 (2011)

Recommended readings:

- Serena Parekh, “Feminism, Structural Injustice, and Responsibility.” In Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, Alison Stone (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. 2017.
- Jennifer Einspahr, “Structural Domination and Structural Freedom: A Feminist Perspective,” *Feminist Review* 94, no. 1 (2010): 1–19.
- Iris Marion Young, “Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective.” *Sign* 19(3): 713–738.

- Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender.” *Gender and Society* 1(2): 125–151. 1987.

Week 6 – Race and structural injustice

We continue by considering racism and the specific kind of harm it involves as well as how these issues relate to the literature on structural injustice.

Required reading: Charles Mills, “Racial Exploitation.” In *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. Oxford University Press. 2017.

Recommended readings:

- Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press. 1997.
- Tommie Shelby, *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Harvard University Press. 2018.
- Sally Haslanger, “Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements.” *Res Philosophica* 94 (1):1-22 (2017).
- Andrew J. Pierce, “Structural Racism, Institutional Agency, and Disrespect.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 39:23-42 (2014)

Week 7 – Colonialism as structural injustice

Colonialism is often thought of as a case of historical interactional injustice; it is thought to consist in the direct interactional violence of colonialists on the colonized. In this class, however, we explore the structural dimensions of colonial injustice.

Required reading: Catherine Lu. 2011. “Colonialism as Structural Injustice: Historical Responsibility and Contemporary Redress,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 19(3): 261–81.

Recommended readings:

- Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press. 2017.
- Alasia Nuti, *Injustice and the reproduction of history: Structural inequalities, gender and redress*. Cambridge University Press. 2019.
- Daniel Butt, “What Structural Injustice Theory Leaves Out.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 2021.

Week 8 – Global justice and structural injustice

Unjust social structures are often global in scope. We analyse the problems of global structural injustice through Iris Marion Young’s engagement with the problem of sweatshop labour.

Required reading: Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Global Labor Justice,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (2004): 365–88.

Recommended readings:

- Iris Marion Young (2006) “Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23(1): 102–30
- Erik Malmqvist and András Szigeti, “Exploitation and Remedial Duties,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2021): 55–72.

- Matt Zwolinski, “Structural Exploitation,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 29, no. 1 (2012): 154–79.
- Miriam Ronzoni, “Two Concepts of the Basic Structure, and Their Relevance to Global Justice,” *Global Justice: Theory Practice Rhetoric*, no. 1 (2007): 68–85.

Week 9 – Structural domination in the economy I.

In this and the next week we consider the kinds of structural injustices that may arise within the capitalist market economy.

Required reading: Nicolas Vrousalis, “The Capitalist Cage: Structural Domination and Collective Agency in the Market.” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 38(1): 40-54. 2021.

Recommended readings:

- Nicholas Vrousalis, “Exploitation, Vulnerability, and Social Domination,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2013): 131–57.
- William C. Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press. 2018.
- Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Week 10 – Structural domination in the economy II.

We continue our engagement with structural injustice and structural domination in the economic realm.

Required reading: Rutger Claassen and Lisa Herzog, “Why economic agency matters: An account of structural domination in the economic realm.” *European Journal of Political Theory*. 2021;20(3):465-485.

Recommended readings:

- Lisa Herzog, *Reclaiming the System: Moral Responsibility, Divided Labour, and the Role of Organizations in Society*. Oxford University Press. 2018.
- Ruth Yeoman, *Meaningful Work and Workplace Democracy: A Philosophy of Work and a Politics of Meaningfulness* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- Robert S. Taylor, *Exit Left: Markets and Mobility in Republican Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Week 11 – Climate change

Although we rarely think about it in these terms, climate change in fact quite readily lends itself to an analysis in terms of structural injustice. In this class we will explore this idea.

Required reading: Michael C. Sardo, “Responsibility for climate justice: Political not moral.” *European Journal of Political Theory*. September 2020. doi:10.1177/1474885120955148

Recommended readings:

- Eckersley, Robyn. 2016. “Responsibility for Climate Change as a Structural Injustice,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*, ed. Teena Gabrielson, Cheryl Hall, John M. Meyer, and David Schlosberg, 346–61. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, “It’s Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations,” in *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Richard B. Howarth (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005), 285–307
- John Broome, “Against Denialism,” *The Monist* 102, no. 1 (2019): 110–129
- Ibo van de Poel et al., “The Problem of Many Hands: Climate Change as an Example,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 18, no. 1 (2012): 49–67.

Week 12 – Summary

In this last session we will reflect on our discussions, on the challenges of structural injustice in the 21st century, and the hope of creating a more just world.