

Understanding Systemic Injustice

REL 451 • Fall 2023

Tuesdays, 2:00 pm – 4:50 pm
Kelsey 105

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Overview of the Course

Our world is hyperconnected today. We can grab a morning coffee, for example, that was flown across the planet before it landed in our cup. This sort of hyper connection is apparent in our moral worlds, too. The coffee that is flown in is produced by hands we will never shake. This course focuses on the myriad ways injustice can be overlooked—or concealed—in our hyperconnected context. This is most noteworthy in cases of what is often referred to as systemic injustice, where social arrangements themselves make injustice very difficult to recognize and repair. In this course, we think about what is systemic about systemic injustice, how that complicates what we might think about moral responsibility, and what can be done to amend systemic wrongs.

Objectives for the Course

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- understand and articulate what is *systemic* about systemic injustice
- integrate multiple theories of moral responsibility in a deeply interconnected world
- communicate to non-experts the value of thinking systemically
- leverage social science and history to develop strategies for addressing particular cases of systemic injustice, such as food insecurity, wealth inequality, educational disparities, environmental degradation, and mass incarceration

Weekly procedure

Students shall have the readings completed for the date on which they are discussed, according to the schedule in this syllabus. Additionally, each student must contribute to a collaborative study chart on Google Docs. Charts will look like this:

Author, Text	1-2 thesis statements (direct quotes; include page numbers)	author's aims (in your own words, 3-5 sentences)	3-5+ key words/phrases (w/pg#)	lingering questions (clarifying or critical)
Coates, "The Case for Reparations"	▪	▪	▪	▪
Himes, "Social Sin and the Role of the Individual"	▪	▪	▪	▪

Students will be required to fill in 1-2 cells of the collaborative study chart each week, on a first come, first served basis—so you'll want to make your contributions early if you'd like to have your pick of the cells! Your contributions are due by **midnight the night before class**. Please include your initials at the end of the cell you've contributed like this: (MN).

The process of drafting these charts provides students with three valuable opportunities. First, students will be able to absorb the essence of the text by being responsible for outlining and responding to it. Second, students will learn to get in the habit of finding these four key elements of texts as they are reading. Third, students will have at their fingertips, by the end of the semester, an index of all of the texts that were read for the class.

Furthermore, following the professor's brief lecture each seminar, students will participate in a discussion led by one of their classmates. Three roles will be involved in this discussion. **Aides** will be responsible for supporting the class's reading and discussion of the texts, drawing especially on the collaborative charts students develop together. **Clerks** will keep minutes of the discussion to be circulated no later than four days after the discussion. **Moderators** will ensure that the discussion proceeds in an orderly fashion.

Essays & exams

In addition to the assessment of their participation, seminar leadership, and note collaboration, students will also be graded according to their performance in three other assignments.

Two projects will be required of each student. The first project, a pedagogical project, is to be completed in pairs. You will be expected to work with one other student to develop an instructional tool to teach others about the conceptual tools covered in the first half of the course. This might be a small wiki, a Youtube video, a two-page handout, an interactive Prezi, or some other resource. Your imagined audience might include your fellow students not taking our course, or even friends and family who are not currently students. Your goal is to convey the material in a clear and compelling way. This will be due after the mid-semester break, but students will be expected to email the instructor with their partner's name and expected format by the fourth week of the semester.

The second will be an academic paper that explores a social issue that can be better understood using the conceptual tools discussed in this course. Cristina Bicchieri, whose work we will read in the second half of the semester, has consulted with UNICEF to develop strategies for addressing open defecation and female genital mutilation. Your task is to consider other social problems that might be illuminated by the texts we discuss, and draw on at least three authors' works to explain the problem and potential strategies for addressing it. You will thus be expected to integrate two types of sources: theoretical materials from our course and concrete evidence about the social issue. The completed paper will be due at the end of the semester, but a two-page proposal will be due before break.

Further details, as well as rubrics, will be offered when the projects are discussed in depth in the second week of the semester.

Finally, a quiz, expecting students to identify terms and arguments, will be administered halfway through the semester, to evaluate students' retention of the material discussed in the course. The charts that students have developed throughout the semester should serve as students' study guides.

Academic integrity & plagiarism

Plagiarism is theft. This institution, and this course's professor, take theft extremely seriously. Students who plagiarize will receive a failing grade on their assignment and, in most cases, a failing grade in the course. In addition, such students will be referred to the Academic Integrity Committee, as per §6.3 in the institution's student handbook, and will face further disciplinary action. We will discuss the issue more specifically in a later class session.

Grading

It should be noted that it is not difficult to pass this course. At the same time, every student should not expect to ace it. Grading for the class shall be calculated as follows:

Assignment	Date	Points
Pedagogical project plan	10/17	50 points
Collaborative pedagogical project	11/16	300 points
Academic project proposal	10/3	50 points
Academic project	12/14	300 points
Quiz	11/2	100 points
Seminar leadership		100 points
Discussion Participation		50 points
Study chart contributions		50 points
Total		1000 points

The grading scale is as follows:

Total Points	Grade
965+	A+
935-964	A
895-934	A-
865-894	B+
835-864	B
795-834	B-
765-794	C+
735-764	C
695-734	C-
665-694	D+
635-664	D
595-634	D-

Required Texts

Four books are required for purchase, and all are available for \$20 or less: Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*; Young, *Responsibility for Justice*; William Darity and Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality*; Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, Loyalty*. Each book is also on hold at Donorname Library. All remaining texts are available on Canvas.

Reading assignments

	Theme	Readings and Assignments
9/12	Systemic injustice yesterday and today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” ▪ Interview with Richard Rothstein on Fresh Air (May 14, 2015) ▪ Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “Structural Violence as Structural Evil” in <i>Resisting Structural Evil</i> ▪ Iris Marion Young, “Structure as the Subject of Justice” in <i>Responsibility for Global Justice</i>
9/19	Arendt and German History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hannah Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> ▪ Iris Marion Young, “Guilt versus Responsibility” in <i>Responsibility for Global Justice</i> <p><i>Further reading:</i> Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility” in <i>Amor Mundi</i></p>
9/26	Catholic Social Teaching on Social Sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ José Ignacio González Faus, “Sin” in <i>Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology</i> ▪ Peter Henriot, “Social Sin: The Recovery of a Christian Tradition” in <i>Method in Ministry</i> ▪ Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Moral Cooperation with Evil and Social Ethics” in <i>Hope for Common Ground</i>
10/3	Individual and Collective Sinning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kenneth Himes, “Social Sin and the Role of the Individual,” <i>The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics</i> 6 (1986): 183-218 ▪ Derek Nelson, “Individual and Social Sin in Selected Latin American Theologies” and “Individual and Social Sin in Selected Feminist Theologies” in <i>What’s Wrong with Sin?</i> ▪ Iris Marion Young, “The Social Connection Model” in <i>Responsibility for Global Justice</i> <p>→ Academic project proposals due</p>
10/10	Blame and Moral Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Michael Zimmerman, “Varieties of Moral Responsibility” in <i>The Nature of Moral Responsibility</i> ▪ David Miller, “Two Concepts of Responsibility” in <i>National Responsibility & Global Justice</i> ▪ Tracy Isaacs, “Introduction” in <i>Moral Responsibility in Collective Contexts</i> <p><i>Further reading:</i> P.F. Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”</p>
10/17	Complicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Christopher Kutz, “Introduction” in <i>Complicity</i> ▪ Gregory Mellema, “Avoiding Complicity” in <i>Complicity and Moral Accountability</i> ▪ Iris Marion Young, “Avoiding Responsibility” in <i>Responsibility for Global Justice</i> <p>→ Emails about pedagogical project due</p>
10/26: No class—break		
11/2	Social Norms and Social Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cristina Bicchieri, “Why Do People Do What They Do?” ▪ Eddie Glaude, “Racial Habits” in <i>Democracy in Black</i> <p>→ Quiz</p>
11/9	Culpable and Motivated Ignorance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clifton Granby, “Epistemic Recalcitrance and the Case for Deference” in <i>More than Just Testimony</i> ▪ Elizabeth Harman, “Does Moral Ignorance Exculpate?” <i>Ratio</i> 24, no. 4 (2011): 443–68 ▪ Gideon Rosen, “Culpability and Ignorance” <i>Proceedings of the Arist. Society</i> 103 (2003): 61–84 <p><i>Further reading:</i> Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i>; José Medina, <i>The Epistemology of Resistance</i></p>
11/16	Memory and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emilie Townes, “Sites of Memory” from <i>Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil</i> ▪ Jeannette Rodriguez, “Sangre llama a sangre” from <i>Hispanic/Latino Theology</i> ▪ Hannah-Jones, “Origins” from <i>The 1619 Project</i> ▪ Donald Shriver, “Being Human While Being American” in <i>Honest Patriots</i> <p>→ Pedagogical project due</p>
11/23	Reparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ William Darity and Kirsten Mullen, “Introduction,” Part 1 and 6 of <i>From Here to Equality</i> ▪ Iris Marion Young, “Responsibility and Historic Injustice” in <i>Responsibility for Global Justice</i> <p><i>Further Reading:</i> Roy Brooks, <i>Atonement and Forgiveness</i></p>
11/30	Our tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Albert Hirschman, <i>Exit, Voice, Loyalty</i>
12/7	Your work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentations
Dean’s Date → Final projects due		