Complicity in Injustice Phil 4900-NFA: Capstone Special Topics in Philosophy Fr 2:30 – 5:25 PM | Room: B-Vert 4-214 Eliana Luxemburg-Peck (she/her/hers) | <u>epeck@gradcenter.cuny.edu</u>

Course Overview

Who, exactly, is responsible for structural injustices such as racism, gender-based discrimination, homelessness, and environmental harm? We normally attribute blame to individuals who act willfully and voluntarily for the harms they directly cause. But structural injustices are imbedded in our social systems and cannot simply be traced to discrete, intentional contributions by blameworthy individuals. How should we even understand responsibility in these contexts? Is complicity a useful framework, and what does it entail? Does it make sense to hold people responsible for injustices that they neither intend nor control? How can we take responsibility for the harmful things we do together? We will ask, and consider answers to, these questions, drawing on contemporary selections from ethics, feminist philosophy, political philosophy, and critical philosophy of race.

Office Hours

- Primarily for TTC prep: Tues 2:30 3:30 PM on Zoom (<u>link</u>) | Passcode: philosophy
- Primarily for general support: Fr 1:15 2:15 PM in person, Rm. 5-272 (first, enter 5-270)

Learning Goals

By the end of this class, you will have:

- 1. Acquired an understanding of some questions, issues, and positions at the intersection of philosophical literature on structural injustice, complicity, and responsibility
- 2. Honed the skills of reading comprehension, interpretation, and critically examining texts; engaged creatively with course texts and ideas through short assignments and a presentation
- 3. Read texts sympathetically and been charitable, active listeners to your peers; practiced empathy, sensitivity, and perspective-taking, including when discussing social issues
- 4. Analyzed and defended judgments about philosophical ideas and claims in the face of competing judgments, including in respectful dialogue and collaboration with each other
- 5. Improved the clarity and persuasiveness of written and spoken arguments; identified a research question of interest to you, practiced advanced philosophical reasoning, and presented the results of that reasoning in the form of an argumentative term paper
- 6. Participated in self-evaluation, peer review, and practices of equitable grading
- 7. Reflected critically on urgent matters of ethical, social, and political concern, drawing on real-world knowledge and developing frameworks that will serve you outside the classroom

Accessibility and Support

Your success in this class is important to me. Your health – both physical and mental – and your safety are important to me. I hope that you will reach out whenever you are confused, need help, or have questions. If there are circumstances (including those brought on by Covid-19) that may affect your performance in this class, or accommodations that would make the course more accessible, please let me know. I am ready and willing to strategize with you and offer support (including through regular meetings, adapting assignments or deadlines, connecting you to campus services, etc.). In addition to working with me, you may also make use of campus services like the Writing Center, Disability Services, Student Academic Consulting Center, Baruch Technology Loan Program, etc.). You have access to free and confidential support at the Baruch College Counseling

<u>Center</u>, or, if it is outside of business hours and you need immediate assistance, by calling 1-888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355). If you have concerns or suggestions regarding any aspect of the course, or if you need help or guidance, please drop by office hours or send me an email. I am committed to making this class a meaningful experience for all of you!

Course Materials

This syllabus is a key resource; revisit it regularly. All course texts are available on Blackboard (BB) or linked to the reading list. Please bring a copy of the readings with you each day, and have them ready for reference (whether on your laptop or printed) – doing good philosophy almost always requires returning to the text. Cell phones and headphones are not permitted, but laptop use is allowed as long as it does not interfere with our discussions. Throughout the semester, I will communicate with you through Blackboard and your CUNY email; please ensure that you have access to both, and check them regularly to stay up-to-date on the course.

On Grading

Most of us, myself included, have been habituated into thinking about grading in a particular way. We've been taught that quantitative grades are objective measures of students' abilities, that the risk of a low score motivates us to work hard, and that a wide grade distribution is a sign that a teacher has paid attention to students' differences. But at CUNY, I've been exposed to teachers and literatures that challenge this model. I have come to believe that traditional grading often prevents us from truly learning, inspires fear rather than motivation, and discourages risk-taking, interrogating unfamiliar ideas, and practicing new skills. Furthermore, standard grades tend to reward students who already have the expected knowledge and skills, not those who are developing them.

As such, we're going to be trying something different this semester. Your grade in this class will be based on your hard work and effort – how much you learn, the work you perform, and the degree to which you engage with the course ideas and practice philosophical skills. The feedback you receive will be primarily qualitative, and will come not only from me but also from self and peer evaluation. You will receive a letter grade at the end of the semester, but I have designed the course requirements with the foregoing goals in mind; note, however, that to pass the class you must submit at least one short assignment and a term paper. These grading practices are new to me, so I hope that we can be open this semester about how they are (or aren't) working for us. If at any point the process is causing more anxiety than it alleviates, please let me know.

A note on due dates. Due dates are designed to help us all: to guide you in arranging your schedule, and to leave me the time that I need to give you feedback and complete the nuts-and-bolts of teaching. Given that, I ask that you generally respect them, with my thanks. If, however, you find yourself needing a short extension, shoot me an email before the deadline and we will arrange one.

Finally, be aware that plagiarism – presenting others' ideas or work as your own – is not compatible with our community values and will not be tolerated in this class. Please familiarize yourself with Baruch's <u>policies</u> on academic honesty and <u>these</u> resources on avoiding plagiarism. Remember, questions are always welcome in philosophy, so if in doubt about these policies, ask!

Course Component	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Below Expectations
Participation	• Attend class consistently	 Mostly attend class Participate regularly in class activities and 	• Rarely attend class

Course Requirements and Grading Structure

	 Participate consistently, thoughtfully, and respectfully in activities and discussion Arrive prepared, with ideas and questions about the readings and topics Enhance our discussions by periodically raising "real world" cases, strategies, and practices for consideration 	 occasionally in discussion Arrive mostly prepared with some ideas and questions to share 	 Participate rarely in class activities and discussion Rarely come to class with ideas to share and readings completed 	
	(2 points) (1 point)		(0 points)	
Short Assignments x3	 Submit short assignments and fulfill the basic requirements (4 points) 	 Submit short assignments and mostly fulfill the basic requirements 	 Submit assignments without fulfilling the basic requirements, or fail to submit 	
Teach the	Lead a TTC and fulfill the	(3-2 points)Lead a TTC and	(1-0 points)Lead a TTC without	
Class (TTC)	 Lead a FFC and fulfill the basic requirements (including the self- evaluation) 	fulfill most of the basic requirements	fulfilling the basic requirements, or fail to lead TTC	
	(3 points)	(2 points)	(1-0 points)	
Scaffolded Term Paper	 Submit the plan, rough draft, and final paper and fulfill the basic requirements for each Participate actively and thoughtfully in every state of the writing process, including peer review 	 Submit the plan, rough draft, and final paper and fulfill most of the basic requirements Participate in most of the writing process, including peer review 	• Submit the term paper and/or components without fulfilling the basic requirements, or fail to submit (note: you must submit a term paper to pass the course)	
	(4 points)	(3-2 points)	(1-0 points)	
Exit Letter	• Submit the exit letter, fulfill the basic requirements, and demonstrate deep reflection	• Submit the exit letter and fulfill the basic requirements	• Fail to submit the exit letter or submit without fulfilling the basic requirements	
	(2 points)	(1 point)	(0 points)	

Your final grade will depend on the number of points you receive:

A = 12-15 points, A = 11 points

B + = 10 points, B = 9 points, B - = 8 points

C + = 7 points, C = 6 points, C - = 5 points

D + = 4 points, D = 3 points, F = 2 or fewer points

Short Assignments

You will complete three short assignments designed to enhance your engagement with the course topics and materials, to be submitted by email. You may choose which three of the following

types to complete, and the texts to which you apply them. Your three short assignments must take **different** forms; do not submit the same type of assignment twice. At least <u>two of the three must be</u> <u>submitted by March 31</u>. The appropriate length for each assignment will vary, but most will require at least 500 words. Finally, I encourage you to share (a full or partial version of) many of your short assignments in our discussion board forums on Blackboard, but this is optional.

Here are the types of assignments – you will choose which <u>three</u> to complete:

- 1. <u>Reading Response</u> reconstruct an argument from a course reading and thoughtfully respond to it, evaluating it, raising questions about its merit, and/or showing its significance for another course text or real-world case. Explain the reasoning behind your evaluation, questions, or application, and support your claims at every stage.
- 2. <u>Dialogue</u> pose a relevant question to two thinkers on the syllabus and write a dialogue between them in which they answer (or debate) your question. Base their comments and responses on their arguments as found in the course texts, citing pages where appropriate. Your dialogue should be substantive, but feel free to have fun with the tone and style.
- 3. <u>Resisting Injustice</u> compile an annotated list of five or more organizations and opportunities to resist and/or respond to injustices in NYC (particularly grassroots and local organizations). Explain how these movements are working in concrete ways to resist structural injustice, and draw connections, where relevant, between their strategies (or language) and ideas from the course. Include links; we'll compile these!
- 4. <u>In the News</u> select a news or popular article employing the language of "structural injustice" or "complicit(y)" and assess how the concept is being used, engaging with at least one course reading. Among other things, you might consider the (explicit or implicit) definition of the concept, to whom or to what it applies, and whether the concept is being used effectively (and to what end?). Attach the news article along with your response.
- 5. <u>Movie Madness</u> choose a movie (or TV show) relevant to course topics, watch it, and write up or record (podcast or video-essay style) an analysis. Be sure to explain the media as if to an audience who has not seen the film, and give reasons for your analysis, drawing on course texts where appropriate. Note: feel free to share relevant media with each other!
- 6. <u>Write an Essay Question</u> write a sophisticated essay question (not an essay itself, just a prompt) based on or responding to a course text or topic. You can use <u>this article</u> to help. Then, in a couple of paragraphs, explain how you developed the question and defend what makes it a good essay question with respect to the text and/or course (consider: what would make it worthwhile and fruitful to answer, philosophically speaking?).

Here are the basic requirements for short assignments:

- You must submit three of the above, each of a different type, by email.
- At least two of your assignments must be submitted by March 31st (all of them by May 5th).
- Your submissions should reflect a sustained and sophisticated engagement with ideas and content relevant to the course. They should have the quality of a finished product, rather than a collection of notes or stream-of-consciousness thinking.
- Your submissions should display philosophical thinking and good reasoning. Defend your claims, explain your reasons, consider implications, and provide evidence where appropriate (including from the course readings).
- Recommended: share the relevant cases, media, organizations, etc. that you find with your peers. There are forums on our Blackboard "discussion board" to do this!

Teach the Class

Students are often surprised by how different the experience of teaching philosophical material is from being taught it, and studies have shown that one of the best ways to learn material is to teach it to others. For this assignment – the TTC – you will lead a class discussion about one of the course texts. The TTC is not a one-sided presentation; your job is to engage your peers in conversation, asking them questions designed to clarify key ideas in the reading and putting those ideas into conversation with the broader topics of the course. To that end, although you might begin by reconstructing - or, better yet, asking your peers to reconstruct - the thinker's central questions and arguments, you should consider what other questions, worries, applications, and directions might enhance our collective engagement with the reading (but be wary of trying to do too much). In office hours a few days prior to your presentation, I will help you prepare for the TTC (see below). After the TTC, you will submit a self-evaluation reflecting on the experience, describing how you fulfilled the basic requirements, assessing the success of your questions and facilitation, and commenting on the takeaways of the TTC for you and your peers. Assign yourself a score using the chart on the syllabus (0-3 points); although I reserve the right to override your evaluation in rare cases, your self-evaluation will determine how much credit your TTC receives. Note: try not to grade yourself too harshly (though I will let you know if you do) - be critical but kind to yourself!

Here are the basic requirements for the TTC:

- <u>Come to office hours</u> prior to your TTC so that we can touch base about your plan and work through any concerns together. If you cannot come (though I do insist that you try), then email me with your plan in time for me to provide written feedback. Please have your reading completed and initial ideas prepped (and questions for me!) by the time we meet.
- <u>Lead a class discussion</u> (~30 minutes) about one of the course texts. No need to monologue or position yourself as an expert your job is to "get the juices flowing," to direct us to key ideas in the reading, invite your peers into conversation, pose questions for discussion, and to facilitate the discussion that ensues.
- During the TTC, you should <u>monitor and guide the conversation</u> (being wary of dominating it), and stay alert to time. I will indicate when time is running low, and ask if you have any final thoughts or questions with which to leave us.
- Submit a thoughtful <u>self-evaluation and reflection</u> no later than one week after the TTC.

Scaffolded Term Paper

You will write one argumentative paper of 2500-3000 words (not including references). The aims of the term paper are: a) to practice critical and creative philosophical thinking about one of the central problems of the course, b) to synthesize and explain the work of other philosophers, and c) to employ good reasoning and clearly support your own claims (including by incorporating ideas from the readings, answering possible objections, and considering implications). You will come up with your own thesis statement on the topic of your choosing, and defend your thesis thoroughly, including by utilizing support from several of the course readings (and external sources, if helpful). Feel free to see me at any point to discuss your ideas. The term paper will include several steps:

- <u>Paper Plan</u>: propose a topic or potential research question for your paper, and indicate what you think your thesis will be. Then, include a short outline (~1 page) of the anticipated structure of the paper. Conclude with a list of 3-5 sources (including course readings), briefly describing each text and how you will use it. Feel free to include questions or concerns; I will send feedback on your proposal. Deadline: March 24th (but feel free to submit early).
- <u>Rough Draft for Peer Review</u>: your rough draft should cover a substantial portion of your paper (at least 1300 words) and include a reference list. You will send the rough draft to me

and to your assigned peer(s) by email on (or before) April 18. You and your peer(s) will need to decide on a time to meet and exchange feedback; class will be canceled on April 21, so you should feel free to meet then, but it is up to you. You will provide your peer with both written and oral comments: "track changes" in the document itself, mark up their draft, note questions, suggest examples or sources, ask "why," tell them how the argument could be stronger, and so on. Deadline: rough draft to them and to me by April 18, peer review in person or on Zoom a few days later (at a time to be arranged by you and your peer).

- <u>Final Draft</u>: your final draft should be within the word limit, fulfill the aforementioned aims, and be submitted on time. We will discuss other standards and guidance for this paper as it approaches. Deadline: Tuesday, May 16 at 11:59 PM

Exit Letter

Write an exit letter (2-3 pages double-spaced) in which you assess yourself holistically and reflect on what you learned in the course. Due by email on May 21st at 11:59 PM (or earlier).

Reading and Assignment Schedule

This syllabus, including the reading list, is subject to change. It is your responsibility to check your email for updates and refer to the newest version of the syllabus, available on Blackboard.

Many readings for this class are fairly challenging, so I want to make clear my expectations: I do expect that, in general, you will make efforts to complete the weekly readings and come ready to discuss them. However, I do not expect you to fully understand the readings on your own; philosophical work is best done in community! So, take your first pass at the texts at home, employing practices of active reading to help with comprehension: underline, reread difficult sections, take notes in the margins, jot down questions, reflect on course themes, etc. Then, arrive to class ready to continue working through key ideas together. If in doubt, aim to bring at least one idea to contribute to discussion and/or a question that directs us to the root of your confusion.

Finally, note that this list includes both required (*) and optional readings. The latter really *are* optional – they are there just in case you wish to explore a topic further, or for your term papers.

Date	Topics & Questions	Reading	Assignment
F Jan 27	Introduction to the	Recommended: Jeffery Schinske and Kimberly	Day 1 Survey
	Course	Tanner, "Teaching More by Grading Less (or	(<u>link</u>) Due
		Differently)" (2017; <u>link</u>)	Tu Jan 31 at
			6 PM
		Note: consider getting a jump on next week's	
		reading, since I think you'll find both the required	
		and recommended reading valuable if you can	
		make the time.	
F Feb 3	Structural Injustice	*Iris Marion Young, "Ch. 2 – Structure as the	
		Subject of Justice" from Responsibility for Justice	
	What is structural	(2011)	
	injustice?		
		*Read these articles on property taxes in	
		Pittsburgh $-$ <u>here</u> and <u>here</u> $-$ and (optional)	
		Netflix Explained, "Racial Wealth Gap" (2020)	

		Optional (but recommended): Olúfe⊡ mi O. Táíwò, "Ch. 2 – Reconsidering World History" from <i>Reconsidering Reparations</i> (2022) (if you don't have time to read the whole chapter, then read 18-29, skim 36-50, and read 51-67)	
F Feb 10	Challenges for Responsibility	*Christopher Kutz, excerpt from <i>Complicity</i> (2000; pp 1-7)	
	Who is to blame for structural injustice?	*Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "It's Not <i>My</i> Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations" (2010)	
	What are some challenges of holding individuals responsible for	*Interview with George Yancy (2018) (and see here for the original article; both also on BB) (cw: anti-Black racism, threats of violence)	
	structural injustice?	Optional: Jocelyn Timperley, "Who is Really to Blame for Climate Change?" (2020) (<u>link</u>)	
F Feb 17	The Social Connection Model What is the "social connection model" of responsibility? How does it differ	 *Iris Marion Young, "Ch. 4 – A Social Connection Model" from <i>Responsibility for Justice</i> (2011) *Catherine Lu, "Colonialism as Structural Injustice: Historical Responsibility and Contemporary Redress" (2011) 	Tip: start working on at least one of your short assignments!
	from "the liability model"?		
F Feb 24	From Connection to Complicity Might it be useful to revisit complicity in structural injustice?	*Corwin Aragon and Alison M. Jaggar, "Agency, Complicity, and the Responsibility to Resist Structural Injustice (2018), focus on 446-452 *Claudia Card, "Complicity in Structural Evils" from <i>Confronting Evils</i> (2010)	
	What is "structural complicity"?		
F Mar 3	Some Theories of Complicity	*Chiara Lepora and Robert E. Goodin, Ch. 5 and 6 of <i>On Complicity and Compromise</i> (2013; note that continuing after page 28 of the PDF is optional)	
	How have morally philosophers tended		

	to think about complicity? Are these models useful for thinking about complicity in structural injustice?	For a thinker who emphasizes "intentional participation," rather than contribution, see (optional) selections from Christopher Kutz, Ch. 4 of <i>Complicity</i> (2000) For a thinker who emphasizes "principles and accomplices," and blameworthiness, see (optional) selections from Gregory Mellema, Intro to <i>Complicity and Moral Accountability</i> (2016)	
F Mar 10	Class on Zoom Complicating the Contribution Condition What makes a person complicit in structural injustice? Can we really be responsible for harms we do not cause?	Class on Zoom *Andrea Sangiovanni, "Structural Injustice and Individual Responsibility" (2018) *Maeve McKeown, "Iris Marion Young's 'Social Connection Model' of Responsibility: Clarifying the Meaning of Connection" (2018) Skim John Gardner, Review (2004) of Kutz' Complicity, highlighted section (~ pg. 4 of PDF)	Paper Plans are due March 24 At least two of your short assignments must be submitted by March 31
F Mar 17	Complicating the Knowledge Condition Does complicity require knowledge? Can we be complicit in and/or responsible for injustices of which we aren't aware?	 Revisit Lepora and Goodin's (2013) treatment of knowledge as necessary condition for complicity *José Medina, selections from The Epistemology of Resistance (2013, pp 27-40 and 133-161, page numbers are in the left margin of the PDF) For some foundational work on epistemologies of ignorance, see these short texts: James Baldwin "Letter to My Nephew" (1962); Uma Narayan, from <i>Dislocating Cultures</i> (1997; pp. 46-54); Charles Mills, from <i>The Racial Contract</i> (1997; pp 17-9) Further reading (optional): Charles Mills, "White Ignorance" (2007); María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, & Loving Perception" (1987) 	
F Mar 24	Responding to Ignorant and/or Marginal Complicity What moral responses might be	*Cheshire Calhoun, "Responsibility and Reproach" (1989) *Eliana Peck, "Active Ignorance, Antiracism, and the Psychology of White Shame" (2021)	Paper Plan Due by email at 11:59 PM (March 24)

	warranted in response to even marginal or ignorant complicity? How should we respond to even non- culpable complicity?	Recommended: revisit Card (2010) on the responsibilities of the non-culpably complicit Optional: Maureen Sie, "Sharing Responsibility: The Importance of Tokens of Appraisal" (2018; esp. the first three pages of the PDF) and Raimond Gaita, selections from "Remorse and Its Lessons" (1989, pp. 43-55)	
F Mar 31	Complicity as Our Constitutive Situation What if complicity is the "constitutive situation for our lives"? What might it mean to "take responsibility" for complicity?	 *Alexis Shotwell, "Complexity and Complicity: An Introduction to Constitutive Impurity" from <i>Against Purity</i> (2016) *Charlotte Knowles, "Responsibility in Cases of Structural and Personal Complicity: A Phenomenological Analysis" (2021) *(Required, but you can skim a bit – look for who is "complicit" and how) bell hooks, "Holding My Sister's Hand" from <i>Teaching to Transgress</i> (1994) 	At least two of your short assignments must be submitted by March 31 Rough drafts of papers due April 18
F Apr 7	No class – Spring Break	No class – Spring Break	
F Apr 14	Worries about Complicity and Individual Responsibility Should we even be talking about individual responsibility? Will a framework of complicity help or hurt our efforts to resist structural injustice?	 *Olúfe□ mi O. Táíwò, "Ch. 4 – What's Missing" from <i>Reconsidering Reparations</i> (2022; pp 104-124) *Michael Brownstein, Daniel Kelly, & Alex Madva, "Individualism, Structuralism, and Climate Change" (2021) It will be helpful to get a sense of the different approaches described by Brownstein, Kelly, and Madva. So, take a look at (skim but *): This advertisement and Dunaway, "The 'Crying Indian' ad that fooled the environmental movement" (2017), as well as Mary Annaise Heglar, "I work in the environmental movement. I don't care if you recycle." (2019, link) And compare to these articles – here and here – as well as here, by Jesi Taylor, "Composting Food Waste Is an Act of Resistance" (2020) 	All 3 short assignments must be submitted May 5 Rough drafts of papers due April 18

		Optional (related to Brownstein et al.): Nabina Liebow and Travis Rieder, "What can I possibly do?" White individual responsibility for addressing racism as a public health crisis" (2022)	
F Apr 21	No class – Peer Review	No class – Peer Review Rough drafts due to me and peer on April 18 th ; see instructions for peer review meetings earlier on the syllabus (under "scaffolded term paper")	Rough Drafts due to your peer and to me by April 18
F Apr 28	Both/And (A Twist on Last Week) How should we, as individuals, conceptualize our place in the wider collective effort to resist structural injustice?	Revisit Brownstein, Kelly, and Madva on a "both/and" approach to meeting injustice *Alexis Shotwell, "Ch. 4: Consuming Suffering: Eating, Energy, and Embodied Ethics" from <i>Against Purity</i> (2016) *bell hooks, <u>watch</u> (1997) and read "Overcoming White Supremacy" from <i>Killing Rage/Ending</i> <i>Racism</i> (1995)	
F May 5	Looking to the Future How should we move forward with an awareness of the scope of our responsibilities? How do we set tasks and priorities in the long work of resisting injustice? How do we avoid becoming overwhelmed?	 *Alexis Shotwell, "Ch. 5: Practicing Freedom: Disability and Gender Transformation" (focus on 154-163) and "Conclusion: The Point, However, is to Change It" from <i>Against Purity</i> (2016) *Iris Marion Young, "Parameters of Responsibility" from <i>Responsibility for Justice</i> (2011, pp 142-151) Recommended if you are feeling overwhelmed: Táíwò, "Ch. 6 – The Arc of the Moral Universe" from <i>Reconsidering Reparations</i> (2022; esp. 199-208) Recommended if you are craving some concrete strategies: Táíwò "Ch. 5 – What's Next" (esp. the "tactics and targets," pp. 172-190) and resources named by Shotwell (pg. 202), <u>here</u> and <u>here</u> 	All 3 short assignments must be submitted by today (5/5) Final Paper Due May 16 at 11:59 PM
Final Session Fr May 19 at 3:30 PM	TBD	Final Paper Due May 16 at 11:59 PM Exit Letter Due by email on May 21 st at 11:59 PM (or earlier)	← See here