

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #19

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Young, I. M. (2011). Structure as the subject of justice. In *Responsibility for justice* (pp. 43–74). Oxford University Press.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. Iris Marion Young claims that structural injustice “is distinct from wrongs traceable to specific individual actions or policies” (p. 44).

How does her extended discussion of the lack of affordable housing in section I illustrate this point?

2. What does Young mean by social-structural positions (pp. 45, 56), structural injustice (p. 52), and structural inequality (p. 58)? In what ways does the notion of social-structural positions help explicate structural injustice and structural inequality? How is structural inequality a form of structural injustice?
3. What four related aspects of social-structural processes does Young develop in section II? For each of these aspects, how does it “give some depth to the claim that many judgments of social injustice refer to structural injustice” (p. 53)? How does each aspect help us to better understand the nature of structural inequality?
4. In section III, after providing a summary of the debate between John Rawls and C. A. Cohen/Liam Murphy concerning the basic structure as subject of justice, Young offers her own response to Rawls. Contrary to Cohen and Murphy, Young argues to retain, though improve, the Rawlsian distinction between judgments of structure and judgments of individual interactions.

How does this division of moral labor work according to Young? What exactly is the difference between a structural

point of view and a point of view focused on individual interaction? In making that distinction, how is Young also trying to retain the idea (from Cohen and Murphy) that individual choice and action will play a part at the structural level of justice and not only at the level of individual interactions?

5. In the final paragraphs of this chapter, how does Young use her division of moral labor to then set up the idea that there will also be a similar division when it comes to individual responsibility?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.