

A Tapestry of Justice: Weaving Social Principles, Moral Duty, and Systemic Change

Chapter 1: The Conceptual Foundations of Justice

1.1. The Evolving Definitions of Social Justice: From Equality to Equity

Social justice is a complex and evolving concept that serves as a cornerstone of modern ethical and political thought. At its core, social justice is aimed at promoting a society that is both just and equitable, ensuring that all its members have equal opportunities and a fair allocation of resources, regardless of their disability, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, or religion. It is a principle that seeks to value diversity and guarantee fundamental human rights for everyone.¹ While a universal definition of the term remains elusive due to its changing nature over time, modern interpretations of social justice commonly incorporate several key principles: access, equity, diversity, participation, and a foundational respect for human rights.²

A profound development in the discourse of social justice has been the shift from an emphasis on simple equality to a more nuanced focus on equity. Equality, in its simplest form, means providing the same resources and opportunities to everyone. However, this approach is often insufficient because it fails to account for the fact that not all people start from the same place or possess the same needs.⁴ This is a central distinction that shapes much of the modern discussion on social justice. For example, providing identical resources to a historically marginalized community and a well-resourced community would not address the systemic disadvantages that the former has faced.

Equity, in contrast, recognizes these systemic barriers and advocates for providing resources that are proportionate to what individuals or communities need to genuinely thrive. It is a

concept that requires meeting people where they are, acknowledging their unique circumstances, and providing tailored support to produce fair outcomes. This tailored approach is particularly important for historically oppressed people, such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), who have disproportionately faced institutional discrimination and systemic racism.⁴ Therefore, the pursuit of equity is, by its very nature, the pursuit of social justice. This reframing of the concept of fairness from a purely procedural ideal to one that actively addresses historical and ongoing imbalances is a critical understanding that guides contemporary social justice efforts.

1.2. The Philosophical Roots of Justice: From Virtue to Fairness

The modern understanding of social justice is built upon centuries of philosophical inquiry into the nature of fairness. The lineage of this thought can be traced back to ancient Greece, where thinkers like Plato and Aristotle explored justice as a fundamental virtue of both individuals and their societies.⁴ For Aristotle, justice was a rational mean between opposite forms of injustice, focused on equitable distributions and reciprocal transactions.⁵ At this stage, the philosophical project was largely internal, a quest to define the just person and the virtues that constitute a good character.

This focus evolved through later philosophical traditions. Hobbes and Hume, for instance, conceived of justice as an "artificial virtue" necessary for civil society to function, a construct arising from the voluntary agreements of a social contract to serve public utility and protect property.⁵ This perspective began to shift the focus from the individual character to the external rules and systems that govern human interaction.

The most ambitious and influential work in this area during the later twentieth century came from John Rawls, whose 1971 text, *A Theory of Justice*, profoundly shaped modern social philosophy. Rawls reintroduced the social contract tradition of philosophers like Locke and Rousseau, proposing a framework where "justice as fairness" is prioritized as the primary virtue of social institutions.⁴ This was a powerful counter-argument to utilitarianism, which might justify unequal outcomes for the sake of the "greatest happiness for the greatest number".⁷ Rawls's work effectively moved the philosophical discussion from the question, "What makes a person just?" to the more institutional question, "What makes a society's basic structure just?" This transition is vital, as it connects the abstract ideal of justice directly to the tangible policies and institutions that shape people's lives. Rawls articulated this framework through two key principles: first, that everyone should have equal basic liberties; and second, that socio-economic inequalities are permissible only if they are attached to positions open to all and, crucially, if they benefit the least-advantaged members of society. This second principle, known as the "difference principle," provides a powerful ethical

justification for policies aimed at equitable resource distribution.⁷ The evolution of this thought highlights how the philosophical project of justice has moved from an emphasis on individual character to a critical examination of the very structure of society.

Chapter 2: Moral Responsibility in an Interconnected World

2.1. The Moral Imperative: From Individual Virtues to Collective Duty

Determining what constitutes a morally right or wrong action is a complex task for which no single, universally accepted method exists.⁹ Over time, philosophers have developed various ethical frameworks to guide decision-making and reasoning. One of these frameworks is

Virtue Ethics, which focuses on the kind of person one should be, asserting that what is moral is what makes us the best person we could be.¹⁰ A different approach is

Deontology, which posits that moral action is a matter of following absolute moral duties, regardless of the consequences.¹⁰

Utilitarianism, in contrast, judges the morality of an action based on its outcomes, holding that what is morally right is what generates the best outcome for the largest number of people.⁹

While these frameworks provide distinct approaches, they can also lead to conflicting conclusions when applied to real-world problems. For instance, a strict utilitarian might argue that overriding the rights of a few individuals is morally acceptable if it leads to the "greatest happiness" for a wider community.⁹ A proponent of

Rights-based Ethics, however, would argue that this is fundamentally wrong, as moral action is that which is in accord with everyone's rights.⁹ The existence of these competing frameworks highlights that applied ethics requires nuanced judgment rather than the application of a simple formula. Another perspective,

Care-based Ethics, adds another layer by emphasizing the importance of promoting healthy relationships and the well-being of individuals and their interdependence.¹⁰

Beyond the frameworks themselves, moral responsibility can be viewed from several angles. **Retrospective responsibility** looks backward, judging an individual for their past actions through praise or blame.¹¹ In contrast,

prospective responsibility is forward-looking, defining a person's duties and obligations, such as a parent's responsibility to care for their child or a citizen's duty to obey the law.¹¹ These different lenses reveal that moral obligation is not a monolithic concept but a multi-faceted set of principles that inform individual and collective duties within society.

2.2. Responsibility Beyond the Individual: Navigating Moral Luck and Systemic Influences

A purely individualistic perspective on moral responsibility can be overly simplistic and fail to account for the complex external factors that influence human behavior and outcomes. The philosophical concept of "moral luck" challenges the notion that individuals are entirely responsible for their actions, as certain outcomes can be determined by circumstances outside their control.¹² For example, a drunk driver who causes an accident is clearly responsible for their actions. However, the situation becomes more complex if the driver is an alcoholic whose condition stems from a troubled, abusive childhood. While the driver remains responsible for their decision, the question arises as to whether they are

completely responsible, or if the external forces that led to their addiction share a portion of the moral debt.¹² This reveals that individual agency is often constrained by systemic and historical forces, such as a society's failure to adequately address childhood abuse or provide mental health support.

This understanding of moral luck suggests that a truly responsible society must not only hold individuals accountable for their voluntary actions but also acknowledge and address the collective failures that contribute to immoral acts. The example of the drunk driver illustrates that when an individual's moral failings are linked to broader societal problems, it is in society's best interest to see such acts as a collective responsibility, promoting empathy and providing support to help those facing difficult circumstances.¹² The idea that society bears a portion of the responsibility for its members' actions is a central, transformative understanding of social justice.

Furthermore, this perspective aligns with philosopher Martha Nussbaum's view, which finds moralities based exclusively on general and universal principles to be "ethically crude".¹³ She argues that a healthy dose of "perception"—the ethical ability to discern the important features of a particular situation—is a necessary antidote to a rigid, duty-based morality.¹³

Nussbaum's work posits that emotions have ethical value, helping us to build a more just society and relate to others with respect.¹³ This viewpoint cautions against a detached intellectual judgment, instead urging a more contextual and empathetic approach to moral decision-making.

The moral vision articulated in *A Christmas Carol*, where the character Jacob Marley wears a great chain forged from his selfish acts and ignored opportunities to help others, serves as a powerful metaphor for this collective moral debt.¹⁵ It suggests that every act of hoarding wealth, evading taxes, or refusing to contribute to the public good adds a link to a communal chain of responsibility. Wealth, while not inherently sinful, is never free from ethical weight; its accumulation without social contribution burdens both the individual and the community.¹⁵ This perspective connects individual moral failings directly to a collective moral responsibility, emphasizing that a just society must actively address the societal failures that constrain individual agency.

Chapter 3: The Structures of Injustice: Systemic and Historical Roots

3.1. From Inequity to Injustice: Understanding Systemic Discrimination

Systemic discrimination is a form of injustice that is deeply embedded in the very fabric of society. It is defined as a collection of attitudes, patterns of behavior, policies, or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization or sector and that, whether by design or impact, create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage for marginalized groups.¹⁶ Unlike individual prejudice, which may stem from a single person's bias, systemic discrimination is rooted in the day-to-day routines, procedures, and organizational cultures of institutions.¹⁷ It operates across a wide spectrum of society, including employment, income, education, health, housing, and policing.¹⁷ A critical element of this form of injustice is that it can appear neutral on the surface but still have an exclusionary or adverse effect on specific groups.¹⁶

The framework of **intersectionality**, a concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is essential to understanding the complex nature of systemic discrimination. Intersectionality highlights that social categories such as race, class, and gender do not exist in isolation; instead, they interact and compound to create unique and intensified conditions of subjugation.¹⁸ For

instance, a woman of color may face a form of discrimination that is qualitatively different from the discrimination experienced by a white woman or a man of color.¹⁸ The historical development of the United States, from the era of slavery and segregation to more modern discriminatory policies, has laid a foundation where these intersecting systems of oppression reinforce each other.¹⁸ The historical policies, such as redlining and unequal educational opportunities, created systemic barriers that continue to affect marginalized communities today.¹⁸

Systemic discrimination is not a one-time problem but a pervasive, deeply ingrained issue that requires sustained attention and initiative to address.¹⁷ It is a critical link between abstract injustice and concrete, lived experience. The problem moves beyond individual acts of prejudice to the deeply embedded and often invisible mechanisms that perpetuate inequality. Understanding this requires looking at the historical policies that created today's unequal outcomes rather than simply focusing on individual attitudes. The following table provides a clear view of how these systemic issues are manifested.

The Intersections of Systemic Discrimination	Key Disparities and Impacts	Relevant Source
Racial Disparities in Health	Racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of illness, earlier onset of disease, and poorer quality of care than their majority peers. These disparities persist even when accounting for socio-economic status (SES), suggesting that race has an added effect beyond income or education level.	57
Historical Economic Disparity	A Black man with enslaved ancestry has a predicted annual income of \$12,500 less than a Black man with free Black ancestry today. This "Free-Enslaved gap" is around one-quarter of the	26

	corresponding Black-white income gap, a direct legacy of Jim Crow laws and other systemic barriers.	
Gender and Class Inequality	Women are disproportionately employed in low-wage and part-time jobs, and this is compounded by class. Research shows that occupational segregation, where women are overrepresented in sectors like caregiving, contributes to persistent wage gaps, limiting their financial security and career advancement.	18
Racial and Class Discrimination	Historical barriers, including discriminatory labor policies and unequal access to education, have contributed to income inequality among marginalized groups. Racial minorities are more likely to experience employment instability and wage suppression, leading to reduced economic mobility compared to their white counterparts.	19

3.2. The Economic Dimension: Wealth Disparities and the Moral Debt

Economic inequality is not merely a statistical phenomenon but a profound moral issue with deep historical roots. The provided research material offers a long-term perspective on this

issue, tracing it back to the 18th and 19th centuries when political economists like Adam Smith declared that "wherever there is great property, there is great inequality" and that the affluence of the few presumes the indigence of the many.²⁰ The historical data confirms this, showing that global inequality rose sharply between 1820 and 1910, a period of rising Western imperialism, and has remained at a high level since.²¹ For instance, the global top 10% income share has oscillated between 50-60% of total income since 1820, while the bottom 50% share has remained at a mere 5-15%.²¹

Contemporary data provides a more granular view of these disparities. The U.S. Census Bureau's Gini index, which measures income inequality, decreased slightly from 2021 to 2022, the first decline since 2007. However, the index has still increased by 7.6% since 1993, highlighting a persistent trend of increasing inequality over the long term. The 2022 data suggests that the decrease was primarily driven by a decline in real income at the top and middle of the distribution rather than an increase at the bottom.²² In a recent survey, a median of 54% of adults across various nations stated that the gap between the rich and the poor is a "very big problem" in their country, with a majority believing that the rich having too much political influence is a key contributor to this inequality.²³

The moral implications of this wealth gap are significant. The argument is made that wealth does not arise in a vacuum but from a "shared enterprise" of social structures, including legal systems, infrastructure, and education.¹⁵ Therefore, to benefit from this system without contributing to its upkeep, especially through a fair share of taxes, is seen as a moral failing.¹⁵ This perspective posits that taxes are not theft, but the "sacred mechanism" by which society funds the public good. It is argued that a just society should have a progressive tax system where greater wealth accumulation comes with a greater obligation to support the system that made it possible.¹⁵

The debate over the role of capitalism in this context is multifaceted. Some critiques argue that capitalism inherently leads to unequal outcomes and that full dignity for the individual can only be achieved through social justice rights granted by the state.²⁴ Conversely, a libertarian perspective argues that capitalism, based on individual rights and voluntary exchange, is the most effective system for lifting the masses out of poverty and that government intervention in the name of social justice can be counterproductive.²⁵ This perspective, however, often overlooks the fact that a significant portion of the current wealth gap is not a result of a purely free market, but a market built on a foundation of historical systemic oppression. For example, research shows that the income and wealth gap between Black Americans whose ancestors were free and those whose ancestors were enslaved persists today, a direct consequence of historical injustices such as Jim Crow laws, military discrimination, and redlining.²⁶ This suggests that the moral arguments for wealth redistribution are not simply about punishing success, but about rectifying an inherited moral debt that stems from a system built on fundamentally unjust foundations.¹⁵

Chapter 4: Justice and Rights: A Human and Environmental Perspective

4.1. The Evolution of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration

The concept of human rights has a long and storied history, evolving from ancient codes and philosophical ideals to a codified set of universal principles. Early precursors include the Code of Hammurabi from 1760 BCE, which promised to "make justice reign," and the Roman Empire's development of natural law.²⁷ Key milestones in this evolution include Britain's Magna Carta in 1215, which established that even a king is not above the law, and the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776, which proclaimed that "all men are created equal" with inalienable rights.²⁷ However, as the historical record shows, these documents, while aspirational, often excluded women, people of color, and other marginalized groups from their protections.²⁸

The modern human rights movement emerged with renewed urgency following the horrific events of World War II. The extermination of over six million Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany shocked the world's conscience and galvanized a global commitment to prevent such "barbarous acts" from ever happening again.²⁹ This collective moral conviction led to the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and, crucially, the adoption of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.²⁹ The UDHR begins by recognizing that "the inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".²⁹ This profound statement transforms the UDHR from a simple legal document into a collective moral and political declaration. It is a shared admission of a global failure to respect human dignity, and a subsequent, collective assumption of responsibility to prevent a return to such barbarism.

The UDHR, which outlines 30 fundamental rights and freedoms, is not a legally binding treaty but serves as a "global road map for freedom and equality".²⁹ Its influence has been profound, leading to the creation of numerous legally binding international agreements that expand upon its principles, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.²⁹ A central element of the UDHR is its assertion that human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent.³⁰ These rights generate "waves of responsibility" that extend beyond national borders.³² While states have the primary duty to protect and fulfill human rights, this

responsibility also extends to international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, corporations, and even private individuals.³² This framework establishes that the promotion of justice is not a top-down mandate but a shared duty for "all of us" to understand, respect, and defend.³³

4.2. Environmental Justice: The Intersection of Ecology and Equity

Environmental justice is a critical and growing area of social justice that recognizes the deeply interconnected nature of ecological health and social equity. It is defined as the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental decision-making to ensure full protection from disproportionate environmental and health impacts.³⁴ This field emerged from the growing recognition that low-income communities and communities of color are systematically and disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards.³⁴

The provided research offers numerous data-driven examples of this phenomenon. In the U.S., people of color, who constitute 42% of the population, make up 52% of the population in counties with unhealthy air pollution and 63% in counties with the worst air quality.³⁴ A study by the George Washington University found that communities of color experience 7.5 times higher rates of pediatric asthma and 1.3 times higher premature mortality rates due to air pollutants compared to mostly white communities.³⁶ These findings hold true regardless of income level or region, suggesting that race is a significant independent factor for exposure to air pollution.³⁷ The roots of this disproportionate burden can be traced to historical racist policies like redlining, which funneled minority families into dilapidated and contaminated areas, a practice that continues to shape communities today.³⁵ Therefore, what may appear to be an unfortunate outcome of geography is, in fact, the predictable result of deeply embedded institutional racism.

The moral duty to address these issues extends beyond simply cleaning up the environment; it requires a fundamental commitment to dismantling the systems that created the injustice in the first place. This requires integrating environmental responsibility with social justice, a concept captured in the idea of a "just transition" to a low-carbon economy.³⁸ This transition must ensure that the costs and benefits of change are shared equitably, protecting workers and marginalized communities from long-term unemployment and increased social inequality as fossil fuel industries decline.³⁹

Environmental ethics provides various frameworks for understanding this moral duty.

Anthropocentrism views humans as the primary holders of moral value and the natural world as an instrument for human use. In contrast, **biocentrism** assigns intrinsic moral value to all living beings, while **ecocentrism** broadens the moral focus to entire ecosystems, including

non-living components.⁴⁰ These frameworks highlight that the moral duty to protect the environment is inextricably linked to the moral duty to ensure justice for all people. The UDHR and the moral principle of collective responsibility require that environmental policy actively corrects for these disparate impacts, making environmental harm a core human rights issue.³⁵

Chapter 5: Social Justice in Practice: From Advocacy to Community Action

5.1. Movements for Change: Case Studies in Social Justice

Moving from abstract theory to tangible application, social justice is best understood through the movements and organizations that actively work to create change. Effective social justice initiatives do not merely provide direct aid; they strategically work to change the underlying systems that create the need for that aid. The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), founded by civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson, provides a powerful example of this approach.⁴¹ EJI works to challenge racial and economic injustices within the criminal justice system by providing legal representation to those who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state prisons.⁴² Beyond individual cases, EJI also seeks to "change the narrative about race in America" by creating institutions like the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum.⁴¹ These projects serve as powerful reminders of the legacy of racial violence and oppression, fostering dialogue and education about systemic injustice.⁴¹

Similarly, the Innocence Project uses DNA testing to exonerate the wrongfully convicted. However, its work goes beyond individual cases of injustice; it seeks to reform the criminal justice system itself to prevent future injustices.⁴¹ This approach exemplifies a fundamental shift from a "helping" paradigm to a "transforming" one. The Campaign for Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY) similarly focuses on systemic change, lobbying for legislative reforms and court rulings that have led to the resentencing and release of individuals sentenced to lengthy prison terms as juveniles.⁴¹ The work of these organizations, which are often amplified by powerful literature such as Michelle Alexander's

The New Jim Crow and Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, demonstrates that the goal is not to fix a broken system but to transform the cultural and legal frameworks that allow injustice to persist.⁴³

The lessons from these movements are clear: tackling systemic discrimination requires a multi-pronged approach that includes direct advocacy, policy reform, and an intentional effort to change the public narrative that enables injustice. This is a continuous process that involves challenging ingrained beliefs and demanding accountability from institutions.

5.2. The Power of Community Action

Social justice is not solely the domain of large, well-funded organizations; it is also a grassroots, participatory process that operates at the community level. The **Community Action Program (CAP)**, a centerpiece of the War on Poverty established in 1964, provides a historical framework for this approach.⁴⁵ The program, carried out by a network of over 1,000 Community Action Agencies (CAAs), is dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other by providing services and advocacy on behalf of low-income individuals.⁴⁵

A powerful modern example of community action is the work of public libraries in addressing the "justice gap"—the substantial deficit between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to address them.⁴⁶ The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) found that in 2021, low-income individuals brought an estimated 1.9 million problems to legal aid organizations, but 1.4 million of those problems could not be adequately addressed. The consequences were devastating, affecting people's finances, mental health, and physical safety.⁴⁶ In response, libraries are partnering with legal aid services to serve as familiar, reliable access points for civil legal information, helping to connect people in need with relevant resources. This demonstrates a decentralized, collective form of problem-solving where local community institutions assume a moral responsibility to address a systemic failing that larger institutions have not adequately resolved.⁴⁶

This kind of community action illustrates that the moral duty to promote social justice is not a top-down mandate but a grassroots imperative. Organizations like Community Change Action build power "from the ground up" by engaging in grassroots organizing, voter engagement, and narrative change.⁴⁷ The power of community action lies in its ability to empower marginalized communities, giving them a voice and agency to fight for economic freedom, health equity, and a more inclusive democracy.⁴⁷

Chapter 6: The Future of Justice: Navigating Emerging Challenges

6.1. AI, Technology, and the New Frontier of Bias

The rapid advancement of technology, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), presents a new frontier for social justice. While AI holds the promise of solving complex social problems, it can also perpetuate and amplify existing inequalities. The central challenge lies in the fact that AI systems are trained on data, and if that data is biased, the resulting system can encode and scale that bias at an unprecedented rate.⁴⁸

Specific examples of AI bias are numerous and alarming. Facial recognition technology has been shown to have higher error rates for people with darker skin tones, a bias that can have serious implications when these systems are used in policing and law enforcement.⁴⁸

Predictive policing algorithms have also been criticized for perpetuating racial profiling by targeting minority communities, leading to unjust outcomes.⁴⁸ This new form of discrimination is not based on overt, individual prejudice but is a result of "unexamined bias" in the algorithms themselves, a form of systemic discrimination encoded in code.⁵¹

The moral responsibility to address these issues falls on technology developers, policymakers, and corporations. A primary step is to increase transparency and accountability in AI decision-making, ensuring that these systems can provide clear explanations for their decisions.⁴⁸ Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented in the development of AI systems, and that input from communities impacted by these systems is actively sought.⁴⁸ The Algorithmic Justice League (AJL) is one organization working to address these issues by raising awareness, equipping advocates with empirical research, and galvanizing policymakers to mitigate AI harms and biases.⁵⁰ This work is critical because technology is not a neutral tool; it is an extension of existing social systems and can become a new and powerful engine for injustice. Fighting for justice in the digital age requires a new kind of literacy and a new set of moral frameworks that demand justice be integrated into technological design from the very beginning.

6.2. Globalization's Promise and Peril

Globalization has a complex and multifaceted relationship with social justice. On one hand, it can stimulate economic growth, promote trade and innovation, and raise overall living standards.⁵² On the other, it can exacerbate income inequality, concentrate wealth, and lead

to a "race to the bottom" in which countries lower labor and environmental standards to attract foreign investment.⁵² The impact of globalization is not universally positive or negative; rather, it depends on how it is managed through government policies, taxation, and social safety nets.⁵²

The reality of issues like climate change underscores a new layer of global moral responsibility.⁵³ The effects of climate change, caused by global actions, disproportionately harm developing nations and low-income communities that have the fewest resources for adaptation.³⁴ This means that the fate of different countries and communities is now inextricably "linked," and the moral duty to one's own citizens can no longer be seen in isolation from the duty to others.⁵³

Addressing the challenges of globalization requires a "systems approach" to social change, one that intentionally works to "disrupt the accrual of power and privilege" on a global scale.⁵³ A key challenge is the concept of a "just transition," ensuring that the global shift to low-carbon economies benefits, rather than harms, the most vulnerable, including workers and indigenous populations.³⁹ This requires a holistic approach that weaves environmental sustainability with social justice, providing support for job creation, retraining, and social protection measures.³⁹ The UDHR, with its vision of a world where all have dignity and rights, provides a foundational moral compass for navigating these global challenges. Justice can no longer be an exclusively national concern; it must be a global one, requiring a shared commitment to building a more equitable and sustainable global economy.³⁹

Chapter 7: A Continuing Commitment to Justice

7.1. Bridging the Gaps: From Research to Practice

The journey toward social justice is not a one-time event with a clear endpoint; it is an ongoing process that requires continuous engagement and a commitment to action. A significant challenge in this field is the "micro-mezzo-macro" divide that often separates social work scholars and practitioners, preventing them from learning from each other and developing integrated, multilevel solutions.⁵⁵ Research has also shown a persistent lack of an agreed-upon definition of social justice among scholars, theorists, and researchers, which can hinder coherent action.⁵⁵

Overcoming these obstacles requires a concerted effort to bridge the gaps between research, policy, and practice. It means developing multilevel research teams that span individual-level interventions through policy-level applications, ensuring that those most affected by injustice have their voices heard and are involved in the process of finding solutions.⁵⁵ The moral obligation to promote justice and well-being should guide this effort, recognizing that a failure to address systemic injustices not only violates core values but also perpetuates oppression.⁵⁵

The ultimate conclusion is that achieving a truly just society requires a relentless and difficult process of aligning our values with our actions. As the research shows, one of the greatest obstacles to change is not a lack of knowledge, but a failure to follow through with new choices and approaches.⁵¹ Systemic bias and injustice are ingrained habits, and dismantling them requires consistent, intentional, and collective effort. As bell hooks effectively emphasized, no one complicit in the oppression of another can fully self-actualize; systemic bias harms everyone, not just the oppressed.⁵¹ Therefore, the commitment to justice is a commitment to a better, more actualized future for all. It is a continuous call to action, demanding that we constantly re-examine our personal and institutional behaviors, challenge ingrained systems of power, and work to transform our social, economic, and technological structures to reflect a more equitable and humane world.⁵¹

Works cited

1. insights.taylorandfrancis.com, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://insights.taylorandfrancis.com/social-justice/what-is-social-justice/#:~:text=%22Social%20justice%20is%20aimed%20at.support%20for%20their%20human%20rights.%22>
2. Social justice in literature | Research Starters - EBSCO, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/social-justice-literature>
3. What is social justice? Definitions and examples of injustice - Insights blog, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://insights.taylorandfrancis.com/social-justice/what-is-social-justice/>
4. Social Justice Definition & Resources | United Way NCA, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/equity-and-social-justice/>
5. Western Theories of Justice - Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://iep.utm.edu/justwest/>
6. Philosophy of human rights - Wikipedia, accessed September 21, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_human_rights
7. A Theory of Justice by John Rawls | Research Starters - EBSCO, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/theory-justice-john-rawls>
8. en.wikipedia.org, accessed September 21, 2025,

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Theory_of_Justice
9. FOUR ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS: a short summary - Nuffield Foundation, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/ethics-frameworks-9634.pdf>
 10. What are ethical frameworks? — Center for Professional Personnel Development, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://aese.psu.edu/teachag/curriculum/modules/bioethics-1/what-are-ethical-frameworks>
 11. Responsibility | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://iep.utm.edu/responsi/>
 12. Who has a moral responsibility in our society? | by Nick James | Be Unique | Medium, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://medium.com/be-unique/who-has-a-moral-responsibility-in-our-society-788aeaebfca0>
 13. Martha Nussbaum on Emotions, Ethics, and Literature | The Partially ..., accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://partiallyexaminedlife.com/2016/08/12/martha-nussbaum-on-emotions-ethics-and-literature/>
 14. "Reading For Life": Martha C. Nussbaum On Philosophy And Literature - Swarthmore College, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1306&context=fac-philosophy>
 15. The Moral Duty of Wealth. If you have gained from society, you... | by ..., accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://medium.com/@llyengalyn/the-moral-duty-of-wealth-2999f9390e20>
 16. 6. Forms of discrimination | Ontario Human Rights Commission, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/6-forms-discrimination>
 17. Systemic Discrimination - Intercultural Cities Programme - The Council of Europe, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/systemic-discrimination>
 18. Race Class Gender In The United States 1 - Welcome Home Vets of NJ, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://www.welcomehomevetsofnj.org/textbook-ga-24-1-30/race-class-gender-in-the-united-states-1.pdf>
 19. Class discrimination - Wikipedia, accessed September 21, 2025,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Class_discrimination
 20. Blog : Global Inequality in Historical Perspective - UNU-WIDER, accessed September 21, 2025,
<https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/global-inequality-historical-perspective>
 21. Global inequality from 1820 to now: the persistence and mutation of extreme inequality - The World #InequalityReport 2022 presents the most up-to-date & complete data on inequality worldwide: global wealth ecological inequality

- income inequality since 1820 gender inequality - World Inequality Database, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://wir2022.wid.world/chapter-2/>
22. 2022 Income Inequality Decreased for First Time Since 2007 - Census Bureau, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/income-inequality.html>
 23. Economic Inequality Seen as Major Challenge Around the World | Pew Research Center, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/01/09/economic-inequality-seen-as-major-challenge-around-the-world/>
 24. Social Justice and Capitalism by William H. Young | NAS - National Association of Scholars, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.nas.org/articles/social_justice_and_capitalism
 25. Book Review: Is Social Justice Just? | Cato Institute, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.cato.org/regulation/spring-2024/book-review-social-justice-just>
 26. Policy approaches to addressing a history of racial discrimination, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/policy-approaches-addressing-history-racial-discrimination>
 27. A Brief Human Rights Timeline, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/brief-human-rights-timeline>
 28. A Short History of Human Rights, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://hrlibrary.umn.edu/edumat/hreduseries/hereandnow/Part-1/short-history.htm>
 29. What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/commission-general/projects/what-universal-declaration-human-rights>
 30. Universal Declaration of Human Rights - Amnesty International, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/>
 31. Human rights as Ideal and Moral rights - The International Studies Association, accessed September 21, 2025, <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/HKU2017-s/Archive/decb089b-ae87-4ee0-b53d-b9f52d0ce9c9.pdf>
 32. 5. Responsibility for Human Rights - OpenEdition Books, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://books.openedition.org/obp/3068>
 33. Who Protects Human Rights? | ISHR, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://ishr.ch/about-human-rights/who-protects-human-rights/>
 34. Environmental Justice Factsheet | Center for Sustainable Systems, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://css.umich.edu/publications/factsheets/sustainability-indicators/environmental-justice-factsheet>
 35. Yale Experts Explain Environmental Justice | Yale Sustainability, accessed September 21, 2025,

- <https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-environmental-justice>
36. Communities of Color Across the US Suffer A Growing Burden from Polluted Air, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://publichealth.gwu.edu/communities-color-across-us-suffer-growing-burden-polluted-air>
 37. Study Finds Exposure to Air Pollution Higher for People of Color Regardless of Region or Income, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.epa.gov/sciencematters/study-finds-exposure-air-pollution-higher-people-color-regardless-region-or-income>
 38. Environmental justice and climate change policies - PMC, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9391311/>
 39. World Day of Social Justice - the United Nations, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/social-justice-day>
 40. Environmental Ethics: Guiding Our Moral Responsibility to the Natural World - ACTenviro, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.actenviro.com/environmental-ethics/>
 41. Case Studies and Success Stories of Effective Social Justice ..., accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.fundsforngos.org/proposals/case-studies-and-success-stories-of-effective-social-justice-proposals/>
 42. 10 Social Justice Organizations Fighting for Equality | Human Rights ..., accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/social-justice-organizations/>
 43. Racial Justice, Racial Equity, and Anti-Racism Reading List ..., accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/faculty-research/library-research-services/collections/diversity-inclusion-belonging/anti-racist>
 44. Books about social justice/important issues : r/booksuggestions - Reddit, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.reddit.com/r/booksuggestions/comments/1268wji/books_about_social_justiceimportant_issues/
 45. More About Community Action - MASSCAP, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.masscap.org/about/more-about-community-action/>
 46. New Justice Gap Study Confirms Problem Persists - WebJunction, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/new-justice-gap-study.html>
 47. Community Change Action: Homepage, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.communitychangeaction.org/>
 48. AI and Social Justice: Navigating the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Society's Equity and Inclusion - Our Future Is Science, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://ourfutureisscience.org/blog/ai-and-social-justice-navigating-the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-societys-equity-and-inclusion>
 49. Human rights issues increasing as tech development rapidly expands - Thomson Reuters, accessed September 21, 2025,

<https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/human-rights-crimes/human-rights-tech-development/>

50. Algorithmic Justice League - Unmasking AI harms and biases, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.ajl.org/>
51. 5 Ways to Become More Conscious About Systemic Bias - Pulsely, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://pulsely.io/blog/5-ways-to-become-more-conscious-about-systemic-bias>
52. Does globalisation lead to rising income and wealth inequality? - Tutor2u, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.tutor2u.net/economics/reference/does-globalisation-lead-to-rising-income-and-wealth-inequality>
53. Social justice and teamwork are the future of globalization - The World Economic Forum, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2018/11/globalization-4-means-harnessing-the-power-of-the-group/>
54. 10 Human Rights Issues Of The Future, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/human-rights-issues-of-the-future/>
55. Bridging the Gaps among Social Justice, Research, and Practice - ResearchGate, accessed September 21, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/47554912_Bridging_the_Gaps_among_Social_Justice_Research_and_Practice
56. Teaching for Equity: Ways to Challenge Systemic Racism in the Classroom, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://www.embracingequity.org/post/teaching-for-equity-ways-to-challenge-systemic-racism-in-the-classroom>
57. Understanding Associations between Race, Socioeconomic Status and Health: Patterns and Prospects - PMC, accessed September 21, 2025, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4817358/>