

Abstract – What is a Feminist Sense of Social Justice

This presentation will explore what, if anything, the designation of “social” adds to our ideal of justice, as well as considering what feminist legal theory can offer to bring greater clarity and direction to the term. The phrase “social justice” has been a rallying cry in progressive circles for decades, suggesting that the word justice alone fails to encapsulate the magnitude of the changes deemed necessary in contemporary society. However, the implications of this modified and presumably enhanced notion of justice for the direction of law and policy are not particularly clear.

Is social justice simply a substitute for a sense of greater economic equity and opportunity? Is it merely an amalgamation of other, specific, and more familiar, senses of justice tied to racial, gender, and other differences? This presentation will consider the origins of the term social justice, as well as its evolution along with emerging theories of human rights and liberalism. It will conclude with the assertion that a comprehensive and inclusive *feminist* sense of the social can effectively challenge the centrality of individualism -- with its attendant principles of autonomy, independence, and individual responsibility -- in our conception of what is just and how to achieve it.