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The Quest for Social Justice

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Jared Wainright

Intro. to Social Justice

SJUS 1003.0

12-13-19

The Quest For Social Justice

The purpose of a dictionary is to define vocabularies, an encyclopedia provides information regarding a range of topics, even a thesaurus provides synonyms for various words; however, some terms have no simple definition. Some terms are defined relatively, better defined by our own experiences and values. After doing an exercise earlier in the semester, four distinct terms were posted around the classroom: Peace, Love, Truth, and Justice. We were asked to choose the term that we valued most. This created a sense of division amongst the words except these words are not mutually exclusive to one another, they all contribute equally to define a concept almost as broad as the breadth of issues it encompasses: Social Justice.

Defining Social Justice is no simple feat. There are a range of issues that lie at the doorstep of this quintessential element of change. Homophobia, Racism, Systemized Poverty, Cultural Appropriation and Objectification, Housing insecurity. These are all obstacles which Social Justice aims tackle, amongst many more. Each component of Social Justice (Peace, Love, Truth, and Justice) holds its own unique meaning to every individual. My goal is to define, based on my own experiences as well as my studies, each of these elements.

Peace, in and of itself, is generally defined as freedom from disarray and complication. It is generally accepted that freedom is the polar opposite of chaos. As humans who live in a world characterized by chaos, plagued with struggle, it is important that our definition of this

word hold a significant weight. Ultimately Peace is the end goal. In an ideal world, peace is completely feasible. Only a few tweaks to society here and there and peace rushes in like a flood of relief as it washes over humanity; however, we do not dwell in an ideal world. Our world is full of complexities, including the complexities of humanity itself. Humans are a uniquely individual collective. Every person is different yet we all function the same. With such a paradox at hand, there is no way in which a dystopian future can be reached. Discord is inevitable in a species capable of such a depth of knowledge and perspective. Every person beholds the world under a different lens. These lenses can be divisible when used to separate. Repurpose these lenses and contemplate the unity that doing so could create. Imagine the collective progression of the human race as a result of uniting our own visions of what the world should be.

It is important to establish a goal before undertaking any Social Justice work. Seeing as humans hold to so many different world views, beliefs, and values, there is no singular mindset that we can adopt as a people that would allow such an easy transition into peace. We can, however, adjust our individual mindsets to benefit a collective vision: peace. By using our unique vantage points, humans can work toward peace in various ways, creating a multitude of facets for change without stifling the individuality of the collective. Peace is not so easily attainable. There will always be discrepancies amongst humanity. Although, it is the vision of peace that will ultimately unite us under individual mindsets working towards a specified vision. Peace is not foreseeable for humanity, at least not under present-day circumstances. Humans will always be working towards peace, and it is this unity that will cement as close a construct of peace as humanly possible.

Love. The word itself its own sentence for it speaks volumes. The simple mention of it is enough to warm a heart. Any who have experienced the feeling are aware of its power over us as people. Love makes one stronger than they would ever thought possible, allowing individuals to endure even the most trying of tribulations. The power of its influence a human cement. Take Greg Jarrell for instance. Jarrell managed to live with his children as well as his family in a very, what might be considered undesirable, neighborhood that housed society's "deplorable." (Jarrell). Jarrell considered running. Even after multiple family friends were killed, he took his family out of their neighborhood to a motel, hoping to escape the despair that he felt as result of the atrocities that had taken place near their home. It was his love for his home and the people that resided within their neighborhood that gave him the strength to return. It was his dedication to this place and these people he so dearly loved that motivated him to go back and give his intentional community a chance to flourish. (Jarrell)

The people and the places we love are what give us the motivation and the strength to engage in Social Justice work. While Peace served as the goal, Love serves as the fortification to endure the coming trials. Love is the essential second step in the process that is Social Justice. Typically, humans value that which they love and it is this value that grants one the ability to subdue even the hardest misgivings about the important work that they do. Oftentimes, seeing so much suffering and injustice in the world discourages one from wishing to participate or continue moving forward. Hence, the armor we must don is essential to bear the gravity of true suffering. Although, there is no way to circumvent the pain that you will see and, in some cases, feel.

Though it must not go without saying that there are many humans who do not carry such a high regard or value for any other human. It is in this vacuum, void of Love, that they are corrupted, becoming forces of malice and disdain. They are typically loners and social outcasts, though some of these individuals will pool together and form groups to suit their need for belonging and acceptance, hoping to, in their own way, feel loved. These groups are typically based in hatred and malcontent. Some famous examples being the Ku Klux Klan, various nationwide gangs, and even organized systems of criminal families, such as the Mafia. These groups thrive on their own hatred, they feed on hatred by means of one another. Be that as it may, it is these groups that true Social Justice hopes to purge. Love can prevail even in the midst of its polar opposite. It is strong enough to overcome its greatest enemy.

Love is total devotion to a person, a cause, or even a concept as vague as an idea. There is not much to be said for those who try to undertake Social Justice work without the proper emotional fortification. Their chances of long-standing participation are very slim. Attacking such grandiose pitfalls without realizing what it is you're fighting for is nearly as great an injustice as those injustices themselves. As the colloquialism goes, one can not pour from an empty glass. One must fill oneself with Love. When combined with Peace, one is halfway down the path of progression that is Social Justice.

The third step on the path to Social Justice is my personal favorite: Truth. Truth is a potent and powerful weapon. It's polar opposite, lies, has cemented itself not only into modern society, but also into the human psyche itself. If Peace serves as a vision and Love serves as armor, Truth serves as a weapon to fight the battle against injustice. There is no force more powerful at the command of humans than Truth. Truth stirs conviction and establishes

clear intentions and motives on both sides of the fight. It is able to withstand the test of time, there is no end to Truth. It is sharp, piercing, and precise while also being blunt, obtuse, and insensitive. Some truths are necessary in order for a person or even a society to move forward; however, that is not to say that these truths are easy to digest. At its core, Truth is truly a double-edged sword. A simple construct with complex inner workings. Truth holds a certain duality that the brother components of Social Justice do not possess: there are subjective truths and objective truths.

An objective truth is defined by cold, hard facts. There is no room for misinterpretation in regards to an objective truth. Truths such as statistics regarding Housing insecurity, as used in Matthew Desmond's, "Evicted". (Desmond) The information used in the book creates an indisputable argument for the systematic creation of poverty and housing security. Even an article we reviewed in class regarding fees that inmates are charged simply for being imprisoned. If one can not pay to be released from prison, they continue to sit in prison and accumulated even more fees. This system is flawed, objectively flawed. It is the power of Truth that gives those who wish to fight the power and the means to demand change, to demand something be done about the issue at hand.

A subjective truth tends to be a little more elusive in terms of definition and usefulness. Subjective truths are usually unique to the individual. As stated previously, upon your introduction, humanity deviates in such a broad manner in values, mindsets, and experiences that it is nearly impossible for truths to be objective in every case. For instance, our self-identification is paramount to our own personal truths. As Solomon writes about in his work titled, "Far From the Tree," every human's identity is self-defined and therefore has as much

potential for change as any other introspective factor of oneself. (Solomon) Our identities are unique to us based upon what we have experienced and what we believe to be correct. For instance, a disabled person may see learning as one of life's greatest obstacle, while a non-disabled person may learn as effectively and efficiently as every other non-disabled person. These subjective truths tend not to hold up as well in regard to fighting Social Justice; however, when used correctly, these truths can open up a world of possibility to understanding those that you wish to help. They can even serve to develop specialized plans of action involving those you intend to help. These plans would serve a specified demographic better than a generalized plan.

The blade that is Truth cuts down false arguments and mentalities. An overwhelming majority of problematic mentalities are based in ignorance regarding the central subject of the argument. Facts are essential to change. If no one knows exactly what the issue is, who can know the true root of the problem, let alone how to solve it. The blade clears away all discrepancies and misinformation, much like a machete in a rainforest. The navigation of the "jungle" that involves the adverse affairs of this world is treacherous; however Truth will continue to serve as an armament amidst these dangerous matters of contentment.

Comprising three of the four factors of Social Justice, we have defined Peace as the uniting quest of humanity, Love as the armor against the emotional attacks of adversity, and Truth as the blade that strikes down all fallacies. Though possibly the most substantial of the four components is Justice. Over the course of this paper, I have likened each component of Social Justice to a traditional component of a Knight's quest. Although, there is one component to a knight's quest that is absolutely paramount to their success: a steed. For the knight that

takes up the call of Social Justice, Justice itself acts as their steed. Justice functions as a vehicle for change, a compelling force that drives the collective vision of Peace. Much like Peace, there is no end in sight for the construct of Justice. In terms of the current social climate of the world, Justice will always be a relevant institution. Justice will always have a place in the fight for Social Justice itself. As a vehicle for change, Justice itself is the writing of a wrong, rather social, emotional, or physical. Much like a knight's steed enables it to take action and embark on their quest, Justice itself allows any practitioner to take action and embark on the journey of change. Without Justice, humans would lack the inspiration to continue fighting for change. When a criminal is sentenced for their transgressions or a flawed system is corrected, beginning to work in favor of those it was meant to benefit, those in the fight for change wish to continue down the path with their steed in tow. Justice is the most motivating of the four complements without a doubt.

Even after defining each of the four components of Social Justice, these individual components mean nothing without being joined together to work as a cohesive unit of societal evolution. These four constructs combine their individual might to form a powerhouse of metamorphosis. Social Justice is ultimately a quest, tackled by all who wish to protect the uniquely individual collective that is humanity. There is no way to guarantee that, one day, humanity's problems will be solved. In fact, I believe there will always be more work to do. Needless to say though, without such progressive work to be done, humanity would risk falling into a state of evolutionary stasis, an indifferent apathy that would stall the growth of the race itself.

The field of Social Justice holds some most disheartening work. Within the field, one will see the very worst humanity has to offer: lies, deceit, manipulation, discrimination, objectification, neglect, and even severe crime. There is no way to bypassing this reality and it is for that very reason the four components of Social Justice are truly substantial. No one human will ever be able to attack this work alone. There is a fifth, external element of Social Justice that is just as important while not as involved in defining the term as its four segments: community. The fifth and final element is the most hopeful aspect of Social Justice. It permits Social Justice to bring us together as a race and bind us under a hope for a better future. Whether for ourselves or those who come after us, though, most likely a combination of the both, there is no greater joy than the feeling that you're making a difference in the world.

This exercise was quite influential in giving me a starting point on defining Social Justice. There is no one definitive phrase or set of terms that can answer the question, "What is Social Justice?" It shall remain an individualistic concept for which one must answer themselves. Maybe there is no answer to this burning question, at least not that will hold true for the collective of humanity. These four terms are words that are spoken everyday though humanity never takes the time to truly and thoroughly define each of them. The more one contemplates the distinct definitions of these words, the more one realizes that their definitions are not distinct whatsoever. Each of these terms holds a spark of the other inside it, sparks that ignite the blazing inferno that is Social Justice. Every warrior must begin their quest with a vision (Peace); after which comes the fortification as one must don their armor (Love); for protection against false claims, misconceptions, and miscommunication one must bear their sword (Truth); finally, a knight must mount his steed (Justice) before charging off into the harsh, cold world to

enact change. Defining Social Justice is as hard as utilizing it. There are no shortcuts, there will be restless nights, there will come hardships, there will come a time when one feels as if they can't continue. It is important in those moments more than any that one utilize the four prong approach to Social Justice. A knight that undertakes the quest of Social Justice fights with the utmost honor as they begin to enact change and equity amongst their fellow humans.

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