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Applicative Justice

A Pragmatic Empirical Approach to Racial Injustice

By Naomi Zack



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About the Book

Naomi Zack pioneers a new theory of justice starting from a correction of current injustices. While the present justice paradigm in political philosophy and related fields begins from John Rawls's 1970 *Theory of Justice*, Zack insists that what people in reality care about is not justice as an ideal, but injustice as a correctable ill. For a way to describe real injustice and the society in which it occurs, Zack resurrects Arthur Bentley's key insight that government and law (or political life) is a constant process of contending interest groups throughout society. Bentley's main idea allows for a resolution of the contradiction between formal legal equality for U.S. minorities and post-civil rights practical inequality. Just law and unjust practice co-exist as a fact of political life. The correction of injustice in reality requires *applicative justice*, in a comparison between those who are treated unjustly with those who are treated justly, and the design of effective measures to equalize such treatment. Zack's theory of applicative justice offers a revolutionary reorientation of society's pursuit of justice, seeking to undo injustice in a practical and fully achievable way.

About the Author

Naomi Zack is professor of philosophy at the University of Oregon. She is author and editor of a dozen books, including *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide* (2015); *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy* (2011); *Ethics for Disaster* (2009).

Praise for the Book

"*Applicative Justice* shows how philosophical theories of ideal justice are unable to imagine or perceive the background conditions and mechanisms by which actual cases of injustice emerge. With a focus on racial injustice, Zack explores the works of both neglected and celebrated political theorists in order to locate better tools for normative investigations of injustice. Using these tools to understand the racial injustices we see today, as well as discourses about them, Zack guides us toward more adequate responses to them."

—Laurie Shrage, Florida International University

"Naomi Zack's newest book is a real tour de force. It does to ideal notions of distributive justice what Charles Mills's *The Racial Contract* did to ideal notions of the social contract. How does one fight for justice when the philosophical theories of justice are themselves unjust to Black people and people of color in general? Zack's notion of applicative justice, as well as her bold invitation to the reader to not just THINK about justice but DO justice, offers us an enlightened way to directly deal with the (white) elephant in the room that goes unnoticed due to an alleged (white) veil of ignorance."

—Brad Elliott Stone, Professor of Philosophy and Chair of African American Studies, Loyola Marymount University

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