



Principles of Social Justice

David Miller

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Social justice has been the animating ideal of democratic governments throughout the twentieth century. Even those who oppose it recognize its potency. Yet the meaning of social justice remains obscure, and existing theories put forward by political philosophers to explain it have failed to capture the way people in general think about issues of social justice. This book develops a new theory. David Miller argues that principles of justice must be understood contextually, with each principle finding its natural home in a different form of human association. Because modern societies are complex, the theory of justice must be complex, too. The three primary components in Miller's scheme are the principles of desert, need, and equality.

The book uses empirical research to demonstrate the central role played by these principles in popular conceptions of justice. It then offers a close analysis of each concept, defending principles of desert and need against a range of critical attacks, and exploring instances when justice requires equal distribution and when it does not. Finally, it argues that social justice understood in this way remains a viable political ideal even in a world characterized by economic globalization and political multiculturalism. Accessibly written, and drawing upon the resources of both political philosophy and the social sciences, this book will appeal to readers with interest in public policy as well as to students of politics, philosophy, and sociology.



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