

Dictionary of Now

# Nikita Dhawan, Christoph Möllers & Sarah Sharma: Justice

WELCOME

Bernd Scherer,  
Director Haus der Kulturen der Welt  
DE → EN

LECTURE

Social (In)Justice Warrior  
Sarah Sharma  
EN → DE

LECTURE

Das Gefühl von Gerechtigkeit  
Christoph Möllers  
DE → EN

LECTURE

Decolonizing Enlightenment:  
Transnational Justice in a Postcolonial World  
Nikita Dhawan  
EN → DE

DISCUSSION AND Q&A

moderated by Bernd Scherer  
EN → DE



The event will be held in English and German with simultaneous translation.

Auster restaurant will be open from 6pm on.

The concept of justice appears to have forfeited its position as a normative guiding principle in political discourse. At the same time, very few concepts have taken its place. Nikita Dhawan, Christoph Möllers, and Sarah Sharma discuss the history of the Enlightenment's ideals of justice and law against the background of today's increasing societal asymmetries and ask about concepts of justice within contemporary capitalist technoculture. What are the limits and boundaries of justice, where are they located, and how are they negotiated today? How is the concept of justice changing in times of growing global inequalities? And how universally must concepts of justice be conceived?

The political scientist Nikita Dhawan raises questions concerning a global civil society and a transnational concept of justice. In her lecture she illuminates the history of the Enlightenment with respect to its social necessity today. The legal scholar Christoph Möllers reflects on justice as a normative concept. He questions how the sense of injustice is echoed in contemporary law. The media theorist Sarah Sharma examines the social and technological parameters of contemporary injustice. She considers the extent to which global capitalism delivers and depends upon racialized and gendered forms of injustice, thus making it difficult to entertain the ideals of Western liberal democracy.

Social (In)Justice Warrior  
Sarah Sharma

Media theorist Sarah Sharma questions the tendency to cast the contemporary moment as uncivil; polarized between camps, tribes, parties, and other binary spatial configurations of competing echo chambers and their respective hashtags. A more appropriate assessment of the technological moment reveals a proliferation of unjustifiable claims of injustice by white nationalists and misogynistic trolls while claims of injustice, such as #metoo and other feminist and anti-racist forms of refusal, are deemed uncivil for not following dialogic protocols. In her lecture, Sharma will explore how the social experience of injustice is deeply intertwined with the technological in a way that is often

illegible according to the dictates of the liberal democratic imaginary. She will offer a profile of the emerging Social Injustice Warrior, a technocultural figure, and reveal how understanding his theories of technology are key to undoing him (in the name of justice).

SARAH SHARMA is Associate Professor of Media Theory (ICCIT) and the Director of the McLuhan Centre for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on feminist approaches to technology with a particular focus on issues related to labor and time. She is the author of *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (2014). Sarah is currently working on a new book about technology and the gendered politics of exit and refusal. This new work fits within one of the ongoing research projects at the McLuhan Centre concerned with invigorating McLuhan's media theory via feminist technology studies.

Das Gefühl von Gerechtigkeit

Christoph Möllers

We never truly come to grips with the concept of justice, but we are not about to let go. Justice is a value that has held up well in modern times. Whether we still believe in the “good” or even the “sacred” may be doubtful, but giving up any claim to justice would go too far. What else would we have left? And yet we do not know what justice means. We most likely just have a negative intuition; a sense of the unjust. Even this intuition is unreliable. It is related to stories and cases, not to the structures and organizations that decide questions of justice today. So not much remains of the idea of justice. It is a reflection on the state of affairs, and as such necessary, but contingent on the mode of application.

CHRISTOPH MÖLLERS is Professor of Public Law and Philosophy of Law at Humboldt University Berlin and permanent fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. His research is focused on German, European, and comparative constitutional law, democratic theory, and the theory of social norms. He was previously Professor of public law at the Universities of Münster and Göttingen, Emile Noël Fellow at New York University, and Visiting Professor at the CEU Budapest, Princeton University, and the Université Paris II to name a few. From 2011 to 2014 he was a judge by outside appointment at the Higher Administrative Court of Berlin-Brandenburg. He is the 2016 recipient of the Gotthold Wilhelm Leibniz Prize of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice in a Postcolonial World

Nikita Dhawan

The intellectual and political legacies of the Enlightenment endure in our times, whether we aspire to orient ourselves to them or contest their claims. In the face of oppression and inequality, the Enlightenment ideals of justice and rights offer a way out of domination towards freedom. However, as has been pointed out by scholars of postcolonial studies, the Enlightenment’s promise of attaining emancipation through the exercise of norms has instead also brought us the legacies of colonialism, slavery, genocide, and crimes against humanity. In light of these considerations, the lecture engages with the challenging question of whether norms of justice, human rights, and democracy enable disenfranchised communities. Or whether they simply reinforce relations of domination between those who are considered dispensers of justice, rights, and aid, and those who are coded as receivers? Tracing the ambivalent consequences of the European Enlightenment for the postcolonial world, Dhawan addresses the inbuilt challenge for politics today.

NIKITA DHAWAN is Professor of Political Science (Political Theory and Gender Studies) and Director of the Research Platform *Gender Studies: Identities – Discourses – Transformations* at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. Her publications include: *Impossible Speech: On the Politics of Silence and Violence* (2007), *Decolonizing Enlightenment: Transnational Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in a Postcolonial World* (ed., 2014), *Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy* (co-ed., 2015), *Negotiating Normativity: Postcolonial Appropriations, Contestations and Transformations* (co-ed., 2016), and *Difference that makes no Difference: The Non-Performativity of Intersectionality and Diversity* (ed., 2017). In 2007 she received the Käthe Leichter Award for outstanding achievements in the pursuit of women’s and gender studies and in support of the women’s movement and the achievement of gender equality.

Over the last hundred years the sciences—and the technologies they have generated—have shaped our conceptions of reality, our thought, and our languages. In the context of *100 Years of Now*, *Dictionary of Now* reflects on language's capacity to both depict and create reality. The Dictionary focuses on omnipresent terms that are central to the description of the deep-rooted changes of the present—but which in their current use are no longer able to grasp them.

What varieties and shifts of meaning lie at the root of these terms, what readings and subtexts do they harbor? What social, political, and cultural processes of transformation can be read from them? And how can they be sharpened and adjusted in order to generate scope for linguistic action? In a series of twelve discussions from 2015 to 2018, distinguished representatives from the sciences and the arts, from theory and practice, question the established meanings of selected terms, updating them against the background of their respective expertise.

A publication to be released in 2019 will bring together the key words and participants from the individual discussions in the series, establishing connections and allowing for new constellations of knowledge.

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