# TRADITIONAL VS. CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

| | Traditional / Liberal Social Justice | VS | Critical Social Justice |
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| **Roots / Origins** | Long-standing concept of fairness in society, **focused on equal rights**, opportunities, and treatment under the law, while promoting the common good. Aligns with classical liberal, Enlightenment, and religious traditions. Individual-focused and **reform-oriented.** | | Recent theoretical framework (late 20th century) based on **Marxist Critical Theory** (Frankfurt School) and **Postmodernism** (Foucault, Derrida etc.) applied to race, gender, sexuality, class and ability. Treats traditional liberalism as **insufficient Or complicit in oppression.** |
| **Key Elements** | • **Equal rights and opportunities** for individuals, procedural fairness, merit, and legal equality, regardless of identity.<br>• **Distributive justice** in a broad sense—fair allocation of benefits & burdens rooted in individual responsibility, charity & reforms.<br>• **Addressing poverty**, exploitation, or discrimination through reforms (civil rights, welfare, education, or labour protections) **preserving individual agency and universal human dignity**.<br>• **Gender** is tied to **biological sex.** | | • **Society is stratified by identity groups**, inequality embedded in "structures" of power, privilege, and oppression (systemic racism, heteronormativity etc.).<br>• **Justice** requires **dismantling systems** by deconstructing norms, language, institutions, and knowledge itself.<br>• **Equity** (equal outcomes by group); "**lived experience**" and knowledge from marginalised perspectives, take precedence over objective evidence or universal reason.<br>• **Activism** aims to **transform culture**, education, policy, and discourse (intersectionality, anti-racism or DEI).<br>• **Gender is socially constructed**, performative, may change over time, and is independent of biological sex. |
| **Unit of analysis** | **Centres Individuals**<br>Individualistic, focused on Universal rights, colour-blind and merit-based treatment. | | **Centres Identity Groups**<br>Collectivist, rooted in oppressor vs. oppressed binaries based on race, gender, etc., with power dynamics as the lens. |
| **View of society and inequality** | **Sees problems as fixable** through better laws, education, or individual virtue within existing institutions (**reformist,** often optimistic about liberalism) | | **Sees inequality as inherent and systemic** in **Western**/liberal structures, requiring ongoing disruption and **social transformation** (revolutionary or deconstructive)<br>Perpetual struggle |
| **Epistemology and truth** | Focused on **reason, evidence, science, rational critical thinking** and shared objectivity. | | Prioritizes subjective **"lived experience", moral relativism**, and critiques of "dominant" knowledge as power plays. |
| **Solutions** | • **Emphasises equality of opportunity**<br>• **Charity**, legal equality<br>• **Personal agency / responsibility.** | | • **Prioritizes equity of outcomes**<br>• **Group-based remedies** (e.g., affirmative action framed as reparations, two tier policing)<br>• **Perpetual struggle** against sources of oppression<br>• **Narrative control** and **institutional overhaul**. |
| **Tone and scope** | Often tied to **religious/moral virtue or liberal humanism.**<br>Applied equally across the globe. | | Explicitly **theoretical/academic**, conflict orientated, described as **"illiberal"** for its focus on group guilt or innocence and **resistance to dissent**.<br>**Critical lens is focused on Western Society** – anti-Whiteness, anti-Eurocentrism. |