

Teaching & Learning Guide for: Theorizing Social Change

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1 | AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

How do we remake our world into a new and better one? Philosophers have been surprisingly reticent on this question. Theories of justice tell us what an ideally just society would look like. Ethical theories tell us the morally right thing to do. But philosophers have virtually no such comparably systematic theories of social change, that is, theories telling us the *right way to bring about a just society*. An underlying interest in social change animates the growing number of what Sally Haslanger (2013) calls “ameliorative” projects that have taken root in the so-called ‘core’ areas of metaphysics, epistemology, and language, just as it has promoted greater attention to real-world oppression within ethics, moral psychology, aesthetics, social and political philosophy. This article shows that social change deserves to be recognized as an area of philosophical study in its own right.

2 | AUTHOR RECOMMENDS

“The Causes and Patterns of Change” (pp. 14-44) in Charles Harper and Kevin Leicht, (2018) *Exploring Social Change*, Taylor and Francis, Milton Park.

An accessible chapter that provides the social scientific perspective on processes of social change, and is useful for illustrating the scale and depth of transformative social change needed.

Wright, Erik Olin (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Verso, London.

One of the few texts in analytic philosophy that directly addresses the problem of social change, laying out a taxonomy of three main strategies (ruptural, interstitial, symbiotic) for change.

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Marx, Karl, & Friederich Engels. "The Communist Manifesto" (1848) In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), (2018) The Marx-Engels Reader, W. W. Norton & Company, New York.

The classic expression of why transformative social change is needed, along with a theory of how it can and will be brought about.

Freire, Paulo (1970/2000) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Bloomsbury, New York.

A canonical text drawing on Marxist and postcolonial theory to develop a model of the consciousness-raising that is key to processes of transformative change.

hooks, bell (1984) Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, South End Press, Cambridge MA.

One of the founding texts of Black feminist theory, presenting a theory of how to end sexist oppression, with emphasis on how it intersects with racist oppression and class exploitation.

Collins, Patricia Hill (1990/2000) Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Routledge, New York.

Another foundational text in Black feminist theory, which includes a model of the four domains of oppression and how they form an overarching matrix of domination.

Jaggar, Alison M. (1983) Feminist Politics and Human Nature. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MA.

A highly comprehensive overview of feminist political theory, with sections outlining four distinct feminist strategies for transformative social change.

Young, Iris Marion (2011). Responsibility for Justice. Oxford University Press, New York.

An extremely influential text arguing that individual agents bear forward-looking responsibility for collectively working with others to challenge structural injustice.

3 | ONLINE MATERIALS

Mobilizing Ideas

<https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com>.

A blog highlighting contemporary social movements and their efforts to secure transformative social change.

The Dig Radio

<https://thedigradio.com>.

A podcast featuring interviews with expert scholars specializing in anticapitalist, feminist, antiracist, environmentalist, and other perspectives on social change.

Forge Organizing

<https://forgeorganizing.org/>

A publication focusing on the ideas, methods, history, successes and limitations of progressive organizing.

Critical Resistance

<https://criticalresistance.org.>

An organization of scholar-activists aimed at abolishing the prison-industrial complex and envisioning a future in which prisons are no longer necessary.

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org.>

An association of international solidarity focusing on struggles across the globe, including Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Great Britain, and the South Pacific.

4 | SAMPLE SYLLABUS

Week I-II: What is transformative social change, and how might we bring it about?

Harper, C., & Leicht, K. (2018) "The Causes and Patterns of Change" (Chapter 2), *Exploring Social Change: America and the World*, Routledge.

Wright, E. O. (2010) "The Tasks of Emancipatory Science" (Chapter 2), *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Verso.

Jaggar, A. M. (1983) Excerpts from Chapters 7-10, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Rowman & Littlefield.

Freire, P. (1970/2000). Chapters 1-2, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Bloomsbury.

Weeks III-V: What needs to be changed?

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848/1972). The Communist Manifesto. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, W. W. Norton & Company.

Wright, E. O. (2010) "What's So Bad About Capitalism?" (Chapter 2), *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Verso.

hooks, b. (1984) "Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression" (Chapter 2), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, South End Press.

Beal, F. M. (1970). "Black Women's Manifesto; Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," In R. Morgan (Ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Random House.

Collins, P. H. (1990/2000) "Toward a Politics of Empowerment" (Chapter 12), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge.

Mills, C. W. (1997) Introduction and Chapter I, *The Racial Contract*, Cornell University Press.

Week VI: What is my role in transformative social change?

Young, I. M. (2004) "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice," *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 12(4), 365-388.

Zheng, R. (2018). "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice," *Ethical Theory & Moral Practice*, 21, 869– 885.

Chislenko, E. (2022). "The Role of Philosophers in Climate Change," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 8(4), 780-798.

5 | SEMINAR IDEA

Assign students or groups of students to each pick a case of an existing social movement, community organization, non-profit or advocacy group, state-sponsored institution, or some other collective effort (CE) to bring about transformative change. This case may be examined throughout the unit or switched out across the three sub-units.

Week I: Identify the strategy (or strategies) adopted by your CE. What are some examples of the tactics used by your CE? What have been the successes and failures of your CE, and why do you think they happened the way they did?

Compare your analysis with another student/group working on the same issue but through different strategy/tactics, or else using the same strategy/tactics but on a different issue.

Weeks II-IV: What is your CE trying to change? What would the philosophers we're studying think of its efforts? Is your CE addressing an issue of class, feminist, or antiracist struggle? If not, what are the intersections between your CE's issue(s) with gender, race, and class?

Week V: What is your role in the movement, or what could it be? What are the best role(s) you could adopt to make the best difference?

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