

Hellenic Roots of Justice and Inequality, and a Jewish Ideological Alternative in Economic Science, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (2023) David Vázquez-Guzmán, Ph. D.

Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez
Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Administración



Presentación preparada para el
Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Sociales
Paso del Norte 2023, UACJ

Outline I

- 1 General Overview
- 2 General Introduction
- 3 The Chapters
 - Chapter 1
 - Chapter 2
 - Chapter 3
 - Chapter 4
 - Chapter 5
- 4 Final Concluding Remarks
- 5 References

“ You Samaritans worship what you do not know;
we worship what we do know,
for salvation is from the Jews.”

(Jesus [c. 33 A.D.], in the Gospel of John 4:22)

Research Interests

One of my passions about economic research is its methodology. It is about what we think as economists, and what methodological perspectives we use. I like to wonder, I like to question the axiomatic frameworks we impose in our models. The purpose is to engage in serious conversations about what we do, and to think 'out of the box', with the purpose to enrich our own research.

In this regards, I write about two topics, and those are rationality and inequality, and today I will talk about the last one.

A book has already been published this year named "Hellenic Roots of Justice and Inequality and a Jewish Ideological Alternative in Economic Science", after years of being in editorial process, and it was a continuation of the methodological part of my doctoral dissertation (2008).

Overall, I argue that very pervasive view of justice of Aristotle-Aquinas-Marx is not needed, and is neither a value-free statement about equality, so alternatives less inflammatory must be considered, like the Jewish one that I propose.

Book Structure

The book has two parts, with 3 chapters each. The first part talk about philosophy and history of justice, while the second is about methodology of justice in economic science, and some conclusions.

The first part discusses and compares two traditions, the Hellenic one, which is ethereal and I think is the one we used mostly, with the Jewish one, which is very pragmatic.

The second part covers the majority of nowadays known distributive justice approaches in economics, by presenting a taxonomy of them with a critical point of view, by finishing the discussion with a use of some of their concepts, and highlighting contradictions and tautologies of such perspectives.

Book Index

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Part I: PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL DISCUSSIONS OF JUSTICE

CHAPTER 1: DISTRIBUTIONAL ETHICS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES:
ARISTOTLE, MARX, AND THE ANTISEMITIC VIEW OF JUSTICE

CHAPTER 2: JUSTICE IN TRADITIONAL ECONOMICS: THE HELLENIC
PHILOSOPHICAL LEGACY AND THE ALTERNATIVE PRAGMATIC JEWISH
RIGHTEOUSNESS

CHAPTER 3: EVOLUTION AND APPLICATION OF THE JEWISH
TRADITION TO DISTRIBUTIONAL JUSTICE

Part II: METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS OF JUSTICE APPROACHES

CHAPTER 4 MODERN JUSTICE DISTRIBUTIVE APPROACHES IN
ECONOMIC METHODOLOGY: A PRAGMATIC CRITIQUE

CHAPTER 5 ABSTRACT MARXISM IN ECONOMICS: A PARTICULAR
TYPOLOGY OF INEQUALITY

FINAL COMMENTS

Book Contents

In the first chapter, I discuss heavily the historical roots of the idea of inequality, which is based on the Aristotelian conception of justice as equality of result, then repeated by Marx, and with a twist of Jewish hatred.

The second discusses the philosophical basis of the egalitarian value judgement we have today (e.g. Bentham, Descartes, the Soviets, Rawls, Dworkin, Sen, etc.), and conclude that all of them are related with the Aristotelian idea.

In the third, I discuss the evolution of the Jewish tradition in regards to inequality, and I conclude that the version we know today from the Jewish side, which is known as the Rabbinic Theology, is not different from the Aristotelian-Aquinas-Marxian perspective, and I suggest to use a more ancient emphatic devices to alleviate injustice from the same Jewish tradition.

The fourth tackle in detail how different strands of justice clash one another, and I offer a solution for that, while the the fifth one critiques the Sen's capability approach using the work of Wright (1987).

General Introduction I

Today, the world is unequal: or at least people are getting serious about how unequal the world is.

In my earlier research, I talked about the incoming waves of equality-minded interests (Vazquez-Guzman, 2008, 2011). This was before the violent uprising which started in Tunisia in 2010, a movement that was known as the “Arab Spring”, and also before the violent protests in the US against social inequality in 2011, known as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. I talked about this even before that the new set of politicians elaborate on income inequality and social justice as essential part of their speeches, where individuals such as Senator Bernie Sanders in the US called himself a “democratic socialist”, which was something unthinkable for American standards.

Nowadays, at the end of the 2020 decade, there is no politician (or ideological leader, or ‘influencer’) having a different electoral platform than social justice.

General Introduction II

I mentioned elsewhere that the topic of justice was so important that even the Catholic tradition evolved recently to accommodate their ideals to this new revival for the care of social justice:

“[I]n a series of statements to the world media in 2008, the Catholic Church announced a set of seven new “sins” through its Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary. These include not only practices such as drug abuse, environmental pollution, or genetic manipulation, but also of interest in this case three additional “obscene” practices related with human destitution, such as causing poverty, social inequality and injustice, and accumulating excessive wealth” (Vazquez-Guzman, 2011, p. 26).

I wonder if that ‘interest’ was not to manipulate the public opinion in regards to the Church’s scandals.

General Introduction III

In any case, the reaction was fierce at the beginning of this millennium, as if it were the proletariat rebelling against the bourgeoisie two centuries ago. There were expressions of discontent everywhere in the media.

The economists' world was no exception for this trend, so this issue was revived in 2014 with an old tale that inequality today was produced by the oppression of rich people in the past (Piketty, 2014): not surprisingly, a "Robin Hood" type of policy was prescribed.

Today, the fact that our world is economically more unequal is more visible, and traditional media has been "informing" us about this fact. But this is no longer our only source of news: the rapid increase in social networking has made this issue more visible.

Chapter 1: Essence of the Marxist Argument

In economics and all social sciences, due to the Aristotelian heritage, it is normal to assume that the word inequality entails some preconception of a non-ideal situation, and according to that school, that problem arises in a dynamic process. This traditional idea usually attaches inequality to some sense of injustice. On these grounds, the legacy of the Marxist tradition, which is one of the most frequently invoked in the context of social deprivation, explains the existence of social inequality as a product of a continuous process of exploitation of the poor by the rich. That view includes a value judgement that has an underlying consideration of inequality as unfairness, a view that has been followed in the justice and its consideration in economics literature by Rawls (1971) and Sen (1973, 1992, 2000, 2009) respectively.

I discuss in this chapter that the Hellenic concept of inequality is inflammatory, demagogic, and discriminative towards those who (having used as a base the Jewish community) earn their money honestly, and because all of this, this concept precludes individuals to do something for their fellow, by consoling themselves by blaming either the rich or the government of the lack of performance, in a perennial vicious complaint, that is more like a societal tantrum.

Aristotle and the 'Rabbinic' Marx

Marx was prolific in establishing a negative view of the Jewish practice of material richness, which he saw as hypocritical from his own people.

Yet, modern writers assume that Karl's father was "not religious" and they tend to portray a more benign account of Marx by completely ignoring his antisemitic work (Mandel, 1987).

Marx knew clearly what he was doing when he criticized his own people, yet he did that with particular Hellenized schools of Protestant and Catholic religion and also with Hellenized Jewish ideologies embedded in the Rabbinic theology he was trained in and used to.

Extreme Aristotelian 'Justice': Marx

Marx inherited from Aristotle the pejorative view of wealth, even a charitable person was a vicious one.

That was in line also with the Rabbinic tradition, because they saw 'the wealthy' as people from the Sanhedrin.

But in Old Jewish tradition, prudent man could be rich.

Protestantism from Marx time, was also critical towards capital accumulation, so wealth was 'demonized' by Marx's accounts, and that is the today's common academic discourse.

Communism: A Dense Cloud of Social Responsibility

Now, many intellectuals are tempted to follow the idealistic fashion to vilify the rich with another subtle purpose, because in that setting, curiously, everything that needs to be done to solve social challenges is outside the individual that preaches injustice.

The issue that people are not following Marx because anti-Semitic sentiments today might be the case, but still that idealistic smoke screen precludes believers to do something for society while they wait 'somebody else' to do the right thing.

A Comparison with Ancient Jewish Tradition: We Are Responsible of Our Society

Originally in the Torah, only men's hearts are those responsible to make decisions about the use of wealth, so material abundance is a device to do good or to do wickedly. Wealth is only an instrument.

The essence of the Jewish Law is simple, it includes four commandments to respect God, and six to respect others, and everyone should abide equally. In the rest of the law, there are misdemeanors, and more serious offences such as felonies, but treatment was irrespective of social and economic status.

Person's character, not material wealth is the one producing social injustice, so prophets denounce bad behaviour, having forgotten the original sense of the Law to help people in need. (The Book of Isaiah 43:8; 56:10; The Book of Zephaniah 1:17; The Gospel of Matthew 15:14 (NIV, 1993))

The calling is towards treat others as ourselves, continuously, constantly, as a sort of social responsibility.

Chapter 2: Marx, Kant, and Bentham, Hellenic Influences

There are a lot of discussions in distributive justice approaches in economics, even in social sciences, yet somehow, all of them point towards more or less the same sources.

Strict egalitarians are the extreme Aristotelian soldiers, and they were fuelled by the extinct Soviet Union.

A 'diluted' version of strict egalitarians are portrayed by followers of John Rawls, with his Kantian (metaphysical) devices. Dworkin, Parfit, and others, follow him at some extent.

Another strand of Hellenic influence, are those following Jeremy Bentham, were his advocates, Mill father and Mill son, try to accommodate their ideal to a moral system.

Sen's capability approach is a mixture of the previous three focuses.

A Contrast: A 'Neighbor' Tax

Taking as a basis the Old Jewish tradition, a transfer mechanism should be established and encouraged, as to distribute among everyone the responsibility for individuals in disgrace.

Taxes should be redirected, and some of them should be used consciously to alleviate immediate fellows in need, widows, orphans, sick people, aliens, and all vulnerable individuals.

Try to avoid the 'tragedy of the commons' where no one cares about the other, solve the problem of collecting information about people in need, and avoid the electoral use of social programs, to make responsible all individuals in society.

Today's technology make this possible.

Chapter 3: Jewish Knowledge, Rabbinic Custom and Institutional Supervision

For those interested in Jewish detail about distributive justice under that umbrella, and why today's understanding of Rabbinic approach is very similar to that of Aristotle, the first part of this chapter make and historical account of the evolution of this school.

Once that is established the difference, a recovering from the Old Jewish tradition portrayed in the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible), is then presented.

To help each other is the main focus of this tradition. Jesus of Nazareth repeated this, and the Catholic tradition dispersed it again by Aquina's recovering of Hellenic sources.

Supervised social alleviating transfers should be local, expeditious, to a known person, non-ethereal in nature, and all of that, together, constructs social 'righteousness', which is indeed social 'justice'.

Chapter 4: Modern Distributive Approaches Taxonomy

Evolution of the word 'equality' as 'justice'.

Discussions of value judgements of different schools, which are not neutral or 'value-free'.

Libertarian neoclassical view seems to be absent of equality preferences, but that is not the case, because the equality idea is assumed at the beginning.

Differences between poverty, inequality, and destitution terminology.

A detailed discussion, proper for researchers with knowledge of economic methodology, and contrasted all those approaches with the Jewish social responsibility perspective.

Chapter 5: Wright (1987) and His Taxonomy of Inequality: A Biased Effort

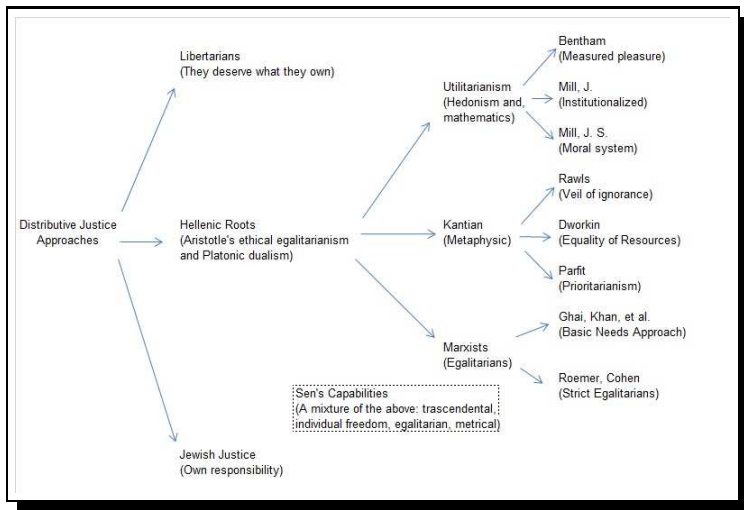
Abstract concepts of inequality, the same tale of historical materialism in the economic dictionary.

Missing individuality, a forced society constructed first by agglomerations and not by collection of individuals.

Attributes and processes, a system of justice.

Using Wright's typology to debunk Sen's capability approach, a fuzziness problem.

Main Distributive Justice Approaches in Economics



Concluding Remarks I

I touched on very sensitive issues that somehow I feel have been forgotten in the distributional ethics of social justice. Aristotle is a very much cited resource on justice matters, where an equal distribution is assumed always fair beyond any doubt.

The Marxist legacy has permeated heavily in social sciences where the poor is considered not only destitute, but also “abandoned” in a metaphysical sense. This issue makes regrettably the case for the myriad of preachers, social activists, and really numerous individuals who claim that criticizing the system is a much needed task, yet unfortunately, that activity only pollute social communication and not much is done to help those in need.

I sustain as well that the Aristotelian-Marxist tradition of equality-fairness eludes the individual responsibility to do something to help others in need, then this Hellenic axiomatization shall be completely rejected both because of the tainted racist’s origins, and also because of the perennial state of elucubration that indeed induces in any social policy design, and therefore should be superseded by a more pragmatic approach as the one is presented clearly in the old Jewish tradition written in the Torah.

Concluding Remarks II

Do something towards people in need... not just 'think' on something to solve the issue of inequality in this world. Not just the rich or the government should be responsible to tackle the problem, we are responsible, and we are behind.





Gracias!!

david.vazquez@uacj.mx

Bibliography I

- Aristotle. (335 BC [1980]). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. (D. Ross, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holy Bible: From the Ancient Eastern Text (1968 ed.). (1939). (G. M. Lamsa, Trans.) San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.
- Holy Bible: New International Version. (1993). Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan.
- Lamsa, G. M. (1939). *Gospel Light: A Revised Annotated Edition* (1999 ed.). (J. Magiera, Ed.) Covington, GA: The Aramaic Bible Society Inc.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Original Edition 2013 ed.). (A. Goldhammer, Trans.) Cambridge/London, Massachusetts/England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Maccoby, H. (2006). *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (Routledge Jewish Studies Series ed.). (O. Leaman, Ed.) London and New York: Routledge.
- Mandel, E. (1987). Marx, Karl Heinrich. In J. Eatwell, M. Milgate, & P. Newman (Eds.), *The New Palgrave: a Dictionary of Economics*. London: Macmillan Press Limited.
- Marx, K. (1841 (1902)). *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. In Marx-Engels Collected Works Volume 1
- Marx, K. (1844). *On the Jewish Question* (First Published: February, 1844 in *Deutsch-Franzsische Jahrbcher* ed.). Marxists Internet Library. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>
- Marx, K. (1861). *Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (From the 1941 German edition, and the 1973 English version. ed.). (M. Nicolaus, Trans.) London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/grundrisse.pdf>
- Marx, K. (1875). *Critique of the Gotha Program*. In K. Marx, & F. Engels, K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works, Vol. II* (M. English translation in Foreign Language Publishing House, Trans., 1938 ed.). New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, K. (1887). *Das Kapital: A Critique of Political Economy (Vol. I)*. (F. Engels, E. E. https://www.marxists.org/archive/., Eds., S. Moore, & E. Aveling, Trans.) Mscow, USSR: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm>
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto* (From the English edition of 1888, edited by Friedrich Engels ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/61/61.txt>

Bibliography II

- Ochser, S., & Kohler, K. (1901). Nicodemus. In I. Singer (Ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. IX, pp. 299-300). New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company. Retrieved from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11525-nicodemus>
- Rawls, J. (1958). Justice as Fairness. *Philosophical Review*, 67.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. K. (1973). *On Economic Inequality* (Second edition (1997). ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sen, A. K. (1992). *Inequality Reexamined* (1995 Edition ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. K. (2000). Social Justice and the Distribution of Income. In A. B. Atkinson, & F. Bourguignon (Eds.), *Handbook of Income Distribution*. Amsterdam: North Holland.
- Sen, A. K. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Toy, C. H., & Kohler, K. (1901). Joseph of Arimathea. In I. Singer (Ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Vol. VII, pp. 256-257). New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company. Retrieved from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8815-joseph-of-arimathaea>
- Vazquez-Guzman, D. (2008). *Measurement of Income Inequality in Mexico: Methodology, Assessment and Empirical Relationship with Poverty and Human Development* (Doctoral Dissertation ed.). Stirling, UK: University of Stirling. doi:<http://hdl.handle.net/1893/446>
- Vazquez-Guzman, D. (2011). *Measurement of Income Inequality in Mexico: Empirical Applications and the Capability Approach* (Coleccion INCISO, Vol. 1. ed.). Ciudad Jurez, Chih., Mxico: Subdireccin de Publicaciones: UACJ.
- Vazquez-Guzman, D. (2015). Ethical Issues in Key Aspects of Economic Development: Rationality and Justice. In K. Ruziev, & N. Perdakis (Eds.), *Development and Financial Reform in Emerging Economies* (SCEME Studies in Economic Methodology ed.). London, UK: Pickering & Chatto Publishers Ltd.
- Vazquez-Guzman, D. (Forthcoming, 2021). *Hellenic Roots of Justice and Inequality and a Jewish Ideological Alternative in Economic Science*.
- Wright, E. O. (1987). Inequality. In J. Eatwell, M. Milgate, & P. Newman (Eds.), *The New Palgrave: a Dictionary of Economics* (Vol. 2, pp. 815-819). London: Macmillan Press Limited. David Vazquez-Guzman