

12 Capitalism, Socialism, and Justice: Reflections on Rawls' Theory of Justice

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SUMMARY

Some key features of a Marxist critique of Rawls' theory of justice are articulated and probed. Without challenging Rawls' fundamental ideals of equal liberty and an equality of self-respect, it is argued that only in a socialist society could such ideals be reasonably approximated. Rawls' own assumptions of what constitute realistic social expectations are in conflict with his own principles of justice. If society must be as Rawls pictures it, then his principles of justice can have not even approximate application.

Marxists believe that John Rawls' conception of justice and his social theory generally suffers from ignoring political, social and, most fundamentally, economic realities.¹ It is supposed to be an account which takes into consideration relevant empirical facts and what substantive social theories tell us about man and society, but it in reality ignores central facts about the way societies work, which, if taken to heart (or so the claim goes), would make it impossible for Rawls to articulate his theory in the way he does.

In seeing what is involved here, I want to turn to a consideration of some explicitly Marxist discussions of liberty and inequality, for they bring forcefully to our attention the kind of claims that Marxists believe the liberal tradition ignores and indeed, they claim, cannot properly accommodate. Rawls regards such matters as belonging to political sociology and therefore (*sic*) not in his purview; a theory of justice, he tells us, 'must not be mistaken for a theory of the political system' (1971: 227). Moral philosophy should describe 'an ideal arrangement, comparison with which defines a standard for judging actual institutions, and indicates what must be maintained to justify departures from it' (*ibid.*). Yet an ideal system, which can provide a systematic guide to action,

must have a clear conception of what the actual possibilities for change are – something Rawls himself stresses – and this requires knowing how things are and what the mechanisms of change are. Rawls' own assumption about the inevitability of classes reflects an awareness of the relevance of such considerations, but then in articulating standards such considerations of political sociology cannot be so cavalierly set aside (Nielsen, 1978d; Macpherson, 1978).

What are the kinds of consideration these Marxists bring to the fore that are allegedly so damaging to liberalism and, presumably, to Rawls' account? (Crick, 1972: 601–2) One of the most crucial things to do, Marxists contend, is to attain a clear understanding of what causes and sustains inequality. A standard Marxist contention is that the underlying causes of inequality are to be located in the social relations of production rooted in a given society's distinctive mode of production. One's class identity is principally determined by one's relationship to the ownership and control of the means of production and inequalities are rooted in class differences; the demand for equality, where it is both sensible and thorough, is the demand for the abolition of classes (Engels 1966, chaps. 9–11). The social relations emerging out of the organization of material production provide us with an understanding of what the inequalities will be like, what injustices they will generate and what social meaning these inequalities will have for the members of that society. In this connection it should be further noted, as Berch Berberoglu well remarks, 'that Marx was not interested in describing the differential ranking of individuals along various dimensions in society, or for that matter the measuring of consequences of class inequality, *per se*. Rather, his interest lay in digging into the root causes of class inequality' (1976–1977: 68). Marx wanted to lay bare the laws of motion of capitalist society, or, if that is too metaphorical, the fundamental dynamics of structural change of capitalist societies 'within the framework of the larger dynamics of social change in the analysis of the evolutionary movement of total societies in the historical development process' (ibid.). Though we should also keep in mind in this context that the understanding of these dynamics and understanding of the underlying causes of class inequality were also linked, for Marx and for Marxists, with a concern for human emancipation. Theory is not to be separated from practice. For Marx, the essential thing was to identify and study the primary motive force of fundamental social transformations in successive modes of production within their broader historical contexts (ibid.). It is within such a framework that Marxist theories of class inequality should be understood.

Both classical liberals and classical socialists would assent to Rawls' underlying principle (fundamental assumption) that all human beings

have a right to equal respect and concern. In accordance with that principle (assumption) institutions are to be constructed such that they reflect that conception of a human being and a human life. The good of self-respect is of such fundamental importance in morality that the ideal of a perfectly just society – or so liberals and socialists believe – is that of a society in which that good must be achievable for all and the conditions for its attainment must be equally available to all. In that sense it must be shared equally. Even Rawls' first principle of justice, the equal liberty principle, is instrumental to the principle of equal respect. It is principally because self-respect is so important that liberty has the importance it has. [Autonomy and self-respect are inextricably linked.]

Though classical liberals such as Locke and John Stuart Mill had this concern for liberty and for self-respect, they were also concerned to defend bourgeois property rights. Indeed, for Locke, this was a very fundamental concern. Principles of justice and the institutions supporting them must be designed so as to protect private property. Locke, particularly in striking out against the system of feudal and aristocratic privileges, closely linked a concern for liberty with capitalism, with the treating as inviolable of the right to private property. (Recall that Rousseau, for all his differences with Locke and his egalitarianism, thought of private property as sacred and as inviolable. As Andrew Levine (1976) and Louis Althusser (1972, part 2) have seen, he was the perfect bourgeois.) It was, Locke believed, the bourgeois order, as against an Aristocratic one, which established the conditions of self-respect for all and an equality of liberty, but in doing so inequalities in the economic sphere were taken to be inevitable and need not be, he believed, unjust. Mill, though more ambivalently, accepted similar conclusions. Rawls, though he puts stringent limits on the economic inequalities that are allowable, follows suit. Yet, these liberal thinkers are defenders of liberty and of the critical importance of an equality not only of liberty but also of self-respect. Here there must be equality and this, for Rawls, requires an equality of citizenship and of political and legal rights. However, he also believes as did his liberal predecessors, that such an equality is perfectly compatible with the system of private property of capitalism and with some rather steep economic inequalities. Political equalities and equal civil liberties do not require economic equality. People suffering from economic disadvantages, they believe, can still be politically equal to those with greater wealth and consequent power.

Socialists have responded by claiming that such a belief rests on an illusion. There is no attaining equal liberty and an equality of self-respect without at least rough economic equality. The realities of capitalism, both *laissez-faire* and modern, make impossible the attaining of equal liberty and

human autonomy. Socialists argue that contemporary libertarian defenders of liberty and opponents of egalitarianism tend, in effect, 'to reduce liberty, in their elemental loyalties, to their own market-place activity' (Sklar, 1977: 103). It becomes 'the mask for a narrow self-interest destructive of community' and of genuine liberty. Liberty becomes in effect the privilege of the few; and the ideology of the priority of liberty, in such libertarian hands, becomes a device for manipulating the mass of the people into an acceptance of their own inferior status and exploitation. Liberty arrayed against equality undermines genuine liberty, i.e., human autonomy, the capacity of people to control and direct their own lives.

Most liberals, as well as contemporary *realpolitik* defenders of corporate capitalism, want capitalism to survive. Rawls believes that capitalism is compatible with what he takes to be a reasonable form of equality, though, as we have seen, this 'equality' sanctions economic inequalities. The more unqualified and unabashed defenders of capitalism, by contrast, assume capitalism's incompatibility with equality and attack egalitarianism. Some of them, particularly those fascinated by an ideology of *realpolitik*, wonder if capitalism can long survive without a curtailment of civil liberties. There is the trilateralist fear that we have had too much democracy.² Their concern is with whether, given all the demands on the system emanating from various democratic impulses, society is becoming ungovernable. That is to say, they fear that the system of capitalist privileges is threatened and the capitalist order is to some degree becoming destabilized. Their primary concern, of course, is for the survival of capitalism.

The demand for equality, translated into the concrete, is the demand of oppressed minorities, of women, and of other partially disfranchised groups for equality of opportunity, equality before the law, and self-determination; it means greater power for groups other than the corporate capitalists in determining the purposes and structure of the economic and political system; and it involves the struggles of the 'working class generally to redistribute income, determine working conditions, and control the investment and market system in the interests of those now without property' (Sklar, 1977: 93; see as well Lichtman, 1970). To the extent that such a demand for equality would not put in jeopardy the institution of private property, Locke would favour many of these equalities; certainly Mill, in spite of his worries about the uneducated classes ruling tyrannically and in ignorance, would also be for many of these equalities. Rawls in principle would also support many of them; they capture in concrete terms much of his 'moderate egalitarianism', though no doubt he would have some Millian reservations about the working class determining working conditions, the control of investment and the market system in their own

interests (Duncan, 1973; Duncan and Grey, 1979). Where they all would most evidently balk is over working class control of capital, though even here, we should remember, Mill came ambivalently to favour socialism (Arenson, 1979).

These liberals, however, are all also prepared to accept considerable inequalities in the interests of capitalist conceptions of efficiency, i.e., a society socioeconomically organized along the systematic rationales of capitalism. Furthermore they also believed – Mill more ambivalently than Locke or Rawls – that a capitalist socioeconomic order could support liberties and could be just, even with its inequalities and its system of class relations and class domination.

Rawls is not an apologist for the capitalist order and he does not even see himself as a defender of that order, though certainly he is no critic of it. He, as we noted initially, sees himself as doing something which is far more abstract and more logically fundamental than such critiquing or defending. Moreover, he views what he is doing as being neutral with respect to such political argumentation. But he does think that capitalism can be compatible with an equality of self-respect, equal liberty for all and a reasonable form of equality, though in specifying what that is, he is willing to accept as just, given the circumstances of life, extensive class-based differences in life prospects. In such a way, he inadvertently provides an ideological defence of a revisionist version of a capitalist society with a human face, i.e., capitalist society with revisionist liberal commitments.

More straightforward and self-conscious defenders of capitalism will argue that 'capitalist property rights comprise the essence of liberty' and that 'capitalist liberty necessarily produces and requires inequality. That is the price of liberty' (Sklar, 1977: 93). They believe that egalitarian movements, if they establish their aims, would harm capitalist development by, among other things, undermining the capitalist incentive to invest and would lead to government intervention which would erode capitalist liberties, i.e., their ability to control their marketplace activity.³ Moreover, once the ideology of egalitarianism is in place, there are no grounds, where its normative assumptions are accepted, for stopping short of socialism. Egalitarianism is the mortal enemy of capitalism and must be undermined if capitalism is to be stable. The pressing by the lower classes and the various disenfranchised for a greater effective realization of their civil liberties will tend toward political turbulence and will be a destabilizing factor for capitalism. Thus it generates 'too much democracy' for the stabilizing of a bourgeois democracy subservient to a capitalist socioeconomic order. Such egalitarianism and the commitment to democracy that goes with it must be resisted.

These self-styled tough-minded defenders of capitalism have come to realize that capitalism is not only incompatible with equality but it is incompatible with democracy as well, where democracy is taken to mean, as it should be taken to mean, 'the people's self-determination in political, economic and social affairs' (Sklar, 1977: 96). With a decent education and the enhanced autonomy that goes with it and starting with the classical liberal (and socialist) commitment to equal liberty and equal self-respect, working-class struggles for such liberties, if extensive, would make the bourgeois democracies unstable; the actual exercise of such liberties would destroy them. To protect capitalism, an ideology must be developed which splits off a commitment to justice from egalitarian justice. The best thing to do is to make 'egalitarian justice', à la Flew (1976, 1978), into a contradiction in terms and to break the historical and at least putatively conceptual link between equality, fraternity, and liberty. Liberty and freedom, by persuasive definition, must be reduced principally to market freedoms and to a commitment to the protection of property rights to the unimpeded exercise of money-making, i.e., capital accumulation. To achieve this a liberty-equality dichotomy is an essential ideological instrument (Dahrendorf, 1968: 151-214; Hayek 1960, Ch. 6). The important thing ideologically is to picture as irrational or as benighted attempts to portray freedom which is distinct from the much prized bourgeois negative liberty from the constraining hand of the state or any other institution. This ideological work is particularly urgent because the nonbourgeois tendency is to take liberty and equality as indivisible, where the free development of each is seen as the condition for the attainment of liberty and full justice (Sklar, 1977). Such egalitarians must be portrayed by such bourgeois ideologists as either irrational or utopian or, at the very least, as hopelessly confused conceptually. This, such defenders of capitalism recognize, is essential in the ideological battle to protect capitalism.

However, if underlying our moral thinking, as was the case for Mill and for Rawls, is a belief – and indeed a belief as a fundamental moral postulate – in equal liberty and equal self-respect, there is a real problem about whether in our historical circumstances a capitalist order can be just. Consider Ronald Dworkin's (1975: 533) expression of Rawls' postulate: namely the claim that all human beings 'have a right to equal respect and concern in the design of political institutions'. How is it possible to achieve anything like this under capitalism? If we are committed to a society where human beings are treated with equal concern and respect, where their lives are taken to count, and taken to count equally, and where they are to have equal liberties, it is a very real problem whether justice and capitalism,

equal liberty and capitalism, full and equal moral autonomy and capitalism are compatible. Rawls believes that such compatibilities obtain or at least can obtain, but his socialist critics may very well be closer to the mark in denying this. (Seeking an exact reading of 'equal moral autonomy' is not going to make that problem go away.)

The central claim of these critics is that if Rawls is right in linking justice with equal liberty, then it is impossible to attain such justice in a capitalist society. The class and exploitative nature of such societies, the inegalitarianism required by such societies, make such liberty an unrealizable ideal. Liberty requires political equality and political equality requires rough economic equality. Nothing like that is achievable in capitalist societies or even approximatable. It is only by being blind to the facts about capitalism – to the facts of political sociology – and by ignoring the structural requirements of the capitalist system, that Rawls can believe that such an egalitarian justice is achievable in a capitalist society.

I shall in (I) through (V) below trot out some of the considerations that socialists have appealed to to bolster their above claims.

I SOCIAL DESCRIPTION: *DE FACTO* INEQUALITIES UNDER CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM

While remembering that interpretive and explanatory elements so deeply infiltrate social description that no sharp distinction between them can be made for any extended bit of discourse, it still remains the case that we can usefully distinguish between social description and social explanation and interpretation. It is with the former that I shall be principally concerned in (I). I shall be concerned to assemble some of the facts that are at least *prima facie* difficult for Rawls' theory of justice or indeed for any liberal theory of justice.

The inequalities under capitalism in Canada and the United States and other capitalist countries, including such progressive ones as Sweden and Holland, are staggering. In the United States – and the statistics do not significantly differ in other capitalist countries – the 'top 5 per cent of all families receive almost as much income as the bottom 40 per cent' and 'the top 1 per cent of all adults own more than 60 per cent of the nation's corporate wealth' (Edwards *et al.*, 1972: 206). What is doubly disturbing is that, popular mythology to the contrary notwithstanding, inequalities in the distribution of wealth are not lessening but have remained stable throughout the postwar period (*ibid.*, pp. 209–10). In the period between 1947 and 1969 US Census Bureau figures show that 'the poorest 20 per

cent of all families have consistently received less than 6 per cent of total personal income while the richest 20 per cent have gotten over 40 per cent (*ibid.*, p. 209). On paper, the tax structure will to a certain extent readjust in favour of the poor, but, with exemptions and sales tax and the like, taxes do little to reduce income inequality. Indeed it may very well be that they increase it. What is undeniable is that the general wealth of the society is starkly unequal: the wealthiest 1 per cent own 31 per cent of the total wealth and 61 per cent of corporate stock. Talk of people's capitalism is nonsense for, while in the United States 30 million own shares in a nation of over 200 million, still 'the vast bulk of corporate stock is owned by a very few people' (*ibid.*, p. 211). In 1966 fewer 'than 2 per cent of all tax-payers received 74 per cent of all dividends and 76 per cent of all capital gains' (*ibid.*, p. 213). Moreover, the United States is not an atypical capitalist country. The pattern is very similar elsewhere.

In North America, we have based many of our expectations and not a little of our social policy on a belief in social mobility. Be patient, work hard, be thrifty and don't rock the boat and, if not you, your children or at least your grandchildren will make it. The key to emancipation, it is widely believed, is through equality of educational opportunity. But this is largely a myth. There has, with the changing nature of the work force, been some movement from blue-collar jobs to white-collar jobs, but it remains the case that in 1962, '71 per cent of the sons of white-collar workers were themselves white-collar workers, while only 37 per cent of the sons of the blue-collar workers and 23 per cent of the sons of farm workers (farm owners and employees combined) had white-collar jobs' (*ibid.*, p. 217).

We should further recognize that money is a kind of god in our societies. It gives rise to all sorts of inequalities: inequalities in privilege, political influence, educational opportunity, status and, most centrally, power. These inequalities exist alongside and reinforce and in turn are reinforced by inequalities in income and wealth. We should recognize that it is their vastly greater wealth that gives the capitalist class their enormous political power in our societies. They select, as in the case of the Trilateral Commission selecting Carter, the political candidates for the major parties, often from their own ranks, for example, Trudeau, Sharp, and Nelson Rockefeller, and support them handsomely in their political campaigns. This class, even more so in the United States than in Canada or Europe, owns and controls the mass media, which in turn push such candidates and generally have a disproportionate influence over public opinion. Furthermore, besides financing political campaigns, they are a powerful lobby in the various parliaments of capitalist countries. Perhaps most importantly, in terms of inequalities in power, this miniscule

capitalist class (about 2 per cent of the population) own and control the giant corporations that make many important decisions about allocation of resources and distribution of income. Such control enables them to have a powerful influence on the actions of municipal and provincial governments and even on small or middle-size federal governments by their ability to locate and relocate their enterprises wherever a favourable business and political environment exists. In short, we see that inequalities in wealth are a source of great inequalities in power, political control, and influence in our societies. It deeply effects the liberty of the disadvantaged, that is their ability to control and direct the decisions made over their own lives. This limits and weakens any kind of effective democracy: people are simply not in control of their own affairs, though some of them are under the illusion they have such a control. The short of it is that the distribution of income is highly unequal and it is not becoming more equal over time (*ibid.*, p. 207). This leads to inequalities in other areas of our lives, the net effect of which is to limit sharply our freedom, in some of the more extreme instances to undermine our self-respect and to make quite impossible a full human flourishing where there is a maximum satisfaction of the wants and needs of everyone or even the vast majority of people. We not only have a society which is alienated in some of its most central activities, we have a thoroughly unjust society.

II AN INTERPRETATION OF THESE FACTS

So much for what is essentially social description with a little normative interpretation or interpolation mixed in. I want now to move to an explanation of what I have described. I want to know whether there is something in the very nature of capitalism, in the logic of its very development, so to say, which requires such inequalities such that it would be impossible to have a capitalist society without such inequalities. We know that the existence of an economic surplus makes possible an unequal distribution of wealth and that societies, other than capitalist societies, i.e., slave and feudal societies, have had such inequalities. Is there anything in the very nature of capitalist societies that requires great inequalities in income and wealth? Let us first look at the argument of the economist Thomas E. Weisskopf in his 'Capitalism and inequality' (1972). He argues there that income inequality is functionally necessary to the capitalist mode of production (*ibid.*, pp. 125-33).

The first thing to be noticed is that the radical distinction between poverty and wealth is even sharper and more plainly evident if one considers

not just the industrialized capitalist nations taken by themselves but the whole world. The disparity in social wealth between the industrialized nations and the underdeveloped areas at their periphery has been increasing and has continued to increase since the early days of colonial conquest. Moreover, it is important to consider these underdeveloped areas, for they are a crucial part of the capitalist world-order.

Yet how is this worldwide capitalist system to be understood? What are its dynamics and functional requirements? Weisskopf is principally interested in the institutional constraints on income distribution within the capitalist system. He attempts to show that there 'are strong forces inherent in a capitalist system that tend to prevent the reduction of income inequality over time from any initial historically determined level' (*ibid.*, p. 126). He then goes on to argue that some 'of these same forces in turn limit mobility between income classes and thereby perpetuate income inequality from one generation to the next' (*ibid.*).

Weisskopf wants first to show that under capitalism income distribution is closely tied to the requirements of production. Marx's conception of a just principle of distribution, a principle which is to come into play when communist society has developed fully, is 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need' (1972). This principle, of course, could only come into play when the whole world had achieved a considerable degree of social wealth. By contrast, Milton Friedman, a bourgeois economist and Nobel Prize winner, proposes the following parallel as the capitalist principle of just distribution: 'To each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces'. To make it quite parallel to Marx's principle, we might extend its formulation as follows: 'From each according to his choice, given his assets, to each according to what he and the instruments he owns produces'. This shows, as Weisskopf points out, that 'the most fundamental characteristic of the distribution of income under capitalism is that it is tied directly to the production process' (Weisskopf, 1977: 126; see also Friedman, 1980). But must capitalism operate according to such slogans?

In trying to answer this, let us first consider the fact that what counts as legitimate income under capitalism arises from only two sources: (1) one's own labor power and (2) from the ownership of means of production.⁴ These are the factors of production that give us income under capitalism. And we reckon how 'valuable' these factors are, to determine how much an individual gets, by 'how much they contribute to the market value of production' (Weisskopf 1972: 127). As Weisskopf puts it (*ibid.*):

The income received by any individual thus depends both on the

quantity of the factors of production he owns and on the price which these factors command in the market. Inequalities in income can result either from unequal ownership of factors of production or from unequal prices paid for those factors.

If we reflect carefully on the situation, we should recognize that income from labor power and income from capital are *necessarily* unequally distributed in a capitalist society. Ownership of capital is necessarily unequal, for if it were not, there would be no distinction between capitalist and worker and hence no capitalism. In a situation where the ownership is equal each person would, theoretically at least, have equal control over the production process and no one would, to survive, be compelled to relinquish control over his labor power by selling it. A capitalist economy requires a labor market 'in which workers are obliged to exchange control over their labor power in return for wages and salaries' (ibid.). If workers were no longer so obliged, the capitalist class would no longer be in control of the production process. So equality of capital ownership is incompatible with the basic institutions and the underlying rationale of the capitalist mode of production.

It is not only ownership and control of capital and income from capital that is necessarily unequal under capitalism, but earnings from labor income as well. This is so because the efficient operation of the labor market requires it. Workers lack control over the process and product of their work. They usually do not determine what they do or why they do it. So their work typically is highly alienated. They work for the money and little or nothing else. They typically, and understandably, under such conditions are not interested in doing the work efficiently, rapidly, and well. Under capitalism, the carrot and the stick, for workers to work efficiently, is higher and lower wages. When money is God 'workers must be motivated to increase their labor power and to work hard by extrinsic rewards such a income with which they can purchase material goods and services' (ibid., pp. 127-8). Moreover, the *homo economicus* that we have been so *socialized* into being, will not defer gratifications except for some monetary reward which will in the long run give still greater gratification. But modern capitalism requires a diversified and, in certain key areas, a well-trained work force with some people needing to postpone gratifications through long job training and education. To get them to do that, it is necessary to attach higher incomes to the jobs requiring such training. How many students would be in university now if they did not believe that by gaining a university degree they had a reasonable chance for a higher income than if they simply graduated from

high school? I doubt that many would, if they could go out into the work force instead at some reasonable salary. To keep workers energetically on the job a possibility to promotion to a higher pay scale is necessary. In short, we need in a capitalist social system to operate with an incentive system. But this necessarily results in a hierarchy in labor 'based upon the differential possession of labor power and the corresponding differential receipt of labor earnings' (ibid., p. 128). To remain 'economically viable, the capitalist mode of production . . . requires significant inequalities in the distribution of labor income' (ibid.). So both in capital holdings and income from capital and in income from labor power, inequalities, resulting in extensive overall inequalities, are functionally essential to the capitalist mode of production. It should not be trivialized by talk about the personal greed of a few capitalists. No doubt most of them are greedy, but, even if they were not, the system requires such inequalities – inequalities, which in turn give rise to inequalities in power, status, and human well-being. And these are inequalities which have a tendency to undermine self-respect.

We should also come to recognize that the capitalist system has a dynamic which tends to concentrate great fortunes in the control of a few people. It enhances and extends the wealth of those who already have considerable wealth and severely hampers the income mobility of those who do not, while favouring the passing on of that accumulated wealth to the descendents of the capitalist ruling class who already have the wealth (ibid., p. 129). Starting with the fact that there are already vast inequalities of wealth and power, it is evident that those who already have considerable wealth and power are, with their surplus income far in excess of basic consumption needs, in a privileged position to make additional investments and thus, from this position of strength, to acquire the opportunity, typically realized, for more capital accumulation. They often do so quite safely, for their wealth and power gives them a better access to relevant information (often privileged inside information) and profitable opportunities. They are much advantaged over the small holder of capital and thus 'inequalities on capital ownership are . . . likely to increase over time' (ibid.). Thus the rich get still richer and the poor do not catch up and may even become, *relatively* speaking, poorer. The reason they are mystified into believing that they are not so situated is that sometimes, at least in absolute terms, they are better off, for the whole society has become wealthier. They get a few crumbs in the general development of social wealth and with the ideology of social mobility, they think they are slowly but surely progressing in the direction of equality. (We shall see in (5) below that even this greater absolute wealth is not, without qualification, true for the most disadvantaged strata of the society.)

III THE CARROT AND THE STICK JUSTIFICATION

It is a popular belief in our culture that inequality is needed for economic growth. (Indeed, it is not only a popular belief but a belief that is crucial for Rawls' argument for *maximin*.) Inequalities which otherwise would be unjustified are, so the argument runs, in reality, everything considered, justified inequalities, because they are causally necessary to attain and retain an economic system which will deliver the goods, i.e., will produce so much social wealth that even the poor will eventually come to have a high standard of living or at least a higher standard of living than they could otherwise enjoy under alternative socioeconomic systems. After all, historically in Western Europe, Japan, and North America, capitalism, with its staggering inequalities, has been the agent of economic growth and development.

The authors of 'The extent of income inequality in the United States' (Edwards *et al.*, 1972: 207-18 for an update see the second edition 1978: 297-307) argue against this thesis as follows. First, they claim that there is no reason to assume that we can continue at our past rates of growth. It may be alarmist to talk of the limits of growth, but, alarmist or not, it is very unlikely that growth rates can continue for long in the way they have in earlier periods of capitalism (Taylor, 1978). But to eliminate poverty and radically lessen the present staggering inequalities would take generations if we continue to have a capitalist organization of society. So, to accept deprivations now and inequalities now for the sake of the system, for the sake of a far richer future, is asking the disadvantaged to accept what is at present a severe deprivation for something that is very unlikely to be achieved in the future. That surely looks like something which it is wrong to advocate and unreasonable for everyone, but the possessing classes, to accept. For them, of course, it is a useful bit of moral ideology in their continued attempt to keep control of society.

Such economic growth, as is necessary to justify the present inequalities, is unlikely to be forthcoming. This will be seen to be even more unlikely when we, reflecting on limits of growth problems, hone in on ecological considerations (*ibid.*). We, for our own survival, whether or not we are members of the exploiting class, will either have to cut back ecologically costly and harmful production, thus reducing the possibility of growth and a payoff for those who have to endure present deprivations for the sake of the future, or we will have to divert economic resources into improving the environment, in which case there will also not be the payoff for the poor accepting present deprivations. In either case there is little rational

motivation for the poor to accept the inequalities inherent in the system for the sake of a promised better future.

These considerations aside, we should realize that human nature, independently of certain perfectly historically contingent forms of socialization, is not so uniformly possessive individualist that it can respond only to material incentives. Where there is a socioeconomic system which has a different rationale, where workers actually have a clear stake in the system's functioning well and understand that they have that stake, we do not have sufficiently good reasons for believing that they, independently of a certain kind of socialization, will not work efficiently, willingly, and inventively unless they get material incentives. This is not to suggest that they will willingly work for peanuts or anything of that sort, but it is to, in effect, claim that we have nothing like a sufficient reason for believing that, independently of a certain kind of socialization and certain determinate social conditions, human beings are such that they will work to capacity only with such incentives. In our present organization of work, with its capitalist rationale, it is in some considerable measure true, as we argued in the previous section, that we require, to work at our utmost, or even at a tolerably high level of efficiency, such material incentives, but in a genuine industrial democracy and in a socioeconomic order geared to the satisfaction of human needs and not principally to profit maximization, these material incentives would not be nearly so strong. Indeed we can see this, under special circumstances, even for the present socioeconomic order when we consider the economic performances of the various countries in World War II.

Finally, it is not evident that rational people in conditions of moderate scarcity – say the conditions that apply for many people in Japan, Western Europe, and North America – would be willing to accept an undermining of meaningful democracy to gain some additional wealth in the future, even assuming, what I challenged initially, that it is likely they will get it. It is not evident that they would so choose if they recognized that they could hardly have both that democracy *and* the wealth that the 'miracle of capitalist production' will bring. They cannot have them both because the price of that production – the cost to individuals – is steep economic inequalities which must lead to severe inequalities in power and control in society. This in turn gives us a situation incompatible with genuine democracy. The nondemocratic option would plainly mean that people would have considerably less control over their own lives. Here it is an ideology about democracy that keeps them from linking democracy with economic democracy or linking the political sphere and the economic sphere. Such an undermining of their autonomy is not just and would not

be accepted by people if they were not ideologically bamboozled on this score. There is a pervasive, and I believe too easy, cynicism here which alleges that all the same people would go for the money. I think this misses the intervening variable of imposed consciousness and the facts about a pervasive skepticism concerning the genuineness of democracy. If people really believed some genuine control of their own lives was possible, they would not, in the conditions of moderate affluence that many workers in the industrial societies have obtained, prefer greater affluence in a controlled society with their present work conditions to greater control over their own lives. Their cynicism, their fear of communism, which for them is taken to be a totalitarian dictatorship not capable even of delivering a reasonable standard of living, is what keeps them from rocking the boat. Bourgeois ideology distorts their view of social reality and this affects how they act. It is far from clear that human nature is such that human beings will always prefer *more* no matter what the circumstances. Cynicism, parading as realism, is in reality evasive here.

IV INEQUALITY OF SELF-RESPECT (AND OTHER SOCIAL GOODS) AT THE POINT OF PRODUCTION

Rawls only sees or at least principally sees problems of social justice in the organizing of our economic lives in terms of freedom of occupational mobility, of equal opportunity (equality of access to its privileged social positions) and of a fair distribution of the *product* of the routines of production (Doppelt, 1975: 5). However, as the world actually goes in capitalist societies, self-respect is significantly shaped and its distribution deeply affected by the way *work* is organized. Actual work in such societies is pervasively hierarchial and where an individual stands in this work hierarchy deeply affects his sense of self-respect and his actual well-being. And this onslaught on his self-respect, it is important to note, is not simply, or even principally, a matter of relative income. Moreover, if we take Rawls' own Aristotelian principle seriously that should not be at all surprising.

Work is very hierarchically organized in capitalist or statist societies and the higher one is in the hierarchy the greater responsibility, interest, satisfaction, pride, and sense of one's worth one will find in one's work (see Stojanovic, 1973: 37-75 for an analysis of statism). Moreover, the higher up one is in that hierarchy the more one will find greater demands made for the display of skill and the more one will find room for various achievements. In the steeply hierarchically ordered work relations that are our lot in capitalist society, the majority of the workers are at or near the

bottom of this hierarchy. And in such situations there is very little of such forms of satisfaction in one's work and thus there is very little, if anything, about it which makes it meaningful or enhances one's sense of self-respect. Those 'at the bottom of the blue and white collar work force suffer serious losses of self-respect and elementary human satisfaction in their work due to the powerlessness, subordination, absence of responsibility and mindlessness implicit in their positions' (Doppelt, 1975: 6). Indeed this capitalist hierarchical division of labor is so oppressive that it takes its toll on family life, capacity to enjoy leisure, health, and longevity for those on or near the bottom of this hierarchy (*Work in America*, 1973: 76-93). Self-respect here is deeply and very unequally affected. Workers at or near the bottom of the hierarchy have, as Marx stresses long ago, deadening labor which is boring, demeaning, and self-stultifying. They have a sense that they haven't made it, that they aren't worth much. They have a sense that their work is not of much value and that they aren't either. In some of the more extreme cases, they realize that they are not being replaced by machines because it is cheaper for them to do the work than it is to replace their work by the use of machines (Braverman, 1974). Yet, just in that situation, they need to fear automation. A productivity and cost-benefit analysis might at any time go the other way and deprive them of their wretched jobs, throwing them into an even more demeaning situation. They have, that is, reason to fear the loss of a debilitating and degrading job, for it is that very job which keeps them from the even more degrading experience of being welfare recipients: objects of 'charity' and societal contempt.

It is true that in the less extreme cases work near the bottom of the hierarchy is not quite that bad. Yet it is still authoritarian: one is just set to a task and given work which is boring, routinized to a mind-numbing degree, often exhausting, and generally destructive of one's developing one's human capacities (*ibid.*). One's real life, if one has one at all, must be found away from one's work. Still, the undermining of self-respect is even deeper in the unemployed who, for the most part, desire work and guiltily blame themselves for their failure to find work, make something of themselves, and support their families.

In capitalist production relations, there is this deep undermining of self-respect for those at or near the bottom. A similar, though a less severe undermining, obtains, in varying degrees, for most people in capitalist societies. (One goes very wrong indeed if one takes as one's model the life of a university professor.) It is not, of course, so extreme in the middle ranges of the hierarchy, but still, even there, there is a similar onslaught on self-respect and well-being. Such an unequal distribution of the good of self-respect is plainly one of the great injustices of capitalist societies

and its principal source is in the organization of our economic life. With different relations of production such gross injustices need not obtain.

V THE INJUSTICE OF UNEQUAL INCOME DISTRIBUTION

It is important to understand the manifold ways in which inequalities of income distribution in the cultural *milieu* of capitalism produces social injustice. This, Doppelt argues, would obtain even if Rawls' *maximin* criterion for income redistribution were in place and functioning. In reflecting on such matters, we should not forget the ethical and social meanings of differences of relative income in the cultural ethos of capitalist society. We misperceive their social function if we view (try to view) such inequalities as ethically neutral instruments for maximizing social wealth.

There are several dimensions to this. First, and perhaps most obviously, if the worst-off in terms of income in a capitalist society accept inequalities in income because of the fact (putative fact) that, through the increased productivity in the society as a whole, they will receive an increase in income greater than they could with a greater equality of income, it still does not follow that they will gain a greater access to the minimal amenities of what they, or others in their society, would regard as a decent standard of living for a culture in that stage of economic development. They may very well not be in any better position to buy healthy food, adequate shelter, decent transportation, adequate health care, livable urban environments, decent recreational and vacation facilities, and the like. These, in such circumstances, may have become even more scarce. While, with the development in productive capacity linked to the advances of science and technology, the absolute social wealth, though not its relative distribution between strata, has changed, it is not so clear whether for those at or near the bottom, in all ways and across the board, their social poverty has been diminished. Income has gradually risen but what they can buy with it in certain crucial ways is more scarce and more dear. Good food is hard to come by – think of just something like bread in North America – and health foods are too dear; homes in suburbia are increasingly out of reach while their own working-class neighborhoods deteriorate; unharrassing decent transportation is more difficult to obtain and they face an increasingly crowded, more polluted environment, and a greater poverty in real chances for relaxing vacations and healthy relaxing activity after work (for example, fishing trips, hikes, a swim). In addition, and compounding matters, they face a greater risk of thermonuclear annihilation or some similar threat as capitalism fuels the war industry and recognizes the need to protect itself.

Some of these claims may very well be overstated and there have indeed, as Irving Kristol (1972: 41–47) will not let us forget, been genuine developments in our social life and enhancements of social wealth. Furthermore, if *maximin* were actually functioning, it might well be the case that the bottom stratum, and indeed other strata as well, by a chain phenomenon, would in certain ways improve their lot. But enough has been said to make it evident that even if the level of income of the worst-off did increase and the society was generally wealthier, it still need not be the case that they would have a greater access to what would be culturally defined as a more adequate standard of living. Indeed, it is not even evident that it is very likely that this would be the case. As Doppelt well puts it (1975: 15), there is little point, within the restrictions of *maximin*, in maximizing, 'the income of the worst-off if the goods and services which they require to improve their situation cannot be bought at all or at prices they can afford'.

We also need to recognize the social meaning of differences in income. Your worth, where the pervasive cultural patterns in capitalist society are norm setting, is measured by what you own and how you stand in relation to others in terms of income. If, on the bottom of the rung, or as part of the lower or even middle strata, you do have adequate wealth to meet creature comforts, it still remains the case that, Rawls notwithstanding, your worth is less, your power is less, your autonomy (capacity to control your own life) is less than that of others in the society not so situated (Rawls 1971: 311–15). So, within the parameters of capitalist society, or a state socialist or statist society functioning very like capitalist society, unequal income distribution, even with *maximin* in place, produces deep social injustices. Doppelt's observation concerning this deserves careful consideration:

From the standpoint of social justice, the key issue is not whether such a scheme can be manipulated or reformed so as to maximize the income of the worst-off; rather, it is whether its basic division of economic power and the imperatives it entails permit any rough correspondence at all (after some historical point in its development) between increasing individual income and raising the real standard of living. (1975: 15)

It is also important to see how the injustice of income inequalities ties in with the injustice of the capitalist system of wage labor. This may seem to some to be somewhat of an exaggeration, but I think that something of what is at issue can be seen if we recall that under that system labor is a commodity and as a commodity it has a price which generally reflects its

relative scarcity and demand on the market. This is not a fact of nature but is a crucial aspect of a determinate social system. In such a social system the labor and time of some is worth more than the labor and time of others. So, as Doppelt puts it, 'the self-diminuation working people experience in self-stultifying jobs is not only a consequence of the intrinsic features of their work, but also of the relatively low price it commands' (1975: 19). Their wage is perceived by them as the value society places on their work and the status it assigns to them relative to others. 'This judgement of relative value is assumed to accurately reflect the relative merit of the worker, what he or she deserves . . .' (ibid.). This, in turn, is related to the scarcity and demand for her or his skills. So the social meaning of unequal income is that unequal pay constitutes unequal rewards for unequal merit, subject, in some instances to seniority qualifications and the like. Thus the scarcity of well-paying jobs in such a system of wage labor becomes a source of injustice by its translation into a scarcity of self-worth. There is a close tie between wage gradations and one's sense of self-worth. The ideal of the equal worth of all human beings is undermined by capitalist production relations. By making a mockery of that ideal of equal human worth, capitalism shows that built into the capitalist system itself there is a deep injustice, an injustice that will persist as long as capitalism reigns.

NOTES

1. See the bibliography at the end of this chapter, which gives the various Marxist and left critiques of Rawls.
2. For the twists and turns here see Samuel Huntington *et al.* (1975) and the Trilateral Commission's publication *Dialogue*, particularly the Summer issue 1975, Winter issue 1975-6 and the Spring issue 1976. See also Chomsky 1977: 10-11.
3. This, as Galbraith among others argue, is a misleading picture of capitalism and capitalist motivations.
4. This is meant to include ownership of land as well.

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* Even with some writers who have a reasonably clear Marxist orientation, not all of the articles listed above plainly reflect that orientation. This is particularly true with some of my own articles and some of the more methodological articles by Norman Daniels.

** Some of the authors, whose articles I say have a 'Left bearing', may not wish to identify themselves politically at all or they may wish to identify themselves as Social Democrats or Left-leaning liberals. One, I suspect, may even think of himself as a conservative. My claim is only that these articles, whatever may have been their author's intentions, have a Left-bearing vis-à-vis Rawls and vis-à-vis the appraisal of liberalism general.