

A Modern Comic Story: Poverty and Distributive Justice

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ABSTRACT

The understanding of poverty as the main social problem in purely economic terms and the argument that poverty should be eradicated translates to making sense of it as a trans-historical concept entirely independent from capitalism. The modern state considers poverty as a major obstacle to economic development and claims to struggle with it. Social justice has spread to a process of fighting poverty, which becomes a constant pursuit like the struggle and dependence between the hero and antihero common to modern comic books. Far from being identified as an ideal situation that needs to be reached, social justice in the hands of the modern state has transformed into a tool for targeted stability within market conditions. In this process, the recognition involved with identifying poverty, narrowly perceived and purged of its political content, become invisible and the social suffering it causes is also suppressed. Based on these claims, this article aims to re-examine the connection between the changing meaning of poverty and modern distributive justice and to support the argument that poverty must be expressed as a social relationship involving recognitional aspects rather than a simple expression of having a limited share of social goods.

Keywords: Poverty, Distributive Justice, Social Justice, Utilitarianism, Market, Capitalism, Recognition

The claim that the market is an economic institution that can best enable people to live well is found in every stage of economic theory, from classical theorists such as Adam Smith to the modern neoclassical and Austrian schools, with this idea having also been supported by various arguments. For example, Smith's welfare argument is still defended, along with the claim that the market prevents the decline of productive labor relative to trade. Accordingly, securing economic growth is possible through the natural distribution of "increased general welfare" as distributed among the different ranks of people thanks to the market (O'Neill, 2001, p. 55). This is also the pursuit of sustainable growth, with distributive justice being created not just as a natural result of increased general welfare but also as the balancing mechanism that will ensure its continuation. Welfare as a justification is accompanied by the idea that one has the freedom to pursue one's own goals and satisfy one's own preferences thanks to a free market. At the same time, seeing excessive consumption in parallel with deepening inequalities and poverty, Smith sought a sense of self-command that would restrain the insatiable desires that create deep tension within market societies between the motivating forces of economic growth and any unintended welfare benefits (O'Neill, 2001, p. 53). The fact that excess wealth and greed together with the ambition to accumulate more, destroying the commercial spirit, is again the product of a moral market-caused decay, and the reason why the classics still attach importance to feelings such as benevolence in the face of corruption and extremism. The market's association with justice manifests itself in the production and exchange of different human needs brought about by the division of labor according to Smith, who placed moral economics[†] in a rational perspective. For Smith, who established this

Another thing that the market is deeply tied to is the division of labor. This is the reason why craftsmen of the Middle Ages who had made the guilds and various stages from production to distribution focused on a single job in capitalism and even become workers over time if they did not have the capital to invest in their own jobs. At first glance, the relevance of the division of labor in the market may not be so obvious. But its relevance to free trade emerges once one accepts that the division of labor saves time as much as it develops ingenuity. Adam Smith understood this: "When the market is very small, no person can have any encouragement to dedicate himself entirely to one employment, for want of the power to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he has occasion for." (Huberman, 1968, p. 111)

[†] Moral economy is used to describe an economy based on goodness, equity, and justice and is thought to be based on a humane market where fair prices are sought and moral sentiments are exchanged in addition to commodities. Because such an economic order was in the minds and dreams of thinkers like Smith, the concept was used by 18th-century moralists and economists. It was also used among thinkers in the 18th century who tried to explain economic behavior in the face of economics and morality's gradual divergence from each other and who were also worried about the erosion of moral values. Although such an economy may be constructed as a state of commerce purged of capitalist impulses, something which can only be considered for small and closed communities where buyers and sellers are producers at the same time, E. P. Thompson, who had a large share in the spread of the concept, attributed a different meaning to it (Thompson, 1966). As seen in the food riots of the late 18th-century in England, moral economics was inherent in a political culture rooted in feudalism based on price-fixing the market for staple foods. Although it seemed like a pre-capitalist concept in terms of expressing a mentality that cared about fair prices, it expressed the transformation experienced in the market through capitalization and the conflict this transformation experienced with the problem of poverty and political culture. It was not just a past order but also one

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relationship somewhere between emotions and interests[‡], justice can be real, a state where people's well-intentioned feelings and interests intersect, not a platonic idea arising from one's careless concern for the other such as with individual interests. Samuel Fleischacker (2004, pp. 62–63) argued that Smith cannot be regarded as the founder of modern distributive justice in the full sense of the word, because despite his practical propositions on distributive justice and his secular point of view, his thinking did not start from the view that no one deserves poverty. In Fleischacker's view, despite Smith believing that property should be taken from the rich and given to the poor, that the rich should be taxed much higher than the poor, and that taxes should be directed toward public expenditures that benefit the poor, he did not explicitly write that the state's duty was to improve the plight of the poor, and thus did not fully express modern distributive justice.

Poverty in Modern Market Conditions

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's inquiries about the nature of property and Immanuel Kant's views on the equal value of people certainly were as influential in the formation of modern social justice as Smith's views. But whether Smith was the first philosopher to think of distributive justice in relation to the market and poverty is just as controversial as the market's relationship to justice, and deciding about this may not be as important as it seems. Also, one should not forget that the discourse of justice, which was voiced in uprisings, rebellions, and revolutions, played a crucial role in the formation of the modern meaning of social justice. The theme of justice was found in the process of these movements, a theme that had different content and uses in the language of the people, which shows that justice may have been unspoken or its meaning forgotten by thinkers and philosophers. From this point of view, one could say that social developments dominated these debates about justice, rather than the debates among thinkers giving direction to justice.

By the 18th century, the extent of capitalist relations regarding production in England, the increasing inequalities, severe poverty, and effort to increase commodity production and profits despite deteriorating working conditions weakened the view that a non-capitalist market was possible. The sharpening class distinctions forced the philosophers, social scientists, and moralists of the period to express their views more clearly and openly as representatives of different social segments, forcing them to take sides. In such a period, Smith made a comprehensive analysis of capital's growth and showed the link among labor, value, class tensions, and the spirit of the time. He started by examining "the causes or circumstances which naturally introduce subordination or which naturally (...) give some men some superiority over the greater part of their brethren seem to be four in number" (Smith, 1937, p. 670) and expressed the condition of institutionalized and enforced obedience of people to others as follows: "Civil government, so far as it is instituted for the security of the property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or those who have some property against those who have none at all" (Smith, 1937, p. 674). From this point of view, Smith's thought about how the process that brought social relations to this point and caused all of this, which had guided him and his neoclassical successors, was shaped around selfish and greedy motives. Despite this, however, Smith remained an optimist and saw capitalism as the highest level of civilization. Accordingly, when governments are in a position to adopt a laissez-faire policy that allows competitive forces to regulate the economy and allows supply and demand to interact on its own free from government boundaries and interference, the invisible hand of the market directs all selfish and greedy actions into a harmonious whole that is mutually beneficial. Upon reaching this state, capitalism will have reached its peak (Hunt & Lautzenheiser, 2011, p. 57).

Despite the optimistic forecasts of Smith and his successors, the technology reached by production in the second half of the 18th century was astonishing, and the cost that the level capitalist production relations had reached was not far from view. Emery Kay Hunt's statements summarizing the conditions of the period are quite striking in revealing how the established system was designed to prevent riots:

The extensive division of labor in the factory made much of the work so routine and simple that untrained women and children could do it as well as men. Because women and children could be hired for much lower wages than men, and because in many cases entire families had to work in order to earn enough to eat, women and children were widely employed. Many factory owners preferred women and children because they could be reduced to a state of passive obedience more easily than men. The widespread ideology in this period that the only good woman was a submissive woman was a great help to their employers. Children were bound to factories by indentures of apprenticeship for seven years, or until they were twenty-one. Almost nothing was given the children in return for long hours of work under the most horrendous conditions. Poor law authorities could indenture the children of paupers, which led to regular bargains ... [where] children [sic] were dealt with as mere merchandise [sic] between the spinners on the one hand and the Poor Law authorities on the other. Lots of fifty, eighty or a hundred children were supplied and sent like cattle to the factory, where they remained imprisoned for many years. These children endured the cruelest servitude. They were totally isolated from anyone who might take pity on them and [sic] the children were disciplined in such savage and brutal ways that a recitation of the methods would appear completely incredible to the reader of today. (Hunt & Lautzenheiser, 2011 p. 67)

The deterioration of the living conditions of the masses who had been made workers by the capitalist system alongside the

where politics dominated the functioning of the economy and that, being guided by morals and values, reflected an understanding in opposition to the rationality of the market economy, which freed livelihoods from moral prejudices and political pressures.

‡ In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith, 2017) Smith emphasized human beings through the feelings of benevolence and sympathy, while in *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1937), he accepted human beings as being motivated by self-interest. Dimitris Milonakis and Ben Fine explained this contrast through the dualism in his method rather than his views changing over time (Milonakis & Fine, 2009, p. 17).

crises in the second half of the 18th century made class conflicts more visible and brought along with it efforts from the ruling classes to take new measures to eliminate the danger and create a legitimate framework upon which to base these measures. All of this happened during the Industrial Revolution, when the poor's standard of living fell dramatically. It was the "very moment when the poor were at the end of their tether... when the middle class dripped with excess capital, to be wildly invested in railways and spent on the building, opulent household furnishings displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851, and on the palatial municipal constructions which prepared to rise in the smoky northern cities" (Hobsbawm, 1999, p. 78). The thinkers of the period agreed to a large extent that this situation could cause discontent and conflict in society to increase. At precisely this point, one witnesses the moral bifurcation between classes to manifest itself in the eyes of intellectuals.¹ While the effects of the widening gap between the wealthy and the increasingly impoverished working class were evident in the reforms proposed to bridge this gap by writers such as Marquis de Condorcet, William Godwin made a critique of industrial society that would be revisited by 19th-century socialists, one that argued justice was only achievable through the abolition of capitalist property relations and suggested radical measures. Thinkers like Condorcet and Godwin disproved the claim that arguing justice to be conceivable outside the relations of production and distribution at that time would be anachronistic. Thomas Robert Malthus, with his theory on population and as an outspoken defender of the rich, showed that the capitalist class and its defenders did not remain silent in the face of the working-class making sense of social justice.

While modernity grants individuals the freedom to take care of themselves, the market's adaptation to this new order takes place when it becomes the intermediary to the transformation of labor, money, and land into commodities. While the market provides people with the freedom to rent their labor, it plays an important role in transforming the individual as one of the main features defining modernization from beings who are dependent on social face-to-face relations into individuals who are coded in advanced forms such as law, money, and state, who find their existence, and who live in anonymous relations. As a working and producing being, the modern person's ability to catch up to the wheels of the market, which is spinning much faster than before, depends on being a part of a more efficient production process as a more disciplined docile human being (*homo docilis*). This process requires specialization, division of labor, and a strong bureaucracy in which impersonal social relations come to the fore. The fact that the physiological and psychological fragility of individuals does not interfere with the modern production process is possible not only through the liberation of the labor market but also through its regulation, with justice getting adjusted accordingly. In the 19th century, social relations organized according to the market were unsuitable for displaying the "power to punish" (Foucault, 1995, p. 224), so different methods were developed. Publicly maintaining conditions such as extreme poverty that disrupt the functioning of the market, unnecessarily personalizes social relations, and undermines trust in the market was impossible. The effort to organize society brought about the re-establishment of poverty as a concept that must be struggled with. Thus, poverty was perceived as a contagious disease that needed to be rehabilitated or eradicated through various forms of confinement under the guidance of scientific knowledge.

A good example of this is Malthus's theory of population, which inspired the New Poor Law in England based on his viewpoint. Although Malthus' stance represented one side of an open class war, his views sought moral ground that presupposes universal justice. This is how the ultimate difference between the rich and the poor was explained; through the high moral character of the rich and the frailty of the poor. Being a so-called realistic person, Malthus considered the approaching misery to be inevitable and accused the poor of carelessness and lack of frugality (Hunt & Lautzenheiser, 2011, p. 77). He opposed any measure to redistribute wealth and income. Beyond opposing aid to the poor, he viewed the private property system and the resultant class inequality as the source of all human cultural success:

It is an evident truth that, whatever may be the rate of increase in the means of subsistence, the increase in population must be limited by it, at least after the food has once been divided into the smallest shares that will support life. . . To act consistently therefore, we should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavoring to impede, the operation of nature in producing this mortality. . . Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations. (Malthus, 1960, pp. 179–180)

At the beginning of his work *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Thomas Pogge asked, "How can severe poverty of half of humankind continue despite enormous economic and technological progress and despite the enlightened moral norms and values of our heavily dominant Western civilization?" (Pogge, 2002, p. 3) When considering the technological advances of Malthus' time and the rules observed by moralists, economists, and social scientists such as Smith before him, one cannot help but be surprised at how it was adopted despite being morally untenable and incompatible with justice during that period. The situation becomes even more interesting when one realizes that, even behind his proposals, Malthus actually wanted to reduce poverty, and this requires an explanation that exceeds this scope. For Malthus, poverty was inevitable. Poverty would remain limited and

¹ E. P. Thompson conveyed this bifurcation in his comprehensive and elaborate work, including the divisions within the parties themselves. In the debates in England, he mentioned W. Cobbett, who was a powerful statement writer, journalist, member of Parliament, and farmer who was unable to satisfy the radicals with his conservatism, in opposition to Malthus' theses as well as the existence of "four tendencies: the Paine-Carlile tradition, the working-class Utilitarians and the Gorgon, the trade unionists around the Trades Newspaper of John Gast, and the variety of tendencies associated with Owenism" (Thompson, 1966, p. 762) shaping the political consciousness of the developing working class.

balanced if not intervened. However, it could be a threat to the whole society when the poor were helped. What was fair was that the population decline as a natural consequence of poverty increased the well-being of the survivors. So fewer people overall would be affected by poverty. Malthus' point of view can be thought of as the product of crude utilitarianism. Nevertheless, the reason why he influenced many social theorists is that Malthus grounded his theory on a moral basis by associating it with justice, although it seems contradictory. One simple but important question: How can the expectation of being recognized as poor be legitimate in a world dominated by the urge to get rich fueled by greed for unlimited profit? First of all, this question should be put forward as a hypothesis: the poor expect to be accepted and recognized despite changing social relations, moral values, and public practices. The difficulty posed by this question is that the two main classes have become more pronounced with the development of capitalism and that the perspective on poverty has changed over time. The rise of the enrichment and profit motive as a value corresponds to a social system in which large sections of society have to become the so-called poor workers. In this case, the old non-working poor are replaced by the new working poor. While employment is rising as a social value and poverty is gradually discredited, a moral dilemma is brought about by the fact that most workers are poor.

This is the impasse upon which modern distributive justice is built. The idea that poverty should be eradicated depends on understanding the real social problem as poverty, which means understanding poverty as a transhistorical concept independent of capitalism. The modern state targets and struggles with poverty as a major obstacle to economic development. Social justice pervades the process as the fight against poverty becomes a constant pursuit. In the hands of the modern state, taxation and various aid transform social justice into a tool by removing it from a situation that needs to be achieved. One can argue that modern societies have attempted to overcome this dilemma in two ways. As the following sections will show, the states and minds of the capitalist class tried to redefine poverty in the 19th century. This attempt to convince the working poor that they are not actually poor ran parallel with discrediting poverty. The poor will inevitably remain poor, even if they do not believe in being poor in the face of the concrete reality of material inadequacy. In other words, the working conditions of the 19th century, namely concrete reality, weakened this imagining. The functioning of capitalism, which requires a more complex and larger social organization than its predecessors, depends on the moral weight of people caring for each other in spite of everything. Despite the material and moral inequalities of class societies that have been riveted by capitalism, the fact that those lost from the bonds that hold these societies together have been replaced by other types. This is made possible by re-establishing the previously unequal forms of recognition that existed in pre-capitalist societies but this time in non-economic fields. Citizenship, civil society, rights, and law formally provide equal space for recognition that the market had become void of moral sentiment. In an inter-individual contract world where no need exists to know anyone, trust anyone, or believe anyone in order to do business, the only way to be recognized is through the rights of being a citizen. E. M. Wood's study dealt with the relationship between democracy and capitalism in a historical context and revealed this form of citizenship was supported by representative liberal democracy, which developed in parallel with capitalism, and was defined at the expense of abstracting these rights and freedoms from economic relations. (Wood, 1995)

In a world where the previous system before was seen as responsible for all evil, market dominance depended on the autonomy of households and companies. For this reason, the existence of agents, who made competitive and rational choices for the market, were considered essential. When poverty is conceived as a feature of a social segment that does not have autonomy, its connection with the market becomes apparent. Now, the poverty problem was redefined as an identity that needed to be removed under market conditions, within the framework in which it is defined, of course, depending on what is understood by social justice. To say that a link could be established between poverty and injustice in the Middle Ages is not to argue that this link existed independently of historical and social conditions. Poverty is considered a social phenomenon (i.e., historical) and far from being a natural phenomenon; it does not happen by itself and does not only affect itself. It depends on individuals being recognized as poor and therefore can only be understood in terms of certain social relations. Ontologizing or onto-theologizing poverty as poverty having always existed and always will is proof that objective social and economic relations between people are translated into relations of domination. This means that poverty cannot be explained solely by what an individual has. When thinking about time and space, cultural values and many other factors easily undermines our perceptions of poverty. As social relations change, the criteria and meaning of poverty change, just as the poverty threshold, which has become an economic signifier today, changes. However, poverty cannot be explained by financial resources alone. Poverty is also an identity attributed to an individual and determines whom that individual can talk to and how, in which places they can enter, where they can get help and how, how they can spend their money if they have enough work, and what kind of jobs they can work in. In what context and how the poor relate to aid institutions, non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, and non-poor people and the limits of these relationships are conditions of the identity and social imagination of poverty. For the other segments of society, having another identity is what provides the opportunity to escape from class for the middle class, the wealthy, or those whose material conditions are not clearly distinguishable from poverty. In other words, the existence of the poor enables the non-poor to be separated from them. This is what is meant by saying poverty is a social relation.

Onto-theology of the Poor: The “*Faux Pauvres*”

By revealing the ideological foundations on poverty, Karl Marx developed the theoretical and methodological elements of a non-ideological view of poverty. He opposed the fatalistic discourse that justifies and makes poverty ordinary. Thanks to Marx's view based on class and social relations, the meaning of poverty has transformed over time. The perspective the Annales School made using these tools has enriched the perspective on the meaning of poverty. For example, if the sharpening changes toward the end of the Middle Ages gave direction to new meanings of poverty, following the footsteps of Marx and the Annales School will show that poverty is not always the same: The accepted poor of the Middle Ages were replaced by the unemployed of the free labor market with the collapse of feudalism. The Old Poor Laws enacted during the reign of Elizabeth I were replaced by the New Poor Laws of 1834, which limited the definition of the poor to the incapacitated and propertyless. This turn shows that the government was attempting to redefine poverty for it to fit the form that laissez-faire capitalism had gained in England with the aim of reshaping the labor market. Government in the 19th century tried to draw a different framework for poverty, one that was accepted as a general category covering a larger part of society from the point of view of the mercantilist English nobility, who regarded everyone who did not have enough property and income to live without working as poor. This does not indicate that the meaning of the word changed in the imagination of the whole society. What had changed was that the capitalist class and political power that had difficulty controlling the labor market also had difficulties providing social control using the same methods under these conditions. The main difficulties the former Poor Laws posed in England was that the definition of poverty had become incompatible with the changing economic and social conditions, not the number of poor.²

This is understood better when encountering the challenging conditions of the 19th century. These conditions were described in detail by Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and clearly affected the lives of the masses with the dramatically changing labor market. The change in poverty laws was primarily related to this situation. The size of the proletariat that was gradually expanding with laborers rushing to cities from the farms brought down wages by 1830, revealing a surplus population that had not been seen until then. So much so that the state of the old poor and the new working poor became similar, with the increased poverty taxes, the wages of the working poor who put pressure on these wages ensured the survival of the unemployed poor. Engels described this changing situation as follows:

... the longer agriculture had remained stationary, the heavier now became the burden upon the worker, the more violently broke forth the results of the disorganization of the old social fabric. The over-population came to light all at once, and could not, as in the manufacturing districts, be absorbed by the needs of an increasing production. The necessary consequence was that the competition of the workers among each other reached the highest point of intensity, and wages fell to a minimum. So long as the Old Poor Law existed, the workers received relief from the rates; wages naturally fell still lower, because the farmers forced the largest possible number of laborers to claim relief. The higher poor-rate, necessitated by the surplus population, was only increased by this measure, and the New Poor Law [sic] was now enacted as a remedy. But this did not improve matters. Wages did not rise, the surplus population could not be gotten rid of, and the cruelty of the new law did but serve to embitter the people to the utmost. Its only effect was that, whereas previously three to four million half-paupers had existed, a million paupers in total now appeared, and the rest, still half-paupers, merely went without relief. The poverty in the agricultural districts increased each year. (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 550)

According to Marx and Engels, Malthus' law on population and the New Poor Law that was prepared in accordance with it were an open declaration of war from the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Malthus considered the tax and aid to the poor to be completely absurd and argued that the aid provided created more competition by protecting the surplus population, which in turn made the system more difficult to maintain by lowering wages. According to him, to employ a poor person was illogical, as it would cause a worker who had a job until that time to become unemployed, and this was not in the best interest of the industry. Therefore, trying to make the surplus population useful was a futile effort. Instead, ensuring that this surplus population was eliminated naturally with as few objections as possible was what was necessary. This is because the old Poor Law allowed the poor to perceive the help given to them as a duty of society, starting with the naive idea that helping the poor was the duty of the community. So much so that, it was stated in the report of the Royal Commission for the Operation of Poor Laws:

a check to industry, a reward for improvident marriages, a stimulant to population, and a blind to its effects on wages; a national institution for discountenancing the industrious and honest, and for protecting the idle, the improvident and the vicious; the destroyer of the bonds of family life; a system for preventing the accumulation of capital, for destroying that which exists, and for reducing the rate-payer to pauperism; and a premium for illegitimate children in the provision of alimony. (From the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners; Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 571)

Marx and Engels also described the gravity of the situation from the report as follows:

We grant you poor a right to exist, but only to exist; the right to multiply you have not, nor the right to exist as befits human beings. You are a pest, and if we cannot get rid of you as we do of other pests, you shall feel, at least, that you are a pest, and you shall at least be held in check, kept from bringing into the world

² According to Nancy Fraser, who cited the Poor Law Reform as an example in her earlier work about needs, where to draw the political boundaries is one of the main issues of social conflict (Fraser, 1989, p. 166-168). The efforts to define the interpretation horizon of distributive justice, which appeared in the nineteenth century, are closely related to the class pressure created by the changing economic and social conditions. From this point of view, parallel to Fraser's approach, we can evaluate this process as an effort by the dominant powers to depoliticize massive poverty by shifting it to the 'economical' field. The distributive justice discourse produced by official authorities expressing 'who needs what for what', some "leaky" or "runaway" needs (Fraser, 1989, p. 169) escape from the official distribution map and moves to the arena of the modern public and finds a way to take place between "legitimate" demands.

'surplus', either directly or through inducing in others laziness and want of employment. Live you shall, but live as an awful warning to all those who might have inducements to become 'superfluous'. (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 572)

With the Poor Law Amendment Act (i.e., the New Poor Law), which Parliament enacted in 1834, money and food aid were abolished, and the poor were left with no choice but to be admitted to Workhouses, also known as the Poor Law Bastille, where conditions were unbearable.

In the hierarchical society of the Middle Ages, poverty appeared as a social relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed, in which the oppressed believed they were saved from misery and the oppressors believed they were charitable; at the same time, the poor had status. However, this situation changed by the 15th century. For example, in 15th-century France, 20-25% of the population were vagrants (Gueslin, 2013, p. 28). This economic burden and increased crime rate combined with capitalism, which required more labor and gradually institutionalized. It caused the perception of poverty to change and the decent poor of the Middle Ages to turn into the bad poor.³ The situation got worse, especially in times of crisis (e.g., the Hundred Years' War, the Black Plague). The changing social conditions caused a separation between beggars as the *faux pauvre* [false poor], whom people pitied, questioning their conscience and giving thanks for what they had because of them, and the sick, disabled, and elderly as the *vrai pauvre* [real poor] (Kitts, 2008, p. 38). This marked a time when the poor faced oppressive methods and were demonized. Similarly, when the distinction between true poverty and false poverty emerged, the poor were examined in cities like Nuremberg to see if they really needed help. Poor people were allowed to collect aid for a period of 6 months only if they were locals; beggars from outside the city were asked to leave the city within three days. In Prussia, beggars were only allowed to beg in their own villages, while in Vienna, an investigation was conducted to see if beggars were worthy of God (Kemnitz, 1996). In the 18th century, begging was no longer seen as a gift from God. Begging was understood as a correctable personal behavioral disorder, and this was accompanied by the establishment of large hospitals and the construction of detention centers for beggars. At first, an attempt was made to train beggars through work. However, the situation worsened until the crime of begging was enacted in France's penal code in 1810 due to unemployment and the recurrent crises; this contributed to the accelerated migration of the country in the 19th century. Prisons were considered the right place for the able-bodied, nursing homes for the elderly, and hospitals for the sick and dying.

In 1601 only beggars and immigrants were seen as the worthless poor, but by 1834 the devaluation of all dependent poor proved that the meaning of poverty had changed. In 1495, poverty was a status that could be earned as a right by swearing in front of a judge that one had less than 5 pounds excluding clothes. In this way, people were granted privileges by the state (as legal recognition), they could file a lawsuit without paying court costs, and benefit from legal services free of charge (Lees, 1998, pp. 39–40).⁴ However, the fact that poverty became an entitlement in early industrial societies did not prevent it from turning into a negative concept. While discipline and self-regulation and the ability to take care of oneself arose as moral values, the association of poverty with moral corruption and crime occurred at the same time.

During this process poverty transformed into a deep social fear of material-spiritual decay, urban pollution and the spread of disease was seen as related to poverty. The reason for this was moral rather than economic. Industrial societies transferred their reaction to dirt, disease, and decay within themselves to the figures of dependent poverty and thus hoped to be purified (Lees, 1998, p. 41).

The *zeitgeist* of the period was not any different in Germany or other European countries where capitalism was developing. As a result of the pressure over wages created by developing capitalist production, distribution relations regarding wages, and the spread of poverty, the public's acceptance of the poor became difficult, and more strict social control and discrediting methods were introduced in order to eliminate so-called acceptable poverty. A parallelism was thought to exist between the *let them die* attitude toward the poor and the *let them survive with the help of the state* approach. Both appear as mathematical formulas of a mindset for managing poverty, and contrary to Fleischacker's argument, this common point was not due to the evil of one side. This idea emerged as a product of a modern mind and depended on the argument that government exists in the legal sense to prevent harm, not to organize good, as Herbert Spencer expressed, arguing that "all suffering ought to be prevented, which is not true: much of the suffering is curative, and prevention of it is prevention of a remedy" (Spencer, 1960, p. 34). Spencer defended real justice as being the obstruction of distributive justice. All this shows that distributive justice was not the product of a single class

³ We emphasize that this situation started to change toward the end of the Middle Ages. The change in attitude toward poverty in the 18th century did not mean that rulers were much more tolerant of the poor, vagrants, and strays just before the 18th century. The 15th century also saw cruel laws against the poor. "A law of Henry VIII provided that vagabonds would be sentenced to whipping, tied behind a cart, and whipped until blood runs from their bodies. After which they will be imprisoned. A later law from the same king aggravated the penalties by adding additional clauses: In the event of recidivism, the vagrant must be whipped again and have half the ear cut off; at the second recidivism, he will be hung" (Suret-Canale, 1998, p. 21).

⁴ Lynn H. Lees interpreted the transformation through a conceptual transition, distinguishing between the poor and the pauper. According to her, what makes this transformation meaningful is that the pauper, who has certain rights in the vocabulary of the state, also has other social connotations. In time, pauper appeared as a more dramatic word than poverty, one expressing extreme neediness: "The pauper helped people define their own virtue by representing what they were not. If in 1601 the unworthy poor were vagrants and migrants, by 1834 all the dependent poor had become unworthy" (Lees, 1998, p. 41).

perspective.⁵ Since the end of the 18th century, the widening difference between the views on justice and the differentiation of its meaning according to class position is proof of this. Bernard de Mandeville viewed poverty as a condition for wealth, and thinkers from Rousseau Smith, and Kant to Paine saw poverty as a major social problem, and considered helping the poor a requirement of citizenship, coexistence, and human rights. This was because Fleischacker admitted that distributive justice was perceived as the duty of government in the 19th century, and this change was related to the self-transformation of “the unruly and seemingly apolitical ‘mob’ of the 18th century into the far more organized and political self-conscious ‘working class’ by the beginning of the 19th century” (Fleischacker, 2004, p. 80). Although the subject of distributive justice has undoubtedly been the scene of conflicts between different class positions, it was formed within a certain production and distribution system. The fact that distributive justice as a modern discourse requires one to consider poverty not as a form of social relationship but as a problem of sharing is because it is historically meaningful in the context of capitalist production and distribution relations.

Beneficial Poverty

Evaluating poverty as one side of extremely unequal positions in distribution highlights another problem that modern distributive justice must face in order to be coherent. This is the problem of wealth at the other end of inequality, and this problem is circumvented by the view that wealth is mutually beneficial. Despite the extreme inequalities, having distributive justice consider only poverty, not wealth, as a social problem certainly makes sense. The persistence of poverty, one that it must constantly fight, derives from the continuity of the capitalist property regime and the modern state that guarantees it. More importantly, studies like Quentin Skinner informed us that ideas such as equality of resources, chance, or opportunity, which come from the secular moral dimension underlying the modern character of social justice, are linked to the formation of a modern rational mind (Spencer, 1978). The modern claim that social justice must accept the principle of equal consideration is supported by equal rights. But the point is to define this equal consideration. The modern character of social justice is somehow related to accepting the principle of rational consent embodied in the traditions of rights and social contract from John Locke and Rousseau to Kant as a moral procedure that is meaningful in guiding individual action and judgment. In this way, the problem actually provides a basis for justification and legitimation used in the distributive will of modern social justice. A certain view of justice, one which determines that the distribution principles are shaped by this rationale means that the modern legitimate basis of a social contract has been provided.

This does not mean that only one system of principles for social justice can be deduced from modern rationality. The possibility of a more rational alternative always nurtures reasoning from different principles. John Rawls’ approach is one example of this. The maximin method, which is based on game theory, concludes that second best is more possible and therefore more reasonable, instead of the option where the total benefit is maximum for everyone; however, the probability of realization is very low (Rawls, 2005, pp. 150–151). Thus, vulgar utilitarianism that advocates the option of maximum total utility, no matter how great the inequalities, is thrown away. Instead, a situation is encountered where rationalism coincides with the results of a deontological search for justice that is sensitive to individuals’ intuitions about justice. For Rawls, this is akin to a way to overcome the epistemological contradictions of modernity. However, in the questioning of what is just, he finds the outlet he seeks in modern epistemology. In this sense, Rawls’ approach is no less modern than his predecessors’ social contracts, and although he stands against it as a method, to consider his work as a coherent philosophical critique of utilitarian reason may not be proper. The surprising description of Rawls’ conclusion as rational and reasonable through the contrast he established between Benthamian utilitarianism and Kantian ethics shows the close relationship modern social justice has with the principle of mutual benefit and utilitarianism. Utilitarianism has been as influential as the equality ideals of Kant’s ethics in the rise of distributive justice. In this sense, the fate of modern distributive justice depends on the coincidence of the *common truth* required by the moral defense of the principles, and the *common good* required by the common interests of those who will defend those truths. The effort to match the just with the good is a common effort in this sense; which one should be prioritized in liberalism is controversial, as seen in Rawls’ work as well (Rawls, 2005, pp. 395–399).

Another important pillar of liberal thought dating from the 19th century to the present day is utilitarian principles alongside trust in the market. Utilitarianism is based on the greatest happiness of the greatest number and is witnessed to have turned into a philosophy school through Jeremy Bentham, who aimed to transform morality into science for the first time, although the roots for this go back to the history of English thought. Utilitarianism starts with the assumption that man is forced by nature to make a choice between pleasure and pain, and reaching pleasure by avoiding pain determines all human thought and action. The observance of these two (i.e., utility) is decisive for rights, laws, equalities, justice and all other components of our moral repertoire. In other

⁵ Lynn H. Lees wrote that, within the Marxist tradition that looks at the history of welfare politics from a class perspective and starting with the capitalist evolution of the European labor market, the use of the class category provided simplistic examples of the motivations that enabled it to happen by bringing into question the role of the state and welfare policies. She cites Lis and Soly’s study (1979) “Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-industrial Europe” as an example. In her work “The Solidarities of Strangers,” (Lees, 1998, p. 4) in which she adopts an approach that includes cultural definitions of poverty instead of a resource-oriented perspective, she argues that insisting on the use of the concept for social control overshadows how it is used pragmatically by the poor and what it means as an identity.

words, concepts such as just and unjust do not mean anything by themselves (Bentham, 1970, p. 13). From this point of view, remaining insensitive toward poverty may appear right at first glance. However, this is not entirely correct. While underlining that quite a few forms of utilitarianism exist today, utilitarians like Bentham interpret the principle of preferring social interests over individual interests in a way that accepts a sharing that will provide limited equality and security in society. Bentham argued that conflicting elements must be in balance so that social interests such as providing livelihoods and creating welfare, equality, and security can be maximized overall (Bentham, 1995, p. 34). He concluded as examples that growing inequalities will eventually result in people taking each other's property by force, which can seriously and irreversibly threaten public safety.⁶ But on the other hand, when the desire for equality reaches such extremes that no difference exists between the conditions of the working people and the status of the needy poor, no reason will exist to be industrious and production efficiency will decrease, causing total social benefit to decrease again. Therefore, equality should be ensured to the extent that security will not be harmed and, more importantly, by appropriate methods. For this reason, he envisaged aid for the poor through savings and volunteering, and at the point where this was not enough, he argued that the panopticon, which he designed to keep the prisoners under constant control in prisons, could be applied not only to prisons, but also to work houses, poor houses, workshops, and even mental hospitals, hospitals, and schools. According to Bentham's proposed plan, the poor working in these supervised workhouses would be able to leave once they managed to produce enough to cover the costs of the resources allocated by the public for their care. These works would be carried out by the National Charity Company, and the company will decide who will be admitted to these workhouses; meat meals that cause extra costs would be removed, and allowances would be limited.

This perspective is the source of the idea of managing poverty in a way that makes it beneficial for all, even making it profitable, and clearly is compatible with utilitarianism. However, the utilitarian approach has also changed and transformed over time. Reading the history of social sciences through its relationship with utilitarianism, Alain Caillé perceived this relationship as a tense one from time to time, but still argued that utilitarianism has gotten stronger over time (2003, pp. 15–36). He described the journey of utilitarianism in the social sciences, first as it was in classical social sciences, from diffuse utilitarianism to a dominant but balanced utilitarianism in the 1770s, and then from the dominant but balanced utilitarianism to generalized and softened utilitarianism in the 1970s. Caillé's study expertly revealed and discussed the traces of utilitarianism in political economy, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and psychology. According to Caillé, the strengthening effect utilitarianism has on the sciences is directly related to modernity, and three institutions have been the guide of the emancipation project of modernization in this context: First the market would provide the game of material interest, a liberation by getting rid of the ambiguity of interpersonal relations that had infiltrated in the game of material interest. Then the national democratic state replaced power based on violence and authority with free elections between representatives of material interests formed in the market, undertaking the task of correcting the potentially dangerous irregularities and tremors of the market. And finally, science got rid of irrational beliefs and legitimized the symbolic meaning of the interests of reason. More importantly, although he wrote that a softened and generalized utilitarianism has dominated the sciences since the 1970s, he added an important annotation in the 2003 edition of his work when neoliberalism made its weight felt and became observable by thinkers:

Accordingly, utilitarianism has become immeasurably generalized in the last decade. However, it has not softened, quite the opposite... After the fall of the Berlin wall, homo ethicus, homo politicus, homo religiosus, homo sociologicus, homo sportivus, and the other aspects of the subject evaporated within a single homo economicus body, with the help of globalization and ultra-liberalism, it eventually found its place in the realm of a short-term interest and profitability which completely appropriated the old forms of regulation. (Caillé, 2003, pp. 37–52)

Whether or not this form of utilitarianism has prevailed, as Caillé argued, its various forms must be admitted to be embedded in contemporary theories of justice. Some forms of utilitarianism truly may be more generous than others in the distribution of resources. In fact, Will Kymlicka wrote that utilitarianism is used to justify sacrificing the weak and unpopular members of the community for the benefit of the majority, as well as to attack those who hold unjust privileges at the expense of the majority (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 45). Today, utilitarian views range from more egalitarian forms based on the principle that interests should be considered equally to more skeptical forms of direct resource allocation. However, even in this classical form, questions such as whether all choices can be considered legitimate and whether selfish choices should be considered are a matter of debate, and utilitarian thinkers give different answers to these questions.

Rawls' objections to utilitarianism depends more on the method he uses than how egalitarian his results are. Arguing that utilitarianism is teleological in any form, Rawls emphasized that, while determining the principles of justice, utilitarians set out from the distribution result predicted by the chosen distributive principles. From this result-focused point of view, first the good is set out, and then the principles that will be suitable for this are defined as so-called fair. If one supposes from this point of view

⁶ The period in which Bentham wrote these thoughts was after the 1789 Revolution. For this reason, he was convinced that one cannot remain indifferent to the level of discontent that extreme poverty can create in society. Still, he can be said to have been a rather cautious thinker about redistribution. Bentham's welfare state is quite different from today's welfare state in helping the poor (e.g., his categorical rejection of gratuitous aid). However, the idea that poverty should be kept under control by distinguishing the elements that may threaten public security overlaps with the understanding of the welfare state, which sees poverty as an issue that should be dealt with by the state. Although Bentham's understanding of welfare state is much more brutal against the poor than contemporary welfare states and is not far from Malthus's suggestions, it is based on the fact that poverty should be regulated by the state, in a way that cares for the overall welfare of its citizens, not just a part of it.

certain distributional principles are chosen that aim at maximizing satisfaction in society, and then considers the dissatisfaction to be caused by enormous inequalities, the principles then get replaced by those which will ensure greater social peace and happiness by producing less resources. Even in this case, Rawls argued that justice is seen as a means, not an end (Rawls, 2005, pp. 24–25). Although this result-oriented teleological utilitarianism in which the good is defined independently of the just is just as possible based on libertarian principles, according to Rawls, it cannot meet the principle of the priority of the just over the good, which increases individual self-esteem. For this reason, the theory of justice should be handled within the framework of deontological reasoning.

Referring to these suggestions from Rawls, Fleischacker argued that true distributive justice should be established as a theory in this way and defended that finally a clear formulation of it could be seen only with Rawls (Fleischacker, 2004, pp. 111–112). As such, utilitarianism that reduces all morality to a single principle should be excluded from modern justice. However, utilitarianism did not decline after the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, which is seen as Rawls' *magnum opus*. Instead, it continued to exist among modern theories of justice. The utilitarian approach is still accepted by most contemporary theorists within the conceptual framework of distributive justice theories. Rawls' theory may be focused on the distribution of primary social goods, but when it comes to how this is to be done, he was not entirely opposed to trusting the market in the distribution of benefits and he was definitely not focused on scarcity, efficiency, or stability issues. Rawls' opposition to utilitarianism as a method does not mean that distributive justice completely excludes it. When dealing with practical matters and considering the moral norms that one thinks of as one of the pillars of modern social justice in general, contemporary utilitarianism can provide a clear, progressive answer to the question of whether we defend the oppressed majority against a small privileged elite, as Kymlicka pointed out; but “when the question is to defend an oppressed minority against a large privileged majority, utilitarianism gives us vague and conflicting answers, depending on how we identify and weigh short-term and long-term effects” (Kymlicka, 2002, p. 48). However, non-utilitarian understandings of social justice are also plural and do not offer a single practical prescription for such situations. As a modern moral discourse, utilitarianism has played a leading role even for non-utilitarian approaches by providing a rational and scientific perspective regarding the rise of distributive justice. Even in Rawls' work, who developed a non-utilitarian method, a part of the utilitarian legacy can be found similar to the rational choice theory, which played a critical role in his strategy for justifying his principles.

However, the contribution of utilitarianism does not eliminate its inevitable reductionism. And this confines the social justice that stands against it to the limits of a certain paradigm. This understanding of distributive justice, one which focuses on the problem of how to distribute the social resources and obligations that are handled in a utilitarian dimension as advantages and disadvantages and confronted as in a mathematical calculation, is based on an idealist philosophical approach and causes the issue to be presented unilaterally. Accordingly, social justice is simply considered as a unity that produces resources and obligations (or advantages and disadvantages) and social justice as an understanding, theory, or set of views on how these should be distributed. In addition, it assumes the presence of a state power with a will, power, and authority to distribute these needs. Social resources must be distributed, and only the institutionalized modern state power is capable of it. In this assumed hierarchical order, thinkers and politicians are found who've expressed their views on the way the resources and obligations are to be distributed. From this point of view, this approach sometimes highlights the economic and social facts that have caused changes in the distribution logic and sometimes changes in the views on how distribution should occur. When this explanation methodically emphasizes the material basis, it forgets the historical one. And when it emphasizes the historical basis, it ignores the issue of organization and determination of the existing production and distribution structures. This also makes individuals politically passive, turning them into parties that will only receive a share of the resources (Forst, 2014, p. 18) which obscures the relational dimension of poverty too.

If one understands poverty as a form of extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth and social resources that has become a social problem, this means that inequality becomes illegitimate once it reaches certain dimensions. Exactly when, however, remain unclear. In a capitalist system, the bond the poor have with society not only is formed when poverty is no longer a poor person's problem, but it also affects the lives of those who are not poor. In other words, poverty becomes associated with social justice only when it is considered purely as a redistribution problem. This is not a result of the increasing number of poor people in society. The understanding of poverty as a problem that the state must overcome with its distribution policies shows that it is a problem society cannot solve, despite it being a social problem. The paradoxical situation that arises when poverty is handled from the point of view of modern justice seems to have been resolved by ignoring the fact that poverty is constantly being produced. Considering poverty as a problem that exists and needs to be dealt with without questioning how it emerged as a result derives from the idea that, although the conditions that produce it are social, its solution should be sought without having the poor classes be confronted with those who have become rich at the expense of their impoverishment. The reality of capitalist production and distribution necessitates the re-establishment of sociality by modern states without encounters between pre-modern classes and strata. Therefore, the modern perspective is based on fighting poverty. Apart from reducing the number of poor, an attempt is made to achieve this by redefining poverty. The aim is to improve the situation of the poor by transferring resources such as taxes, aid, and public expenditures to the poor or through minimum wage and living standards. Resolving the contradiction for the modern

state and its understanding of justice lies in evaluating the state of resources and wealth distribution in society, independently of the process of producing said resources and wealth. Although poverty is related to justice, it ceases to be related to injustice. The radicality of posing extreme inequality problematized by modern distributive justice as a problem of justice is overshadowed by the failure of its advocates to confront the truth, as already understood in the 19th century: It is in fact constantly reproduced by the capitalist system.

The understanding that views the main social problem as poverty in purely economic terms and the argument that poverty should be eradicated translate to making sense of poverty as a trans-historical concept entirely independent from capitalism. The modern state considers poverty as a major obstacle to economic development and claims to struggle with it. Social justice spreads to the process of fighting poverty, which becomes a constant pursuit like the struggle and dependence between the hero and antihero common to modern comic books. In the hands of the modern state through taxation and various aids, social justice transforms into a tool for targeted stability within market conditions, far from being identified as an ideal situation that needs to be reached. With the contribution of liberal democracy's formal equality, poverty being purged from its political content and perceived in a compressed sense has taken it out of context. In this process, the recognition involved with identifying poverty becomes invisible, and the social suffering it causes also gets suppressed. This is exactly why the effort to separate the hero (i.e., modern distributive justice) from the previous conception of justice should be concerned with the study of changing social relations that give direction to it rather than to decide in which thinkers' works it appeared first. Justice has always contained the tension for what is included and what is not. The restructuring of the justice discourse under changing social circumstances comes with the changing facts experienced as injustice. The main tension in the emergence of modern justice discourse shows itself as opposed to the form that poverty takes under the conditions of capitalism and the attitude that modern political powers show in response. Poverty certainly cannot be reduced to an objective related to income: It also includes an irreducible subjective side designated by the category of psychic suffering (Renault, 2002, p. 27). The same can also be said for social justice. The desire for a just society cannot be considered independently from an effort to produce an ethical approach and a normative discourse that will help to express the existing injustices including the negative effects of poverty on the individual and a political point of view that seeks the conditions of just social relations.

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