



Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Winter 2002

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Inside front cover : Detail from Goya's "Estragos de la guerra" (Ravages of War), etching number 30 from "Los desastres de la guerra" (The Disasters of War). Some experts believe that this is the first depiction by an artist of the civilian victims of a wartime bombing. See Ira Katznelson on *Evil & politics*, pages 7 – 10.
Courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery.

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Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences



The Academy was chartered in 1780. Its seal depicts Minerva flanked by a quadrant and a telescope in a field of Indian corn. The sun above the cloud represents the nation's rising state "in regard to empire, and the arts and sciences," while the motto, *Sub libertate florent*, conveys the idea that arts and sciences flourish best in free states. *Dædalus* was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal's namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a labyrinth seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

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With this issue *Dædalus* enters a new era. Founded in 1955 and launched as a quarterly in 1958, the journal took shape under the pioneering leadership of Walter Muir Whitehill, Gerald Holton, and Philip Rieff – and then flourished for nearly forty years under the distinguished direction of Stephen R. Graubard. Over these years Graubard produced memorable issues on a wide variety of topics, from *The Negro American* in 1965 to *Why South Africa Matters* just last year. Professor Graubard, like his predecessors, has left a remarkable legacy that a new editor can only hope to extend.

From its inception *Dædalus* has been published by one of the nation's oldest honorific societies, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. But from the start, *Dædalus* has been an experiment, a work in progress – a bold effort to bring a variety of specialists from every field of endeavor into ongoing contact with educated readers from all walks of life.

It is in this spirit of interdisciplinary experimentation that the present issue of *Dædalus* introduces some novel features. As before, the journal at its heart will consist of essays on a single theme that changes with each issue. But in addition to this core of thematic essays, we will regularly publish poetry and fiction; we will occasionally include commentary on current events; and we will sometimes print letters from our readers. In addition we are inaugurating a new department in the journal consisting of brief “notes” written exclusively by Fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. These

notes are meant to keep readers abreast of developments in every field represented in the Academy. In each issue readers may thus expect to hear from some of our nation's most accomplished figures, addressing topics from the meaning of intelligence to the future of American medicine.

In 1958, upon launching *Dædalus* as a quarterly, Gerald Holton promised to turn the journal into “a medium through which leading scholars in all fields can address one another,” in order to focus “our attention again on that which does or should make us members of one community.”

I share this vision. And as I start my editorship, I hope to be able – like Whitehill, Rieff, Holton, and Graubard – to honor in practice the eighteenth-century charter of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences:

To cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honor, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people.

James Miller
Editor of *Dædalus*

Comment by Ira Katznelson

Evil & politics

In the immediate aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, it was hard to know what to say. We seemed bereft of “a terminology,” as Madame de Staël observed after the Jacobin Terror, in a situation “beyond the common measure.” In the days that followed, my own thoughts turned to Hannah Arendt, and the works she had written in an effort to grapple with another situation beyond the common measure. “The problem of evil,” Arendt forecast in 1945, “will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe – as death became the fundamental problem after the last war.”

‘Evil’ is a word one heard with some frequency in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, though rarely deployed with Arendt’s precision. Within some intellectual circles, a denunciation of these acts as evil has been accompanied by a far too simple justification of liberalism and the Enlightenment as decency incarnate. Evil, in this view, implies more than doing harm or inflicting pain on

innocents. Behavior is evil when it attacks valued goods proffered by Western modernity.

Disputing the integrity and worth of these goods, critics in other intellectual circles have focused instead on the evils of postcolonialism and the exploitative relationships characteristic of global capitalism. It is these iniquities that should command our attention, not the acts of terror they consider in a cooler, sometimes icy, register.

I find the impulses at play in both responses unsettling. Each group is better at assuming a posture than developing ways of acting and living decently in a world riven by heterogeneous, interconnected, and sometimes conflicting cultures. A rote defense of Western liberalism could very well authorize a new brand of colonialism, once again making many non-Western peoples ineligible for its core values of rights, toleration, participation, and consent. A wholesale rejection of enlightened liberalism as a mere figment of Western imperialism could very well license an irresponsible and foundationless antimodernism, reinforcing a mirror-image view of ‘us’ against ‘them.’ Intransigently advanced, each perspective evades asking how we can shade the sensibilities, deepen the capacities, and address the limitations of the liberal tradition in full awareness that credulous notions of human perfectibility have been mocked by the global diffusion of human superfluosity, the central hallmark of modern

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“radical evil,” as Hannah Arendt argued in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Writing in the aftermath of total war and the *Shoah*, Arendt sought both to apprehend the appearance of “radical evil, previously unknown to us,” and to transform the eschatology of evil into a systematic tool with which to name and explain the terrible cost Nazism and Stalinism had exacted. By ‘radical evil,’ she understood the project of erasing the moral and the juridical person as a prelude to physical annihilation. Justified by millenarian ideologies and advanced by what Arendt called manufactured unrealities, radical evil literally erased human plurality by stripping large populations of their rights as citizens, including the right to a name, as a prelude to mass killing. Turning innocents into nonpeople, both the Nazis and the Soviets thus elided the liberal tradition’s central puzzle of how to make it possible for incommensurable values and identities to coexist, perhaps even flourish, in a climate of toleration.

Although today’s constellation of Muslim fervency, fascist-style mobilization, and Internet-friendly coordination may be new in some respects, it is manifestly as capable of producing radical evil as the barbarous offshoots of Western civilization Arendt addressed, even if thankfully it has yet to equal them. Familiar, too, are the challenges that Islamic zealotry can pose to the tradition of Enlightenment and to the possibilities of a decent liberal politics.

Given these hazards, we need to explore whether the Western liberal tradition can effectively contest radical evil without sacrificing its own best features. I think it can, though not on its own and only if liberals can find a terminology and institutional practices to engage with nonliberal beliefs and cultures without dismissing them too hastily as irretrievably antiliberal.

Any meaningful effort to refine the language and institutions that a robust liberalism requires must move beyond a thin and often misleading claim to universality; it also can gain confidence from a fresh appreciation for the Enlightenment’s rich, though often neglected, lineage of realism and a recognition of liberalism’s history of invention and transformation. Kant, for example, worried about the demagogic uses of reason and the possibility that a new set of ostensibly enlightened “prejudices [can] serve, like the old, as the leading strings of the thoughtless masses.” He also well knew that demonic violence has long characterized human affairs. Such realism is quite distinct from the rosy optimism of those eighteenth-century *philosophes* who supposed that systematic understanding would trump torture and barbarism, as if to realize the title of Pierre-Paul Prud’hon’s painting of 1798: *Darkness Dissipates as Wisdom and Truth Descend to Earth*. Rather than Prud’hon’s canvas, it is Goya’s etchings of *Los desastres de la guerra* after the Spanish insurrection of 1808 and the Peninsular War with Napoleon that might better be adopted as chastening emblems of a humane realism.

Today’s terror forces, or should force, an engagement not just with this year’s instance of evil but with a proper role for realistic reason and institutional innovation in the face of a persistent human capacity for desolation, now enhanced by the legacy and diffusion of twentieth-century models of radical evil. Times of turmoil and fear urgently pose two questions: whether liberalism can thrive in the face of determined adversaries and what kind of liberalism we should wish to have. Answers to ‘what kind’ affect the possibilities for ‘whether’ by offering choices not only about doctrines but also about institutions and public policies.

The ideals of the liberal tradition,

properly appreciated, represent an open sensibility rather than a fixed set of arrangements or ideas. The most important moments of innovation and change in the modern West's liberal political tradition have come in circumstances governed by anxiety and alarm. Consider not only Locke's institutional formula for toleration in conditions of religious warfare between Catholics and Protestants, but his specifications for political consent and representation in the context of a century of civil war in England. Consider, too, the constitutional innovations of Benjamin Constant in France when faced with a global war and the collapse of legitimate kingship. Consider, finally, the development of the twentieth-century liberal welfare state in response to depression, class conflict, and the rise of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Nazism.

Especially at moments of danger and innovation, the liberal tradition has been neither self-contained nor homogeneous. There have been liberal democrats, liberal socialists, liberal republicans, liberal monarchists – and also liberal Christians, liberal Jews, liberal Muslims. In each instance, the absence of a partnership with political liberalism has proved an invitation to oppression. Without a commitment to such a cardinal liberal value as toleration, even a declared democrat may be tempted by despotism. The liberal tradition is thus necessary to an effectively decent politics. But it is not sufficient. An abstract commitment to universal human rights by itself, without depth, passion, and historical particularity, cannot possibly contend with radical evil. An effective liberalism modifies but does not replace other commitments.

The more global our world, as Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us, the more imperative it is to register that the prove-

nance of an idea may affect its status but not its value or capacity. Even if liberal political thought is inescapably Western in origin, it no longer belongs only to the West. "Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on," he observes, "all bear the burden of European thought and history." These secular and universal categories and concepts were preached "at the colonized and at the same time denied . . . in practice. But the vision," writes Chakrabarty, "has been powerful in its effects. It has historically provided a strong foundation on which to erect – both in Europe and outside – critiques of socially unjust practices. . . . This heritage is now global." Even when contradicted by such deep injustices as slavery and Jim Crow, European imperialism, and today's spectacular global inequalities, struggles based on these orientations ensue "because there is no easy way of dispensing with these universals in the condition of political modernity." Or at least, one might say, no attractive struggles are possible wholly outside their frame.

Both liberalism and the Enlightenment within which it nestles advance a philosophical anthropology of rational actors and rational action, insisting that human agents develop the capacity to deliberate, choose, and achieve sensible goals. In their effort to cultivate such rational citizens, liberal regimes in the past have all too often imposed various limits, drawing boundaries that stunt the capacities of individuals based on their religion, race, gender, literacy, criminality, or colonized status. But after centuries of struggle about the dimensions of freedom, enlightened political liberalism

Comment
by Ira
Katznelson

today acknowledges *no* legitimate barriers to reason, hence no legitimate ascriptive barriers to liberal inclusion and liberal citizenship.

The result is a deep paradox. The global appeal of an enlightened liberalism cannot help but jeopardize the local attachments, the historical particularities – the human plurality – that constitute its most important rationale.

Here, then, lies liberalism's most basic current conundrum: how to broaden its endowments in order to protect and nourish heterogeneity while coping with its perils.

As our version of this challenge beckons, it is not a war on terrorism that will define the early twenty-first century, but a series of battles for the soul – that is, for the content, rules, and respectful inclusiveness – of a properly robust, and realistic, liberalism. This endeavor, rather than a stylized conflict about the merits of Enlightenment, had better be the struggle we make our first priority.

James K. Galbraith

*A perfect crime: inequality
in the age of globalization*

Most of the world's political leaders have embraced economic globalization on two grounds: that open markets and transnational production networks are unstoppable; and that the benefits will surely flow out to all the world's people, rich and poor. Leading economists and journalists agree, convinced by the logic of laissez-faire, comparative advantage, and technology transfer. Accordingly, they declare, class conflict and competitive struggle are obsolete.

Yet, outside elite circles, conflict and struggle refuse to disappear. In rich countries, electorates and pressure groups remain protectionist and proregulation, even socialist in parts of Europe; there is wide sympathy for the (nonviolent) protestors of Seattle, Davos, and

Genoa. In poor countries, globalization is the new synonym for imperialism and colonialism; generally the word evokes collapse rather than common gain. All in all, if the imposition of deregulation, privatization, free trade, and free capital mobility has in fact raised living standards worldwide, gratitude is devilishly hard to find.

So what are the facts? Has globalization hurt or helped? Oddly, researchers do not know; mostly they do not ask. For the doctrine of globalization as it is understood in elite circles contains the curious assumption that the global market is itself beyond reproach. The formulae for success in that market – from openness and transparency to sound finance to investment in education – remain matters of national responsibility; countries that fail have only their own deficiencies to blame. In line with this view, most research has focused on national conditions and national policies, and not on global conditions or the effects of globalization as such.

Whether such a national focus is appropriate, or whether a global view would be better, is a question of great importance. To resolve it, we would need new efforts to measure economic development and social progress across countries around the world – in effect,

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we would need to write a global report card. But official initiatives in this vein, notably the World Bank's *Human Development Report*, are caught in contradictions between the cheerful predictions of globalization theory and what the evidence of epidemics, illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty suggests is actually happening – contradictions that have driven several senior figures (most famously, former chief economist Joseph Stiglitz) out of the Bank. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) are today closed societies, sealed off from most forms of serious critical discussion.

So, what can *independent* research contribute to an understanding of the state of the global economy today? Not much, perhaps, beyond the fragmentary evidence of case studies and field reports. Truly independent scholars usually lack the resources to bring together new information on a global scale.

Still, one broader area has attracted attention: economic *inequality* and its relationship to economic growth. In this area, data (collated, as we shall see below, from many independent sources) are already available. A rich (but inexpensive) econometrics can be brought to bear. And much hinges on the findings. For, while inequality and economic growth are hardly the only issues in world development – life, health, literacy, and peace are more important – the perceived relationship between these two economic variables underlies development policy in profound ways.

Long ago, the great economist Simon Kuznets (1901 – 1985) linked equality to the development process. Kuznets argued that as industrialization began, it might lead to an increasing inequality at first: the rough parity among farmers would give way to an emerging urban-

rural divide. But as industrialization deepened, the center of economic gravity would shift to the cities. To live in cities, to work for wages, requires free labor and that every family have some access to cash. The larger the share of basic consumption goods provided through the marketplace, the more equal money incomes must become. Eventually, democracy and social-welfare systems would emerge; progress toward the social democratic frameworks of Western Europe and North America was a pragmatic possibility as well as an ideal.

Kuznets offered an optimistic vision, similar to that of John Maynard Keynes though more austere in style. Properly managed, development could be civilized; it need not lead to the misery and upheaval that Karl Marx had earlier foreseen. But in recent years, as the Marxian threat disappeared, Kuznets's vision also receded. With unions in disorder and welfare states in disrepute, the 'Kuznets hypothesis' now serves mainly as a whipping boy of development researchers, to be raised, sometimes at length, but usually to be dismissed as disconfirmed by modern data, generally by economists who see no contradiction between inequality and development.

In a 1993 report entitled the *East Asian Miracle* (hereafter referred to as EAM), economists at the World Bank offered an alternative theory. They argued that early redistributions, especially of land and primary schooling, were preconditions for industrial success in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. This argument has been widely cited to underpin a case for education as a development tool, to support redistributive policies in the early stages, and especially to argue that development can be market-friendly, provided the "right" pattern of endowments and incentives exists at the outset.

By emphasizing market-friendly preconditions for growth, the EAM team undermined the presumption that development and rising equality normally occur together – even though the Asian evidence did suggest that this was in fact the case in most places. The team also downplayed the policy activism of many Asian states, especially their commitments to planning, industrial policy, financial control, and the development of social welfare – all cornerstones of a normal development process as understood by Keynes and Kuznets in their day.

The EAM's striking hypothesis also called attention, indirectly, to the incompleteness of information about inequality around the world. While there had been many efforts to measure inequalities at the national level, no one had brought those measurements together in a single global data set. As a result, it remained unclear whether one could generalize from the East Asian experience. Were the apparent lessons valid on a wider scale? Was it really true that redistributive policies set the stage for growth?

To help answer that question, Klaus Deininger and Lyn Squire of the World Bank decided to mine the economic development literature for surveys of income inequality. Finding thousands of such measures in scores of studies, they evaluated each data point on three criteria. Did the study focus on households, rather than persons? Did it attempt to measure all forms of income, including in-kind incomes? Did it attempt to cover all parts of the society, including rural as well as urban areas? In 1996 they republished the data satisfying these three criteria as a "high-quality" data set on household income inequality since 1950. The Deininger-Squire data set is now a standard reference; a recent version of-

fers nearly 750 country/year observations on which dozens of papers have been based.

The result has been an unintended descent into confusion. As scholars sought systematic relationships between inequality, income, and growth in the World Bank's data, no consistent pattern emerged. Some seemed to confirm the Kuznets hypothesis. Others argued instead that inequality first falls and then rises with rising income: the opposite pattern. The EAM finding of a relationship between low inequality and later growth was first supported, and then questioned, on the ground that the relationship seemed to rest on continent-specific differences between Latin America and Asia.

Meanwhile, pro-equality viewpoints came under challenge, from a quarter associated with older theories and conservative policy views. In Victorian economic thought, inequality was itself the spur of growth. Growth required capital accumulation, and it was the accumulations made possible by concentrating incomes that justified an unequal class structure. The Victorian system worked well enough – so long as, in practice, growth did occur and the working classes enjoyed the benefit of a steadily rising living standard. But, as Keynes particularly well understood, all this had died with World War I.

And then, after sixty years, the very same idea was born again. Let the rich rule – so wrote the supply-side economists who came to power behind Ronald Reagan in America and Margaret Thatcher in Britain. Tax cuts would improve the incentives of the wealthy to "work, save, and invest." High interest rates would reward saving and quash inflation. And a fetish of the entrepreneur spread through political and business culture, a doctrine that implicitly

rooted the concept of value in innovation and leadership, rather than in labor or even in the happiness of consumers.

Today, a similar doctrine finds expression in models that emphasize synergies, increasing returns, technological change. Two good educations, in partnership, are more than twice as good as one, so the educated should concentrate into enclaves. Technical development raises the relative productivity of the well trained – therefore, pay the skilled more and the unskilled less. In these cases, inequalities expressed as clusters of privileged opportunity will foster more rapid growth.

Seeking an empirical basis for such claims, Kristin Forbes uses the Deininger and Squire data set to find that increases in inequality are followed by increased growth rates. If valid, these findings would reverse the EAM idea without restoring lost luster to Simon Kuznets.¹

As matters stand, economists have broached four different possibilities, each with different implications for the strategy of economic development:

The *redistributionist view* holds that egalitarian social policies are a precondition for growth and points to the Asian miracle – before the crash of 1997 – as prime evidence. This view emphasizes land reform and education, but tends to resist intervention in market processes once preconditions have been successfully met.

The *neoliberal view* is that policymakers should go for growth, concentrating resources on comparative advantage, exports, and the fostering of technological

change. Inequality may well rise, but the success of a growth strategy makes the sacrifice worthwhile.

The *Kuznets and Keynes view* implies that increasing equality is the normal outcome of a process of rising incomes – whether fast or slow – and that social welfare policies are normal outgrowths of the transition to an urban industrial economy. This perspective does not presuppose that redistribution should precede growth; it only implies that inequality will decline as the development process matures. But if Kuznets and Keynes were right, then strategies of planning, industrial diversification, import substitution, financial control, and the welfare state are a legitimate part of the development tool kit; they do not contradict the fundamental project.

The *Scotch verdict* – “not proven” – is that development may be unrelated to social and economic inequalities in any systematic way. This is the fallback position of some who argue for growth as the sole development objective.

Plainly, the world is complex. Many different things could be true. But how many of these four conflicting hypotheses are, actually, correct? At most, one.² Which one? A great deal rides on the answer.

One reason why the question remains unresolved is that the evidence against which the modern views have been tested – the Deininger-Squire data set – is unreliable.

2 To see the contradiction between the Kuznets hypothesis and, say, the Forbes hypothesis, consider two countries that start with identical levels of income and inequality. If both then grow to a higher income level, under Kuznets inequality should decline in both. But the Forbes model suggests that one country can raise its growth rate by increasing inequality in the short run. It follows that later

1 See Kristin Forbes, “A Reassessment of the Relationship Between Inequality and Growth,” *American Economic Review* 90 (3) (September 2000): 869 – 887.

One cannot but admire the effort of Deininger and Squire to bring some order to the chaotic history of income-inequality measurement. Still, a comparison of coefficient values from their “high-quality” data set quickly reveals fundamental problems.

First, in many parts of the world – in Africa most of all, but also in Latin America, Asia, and even in parts of Europe – measurements are sparse, separated in time by many years or even decades. Second, while some of the rankings seem reasonable – one might expect low inequality readings from Eastern Europe during the communist years – others are, to put it mildly, implausible. Is inequality in India, Pakistan, and Indonesia really in the same general league as in Norway? Is inequality in Spain really lower than in France? Is inequality in the United States and Australia really comparable to, say, Nigeria or the Sudan? It is doubtful that any Sudanese thinks so.

The thin coverage on which these results are based becomes a more serious problem still when one tries to compute changes in the World Bank’s inequality data over some consistent time period. One is rapidly reduced to a data set where half of all observations are from

on that country will have, other things being equal, higher income and at least equal, or perhaps higher, inequality. The downward-sloping Kuznets relation will no longer be observed, either in time series or panel data. Similarly, if the EAM model is correct, then a country reducing inequality in the short run will be observed at lower inequality but initially the same income level as one that does not. In this case, if growth then accelerates in the redistributing country, the Kuznets pattern may be restored after a time. But it will not be observed during the transition, and it may not be restored at all; the EAM hypothesis does not clearly specify what happens to inequality after growth accelerates.

the affluent member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (this is true of the Forbes study, for example). A simple effort to compare changes from the 1980s to the 1990s – the decades for which the Bank reports the *most* observations – shows no data for most of Africa, West Asia, and Latin America. And where observations exist, they are questionable: inequality falls for about half the countries in this exercise, in a decade marked by wide protests against rising inequality! When data and common perception clash so sharply, which is to be believed?

We clearly need more and better data. A new data set should, ideally, approach comprehensive coverage of the global economy on a year-to-year basis, permitting detailed comparison of changes in inequality to changes in GDP. It should be based on data that are reasonably accurate and reasonably consistent across countries.

This turns out to be possible, so long as one is willing to narrow the focus and to return to official sources of information – sources that are very rich, but widely neglected. Inequalities of household income – the focus of Deininger and Squire – are very difficult to measure, and the measurements we do have often come from unofficial surveys.³

Levels of pay, on the other hand, may be measured easily and accurately for many countries. Pay is, of course, a large

3 The only consistent *formal* definition of income we have comes from the income tax, whose code specifies the precise allowable treatment of each type of inflow and outflow. It is tax law that specifies that wages and salaries are income, but that gifts received are not, that reimbursements of business expenses should be deducted, and so on. Since tax laws vary, the concept of income is therefore *nation-*

subset of income. Levels of *manufacturing pay* – an important subset of all pay – have been measured with reasonable accuracy as a matter of official routine in most countries around the world for nearly forty years. The resulting data – payrolls by manufacturing sector – have been placed in a single systematic industrial accounting framework by the United Nations International Development Organization (UNIDO), which makes cross-country comparison both easy and relatively reliable.

In short, if one is willing to look at the growth-inequality relationship through the narrow lens of pay rates and earnings structures, it is possible to get the picture into focus.⁴

The contribution of the University of Texas Inequality Project (UTIP) has been to compute consistent measures of manufacturing pay inequality from this

ally specific, well defined only where precise accounting conventions are codified in the tax laws. Differences in accounting and tax treatments across countries will produce differences in measured incomes. In countries where substantial parts of income are unrecorded, or delivered in kind, or hidden from tax, or where accounting standards are vague, problems of valuation and aggregation rapidly mount. There is no reason to expect measurements to be consistent through time or across surveys. These facts make the project of comparing income inequality across countries and years doubly difficult, and in practice even to arrive at moderately reliable comparisons requires meticulous examination of micro-level data. Such a project has been undertaken with skill in recent years by the Luxembourg Income Studies, but it is restricted mainly to the wealthiest countries. The World Bank's researchers, on the other hand, had to base their judgments of data quality on summary information about work done over a half century in far-flung locales, often through independent surveys. It cannot be surprising – and is not their fault – that the resulting inequality coefficients are problematic.

information, using an inequality metric developed in the 1960s by the late econometrician Henri Theil.⁵ The application of this technique to UNIDO's industrial data set permits us to generate large numbers of inequality measures that can be compared across countries and through time. The year 2000 release of the UNIDO data set alone contains sufficient information for nearly 3,200 country/year observations between 1963 and 1998 – more than four times the coverage of Deininger and Squire.

4 The main trade-off is between comprehensiveness and accuracy: we emphasize accurate measurement of a limited domain, manufacturing pay inequality, over implausible measurement of a comprehensive one, income inequality. However, manufacturing pay inequalities are interesting in their own right. First, many important economic problems, particularly the effects of trade, technological change, and the Kuznets hypothesis itself, concern the distribution of pay, rather than the broader concept of household income distribution, which includes confounding the effects of transfers, taxes, and changing household composition. Second, there is nevertheless a strong apparent correlation between our measures of manufacturing pay inequality and the (we believe, reliable) measures of income inequality reported – but only for a limited range of countries – by the Luxembourg Income Studies. This is, of course, highly plausible: countries with strongly egalitarian values are likely to have both compressed pay structures and strong welfare states. Thus we believe that the UTIP approach provides a very inexpensive way to approximate rankings of income inequality for many countries, where detailed and reliable micro-data are not available.

5 To be precise, we compute the between-groups component of Theil's T statistic across a set of industrial categories, generally at the two- to three-digit international standard industrial classification (ISIC) levels. Theil's T statistic is the best-known example of a class of inequality measures known as "generalized entropy measures," based originally on information theory. Such measures have all the desirable mathematical characteristics of the

A map averaging values of an inequality coefficient computed from these data (see figure 1) graphically displays the key findings. Over the 1963–1998 period, as these data reveal, manufacturing pay inequality was lowest in the social democracies of Scandinavia and in Australia and under the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, China and Cuba (because of the boundary changes, data for Russia here exclude the Soviet years). Southern Europe and North America form a second group of countries with relatively low levels of pay inequality. The wealthier countries of Latin America (such as Argentina, Venezuela, and Colombia) and West Asia (Iran) form a middle group; Russia (after 1991) and South Africa rank slightly higher. The regions of highest inequality are found in a broad equatorial belt, from Peru and Brazil through central Africa and southern Asia, reflecting the largest gaps between city and countryside, between oil

more widely known Gini coefficient, and in addition they are additive and decomposable (meaning that inequality within a set of groups plus inequality between the groups sums to total inequality for the combined population). This makes them a very flexible tool for working with semi-aggregated data, and we have shown that changes in between-group measures are often a very robust indicator of changes in the whole distribution (including the unobserved within-groups component). Use of industrial category schemes for purposes of international comparison is the principal innovation of the UTIP project. For further discussion of technical details, please consult the technical appendices in James K. Galbraith and Maureen Berner, eds., *Inequality and Industrial Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). I thank Pedro Conceição, Hyunsub Kum, and George Purcell especially, from among the UTIP team, for diligent help with concepts and with calculations; the present world data set in particular is Kum's handiwork. The UTIP measurements are at <<http://utip.gov.utexas.edu>>.

and food, and the weakest development of mass manufacturing and the production of capital goods.

These findings are in striking accord with Kuznets's basic hypothesis. Higher incomes and lower pay inequality are strongly associated. Because this is true, there is no reason to expect a systematic relationship between inequality today and growth later, and none can be found. Redistribution in either direction – up or down – is apparently not a precondition for economic growth; instead, successful growth and redistribution tend to go hand in hand.

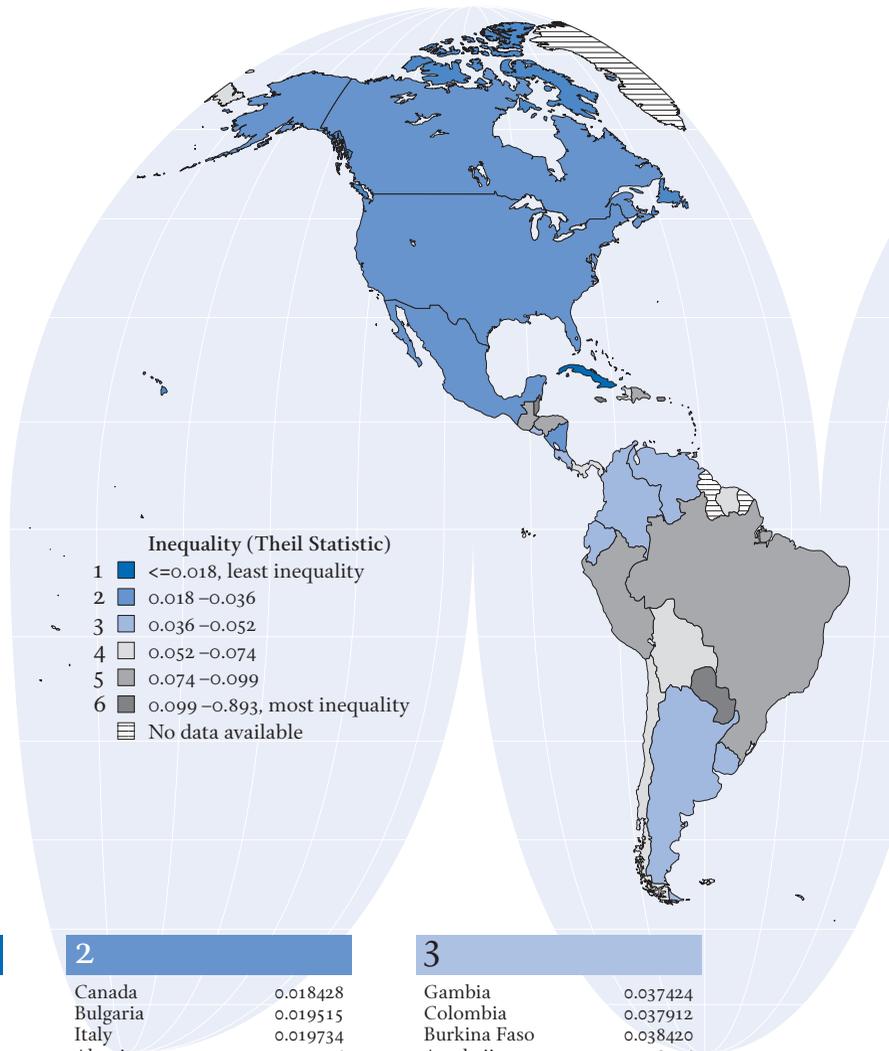
Although the Kuznets hypothesis relating levels of inequality to levels of pay or income is broadly corroborated by these findings, some doubts about his views do remain. It is debatable, for example, if inequality must increase, as Kuznets supposed, in the earliest stages of industrial development. Yet that question is moot in most places, so far as modern times and data are concerned: most countries are past the early stages. It may also be that inequality rises slightly in a few of the very richest countries as income grows, due partly to capital gains in technology sectors – a pattern of interest for students of the United States and the United Kingdom, but not broadly relevant to the study of economic development.

On the whole, inequalities of pay within manufacturing tend to be lower in rich countries than in poor. That means that inequality almost surely declines as industrialization deepens and as incomes rise. This finding is consistent over the globe, with limited exceptions, over a thirty-five-year run of annual data, beginning in the early 1960s.

Besides confirming that Kuznets's view of the relationship between growth and inequality remains basically correct,

Figure 1
Global Inequality
1963 – 1997

Inequality of manufacturing pay computed by the University of Texas Inequality Project from the UNIDO 2000 edition of Industrial Statistics and averaged over 1963 – 1997; countries ranked into six quantiles as in Figure 3. Note the high coverage and geographic consistency of inequality patterns in the OECD and across the developing regions. Data for Russia are post-Soviet only; those for China start in 1979. Data for the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the post-Yugoslav states begin with the formation of those states in the 1990s.



1 Least inequality

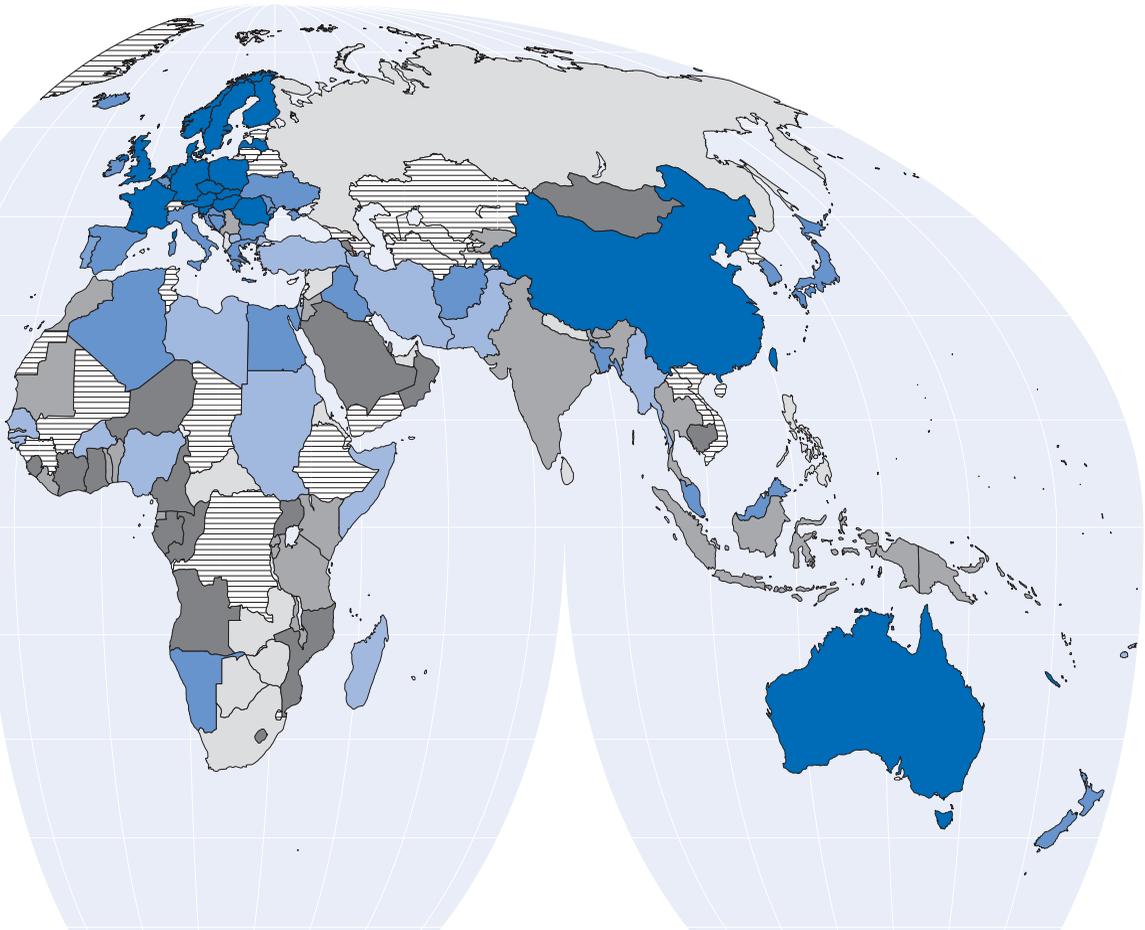
China	0.002510
Cape Verde	0.002604
Latvia	0.002916
Cuba	0.004644
Sweden	0.005988
Czech Republic	0.006639
Denmark	0.007344
Seychelles	0.007539
Romania	0.008529
Macau	0.009058
Norway	0.009170
Australia	0.009634
Finland	0.010957
Germany	0.011076
Netherlands	0.011777
Poland	0.012012
Luxembourg	0.013181
Hong Kong	0.013624
Hungary	0.014684
Slovakia	0.015137
Malta	0.015548
Britain	0.015610
Taiwan	0.015858
Slovenia	0.016014
France	0.016278
Austria	0.017799

2

Canada	0.018428
Bulgaria	0.019515
Italy	0.019734
Algeria	0.020126
Croatia	0.020982
Nicaragua	0.022988
Afghanistan	0.023208
New Zealand	0.025219
Ireland	0.025589
Belgium	0.025629
United States	0.025646
Mexico	0.027479
Iceland	0.028083
Bangladesh	0.028631
South Korea	0.028825
Ethiopia	0.029650
Egypt	0.029919
Bosnia & Herz.	0.030493
Iraq	0.030966
Japan	0.031031
Namibia	0.031425
Moldavia	0.031845
Spain	0.033788
Malaysia	0.034413
Ukraine	0.034697
Greece	0.035561

3

Gambia	0.037424
Colombia	0.037912
Burkina Faso	0.038420
Azerbaijan	0.038456
Costa Rica	0.038469
Portugal	0.039110
Nigeria	0.040251
Libya	0.040600
Turkey	0.040697
Iran	0.040782
Burma	0.041626
Senegal	0.042025
Madagascar	0.042821
Cyprus	0.043173
Macedonia	0.043215
Israel	0.044112
Fiji	0.045027
Ecuador	0.045361
North Yemen	0.045504
Pakistan	0.045698
Uruguay	0.045894
Argentina	0.048402
Sudan	0.048610
Somalia	0.048952
El Salvador	0.051577
Venezuela	0.051952



4

Haiti	0.052814
Zimbabwe	0.054305
Botswana	0.055032
Sri Lanka	0.056491
Singapore	0.058459
Chile	0.058507
Russia	0.058517
South Africa	0.058699
Zambia	0.061265
Tonga	0.061392
Neth. Antilles	0.061593
Philippines	0.061596
Suriname	0.062061
Panama	0.062894
Barbados	0.063116
Ivory Coast	0.064147
Syria	0.065215
Cen. African Rep.	0.066105
Bolivia	0.066374
Nepal	0.068082
Am. Samoa	0.069093
U. Arab Emir.	0.069918
Mauritius	0.071762
Eritrea	0.072629
Albania	0.073632

5

Benin	0.074386
India	0.075959
Yugoslavia	0.076278
Brazil	0.077607
Rwanda	0.078161
Dominican Rep.	0.079278
Tanzania	0.079455
Lithuania	0.080079
Tunisia	0.080430
Burundi	0.082687
Jordan	0.082940
Peru	0.082944
Indonesia	0.084083
Kyrgyzstan	0.085131
Liberia	0.085607
Morocco	0.085982
Kenya	0.086183
Togo	0.086519
Papua N. Guinea	0.086716
Honduras	0.086866
Eq. Guinea	0.089228
Mauritania	0.092261
Thailand	0.094014
Bhutan	0.095370
Malawi	0.095639
Guatemala	0.097286
Bahamas	0.098721

6

Most inequality

Lesotho	0.105516
Belize	0.105935
Gabon	0.106911
Swaziland	0.106922
Armenia	0.108136
South Yemen	0.109596
Uganda	0.109652
Oman	0.113724
Ghana	0.118893
Puerto Rico	0.121705
Cameroon	0.129300
Congo	0.136999
Trinidad & Tobago	0.145823
Mozambique	0.149679
Saudi Arabia	0.184693
Niger	0.188703
St. Vincent & Gren.	0.194245
Angola	0.201428
Cambodia	0.206362
Kuwait	0.230317
Sierra Leone	0.253880
Jamaica	0.312738
Bahrain	0.403546
Qatar	0.404105
Mongolia	0.442336
Paraguay	0.892605

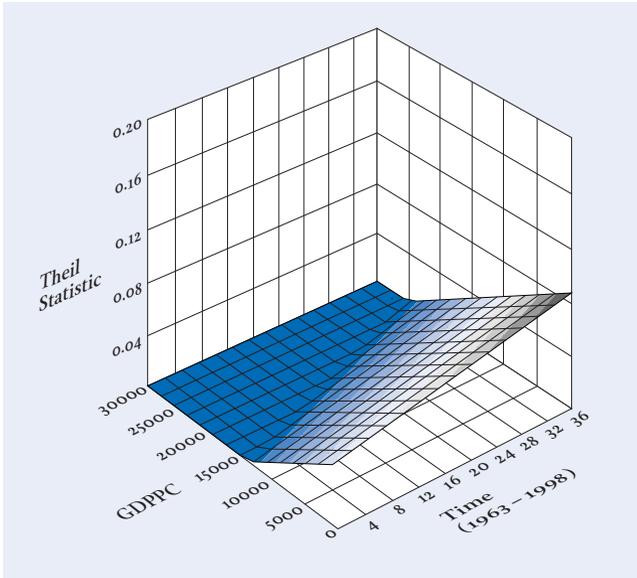


Figure 2
A regression of inequality on income and time, UTIP data set. The regression reflects a downward sloping Kuznets relation as well as a global drift toward sharply higher inequality over time. (Color scales have a similar gradient but are not matched to previous graphs.)

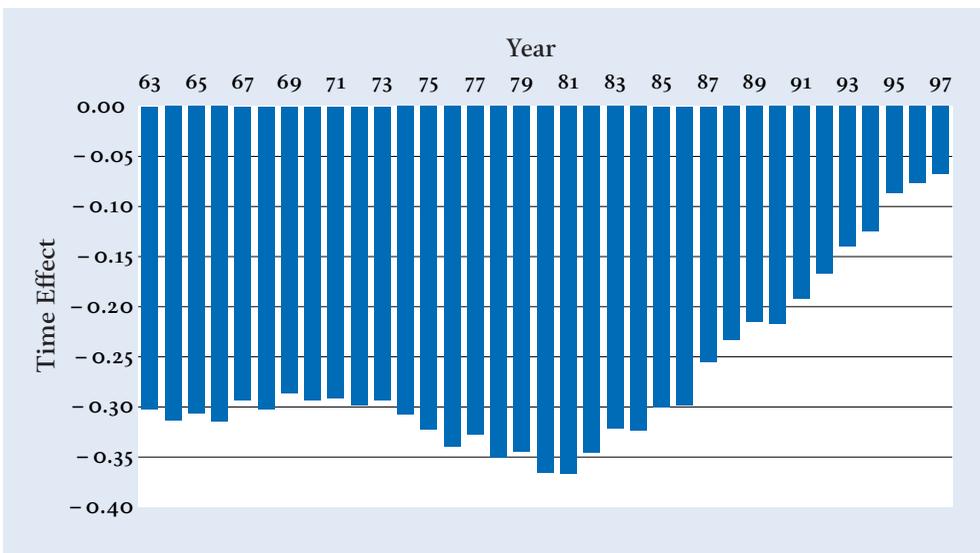


Figure 5
Panel estimates of the worldwide time pattern of rising inequality, controlling for country-specific effects and the effect of changes in per capita real income levels. The method of panel estimates permits calculation of a year-to-year pattern in changing inequality.

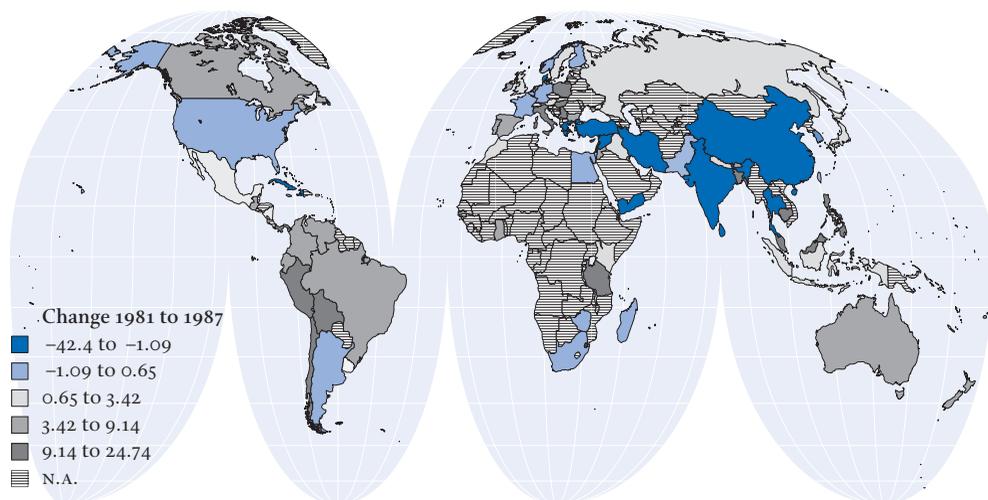


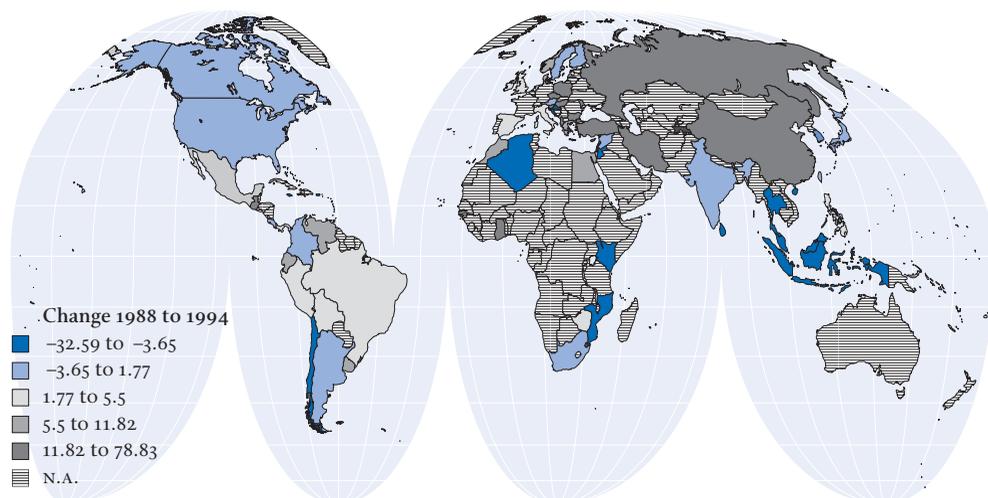
Figure 3 (above)

Inequality in the Age of Debt. Changes in inequality from 1981 to 1987. Dark gray indicates the largest increases (notably in Latin America and among oil producers at this time of collapsing oil prices); blue indicates declines; light gray is "neutral." Almost the only cases of declining inequality in this period are in countries insulat-

ed from the global financial system (China, India, Iran). Greece and Turkey showed very large increases following their confrontation over Cyprus in the 1970s; declines in the 1980s may be a return to normality, including policy in Greece after the end of military rule.

Figure 4 (below)

Patterns of rising inequality in the age of globalization. Changes in inequality from 1988 to 1994. The rise in Russia is extreme. The only significant region of declining inequality is in the boom countries of South-east Asia – more evidence of the Kuznets effect.



the UTIP data also permit us to detect global patterns in changes of inequality, to take a fresh look at the New World Order.

This exercise produces a disquieting result. For when the global trend is isolated, we find that in the last two decades, inequality has increased throughout the world in a pattern that cuts across the effect of national income changes. During the decades that happen to coincide with the rise of neoliberal ideology, with the breakdown of national sovereignties, and with the end of Keynesian policies in the global debt crisis of the early 1980s, inequality rose worldwide. In effect, the Kuznets curve relating inequality to income shifted upward. This finding – the upward slope of the plane in figure 2 – points to influences on inequality of a global order.

The finding that there is a common global upward trend in inequality provides strong evidence for one of two propositions. One possibility is that national economic policies have almost universally raised inequality independent of income changes – but for what reason? Alternatively, it may be that national economic policies alone do not and cannot entirely control national pay structures, that there is a common, and pernicious, global element in the global economy.

In the latter case we have to ask, what is that element? Is there, perhaps, something about the process of global *laissez-faire* itself that created this outcome? And if so, is it an inherent feature of “globalization?” Or is it only an artifact of the particular policies under which the global market has been liberalized in recent years?

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the regional patterns of increasing inequality during two key episodes. First, there was the early 1980s, the years of debt crisis and

of the oil slump that followed. During that time, inequality rises most rapidly in the Southern cone of Latin America and in parts of the Middle East. Second, there was the collapse (in part induced, as in Yugoslavia and Poland, by intractable debts) of the communist world; these countries become the focus of rising inequalities in the late 1980s. By the mid-1990s, as figure 4 reveals, almost the only countries with declining inequality were the booming countries of Southern Asia (even if the crash after 1997 almost surely took some of them in another direction).

This pattern shows – as clearly as any one indicator might hope to do – the serial failure of the global development process as a whole to permit the building of advanced industrial democracies and welfare states on which Kuznets and Keynes rested their hopes fifty years ago. Even so, the figures do not fully capture (though they do reflect) the deepening dissolution of nation-states, whose extreme cases lead to war, as in Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, the eastern Congo, Chechnya, Aceh, southern Colombia, and even Chiapas – all of them among the poorest parts of their parent states. But as inequality deepens, more of this is surely on the way.

Since Kuznets passed out of fashion, economists have generally fallen into two camps: those who believe that redistribution fosters growth, on the one hand, and those who believe on the contrary that rising inequality is a price worth paying for development. These are, however, statements about national conditions. Working with the UTIP data set, it is possible to isolate a different set of factors: those factors that co-evolve in the world economy through time, independently of the movement of national income. The annual pattern of these

time effects, presented in figure 5, gives us an essential clue so far lacking: the precise turning point at which the global element in inequality ceased declining and started to rise.⁶

As figure 5 shows, the common global element in pay inequalities declines slightly through the late 1970s. It then turns around in 1981 – 1982, just as Ronald Reagan took office in the United States. At this time, a shift in the global climate of real interest rates brought the latter from near 0 to 5 percent or higher for completely riskless assets – and much higher for most countries with depreciating currencies. The result was to precipitate a global debt crisis in the course of which many poorer nations were forced first to cut imports and capital spending, and then were pressured to abandon long-standing trade and welfare policies. The years since 1980 have thus seen an empirical test of the second point of view: an extraordinary, systematic increase in inequality. It has not been followed by any increase in the global rate of economic expansion.

For a cause of worldwide rising inequality, one must look to events that characterize the period after 1980, but not before. Growth of trade will not do. Worldwide trade grew very rapidly through the period of “stabilizing development” (the Mexican term) that began in 1945 and ended in the 1970s; it is not a peculiar feature of the environment after 1980.

6 Our technique here is a two-way fixed effects panel data estimation, which entails creating “dummy” variables for each country and year in the sample. The coefficient estimates on the country dummies then reveal the pattern of national institutions, while the coefficient estimates of the time dummies reveal the common course of inequality in the global economy over the years, controlling for income changes. The time effects are presented in figure 5.

Nor can accelerating technological change explain the pattern. The story often hinted at for the American case is that the rapid spread of computers after 1980 made “skill-biased technological change” a driving force behind rising pay differentials. But the UTIP (and all other) data clearly show rising inequality in the United States beginning in the 1970s, long before the personal computer revolution. And after 1980, inequality rises more sharply in poorer countries, where of course new technologies spread the least. In a country like Finland, a leader in Internet penetration, inequality hardly rose at all.

What can explain a sequence of events that affects an almost universal spectrum of poorer countries after 1980, excluding only India and China in that decade and a handful of the booming economies of South Asia in the 1990s?

The evidence of timing points toward the effect of rising real interest rates and the debt crisis. For this, the stage was set by the dissolution in 1973 of the Bretton Woods framework of fixed-but-adjustable exchange rates and international supervision of capital flow. As figure 5 shows, the collapse of that framework ended a period of relatively stable growth – and stable pay structures. There then followed a short period of the oil and commodities boom, with *declining* inequality fueled by commercial debt. But this was unsustainable, and it came to a crashing end in the worldwide financial shock that was initiated in 1980 – 1981 by the United States, as the U.S. Federal Reserve pushed nominal interest rates past 20 percent. The rise in interest rates produced dramatic and continuing cuts in imports, with devastating results for the development prospects of poorer countries. Many of them have never recovered.

Indeed, matters were made worse by the concurrent triumph of neoliberalism in the United States and the United Kingdom in these same years. Following the debt crisis, the rich countries preached the “magic of the market-place” to the poor. No new financial architecture was created from the wreckage left by the commercial banks. Instead, the International Monetary Fund preached austerity, and then financial deregulation and privatization – sale of state assets at fire-sale prices to foreign investors.

After honing these policies in Latin America, they were applied after 1989 in

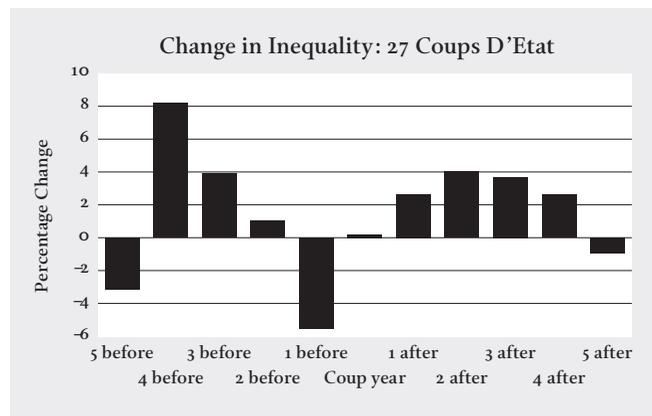
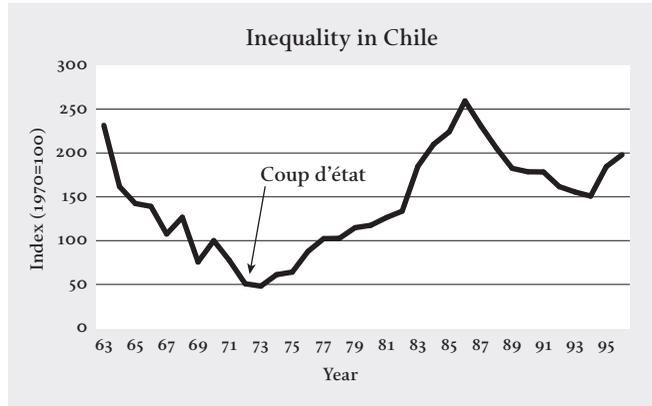
Russia and Eastern Europe, and then in Asia.

Everywhere, crisis ensued. Only where countries successfully resisted the neoliberal policy prescriptions – most notably in China, in Northern Europe, and in the United States itself after the mid-1990s – did growth continue and pay inequality remain under reasonable control.

It is not, then, by accident that the effects of neoliberalism at a global level resemble those of a coup d’état at a national level.

In an early analysis using UTIP’s data set, George Purcell and I calculated the

Figure 6
Inequality before, during, and after coups: the case of Chile and the general pattern. The chart on the bottom averages the change of inequality for up to five years before and up to five years after a coup d’état; the average is calculated across twenty-seven historical cases.



average effects of twenty-seven coups d'état on our measurements of pay inequality. We found a pattern of striking consistency. After rising four and five years before the coup, inequality would decline sharply in the two years immediately beforehand. In the year of the coup itself, the decline in inequality would stop. And in the five repressive years that followed (coups, as distinct from revolutions, are almost invariably right-wing), rising inequality would occur systematically in each year, until overall inequality stood far higher than in the period before the coup. Figure 6 presents our data for the canonical case of Chile and the curve that emerges from averaging effects over the twenty-seven cases.

Viewed from a global perspective, the pattern of time effects observed worldwide after 1975 strongly resembles this characteristic curve. Global inequality fell in the late 1970s. In those years, poor countries had the benefit of low interest rates and easy credit, and high commodity prices, especially for oil. Indeed, in the 1970s, the UTIP data shows that it was the lower-income workers in the poorer countries who made the largest gains in pay. But in 1980–1981, the age of low interest rates and high commodity prices ended.

In 1982, the repression took hold – a financial repression, to be sure, but not less real for having taken that form. And while the debt crisis was not accompanied by overt violence – coups are, indeed, often very limited in their *overt* violence – the effects were soon felt worldwide, and with a savage intensity that has continued for two decades.

In sum, it is not increasing trade *as such* that we should fear. Nor is technology the culprit. To focus on “globalization” as such misstates the issue. The problem is a process of integration carried out since at least 1980 under circumstances of unsustainable finance, in which wealth has flowed upwards from the poor countries to the rich, and mainly to the upper financial strata of the richest countries.

In the course of these events, progress toward tolerable levels of inequality and sustainable development virtually stopped. Neocolonial patterns of center-periphery dependence, and of debt peonage, were reestablished, but without the slightest assumption of responsibility by the rich countries for the fate of the poor.

It has been, it would appear, a perfect crime. And while statistical forensics can play a small role in pointing this out, no mechanism to reverse the policy exists, still less any that might repair the damage. The developed countries have abandoned the pretense of attempting to foster development in the world at large, preferring to substitute the rhetoric of ungoverned markets for the hard work of stabilizing regulation. The prognosis is grim: a descent into apathy, despair, disease, ecological disaster, and wars of separatism and survival in many of the poorest parts of the world.

Unless, of course, the wise spirits of Kuznets and Keynes can be summoned back to life, to deal more constructively with the appalling disorder of the past twenty years.

Orlando Patterson

Beyond compassion: selfish reasons for being unselfish

America has developed an unusual class system. It is a highly competitive society in which the majority of players are winners, but in which the winners to an increasing degree take all, or nearly all. This is the best of all possible worlds for the majority of winners. But for the losers, especially those at the bottom, it is the worst of all possible worlds. It means that, even as inequality grows, the dominant value legitimizing, as well as driving, America's enormously successful social economy – the conviction that anyone can make it if they only try hard enough, and that failure is a reflec-

tion of character – is believed by the majority, which has its own successes to prove it.

Paradoxically, the great majority of Americans continue to espouse the ideal of equality. Surveys indicate that the commitment is genuine and plays an important role in the struggle of disadvantaged groups to improve their lot.¹ Still, as Sidney Verba and Gary Orren concluded fifteen years ago, “The United States ranks among the most open and participatory of modern democracies when it comes to politics and among the least egalitarian when it comes to economic matters.”²

How do Americans reconcile their egalitarianism with the realities of extreme inequality and rampant poverty in the midst of affluence? Partly by separating economic life from egalitarian ideals, confining the latter to the domain of the personal and political; and partly through widespread denial about the realities of inequality. As Jennifer Hochschild found, “almost all [Ameri-

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1 Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos: Public Attitudes toward Capitalism and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), chap. 3.

2 Sidney Verba and Gary Orren, *Equality in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), chap. 1.

cans] define themselves as members of the middle class, no matter how poor or rich they are.”³

Above all, Americans seem to be confused about the notion of equality, and either naive or hypocritical about the relationship between equity and the economic system. It is hard to know what else to make of findings such as the following: “Although few Americans are willing to blame the poor for their plight, even fewer blame the economic system for making them poor.”⁴ The problem, I want to argue, lies in the very idea of equality itself, and in our failure to find ways of reconciling modern American conceptions of it with the individualist indeterminism that is the foundation of America’s successful capitalist system.

For Aristotle, equality meant equal treatment for equals and unequal treatment for unequals with respect to given qualities, a conception of fairness that virtually requires a very unequal society. It is obvious that human beings differ greatly in their capacities: some are stronger than others; some are more beautiful; some can do math better; some can sing better; and some are clearly better athletes. These qualities are nonassociative. Cognitively smart people are not necessarily beautiful or physically agile. Indeed, they may not even be very smart in areas of cognition outside of their special fields of competence. We have all met the great scientist who is hopelessly naive in social or political matters. And there are good reasons for distinguishing people good

at soldiering from those competent at political and civic leadership.

One difficulty with America’s approach to inequalities like this is that we reward different kinds of competence at different rates – and there is no rationale or fairness to how we do this. In a capitalist society, people are paid in relation to the market value of their productive activities. But as a justification for the distribution of income prevailing at any given time, the market is a moral nonstarter. Is a good manager really worth over 150 times the earnings of a good worker, not to mention thousands of times the latter’s wealth? Is the work of nude dancers and *Playboy* pinups really hundreds of times more valuable than what homemakers do? Is an actress playing Mother Teresa millions of times more worthwhile than the relatively poor saint she plays? Clearly not. Market logic dictates that a diligent nude lap-dancer earning \$250,000 per year is ten times more productive than a dedicated day-care teacher earning \$25,000, but no economist still in his moral senses would ever argue that this is a fair or socially reasonable outcome.

But if the market cannot function as a moral yardstick, what can? All attempts by social scientists to come up with some kind of general standard for assessing the relative worth of qualities have failed, most notably the various functionalist theories of competence – arguments that the worth of qualities is proportionate to their contribution to society at large. As John Rawls has cogently argued, the standard meritocratic argument also fails, for the reason that native endowments (such as high intelligence, beauty, and athletic talent) are qualities that we did nothing to deserve, and therefore it is unjust to reward them unduly.

3 Jennifer Hochschild, *What’s Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 143 and chap. 5 passim.

4 McClosky and Zaller, *The American Ethos*, 125.

Alas, we live in a very imperfect world, and given the trends toward growing inequality, it is one that daily becomes more imperfect. In America today, it is also true that appeals to justice, or general moral principles, such as those enunciated by Rawls, carry little weight in practice. Ours is a harsh moral universe. Apart from a few “deserving” exceptions such as the badly crippled or otherwise disabled, most highly successful Americans see the poor and disadvantaged as self-made failures. Under these circumstances, we have to ask not how we can change the terms of moral judgment, but how we can remedy the worst inequities of the system despite the currently prevailing terms of moral judgment. We also need to know how to defend such remedies in a manner that might appeal to the most morally insensitive “winners.”

Is there any way of analyzing the consequences of inequality that will have persuasive power in our winner-take-all world?

Only one kind of argument seems likely to succeed: an argument based on self-interest, or, to put it more bluntly, on selfishness. If it can be shown that too brutal a disregard for losers undermines the interests of the winners, then it may be possible to salvage some of what remains of the welfare state. In what follows, I will ignore the “standpoint of justice” defended by Rawls. Instead, I will rehearse three sociologically pragmatic – and morally ignoble – lines of reasoning: what I will call the Degradation argument; the Acts of Man argument; and the Acts of History argument.

Few deny any longer that a market regime will, in some circumstances, fail to prevent the physical degradation of

the environment by private firms. If the state does not intervene to regulate and forestall such degradation, society as a whole will suffer. Even the winners suffer in a city where the air is not fit to breathe.

A similar argument holds for the social and cultural degradation that comes as a result of pursuing a totally selfish, uncaring social policy. Chronic poverty and unemployment in the midst of plenty is directly related to chronic drug use, criminality, the desolation of communities both urban and, increasingly, rural, and growing violence in all aspects of life. A semiliterate and alienated lower class wastes much of America’s potential manpower.

Worse, a discouraged, angry, and alienated lower class is directly related to the growing debasement of our popular culture. The mass media, driven by advertising revenues, increasingly pander to the lowest common denominator. This accounts for the decline in public-interest programming and in the shrinking amount of time devoted to serious news on TV, as well as the growing reliance on the banalities of survivor shows and on gruesomely violent dramas. Accompanying these developments has been the well-documented and frequently lamented degradation of popular music.

What is true of the weather is equally true of the moral climate we share: the rich winners, and their children, can no more escape cultural pollution than they can escape air pollution. As distinguished economists Robert Frank and Philip Cook have argued at length in their landmark study of *The Winner-Take-All Society*, “activities that affect our preferences affect the well-being of others, just as activities that generate pollution affect the well-being of oth-

ers.”⁵ There is growing evidence that America’s lowest-common-denominator popular culture is having a damaging effect on middle- and upper-class children, even as early as kindergarten. It has not gone unnoticed that the perpetrators of mass murder in our high schools have all been children from the families of privileged winners. And it is now well known that the major audience for the most brutally misogynistic and violent of rap lyrics is composed of upper-middle-class Euro-American youngsters.

As the sociologist David Riesman argued over a half century ago, untrammelled individualism ultimately undermines individualism itself: “People can become deeply attached only to a society which takes account of longings for connection with each other,” he wrote, and “to the degree that capitalist individualism has fostered an ethic of callousness,

5 Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 202 and chap. 10 passim. Frank and Cook have vigorously argued that there is a close relationship between the spectacular rise in inequality in recent decades and the spread of winner-take-all markets. There has been a change in the distribution of opportunities, rather than talents, and in the ability of those at the top to leverage their relative standing into disproportionately higher earnings (*The Winner-Take-All Society*, 61–84; 86–89). While I am in general sympathy with Frank and Cook’s argument, we differ in one important emphasis. While they emphasize an elite of winners, it seems to me that what has emerged is a society in which the majority are winners and, of equal importance, are smug in their belief that they are successful middle-class winners. Surveys repeatedly show that over three-quarters of Americans believe that “in a capitalist society, every individual has an opportunity to develop his/her own special abilities.” See, for example, Robert Peterson, Gerald Albaumb, and George Kozmetsky, *Modern American Capitalism: Understanding Public Attitudes and Perceptions* (New York: Quorum Books, 1990), 43.

the result has been to undermine all forms of individualism, good and bad.”

As is well known, Adam Smith was acutely aware of such problems. So, to a degree, are some modern American conservatives. However, their preferred solutions seem unable to address the kinds of cultural degradation that inequality breeds. There are clear limits to what voluntary organizations can do to remedy the fissiparous tendencies of an inherently selfish capitalism. And there are equally clear limits to what a mass incarceration of the most violent of the degraded classes can accomplish: rather than deterring crime, jail time in many of our largest cities is now seen by many potential gang leaders as a necessary rite of passage, a period of hardening and a badge of “honor” that lends prestige on the outside.

Since voluntary associations and the so-called prison-industrial complex have evidently failed to counteract the cultural degradation wrought by growing inequality, perhaps it is time for our elites, out of pure self-interest, including an interest in their most vulnerable children, to shift gears and reconsider the need for a more humane set of social policies aimed at reconnecting those who lose to their societies. At the very least, such policies might produce a larger body of literate, more pliant workers.

My Acts of Man argument is also modeled on an existing approach to remedial action acceptable to the greediest and most atomistically individualistic among us. No one denies that people who have suffered catastrophic losses as a result of earthquakes, hurricanes, and other “Acts of God” deserve rapid help from their government. If we can justify such help on the grounds that those who suffer are not at fault, it seems only reasonable that an otherwise implacably

individualistic society can justify remedies aimed at injuries suffered as an unintended consequence of manmade changes in the social environment. Indeed, precisely because others are responsible for Acts of Man, there is all the more reason why any untoward consequences of such acts should be attended to with even greater urgency than we respond to Acts of God. Thus, when the chairman of a company decides, with the stroke of a pen, to relocate a factory in another part of the country or another nation, thereby devastating the lives of a whole town, some remedial action seems justified. There is no more moral hazard here – to use the peculiar language of economics – than that which goes with helping those who suffer Acts of God. (And there is a lot less spiritual hazard, since we are never sure whether our efforts to remedy Acts of God may not amount to a hubristic defiance of His divine judgment.)

What I have called Acts of History may similarly justify extending aid to victims. By Acts of History I mean the injuries that come from systematic patterns of oppression and exclusion in the past and from continuing discrimination in the present. Ethnic, gender, and class discrimination are typical of what I have in mind. One of the extraordinary ironies of contemporary America is that many of its most successful large corporations are more amenable than the state to remedying such Acts of History. The strongest opposition to affirmative action has come from noncorporate interest groups and politicians. Furthermore, while there is apparently strong opposition to affirmative action in the abstract among ordinary American workers, the number who oppose affirmative-action programs at their own workplaces slumps to under 8 percent.

The data suggest that the controversy surrounding affirmative action has been largely generated by vocal elites concerned about its fairness for themselves and their friends and family.⁶

Remedying Acts of History nevertheless poses special problems. Since many of the relevant issues have been aired in the ongoing debate over affirmative action, there is no need to rehash them here.⁷

What I propose to do in the remainder of this essay is address some of the other problems generated by Acts of History. How should we think about evaluating the injuries caused by historic discrimination? To what extent should those injured be treated as responsible moral agents in their own right?

In our selfish, winner-take-all world, we need some way of determining those aspects of a losing group's problems for which they are not liable, and those for which they must be held responsible. But before sketching a framework for doing this, it is necessary briefly to say something about what may be called the moral sociology of human agency.

As human beings we experience long years of socialization and are clearly the products of our upbringing and our circumstances. In purely objective terms, we are utterly determined – by our social, economic, and physical environment, by our genes, and by the interac-

6 For an analysis of the survey data, see Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas/Counterpoint, 1977), 147–158.

7 *Ibid.*, 158–169. See also Derek Bok and William Bowen, *The Shape of the River: Long-term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), and John Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

tions between and within our genes and environments, in ways that are still largely indecipherable and may remain so.

Nonetheless, it is sociologically impossible to behave in terms of this objective deterministic truth. For society to be possible, and for individuals to be successful, it is necessary that we believe, and act as if, we are free of such conditioning. The more complex and advanced a society, the greater the forces that constrain and determine us, but the greater the need to deny the truth of determinism and assert the necessary belief in personal agency. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, a totalitarian tyrant determined to create a world consistent with the scientifically true dictates of determinism would have to invent the myth of agency. Determinism is perhaps the only truth that requires a belief in its denial for its realization.⁸ The sociologically necessary myth of agency – made real by the intensity of our belief in it – is a *sine qua non* of any kind of successful modern society.⁹

A major drawback of liberal social science is the failure to recognize the contradiction in determinism. As a result,

8 It was Epicurus who first recognized this contradiction in determinism and the implied sociological necessity for human agency. Indeed, he went further and showed that the very terms in which any possible defense of determinism may be argued will always assume a contradiction. I have argued elsewhere that sociological pragmatism originates in his work. See Epicurus, "Letter to Menoeceus," in A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a more detailed discussion, see Orlando Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 187–190.

9 I made this point many years ago in my paper "The Moral Crisis of the Black American," *The Public Interest* 32 (Summer 1973): 43–69.

some of the policies advocated by liberal social scientists assume an oversocialized view of human beings. The pervasiveness of liberal social science policy has, in turn, legitimized a crudely deterministic approach to the problems of the unfortunate minority of the poor. One consequence has been a devastating embrace by America's disadvantaged of a view of themselves as purely passive victims.

At the same time, one must beware the even greater danger in upholding an undersocialized view of human beings that simply denies the overwhelming evidence of objective determinism. This view was given perhaps its most famous recent expression in the inane declaration of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that there "is no such thing as Society. There are individual men and women and their families." This is the same Margaret Thatcher who fervently appealed to some *thing* called the British nation during her war with Argentina, which was clearly meant to be more than the sum of individuals and their families claiming British citizenship. The necessary ideology of human agency can be, and has been, taken too far by some in conservative Anglo-American circles, all of whom contradict themselves in their deep commitment to clearly extra-individual entities such as business corporations, church, army, and nation. There is no need to waste time arguing against such obvious contradictions.¹⁰

A commitment to a vigorous ideology of human agency is not inconsistent with recognition of the fact that some

10 For more on the problems of undersocialized and oversocialized conceptions of human agency, see Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure," in Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, eds., *The Sociology of Economic Life* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 53–81.

people will fail for reasons that are not primarily their own and are clearly societal in origin.

How do we avoid these two extremes? This is a difficult question, and I have no easy answers. But it may be helpful to map out some of the different possibilities, using a simple framework. We may begin with a basic distinction in the problems that people face: between those with internal causes, and those with external causes.

External causes include both Acts of God and Acts of Man: a person is obviously not responsible for being born blind, or for being discriminated against because of his religion or the way she looks.

Internal causes include acts or predispositions of an individual or a group (when this is the unit of interest). If a person loses his job because of alcoholism or for sexually harassing colleagues, this would seem to be an internal cause for which he is wholly responsible. When we are speaking on the level of groups of persons, internal problems are those cultural patterns or typical predispositions that increase the probability of failure. Traditions of masculinity or notions of ethnic pride that disdain schoolwork as geeky, negative attitudes toward working for others, early marriage for girls, extravagant and wasteful expenditure on rite-of-passage ceremonies – all these may be examples of internally caused problems.¹¹

11 These examples will immediately raise the hackles of many, since there is a dogmatic tradition in social science that rejects all cultural explanations of problems. I say “may” to signal my own position that cultural effects always operate interactively. A cultural pattern may be a real source of failure in one context, yet be harmless in another. See my chapter, “Taking Culture Seriously,” in Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), chap. 15.

This distinction, however, is unsatisfactory as it stands, and the reason becomes apparent as soon as we ask: what are the origins of internal and external problems? It happens that many internal problems (both individually and collectively) originate in external circumstances, and it is also the case that many external problems originate in internal conditions.

We can produce, then, a fourfold matrix of the sources of social problems, which I will review here only in the broadest outline.

The first type of problems involves *external outcomes with external origins*. Such problems have clear-cut external causes both in current circumstances and in past conditions. Racial discrimination in employment is perhaps the best example; gender discrimination is another. African Americans and women continue to experience discrimination at the workplace on the basis of their ethnicity or gender, or both. Such discrimination has a long history and grows out of previous patterns of discrimination both in and out of the workplace. One important consequence of this is that current discrimination is of two types: continuing direct discrimination, and what has been called institutional discrimination. Direct discrimination is on the decline, due to recent laws against it and changing attitudes resulting from vigorous political action on the part of African Americans, women, and other groups who have suffered some form of discrimination. In many areas, it is reasonable to say that it has been largely eliminated. However, it is incorrect to point solely to the decline of such direct discrimination as evidence of improvement. Institutional discrimination persists in those inherited prejudices, many of them unintended, that still constrain

women and minorities. Thus, the isolation of African Americans in segregated communities is largely a product of previous racial prejudice and discrimination in housing. But this isolation cuts them off from social networks and cultural capital that are indispensable for survival and success at all levels of the workplace. Similarly, women's exclusion from male bonding practices seriously impedes their access to vital tacit knowledge for successful entrepreneurial activity. In addition, cultural assumptions by caregivers and role models during child-rearing and schooling create biases that lead women and minorities away from successful paths.

A second category of problems may be described as *internal outcomes with external causes*. Many problems faced by disadvantaged groups are, on the surface, internal and hence would seem to be of their own making. However, on closer scrutiny, such problems are seen to be the direct outcome of externalities for which the persons involved cannot be held wholly responsible. A good example of this is the condition of unemployment that comes from chronic long periods of unemployment. Economists who measure unemployment know that the rate is often flawed by the fact that a substantial number of persons have simply removed themselves from the workforce. Some of these people may be simply shiftless – that is, unwilling to do regular work in the first place. But many studies – including studies by me of unemployment among the urban poor of Kingston, Jamaica – indicate that most persons who remove themselves from the workforce are discouraged workers. After seeking work for years and not finding adequate employment or employment that offers a living wage, such workers may become unemployed in that they have lost the basic dis-

cipline of working in a modern workplace. Their incapacity is conditioned, in the sense that external circumstances clearly help to explain their characteristic behavior. A near-experimental demonstration of this is seen in those cases in which the environment of a seemingly work-incapacitated person is changed. Just such a case is found among Jamaicans who are brought to the United States to work as contracted farm laborers during the harvest season. The same people who, in Jamaica, seem shiftless become such prized workers in America that in the apple growing areas of New Hampshire they earn more money than native workers do.

A third type of problems involves *external outcomes with internal causes*. An extreme example, on the individual level, is the condition of agoraphobia. On the social level, these are the kinds of problems that more conservative analysts and leaders like to point to. For example, it is now well established that single parenting greatly increases the likelihood of a woman and her children living in poverty, and, since the 1960s, it has become a major cause of poverty in the United States. Such families have a poverty rate several times greater than families headed by married couples. While the issue is still controversial, I have concluded from my own review of the historical and contemporary data that the pattern of single parenting among African Americans, combined with the abandonment of children and families by men, is predominantly cultural, although its behavioral expressions have to be understood in terms of the interaction of these cultural propensities with structural factors. Poverty, of course, has several major causes. Still, being a single mother has other important external consequences for one's children, such as the greater risk of juve-

nile delinquency, teen pregnancy, single parenting, lower educational attainment, and poverty. Other, perhaps less controversial examples of internal cultural sources of external problems are religious and other values that lead to behaviors that increase the risk of poverty. In many Third World countries such as India, for example, the rural poor have a strong tradition of having large numbers of children, often due to the bias in favor of boys; such behavior reinforces their impoverishment.

The fourth and final category of problems involves *internal outcomes with internal causes*. This cluster of problematic outcomes is usually what we have in mind when we think of patterns of behavior that are the result of a person's socialization or, on the collective level, when we think of the secondary cultural consequences of highly institutionalized cultural patterns. On the individual level, tragic cases in point are the tendency for child abusers to have been themselves abused as children, or of alcoholics and wife batterers to be the children of alcoholic fathers who battered their mothers. Collectively, a good example is the extremely fraught pattern of gender relations among some groups that come from wholly internal patterns of inherited gender attitudes and behavioral models.

These four types of problems and their causes are by no means exhaustive, even within the terms explored here. For example, it will have already occurred to some that the internal causes of external outcomes may themselves have originated at an earlier period in external causes. Individually, this is the classic Freudian model of neurotic behavior. On the group level, I myself have attempted to demonstrate just such a more complicated causal path in my discussion of cur-

rent African American familial problems by showing that the far greater internal propensity of poor African American men to abandon their children and the mothers of their progeny originated in the very external conditions of slavery and, later, the sharecropping regime. Nonetheless – and this point is critical – while we can always trace the origins of internal causes back to external roots in the past, all that this demonstrates is that in the final analysis our lives and our behaviors are ultimately conditioned. Indeed, given perfect knowledge, it would be possible to show how every behavior, right down to our most intimate gestures, is the result of some previous condition. This, however, takes us back to the point made earlier – that we cannot allow this fact of ultimate, objective determinism (assuming omniscience) to dominate or frame our personal morality or view of others, including the disadvantaged, or our public policies aimed at helping them. The practical necessity of the belief in human agency – not to mention the impossible assumption of omniscience required by outright determinism – puts limits on the degree to which we can explain away internal sources of our actions. As historians and social scientists, it is our task to pursue causal regresses as far back as they can meaningfully explain present problems. But to explain is not to justify. The social logic of human agency requires a shorter leash on justification than on explanation.

How much shorter? Where do we draw the line and say “Enough! Here the explanatory buck stops – however forceful and valid the historical and socioeconomic arguments – and agency begins”?

One cannot be precise, for the simple reason that what may be called the buck-stops-here point is often the product of negotiation, struggle, and sometimes

conflict between individuals and groups. Just such a process is taking place in the heated, largely middle-class national debate over affirmative action. With regard to the real losers (William Julius Wilson's "truly disadvantaged" and Cynthia Duncan's "worlds apart" Appalachians), as violent collective action becomes less and less feasible in America – with the state's security agencies, legal system, and prison-industrial complex becoming more efficient and draconian in protecting the majority of "winners" – this increasingly aggrieved minority may well resort to the only weapon it has in its relation with the winner-take-all majority. This is what I have called elsewhere their counter-leviathan power – their ability to subvert prevailing social and cultural norms by acting in often self-destructive ways that degrade the quality of life for all: through drug addiction, personal violence, petty criminality, bad attitudes, and widespread vandalism.

Despite its limitations, our fourfold matrix of the sources of social problems may help convince the selfish skeptic that *some* measure of social justice requires redressing the unfair consequences of Acts of Man and Acts of History. By clarifying the social logic of human agency, the fourfold matrix may help to indicate where government intervention is not simply justified but necessary.

In brief: problems involving external outcomes with external origins all require vigorous intervention and a combination of strongly enforced laws and compensatory affirmative action on behalf of those who have been, and continue to be, injured and excluded from social, economic, and cultural resources. Problems involving internal outcomes with external causes require a combina-

tion of external intervention and, if necessary, forceful prevention; but they primarily require rehabilitative measures. Here, however, America has failed badly, due to the undersocialized approach of its leaders and most successful citizens to this kind of problem. A substantial proportion of persons in the nation's exploding prison population are drug addicts who are clearly suffering from this class of problems. Incarceration has worsened the problem, not only turning nonviolent offenders into hardened criminals, but also making drugs far more expensive and the drug trade far more lucrative than it would be under a decriminalized regime (such as that in Holland).

The third type of problems, involving external outcomes with internal causes, is complex, and calls for very nuanced and intricate responses. In extreme cases of incapacitation, such as social problems resulting from chronic mental illness, there is clearly a need for substantial intervention, although, even here, it is important not to regress to Victorian systems of institutionalization. The story of the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill in America is very instructive. Up to the early 1970s, as Christopher Jencks has shown in his study *The Homeless*, this was a successful process, one that nicely balanced respect for individual autonomy with concern for the public interest. But after the mid-1970s, this balance collapsed, with disastrous consequences – a worst-case scenario of liberal and conservative blunders reinforcing each other. In most problems of this sort, the challenge is to find ways to support individuals in their efforts to reform themselves. If single parenting and paternal abandonment are major causes of poverty, especially childhood poverty, then it is clear that government intervention has serious

limitations. Of course, the state has a responsibility to the children who are innocently trapped in this internally driven disaster. Still, there can be little doubt now that the nation's welfare system before its recent reform created serious moral hazards for certain groups. Change was imperative. The more than moderate success of these reform measures, however many transitional problems have accompanied them, indicates so far that the changes were justified and reinforces our view that the primary responsibility for problems involving external outcomes with internal causes lies with the individuals involved. No one forces a single woman or man, or a poor couple, to have more children than their resources permit, certainly not in an advanced society with readily available birth-control facilities; in overextending themselves, such people are freely exercising their God-given right to reproduce as much as they like. And as human agents fully aware of the consequences of their actions, they – though emphatically not their children, for whom the most radical interventions are necessary – must pay the price of lowered income when that is the outcome of their choices.

The tragic case of AIDS infection also falls into this third category of problems. Here, however, internal attitudes and patterns of behavior have external consequences for the innocent or unwary – and this justifies vigorous intervention by the government. One extreme kind of conservative response, which is as cruel as it is myopic, is that AIDS is the result of high-risk internal choices and practices and that its victims have only themselves to blame. One suspects that the tragic neglect of the pandemic spread of the disease in Africa also springs from such thinking. It was fear of such attitudes that led early activists and advo-

cates to exaggerate the risk and spread of the disease in the United States, which, we now know, never came close to being the mass epidemic that was warned. AIDS, in the vast majority of cases, is undoubtedly the consequence of internally problematic behavior. Its recent spread among poor, rural African American women is without doubt the result of a combination of predatory male sexual behavior and unthinking, high-risk sexual conduct by women. In the final analysis, the disease will only be halted, barring a vaccine, by a change of such high-risk behavior, although recent research suggests that even persons fully aware of the risks nonetheless take them. As a public-health menace with dire implications for some innocent persons, especially the children of victims, AIDS requires substantial intervention, regardless of the level of personal responsibility involved.

The same cannot be said, however, for external problems resulting from internal choices and cultural predispositions that have no public-health or urgent social implications. A person who drops out of school and later refuses to take advantage of the many compensatory educational facilities available in the United States can hardly complain about receiving a low wage for his or her labor. In a capitalist society it is high-risk behavior to remain unqualified. Beyond preventing its citizens from falling beneath an absolute floor of poverty, a government has no responsibility to supplement the income of sane persons who choose – and it is a choice, however self-destructive – not to educate themselves in what they know to be a knowledge-intensive, high-technology society. Liberal advocates, in irrational denial of this simple fact, insist on blaming bad schools rather than bad choices for these outcomes, even though nearly all the

best studies on the nation's schools (usually done by scholars with impeccable liberal credentials) indicate that poor schooling and inadequate school opportunities explain only a very small part of low educational attainments.

The fourth type of problem, involving internal outcomes with internal causes, is the sole responsibility of the individuals and groups involved. Only Native Americans can change the eating and drinking habits that lead to chronic diabetes, obesity, and alcoholism among them. Only Appalachian poor whites can overcome the chronic patterns of false pride, dysfunctional familial and gender attitudes, obsessive regional and communal loyalties, and corrupt local politics that have proved resistant to countless well-meaning, and often counterproductive, interventions by government and private groups alike. And only African Americans can heal the sad and deeply fraught state of gender relations that have long beset them, accounting for the fact that they have the smallest network of close, supportive ties of all Americans (the compensatory rhetoric of "sisterhood" and "brotherhood" notwithstanding).

It is time to go beyond moral principles and political rhetoric in our approach to social policy in regard to the poor and disadvantaged. We have to begin by accepting the fact that America is an advanced capitalist society, the most successful and the most purely capitalistic system that has ever existed. We have to accept as well the fact that it is the most unequal of all advanced modern societies and becoming ever more unequal with each passing day. We have finally to accept the fact that greed and selfishness are not just the dominant values of its most successful citizens, but may well be the necessary source of its

enormous dynamism and affluence.

Nowhere has this been made more obvious than in the wholly contradictory messages being sent out by the nation's leaders since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. One reaction to the national tragedy has been an all-too-rare tendency for citizens to think in national, almost solidaristic terms, as well as to turn inward and reflect on what is valuable beyond the purely materialistic and selfish pursuit of affluence. This collective soul-searching has led to an unusual increase in confidence in the government and a turn to the nation's politicians, usually a despised group, for leadership and guidance.¹² The national leadership has greatly welcomed this attention and the high poll ratings that come with it. And the new mood has made it easier to garner support for war and to make appeals for alertness in the fight against terrorism.

However, the leadership is also increasingly worried that the turn from the selfish pursuit of affluence, especially by the majority of winners, is bad for the economy – hence the utterly contradictory calls for ostentatious displays of consumer confidence and for a rapid return to business as usual, even as the politicians try to implement tax policies that will shift even more wealth from

12 A recent study by the National Opinion Research Center of public responses to the terrorist attack of September 11 found the percentage of Americans expressing "great confidence" in the executive branch of government increasing from 13.5 percent prior to the attack to 51.5 percent in the weeks afterwards. There was a similar increase from 12.7 percent to 43.8 percent of persons having "great confidence" in Congress. Tom W. Smith, Kenneth A. Rasinski, and Marianna Toce, *America Rebounds: A National Study of Public Response to the September 11th Terrorist Attacks* (Chicago: NORC, October 2001), Table 1.

the poorest bottom fifth of losers to the top 1 percent of winners. This being so, it is a waste of time to keep calling for policies and programs that are completely at variance with the self-interested, highly individualistic ethic of the society and the selfish pursuit of riches that is as often as not driven by pure greed. Even in the days after September 11, one would be hard put to find any willingness among Americans to share John Rawls's noble egalitarian concern with "the goodness of the settled desire to take up the standpoint of justice."

To be sure, Rawls's first principle of "justice as fairness" is alive and well among all winners and even most losers who are citizens. This is the principle that "[E]ach person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all."¹³ While not fully realized in practice, a similar view is strongly held by all but the bottom 10 percent of citizens, as demonstrated in my own recent survey on Americans' views of freedom.¹⁴

However, Rawls's second principle of justice is honored largely in the breach in the United States. According to Rawls, "social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advan-

tagged members of society."¹⁵ Nothing like such conditions currently obtain in America – and they are not likely to obtain any time soon. Even though most Americans ruefully disagree with the statement that they are "very proud" of the country's "fair and equal treatment of all groups in society," fully 85 percent of them, nonetheless, are of the view that "generally speaking" America is a better country than most other countries, and less than 3 percent would wish to be a citizen of any other country in the world.¹⁶

In this essay I have attempted to offer arguments for intervention on behalf of those who lose that are premised on the ethic of extreme individualism and chronic selfishness. In essence, I have argued that it is bad for business to neglect those who lose. The continued selfish pursuit of affluence requires a minimal commitment to a handful of unselfish social policies.

If my arguments have not appealed to our noblest motives, that is only because such appeals have repeatedly failed. I have not tried to show how to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people – but rather how to secure the least possible unhappiness for the minority of losers in the winner-take-all society that most Americans now enjoy.

13 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5. Note this is the revised version of the principle. Compare the earlier version in Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 302.

14 Orlando Patterson, "The American View of Freedom: What They Say; What They Mean," *Society* 38 (4) (Spring 2001): 34–45.

15 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 6.

16 Smith et al., *America Rebounds*, Table 1.

Richard A. Epstein

Against redress

One of the hardy perennials of political theory asks how, if at all, one might justify the inequality of wealth and opportunity that is so manifest in society. The issue has been with us from the earliest times, but it seems to have gained renewed urgency in the past decade or so as economic inequality in the United States, if not in the rest of the world, seems to have become more extreme with the rise of technology.

In his essay “Beyond Compassion,” Orlando Patterson captures something of the current anger over inequality when he laments the perverse distribution of wealth that allows the CEO of a large corporation to pull down wages and stock options that exceed the wages and benefits of a thousand line employ-

ees. He condemns the society that offers nothing but small handouts to mothers who raise small children but awards fortunes to go-go dancers.

It is easy to recite statistics to show that an ever-greater percentage of wealth is concentrated in – take your pick – the top 1, 5, or 10 percent of the income distribution in the United States. Public discomfort with the current situation is only magnified because this economic divide between rich and poor often tracks profound and enduring racial cleavages.

In our multiracial society, it is an oversimplification to treat the inequality of income and wealth as a racial problem. But, that said, there is ample evidence to support the proposition that whites as a group are blessed with both greater wealth and higher income than their black counterparts. In many quarters, the combination of these two dominant features raises twin concerns about political stability and racial and economic justice.

In light of this sorry state of affairs, it is perhaps too easy for Patterson to conclude that the market is a “moral non-starter.” But denunciation is not quite the same as argumentation. The current distribution of wealth in America is not just the product of the market. It is also

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the product of the crazy-quilt pattern of regulation and taxation that seeps into every area of life. It is therefore necessary to disentangle the consequences that flow from regulation from those that flow from the market, which in return requires some theory of what a society based on the market looks like.

Frederich von Hayek's claim that local knowledge in a decentralized system will outperform the handiwork of state ministers (many of whom control literally tens of thousands of times the wealth of ordinary peasants) remains unrefuted by history, so much so that virtually all systems of regulation, wise or foolish, treat the market almost by default as the starting place for analysis. Labor statutes do not prohibit negotiations between management and labor to set wages and working conditions. They just institute a system of collective bargaining. Antidiscrimination laws do not shut down private employment markets. They only specify certain grounds on which employers are not allowed to base their hiring decisions. One can attack or defend these institutions for the consequences that follow in their wake, but the simple and inescapable truth today is that when it comes to the provision of goods and services, nothing beats the market.

Like it or not – and “moral” or not – with the demise of central planning, the market *is* our starting point.

It hardly follows, however, that the market is both the starting *and* the ending point of the analysis. Questions of both social and economic inequality remain with us still. Today's sorry state of affairs, which finds prosperity tempered with poverty, surely invites some wholesale reform. Obviously, as a political matter, it is hazardous to argue that, even if we keep our market institutions, the redress of inequalities within the

United States does not, and should not, rank high on the list of legislative priorities for the social and economic reforms of the next generation.

It is nevertheless this hazardous position that I wish to defend.

In order to show why the redress of inequalities should not rank on our list of legislative priorities, I shall first try to outline a sensible theory that helps explain both the uses and the limitations of the market. The theory here is rightly described as libertarian in its orientation, but it makes no pretense that the market can discharge all social functions or indeed operate on its own resources without the assistance of the state. Rather, it argues that state intervention is needed to supply all individuals with protection against force, fraud, and monopoly.

Once this benchmark is established, I shall then sketch out in general terms two separate lines of argument used to justify government intervention to redress economic and social inequality, and then indicate why both of these fall short of their intended goal. These are arguments about restitution and redistribution, respectively.

Finally, I shall indicate briefly a general strategy for social reform that could, and should, be adopted to achieve a more just society, without the costly and unneeded by-products of government intervention. Rather than add more layers of taxation and regulation, the best tonic for a healthy society is to free up entry into a host of markets by removing the plethora of taxes and regulations already in place. The emphasis should be on self-sufficiency, not transfer; it should be on making the economic pie greater, not trying fitfully to use government action to put more goods in the hands of those who need them the most.

The question of economic and racial inequalities plays itself out on a vast canvas. But as with so many large problems, it is best attacked by breaking it down into smaller problems that may prove amenable to legal solutions that satisfy our best moral and political instincts. Before attempting to understand the role of state power in dealing with claims between groups, it is far easier to ask when the state should back a claim for compensation or support brought by one individual against another.

The first place to turn is the theory of corrective justice that has dominated our view of human interactions since Aristotle. It takes little imagination to award compensation to the person who is either physically attacked or duped by another.

As an initial matter, it is hard to deny the proposition that the (indiscriminate) use of force or fraud seriously diminishes the overall welfare of society. The individual who takes from another always gains, but that gain pales into insignificance beside the loss inflicted on the other person. This reduction in overall wealth and utility (for in this context the two go hand-in-hand) moreover has adverse consequences on third parties, who perceive themselves as at risk when force and fraud are allowed unabated.

At the same time, Aristotelian, Kantian, and utilitarian moral theories are all hard-pressed to condemn any form of vigorous economic competition that involves neither force nor fraud. The routine business transactions of everyday life produce a common good – economic gains for all parties to the transactions. That increased wealth in turn creates still greater opportunities to produce more goods for trade through third parties. Insofar as this is true, we do not need to know whether one party

to the transaction is rich and the other poor, because the voluntary transaction will improve the position of both, regardless of their initial endowments of wealth.

This is why a market analysis is, emphatically, a *moral starter* for social theory.

The standard libertarian theory therefore has ample grounds to draw a sharp line between aggression and deceit, which it condemns, and competition, which it praises. Competition expands the size of the pie, and of each of its slices; coercion reduces the size of the overall pie, and forces some individuals to bear a disproportionate share of the loss.

Many Marxist or left-wing theorists dispute this result by insisting that ordinary market transactions are contaminated by exploitation, which is, when all is said and done, a form of theft.

The term “exploitation” requires, of course, some explication. Clearly, no one is particularly upset when it is said that a skillful halfback exploited an opening in the defense in order to run for a touchdown. Taking advantage of opportunities made available within the context of the rules is often a good, not a bad, thing. And the firm that exploits an opening in the market to introduce a new widget that displaces its creakier rival deserves our thanks, not our condemnation.

To the determined Marxist or his modern sympathizers, however, exploitation often carries the more cynical connotation that one side of the transaction is left worse off than he would have been if he had never entered it at all.

But this view of exploitation offers no explanation as to why someone down on his luck would choose to make a contract that left him poorer than before. Many contracts are performed on a

repetitive basis: the ordinary worker can quit at any time and yet frequently will return to work day after day. He obviously does so because he thinks that this opportunity is better than any of his alternatives, and it would be an odd form of assistance to ban him from that line of work altogether.

In some cases, the charges of exploitation are refined so that they concede the point of mutual gain by contract, but insist that the worker is exploited because the firm has obtained a disproportionate share of the joint profit from the transaction. Why they presume the asymmetrical division of this unobserved gain remains something of a mystery. Their intuition is that minimum wage laws, for example, can boost the least fortunate worker's share of the gain to a larger, and more just, proportion.

But the imposition of any such rule of division does more than alter shares enjoyed by current players. It also changes the entire landscape. The higher minimum wage will induce some employers to reduce their workforces, others to change nonwage terms of the contract. It will narrow the gap between lower- and higher-skilled employees and thus reduce worker incentives to invest in their own human capital.

Yet, ironically, the one effect that is not likely is a reduction in the employer's share of the surplus, for the higher the minimum wage, the more likely that some firms will exit from the market.

Hence, the one confident prediction we can make is this: any effort to tilt by legislation the contractual wage balance in competitive markets will block voluntary transactions, leaving both sides worse off than before. The Marxist conception of exploitation is in the end undermined by the unjust consequences that its application in practice will produce.

This does not mean, however, that exploitation is an empty concept. It receives its best definition from classical economic theory, which condemns (as some hard-core libertarians do not) monopoly, even if it grows out of voluntary combination and not government (or private) coercion.

For the purposes of this essay, I shall accept the standard efficiency-based economic theory that in general seeks to regulate or outlaw monopoly for the resource losses that it imposes on society as a whole. Hence it may in principle make sense to regulate the rates charged by natural monopolies (i.e., traditional water, power, and light companies) that cannot be divided without fatal losses in efficiency. And it may in principle be possible to prevent the formation of voluntary cartels that seek to divide markets or to rig prices.

But if this theory allows the use of government force to break up or limit monopoly power, by the same token it takes a very grim view of any state barriers to entry into various economic or social markets. The state that imposes a protective tariff may benefit some local industry, but that interference with trade places a far greater burden on those other individuals who are blocked from choosing their trading partners.

Within this general framework, the state also commits a wrong against its own citizens when it imposes restrictions against their entering into some trade or business, unless that restriction is clearly calibrated, as most occupational restrictions are not, to prevent the practice of fraud on hapless customers.

We are now in a position to outline the relationship between this general theory of individual rights and the larger issues of economic and racial inequality. One way to frame the issue is to ask

whether poor people generally, or black people specifically, have a claim for restitution from society at large.

To state the question in this way requires us to observe at least two important caveats. The first is that we cannot predicate sound theories of restitution on bad theories of social justice. The case here cannot rest therefore on undifferentiated charges of exploitation but must be tied to a demonstration that these individuals have been the group victims of force and fraud, including the imposition of barriers to entry, by other members of society.

The second caveat is that in principle the question of restitution is not restricted solely to the position of African Americans, but could in fact be asked in connection with American Indian tribes, with Chinese and Japanese immigrants, or indeed with any group that claims to have suffered injustice at the hands of others. But for these purposes at least, I shall concentrate on the black experience precisely because the answer to the question of whether restitution should be provided may seem to be self-evidently in the affirmative.

After all, there is little question that the institution of slavery as practiced in the United States before the Civil War and the racial restrictions that lay at the heart of Jim Crow and the black codes were wholly indefensible when measured against a basic theory of libertarian rights. Excluding blacks from participation in the political and social life of that time constitutes one of the great stains on our history, made still worse by the countless acts of private violence and intimidation to which the state turned a blind eye.

Yet it is one thing to recognize the commission of these past serious wrongs, and quite another to conclude that they support claims for restitution

today to the descendants of the victims of state and private violence.

Critical problems arise on both sides of the line. Who should receive restitution? And who should be made to pay for it? Let us take these two elements in order.

First, who counts as a victim? That question was easy to answer in 1865 when huge portions of the African American population in the United States had just been released from the bonds of slavery. But it is far harder to afford victim status, over 135 years later, to their descendants. No one alive today suffered the cruelties of past regimes.

The point here is especially true when claims for restitution are pressed on a limited basis. For over twenty years, for example, black parents in Kansas City, Missouri, have pressed claims for restitution by claiming that black children in the city had been victims of the vestiges of segregation that survived after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. But no remedy here can fit the ostensible wrong, for today's schoolchildren in the district bear no relationship to the black children in that district whom segregation might have shortchanged two generations ago. Quite simply, the program forces vast amounts of state tax revenue into lavish expenditures in one school district, while the educational needs of other children, black and white alike, suffer from comparative neglect.

The difficulties are, if anything, greater in considering who should pay these claims for restitution. Here the nub of the difficulty is that the state is not just some disembodied entity with a heart and mind of its own. Even more than the private corporation, it is a composite of huge numbers of individuals who bring to this sprawling nation their own distinctive pasts. Any program of

restitution, however, contemplates the use of tax dollars to benefit some subclass of the population at the expense of everyone else. In all cases, this approach necessarily results in risks of overinclusion.

For example, the claim for restitution brought against the German state after World War II necessarily fell with equal weight on resistance fighters and the most ardent Nazis. Even so, the state ran the risk of overinclusion because of the immediacy and enormity of the wrong; it adopted a two-pronged approach that compensated survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants, and then, generally, the state of Israel.

It is hard to see how one could devise any similar program of restitution for the descendants of former slaves in America. Too much time has passed to have any confidence that the brunt of these payments will be borne by individuals who had any connection, direct or indirect, with the wrongs of a previous generation. Many Americans today descend from those individuals who gave their lives during the Civil War to free the slaves. Millions of people have migrated to our shores from just about every point on the globe, often to escape the physical danger and economic oppression of their own lands. By what right do we ask these immigrants and their children to compensate blacks whose ancestors have been injured by others when they have done nothing wrong themselves?

We could, of course, bite the bullet and conclude that some substantial transfer payment should be made from general resources nonetheless. But even here, we have to consider the complications that remain.

Claims for restitution today do not occur in a vacuum. The same country that saw Jim Crow was able to redirect

its moral compass and provide extensive programs that were designed to remedy some of the past conditions of slavery. We have had extensive affirmative-action programs; we have had programs that targeted the educational shortfalls on inner-city youth, predominantly black; we have extensive welfare programs that benefit disproportionate numbers of African Americans.

As a matter of social cohesion, I believe that we would do far better keeping some general programs in place that help those at the bottom than trying to find ways to pay restitution to blacks rich and poor alike. Owing to the complexities involved, my great fear is that any program of restitution will emerge as a twisted jumble of preferences that heaps a second set of injustices on the first.

Having examined the claims for restitution made by African Americans today, I shall next briefly address the question of the best social response to inequalities of wealth.

Much of the wind would be taken from the sails of the current restitution movement if the average income of black citizens were equal to that of whites. But while claims of economic inequality only lurk behind restitution claims, they become the centerpiece of any claim for the redistribution of income and wealth.

This claim of course runs smack into the libertarian prohibitions on the use of force and fraud, for it honors claims for redistribution even when the poor person concedes that he has no corrective justice claim to the wealth of the rich person. The question is whether these inequalities of wealth justify some action for redress when the wealth is acquired, and accumulated, through industry, thrift, and invention.

Perhaps the easiest way to make the case for *some* redistributive action is to appeal to the diminishing marginal utility of wealth. The point here is that the value of the additional dollar drops the more dollars that a given person has. A perfect system of wealth transfer between persons could presumably improve aggregate social utility by taking dollars from the persons who need them the least, giving them to the persons who need them most. The total number of dollars could, in some ideal world, remain constant after the transfer. Does greater satisfaction from these (redistributed) dollars justify the coercive transfer?

One conceptual obstacle to this argument is that it is fanciful at best and mischievous at worst to purport to make these interpersonal comparisons of wealth. Clearly no social ruler (pun intended) lets us know with certainty that wealth is worth more in the hands of a poor person than in the hands of a rich person, so the determined economist can shipwreck the case for wealth transfers from the start by denying the possibilities of interpersonal comparisons of utility. I can assert that wealth is worth more to the poor person than to the rich person; you can deny that proposition. The rich person might use the next dollar to complete work on an invention that will improve the lives of others. The poor person might squander it on a drinking binge. We have no way of knowing if wealth is more useful to a poor than a rich person.

Still, this hard-edged argument has bite only insofar as it cautions us against the easy assumption that the marginal dollar is *always* worth more in the hands of the poor person than in the hands of the rich person. But it does not in my view show that *in general* these comparisons are ill conceived. Homeless people

on the edge of starvation *do* on average need that next dollar more than the fashionable elites choosing between vintage wines. The entire enterprise of charitable activities, through churches, hospitals, and schools, would be largely unintelligible if in fact the marginal dollar of wealth were, and were perceived to be, worth as much in the hands of the rich as in the hands of the poor. Who would choose to fund soup kitchens, childhood vaccinations, and scholarships under those circumstances?

So one conceptual objection to redistribution fails to deliver a knockout blow. How then does one continue to dislodge demands for state-mandated redistributions of wealth?

A more promising line of argument seeks to demystify the state by treating it merely as the agent for those individuals who in any given situation benefit from its actions. Hence the question of whether the state can take wealth from A and give it to B can be reposed: can B demand some part of A's wealth, solely because B needs it more?

At this point, the hard-core libertarian will dismiss B's claim as mere theft – a coercive seizure of private property. The state, therefore, is no better than the Robin Hood who takes from A and gives to B.

This argument looks too glib to be wholly convincing. There are marked differences between an organized system of state redistribution and the isolated actions of a brigand. State action can proceed through the ordinary channels of taxation and thus does not present the same threat to peace and social order as the actions of the ordinary thief. In addition, the social levies in question are not concentrated against one person on a whim, but are part of a comprehensive social plan that asks *all* of the more fortunate among us to con-

tribute something to the support of those who are least fortunate. This web of institutional constraint surely makes state action less of a threat than that individual action.

Or does it?

In reply, one could argue that it would be odd to sanction individual thefts on the grounds that the thief took only some predetermined amounts of wealth from those individuals who were in a position to pay for it. The interposition of political majorities does not necessarily insulate the state's decision from all criticism. As James Madison reminds us, political factions often act and vote in ways that allow them to line their own pockets. It hardly counts as a tribute to the democratic process if a minority of wealthy persons is consistently outvoted and outmuscled by those who enjoy the advantage of greater numbers, namely, the poor.

The objection of theft may not be a showstopper, but it can hardly be dismissed on the grounds that the processes of deliberative democracy insulate all of its decisions from substantive attack. The owners of private property are entitled to nothing more than the protections that deliberative democracy wishes to confer upon them. Outright confiscation is not cleansed simply because it is authorized by a majority, or even supermajority, vote. Progressive taxation is not cut from the same cloth as those forms of collective action that raise the standards of wealth and happiness for all, which is what the state tries to do by supplying certain standard public goods – military defense, a judicial system, police protection, public infrastructure – to all its citizens.

This last observation is fortified when one looks more closely at the unhappiness created by individual acts of theft. Here a proponent of redistribution

might argue that whenever the thief has more use for the stolen goods than their owner does, the theft helps to advance happiness. But that shortsighted calculation ignores the broader dynamics of theft.

If the state were to legalize individual theft, the scope of these activities would sharply increase, as many individuals would forsake productive activities for what once passed as a life of crime. In response, property holders would be forced to hire more armed guards to protect their possessions. Worse, they might avoid theft by prematurely consuming goods that they would otherwise save, thereby depleting the social store of wealth over time. And if consumption is not possible, a property holder can always choose to invest resources in bricks and mortar, which are harder to steal than money.

Theft is therefore a losing proposition on both sides of the ledger. The proper social response is to make it illegal – both for individuals and for the state.

The hard social question is how many resources should be devoted to its elimination. Here the idealist might be tempted to hold that the state simply has a moral and social duty to eradicate *all* forms of theft, including taxation. For our purposes, the critical point is that the destructive cycle wrought by individual theft may be mirrored when the state uses coercive means to redistribute wealth.

Thus the wise citizens of Hong Kong, fearful of expropriation after the Chinese takeover in 1997, invested large sums of free cash into their new local airport, where it was relatively insulated from expropriation. Allowing the state to steal from the wealthy alters the full range of productive and consumptive activities – generally for the worse.

Here again, a note of caution is need-

ed. I have no doubt that the strong sense that motivates private charitable transfers affords some political margin of error against certain state-mandated transfers designed to help those in dire need. Most people who are taxed would be prepared to devote for religious or moral reasons some fraction of their wealth to the alleviation of poverty and misery. Once the state undertakes that role, private citizens can reduce their amount of private giving to offset the state exaction. Hence the public system of support displaces the ordinary system of private charity, but meets with relatively little resistance so long as the reductions in private giving are available.

Yet the margin for error in this scenario is not infinite. Raise the level of transfer payments for public services too high, and the private adaptive response will be less charity – such that it will no longer be able to offset the increased burden of public taxation. Matters only get worse if the transfer payments in question have, as is so often the case, little to do with the alleviation of poverty and hardship in our midst.

At this point, Madison's warning about factions becomes pertinent. How taxes are spent generally depends on the kind of bare-knuckled political struggle that makes Washington politics so ugly today. Losers from proposed legislation can lobby furiously against it. But lobbying is always a two-way street that allows well-organized beneficiaries to mount a political campaign in response.

Once the government halls are open for business, anyone can apply for grants. Farmers can obtain their special subsidies; small-business men can opt for theirs; corporate welfare can enrich well-heeled stockholders; senior citizens can cash in on a rich set of retirement and medical benefits denied to

their younger and poorer brethren. Public cynicism can mount, as it has mounted, in response to the transparent efforts to make it appear as though every giveaway on the map should be extolled in the name of the public good.

Why believe that the total sum of state and federal redistributive activities provides any net benefit to the poor, who pay through the nose for every major subsidy only to receive relatively paltry welfare benefits in exchange?

In the struggle between different political factions over transfer payments, as with individual theft, two sides are engaged in either blocking or securing wealth transfers. Their combined activities result in a net diminution of wealth across the board, whether peanut farmers or tobacco farmers win their vaunted subsidies.

The parallel to individual theft goes one step further. Once wealth redistribution is fair game, people will alter their patterns of consumption and investment. They will leave less to the next generation out of fear that the estate tax will gobble up their bequests. And they will hire the finest lawyers and planners to navigate their private fortunes safely through the arcane niceties of the tax code.

My conclusion is simple: any effort to secure redistribution necessarily reduces the total stock of wealth. And it is not likely to result in transferring wealth to the poor.

If, as I believe, restitution and redistribution are more often than not misguided, even dangerous, strategies for social reform, what alternatives exist?

I can think of two underappreciated lines of inquiry. The first of these is the use of charitable contributions to assist the poor, even through faith-based initiatives *without* direct government sup-

port. Smaller amounts of state-sponsored redistribution could give families stronger incentives to take care of their wayward members. In addition, any charitable dollar is likely to do more good than a government dollar because voluntary contributors have at least some incentive to monitor how their funds are spent. Finally, reducing government transfers is likely to increase overall wealth, which in turn reduces the demands on the welfare system. Evaluated by its systematic returns, increased charitable spending is no panacea, but it has none of the drawbacks of coercive government programs.

The second line of action comes from a different quarter. The statute books are littered with laws that impose indefensible barriers to entry into product and labor markets. It is easy to find all sorts of regulations that exclude individuals from driving jitneys, braiding hair, or practicing law and medicine. Why is it that Sears, Roebuck can sell lawn mowers but not legal services if it is prepared to stand behind both?

The political forces behind the status quo are formidable. It may well be the case that entrenched interests will block any quick and sudden shift in political fortunes that would block the operation of competitive markets. But however

vexed these transitional issues, the intellectual program is clear: remove barriers to entry in the trades and professions. Removing these obstacles costs the government nothing in direct expenditures. Indeed, it reduces administrative bloat and, through it, tax burdens. In addition, it increases the total level of production in society. In the midst of all the clamor for redistribution, we should not forget our initial point of departure: that ordinary contracts produce gains from trade that are shared by all parties. The lower the level of transactions costs, the higher the velocity of exchanges that move resources from lower- to higher-valued uses. Open entry and freedom of contract expand the opportunity set across the board, and are prey to none of the destructive consequences that mark resort to faction or theft. The nineteenth-century program of trade and labor liberalization makes as much sense in today's Internet age as it did in an era dominated by iron and steel.

John F. Kennedy had it right when he said that a rising tide lifts all boats. And that tide will only rise when we put aside our preoccupation with redress and redistribution – and agree instead to unleash the productive capacities of all our citizens.

Christopher Jencks

Does inequality matter?

The economic gap between rich and poor has grown dramatically in the United States over the past generation and is now considerably wider than in any other affluent nation. This increase in economic inequality has no recent precedent, at least in America. The distribution of family income was remarkably stable from 1947 to 1980. We do not have good data on family incomes before 1947, but the wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers narrowed dramatically between 1910 and 1947, which probably means that family incomes also became more equal. The last protracted increase in economic inequality occurred between 1870 and 1910.

The gap between the rich and the rest of America has widened steadily since 1979. The Census Bureau, which is America's principal source of data on

household incomes, does not collect good data from the rich, but the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has recently combined census data with tax records to track income trends near the top of the distribution. Figure 1 shows that the share of after-tax income going to the top 1 percent of American households almost doubled between 1979 and 1997. The top 1 percent included all households with after-tax incomes above \$246,000 in 1997. The estimated purchasing power of the top 1 percent rose by 157 percent between 1979 and 1997, while the median household's purchasing power rose only 10 percent.¹ The

1 Estimates of the absolute change in purchasing power should be treated with extreme caution. The Consumer Price Index suggests, for example, that the purchasing power of the bottom quintile did not change between 1979 and 1997, yet data on food expenditures suggest that the poorest quintile felt it had more discretionary income (see Bruce Hamilton, "Using Engel's Law to Estimate CPI Bias," *American Economic Review* 91 [June 2001]: 619–630) and direct measures of housing conditions and other amenities suggest that the poorest quintile's material standard of living rose (see Susan Mayer and Christopher Jencks, "Do Official Poverty Rates Provide Useful Information about Trends in Children's Economic Welfare?" Levy Institute, Bard College, June 2001, available at <<http://www.jcpr.org>>).

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gap between the poorest fifth of American households and the median household also widened between 1979 and 1997, but the trend was far less dramatic.

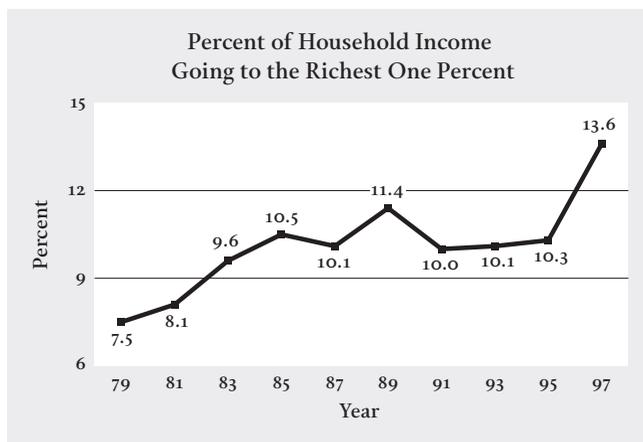
To liberals who feel that economic inequality is unjust or socially destructive, its growth is evidence that America has been headed in the wrong direction. To conservatives who feel either that riches are the best way of rewarding those who contribute the most to prosperity or that a generous welfare state encourages idleness and folly among the poor, the growth of inequality seems either innocuous or desirable. The debate over inequality involves both moral and empirical claims, but because the empirical claims are hard to assess, both sides tend to emphasize moral arguments. But treating inequality as a moral issue does not make the empirical questions go away, because the most common moral arguments for and against inequality rest on claims about its consequences. If these claims cannot be supported with evidence, skeptics will find the moral arguments unconvincing. If the claims about consequences are actually wrong, the moral arguments are also wrong.

The connection between moral obligations and empirical evidence is most obvious in the case of utilitarian morality, which requires everyone to follow rules consistent with the greatest good of the greatest number. Utilitarian morality tells us, for example, that we should not litter even when there is no chance of being punished, because the cost to others usually exceeds the benefit to ourselves. But a moral obligation to follow rules that promote the greatest good of the greatest number does not tell us which specific rules for distributing goods and services produce that result.

If humanity lived entirely on manna that dropped from heaven, and if each additional pound of manna yielded a progressively smaller increase in the recipient's well-being, rulemakers committed to the greatest good of the greatest number would seek to distribute manna equally, at least when recipients had equal needs. But economic goods and services do not drop from heaven. People have to produce these goods and services in order to sell them to one another. How much people produce depends partly on how generously their efforts are rewarded. Rulemakers therefore have to make tradeoffs between the needs of consumers, which are relatively

Figure 1
Changes in the percent of household income going to the richest 1 percent of American households, 1979–1997.

Source: Congressional Budget Office, *Historical Effective Tax Rates, 1979–1997*, September 2001, Table G-1c.



equal, and the motives of producers, who usually produce more when extra effort leads to higher rewards.

The most widely discussed alternative to the utilitarian theory of justice is the theory proposed by John Rawls.² Rawls claimed that when uncertainty is great and downside risks are high, people are – or should be – absolutely risk averse. This assumption led Rawls to believe that if people did not know what position they would occupy in a society they would want to organize the society so as to maximize the well-being of the society's least advantaged members. If this claim is correct, utilitarian logic also implies that society should maximize the well-being of the least advantaged. Even if most people are not as risk averse as Rawls claimed, they may be sufficiently risk averse to feel that maximizing the position of the least advantaged should be given very high priority in a just society.

But most thoughtful liberals, including Rawls, also recognize that rewarding people for producing more goods and services will often improve the absolute well-being of the least advantaged. Identifying the best strategy for improving the position of the least advantaged therefore requires complex empirical calculations that turn out to be rather similar to the calculations required to achieve the greatest good of the greatest number. The rest of this article assesses various empirical claims about how economic inequality affects both the mean level of well-being and the position of the least advantaged.

Some of the potential costs and benefits of inequality emerge when we contrast the United States with other rich

democracies. One simple way to describe income inequality in different countries is to compute what is called the “90/10 ratio.” To calculate this ratio we rank households from richest to poorest. Then we divide the income of the household at the ninetieth percentile by the income of the household at the tenth percentile. (Comparing the ninetieth percentile to the tenth percentile is better than, say, comparing the ninety-ninth percentile to the first percentile, because few countries collect reliable data on the incomes of either the very rich or the very poor.)

The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), which is the best current source of data on economic inequality in different countries, has calculated 90/10 ratios for fourteen rich democracies in the mid-1990s. Table 1 shows the results.³ To keep differences between these fourteen countries in perspective I have also included data on two poorer and less democratic countries, Mexico and Russia. If we set aside Mexico and Russia, the big English-speaking democracies are the most unequal, the Scandinavian democracies are the most equal, and Western European democracies fall in the middle. (Italy looks more unequal than the other continental democracies, but the Italian data is somewhat suspect.) Within the English-speaking world the United States is the most un-

3 LIS adjusts household incomes for size-related differences in households' economic needs using a scale in which, for example, a household of four needs twice as much as a household of one, and a household of nine needs three times as much as a household of one. This scale probably underestimates the additional income needed to maintain a constant level of material well-being and probably overestimates the additional income needed to maintain a constant level of subjective well-being when household size rises.

2 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Table 1
Income inequality and economic output in various countries during the 1990s

Country (and year of the ninetieth to the tenth percentile)	Ratio of holdhold income at the 90th to 10th per- centile ^a	GDP per capita as a percent of U.S. level in 1998 ^b	Life expec- tancy at birth (1995 est.) ^c
Scandinavia ^d	2.8	75	77.2
Sweden (1995)	2.6	68	78.9
Finland (1995)	2.7	68	76.6
Norway (1995)	2.8	85	77.8
Denmark (1992)	2.9	79	75.4
Western Europe	3.6	73	77.5
Nether. (1994)	3.2	75	77.5
Germany (1994)	3.2	71	76.6
Belgium (1996)	3.2	74	76.4
France (1994)	3.5	66	78.4
Switz. (1992)	3.6	84	78.5
Italy (1995)	4.8	67	77.6
Brit. Com.	4.3	73	77.7
Canada (1994)	4.0	78	78.2
Australia (1994)	4.3	75	78.0
U.K. (1995)	4.6	67	77.0 ^e
U.S. (1997)	5.6	100	75.7
Middle-income LIS nations			
Russia (1995)	9.4	21 (?)	65.0
Mexico (1998)	11.6	25	NA

a From <<http://lisweb.ceps.lu/key/figures/ineqtable.htm>> (8/13/01).

b From U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2000*, Government Printing Office, Table 1365. GDP is converted to \$U.S. using purchasing power parity.

c National Center for Health Statistics, *Health, United States, 2000*, Government Printing Office, 2000, Table 27.

d All area averages are unweighted arithmetic means.

e England and Wales.

equal of all. The 90/10 ratio in the United States is twice that in Scandinavia. But even the United States is nothing like as unequal as Russia, Mexico, or

many other Latin American countries.

America's unusually high level of inequality is not attributable to its unusually diverse labor force. Years of schooling are more equally distributed in the United States than in the European countries for which we have comparable data (Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany). Adult test scores are more unequally distributed in the United States than Europe, partly because American immigrants score so poorly on tests given in English. But disparities in cognitive skills turn out to play a tiny role in explaining cross-national differences in the distribution of earnings. If one compares American workers with the same test scores and the same amount of schooling, the Americans' wages vary more than the wages of *all* Swedish, Dutch, or German workers.⁴

Almost everyone who studies the causes of economic inequality agrees that by far the most important reason for the differences between rich democracies is that their governments adopt different economic policies. There is no agreement about *which* policies are crucial, but there is a fairly standard list of suspects. A number of rich countries have centralized wage bargaining, which almost always compresses the distribution of earnings. Many rich democracies also make unionization easy, which also tends to compress the wage distribution. Some rich democracies transfer a lot of money to people who are retired, unemployed, sick, or permanently disabled,

4 Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn, "Do Cognitive Test Scores Explain Higher U.S. Wage Inequality?" Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2001; and Dan Devroye and Richard Freeman, "Does Inequality in Skills Explain Inequality in Earnings Across Advanced Countries?" Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2001.

while others are far less generous. The United States is unusually unequal partly because it makes little effort to limit wage inequality: the minimum wage is low, and American law makes unionization relatively difficult. In addition, the United States transfers less money to those who are not working than most other rich democracies.

The fact that the American government makes so little effort to reduce economic inequality may seem surprising in a country where social equality is so important. American politicians present themselves to the public as being just like everyone else, and once they step outside their offices, Americans all wear jeans. The way Americans talk and the music they listen to are also affected by egalitarian impulses. But while the tenor of American culture may be democratic, Americans are also far more hostile to government than the citizens of other rich democracies. Since egalitarian economic policies require governmental action, they win far less support in the United States than in most other rich democracies.

Conservatives have argued for centuries that trying to limit economic inequality inevitably reduces both the incentive to work and the efficiency with which work is organized. As a result, they think egalitarian societies have fewer goods and services to distribute than societies that allow the market to determine household incomes. One simple way to test the claim is to ask whether countries that tolerate a high level of inequality really do enjoy a higher standard of living.

Measuring a country's standard of living is not easy. The most widely used measure is probably per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), converted to American dollars using what is known as "purchasing power parity" – a system

designed to measure what different currencies actually buy in the countries where they are used. Column 2 of Table 1 shows GDP per capita for the fourteen rich democracies on which LIS provides distributional data. At first glance the data seem to support the conservative case, because the most unequal country, the United States, also has the highest GDP per capita. That fact makes a strong impression on most Americans. But if you compare the other thirteen rich democracies in Table 1 you will find no systematic relationship between inequality and per capita GDP. Britain and Italy, for example, rank just below the United States in terms of inequality, but their GDP per capita is lower than any other country but France. The fact that egalitarian economic policies have no obvious correlation with per capita GDP within Europe or the Commonwealth makes a strong impression on egalitarians in those countries. It also suggests that America's high output per capita may be traceable to something other than our tolerance for economic inequality.

Notice, too, that no rich democracy is as unequal as Mexico or Russia. Some think this is because the combination of affluence and democracy always leads countries to adopt somewhat egalitarian economic policies. Others think the causal arrow runs the other way, and that extreme inequality retards economic growth. This debate is unlikely to be settled soon, because it requires historical evidence that is hard to find in poor countries.

If inequality does not account for America's high GDP per capita, what does? A first step toward answering this question is to decompose economic output into two components: the number of hours worked in different countries ("effort") and the value of the goods and

Table 2
Estimates of economic inequality, output, effort, & efficiency in seven rich democracies for 1998

	U.S.	U.K.	Australia	Canada	France	Germany	Sweden
Inequality (1994 – 1997)							
line 1: 90/10 ratio	5.6	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.5	3.2	2.6
Output (1998)							
line 2: GDP per capita	\$32,184	\$21,673	\$24,192	\$25,179	\$21,132	\$23,010	\$21,799
Effort (1998)							
line 3: % of pop. employed	48.6	45.9	45.8	46.6	38.1	43.5	45.1
line 4: Hrs per worker per yr.	1864	1731	1860	1779	1567	1510	1629
Efficiency (1998)							
line 5: GDP per worker	\$60,106	\$44,280	\$47,558	\$49,007	\$55,714	\$50,616	\$44,000
line 6: GDP per hr.	\$32.25	\$25.58	\$25.57	\$27.55	\$35.55	\$33.52	\$27.01
line 7: GDP per “available” hr.	\$30.81	\$23.95	\$23.51	\$25.26	\$31.38	\$30.38	\$24.77

Source by line: Lines 1 and 2: see Table 1. Line 3: see *Statistical Abstract 2000*, Table 1376. Line 4: see Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Employment Outlook, Statistical Annex*, 2001, 225. Line 5 = line 3/line 4. Line 6 = line 5/line 4. Line 7 = line 6 adjusted to include hours available from those not working but seeking work, assuming that they wanted to work the same number of hours as those actually employed.

services that workers produce per hour (“efficiency”). Table 2 shows such statistics for the United States and six other rich democracies. Americans are more likely to have paid jobs than people in the other six countries, but except in the case of France the difference is fairly small. American workers also seem to put in more hours per year than workers elsewhere, although data on hours worked is not collected in the same way in all countries, so the numbers must be treated gingerly. Still, the estimates of output per hour suggest that while the United States is considerably more efficient than Canada, Australia, Great Britain, and Sweden, it is slightly less efficient than France and Germany.

One obvious objection to this comparison is that unemployment is higher in France and Germany than in the United States. One way to correct for this waste of human resources is to divide economic output by what Table 2 labels “avail-

able” hours – the number of hours actually worked plus the estimated number of hours that those looking for jobs in a given week wanted to work. The last row of Table 2 shows the results of this calculation. After this adjustment is made, the United States, France, and Germany look about equally efficient. If we set the United States to one side, moreover, there is again no obvious correlation between inequality and efficiency in the other six countries.

Another objection to the calculations in Table 2 is that they take no account of cross-national differences in the stock of physical and human capital. This is true, but since one major rationale for tolerating a high level of inequality is that this supposedly encourages capital accumulation and investment, holding America’s advantages in these domains constant would bias the results in favor of equality. The calculations in Table 2 also ignore national differences in natural

resources, but such an adjustment would almost surely make America look worse, not better. Perhaps the most fundamental objection of all is that statistics on GDP take little account of differences in the quality of the services in different countries, since these differences are almost impossible to measure. If America's service sector produces more satisfied customers than the service sector in France or Germany, Table 2 may understate the benefits of inequality.

If American managers had organized the economy in an unusually efficient way, so that American workers were producing significantly more (or better) goods and services per hour than their counterparts in other rich democracies, it would be fairly easy to argue that they deserved their fabulous salaries. Table 2 is obviously not the last word on this issue, but it does not suggest that American workers are producing significantly more per hour than their counterparts in other rich countries. Comparisons that adjust for the stock of physical and human capital show the same thing.⁵ America's high standard of living seems to depend as much on long hours as clever management or clever workers.

The fact that Americans spend so much time working is rather surprising for an affluent nation with a reputation for hedonism. Workers in Germany, France, Japan, and Britain have cut their hours substantially since 1980. Americans cut their hours earlier in the twentieth century but have not done so since 1980. Americans tell pollsters that they would like to work fewer hours, but when they have a choice between short-

er hours and more consumer goods, they mostly seem to opt for consumer goods rather than family time or leisure. This is a legitimate choice, but it has nothing to do with economic efficiency.

Until fairly recently the United States was so much richer than other countries that even the poor lived better in America than elsewhere, leading conservatives to argue that laissez-faire policies benefited everyone in the long run. Today, however, the American poor are no longer the world's most affluent. Tim Smeeding, who directs the LIS, and Lee Rainwater, a Harvard sociologist, have compared the purchasing power of households at the tenth percentile of the income distribution in thirteen rich democracies covered by the LIS. These comparisons provide a pretty good indication of how the poor fare in different countries. Table 3, which is based on their work, shows that the American poor are better off than the poor in Britain or Australia but marginally worse off than the poor in Sweden, Canada, and Finland, and substantially worse off than the poor in Western Europe.

Conservatives often blame American poverty on the existence of an "underclass" that rejects mainstream social norms, does little paid work, and has children whom neither parent can support. It is certainly true that poor American households include fewer working adults than affluent American households. This is true in every rich country for which we have data. But when Lars Osberg, an economist at Dalhousie University, compared poor households in the United States, Canada, Britain, Sweden, France, and Germany, he found that the poor American households worked far more hours per year than their counterparts in the other five

5 Robert Hall and Charles Jones, "Why Do Some Countries Produce So Much More Output per Worker than Others," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 114 (1999): 83–116.

Table 3
Purchasing power of households at the 10th and 90th percentiles of each nation's distribution relative to households at the same percentile in the United States in the same year, 1992 – 1997

Country (and year)	Purchasing power as a percent of the U.S. level in the same year		
	10th percentile	90th percentile	Average of all percentiles
Scandinavia	112	57	77
Sweden (1995)	103	49	67
Finland (1995)	105	53	73
Norway (1995)	128	68	88
Denmark (1995)	110	59	80
Western Europe	119	73	88
Neth. (1994)	110	64	76
Germany (1994)	113	67	82
Belgium (1996)	121	73	80
France (1994)	110	71	84
Switz. (1992)	141	89	116
Commonwealth	94	73	80
Canada (1994)	105	80	92
U.K. (1995)	85	68	72
Australia (1994)	87	71	76
U.S. (1997)	100	100	100

Source: Columns 1 and 2 are from Timothy Smeeding and Lee Rainwater, "Comparing Living Standards Across Countries: Real Incomes at the Top, the Bottom, and the Middle" (paper prepared for a conference on "What Has Happened to the Quality of Life in America and Other Advanced Industrial Nations?" Levy Institute, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., June 2001). Local currencies were converted to dollars using their estimated purchasing power parity. Area averages are unweighted arithmetic means. Column 3 is calculated from the national means of the logarithms of after-tax household income, using data provided by Rainwater.

countries.⁶ This finding suggests that what distinguishes the United States from the other rich democracies is not the idleness of the American poor but the anger that idleness inspires in more affluent Americans, which helps explain the stinginess of the American welfare state.

If Rawls is right, disinterested rulemakers in all societies should be trying to maximize the well-being of the least advantaged. If you accept that claim, Table 3 suggests that Western European countries are doing a better job than the United States and that Western European countries are more just. But if you are a utilitarian whose goal is to maximize the average level of well-being, the situation is not so clear. If you want to compare the average level of well-being in countries with different distributions of income, you need some way of comparing the value people at different points in the income distribution assign to additional after-tax income. Table 3 suggests, for example, that poor Canadians have 5 percent more purchasing power than their American counterparts, while affluent Americans have 25 percent more purchasing power than affluent Canadians. If your goal is to achieve "the greatest good of the greatest number," you need some way of deciding whether the 25 percent advantage of affluent Americans over affluent Canadians should count for more or less than the 5 percent advantage of poor Canadians over poor Americans.

When employers want to reward all members of a hierarchical work group equally, they usually raise every member's wage by the same percentage.

6 Lars Osberg, "Labour Supply and Inequality Trends in the U.S.A. and Elsewhere," available at <<http://is.dal.ca/~osberg/home.html>>.

When social scientists measure economic inequality, they too assume that inequality has not changed if everyone's income has risen by the same percentage. Such practices suggest that many people think a 1 percent increase in income is equally valuable to the rich and the poor, even though a 1 percent increase represents a much larger absolute increase for the rich. In what follows I will refer to the assumption that a 1 percent gain is equally valuable at all income levels as the "One Percent Is Always The Same" rule, or the OPIATS rule for short.

The OPIATS rule implies that if my income is \$100,000 and I give \$20,000 of it to the poor, my well-being falls by a fifth. If I divide my \$20,000 equally between ten people with incomes of \$10,000, ten people's well-being will rise by a fifth. The gains from this gift will thus exceed the losses by a factor of ten. The utilitarian case for governmental redistribution almost always reflects this logic: taxing the rich won't do them much harm, and helping the poor will do them a lot of good. If you look at the actual relationship between income and outcomes like health and happiness, the OPIATS rule seldom describes the relationship perfectly, but it comes far closer than a "One Dollar Is Always The Same" rule, which is the only rule under which income inequality does not affect health or happiness.

If we apply the OPIATS rule to the tenth and ninetieth percentiles in Table 3, the percentage gains accruing to those at the ninetieth percentile from living in the United States almost always exceed the percentage gains accruing to those at the tenth percentile from living in Western Europe or Canada. Switzerland is a notable exception. Americans near the bottom of the distribution would have gained far more from living in Switzer-

land in 1992 than Americans near the top would have lost. Column 3 of Table 3 generalizes this logic by comparing households at every point in each country's income distribution to those at the same point in other countries and averaging the percentage differences.⁷ Averaging across the entire income distribution, Switzerland again does substantially better than the United States in 1992, but all the other rich democracies in Table 3 do somewhat worse than the United States.

Up to this point I have been focusing exclusively on what people can afford to buy. While economic goods and services are obviously important, many people believe that inequality also affects human welfare in ways that are independent of any given household's purchasing power. Even if my family income remains constant, the distribution of income in my neighborhood or my nation may influence my children's educational opportunities, my life expectancy, my chance of being robbed, the probability that I will vote, and perhaps even my overall happiness. The remainder of this article tries to summarize what we know about such effects.

Educational opportunities: Increases in economic inequality have raised the value of a college degree in the United States. If all else had remained equal, making a college degree more valuable should increase both teenagers' interest in attending college and their parents' willingness to pay for college. But the growth of economic inequality in America has been accompanied by a change in

7 Column 3 is calculated from the differences between national means for the logarithm of after-tax household income adjusted for household size. Comparing medians in different countries yields almost the same results.

the way we finance public higher education. Tax subsidies play a smaller role than they once did, and tuition plays a larger role. Since 1979 tuition at America's public colleges and universities has risen faster than most parents' income.

If American high-school graduates were as well informed and farsighted as economic theory assumes, they would have realized that the monetary value of a college degree was rising even faster than tuition. College attendance would have risen both among children whose parents offered to pay the bills and among children who cover their own costs, who would either have borrowed more or worked longer hours to earn a degree.

But while some students clearly respond to changes in the long-term payoff of a college degree, many do not. Indeed, the reason affluent parents offer to pay their children's college expenses rather than just giving their children cash is that parents fear that if the children got the cash they might spend it on something with more short-term payoff, like a flashy car or a trip around the world. If affluent parents are right in thinking that their seventeen-year-olds have short time horizons, the same is probably true for less affluent high-school graduates whose parents cannot pay their college expenses. Such students are likely to be far more sensitive to changes in tuition than to a change in the hypothetical lifetime value of a BA. Tuition is easily observed and has to be paid now. The lifetime value of a BA is always uncertain and cannot be realized for a long time. Among students who pay their own bills, higher tuition could easily reduce college attendance even when the long-run returns of a college degree are rising.

Table 4 is taken from work by two economists, David Ellwood at Harvard

Table 4

Percent of high-school graduates enrolling in a 4-year college or some other form of postsecondary education within 20 months of graduation, by income quartile: 1980–1982 and 1992

Income quartile	Entered a 4-year college			Entered some other form of post-secondary education		
	1980–82	1992	Change	1980–82	1992	Change
Lowest	29	28	-1	28	32	4
Second	33	38	5	30	32	2
Third	39	48	9	33	32	-1
Highest	55	66	11	26	24	-2
All	39	45	6	29	30	1

Source: David Ellwood and Thomas Kane, "Who Is Getting a College Education? Family Background and the Growing Gaps in Enrollment," in Sheldon Danziger and Jane Waldfogel, eds., *Securing the Future* (New York: Russell Sage, 2000).

and Thomas Kane at UCLA. It shows changes between 1980–1982 and 1992 in the fraction of high-school graduates from different economic backgrounds entering four-year colleges. Among students from the most affluent families, the proportion entering a four-year college rose substantially. Among students from middle-income families, whose families often help with children's college expenses but seldom pay the whole bill, attendance rose more modestly. Students from the poorest quartile were no more likely to attend a four-year college in 1992 than in 1980–1982. This pattern, in which enrollment rises more at the top than at the bottom, is just what we would expect if parents respond to changes in the long-term benefits of college while students respond to changes in short-term costs. It is important to emphasize, however, that the poorest quartile's chances of attending college

did not fall appreciably; they just failed to rise. The poorest quartile was worse off only insofar as higher education constitutes a “positional” good, whose value depends not just on how much you have but how much others have. That remains a contested issue.

If rising economic inequality explained the trends in Table 4, the correlation between parental income and college attendance should have grown fastest in those states where economic inequality grew fastest. Susan Mayer, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, has shown that that is exactly what happened during the 1970s and 1980s.⁸ Overall, growing economic inequality in a state raised college attendance, partly because it was accompanied by increased spending on all levels of public education. The positive effects of growing inequality on college attendance persisted even when Mayer took account of changes in the payoff of schooling in the student’s home state. But in the states where inequality grew the most, the effect of parental income on educational attainment also grew.

Mayer has also shown that the increase in economic inequality between 1970 and 1990 led to greater economic segregation between neighborhoods.⁹ When the rich got richer they evidently moved to affluent suburbs where other rich people were also moving. Income disparities *within* neighborhoods hardly changed. Economic segregation is likely

to be important, because a school’s ability to attract effective teachers turns out to depend largely on its socioeconomic mix. Even when districts with a lot of poor children pay better than nearby districts, as they sometimes do, they seldom attract teachers who are good at raising children’s test scores. Increasing economic segregation is therefore likely to reduce the chances that low-income students will get good teachers.

Life expectancy: People live longer in rich countries than in poor countries, but the relationship flattens out as national income rises. Indeed, the statistics in Table 1 show that life expectancy and GDP per capita are not strongly related in rich democracies. In particular, life expectancy is lower in the United States than in almost any other rich democracy.

Within any given country people with higher incomes also live longer. This relationship flattens out near the top of the income distribution, but the gap between richer and poorer families does not seem to narrow when everyone’s standard of living rises. Despite both rising incomes and the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid, for example, the effects of both income and education on mortality increased in the United States between 1960 and 1986.¹⁰ Class differences in mortality also widened in England between 1930 and 1960, even though the overall standard of living rose and the National Health Service

8 Susan E. Mayer, “How Did the Increase in Economic Inequality between 1970 and 1990 Affect Children’s Educational Attainment?” *American Journal of Sociology*, forthcoming.

9 Susan Mayer, “How the Growth in Income Inequality Increased Economic Segregation,” Irving Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago, 2001, available at <<http://www.jcpr.org>>.

10 See Harriet Orcutt Duleep, “Measuring Socioeconomic Mortality Differentials over Time,” *Demography* 26 (May 1989): 345–351, and G. Pappas, S. Queen, W. Hadden, and G. Fisher, “The Increasing Disparity in Mortality between Socioeconomic Groups in the United States, 1960 and 1986,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 329 (1993): 103–109.

equalized access to medical care.¹¹ Such facts suggest that the linkage between income and health involves more than material deprivation. Otherwise, doubling everyone's purchasing power would narrow the gap between the top and the bottom.

One reason for the persistent correlation between income and health is that poor health lowers people's earning power. In addition, big medical bills can deplete a family's savings, lowering its unearned income in later years. But while poor health clearly affects income, studies that follow the same individuals over time suggest that income, occupational position, and education also affect people's health. One reason is that members of affluent households are more likely to follow the medical profession's advice. Affluent Americans now smoke far less than poor Americans, for example. Affluent Americans also get a bit more exercise than the poor and are less likely to be overweight. But even when we take these differences into account, much of the correlation between income and life expectancy remains unexplained. Experimental studies that manipulate a monkey's rank in the hierarchy of its troop suggest that rank affects health, and the same is pretty clearly true for humans. But we do not know how much of the association between income and health can be explained in this way.

In 1992 Richard Wilkinson wrote an influential article arguing that a more equal distribution of income improved life expectancy in rich countries.¹² Sub-

11 See Elsie Pamuk, "Social Class Inequality in Mortality from 1921 to 1972 in England and Wales," *Population Studies* 39 (1985): 17–31.

12 Wilkinson summarized his thinking on this issue in *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality* (London: Routledge, 1996).

sequent work showed that mortality was also lower in American states and metropolitan areas where incomes were more equal. One explanation for this phenomenon is the OPIATS rule. A 1 percent increase in income lowers the odds of dying before the age of sixty-five by roughly the same amount, regardless of what your initial income is. This means that adding \$1,000 to the income of a million poor families while subtracting \$1,000 from the incomes of a million richer families should lower overall mortality. It follows that countries, states, or cities with the same mean income should have lower death rates when this income is more equally distributed. But if this were the only way in which income inequality affected life expectancy, the difference between the United States and Sweden would be quite small.

Wilkinson and his followers believe that inequality also lowers life expectancy independent of its effect on any given household's income, because it changes the social context in which people live. According to Wilkinson, inequality erodes the social bonds that make people care about one another and accentuates feelings of relative deprivation (the social-science term for what people used to call envy). Other epidemiologists take what they call a "materialist" position, arguing that inequality kills because it affects public policy, altering the distribution of education, health care, environmental protection, and other material resources. Either way, if we compare people with the same income – say \$50,000 a year – those who live in places where incomes are more unequal should die younger.

Recent research has raised serious doubts about such claims. As data on more countries and more time periods have become available, the cross-national correlation between economic in-

equality and life expectancy has fallen perilously close to zero. If you look at Table 1 and simply contrast America with other rich democracies, the idea that inequality kills seems to make sense. But if you compare the other rich democracies with one another, you find no consistent association between inequality and life expectancy. Incomes are far more unequal in Canada, Australia, and Great Britain than in Scandinavia, for example, but life expectancy is about the same in these two groups of countries.

Recent work has also raised doubts about the causal link between inequality and life expectancy in American states and cities. In America, both economic inequality and life expectancy are correlated with the percentage of African Americans in a state or city. Blacks die younger than whites no matter where they live, so states with large black populations have above-average mortality rates no matter how their residents' income is distributed. American whites also die younger when they live in a state or a metropolitan area with a large African American population. Once one takes the effects of race into account, the correlation between economic inequality and mortality tends to disappear.¹³

If we want to know whether egalitarian policies would improve people's health, however, we need to ask whether *changes* in economic inequality at the national, state, or local level are associated with *changes* in life expectancy. The answer to this question is "sometimes." When Andrew Clarkwest and I analyzed changes in economic inequality within American states during the 1980s, we found that white mortality rates fell least in the states where inequality in-

creased fastest. That finding was consistent with the Wilkinson hypothesis, although the effect could have been due to chance. But when we extended our analysis back to 1970, the relationship was reversed. That relationship could also have been due to chance.

When Clarkwest and I looked at changes in economic inequality within the rich democracies that participate in the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), we found that life expectancy had risen everywhere, but it has risen less rapidly in those countries where economic inequality was rising fastest.¹⁴ This was consistent with the Wilkinson hypothesis, and in this case the relationship was too large to blame on chance, at least using conventional statistical standards. Nonetheless, the relationship was weak. Economic inequality in the United States rose by about a sixth between 1979 and 1997.¹⁵ Life expectancy in the United States rose by three years during this period. Had inequality not increased, the LIS data implied that life expectancy in the United States would have risen by an additional 0.3 years. To keep this number in perspective, it helps to remember that Americans in the top 5 percent of the income distribution can expect to live about nine years longer than those in the bottom 10 percent.¹⁶

14 See Andrew Clarkwest, "Notes on Cross-National Analysis of the Relationship between Mortality and Income Inequality," Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, Harvard University, 2000, available at <<http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/socpol/MWCstdntresearch.htm>>.

15 This estimate assumes that the apparent increase in inequality between 1992 and 1993 was a methodological artifact caused largely by changes in the Census Bureau's data collection and coding procedures.

16 This calculation is based on an analysis of the National Longitudinal Mortality Survey by

13 See also Angus Deaton and Darren Lubotsky, "Mortality, Inequality, and Race in American Cities and States," Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2000.

The apparent effect of even a fairly large change in a nation's income distribution pales by comparison.

We also need to bear in mind that the cross-national correlation between changes in economic inequality and changes in life expectancy may not be causal. Countries that restrained the growth of economic inequality after 1980 were dominated by political parties that felt either politically or morally obligated to protect the interests of their less affluent citizens. Such countries may have done all sorts of other things that made people live longer, like reducing the work week or ensuring that more people got the health care they needed.

Happiness: The relationship between income and happiness is much like the relationship between income and health, except that it is easier to tell whether someone has died than whether they are unhappy. Almost every year since 1972 the General Social Survey (GSS) has asked national samples of American adults the following question:

Taken all together, how would you say things are these days? Would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?

Those with higher incomes tend to say they are happier than those with lower incomes. This relationship flattens out near the top of the distribution, but not enough to suggest that making the American distribution of income like

Angus Deaton, which shows that men in the highest income group have death rates comparable to men twelve years younger in the lowest income group, and that women in the highest income group have death rates comparable to women six years younger in the lowest income group. My use of Deaton's results to infer overall disparities in life expectancy requires several assumptions that are unlikely to be exactly correct.

Sweden's would have a big effect on happiness. Just as with health, equalizing the distribution of income is only likely to have large effects on happiness if it changes the social context in which people live. If equality strengthens social ties or reduces envy, for example, that could reduce unhappiness significantly.

Empirical evidence for a correlation between equality and happiness remains thin. Michael Hagerty, a social psychologist at the University of California, Davis, has shown that Americans are less likely to say they are happy when they live in cities where incomes are more unequal, but his analysis does not take account of the correlation between economic inequality and racial mix. A team of economists at Harvard and the London School of Economics has shown that Europeans become less satisfied with their lot when their country's income distribution becomes more unequal, but this effect is confined to respondents who identify with the political Left.¹⁷ All this evidence is suggestive, but hardly definitive.

Crime: Several studies have found that violent crime is higher in American metropolitan areas where the distribution of income is more unequal. But these studies have not looked at whether *increases* in inequality are associated with *increases* in crime. For the United States as a whole, trends in economic inequality do not match trends in violent crime at all closely. Inequality hardly changed during the 1960s, when violent crime rose

17 See Michael Hagerty, "Social Comparisons of Income in One's Community: Evidence from National Surveys of Income and Happiness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000): 764–771, and Alberto Alesina, Rafael Di Tella, and Robert MacCulloch, "Inequality and Happiness: Are Europeans and Americans Different?" Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2001.

sharply. Inequality rose in the early 1980s, when violent crime fell. Inequality rose more slowly in the late 1980s, when violent crime rose again. Inequality near the top of the distribution rose in the 1990s, while violent crime fell. None of this proves that changes in the distribution of income have no effect on crime, but it does suggest that trends in violent crime depend largely on other influences.

Political influence: Americans are less likely to vote today than in the 1960s. The Left sometimes blames this decline in turnout on the fact that almost all the benefits of economic growth have been going to a small minority. Parties of the Left in most other countries have made sure that the benefits of growth were more equally distributed. In America, the Democrats have barely discussed the problem. As a result, voters are said to have become convinced that neither party cares about their problems.

Nonetheless, growing economic inequality cannot explain the decline in turnout, because this decline occurred in the early 1970s, well before inequality began to grow. Turnout has hardly changed since 1980.¹⁸ If growing inequality has affected turnout, it must have done so by perpetuating a decline that occurred for other reasons.

The most obvious causal link between turnout and equality runs the other way. If everyone votes, the electorate is by definition representative of the popula-

tion and politicians need to keep all income groups happy. When people stop voting, turnout almost always falls the most among the poorest and least educated. As the income gap between those who vote and the population as a whole widens, politicians have less incentive to push legislation that benefits the lower half of the income distribution. Richard Freeman, an economist at Harvard, has shown that class disparities in presidential turnout increased between 1968 and 1972 and that the same thing happened between 1984 and 1988.¹⁹ I have not seen any evidence on what has happened since 1988.

American political campaigns have also changed in ways that make it riskier for politicians to upset the rich. Until the 1960s most political candidates relied largely on volunteers to staff their campaign offices and contact voters. Now they rely largely on paid staff and television advertising. This change reflects the fact that politicians can raise more money today than in the past. Political contributions have probably risen because government affects more aspects of our lives, so both voters and corporations are willing to spend more money to influence government regulations and spending patterns. Whatever the explanation, people who can contribute money now have more political weight, and people who can contribute time have less. Politicians also know that the

2000, Table 479). If one allows for the fact that citizens constitute a declining fraction of the voting-age population and the fact that more citizens are disenfranchised because they are – or have been – in prison, turnout among eligible voters may actually have increased slightly since 1980.

19 Richard Freeman, “What, Me Vote?” paper presented at the Workshop on Inequality and Social Policy, Kennedy School of Government, June 2001.

18 About 62 percent of the voting-age population cast ballots in the three presidential elections conducted during the 1960s. Turnout fell to 55 percent in 1972, 54 percent in 1976, and 53 percent in 1980. Since 1980 presidential turnout has averaged 52 percent, with no clear trend. Off-year congressional elections have followed the same trajectory (U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2000, Government Printing Office,

easiest way to raise the money they need is to court affluent contributors. When the share of income going to the top 1 percent rises, politicians have more incentive to raise money from this group. If politicians had to rely exclusively on contributions of less than \$100, they would also have to rely more on volunteers to do a lot of their campaign work.

I began this inquiry by arguing that America does less than almost any other rich democracy to limit economic inequality. As a result, the rich can buy a lot more in America than in other affluent democracies, while the poor can buy a little less. If you evaluate this situation by Rawlsian standards, America's policies are clearly inferior to those of most rich European countries. If you evaluate the same situation using a utilitarian calculus, you are likely to conclude that most American consumers do better than their counterparts in other large democracies. Much of this advantage is due to the fact that Americans spend more time working than Europeans do, but that may not be the whole story.

I also looked at evidence on whether economic inequality affects people's lives independent of its effects on their material standard of living. At least in the United States, the growth of inequality appears to have made more people attend college but also made educational opportunities more unequal. Growing inequality may also have lowered life expectancy, but the evidence for such an effect is weak and the effect, if there was one, was probably small. There is some evidence that changes in inequality affect happiness in Europe, but not much evidence that this is the case in the United States. If inequality affects violent crime, these effects are swamped by other factors. There is no evidence that changes in economic inequality affect

political participation, but declining political participation among the less affluent may help explain why American politicians remained so passive when inequality began to grow after 1980.

My bottom line is that the social consequences of economic inequality are sometimes negative, sometimes neutral, but seldom – as far as I can discover – positive.²⁰ The case for inequality seems to rest entirely on the claim that it promotes efficiency, and the evidence for that claim is thin. All these judgments are very tentative, however, and they are likely to change as more work is done. Still, it is worthwhile to ask what they would imply about the wisdom of trying to limit economic inequality if they were, in fact, correct.

Readers' answers to that question should, I think, depend on four value judgments. First, readers need to decide how much weight they assign to improving the lot of the least advantaged compared with improving the average level of well-being. Second, they need to decide how much weight they assign to increasing material well-being compared with increasing "family time" or "leisure." Third, they need to decide how much weight they assign to equalizing opportunities for the young as against maximizing the welfare of adults. Fourth, they need to decide how much value they assign to admitting more people from poor countries such as Mexico to the United States, since this almost inevitably makes the distribution of income more unequal.

If you are a hard-core Rawlsian who thinks that society's sole economic goal

20 Mayer's finding that inequality raises educational attainment among the affluent is a partial exception, since the increase among the affluent is larger than the decline among the poor, making the net effect on educational attainment positive.

should be to improve the position of the least advantaged, European experience suggests that limiting inequality can benefit the poor. If you are a hard-core utilitarian, European experience suggests – though it certainly does not prove – that limiting inequality lowers consumption. But European experience also suggests that lowering inequality reduces consumption partly by encouraging people to work fewer hours, which many Europeans see as a good thing. If you care more about equal opportunity for children than about consumption among adults, limiting economic inequality among parents probably reduces disparities in the opportunities open to their children.

All things considered, the case for limiting inequality seems to me strong but not overwhelming. That is one reason

why most rich societies are deeply divided about the issue. Yet given the centrality of redistribution in modern politics, it is remarkable how little effort rich societies have made to assemble the kinds of evidence they would need to assess the costs and benefits of limiting inequality. Even societies that redistribute a far larger fraction of their GDP than the United States spend almost nothing on answering questions of this kind. Answering such questions would require collecting better evidence, which costs real money. It would also require politicians to run the risk of being proven wrong. Nonetheless, moral sentiments uninformed by evidence have done incalculable damage over the past few centuries, and their malign influence shows no sign of abating. Rich democracies can do better if they try.

*Does
inequality
matter?*

Sean Wilentz

America's lost egalitarian tradition

Egalitarianism assumes many shapes in contemporary America: equality of opportunity, equality of rights, racial equality, sexual equality, equal justice, equal pay for equal work, and more. One egalitarian ideal is, however, conspicuously absent from most American public discussions: the ideal of equal wealth. Although complaints about economic inequality arise from the margins, the subject passes virtually unnoticed in our political debates. Apparently, most Americans find nothing unjust about gross disparities of economic resources, so long as every citizen is given a reasonable chance to prosper. Discrimination, prejudice, extreme poverty, and other enormities may endanger the stability and prestige of the republic (although there is intense disagreement about how

much they do so anymore). Yet staggering inequalities of wealth, in and of themselves, pose no such threat in most Americans' eyes.¹

This was not always true.

At the time of the nation's founding, Thomas Jefferson, the slaveholding democrat, famously decried the "numberless instances of wretchedness" that stemmed from gross inequalities of property. Jefferson recognized that "an equal division of property is impracticable." Nevertheless, he observed (in a letter to James Madison) that "enormous inequality" produced "much misery to the bulk of mankind" – so much misery that "legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property, only taking care to let their subdivisions go hand in hand with the natural affections of the human mind."

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¹ The best study to date of Americans' attitudes toward wealth distribution is James L. Hutson, *Securing the Fruits of Labor: The American Concept of Wealth Distribution, 1765–1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998). Although I have differences with Hutson's interpretations, in this essay I have drawn generously from the materials and analysis in his important book. I would also like to thank Joyce Appleby for some cogent criticisms of an earlier draft of this essay. Readers interested in citations for specific quotations may contact the author at swilentz@princeton.edu.

Jefferson's sometime friend and sometime antagonist, the Massachusetts conservative John Adams, agreed, noting that concentrations of wealth in the hands of the few ultimately bred tyranny over the many. "The balance of power in a society," Adams wrote in 1776, "accompanies the balance of property in land." Only by making "the acquisition of land easy to every member of society . . . so that the multitude may be possessed of landed estates," Adams believed, could power be secured "on the side of equal liberty and public virtue."

Similar formulations appeared throughout the infant republic, cutting across lines of party, region, and ideology. Noah Webster, the staunch Connecticut Federalist, claimed in support of the Federal Constitution in 1787 that "*a general and tolerably equal distribution of landed property is the whole basis of national freedom,*" and "*the very soul of a republic.*" A year later, a Virginia Anti-Federalist writing under the pseudonym "The Impartial Examiner" attacked the proposed Constitution precisely because, he contended, it would enable "a few men – or one – more powerful than all others," to "obtain all authority, and by means of great wealth" to "perhaps totally subvert the government, and erect a system of aristocratic or monarchic tyranny in its room [that is, in its place]." There were, of course, exceptions, all along the political and social spectrums – thinkers who asserted that great economic inequalities between the few and the many were inevitable and even, some said, desirable. In general, however, Americans of otherwise clashing political beliefs agreed with one New Jersey cleric that, in a republic, "there should, as much as possible, be . . . something like an equality of estate and property."

Though not unchallenged, and though open to conflicting interpretations, the

conceptual basics of the egalitarian tradition lasted for a century after the Revolution. Ironically, the so-called consensus school of American historians of the 1940s and 1950s, focused as it was on the nation's historical commitment to individualism and the sanctity of private property, largely ignored the once-prevalent commitment to economic equality. So have most subsequent historians, whether they have defended or attacked the consensus idea.

As a result, we have misunderstood some of the fundamental themes of American history from the Revolution through Reconstruction. And we have likewise misunderstood the complicated political legacy of those themes, from the late nineteenth century down to our own time.

The intellectual origins of America's egalitarian tradition lay in the eighteenth-century antimonarchical politics that culminated in the Revolution. Forged in an overwhelmingly rural and antiaristocratic world, these politics contained two powerful and connected assumptions: first, that human labor is the creator of all wealth; and second, that social and economic disorders are the consequence, and not the cause, of political disorder. These assumptions are alien today, which makes it difficult for modern readers to discern the egalitarian tradition, let alone to comprehend it.

The labor theory of value – the doctrine that all property is derived from human labor – claimed an enormous array of supporters in early national and antebellum America. The concept lay at the core of John Locke's theory of property, as stated in the second of his *Two Treatises on Government*. Followers of such different Enlightenment writers as Volney, David Hume, and Adam Smith took the idea for granted. So did Ameri-

can political agitators and public officials ranging from Sam Adams and John Rutledge in (respectively) revolutionary Massachusetts and North Carolina to Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, and Abraham Lincoln.

A major reason for the labor theory's ubiquity was the ambiguity of its implications, which proved useful to the American colonists. Locke, for example, formulated the labor theory in ways that permitted, indeed encouraged, the subjugation of a variety of "nonproductive" persons, be they nomadic hunters and gatherers or dependent African slaves. American slaveholders naturally assumed that the labor of their slaves did not count as the slaves' own property (although in the late eighteenth century, many slaveholders, aroused by the egalitarianism of the Revolution, had second thoughts). Likewise, slaveholders and non-slaveholders discounted the labor of other bound workers, as well as wives and children. And to the vast majority of settlers, the sojourning hunting and fishing economies of the Native Americans plundered resources but produced nothing. Yet to all free citizens, rights to property arose, as the Pennsylvania democrat George Logan observed in 1791, "from the labor we have bestowed acquiring [it]."

In the agrarian semicommercial economy of revolutionary America, the labor theory of value thus had profoundly hierarchical as well as profoundly egalitarian implications. The tensions between these implications created a dialectic within the egalitarian tradition that would rattle American politics for decades to come.

Still, for the free white men who settled there, America seemed a kind of utopia. Because the vast preponderance of American wealth came from the land, because American land was plentiful,

and because ownership of the land was (compared to the Old World) widely distributed, it followed that free Americans could uniquely avoid great disparities of wealth. Likewise, it followed that most free and productive American households would escape the inequities of past civilizations and fully enjoy what their labor had justly obtained. Of course, all would not be perfectly equal. Some citizens, by dint of extraordinary hard labor or good fortune, would always obtain more property than others, while the lazy or unfortunate would obtain less. But given the limits that nature placed on what the land could produce, there were limits on how far the wealthiest citizen could rise above the poorest. A visionary ideal took hold of a nation where liberty was secure, "so long as Property . . .," meaning land, Ezra Stiles wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1786, "is so minutely partitioned and transfused among the Inhabitants."

To be sure, the available historical statistics on American inequality depict a very different reality. On the eve of the Revolution, according to the findings of Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, the richest 1 percent of Americans held over 10 percent of the nation-to-be's wealth, while the richest 10 percent owned roughly half of that wealth.² But these figures need to be understood in their larger context. Compared to later periods in American history – and compared to Great Britain and Europe in the 1770s – the degree of economic inequality among nonslaves in Revolutionary America was remarkably low. Moreover, local studies of the colonial era strongly suggest that American inequality wors-

2 Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

ened fairly dramatically in the mid-eighteenth century – a worsening that Americans blamed largely on what one historian has called the “Anglicization” of colonial society during the two decades or so before 1776.³

Although they did not live in the classless utopia described by some patriots and astonished foreign visitors, Americans could easily consider their world the closest thing in the history of the West to such a utopia, so long as they relegated slaves and Indians (as many, if not most, did) to special castes, outside society. (Even Thomas Paine, an outspoken antislavery man, could write in 1782 that “[t]here are not three millions of people in any part of the universe, who live so well, or have such a fund of ability, as in America.”) And in this providential setting, Americans interpreted rising inequality among freemen as a by-product of artificial political manipulations by the British and their American allies, as well as of the persistence in the New World of certain undesirable Old World institutions.

Here, Americans’ views on labor and equality conjoined with another conceptual distinction, common in eighteenth-century Anglo-American political thought, between society and government – a distinction that vaunted the former over the latter. In this view, social relations, including trade and commerce, were wholly natural, and, especially in America, they tended strongly

to promote equality. Gross inequality, it followed, was unnatural, the product of laws and customs imposed on society by government – specifically, in America, by hereditary monarchy and aristocracy. To American patriots, observes one historian, commenting on Paine, “[t]he cause of . . . wretchedness,” was “political, not economic: the existence of poverty” – the most glaring indication of economic inequality – implied that “something must be wrong in the system of government.”⁴

To a degree not yet fully appreciated by historians, this explosive mixture of the Lockean labor theory of value and anti-aristocratic politics propelled the American radical and reformist movements of the second half of the eighteenth century, including the movement for independence.⁵ The idea that the British operated as parasites, feeding off the sacrifices and labor of their productive colonial subjects, cropped up all across Revolutionary America, most famously in Jefferson’s *Summary View of the Rights of British America* in 1774: “America was conquered, and her settlements made, and firmly established, at the expence [*sic*] of individuals and not of the British public . . .,” Jefferson wrote, “and for themselves alone they have a right to hold.” And the same antiaristocratic producerism that helped ignite the Revolution also led Americans to repudiate what they considered the most egregious of their own traditional and inherited political and legal arrangements, not least the laws of entail and primogeni-

3 See John M. Murrin, “Review Essay,” *History and Theory* (1972): 226–275; and Murrin, “A Roof Without Walls’: The Dilemma of American National Identity,” in Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter, eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 333–348.

4 Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 93.

5 The best work to date on these themes is Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

ture. By abolishing these practices, Jefferson boasted, Americans “laid the axe to the root of Pseudo-aristocracy.”

Like all modern revolutionaries, the American patriots came to blows quickly after they won their revolution. Those battles, first between supporters and opponents of the Federal Constitution, then between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, eventually produced, in the Hamiltonian financial and commercial system of the 1790s, the single greatest threat to the egalitarian tradition before the Civil War, apart from the institution of slavery itself. Unlike most of the other American revolutionaries, Alexander Hamilton understood inequality neither as some artificial political imposition nor as something to be feared arising in the future, but as an ineluctable fact. Inequality, Hamilton declared in 1788, “would exist as long as liberty existed, and . . . would unavoidably result from that very liberty itself.” His entire program of national debt assumption, a federal bank, and internal taxation aimed to turn that fact toward national prosperity and greatness, by attaching the loyalties (and the purses) of the monied “few” firmly to the federal government, and then channeling their power toward rousing America out of its semicommercial slumbers and developing the new nation’s economic and military capacities.

But Hamilton’s program did not win mass support, and with the Jeffersonians’ so-called Revolution of 1800 and the subsequent dismantling of Hamilton’s innovations, the egalitarian tradition forcefully reasserted itself. To Jeffersonians – and, on certain issues, even some Federalists, like John Adams – Hamilton’s proposals about banks, currency, and debt amounted to a reversion to corrupt, artificial, monopolistic, quasi-aristocratic favoritism extended

to the rich and well-born. The agrarian Republican John Taylor of Caroline charged that Hamilton’s credit system rejected the basic truth that “a democratic republic is endangered by an immense disproportion of wealth” and said that Hamilton’s system would produce “tyrants and slaves – an aristocracy enormously rich, and a peasantry wretchedly poor.” Jefferson’s more moderate friend and Republican ally, James Madison, declared that, although some degree of inequality was inevitable, Hamilton’s plans would severely exacerbate the problem by extending special favors to the elite and thereby enlarging “the inequality of property, by an immoderate, and especially an unmerited, accumulation of riches.” Instead, Madison favored a strong but restrained central government and “the silent operation of laws which, without violating the rights of property, reduce extreme wealth towards a state of mediocrity, and raise extreme indigence toward a state of comfort.”

With the demise of the Federalist Party after 1815 the egalitarian economic ideals of the Revolution stood virtually unchallenged. Although they would survive for another three generations, it would be in a curiously fractured way.

Deepening inequality accompanied the market revolution that transformed the American economy after 1815. In 1860, the richest 1 percent of Americans held nearly 30 percent of the nation’s wealth, more than twice the percentage of the Revolutionary era. Whereas in 1774 the richest 10 percent owned 50 percent of the nation’s wealth, by the outbreak of the Civil War, the equivalent portion of the population controlled nearly three-quarters of the nation’s wealth. The shift did not go unnoticed. Between 1815 and 1860, a host of dissent-

ing movements – organized workingmen, religious and secular communarians, Anti-Masons, radical abolitionists, and more – challenged the idea that America's basic economic and social relations were sound. In more orthodox electoral politics, issues concerning economic justice and inequality exploded with a force that matched that of the 1790s.

Strikingly, however, mainstream political antagonists, and even some radical dissenters, embraced clashing versions of the egalitarian tradition.

The fullest restatements of the established antiaristocratic egalitarianism appeared in the policies and pronouncements of the Jacksonian Democratic Party. Firm believers in the labor theory of value – “Labor the Only True Source of Wealth” was actually a Jacksonian battle cry – the Democrats lambasted wealthy nonproductive drones as “aristocrats,” who held their power and lived off the labor of others by the grace of charters and other privileges granted by the federal and state governments. “Monopoly” became the Jacksonians' catchword, the demiurge of evil inequality. The Democrats' great goal was to remove the aristocrats' hands from the levers of economic power and restore what they considered “natural” commerce, by arousing the great democratic majority of the (newly enlarged) white male electorate.

The central Democratic antimonopoly struggle was President Jackson's war with the Second Bank of the United States, and the key Democratic document of that struggle – Jackson's message vetoing the bank's rechartering in 1832 – was a virtual manifesto of Democratic egalitarianism, containing all of the old revolutionary- and Jeffersonian-era ideals and language virtually intact. Calling the bank a “monopoly,” Jackson

elaborated at length his constitutional reasons for blocking the charter, then launched into a powerful peroration:

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society – the farmers, mechanics, and laborers – who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their government. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing. In the act before me there seems to be a wide and unnecessary departure from these principles.

It could have been written by a Democratic-Republican in the 1790s.

Jackson's chief opponents, known first as National Republicans and then as Whigs, viewed the president's attacks on the bank (as well as on paper money and protective tariffs) with horror as assaults on commerce and property rights that were bound to ruin the nation's expanding market economy. Yet unlike Hamilton and the High Federalists of the 1790s, the National Republicans and the Whigs of a generation later carefully presented their alternative developmental programs in terms agreeable to the

egalitarian tradition.

Fundamental to the National Republicans'/Whigs' reconciliation to egalitarianism was their success in seizing upon and exploiting ambiguities in the labor theory of value. Jeffersonians and Jacksonians tended to define "labor" narrowly, to mean manual labor or (in the case of Southern planters) direction of the productive agricultural manual labor of slaves. Other occupations – whether they involved living off accumulated fortunes, trading commodities, or speculating – were far more suspect. Bankers, financiers, and bondholders, in particular, struck Democrats as inherently parasitic, quite apart from their monopolistic proclivities – moneyed men who produced nothing, but who made considerable fortunes by living (as John Taylor, among many others, had put it) "upon the labour of the other classes."

By expanding the concept of labor to include all gainfully employed persons, however, the National Republicans and Whigs at once blurred class distinctions, upheld the labor theory of value, and presented themselves as the true friends of the toiling masses. Invidious distinctions between producers and nonproducers, the National Republican manufacturer Tristram Burges declared in 1830, only excited "hostile feelings among men, all equally engaged in one great community and brotherhood of labor for mutual benefit." Lacking a formally titled aristocracy, the United States was a land of unlimited opportunity, where, Edward Everett remarked, "the wheel of fortune is in constant operation, and the poor in one generation furnish the rich of the next." And just as every workingman was a capitalist in classless America, so, the argument followed, every capitalist, like every planter, was a workingman; indeed, as one anonymous writer put it in 1833, in America, "all men are

workingmen."

Inequality, according to the National Republicans and Whigs, stemmed not from imagined corrupt privilege but from individual moral differences and from the Democrats' arbitrary and disastrous class-based rhetoric and policies. Drenched in the evangelical ethical righteousness of the Second Great Awakening, anti-Jacksonians blamed poverty on bad individual choices and on the refusal by some men to exert the basic virtues of industry, economy, and temperance. Government, they insisted, had a duty to help the people effect their individual self-improvement, by enacting temperance reform and by building reformatories, asylums, and new-model prisons (all of which required public taxation). And in order to widen economic opportunities and promote equality, government needed to help accelerate economic development by chartering banks, funding internal improvements, and undertaking other orderly innovations that would, they claimed, benefit all industrious citizens, not merely a privileged few.

The great political emblem of this egalitarian anti-Jacksonianism was the protective tariff. Jacksonians tended to regard protectionism as but another form of unnatural monopoly, granted by government to select elite interests – a mechanism that transferred wealth from hand to hand, enriched the few, impoverished the many, and established what one New Hampshire Democrat called "the basest, most sordid, most groveling of aristocracies . . . a moneyed aristocracy." But for National Republicans and Whigs, tariff protection ratified the harmony of interests between capital and labor and laid a foundation for economic growth and military security that would in turn combat what the protectionist writer Daniel Raymond singled out as a great

evil: "a too unequal distribution of wealth."

While squaring themselves with labor, the Whigs turned the tables on the Jacksonians by also squaring themselves with political democracy. Having denied Democratic charges of "aristocracy," they countercharged that a reborn monarchialism, under the executive tyrant Jackson and his minions, was ruining the nation's economy, running roughshod over the Constitution, and offering special favors to Jackson's political cronies and supporters. Again, Jackson's war with the Bank of the United States became the flashpoint. Supposedly, by disregarding both Congress and the Supreme Court during the bank struggle, "King Andrew I" had usurped authority, trampled on the people's liberties, and funneled power and property to his own corrupt coterie. The basic conflict was not between the nonproducing few and the producing many, but between despotic, patronage-glutted Democratic rulers and the mass of the people. By that logic, the Whigs were the true democrats, who offered laboring Americans what the publicist Calvin Colton called "the democracy which does them most good; which gives them food, clothing, and a comfortable home, instead of *promises*."

And so, amid the market revolution, the egalitarian tradition survived – but fractured, now, into two distinct versions. Americans continued to believe in the necessity of restraining gross disparities of wealth. They continued to believe that productive men deserved to enjoy the full fruits of their labor. They continued to believe that special interests in politics – either selfish aristocratic monopolists or immoral monarchial demagogues – were chiefly responsible for deepening inequality. By the mid-1840s, these two versions of the egal-

itarian tradition could claim closely matched electoral support nationwide. Thereafter, however, the Jacksonian-era politics of inequality would unravel as westward expansion forced Americans to confront the institution of slavery and its implications for both moral and economic justice.

Charges that chattel slavery directly threatened the American egalitarian tradition dated back to the Revolutionary era. The most radical voices agreed with Thomas Paine that slaves, as human beings, were entitled to be free and enjoy "the fruits of their labors at their own disposal." Other critics, North and South, blamed slavery for encouraging an aristocratic love of luxurious leisure and a despotic temperament among the slaveholders. Still others charged that slavery produced a backward economy, controlled by a small opulent elite that discouraged the wide diffusion of property among nonslaves.

In the South, as the historian David Ramsay of South Carolina noted in 1789, slavery had "led to the engrossing of land, in the hands of a few," in marked contrast to the (by then) mostly free North. It was only after the revival and vast expansion of southern slavery thanks to the post-Revolution cotton boom, however, that a coherent pro-slavery argument emerged. Only then did clashes over slavery become truly politically dangerous. And when that happened, each side tapped into the egalitarian tradition, promoting its own version while accusing the other of trying to impose tyranny on the entire nation.

Political opposition to slavery reached maturity in the Republican Party of the 1850s, an amalgam of Northern antislavery Whigs (whose national party had collapsed) and dissident free-soil

Democrats. Befitting the party's mixed origins, the Republicans' antislavery variant of the egalitarian tradition borrowed elements from both Whig and Democratic thinking, as well as from long-established antislavery arguments. Like the Whigs, Republicans generally vaunted free labor as a harmony of interests in which the humblest industrious man enjoyed what, in 1860, the ex-Whig Abraham Lincoln called "an equal chance to get rich with everyone else." Slavery, by contrast, suppressed what Lincoln called "the true system" by enriching a small group of slaveholders and by denying blacks the chance to improve their condition.

From the antislavery Democrats, the Republicans absorbed a critique of the slaveholders as an aristocracy, who, by aggressive political action, warped American society to advance their peculiar and oppressive institution at the expense of ordinary Americans, slave and free. In 1839, the Ohio antislavery Democrat Thomas Morris observed that the moneyed aristocracy of the North, which he called the Money Power, had forged a fresh alliance with the southern slaveholders, which he called the Slave Power, "both looking to the same object – to live on the unrequited labor of others." Whereas orthodox Jacksonians described slaveholders as honorable producers, antislavery Democrats such as Morris relegated the slaveholders to the category of aristocrats, at war with ordinary men's property and liberty. Thereafter, attacks on the aristocratic Slave Power became a staple of political antislavery appeals, culminating in the Republican declarations of the 1850s.

Republican attacks on the slaveholder aristocracy went hand in hand with a vindication of their own inclusive version of the labor theory of value, and with their defense of an America in

which disparities of wealth would be limited. Lincoln, in his momentous debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, stated plainly the Republican belief "[i]n the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns." Slavery violated this fundamental idea, Republicans claimed, both by robbing slaves of their just rewards and by degrading the dignity of all labor by turning laborers into chattel, constrained by force. With these aristocratic affronts to labor, slavery deepened gross economic inequalities between the haves and the have-nots – the latter including slaves and most freemen.

Pro-slavery spokesmen, concentrated after 1854 in the southern wing of the Democratic Party, had a more difficult time adapting the established egalitarian tradition to their cause. In promoting slavery as a positive good, they often found themselves explicitly repudiating the natural rights legacies of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. Some openly praised the virtues of aristocracy, though they made clear that they opposed hereditary aristocracy. And any honest defense of slavery required an admission that certain inequalities were inevitable and, indeed, decreed by God – that, as Abel Upshur asserted, "one portion of mankind shall live upon the labor of another portion."

Yet despite their aristocratic pretensions, slavery's advocates, the most reactionary American political force of the nineteenth century, turned to and reworked the egalitarian tradition. It was not (as Louis Hartz once argued) that the slaveholders, deep down, remained Lockean liberals. Rather, pro-slavery writers adapted those pieces of the Lockean and revolutionary legacies that suited their purposes, in part to secure the support of southern white non-slave-

holders. Repeatedly they described their labor system as more egalitarian – for whites – than the supposedly “free” labor of the North.

George Fitzhugh, perhaps the greatest admirer of feudalism to emerge from the pro-slavery ranks, dedicated much of his writing to attacking the economic injustice and inequality of the North. Although Yankees boasted of their adherence to the labor theory of value, Fitzhugh declared, in fact, “*Labor makes values, and wit exploits and accumulates them.*” Northern “freedom,” Fitzhugh proclaimed, amounted to forsaking all sense of responsibility and permitting nonlaboring employers to earn their livelihoods off the sweat of their workers, while compelling the workers to accept subsistence wages – on pain of joblessness and starvation. Under slavery, however, the slaves, as valuable property, were assured of a decent living standard, while southern whites supposedly lived in something far closer to economic equality than northerners. The prominent South Carolina slaveocrat James H. Hammond, who like Fitzhugh accepted the idea that slavery created an aristocracy, went on to describe that aristocracy as a remarkably large and democratic one, consisting of every freeman: “Be he rich or poor, if he does not possess a single slave, he has been born to all the natural advantages of the society in which he is placed, and all its honors lie open before him, inviting his genius and industry.”

Just as antislavery forces moved slaveholding planters from the category of “producers” to “nonproducers,” so the pro-slavery forces retained the idea, older than the Constitution, that black slaves fell outside consideration as part of American society proper and formed what Hammond called a “mudsill” class of inferior beings – a class whose sub-

mission guaranteed white freemen’s equality. Slavery furthermore promoted a variation of what Northern Whigs and Republicans liked to call an underlying harmony of interests – between superior and inferior, in the organic connection between white master and black slave, but also between white equals. So long as the planters preserved (indeed, after 1830, enlarged) the suffrage rights of non-slaveholders, so long as the white majority of non-slaveholding yeoman were permitted to enjoy the full fruits of their labor, so long as tax burdens remained light, and so long as the non-slaveholders raised no objections to slavery, there would be no exploitation of whites by whites.

Seen through this lens, even the slaveholders’ familiar stance on states’ rights has its connection to the egalitarian tradition, as a variation on the idea that economic and social injustice was rooted in political tyranny. According to John C. Calhoun, the ablest pro-slavery political theorist, the framers had designed “a democratic federal republic” in which the states “retained their separate existence as independent and sovereign communities.” Unfortunately, the work of the framers was flawed by their failure to provide the states with an explicit veto power over federal legislation, thereby allowing pro-consolidation Federalists, beginning with Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall, to advance what Calhoun called “the national impulse.” And in the 1830s, the National Republicans/Whigs turned themselves into the numerical balance of power in national politics and compelled the Jacksonian parties, bit by bit, to abandon the South and the animating spirit of the Revolution. The federal government, Calhoun charged, had aggressively usurped power, and created “a great national consolidated democracy . . . as

despotic as that of the Autocrat of Russia, and as despotic as any absolute government that ever existed." The South's blessed slaveholders' democracy was under siege by a corrupt and hypocritical northern democratic absolutism.

As the controversies over dispensation of the western territories grew unavoidable, so the Jacksonian political alignments crumbled. Civil war proved unavoidable. And in the aftermath of that war, the victorious Union made the last notable effort in our history to vindicate the old egalitarian tradition.

As the former Confederate secretary of the treasury Christopher G. Memminger noted soon after Appomattox, reconstruction turned entirely "upon the decision which shall be made upon the mode of organizing the labor of the African race." To Republicans, moderate and radical, the only possible solution was to organize the ex-slaves' labor along the lines familiar in the North, by eradicating the slaveholding aristocracy and ensuring that every freedman would receive the full harvest of his labor.

In the broadest terms, ex-slaves agreed. "[W]e . . . understand freedom," a mass meeting of blacks in Petersburg, Virginia, resolved in June of 1865, "to mean industry and the enjoyment of the legitimate fruits thereof."

But reinventing the egalitarian tradition in order to include the ex-slaves proved to be an overwhelming task. Radical Republicans, led by Thaddeus Stevens, believed that only comprehensive economic and political reform, including mass redistribution of rebel lands to the freedmen, would suffice – proposals that, not surprisingly, met with intense opposition in the white South.

In the North as well, calls to redistribute southern land ran afoul of what most

Republicans and old-line Democrats considered acceptable under the egalitarian tradition (with its insistence on the inviolability of private property). Worse, northern businessmen pointed out, redistribution would play havoc with the staple-based agriculture that was the foundation of southern prosperity and (not incidentally) a source of northern profits. Worse still, land redistribution in the South might encourage increasingly restive northern workers to undertake some similar sort of revolution.

There was, however, one area in which radical and more moderate Republicans, as well as freed slaves, could agree: the imperative of black suffrage in the South as a means to promote economic equality. And in this respect, Reconstruction was in line with the basic concepts of the old egalitarian tradition. Without black suffrage, George Julian observed, former slaveholders would reassume political power and make "the condition of the freedmen more intolerable than slavery itself." But as long as the political monopoly of the slaveholders was broken, enfranchised blacks would have the power to prevent the reemergence of aristocracy and inequality.

The guarantee of black voting, proclaimed the free black Republican Oscar J. Dunn of Louisiana, preserved the essence of America's revolutionary legacy, which was to abolish all "hereditary distinctions" and bar the door from "the institution of aristocracy, nobility, and even monarchy." If black suffrage would not have the sudden cataclysmic effect on the distribution of wealth that radical redistribution would have, it would at least open up the strong possibility of further change, and of greater economic equality, in the South. Black suffrage, lamented one ex-Confederate political leader, was a revolution, "and nobody

can anticipate the action of revolutions.”

The slackening of Republican free-labor reformism amid the depression of the 1870s, and the final abandonment of Reconstruction in 1877, marked a signal defeat for the prewar Republican version of the egalitarian tradition. As a resurgent racism fed charges that the black-supported Reconstruction governments were hopelessly corrupt, and as southern blacks became entangled in a sharecropping system that meant virtual debt peonage, the tradition that had beckoned to a vibrant egalitarian free-labor South looked shaky.

Thereafter, the emergence of enormous new business corporations and trusts and the rise of an all-too-conspicuous American plutocracy battered existing egalitarian assumptions. Suddenly, basic verities – that American abundance and republican government would guarantee workers the full fruits of their labor; that respect for competition, private property, and contracts would, in America, foster a rough equality – were dashed. A gigantic force unknown to earlier generations – what one liberal critic would call “the devil of private monopoly” – was now in the saddle.

A revolution in economic thought, begun in the 1860s and 1870s, both hastened and justified the emergence of the new economic order. The labor theory of value, so fundamental both to formal political economy and to popular thinking about economic justice before the Civil War, proved irrelevant to understanding numerous vital aspects of the corporate economy, from the setting of prices to adjustments in the money supply. More important, economists who accepted the new order accepted the rise of huge corporations as perfectly natural – an inevitable outcome of technological breakthroughs rather than of

political or entrepreneurial changes. Indeed, economists effectively divorced the corporate economy from politics altogether, and insisted that whereas earlier monopolies had been the creation of political favoritism, the modern corporation – or what some experts called “cooperation” – arose strictly out of objective market forces. Economics, as a self-regulating sphere of its own, supplanted the old egalitarian versions of political economy: “This,” wrote one of the popularizers of the new economic doctrine, Charles R. Flint, “is the difference between monopoly and cooperation, between government favoritism and natural law.”

By the 1920s, the terms on which Americans understood economic inequality had changed utterly. Above all, the old association between inequality and exclusive political privilege dissolved. Far from an unnatural distortion of the invisible hand, caused by political favoritism, gross inequality now turned out to be a perfectly natural result of market forces. Government intervention in the internal operations of business, once considered the foundation of monopoly and exploitation, became the means to promote economic equality. Restraint of government, meanwhile, became the touchstone of the new economics and of conservative pro-business dogma, based on the resurgent principle that inequality was not only inevitable, it was rational and just. Government regulation, in this view, would only distort the natural operations and just outcomes of the market by preventing talented and fortunate Americans from accumulating and possessing as much property as they could.

Still, this wrenching transition – what the great reformer of the new century Robert M. La Follette would call the “vast revolution in economic condi-

tions” – did not destroy the American egalitarian impulse. Instead, its character was dramatically transformed, for now government became the instrument, and not the enemy, of equality.

The Populist movement of the 1890s, though it still spoke in the Jeffersonian-tinged antimonopoly rhetoric of the old egalitarianism, proposed all sorts of government interventions, from price regulation to nationalization of the railroads. Trade unionists and socialists, led by the redoubtable Samuel Gompers and the radical Eugene V. Debs, in turn, deployed the labor theory of value, as Karl Marx had, to criticize the exploitation of labor by capital and to justify union organizing, collective bargaining, and (in Debs’s case) the creation of new forms of commonwealth and industrial democracy.

Thereafter, the Progressives and later the New Dealers of the first half of the twentieth century created the foundations of a new government bureaucracy that, while accepting modern capitalist enterprise, could intervene in the marketplace and (with the new federal income tax and estate taxes) directly redistribute wealth.

Herbert Croly most famously described these efforts as using Hamiltonian means to reach Jeffersonian ends. Later nonsocialist writers, including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith, struggled to reinvent a modern liberal version of the egalitarian tradition, excoriating the hyper-individualist voluntarism of the pre-Depression years and after (expressed most plainly by Herbert Hoover) as an apology for plutocracy that would, eventually, produce economic catastrophe.

In the 1950s and 1960s, this reborn economic egalitarianism became closely intertwined with the governmental interventionism of the civil rights move-

ment. If American civil rights advocates learned any lesson from the disastrous decades after the demise of Reconstruction, it was that positive federal action – backed, if need be, by official force – was fundamental to securing civil rights for blacks. Amid the Second Reconstruction, that impulse became allied as never before with the larger impulse for economic equality, combining most fully during the brief heyday of the Great Society.

Overall, the reinvented proactive egalitarianism of the Progressives, New Dealers, and Great Society liberals was effective in reversing the trends of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while at the same time the United States became the most powerful economy on earth. After 1940, economic inequality abated, to the point where, by 1980, the degree of economic inequality, measured statistically, was roughly the same as it had been in the 1770s. To Americans who came of age between 1940 and 1965, Progressive and New Deal liberalism seemed, for better or worse, to have become the national creed. And to many leading historians during these decades, all of mainstream American political history appeared to be but a variation on the basic values of liberal capitalism.

Yet the merging of modern egalitarianisms, racial and economic, in the 1960s could not, finally, overcome some of the lingering ambiguities of the nineteenth-century egalitarian tradition – ambiguities seized upon by the enemies of economic redistribution. Above all, the old producerist prejudice against “nonproducing parasites” could, as ever, be directed against the beneficiaries of federal reform and largesse as well as against the privileged rich. This redirection became especially easy when

large portions of the public identified those beneficiaries as “backward” blacks, “thoughtless” unmarried welfare mothers, and others who, by dint of ancestry or bad moral choices, sought to get more out of the system than they deserved. Much as the more egalitarian implications of the labor theory of value arose in the 1850s and 1860s, only to be shunted aside in favor of more hierarchical thinking, so the revamped egalitarianism of a century later was vulnerable to a revamped hierarchicalism that posited itself as the soul of democratic justice.

Conservative reaction, held in check during the New Deal and its immediate aftermath, began in earnest in the white South’s “massive resistance” to the civil rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Then, with the rise of the Goldwater movement in 1964, laissez-faire pro-corporate politics joined with laissez-faire anti-civil-rights politics and generated a ferocious power. Following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, federal intervention – indeed, the federal government itself – became demonized as at no time since southern secession, only now the demonization came from all sections of the country.

Reinforcing that demonization was the conservatives’ successful depiction of virtually all government action as an interference with individual liberty. Here, again, old antiaristocratic themes became the foundation for a revamped attack on the liberal state. In 1860, Andrew Jackson’s sympathetic biographer, James Parton, excoriated what he called the “Paternal-Government party,” the party of born conservatives that wished to mold the world according to its own arrogant visions while destroying individual freedom. That same line of reasoning reappeared in the Reagan era and after as a chief article of the new

conservatism, in attacks on the so-called “nanny state” that would force liberty-loving Americans to obey all sorts of arbitrary regulations, on everything from gun registration to mandatory automobile insurance – supposedly for their own good.

By the early 1990s, the moderating trends of mid-century had reversed themselves once more, as inequality of wealth distribution returned to the levels of the 1920s. The remnants of the old egalitarian, antiaristocratic language became keywords for the new conservatism, intermingled with a reinvented Hooverian “rugged individualism” – George H. W. Bush’s “thousand points of light” – that arrived in the guise of fearless libertarianism.

Whereas nineteenth-century Americans believed that the federal government would unjustly transfer wealth from the middling classes to the wealthy, the late-twentieth-century Right charged, with great political success, that the federal government was unjustly transferring wealth from the wealthy and the middle class to the poor (especially the minority poor). The imagery of parasitic nonproducers became affixed, in this new vocabulary, to the bottom of the social ladder instead of the top. The true monarchs and aristocrats in Reaganite America became the so-called welfare queens and arrogant, elitist, bleeding-heart “brie-and-Chablis” liberals. Collective solutions to ordinary individual problems – through labor unions, civil-rights groups, and other movements partly reliant on the state – became stigmatized as the distorting influence of entitled “special interests.” Collective efforts by private corporations, even those reliant on the state, to secure their own interests passed unnoticed – or won approval as the natural operations of free enterprise.

This conservative reaction put latter-day egalitarians on the defensive, scrambling for some redefinition of purpose. After his own redistributive efforts in the area of health care came to naught, President Bill Clinton was forced to declare that “the era of big government is over.” In place of the Great Society formulas, liberals, when not fending off attacks on progressive taxation and other achievements of earlier decades, looked for smaller programs and indirect redistribution (through tax credits) to improve opportunities for middle-class and poor Americans.

From time to time, liberal officials and office-seekers would rail against the monopolistic corporate special interests – Big Oil, the pharmaceutical companies – but with less consistency and conviction than their Progressive and New Deal predecessors. Outside the liberal and left-wing margins, virtually no one seemed willing to make the case that even mild redistribution was essential to the health of our political system. And the newly regnant conservatives began reenvisioning the American past in their own image, as if Madison, Jefferson, Jackson, and the generation that followed cared a great deal about individual liberty and nothing about economic equality.

But such conservative interpretations have misread the old egalitarian tradition as surely as the liberal consensus historians of the 1940s and 1950s ignored it. During the nation’s first century most Americans held that, in a strong republic, unlike a corrupt aristocracy, labor would be amply rewarded and the gaps between the poor and the rich would be minimized. To compare that egalitarian vision with the striking inequalities of our own time is, to say the least, troubling.

The old egalitarianism, to be sure, proved incapable of meeting the challenges of modern corporate capitalism. An entirely new form of liberal egalitarianism had to replace it – one that, a century later, is besieged by post-Reagan conservatism, with its selective but persuasive appropriation of old egalitarian themes.

But if their thinking about political economy has been rendered obsolete, the old egalitarians’ basic legacy endures, not just in the rhetoric of the New Right, but in the embattled idea that, if it is to survive, a truly democratic government of the people requires a fundamental equality and justice in the distribution of its wealth. Those who would salvage and modernize this lost American tradition had better be about their work.

James F. Crow

Unequal by nature: a geneticist's perspective on human differences

In February of 2001, Craig Venter, president of Celera Genomics, commenting on the near-completion of the human genome project, said that “we are all essentially identical twins.” A news headline at the time made a similar point: *Are We All One Race? Modern Science Says So*. In the article that followed, the author quoted geneticist Kenneth Kidd: “Race is not biologically definable, we are far too similar.”

Venter and Kidd are eminent scientists, so these statements must be reasonable. Based on an examination of our DNA, any two human beings are 99.9 percent identical. The genetic differences between different groups of human beings are similarly minute.

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Still, we only have to look around to see an astonishing variety of individual differences in sizes, shapes, and facial features. Equally clear are individual differences in susceptibility to disease – and in athletic, mathematical, and musical abilities. Individual differences extend to differences between group averages. Most of these average differences are inconspicuous, but some – such as skin color – stand out.

Why this curious discrepancy between the evidence of DNA and what we can clearly see? If not DNA, what are the causes of the differences we perceive between individuals and between groups of human beings?

DNA is a very long molecule, composed of two strands twisted around each other to produce the famous double helix. There are forty-six such DNA molecules in a human cell, each (along with some proteins) forming a chromosome. The DNA in a human chromosome, if stretched out, would be an inch or more in length. How this is compacted into a microscopic blob some 1/1000 inch long without getting hopelessly tangled is an engineering marvel that is still a puzzle.

The “business” part of the DNA, the part that carries genetic information, is the sequence of nucleotides, or bases, in

the molecule. There are four of these, commonly designated as A, G, T, and C. (I could tell you what these letters stand for, but you wouldn't understand this essay any better if I did, so I won't.)

In the double helix, there are four kinds of base pairs: AT, GC, TA, and CG. The specific pairing rules – A with T and G with C – are dictated by the three-dimensional structure of the bases.

In a chromosome, the base pairs are in a precise sequence, and the orderly process of cell division assures the reproduction of this sequence with remarkably few errors. Chromosomes occur in pairs, one member of each pair from each parent, and the DNA sites in the two corresponding chromosomes match up. We have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, or a total of forty-six, as previously mentioned, in each cell. These forty-six chromosomes contain about six billion base pairs. If we randomly choose a pair of bases from corresponding sites in two persons, 99.9 percent of the time they will be the same. This percentage depends only slightly on whether the two people are from the same or from different continents, from the same or from different population groups.

In order to make sense of how the DNA of human beings can be so similar, despite all the important visible and physiological differences among individuals and groups, it is helpful to recount our evolutionary history.

All mammals, including ourselves, are descended from an ancestral species that lived about one hundred million years ago. In our mammalian ancestry an average base has changed, say from an A to a T, at the almost unbelievably slow rate of about one change per billion years. This means that only a small fraction of the bases, one hundred million divided by one billion, or 1/10, have changed during

that time. As a result, we share roughly 90 percent of our DNA with mice, dogs, cattle, and elephants.

Coming closer to home, the DNA of human beings and chimpanzees is 98 to 99 percent identical. The differences between us that we (and presumably the chimps) regard as significant depend on only 1 or 2 percent of our DNA.

Much of human DNA is very similar to even more remote ancestors: reptiles, invertebrates, and even plants. All living things share many functions (e.g., respiration) going back to a very distant past. Most of our DNA determines that we are human, rather than determining how we are different from any other person. So it is not so surprising that the DNA of any two human beings is 99.9 percent identical.

What produces variability between individual organisms – and makes possible evolutionary change – is errors in the DNA copying process. Sometimes, because of this, one base is changed to another – it mutates. Among the six billion base pairs each of us inherits from our parents, a substantial number – a hundred or more – are new mutations.

How can we reconcile this large number with the extremely slow rate of evolutionary change? The explanation is that only a tiny fraction of mutations persist over time. Some mutations survive as a matter of either luck or – if the mutation confers a biological advantage – natural selection. Even if advantageous, an individual mutation has little chance of surviving a long evolutionary trip. The slow rate of evolutionary change explains why we mammals are so similar in our DNA.

Molecular studies of DNA have been extremely fruitful in working out the evolutionary history of life. Much of what we know about human ancestry comes from DNA studies, supplemented

by a rather spotty fossil record. The DNA evidence strongly supports the idea that the human species originated in Africa, and that European and Asiatic populations – indeed, all non-Africans – are descended from a small number of migrants from Africa. The strongest evidence for this is that Africans are more variable in their DNA than are other populations.

Analysis of DNA allows us to measure with some precision the genetic distance between different populations of human beings. By this criterion, Caucasians and Asians are relatively similar, whereas Asians and Africans are somewhat more different. The differences between the groups are small – but they are real.

DNA analysis has provided exciting new answers to old questions. But its findings can also be misleading. Take the case of men and women and sex chromosomes. Females have two X chromosomes, while males have an X and a Y. The Y chromosome makes up perhaps 1 percent of the DNA. But there is very little correspondence between the Y and the other chromosomes, including the X. In other words, the DNA of a human male differs as much from that of a female as either does from a chimpanzee of the same sex. What does this mean? Simply that DNA analysis, which has given us a revolutionary new understanding of genetics and evolution, doesn't give sensible answers to some contemporary questions that society is interested in.

Most of the differences that we notice are caused by a very tiny fraction of our DNA. Given six billion base pairs per cell, a tiny fraction – 1/1000 of six billion base-pairs – is still six *million* different base pairs per cell. So there is plenty of room for genetic differences among us. Although we differ from each other in a

very tiny proportion of our DNA, we differ by a large number of DNA bases.

Some noteworthy evolutionary changes in human beings have occurred relatively rapidly, despite the slow overall rate of change at the DNA level. The difference between the skin color of Africans and Europeans probably evolved in less than fifty thousand years, an adaptation to differences in climate. Still more rapid were changes in genes that confer resistance to malaria in Africa and Mediterranean regions; it only took between four and eight thousand years for the new genes to evolve. What genetic analysis reveals is that some of the genetic changes that seem so significant to us depended on a very tiny fraction of our DNA.

But, as I said, this tiny fraction is still a very large number of bases. No two human beings are alike in the traits they possess. Some are tall, others are short; some are stocky, others thin; some are gifted musically, others tone deaf; some are athletic, others awkward; some are outgoing, others introverted; some are intelligent, others stupid; some can write great poetry or music, most cannot. And so on.

To understand our differences, we need to consider not just DNA, but its cellular products as well. This area of study is new, but it is progressing rapidly. The emphasis is changing from DNA sequences to genes. A gene is a stretch of DNA, usually several thousand base pairs long. The function of most genes is to produce proteins. The genome sequencing project has revealed that we humans have thirty to forty thousand genes. But since a gene often produces more than one kind of protein, sometimes producing different kinds for different body parts, the number of kinds of protein is more like one hundred thousand.

We share a number of genes with

chimpanzees, genes that make us primates rather than elephants or worms. Evolutionary scientists believe that many of the differences that we observe between ourselves and chimpanzees involve changes in the amount rather than in the nature of gene products. Human beings and chimpanzees share proteins that produce body hair and brains, but in chimpanzees these proteins produce more hair and less brains. Why this should be so is still far from being fully understood. But this is a research area that is advancing very rapidly, and there are good genetic leads to be followed up.

Of course, not every human difference has a genetic cause. Many are environmental, or are the result of interactions between genes and environment. Even genetically identical twins develop into distinct individuals.

The ability to learn a language is largely innate, built into the nervous system of all normal people, as demonstrated so beautifully in the effortless way in which young children learn to speak. But the particular language any individual learns obviously depends on the social setting. Mozart was a great composer partly because of his genes and partly because of his training. Ramanujan had a great talent for mathematics, but without his being exposed to a textbook – not a very good one, by the way – he could never have made his astounding discoveries. Michael Jordan has a talent for basketball, but it would never have developed had he grown up among the Inuits.

Just as there are great differences among individuals, there are average differences, usually much smaller, between groups. Italians and Swedes differ in hair color. Sometimes the differences are more conspicuous, such as the contrasting skin color and hair shape of Africans

and Europeans. But, for the most part, group differences are small and largely overshadowed by individual differences.

Biologists think of races of animals as groups that started as one, but later split and became separated, usually by a geographical barrier. As the two groups evolve independently, they gradually diverge genetically. The divergences will occur more quickly if the separate environments differ, but they will occur in any case since different mutations will inevitably occur in the two populations, and some of them will persist. This is most apparent in island populations, where each island is separate and there is no migration between them. Each one has its own characteristic types. In much of the animal world, however, and also in the human species, complete isolation is very rare. The genetic uniformity of geographical groups is constantly being destroyed by migration between them. In particular, the major geographical groups – African, European, and Asian – are mixed, and this is especially true in the United States, which is something of a melting pot.

Because of this mixing, many anthropologists argue, quite reasonably, that there is no scientific justification for applying the word “race” to populations of human beings. But the concept itself is unambiguous, and I believe that the word has a clear meaning to most people. The difficulty is not with the concept, but with the realization that major human races are not pure races. Unlike those anthropologists who deny the usefulness of the term, I believe that the word “race” can be meaningfully applied to groups that are partially mixed.

Different diseases are demonstrably characteristic of different racial and ethnic groups. Sickle cell anemia, for example, is far more prevalent among people of African descent than among Euro-

peans. Obesity is especially common in Pima Indians, the result of the sudden acquisition of a high-calorie diet to which Europeans have had enough time to adjust. Tay-Sachs disease is much more common in the Jewish population. There are other examples, and new ones are being discovered constantly.

The evidence indicating that some diseases disproportionately afflict specific ethnic and racial groups does not ordinarily provoke controversy. Far more contentious is the evidence that some skills and behavioral properties are differentially distributed among different racial groups. There is strong evidence that such racial differences are partly genetic, but the evidence is more indirect and has not been convincing to everyone.

To any sports observer it is obvious that among Olympic jumpers and sprinters, African Americans are far more numerous than their frequency in the population would predict. The disproportion is enormous. Yet we also know that there are many white people who are better runners and jumpers than the average black person. How can we explain this seeming inconsistency?

There is actually a simple explanation that is well known to geneticists and statisticians, but not widely understood by the general public or, for that matter, by political leaders. Consider a quantitative trait that is distributed according to the normal, bell-shaped curve. IQ can serve as an example. About one person in 750 has an IQ of 148 or higher. In a population with an average of about 108 rather than 100, hardly a noticeable difference, about 5 times as many will be in this high range. In a population averaging 8 points lower, there will be about 6 times fewer. A small difference of 8 points in the mean translates to several-fold differences in the extremes.

Asian Americans represent about 12 percent of the California population, yet they represent 45 percent of the student body at the University of California at Berkeley. Asians have only slightly higher average SAT scores than Caucasians, but the university's policy of admitting students with the highest SAT scores has yielded a much larger proportion from the group with the higher mean.

Two populations may have a large overlap and differ only slightly in their means. Still, the most outstanding individuals will tend to come from the population with the higher mean. The implication, I think, is clear: whenever an institution or society singles out individuals who are exceptional or outstanding in some way, racial differences will become more apparent. That fact may be uncomfortable, but there is no way around it.

The fact that racial differences exist does not, of course, explain their origin. The cause of the observed differences may be genetic. But it may also be environmental, the result of diet, or family structure, or schooling, or any number of other possible biological and social factors.

My conclusion, to repeat, is that whenever a society singles out individuals who are outstanding or unusual in any way, the statistical contrast between means and extremes comes to the fore. I think that recognizing this can eventually only help politicians and social policymakers.

These are times of very rapid change in our understanding of biological processes. The genome project is but one example. At the same time, we are getting much closer to a deep understanding of the nervous system and of human behavior. Medical knowledge improves, as does data collection and computer

analysis. All of these tell us more about individual and group differences. What will be the impact of this new knowledge on societal issues? What are the political implications of modern biology?

We have seen that the DNA sequence similarities revealed by the genome project, valuable as these are for answering many interesting and important questions, are misleading in regard to important human differences. But this situation is rapidly changing. The current emphasis goes beyond simple DNA sequences to identifying the individual genes, their products, and their complex interactions. At the same time, not only the kinds of gene products (usually proteins) but their relative amounts are being investigated by much sharper new tools. Genes differ greatly in their productivity, including differences in activity in different parts of the body.

In the near future, biologists will be able to tell us much more than we now know about the genetic and environmental causes of human differences. The most obvious and immediate human benefits will be in medicine. We can foresee the time when many – we can hope most – of our individual susceptibilities to disease will be understood, so that the disease can be predicted in advance, allowing doctors to anticipate and tailor treatments for the particular person. Small steps in this direction have already been made. New treatments are under development. As a result of our genetic understanding, we also now better understand how to manipulate the environment in order to help prevent disease.

At the same time, the study of gene products and their regulation is being extended to normal traits. We can expect that the molecular biology of the future, perhaps the quite near future, will provide precisely the kind of information

that in the past has depended on observation and statistical analysis of often vaguely defined traits. We shall be able, as individuals, to know a great deal about our own genetic makeup.

The magnificent advances in molecular biology will bring new depths of understanding of human differences, normal and pathological, and the extent to which these are genetic or environmental – or, as usually will be the case, both. Whether society will accept this knowledge willingly and use it wisely I don't know. My hope is that gradual progress, starting with small beginnings, can lead to rational individual behavior and thoughtful, humanitarian social policies.

It is important for society to do a better job than it now does in accepting differences as a fact of life. New forms of scientific knowledge will point out more and more ways in which we are diverse. I hope that differences will be welcomed, rather than accepted grudgingly. Who wants a world of identical people, even if they are Mozarts or Jordans?

A good society ought to provide the best kind of environment for each person and each population. We already do this in part. We give lessons to musically gifted children. We encourage athletes and give them special training (and sometimes dubious drugs). Students elect courses according to their abilities and interests. We have special classes for those with disabilities, and such classes are becoming more specific as the causes of the disabilities are understood.

We cannot, of course, tailor-make a special environment for every individual, but we can continue to move in this direction. Finding a genetic basis for a trait doesn't mean that environment is unimportant. Indeed, more environmental influences on the human organ-

ism are constantly being discovered, often through genetic studies.

A test of our democratic institutions will be the degree to which people can accept all our differences and find ways to fit them into a smooth-working, humanitarian society. And I argue that we should strive not only for maximum personal satisfaction but for maximum contribution; each of us owes society the fruits of our special gifts. I believe strongly that research into the genetic and environmental causes of human differences should continue and be supported. The newer procedures brought about by molecular advances and computers will greatly accelerate discoveries.

I believe that knowledge, even unpleasant knowledge, is far preferable to ignorance. I hope that American society can be less fearful of learning the truth about biological inequalities and more courageous in using discoveries in ways that are humanitarian and promote human welfare.

The question of equal opportunity versus equal outcomes becomes particularly vexing in those occupations and professions for which only a small fraction of a population can qualify. I have already mentioned the gross overrepresentation of African Americans among Olympic runners. This is closer to a true meritocracy than anything else I can think of: a stopwatch is color-blind. In this case, there seems to be no social purpose in demanding equal racial representation.

In some important professions, such as physics and engineering, Asian Americans are overrepresented and African Americans underrepresented. We presumably get better research because of this. This may or may not outweigh the inequity of unequal group representation. That is a social decision.

What about physicians? There may well be social considerations, perhaps temporary ones in our society, that would make race more important than test scores in selecting students for medical schools.

To achieve political and social equality it is not necessary to maintain a fiction that important human differences do not exist. The great evolutionist Theodosius Dobzhansky said it well: "People need not be identical twins to be equal before God, before the law, and in their rights to equality of opportunity."

I have emphasized that people differ, and differ greatly. They differ not only in shapes and sizes, but also in abilities and talents. They also differ in tastes and preferences. As Shaw said, "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same." Society's business, I think, is not to minimize individual differences. We shouldn't try to fit people into one mold.

While I expect that science will continue to provide us with further evidence of human variability, and while I welcome such variability as a source of social enrichment, there are some kinds of human variability that we could well do without. I refer to serious, painful, debilitating diseases. Many of these are the result of an unlucky throw of the genetic dice. Already there are ways of discovering, preventing, and treating some of them. More treatments are sure to come. I hope they will be accepted willingly and used responsibly. I for one would be content if the genes for Tay-Sachs disease and Duchenne muscular dystrophy were to become extinct, along with the malaria parasite and AIDS virus. I hope the great humanitarian benefits that could come from genetic research will not be held up by fears of possible future misuse.

*James F.
Crow
on
inequality*

Let me leave the last word for Jim Watson, co-discoverer of the double helix and a major figure in the genome project:

If the next century witnesses failure, let it be because our science is not yet up to the job, not because we don't have the courage to make less random the sometimes most unfair courses of human evolution.

Ernst Mayr

The biology of race and the concept of equality

There are words in our language that seem to lead inevitably to controversy. This is surely true for the words “equality” and “race.” And yet among well-informed people, there is little disagreement as to what these words should mean, in part because various advances in biological science have produced a better understanding of the human condition.

Let me begin with race. There is a widespread feeling that the word “race” indicates something undesirable and that it should be left out of all discussions. This leads to such statements as “there are no human races.”

Those who subscribe to this opinion are obviously ignorant of modern biology. Races are not something specifically

human; races occur in a large percentage of species of animals. You can read in every textbook on evolution that geographic races of animals, when isolated from other races of their species, may in due time become new species. The terms “subspecies” and “geographic race” are used interchangeably in this taxonomic literature.

This at once raises a question: are there races in the human species? After all, the characteristics of most animal races are strictly genetic, while human races have been marked by nongenetic, cultural attributes that have very much affected their overt characteristics. Performance in human activities is influenced not only by the genotype but also by culturally acquired attitudes. What would be ideal, therefore, would be to partition the phenotype of every human individual into genetic and cultural components.

Alas, so far we have not yet found any reliable technique to do this. What we can do is acknowledge that any recorded differences between human races are probably composed of cultural as well as genetic elements. Indeed, the cause of many important group differences may turn out to be entirely cultural, without any genetic component at all.

Still, if I introduce you to an Eskimo

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and a Kalahari Bushman I won't have much trouble convincing you that they belong to different races.

In a recent textbook of taxonomy, I defined a "geographic race" or subspecies as "an aggregate of phenotypically similar populations of a species inhabiting a geographic subdivision of the range of that species and differing taxonomically from other populations of that species." A subspecies is a geographic race that is sufficiently different taxonomically to be worthy of a separate name. What is characteristic of a geographic race is, first, that it is restricted to a geographic subdivision of the range of a species, and second, that in spite of certain diagnostic differences, it is part of a larger species.

No matter what the cause of the racial difference might be, the fact that species of organisms may have geographic races has been demonstrated so frequently that it can no longer be denied. And the geographic races of the human races – established before the voyages of European discovery and subsequent rise of a global economy – agree in most characteristics with the geographic races of animals. Recognizing races is only recognizing a biological fact.

Still, the biological fact by itself does not foreclose giving various answers to the question, What is race? In particular, adherence to different political and moral philosophies, as we shall see, permits rather different answers. But I believe it is useful at the outset to bracket the cultural factors and explore some of the implications of a strictly biological approach.

The evolutionary literature explains why there are geographic races. Every local population of a species has its own gene pool with its own mutations and errors of sampling. And every popula-

tion is subject to selection by the local environment. There is now a large literature on the environmental factors that may influence the geographic variation of a species. For example, populations of warm-blooded vertebrates (mammals and birds) in the colder part of their geographical range tend to larger size (Bergmann's rule). Darwin wondered whether these climatic factors were sufficient to account for the differences between geographic races in the human species. He finally concluded that sexual selection, the preference of women for certain types of men, might be another factor leading to differences between geographic races.

This kind of biological analysis is necessary but not sufficient. By itself, biology cannot explain the vehemence of the modern controversy over race. Historically, the word "race" has had very different meanings for different people holding different political philosophies. Furthermore, in the last two hundred years there has been a change in the dominant philosophy of race.

In the eighteenth century, when America's Constitution was written, all our concepts were dominated by the thinking of the physical sciences. Classes of entities were conceived in terms of Platonic essentialism. Each class (*eidos*) corresponded to a definite type that was constant and invariant. Variation never entered into discussions because it was considered to be "accidental" and hence irrelevant. A different race was considered a different type. A white European was a different type from a black African. This went so far that certain authors considered the human races to be different species.

It was the great, and far too little appreciated, achievement of Charles Darwin to have replaced this typological approach by what we now call *population*

thinking. In this new thinking, the biological uniqueness of every individual is recognized, and the inhabitants of a certain geographic region are considered a biopopulation. In such a biopopulation, no two individuals are the same, and this is true even for the six billion humans now on Earth. And, most important, each biopopulation is highly variable, and its individuals greatly differ from each other, thanks to the unique genetic combinations that result from this variability.

Let me illustrate the implications of individual differences by analyzing the outcome of the 2001 Boston marathon. Kenyans are a population famous for producing long-distance runners. Three Kenyans had entered the race, and it was predicted that they would end the race as numbers one, two, and three. However, to everybody's great surprise, the winner was a Korean, and, even more surprisingly, number two was an Ecuadorian from a population that had never been credited with long-distance running abilities. It was a clear refutation of a typological – or essentialist – approach to thinking about race.

In a Darwinian population, there is great variation around a mean value. This variation has reality, while the mean value is simply an abstraction. One must treat each individual on the basis of his or her own unique abilities, and not on the basis of the group's mean value.

At the same time, nothing could be more meaningless than to evaluate races in terms of their putative "superiority." Superiority where, when, and under what circumstances? During the period of the development of the human races, each one became adapted to the condition of its geographic location. Put a Bushman and an Eskimo in the Kalahari Desert and the Bushman is very much

superior; put a Bushman and an Eskimo on the Greenland ice and the Eskimo is by far superior. The Australian Aborigines were very successful in colonizing Australia around sixty thousand years ago and developed local races with their own culture. Yet they could not defend themselves against European invaders.

What happened to the human population in this case of European colonization is comparable to what happened to the biota of New Zealand – a case that Darwin studied. When British animals and plants were introduced into New Zealand, many native species were not able to cope with this new competition and became extinct. In both cases, the success of the European populations of plants, animals, and colonists may have been simply due to a constellation of favorable geographic factors. There is no evidence at all that it was due to some intrinsic genetic "superiority."

When dealing with human races we must think of them as the inhabitants of the geographic region in which they had originated. Presumably each human race consists of individuals who, on average and in certain ways, are demonstrably superior to the average individual of another race. Eskimos, for instance, are superior in their adaptedness to cold. In the last four or five Olympics there were always six to eight contenders of African descent among the ten finalists in the sprinting races, surely not an accidental percentage.

These considerations should teach us how we should think about human races. A human race consists of the descendants of a once-isolated geographical population primarily adapted for the environmental conditions of their original home country. But, as is illustrated by the success of Europeans and Africans and Asians in all parts of

the world, any race is capable of living anywhere. Most importantly, a race is always highly variable: any human race will include a wide variety of extraordinary individuals who excel in very different human abilities.

When comparing one race with another, we do find genes that are on the whole specific for certain populations. Many individuals of Native American descent have the Diego blood group factors, and people of Jewish descent have a propensity for Tay-Sachs disease. Some of these characteristics are virtually diagnostic, but most are merely quantitative, like the description of the human races in older anthropology textbooks describing skin color, hair, eye color, body size, etc. An ensemble of such characteristics usually permits classifying an individual in the relevant race. All these characteristics are nevertheless highly variable, and it is virtually impossible to classify every individual definitively, especially in those areas where one geographic race merges into another (as is true, for example, for the human population of modern-day America).

Curiously, when people make derogatory statements about members of other races, they often do not refer to biological traits at all, but rather to putative character traits: members of a certain racial group are said to be lazy, dishonest, unreliable, thievish, arrogant, etc. There is no scientific evidence of a genetic basis for any such negative traits. There is also no scientific evidence known to me that the genetic differences we do discover among the human races have any influence at all on personality. Most of the mentioned undesirable personality traits, if they are at all correlated with specific human populations, are obviously cultural and therefore open to change through appropriate forms of education.

It is generally unwise to assume that every apparent difference in traits between populations of human beings has a biological cause. In a recent aptitude test administered in California, students of Asian descent did conspicuously better than students of African descent. Researchers evaluating these results subsequently discovered that in the year preceding the test, the Asian-American students had spent a daily average of three hours on homework, while the African-American students had done virtually no homework at all. The test results by themselves cannot tell us what percentage of the superior performance by the Asian-American students was due to their genetic endowment and what percentage to the cultural trait of being better prepared for the test thanks to spending, on the whole, far more time on homework than the African-American students did.

One can conclude from these observations that although there are certain genetic differences between races, there is no genetic evidence whatsoever to justify the uncomplimentary evaluation that members of one race have sometimes made of members of other races. There simply is no biological basis for racism.

Indeed, what is far more important than the differences between human races is the enormous variation *within* each racial group. We must always keep in mind that no two human beings – even so-called identical twins – are in fact genetically identical. When encountering a lying member of another race, nothing would be more illogical – and unjust – than to conclude that all members of that race are liars. Likewise, if one encountered a particularly warm-hearted member of a different race, it would be equally foolish to conclude that all members of that race are equally

warmhearted. To avoid such mistakes, it is useful to apply the population thinking pioneered by Darwin.

It also helps to adopt the motto “They are like us.” This was my motto more than seventy years ago when I became one of the first outsiders to visit a native village in the interior of New Guinea. Invariably, they *are* like us. Whenever I lived with one of these relatively isolated populations of human beings for any length of time, it did not take me long to discover the differences in the personalities of the individuals with whom I had to deal. The rule that no individuals are the same was as true for the Stone Age natives of New Guinea as it is for a group of my Harvard colleagues. A lot of our human difficulties are due to people forgetting the simple rule that no two people are the same.

So what, if anything, does biology, and specifically the biological understanding of race, have to teach us about the concept of equality?

In the first place, the biological facts may help to remind us just how new the political concept of equality really is. When we look at social species of animals, we discover that there is always a rank order. There may be an alpha-male or an alpha-female, and all other individuals of the group fall somewhere below them in the rank order.

A similar rank-ordering has long marked many human societies as well. During the years I lived in a small village of Papuans in the mountains of New Guinea, the local chief had three wives, other high-ranking members of the village had one, and a number of “inferior” tribesmen had no wives at all. Nineteenth-century British society distinguished clearly between aristocrats, gentlemen, and common workingmen. As George Eliot describes in the novel

Middlemarch, there was even a rank order within each of these major classes.

As a historian of science, I am inclined to believe that the scientific revolution of the eighteenth century helped to promote new ways of thinking about equality. From the perspective of Newtonian essentialism, all samples of a chemical element are identical and, as modern physics assumes, so are nuclear particles. Equality of this sort is a universal phenomenon. Perhaps it was only a small step from Newtonian essentialism to the moral proposition that all human beings are essentially equal, and therefore should have equal rights.

As is true of the word “race,” “equality” has come to mean different things to different people. I take it for granted that every good American accepts the principle of civil equality. This means equal opportunity, equality before the law, and equality in social interactions. To have elaborated this principle is one of the glorious achievements of the American Revolution.

Still, the principle cannot in many contexts be applied concretely, for the kinds of biological reasons I have already discussed. No two human individuals are genetically the same. Paradoxically, it is precisely because the human population is genetically and culturally so diverse that we need a principle of civil equality. Anybody should be able to enjoy the benefits of our liberal society in spite of differences of religion, race, or socioeconomic status. Regardless of whether the difference in performance between individuals, or two groups, has biological or purely cultural causes, it is our moral obligation to see to it that each individual and group has an equal opportunity. The great British geneticist J. B. S. Haldane asked what we can do to provide equal opportunities to all members of our society, regardless of

any differences in ability. He said we simply have to provide more opportunities, we must diversify our educational curricula, and we must offer new incentives.

These reflections on the biology of race and the concept of equality suggest the following conclusions:

- Every single human being is biologically unique and differs in major characteristics even from close relatives.
- Geographical groups of humans, what biologists call races, tend to differ from each other in mean differences and sometimes even in specific single genes. But when it comes to the capacities that are required for the optimal functioning of our society, I am sure that the performance of any individual in any racial group can be matched by that of some individual in another racial group. This is what a population analysis reveals.
- In small groups of primitive human beings, just as in all groups created by social animals, there is a rank order, with certain individuals being dominant.
- In the large human societies that developed after the origin of agriculture and the rise of cities, new systems of ranking became established, of which the

European feudal societies of the fourteenth to the eighteenth century were typical.

- Democracy, including the principle of civil equality, emerged during the Enlightenment and became fully established through the American Revolution and incorporated in the Constitution of the new American republic.
- When Thomas Jefferson proclaimed that “all men are created equal,” he failed to distinguish between the civil equality of individual human beings and their biological uniqueness. Even though all of us are in principle equal before the law and ought to enjoy an equality of opportunity, we may be very different in our preferences and aptitudes. And if this is ignored, it may well lead to discord.
- It is our obligation to overcome the seeming conflict between a strict upholding of civil equality and the vast biological and cultural differences among individual human beings and groups of individuals. The introduction of new educational measures and even legislation to overcome existing inequalities will be successful only if based on a full understanding of the underlying biological and cultural factors.

Martha C. Nussbaum

Sex, laws, and inequality: what India can teach the United States

In every house there is fear.
Let's do away with that fear.
Let's build a women's organization.

– “Mahila Samiti” (“A Women’s Organization”), song sung all over India in women’s groups

Hanuffa Khatoon, a citizen of Bangladesh and also an elected official of that nation’s Union Board, arrived at Howrah Station in Calcutta, India, on the afternoon of February 26, 1998, planning to catch the Jodhpur Express that

night. Because her sleeping-car reservation had not yet been confirmed, she contacted the train ticket examiner, who asked her to wait in the ladies’ waiting room. At around 5 P.M., two railway officials came to confirm her sleeping berth; they also offered to show her to the station’s restaurant, where she could get dinner before the departure. Ms. Khatoon followed a station-boy to the restaurant and ordered some food, but immediately began to vomit. She returned to the ladies’ waiting room, quite ill. The railway officials then offered to take her to the official station hotel managed by the Railways Board. She insisted on checking their credentials first, but when the official on duty at the ladies’ waiting room told her that their credentials were in order, she agreed to go. In the hotel room she was brutally gang raped for several hours by a group of four station employees. Finally she escaped and returned to the platform, bleeding and in a state of shock. There she found another railway official who pretended to assist her. He said he would take her to his wife, who would take care of her until she could get another train in the morning. At the wife’s alleged residence she was brutally gang raped again, and two of the employees tried to suffocate her. Hearing

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her cries, the landlord called the police, who finally rescued her.¹

What is significant – and specifically Indian – about this story, however, is not the sad fact of gang rape, familiar throughout recorded history in all nations. What is significant is its dénouement.

Two years later, in an unprecedented judgment, Ms. Khatoon won a large damage award from the Railways Board. It was a landmark case in which the Supreme Court of India declared rape to be a violation of the fundamental right to live with human dignity, under both the Indian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. “Rape,” wrote the Court, “is a crime not only against the person of a woman, it is a crime against the entire society. It destroys the entire psychology of a woman and pushes her into deep emotional crisis. Rape is therefore the most hated crime. It is a crime against basic human rights and is violative of the victim’s most cherished right, namely, right to life which includes right to live with human dignity....”

It is a mid-April evening in Bihar, in northeastern India. A woman is sitting with her brother in the backyard of her mud hut in a poor area of this state, one of the most corrupt and anarchic in the nation. Women have traditionally had little political power in Bihar, where, in some regions, the sex ratio is as low as 75 women to 100 men – a figure indicative of the differential nutrition and health care of girls, sex-selective abortion, and, probably, outright infanticide. But Poonam Devi, mother of two girls, is a candidate for election to her *panchayat*, or local council, and she is arranging the

voting slips, with her number on them, to be given to voters on election day.² A gentle, soft-spoken woman, Poonam Devi has for two years been president of a woman’s collective, where she has helped to arrange loans for all fifteen members of her group.

What is most astonishing about Poonam Devi’s campaign, however, is not the fact of her candidacy – but the fact that she is running against her husband, who is affiliated with the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, the currently dominant party nationwide, with a Hindu fundamentalist program). Originally it was thought that this constituency would be among those reserved for women in the current election, so Poonam Devi’s husband groomed her for candidacy, assuming that he would be unable to run. But when the electoral plan was announced, the constituency was not reserved for women, and the husband could run. But Poonam Devi decided to run anyway, with support from her parents and brothers. Her husband asked her to withdraw, but she refused. He is angry. After all, he says, she is a weak and insignificant candidate next to him. He is educated, he owns some land, he has been a teacher – and, he points out, he is even unemployed, so he has lots of time for the council. A reporter from the national news media asks Poonam Devi, “Why are you fighting against your husband?” She questions right back: “Why can’t I fight the elections, husband or no husband? Why can’t a woman and a man be candidates from the same family?” Her platform focuses on unemployment, the old-age pension, and the insecure economic

1 *Chairman, Railway Board v. Mrs. Chandrima Das* AIR 2000, SC 988.

2 In Indian elections, voters receive slips with the symbol of each candidate, and they then deposit the slip of their choice in the box – a procedure designed to make voting easy for illiterate voters.

position of single women and widows.³

The outcome of Poonam Devi's candidacy remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Seventy-Second and Seventy-Third Amendments to India's constitution, which establish a bold program of affirmative action for women in the local *panchayats*, are bringing large numbers of women into politics all over India, with clear results for the salience of issues pertaining to the welfare of women and children.

Inequality on the basis of sex is a staggering problem worldwide. India is hardly unique in this regard. Women in all nations – including the United States – still suffer serious inequalities in at least some central areas of human life.

Gang rape is hardly a problem indigenous to Calcutta: it is the regular fare of U.S. courts. (A recent showing of *Law and Order* reruns managed to fill an entire evening with programs on this one theme, most of them based on real stories.) And it is just one especially terrible aspect of the general worldwide problem of violence against women, a problem that seems to be particularly grave in the United States. (According to a report recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, one-fifth of the Massachusetts high-school girls studied have suffered some type of violence from a date, either assault or sexual violence. A recent national study concludes that 25 percent of adult women have experienced violence from a romantic partner. The Justice Department estimates that more than 1.5 million U.S. women experience physical or sexual violence each year from a

boyfriend, husband, or date.⁴)

Nor is lack of political power a distant difficulty. Women in the United States hold only 13.8 percent of its national legislative seats – one of the lowest figures among the developed nations, according to the *Human Development Report 2001*. And in no nation does the figure come very close to equality: Sweden and Denmark take the lead, with 42.7 percent and 37.4 percent, respectively; outside the Nordic countries, the highest figures are for the Netherlands at 32.9 percent and Germany at 30.4 percent; highest in the developing world is South Africa at 27.9 percent.

But women are also contesting age-old forms of subordination with increasing success, creating innovative proposals for change in both custom and law. And sometimes nations that are widely perceived as lagging behind the “advanced democracies” of the United States and Europe can actually take the lead, with bold measures like those that altered the lives of Hanuffa Khatoun and Poonam Devi.

In this essay I shall look at the problem of women's inequality through the lens of today's India, a nation with both enormous gender problems and rich political creativity. I shall begin by offering a thumbnail sketch of the situation of women in India and of the Indian constitutional tradition, which has been remarkably woman-friendly, and discuss conceptions of equality and the role of law that offer rich resources for those seeking to advance women's position in society. I shall then return to the cases with which I began, showing how a reasonable conception of affirmative action and a reasonable openness to the norms

3 See Mukul Sharma, “Bihar: Making of a *Panchayat* Election,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 May 2001.

4 Erica Goode, “Study Says 20% of Girls Reported Abuse by a Date,” *New York Times*, 1 August 2000, A10.

of the international community (both rather lacking in current U.S. politics) have enabled India to progress.

It is extraordinarily difficult to sum up succinctly the situation of women in India, since there is probably no nation in the world with greater internal diversity and plurality. In what follows I shall be mentioning some of those differences (of caste, religion, regional background, wealth and class, and still others). All generalizations cover multiple differences.

India celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence from Britain on August 15, 1997. It is the world's largest democracy, with a population of 846.3 million. It is a constitutional parliamentary democracy, with a written account of Fundamental Rights containing the abolition of untouchability and an elaborate set of equality and nondiscrimination provisions. Its legal system is in some respects similar to (and modeled on) that of the United States, combining a basically common-law tradition with the constraints of a written constitution including the extensive list of Fundamental Rights. Its Supreme Court, like ours, is the ultimate interpreter of these rights.

India's Constitution is in some ways very attuned to issues of sex equality, which were prominently debated when the Constitution was adopted in 1950. The framers of the Constitution were very conscious of deeply entrenched inequalities, both those based on caste and those based on sex, and they made the removal of them one of their central goals. The text of the Constitution is in many ways exemplary in its treatment of issues of gender and sex, particularly in the section dealing with Fundamental Rights.

Article 14 says that the state shall not

deny to any person "equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws." Article 15 prohibits state discrimination "on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them." Other rights that are highly relevant to sex equality include Article 13 (invalidating all laws inconsistent with the Fundamental Rights); Article 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment); Article 19 (protecting freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association, freedom of travel, freedom of residence, and freedom to form labor unions); Article 21 (stating that no citizen shall be deprived of life or liberty "except according to procedure established by law"); Article 23 (prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labor); and Article 25 (freedom of conscience and religion). (Article 17 abolishes untouchability: "its practice in any form is forbidden.")

The understanding of equality in the Constitution is explicitly aimed at securing substantive equality for previously subordinated groups. The framers carefully distanced their conception from the idea, already familiar in those days, that equality requires treating everyone the same and not using race or sex as grounds for any type of differential treatment – an understanding that has been used in the United States to subvert affirmative action. In India, by contrast, the Constitution's so-called Directive Principles of State Policy (a nonenforceable section of the Constitution) devotes a great deal of attention to promoting economic equality, and the Fundamental Rights are themselves specified in a way that makes room for affirmative-action programs designed to advance the material situation of women and the lower castes.

Thus, Article 15 states that "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from

making any special provision for women and children,” and that “Nothing in this article . . . shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.” Similar clauses appear in Article 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment) and in Article 19 (various other rights and liberties). Even before independence, quotas and other affirmative-action measures for deprived groups were an accepted part of the Indian scene, and they became even more salient at independence. In short, the framers understood the goal of equality in terms of an end to systematic hierarchy and discrimination based on both caste and sex.

In light of this tradition it is not surprising that India has long been a center of thought and planning about sex equality, or that, when the United Nations Development Programme needed a major report on gender and governance, it turned the writing of this report over to its New Delhi office.⁵

There is one great structural difference between the Indian legal system and the Anglo-American systems to which it is related: India has no uniform code of civil law (even within each region). Criminal law is uniform for the nation as a whole and is administered by the state. But with the exception of commercial law, which was uniformly codified for the nation as a whole by the British and has remained so, civil law remains the province of the various religious systems of law – Hindu, Muslim, Parsi, and Christian. These systems are

defined by laws passed in Parliament, but they assign to religious bodies considerable power in the areas of marriage, divorce, child custody, and property. There are some individual secular laws of property, marriage, and divorce, but they do not form a system, and, because one is typically classified into a religious system at birth, it is not so easy for individuals to disengage themselves, particularly when property is jointly owned in family consortia (as it often is) from which individuals may not extricate their shares. These systems of personal law have made it uniquely difficult to end discrimination based on caste and sex.⁶ To explore these difficulties, however, would take us rather far from our primary topic.

Unlike the United States, India is an extremely poor nation. It ranks 115th out of the 162 nations of the world on the Human Development Index of the 2001 *Human Development Report*. The average life expectancy at birth is 62.9 (as opposed to 80.8 in Japan, 76.8 in the United States, and somewhere between these two numbers in Canada and most of Europe⁷), and infant mortality is high, at 70 for 1,000 live births (although this represents a great decline from 165 in 1960).

Women do even worse than men in basic nutrition and health. If equal nutrition and health were present, it is

6 See my discussion in *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 3.

7 Ireland and Denmark are the only nations in Western Europe to have lower life expectancy than the United States, although most of the nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union also have lower expectancy. Also ahead of the United States are Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Hong Kong, Cyprus, Singapore, and Malta; Costa Rica and Barbados are close (76.2 and 76.6, respectively).

5 This report will be published shortly; its authors include citizens of India, Sri Lanka, and the United States. (I wrote the introduction and the discussion of issues of sex equality within the family.)

estimated that the sex ratio would be approximately 103 women to 100 men. India's sex ratio has not been even 1:1 at any time since measurements began in the early twentieth century. From a high of 97 women to 100 men in 1901, the ratio dropped steadily, reaching a low of around 93:100 in 1971; after a slight rise, it declined again even further, reaching 92.7:100 in 1991. These are official figures. Things are probably much worse, at least in some regions. A house-to-house count by a good NGO in rural Bihar arrived at a ratio of 75:100, and a similar count in a region of Karnataka found 65:100. Some of these differences should be attributed to the differential nutrition of boys and girls and to unequal health care, but sex-selective abortion and active infanticide are playing an increasing role. A recent study by the Indian Association of Women's Studies estimates that 10,000 female fetuses are aborted every year. Some regions tell a very different story: Kerala, for example, has more women than men. (This situation results from a combination of relatively female-friendly traditions and gender-friendly state governance.) But clearly, on the whole, women face special obstacles in India.

In education, the male-female gap is even more striking: the adult literacy rate for women is 44.5 percent, as against 67.8 percent for men. (In China, the figures are 75.5 percent for women and 91.2 percent for men.) Such statistics are hard to interpret, since local governments tend to be boastful and since it is hard to establish a clear measure of literacy. Yet what is unambiguously clear is that, despite the fact that education is a state responsibility, India has done very badly in basic education across the board, and even worse in basic education for women. Although all Indian states have laws making primary educa-

tion compulsory, these laws have little relation to reality. Many regions utterly lack schools of any kind, just as they frequently lack reliable electricity, medical services, water, and decent roads; many local functionaries are corrupt, and so teachers in many regions take pay without ever even showing up in the region where they are supposed to be teaching. In some rural areas, female literacy is as low as 5 percent. The national government, though well-intentioned, has done little to fill these gaps, although some adult education programs have been established in some of the poorer states, and many nongovernmental organizations run both adult education programs and after-work programs for working girls.

Still, this does not seem to be a necessary or unbreakable pattern, since some otherwise poor regions have done extremely well. Kerala has adult literacy of 90 percent and near-universal literacy among adolescent boys and girls. This remarkable record is the outcome of more than a hundred years of concerted public action. Recently a constitutional amendment was introduced that would make the right to education a justiciable fundamental right in India.⁸ It may be hoped that the passage of this amendment will goad government into acting more aggressively on its good intentions.

Among the greatest obstacles to fully equal citizenship that women face, in all nations, is their unequal exposure to sex-based violence.⁹ In India the problem of

8 Amendment 83, to be inserted in the Fundamental Rights section of the Constitution as Article 21a. See the full text of the amendment in *From the Lawyers Collective* 13 (April 1998): 10.

9 For data on the United States, and the failure of law to deal adequately with these problems, see chap. 5 of my *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

violence against women is compounded, often, by the low age of marriage and the lack of economic options for a woman with little or no education. The marriage of girls as young as four or six, although long since illegal, is a common reality, especially in some regions where it is traditional. Laws against it are not enforced, and it shapes a girl's life from birth, often discouraging her family from educating her.

Within marriage, at all ages, domestic violence is so pervasive that three states have adopted alcohol prohibition laws in response to women's lobbying in an effort to reduce such violence. Police do not aggressively investigate domestic abuse, and virtually no women's shelters exist. Rape within marriage is not even illegal. Thus, women who wish to protect themselves against marital violence have few options. If they are not equipped for employment outside the home, they have virtually no exit options; many women endure lives of abuse because they know that prostitution is their only alternative.

The problem of domestic violence is being addressed, above all, through education, credit, and economic options. Hundreds of nongovernmental organizations, from the large Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), with over fifty thousand members, to the small village-based women's collective led by Poonam Devi, have been educating girls and women outside the formal state structure, lending them money, and teaching them employment-related skills so that they can do something on their own if they decide to leave a bad marriage. Education, credit, and the reform of antiquated property laws to give women land rights in their own names are probably the three most significant strategies against domestic violence. At the same time, most local

women's groups also address domestic violence directly, and politicians such as Poonam Devi fight to make life a bit fairer for widows and single women, two groups that suffer greatly from discrimination and vulnerability to violence.

Rape, however – in India as in so many other nations – has been badly dealt with under the law for many years, and the number of rapes appears to be on the rise. It is easy to find cases in which acquittal was secured on the grounds that the woman was of low caste, or “immodest,” even when there is ample evidence of forcible rape in the particular instance. Rape is also used as a weapon against women crusading for political change. In 1993 Bhanwari Devi, a member of the state of Rajasthan's Sathin movement for women's welfare, was campaigning against child marriage when she was gang-raped by men from a community that supports the practice of child marriage. Because the men were influential community leaders, police refused to register the case until it was too late to perform the necessary medical examination; a lower court in Jaipur acquitted all the accused. Although Bhanwari appealed this judgment and the Rajasthan High Court agreed in 1996 to hear her appeal, arguments in the case have not yet been heard.

In general, delays in the criminal justice system often create a lapse of ten years between rape and court date, making it very difficult for women to pursue their cases, even when they want to. Often they don't want to, because a woman's sexual history is still admitted as evidence, and assumptions about the woman's behavior and dress continue to influence the resolution of rape trials. Defendants can usually win a continuance on the flimsiest of pretexts, and their strategy typically is to delay and delay until the woman gives up the pros-

ecution. A friend of mine who is a professor of philosophy and women's studies at University of Lucknow urged a former student to pursue her rape complaint and promised to join her in court whenever the case surfaced – until, after five years, the woman had remarried, and didn't want to think about her rape any longer.

One case that spurred awareness of women's grievances in this area was the 1979 case of Mathura, a sixteen-year-old tribal woman who was raped by two policemen within a police compound. The lower court acquitted the policemen on the grounds that Mathura had eloped with her boyfriend and hence was "habituated to sexual intercourse"; they thus reasoned that she could not be an unconsenting victim – therefore she was not, technically, raped. The High Court overturned the decision, holding that mere passive surrender under threat cannot be counted as consent to intercourse. The Supreme Court, however, reinstated the lower court decision.

This judgment triggered widespread public protest and publicity; rape and rape law were discussed widely and openly for the first time. Four Delhi University law professors wrote a petition to the Supreme Court calling for a rehearing of the case. The petition, unfortunately, was dismissed. It did, however, energize the women's movement to demand legal change. More important, a law commission was set up by the government to consider changes in rape law.

One significant result was a shift in the burden of proof in custodial rape cases, as well as a set of mandatory minimum sentences for rape. Other feminist demands, such as the demand that a woman's prior sexual history should not be deemed relevant evidence, were not included in the version of the new legislation that was passed in 1982.

Recently, however, the Supreme Court, at least, has shown greater sensitivity to the issue of sexual violence. Hanuffa Khatoon's case shows a determination to confront the problem head-on, using the resources of the constitutional tradition, which has already held that the right to life guaranteed in Article 21 includes a right to life with human dignity. (The landmark case was one defending the rights of the homeless.) In an earlier case not centrally dealing with rape, the Court had already opined that rape is a constitutional issue, and they quoted from that case at the outset of their opinion in Hanuffa Khatoon's case, declaring that rape is a "crime against the entire society" because it "destroys the entire psychology of a woman." It is therefore a "crime against basic human rights" and a violation of the right to life with dignity guaranteed under Article 21. This judgment the justices then applied to Ms. Khatoon's gang rape by the railway employees. The justices argued, moreover, that the fundamental right to life with dignity belongs not only to citizens of India, but to all "persons" (like the Bangladeshi visitor Ms. Khatoon) within the territory of India.

Then, in a most interesting discussion, the courts pointed out that the Fundamental Rights are closely modeled on the list of rights in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They mention particularly the declaration's emphasis on equal human dignity (Article 1); the right to life, liberty, and security of person (Article 3); the prohibition of "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" (Article 5); the guarantee of nondiscrimination and the equal protection of the laws (Article 7); and the prohibition of arbitrary detention (Article 9). They argue that the purpose of the section on Fundamental Rights in the Indian Constitution was to enact the

Universal Declaration and “to safeguard the basic human rights from the vicissitudes of political controversy. . . .” This being so, the meaning of the word “life” in the Indian Constitution can be further interpreted with reference to the declaration. They note that earlier Supreme Court decisions have already given “life” a broad construction, including the idea of life with human dignity. Since gang rape is obviously inconsistent with human dignity, and the rape was committed by government employees, the judgment of the Calcutta High Court awarding Ms. Khatoun damages from the Railways Board was upheld.

This creative judgment shows how a legal tradition can be fruitfully mined to give women redress against violence. Thus far, it has a function similar to that of the U.S. Violence Against Women Act, passed by Congress in 1994, which offered victims of sex crimes a federal avenue of redress, given the evident unevenness and unreliability of the criminal justice system in the states.¹⁰ (Of course, our Supreme Court, moving in the opposite direction from its Indian counterpart, has declared the 1994 Violence Against Women Act unconstitutional on the grounds that it allegedly exceeds the power of Congress.¹¹) But the Indian Supreme Court’s judgment shows something more: it shows that a national legal tradition may deepen and strengthen its fundamental rights through incorporation of the rights guaranteed in the international documents it has ratified.

This move has been made before in

10 On this issue see Stephen J. Schulhofer, *Unwanted Sex: The Culture of Intimidation and the Failure of Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

11 *U.S. v. Morrison*, 120 S. Ct. 1740 (2000).

India. In another significant judgment concerning sexual harassment, the Supreme Court ruled that the guidelines on harassment in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) are binding on the nation through its ratification of that treaty.¹² In this way the universal human rights guaranteed in treaties may enter a nation without violation of its democratic sovereignty and after due deliberation by the body that has been entrusted with the interpretation of fundamental rights.

In short, when a nation understands itself to be a member of the world community, committed to taking its treaty obligations seriously, creative legal change may ensue. Unfortunately, the United States is currently reverting to old isolationist habits, giving the impression that it does not need to consult with any other nation and that it is powerful enough to show disdain for the world community.

The surprising candidacy of Poonam Devi also is the fruit of creative constitutional thinking. At the time of India’s founding, in keeping with the generally substantive understanding of equality in its Constitution, various schemes of affirmative action on behalf of traditionally subordinated groups were contemplated. The Constitution created a system of representation meant to reflect the proportion of every caste and tribe in the total population of each state. The system works by a complex scheme of rotations: in successive elections, only members of certain groups may run for office, although all citizens

12 *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*, AIR 1997, 6 SCC 241. Compare the invocation of CEDAW as binding on the nation in a nationality case in Botswana: *Attorney General v. Unity Dow*, 1992 LRC (Cons) 623 (July 2, 1992).

may vote. Despite controversy and many complaints, the system seems to have worked reasonably well, effectively enfranchising a variety of previously disadvantaged groups and promoting their economic and social well-being. There is little doubt that it would have been difficult to achieve progress against the deeply entrenched realities of caste without such affirmative legal measures.

On the other hand, legitimate objections can be made to the system. First of all, no reserved seats have ever been created or even seriously championed for Muslims, arguably as vulnerable a minority as the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Second, the practice of reservation has led over time to a situation in which castes at the very bottom of the social ladder do considerably better than those just above them. Thus, more recently, as a result of the 1980 report of the Mandal Commission, reservations for OBCs (Other Backward Castes) were added to the list. (Estimates of the proportion of India's population that belongs to OBC groups range from 25 percent to 37 percent, and many of these people are economically advantaged. Thus it can now be argued that the system of reservations no longer protects the most vulnerable and otherwise unrepresented groups.) As a result of the system of representation, a politics of caste has to some extent displaced a politics of national issues, and recent governmental instability at both regional and national levels can be partially attributed to the proliferation of caste-based parties. Despite these problems, however, the quota system seems to most Indians to be a source of more good than harm, and there is no serious demand for its abolition.

Reserved seats for women have been discussed since before independence. Early feminists opposed reservations,

arguing that they would compromise the struggle for women's full equality. At independence, accordingly, reservations for women were rejected, although, as noted above, affirmative action on the basis of sex won general support in the Constitution. In 1971, the government appointed a Committee on the Status of Women in India to study the progress that had been made by women since independence. In its famous 1974 report *Towards Equality*, the committee delivered a scathing critique of the political process, arguing that the political position of women in India had, if anything, worsened since 1950, and that women were neither able to claim their legal rights nor, in many cases, even aware of them. The majority of the committee continued to oppose reserved seats as a remedy, but a minority report signed by some especially prominent feminist leaders argued that this remedy was necessary for the resumption of social and political progress for women.

A generation later, the representation of women in central and state government continues to be very low: 6–7 percent in the Lok Sabha (the analogue of the House of Commons), one of the lowest parliamentary figures in the world. Political parties have talked about reserving a certain proportion of their own candidacies for women, but have done nothing about it. At the same time, women's voter turnout has significantly increased and is now at 55 percent, only slightly less than the national average. In this situation, it is not surprising that the idea of reserved legislative seats for women has attracted new political and constitutional attention, in connection with a push for greater local self-rule.

Arguing, like John Stuart Mill, that participation in local politics teaches citizens how to appreciate the common good, national legislators successfully

amended the Constitution in 1992 to give formal legal status to the system of *panchayats*, or local village councils, an aspect of governance central to Gandhi's vision of India but never fully implemented. The Amendments established a 33 percent quota for women in the *panchayats* and set up a system of rotation that is similar to that by which reservations for lower castes have already been implemented at the national level.

Initially, advocates for women were split about the merits of this system. Many feared that the women who would be selected would simply be tools of male interests. But nearly ten years of experience with the plan has shown that, on balance, its merits outweigh its drawbacks. Certainly in some cases women do initially function as proxies for the powerful men in their families. Poonam Devi was initially groomed for office by her husband, who believed that he would be unable to run for the seat. But even such women learn political skills in the process. Poonam Devi became so interested in politics that she is now running for office *against* the wishes of her husband. Whether she wins or loses, she is gaining valuable experience; if she loses, in due course she will be able to run for a reserved seat.

Moreover, the new system's extension of political power to poor and illiterate women has been dramatic. Studies show that a majority of women who serve in the *panchayats* are illiterate or barely literate. Moreover, approximately 40 percent of female representatives come from families with income below the poverty line. Women report many obstacles to their effective participation, including harassment and the threat of violence. Nonetheless, a number of women are evidently learning political skills and participating in decision-making in a way that would not have

been possible without the Amendments. In addition, the system has increased demands for female education: mothers can now urge their daughters to go to school in order to prepare themselves for a role in politics. They report that this gives them more power in the family to decide which children shall go to school.¹³

More recently, proposals to introduce reservations for women at the national level have encountered tremendous opposition – largely from lower-caste parties, who fear that the new quotas would result in fewer lower-caste legislators, since they believe that educated women will be the most likely to be elected. They propose a subquota in the general women's quota for lower-caste women, but so far proponents of the Amendment have rejected this proposal. Certainly such a quota for lower-caste women would exacerbate some of the problems already produced by caste-based reserved seats at the national level. A possible outcome of the current debate is that parties will agree to reserve a certain proportion of their tickets for female candidates (as they do in France and quite a few other countries).

It is ironic – and telling – that similarly creative proposals are non-starters in the United States. Even though the United States has one of the lowest proportions of women in the national legislature within the developed world, we are not looking around with genuine curiosity to see what other nations have done about

13 On all these matters, see Nirmala Buch, *From Oppression to Assertion: A Study of Panchayats and Women in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1999); I am also grateful to Zoya Hasan and to Niraja Gopal Jayal for allowing me to read unpublished works on this topic, and for discussion.

this problem.

This is not to say that the Indian solution fits the U.S. situation. Very likely it does not. Quotas for women in the *panchayats* are a solution well adapted to the situation of the rural poor in India, where illiteracy and lack of employment outside the home pose daunting obstacles to women's political participation. In the United States, by contrast, many more women already work – and no real equivalent of India's *panchayats* exists.

Still, Indian politicians and jurists are *thinking* – as ours have too often refused to think – creatively. We should more vigorously confront the problem of violence against women and the problem of the underrepresentation of women in politics by considering a wide range of remedies – first on the list being campaign finance reform, which has at least received a hearing. But systems of multi-

ple voting and proportional representation, which have been used successfully by some municipalities for years to enfranchise underrepresented groups, should also be considered. In general, we should attend to the issue, debate it without phobic reactions (such as the term “affirmative action” so often evokes), and learn from other nations.

Both of these issues show us one large fact: the world is moving on, with or without U.S. participation, to find creative solutions to pressing problems of human inequality. Usually U.S. citizens don't know anything much about these developments, and some of our politicians encourage disdain for what is happening elsewhere. We need to learn new habits of curiosity and respect if we are to be productive members of an increasingly interdependent global community.

Robert W. Fogel & Chulhee Lee

Who gets health care?

Around the world, as in the United States, concern is growing about who gets health care.¹ Individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds face distressingly different prospects of living a healthy life. As numerous studies confirm, the disparities in various measures of health between the privileged and the deprived remain wide, even in rich countries, despite the long-term tendency toward a healthier society.

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Some investigators believe that the disparities are actually increasing. They suggest that the shift in the health-care system in advanced industrial countries from the principle of universal access to a more market-oriented system may be one cause of the growing disparities they observe; rising income inequality is another potential culprit.

Policymakers worldwide meanwhile speak of more efficiently delivering “essential” health care, but nobody is certain what this means in practice.

What counts as “essential” in health care? What is the optimal mix of private and government components of health-care services?

It is these questions that we wish to explore in more detail. After reviewing the economic and epidemiological literature on disparities in health and health-care systems, we will tackle directly the question of how to define “essential” health care – and then explore the policy implications of our analysis.

¹ We have benefited from the insightful suggestions of Bernard Harris and David Meltzer. Parts of the research for this paper were supported by a grant from the National Institute of Aging. A more fully documented version of this essay is available as a National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper at <<http://www.nber.org>>.

In the United States, substantial socioeconomic differences in illness and death rates have been documented by many researchers. These disparities not only vary widely by level of education but, as reported in 1993 in a paper published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, the disparities increased between 1960 and 1986 for both men and women.²

Growing inequalities in well-being and access to health care have been reported for other nations, too. In Britain, recent studies by Russel Ecob and George Davey Smith, and also studies by Vani K. Borooah, have provided extensive evidence of socioeconomic disparities in the prevalence of illness, the probability of long-term limiting illness, perinatal deaths, low birth weight, and stillbirth risk. In Denmark, Finn Tüchsen and Lars A. Endahl found that illness and death due to cardiovascular disease was promoted by inequalities in income. Moreover, this disparity rapidly increased between the early 1980s and 1990s. In Rome, according to another recent study published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, socioeconomic differences in death rates rose during the early 1990s. In China, as Yuanli Liu, William C. Hsiao, and Karen Eggleston have shown, the gap in the levels of health between urban and rural residents also widened in the same period, despite rapid economic growth. Disparities have also increased in the treatment of less serious medical conditions. Thus, while overall oral health improved in Norway, the disparities in the treat-

ment of cavities by socioeconomic group increased from 1983 to 1994.

Over the last decade, a number of studies have produced evidence that the extent of income inequality in a society is negatively associated with the health status of citizens, based on cross-sectional comparisons between and within countries.³ These apparent empirical findings have provoked a debate over precisely how income inequality may affect individual health status. Some researchers have focused on the psychological stresses that may result from a perception of relative deprivation, or alienation from a highly unequal social order.⁴ This hypothesis is bolstered by research showing that more egalitarian societies exhibit more cohesion, less violence, lower homicide rates, more trust, lower hostility scores, and more involvement in community life. Still other researchers have focused instead on material conditions, arguing that income inequality leaves the poor exposed to disease, while the state lowers its investment in education, housing, income, and public and private sanitation.⁵

At the same time, doubts have been raised about the validity of the empirical relationship between income inequality

2 Gregory Pappas, Susan Queen, Wilbur Hadden, and Gail Fisher, "The Increasing Disparity in Mortality between Socioeconomic Groups in the United States, 1960 and 1986," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 329 (2) (8 July 1993): 103–109.

3 R. G. Wilkinson, "Income Distribution and Life-Expectancy," *British Medical Journal* 304 (6820) (18 January 1992): 165–168; I. Kawachi and B. P. Kennedy, "The Relationship of Income Inequality to Mortality: Does the Choice of Indicator Matter?" *Social Science & Medicine* 45 (7) (October 1997): 1121–1127.

4 R. G. Wilkinson, *Unhealthy Societies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Wilkinson, *Mind the Gap: Hierarchies, Health, and Human Evolution* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000).

5 John W. Lynch, George Davey-Smith, George A. Kaplan, and James S. House, "Income Inequality and Mortality: Importance to Health of Individual Income, Psychological Environment, or Material Conditions," *British Medical Journal* 320 (7243) (29 April 2000): 1200–1204.

and health.⁶ In a recent working paper on “Health, Inequality, and Economic Development,” Angus Deaton argues that the evidence that income inequality affects individual health is not as strong as commonly assumed. According to him, previous studies based on international comparisons lack adequate data on health for some countries, and comparable data for others. The link between income inequality and health that is observed in cross-sectional U.S. data becomes insignificant once various effects of population composition, especially the effect of race, are considered. Deaton argues that it is the level of a country’s income, rather than the degree of inequality, that is crucial.

Income inequality and levels of national income may not be the only factors that help to explain disparities in health: many researchers blame the rising inequality in access to health care for the trend toward a greater inequality in health. Jon Gabel, writing for *Health Affairs* in 1999, noted that the coverage of job-based health insurance in the United States declined between 1977 and 1998, particularly among low-skilled, marginal workers, because of the decline in real wages among low-skilled workers, a 2.6-fold real increase in the cost of health insurance, and a 3.5-fold nominal increase in the cost of health insurance. A survey published in May of 2000 in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* entitled “Inequality in Quality: Addressing the Socioeconomic, Racial, and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care” suggests

that, even among those with health insurance, lower socioeconomic position is associated with receiving fewer mammograms, childhood and influenza immunizations, and diabetic eye examinations, later enrollment in prenatal care, and lower quality of ambulatory and hospital care.

In Britain, too, doctors serving poor populations reported significantly lower rates of utilization of more advanced technologies such as angiography and revascularization in coronary artery surgery.⁷ In eight developing countries, including Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Paraguay, South Africa, Thailand, and Zambia, researchers found that richer groups were more likely to obtain care when sick, to be seen by a doctor, and to receive medicines when ill than poorer groups.⁸ An interesting exception to these usual patterns of health-care disparities is New Zealand, where the poor were found to receive either an appropriate or a slightly excessive level of services given their estimated health needs. This may be explained by the effects of a continued restructuring of the New Zealand public-health system, which focuses on providing decent minimum care.

Some investigators believe that disparities in health delivery are increasing. Since the demand for health care has a relatively large income elasticity (defined as the percentage increase in health expenditures brought about by a 1 percent increase in income), a widening

6 K. Fiscella and P. Franks, “Poverty or Income Inequality as a Predictor of Mortality,” *British Medical Journal* 314 (7096) (14 June 1997): 1724–1728; H. Gravelle, “How Much of the Relation between Population Mortality and Unequal Distribution of Income is a Statistical Artefact?” *British Medical Journal* 316 (7128) (31 January 1998): 382–385.

7 Julia Hippisley-Cox, “Inequality in Access to Coronary Angiography and Revascularisation: The Association of Deprivation and Location of Primary Care Services,” *British Journal of General Practice* 50 (455) (June 2000): 449–454.

8 M. Makinen et al., “Inequalities in Health Care Use and Expenditures,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 78 (1) (2000): 55–65.

of the income gap between rich and poor would produce an even greater disparity in expenditure on health care. Additionally, a rise in income inequality in a locality may undermine primary health-care provisions, especially for its poorer residents.⁹ Finally – and paradoxically – advances in medical technologies may help to produce more disparities in health and well-being. Because affluent and educated people tend to take care of themselves and know how to utilize the health-care system, according to the recent study “Understanding Health Disparities across Education Groups,” by Dana Goldman and Darius Lakdawalla, reductions in the price of health care or expansions in the overall demand for health inputs may disproportionately benefit the well-educated.

As this review of the literature on health reveals, economists and epidemiologists are primarily focused on empirical issues: establishing the facts on differences in health and health care by socioeconomic status, and measuring the impact of inequality on health outcomes. Discussions of such normative issues as what proportion of national resources ought to be devoted to health care, or how these resources ought to be distributed within the population, are left largely to legislatures and to various specific-interest organizations and think tanks.

International organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have called on all countries to guarantee delivery of “high-quality essential care

to all persons, defined mostly by criteria of effectiveness, cost and social acceptability.”¹⁰ Cost has become a controlling issue since the health-care systems established in most OECD countries after World War II, which sought to guarantee complete health care for all through government-run health or insurance systems, have become too expensive and now threaten the fiscal stability of governments. As incomes have risen, the public demand for health services has increased much more rapidly than income (because of the high income elasticity of the demand for health care), making the cost of operating such systems unsustainable.

The new systems of “essential care,” now in the course of construction in OECD countries, recognize the necessity of explicitly establishing priorities among health interventions (rather than unlimited coverage). As a result, it has become necessary to ration health-care services even more stringently than before. In order to guarantee that the health of the poor is not neglected under these circumstances, the WHO proposes three principles: health-care services should be prepaid (i.e., taxes for health care should be collected throughout the working life, even though the need for services is relatively low during young adult and middle ages); those who are healthy should subsidize those who are sick (which means that taxes should not be adjusted to reflect differential health risks, as policy rates often are under private insurance); and the rich should subsidize the poor (which means both that the rich should pay higher health taxes than the poor, and that the quality of

9 Leiyu Shi, Barbara Starfield, Bruce Kennedy, and Ichiro Kawachi, “Income Inequality, Primary Care, and Health Indicators,” *Journal of Family Practice* 48 (4) (April 1999): 275–284.

10 World Health Organization, *The World Health Report 2000: Health Systems: Improving Performance* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000), xiii.

service in government-run programs should be no better or more comprehensive for privileged groups).

This recommended standard explicitly recognizes that privately funded health programs and private insurance will need to provide a major part of a nation's health services. Since persons in the upper half of income distributions tend to spend more on health services than poorer people do, the distribution of health services is bound to be unequal. In fact, all OECD countries currently have mixed private and governmental systems, ranging from about 85 percent of total expenditures made by the government in Great Britain to about 45 percent in the United States. It is likely that the reforms now in progress will generally increase the private share of health-care services.

There is no clear agreement currently on the optimal mix of private and government components of health-care services. There is not much of a literature on this question, nor is there a consensus on the criteria that should be invoked to resolve the issue. Moreover, conditions vary so much from country to country that the optimal mix cannot be the same for all countries.

In very poor countries, where the need for health-care services is great, the average annual level of per capita expenditures from both private and government sources is shockingly low. In such countries as Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, and Nepal, annual per capita expenditures range between \$20 and \$56 (using international dollars, which adjust exchange rates for the domestic purchasing power of a country's currency). In India, the figure is \$84, and in China it is \$74. By contrast, the figures for the five largest countries of Western Europe are: France \$2,135, Germany \$2,365, Italy \$1,824, Spain \$1,211, and the United

Kingdom \$1,193. Annual per capita expenditures on health care in the United States – \$3,724 – are more than three times the British figure and more than 1.5 times the German figure. The spending on health care of the typical American in ten days exceeds the average *annual* expenditures of people living in countries with more than three-fifths of the world's population.

The fact that Europeans spend so much less on health care than Americans has led some critics to argue that the American system is wasteful. This contention is often buttressed by the fact that American disability-adjusted life expectancy (the average number of years expected before the onset of disabilities) at birth is less than that of France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany. If all those extra dollars spent by Americans are not buying better health and longer lives, what are they buying?

It is not yet possible to provide an adequate answer to that question. It is often assumed that the increase in longevity over the past two or three decades is due primarily to the increased amount and quality of health-care services. There is no doubt that medical interventions have saved many lives, especially in such areas as infectious diseases, cancer, and heart disease. However, we cannot yet say how much of the six or so years of increase in life expectancy since 1970 is due to medical interventions and how much is due to better levels of education, improvements in housing, and other factors that contribute to the increase in life expectancy.

Some recent findings suggest that most of the huge increase in life expectancy since 1900 is due to the large investment in public-health programs between 1880 and World War II that cleaned up the water and milk supplies,

developed modern waste-disposal systems, reduced air pollution, and improved nutritional status. Of course, these public-health programs were made possible by advances in medical knowledge. But the research behind these public-health advances represents a relatively small part of what is included in the category of "health expenditures." In the United States, for example, medical research (not including R&D of drug companies and providers of medical equipment and supplies) adds up to just 1.7 percent of U.S. national health expenditures.

Since deaths due to infectious diseases are now a small proportion of total deaths, it might seem that environmental improvements that were so important in reducing health risks before 1950 have been exhausted. Such a conclusion is premature. A series of recent studies has reported a connection between exposure to stress (biological and social) in early life, including insults *in utero* and during infancy, with the onset of chronic diseases at middle and late ages, and with life expectancy.¹¹ The strongest evidence for such links that has emerged thus far is with respect to hypertension, coronary heart disease, and type II diabetes.¹² A review of the research dealing with the relationship between birth weight and hypertension showed a tendency for middle-aged blood pressure to increase as birth weight declined.¹³ Evi-

dence of a connection between birth size and later coronary heart disease has been found in England, Wales, Sweden, India, and Finland. The volume of studies confirming the impact of insults during developmental ages on health in later life has increased substantially since 1994.

One of the strongest recent confirmations of the impact of early life events on longevity is a study reporting a statistically significant relationship between longevity after age fifty and the week of birth for cohorts born between 1863 and 1918. In the northern hemisphere, average length of life is shortest for those born in the second quarter of the year and longest for those born in the fourth quarter. In Australia, a relationship between birth month and longevity exists, but the peak and trough are the mirror image of that in the northern hemisphere.¹⁴ This result, which is apparently related to seasonal variations in nutritional status, has also been found in the Union Army data for cohorts born between 1820 and 1850.¹⁵ Consequently, we cannot rule out the proposition that one of the biggest factors influencing the prevalence rates of chronic diseases among the elderly in 2001 (and which accounts for a huge slice of national medical expenditures) was their exposure to environmental insults half a century, or more, ago.

11 D. J. P. Barker, *Mothers, Babies, and Health in Later Life*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh and New York: Churchill Livingstone, 1998).

12 Nevin S. Scrimshaw, "More Evidence that Foetal Nutrition Contributes to Chronic Disease in Later Life," *British Medical Journal* 315 (7112) (4 October 1997): 825–826.

13 Catherine M. Law and Alistair W. Shiell, "Is Blood Pressure Inversely Related to Birth Weight? The Strength of Evidence from a Sys-

tematic Review of the Literature," *Journal of Hypertension* 14 (8) (August 1996): 935–941.

14 Gabriele Doblhammer and James W. Vaupel, "Life Span Depends on Month of Birth," *Science* 98 (5) (27 February 2001): 2934–2939.

15 Tayatat Kanjanapipatkul, "The Effect of Month of Birth on Life Span of Union Veterans," typescript, Center for Population Economics, University of Chicago, 2001.

These new scientific findings are directly relevant to the problem of how to define “essential” health care and how to divide the national budget for health (regardless of how it is financed) among competing needs. It may well be that a very large increase in expenditures on antenatal care and pediatric care in infancy and early childhood is the most effective way to improve health over the entire life cycle, by delaying the onset of chronic diseases, alleviating their severity if they do occur, and increasing longevity.

Whatever the virtues of such a strategy, it raises the issue of intergenerational bias. This strategy gives a preference to the unborn and the very young over the immediate needs of the elderly. It is a kind of double blow to the elderly, who are now suffering from the early onset of chronic conditions and premature disability because of environmental insults they incurred *in utero* and during early childhood. Yet under a strategy that emphasizes antenatal and early childhood care, in order to make new generations better off throughout their life cycles, the elderly of today will be asked to restrain their demand for relief.

It is much easier to define “essential care” in the impoverished nations of the world because their alternatives are so stark. They are still suffering from deadly killers and cripples, virtually eliminated from OECD nations, that can be vanquished at quite modest costs compared to the expensive procedures routinely used to deal with more modest complaints in rich countries. As the WHO reported in 2001, the prospects of the poorest billion in the Third World can be “radically improved by targeting a relatively small set of diseases and conditions.”

Urgent needs include the distribution of drugs to combat tuberculosis, malar-

ia, and acute gastrointestinal and respiratory infections; the widespread provision of vaccines to prevent measles, tetanus, and diphtheria; and improved nutrition in order to revitalize immune systems, reduce perinatal deaths, lower death rates from a wide range of infectious diseases, and improve the functioning of the central nervous system. The Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (CMH) of the World Health Organization has estimated that 87 percent of deaths among children under age five, 71 percent of deaths between ages five and twenty-nine, and 47 percent of deaths between ages thirty and sixty-nine can be avoided by making use of available drugs and vaccines, by the delivery of vital nutrients, and by public-health programs aimed at producing safe water supplies and improved sanitation and health education. CMH estimates that donations from private and public sources in OECD countries, amounting to just 0.14 percent of their combined GDP, will be enough to realize these opportunities rapidly.

Defining “essential care” for the United States is more problematic, because the technologies needed for rapid and dramatic improvements in health and longevity are still on the drawing board, in contrast to poor countries where the problem is how effectively to deliver food and existing drugs and vaccines. To clarify the issue of “essential care” in a country where per capita expenditures on health exceed those of poor nations by 50 to 150 times, it is necessary to consider exactly what it is that our luxurious (even by European standards) expenditures are buying.

Saving lives, as important as it is, and as effective at it as modern medicine has become, is not the main activity of physicians and other health professionals. As we have already indicated, it is

likely that past public-health reforms, improvements in nutrition and other living standards, and the democratization of education have done much more to increase longevity than has clinical medicine. The main thing that physicians do is to make life more bearable: to relieve pain, to reduce the severity of chronic conditions, to postpone disabilities or even overcome some of them, to mend broken limbs, to prescribe drugs, and to reduce anxiety, overcome depression, and instruct individuals on how to take care of themselves.

Europeans are much more willing than Americans to stint on “unnecessary” services, on procedures that are “optional” rather than “vital,” on conveniences rather than necessities, on small rather than large reductions in risk. Rather than insisting on wide choice, they will settle for limited choice or no choice at all (take it or leave it). Consider the issue of queuing, one of the principal devices employed by public-health systems in Europe to keep demand from exceeding politically negotiated budgets. Americans are unwilling to wait two years or more for a hernia operation, as is now the case in Britain, but demand that such a service be available quickly, in a few weeks in most cases. Americans chafe at another favorite European device to control costs: rationing. They do not want to be told that they are too old or too fit or not fit enough to be eligible for some course of treatment. Nor are they willing to have their access to specialists sharply curtailed, and so the ratio of specialists to primary-care physicians is much higher in the United States than elsewhere. They also resist hasty impersonal examinations and denial of access to inpatient hospital care. And the rich insist on being allowed to spend as much on health care as they desire, even if some of these expenditures are wasteful.

And so the United States has some 6,000 hospitals, while Britain’s National Health Service has only 430 very large hospitals (beds per capita are similar in both countries). Every substantial suburban community in the United States demands its own facility with a wide range of services. In America today, not just research hospitals but many community hospitals have on staff physicians who specialize in heart bypass surgery and other high-tech procedures. Since Americans like to save a buck as much as Europeans, they are willing to join HMOs, but HMOs have found that to be competitive they have to offer numerous options on copayments, access to physicians outside of the primary network, and self-referral to specialists. Americans also demand the option to change health plans if they are dissatisfied. Such options cost money, among other things because they increase the cost of administration, even if they do not improve health outcomes.

The American passion for such individually tailored health services may be attributed to the country’s wide-open spaces, evangelical religion, and longstanding hostility to government. But it also reflects income. The average American, after all, is 50 percent richer than the average British person. Hence, it is not strange that they are willing to consume services that are too expensive for poorer people. Americans are no more self-indulgent in their purchases of health care than they are in their purchases of appliances or cars.

And so, what is viewed as “essential” health care in the United States includes services that in other cultures would be regarded as wasteful luxuries.

This situation puts into fresh perspective the common lament that 15 percent of Americans are “uncovered” by health insurance. “Uncovered” does not mean

that they are untreated. The uninsured see doctors almost as frequently as the insured. Nor is it clear that the effectiveness of their care is always less than those who have insurance. The uninsured are treated in public clinics and in emergency rooms, which (although they lack the conveniences of insured care and may have long queues) provide competent services, both standard and high-tech.¹⁶

Although access to health care matters, insurance does not guarantee adequate access. Moreover, while some of the uninsured in the U.S. system are in poorer health than the insured, others are in prime ages, have relatively good health, and prefer to self-insure. An important but poorly addressed issue is how different attitudes toward risk influence the insured and the uninsured in deciding when and where to seek health care. This issue is important when considering solutions to those who are underserved in health care, since underservice of the poor also exists in countries with universal health insurance. If the poor and the young are willing to accept higher health risks than are the rich and the elderly, merely extending entitlements may not be adequate. An aggressive outreach program, targeted at those who fail to take advantage of entitlements, may be required.

Our analysis has a variety of policy implications, both for health care in the United States and also for the world as a whole.

We believe that the most effective way to improve the U.S. health system for the poor is by identifying their most

urgent needs and designing an effective way of ministering to those specific needs. This goal will not be met merely by equalizing the annual number of visits to doctors (since the rich often waste medical services) or the annual expenditures on drugs (since the rich often over-medicate). Focusing on the specific needs of the poor may not save money, but it will ensure that whatever is spent is properly targeted.

In this spirit, the number-one priority ought to be an expansion of prenatal and postnatal care targeted particularly at young single mothers. The priority is suggested by the new evidence that proper nutrition, including supplements of such key nutrients as folate and iron, can reduce perinatal deaths and birth defects, including damage to the central nervous system. It is also necessary to counsel pregnant women on the dangers to the fetus from smoking and consumption of alcohol, on the benefits from proper diets, regular and early examinations, and exposing the fetus to a stimulating environment (music and conversation). A focus on young, single mothers makes sense not only because they are among the most needy, but also because there is now persuasive evidence that insults *in utero* that reduce birth weight and length, as well as inadequate weight gains in infancy, greatly increase health risks throughout the life cycle.

A second priority is improved health education and mentoring to enable poorly educated people, both young and old, to identify their health problems, to be able to follow instructions for health care, to properly use medication, and to become involved in social networks conducive to good health. It not enough to wait for such individuals to seek out available service. Outreach programs need to be developed to identify the

16 Marc L. Berk and Claudia L. Schur, "Access to Care: How Much Difference Does Medicare Make?" *Health Affairs* 17 (30) (May - June 1998): 169 - 180.

needy individuals. Hence, support should be extended to organizations already experienced in outreach, such as the Girls Clubs of America and community churches, so that they can include health screening and counseling among their services. Systems for monitoring the effectiveness of such community organizations also need to be established.

Another priority is the reintroduction into public schools, particularly those in poor neighborhoods, from nursery school through the twelfth grade, of periodic health-screening programs, using nurses and physicians on a contract basis. Personnel should also be employed to ensure that parents understand the nature of their children's problems and to direct the parents to public-health facilities that can provide appropriate services.

A fourth initiative is the establishment of public-health clinics in underserved poor neighborhoods that can supplement the emergency rooms of regular hospitals, which are a frequent source of routine health-care services for the poor and near poor. Convenient access is a key issue, because even individuals with insurance, such as those on Medicaid, may fail to take advantage of available facilities if they are inconvenient. Time is a cost to the poor as well as the rich, and lack of convenient facilities may cause individuals to accept higher health risks than they would otherwise choose. The mission of community clinics should include health education in addition to treatment. Community clinics need to be regularly monitored to ensure their effectiveness. Basements of churches and space in public schools after normal teaching hours can be good locations for community clinics, both because they help to stretch available funds and because they provide familiar

settings.

Readers may be surprised that we have not emphasized the extension of health-insurance policies to the 15 percent of the population not currently insured. The flap in the United States over insurance has more to do with taxation than with health services. Keep in mind that the poor are already entitled to health care under Medicaid, and that the near poor often receive free health care through county or city hospitals and emergency rooms. What they do not do is pay taxes for those services. Most proposals for health insurance imply the taxation of their wages for services they already receive. Such insurance may relieve the pressure on the public purse, but it will not guarantee better health care. We believe that health screening in schools and community clinics has a better chance at success than unexercised theoretical entitlements.

Last but not least, any consideration of how to improve health care must take into account the world as a whole, since a great many diseases are more easily transmitted than ever across national frontiers.

We believe that America has an obligation to increase its contribution to the international campaign to bring vaccines and other products to children and adults whose lives can be saved, if there is the international will to do so. The lack of access to such products in the poorest fifty or so countries is the most glaring instance of inequality in the global health system and a lingering threat to the health of those in rich countries.

The large advances in life expectancy in China and other emerging economies show that it is not necessary to wait for industrialization to be completed before making major advances in health and longevity. Modern methods of sanita-

tion and other public-health programs can be introduced at modest cost. Cleaning up the water supply, improving the distribution of basic nutrients, draining swamps and otherwise disrupting vectors of disease, and making improvements in waste disposal can be achieved quickly and cheaply, as has been demonstrated by China, Indonesia, and Malaysia. OECD nations can help speed up the process in countries still lagging behind by training public-health officials and helping to supply food supplements, antibiotics, and other vital drugs and vaccines to needy nations.

A particularly urgent issue is posed by the worldwide pandemic of HIV/AIDS. Although death rates from AIDS have recently declined in the United States and other OECD nations, AIDS is ravaging Africa. Of the three million individuals worldwide who died of AIDS in 2000, more than two million lived in sub-Saharan Africa. Although rates of

infection are still relatively low in India and China, there is a risk of a rapid escalation in the spread of the infection. Public campaigns to inform the populations of these countries of the threat of this disease, of means of reducing the odds of infection, and of available treatment for those already infected are urgently needed.

The OECD and other international agencies can provide both money and skilled personnel to confront AIDS and other deadly infectious diseases, and to help provide vaccines and other drug therapies to those who need them. One important way to help is by increasing the money spent in OECD nations on understanding diseases that afflict the poor countries of the world. It is not only morality but also self-interest that argues for these measures. There is always a risk that epidemics in the Third World may spread to OECD nations.

*Who gets
health care?*

Why the poor don't soak the rich

To ask why there is so much inequality in modern-day democracies is to ask a loaded question.¹ Why should we expect there to be less?

Such an expectation was nevertheless widely shared in the nineteenth century, both among conservatives who feared the economic implications of democracy and among socialists who welcomed democracy precisely because of its apparent economic implications. The Left and Right agreed: if majority rule and universal suffrage were introduced into a society marked by massive inequality, then most voters, being relatively poor, would inevitably favor taxing the rich and transferring the proceeds downward. I will call this the *redistributive thesis*.

This is one thesis that history has roundly refuted. Although there have been redistributive eras in capitalist democracies since the advent of a universal franchise, there has been no systematic relationship between democracy and downward redistribution – not even a detectable relationship between the expansions of the franchise and episodes of downward redistribution.²

Indeed, expanding the franchise has sometimes been accompanied by regressive redistribution. In the United States, economic inequality rose sharply between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s, despite the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the lowering of the voting age to eighteen in 1971. Similarly, in the post-communist world, the advent

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1 An expanded version of this essay, including extensive discussion of the literature on which it is based, can be found at <<http://pantheon.yale.edu/~ianshap/papers.htm>>.

2 Inequality in the United States remained comparatively stable throughout the nineteenth century and only began to drop in the 1930s; yet during this period a number of voting reforms expanding the franchise were enacted. See Jeffrey G. Williamson and Peter H. Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 62–63; and Michael Levin, *The Spectre of Democracy* (Hampshire, U.K.: Macmillan, 1992), 3–9.

of democracy has been accompanied by the ostentatious growth of inequality. No doubt these developments owe at least as much to the introduction of capitalism as they do to democracy. Still, if the redistributive thesis is of interest, it must surely predict that a representative democracy will reverse – or at least retard – the regressive implications of market capitalism. Yet in practice, democracies often seem willing to tolerate growing inequality.

There are several ways that social scientists have tried to explain this apparent anomaly. A number of them have pointed to the logic of democracy, the logic of capitalism, and the ways in which they interact. Such analysts argue that the propensity to demand downward redistribution would be realized were it not for unexpected dynamics unleashed by the institutions of democracy and capitalism and their interaction.

My purpose here is not to criticize this kind of institutional account, but rather to raise doubts about some assumptions behind it. No doubt part of the intuitive plausibility of the redistributive thesis is that it seems supported by a number of common assumptions about human psychology. If individuals in general were rational in the pursuit of self-interest, or rational in their pursuit of class interests, then we would expect most people in a democracy to support downward redistribution – if not to the point of perfect economic equality, then at least to something a lot closer to it than what we now have.

The expectation that democracies will redistribute downward is often motivated by the observation of poverty amid opulence. It seems reasonable to anticipate that the greater the manifest opulence of the few, the stronger will be the redistributive pressure from below.

Paradoxically, however, something closer to the opposite may often be the case.

Why this discrepancy? An important part of the answer, I think, lies in exposing a number of dubious assumptions about human psychology. Those who adhere to the redistributive thesis, be they Marxist, liberal, or conservative, usually assume that people in general keep themselves well informed about their place in the distribution of income and wealth, that the poor and middle classes compare themselves to the wealthy when thinking about what is feasible or just, and that those toward the bottom of the income distribution are like coiled springs – were it not for various external forces that are pressing them down, they would leap into action and demand a greater share of the economic pie.

Every one of these assumptions is questionable – and every one of them deserves to be questioned.

Aspirations do not form in vacuums. People must be able to picture realistically the goods for which they will strive. If the gap between where a person is and where he or she might hope to be is too great, certain goods are likely to seem out of reach – and hence outside the range of realistic aspirations. There thus arises the possibility of an *empathy gulf*, a situation in which people who are situated in one stratum of society may find it literally impossible to imagine the goods pursued by those in another.

When levels of inequality are extremely high, such an empathy gulf might actually dampen redistributive demands from the very poor. An extreme example will make this point. In modern-day Cape Town, it is common for domestic cleaners who live in squatters' camps to work for ten dollars a day cleaning half-million dollar houses, where the cars in

the garages cost many multiples of their expected lifetime earnings. It may just be impossible for the cleaners to picture themselves ever owning such a car, let alone the houses in which their owners live. You can see yourself stepping unaided over a puddle or a stream, perhaps even swimming a river, but not swimming the Atlantic ocean.

By the same token, those who are very rich may find it impossible to picture themselves ever becoming poor. To the degree that willingness to tolerate downward redistribution is part of the worry “there but for the grace of God go I,” the worry has to be credible. If you are rich and the gap between you and the poor you see around you is so vast that no calamity you can imagine befalling you will put you into their circumstances, then any prudential reasons you might have for improving their lot disappear. Presumably this is one reason why most people can tune out panhandlers and street people and acquiesce in the demonization of the underclass. The mighty may fall into destitution in Zola’s novels – but no one who reads Zola in modern-day America really expects that such things could happen to them.

The more extreme the income inequality, the greater the psychic distance between the have-nots and the haves. Beyond certain thresholds that would have to be determined empirically, inequality may be expected to spawn empathy gulfs that dampen demands for change from below and reinforce the complacency of those who are rich. If the conditions for revolutionary social change are absent, and if a democratic order is seen as fundamentally legitimate, then the very existence of a vast gulf between rich and poor may very well reinforce the inegalitarian status quo. People will be more likely to blame others who are close to themselves in the

social order for their plight rather than the wealthy, who seem unimaginably far away. This may fuel characteristic types of conflict among different groups and classes toward the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, but it is unlikely to have much effect on the overall distribution of income and wealth.

The existence of empathy gulfs complements other possibilities that have been suggested to explain why voters would not make the kinds of egalitarian demands predicted by the redistributive thesis. An older sociology literature that runs from Max Weber to Frank Parkin suggests that in market systems most people think there is less inequality than there actually is, and that their relative position is better than it actually is. There is also an economics literature that seeks to explain people’s apparently irrational beliefs about the prospects for their own upward mobility, and there is empirical research in social psychology that supports the notion that in formally egalitarian systems people opt for individual advancement rather than collective action to improve their circumstances.

In the United States, at least, although people might be egalitarian in many facets of social life, they tend to accept economic outcomes as legitimate unless they seem to be both procedurally and substantively unfair. But this seldom happens, because the market is widely believed to be a fair distributive instrument. Jennifer Hochschild’s 1995 study, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, revealed a remarkably widespread endorsement of the idea that “skill rather than need should determine wages,” and that “America should promote equal opportunity for all” rather than “equal outcomes.” Overwhelming majorities from different occupational, racial, and politi-

cal groups endorsed this ideology.

To be sure, not everyone believes in the justness of capitalism or the American Dream. Hochschild herself notes that a subset of the population is estranged from it. Because desolation and apathy are unlikely to coexist with ambition and determination for success, it seems clear that differently situated poor people have different beliefs and aspirations. It may be that those who could organize for redistributive politics are insufficiently disaffected to do so, while those who are sufficiently disaffected are incapable of organizing.

Like empathy gulfs, what some psychologists call *framing effects* also shape what people see as pertinent political alternatives. Here the concern is not with the goods people might in principle, or on reflection, imagine themselves deciding to pursue, but rather with what they actually focus on when making a particular decision.

In 1984, Ronald Reagan ran for reelection by asking a pointed question: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" This directed people to think about a bundle of goods represented by their disposable income, and to ask whether their stock of it had increased. This is a self-referential comparison: it requires no attention to what others have.

Research shows that people often think largely in self-referential terms. Moreover, when they do compare themselves to others, it is generally to people who are situated like themselves. Workers do not compare themselves to their bosses in assessing their circumstances. They do not compare themselves to the rich, but rather to workers like themselves.

Yet even if most workers understand their own interest in such narrow terms,

it still seems to follow that workers pursuing the interests they do share will, sooner or later, support a redistribution of wealth – this, after all, was a part of what Karl Marx expected to happen under capitalism. To explain why this does not happen, we should attend to a variety of other factors.

For example, one reason workers might not press for redistribution stems from *backward-looking framing effects*, a phrase meant to capture the reactive character of much human behavior. After all, the query "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" directs attention to the past – with the implication that the alternative to the present is not progress, but backsliding. Once a marginal advance has occurred, there is always the possibility of losing it.

People who are surprised that there are not more demands for downward redistribution tend to work on the assumption that those near the bottom of the economic distribution think they have nothing to lose. This may be true for a handful of people, but certainly not for most – and definitely not for most modern-day workers. In many circumstances, voters may decide that things could well get worse – particularly if things have been worse in the recent past.

What may be called *inward-looking framing effects* also shape the decisions that people routinely make. Rallying grassroots supporters for the Million Man March in October of 1995, Louis Farrakhan insisted that the time had come for the dispossessed in the black community to draw on their own resources and bootstrap themselves out of poverty. His message was unequivocal: forget the inequality out there and focus on yourself. When people internalize ideologies of this kind, they will not demand redistribution through public

institutions. Instead, they will blame themselves for their circumstances and accept that they should look inward when trying to improve them. Inward-looking framing effects are likely significant in accounting for the dearth of redistributive demands in the United States, given the power of bootstrapping ideologies here. Whether the inward-looking focus is on the self or on a comparatively dispossessed group, it is significantly not on the larger society and its distribution of goods and opportunities.

Even individuals who are fully aware of the real dimensions of economic inequality sometimes decide that they have other priorities that are more important than trying to redress perceived economic injustice. Some people may be more concerned about their status or dignity than about income and wealth. In contemporary South Africa, for instance, the abolition of second-class citizenship since the democratic transition in 1994 has produced a tangible new noneconomic good: the dignity that comes with the act of voting. In such circumstances, the mere right to vote may well dampen popular concern with the continuing existence of economic inequality.

Even in the United States, economic issues must vie for attention with concerns about status and recognition. Part of the appeal of ethnic and other forms of identity politics in countries like ours comes from the persistence of status inequalities. By focusing on issues of status and dignity, social movements sometimes draw attention away from more purely economic concerns.

Downward-looking framing effects draw attention away from redistribution in still another way: by directing attention to those less fortunate in the social order. The existence of the very poor can seem frightening to those just above

them in the social order in at least three ways: they might be thought to threaten violence, they might be believed to be the cause of tax burdens to fund welfare demands, and the possibility of unemployment might conjure up the possibility of plunging into their ranks.

Fear of the marauding rabble of dispossessed poor has existed for centuries. Rather than disappearing in capitalist democracies like the United States, this fear seems to have taken on a petit bourgeois form. Among those in the middle class and especially the lower middle class the fear takes the form of an antipathy toward those who are below them. There is even a tendency for those in the upper reaches of the lower class to distance themselves from the lower reaches, identifying instead with middle-class norms.

At the same time, a good deal of electoral politics in a modern democracy revolves around reinforcing stereotyped images of the underclass in ways that foment tensions between working-class and upper-middle-class Americans. Much of the trench warfare around affirmative action, for instance, is about promotions in the police department, the post office, and the fire department. It has little impact on people who live in Scarsdale or on the structure of income distribution. This is why political commentator Michael Lind can write of a white upper middle class, whose members support racial preferences and multiculturalism from which they are largely immune, that they “live right and think left” by looking askance at lower-middle-class opposition to their preferred policies. Though Lind perhaps exaggerates when he argues that affirmative action is the result of a divide-and-conquer conspiracy, he is surely right about its effects: keeping America’s middle and lower classes squabbling among

themselves feeds racism and destroys what otherwise might be natural political alliances in a campaign for redistributive change.

Downward-looking framing effects are sustained by demonizing those at or near the bottom of the social order. Hatred of welfare stems from the perception that most recipients are undeserving. Media portrayals of the very poor as disproportionately black and lazy reinforce this perception – as does the act of criminalizing the poor. The vast numbers of poor people who currently are housed in American prisons constitute a manifestly demonized group – even though the overwhelming majority of these prisoners have in fact committed no violent crime.³

Finally, perceptions of political alternatives are often shaped by *anecdotal distractions*. In *Albion's Fatal Tree*, historian Douglas Hay tells the story of an eighteenth-century criminal law that operated almost exclusively in the interests of propertied elites, but by means of which even noblemen were occasionally subjected to extreme forms of punishment – even the death penalty – for relatively minor offenses against property. Hay argues that such token but spectacular punishments meted out to aristocrats were meant to instill awe for the legal order that protected the propertied

classes. What better way to get the poor to think that the law is not the instrument of the rich than to have it so visibly enforced against a member of the nobility?

Anecdotal distractions need not be directed only at the rich: lurid stories about “welfare queens” driving Cadillacs draw attention away from the law-abiding behavior of most welfare recipients. Horatio Alger stories work in the same way, as Ronald Reagan well understood (“What I want to see above all is that this country remains a country where someone can always get rich”). When politicians visibly single out individuals who have moved from welfare to work or otherwise triumphed over adversity, they exhibit their understanding of the power of anecdotal distractions. The man in the street does not ask questions about random sampling or selecting on the dependent variable.

I have discussed so far the psychological implications of empathy gulfs and of various kinds of framing effects. In addition, sheer geographical distance – *physical gulfs* – may also attenuate redistributive demands. One might think of this as another kind of framing effect: out of sight, out of mind. But it is both more and less than this.

Physical gulfs can be more than framing effects in that segregation of the have-nots from the haves in capitalist democracies is real and increasing. The starkest illustration of this in the United States is the middle-class dash from cities to suburbs that took off a generation ago and is now culminating in enclave living. As recently as 1960, gated communities numbered in the hundreds and were for the elderly and the super-rich. By 1997, there were as many as twenty thousand gated communities in the country, consisting of more than

³ For data on the explosive growth of incarceration in the United States (which has transformed the United States from a country that incarcerated around one hundred per one hundred thousand between World War II and 1970 to one that incarcerated over four hundred per one hundred thousand by the mid-1990s), see John Irwin and James Austin, *It's About Time: America's Imprisonment Binge* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1997), 1–3. Almost three-quarters of those incarcerated have not committed violent offenses of any kind; convictions for drug possession or trafficking account for the great majority of the increase. *Ibid.*, 19–61.

three million housing units, at least a third of which were middle-class, and a growing number of which were working-class in composition. These numbers greatly understate the reality of enclave living, since many country towns (often functional suburbs) can for all practical purposes be inaccessible to inner-city residents.

The net effect is the rise of what Douglas Rae has called a “segmented democracy.”⁴ Freedom of movement lives cheek by jowl with effective segregation by race and class. In America today, this segregation is in many respects as onerous as it was in South Africa under apartheid. Movement by poor black and brown people from the inner cities into middle- and upper-class neighborhoods is not a practical option, given the realities of transportation and local policing practices.

Spatial segregation also means that the middle and upper classes restrict their urban life to business districts and daylight hours, a trend that is greatly enhanced by the flexibility to work from home afforded by the Internet. And those who live in refurbished parts of inner cities have enclaves of their own. Their daily paths from guarded apartment buildings to work, gyms, and upscale restaurants enables them to minimize their contact with anyone who is disturbingly different from themselves. In this way, the physical gulfs of a segmented democracy reinforce the

empathy gulfs already discussed.

Yet physical gulfs amount to less than a framing effect, in the television age, in that “out of sight” is not – strictly speaking – “out of mind.” The paradox is that despite the geographic reality of physical segmentation, the have-nots are not ignorant of what the haves have. Tocqueville said that the poor knuckle under in aristocracies because they are ignorant of comfort: “they despair of getting it and they do not know enough about it to want it.” The implied suggestion is that, were it available, such knowledge would become the engine of redistributive demands. Yet despite the fact that people are bombarded with images of how the other half (or, more accurately, the other 2 percent) lives, these images produce scant interest in economic equity. Knowledge by acquaintance is more important, it seems, than knowledge by television. This is consistent with the research suggesting that what people learn through the media is not a substitute for everyday proximity in shaping their aspirations.

It also suggests that a perverse dynamic may be at work as well. If *de jure* segregation, such as the Group Areas Act that launched South Africa’s residential segregation in 1950, or the Jim Crow laws that prevailed in the southern United States until the 1960s, eventually provokes collective resistance, then simply removing the legal prohibitions may well destroy the will to act collectively – leaving *de facto* segregation unchanged. As long as they are free and equal under the law, individuals will generally aspire toward individual economic mobility – even if the odds of success are negligible. The contemporary United States provides anecdotal evidence in support of this contention, and so does post-apartheid South Africa.

4 Douglas Rae, “Democratic Liberty and Tyrannies of Place,” in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón, eds., *Democracy’s Edges* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 165 – 192. See also Thomas J. Sugrue, “The Structures of Urban Poverty: The Reorganization of Space and Work in Three Periods of American History,” in Michael Katz, ed., *The Underclass Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

This last point may recall Karl Marx's famous critique of the ways in which a democratic constitution formally committed to the rights of man and citizen may distort perceptions of injustice, and so blunt demands for social change. For Marx, democracy was an engine of false consciousness. But Marx suffered from his own form of false consciousness. His version of the redistributive thesis depended on a crude picture of a society increasingly polarized into two separate and highly unequal classes: a tiny ruling class, and a vast working class whose members were barely scraping by. A few from the middle classes might join the ruling class, but most others, he argued, would fall down into the proletariat as capitalism advanced.

Part of Marx's failure here was conceptual. His theory of exploitation moves illicitly between the claim that the relative immiseration of the proletariat will increase (which follows analytically from his theory of exploitation) to the claim that their absolute immiseration will also increase (which does not follow). The rate of Marxian exploitation can increase while wages remain constant or even rise. Another part of Marx's failure was empirical. In all capitalist democracies, a relatively affluent middle class, far from disappearing, has flourished, in part by including many people Marx would have classified as workers: they must sell their labor-power to others in order to survive, yet they live considerably above mere subsistence. Such people are unlikely to respond to Marx's famous battle cry that they have "nothing to lose but their chains."

Marxian political economists have sometimes claimed that this is a transient state of affairs: working-class discontent is bought off through welfare states that will eventually succumb to

fiscal crises, after which contradictions will inexorably surface, leading finally to two-class polarization.

In fact, a more complex class dynamic might be stable for reasons that are quite distinct from any of the considerations about reference groups, knowledge, beliefs, framing effects, and empathy and physical gulfs that I have already adduced. Even in a world of fully informed self-interested rational actors, it is far from clear that a middle-class voter, though relatively disadvantaged compared to the rich, would support a policy of economic redistribution.

Take the case of South Africa today. At the moment, there is not significant pressure for downward redistribution from the grassroots of the ruling African National Congress Party in South Africa – in part because of the extreme character of the economic inequality that currently prevails. An increase in taxes for even the top 20 percent of the population would entail an increase in taxes for much of the black working class – so they have self-interested reasons to oppose it. Even if they did support redistribution, it would scarcely be to those at the bottom of the economic order in a country where at least a third of the black population is unemployed.

This confirms the importance of looking seriously into the counterintuitive possibility that the more unequal the distribution, the harder it may be to mobilize lower-middle- and working-class support for redistribution downward – certainly for redistribution to those at the bottom.

In one attempt to model the implications of this type of social situation, Fredrich Breyer and Heinrich W. Ursprung have shown formally that above-average income earners are in a position to bribe the small segment of voters whose incomes fall between the

median and the mean to resist the temptation of confiscatory taxation.⁵ In another article, James M. Snyder and Gerald H. Kramer have argued that a majority of middle- and upper-income taxpayers might support a relatively progressive income tax – but only if it reduced their tax burden at the expense of the poor.⁶ The more wealth a tiny minority has, the easier it is to co-opt middle-class voters through marginal tax cuts, middle-class tax benefits such as home interest mortgage deductions, and subsidies for their children's higher education. The members of this middle group may well be more concerned about what they stand to lose from an aggressive system of progressive taxation than attracted to the uncertain benefits of allying with those below them in order to soak the rich.

As I have noted briefly in relation to the United States, and as others have detailed more systematically in connection with other countries, distributive politics have moved in different directions at different times in different democratic systems. Some of the factors adduced here apply generally, but some do not.

This can scarcely be surprising. The psychology of citizens is but one of a host of factors that influence the evolving structure of inequality in capitalist democracies. It may also be that democracies do redistribute downward sometimes, but that capitalist economies pro-

duce inequality at a faster rate than the political process can attenuate it. If so, a definitive evaluation of the redistributive thesis may prove elusive.

The past thirty years have been a period of unusually regressive redistribution in the United States. This suggests that we should look to historically contingent factors to account for it in addition to considering the ongoing obstacles to progressive redistribution that I have described. Among those mentioned here, two candidates are the advent of segmented democracy and the massive increase in the rate of incarceration for nonviolent crimes. Other dynamics I have mentioned may also have been involved, such as the paradoxical ways in which massive inequality may make downward redistribution more difficult once certain thresholds have been passed. Perhaps these developments are causally implicated in the upward redistribution we have seen in the United States in recent decades; perhaps they are consequences of it.

In any event, other factors have been involved as well. One such is doubtless *Buckley v. Valeo*. This 1976 Supreme Court decision ushered in an era of limitless spending in political campaigns, loading the dice more heavily than before in favor of those with money. Particularly in an inquiry that aspires to be sensitive to the consequences of incomplete information, cognitive limitations, and framing effects, some attention to how and why issues are put in front of people is in order.

Another likely cause of the recent dearth of demands for downward redistribution derives from the changing beliefs of the elite. In the era from the New Deal through the Great Society, many American political and economic elites embraced a Keynesian worldview. Among its implications was the belief

5 Friedrich Breyer and Heinrich W. Ursprung, "Are the Rich Too Rich to be Expropriated? : Economic Power and Feasibility of Constitutional Limits to Redistribution," *Public Choice* 94 (1/2) (1998): 135 – 156.

6 James M. Snyder and Gerald H. Kramer, "Fairness, Self-interest, and the Politics of the Progressive Income Tax," *Journal of Public Economics* 36 (1988): 197 – 230.

that capitalism could conceivably fall apart, and that spending by government to stimulate demand at the bottom of the economy was needed to stave off this possibility. That fear is much less prevalent among elites today. There is, moreover, no longer a threatening alternative system on offer from the Soviet Union, eliminating a very good ulterior motive for the haves to worry about the have-nots. The potential of these developments to reinforce empathy gulfs and downward-looking framing effects is obvious.

These observations suggest that we are unlikely to be able to formulate any simple theory about how the politics of redistribution work out in a modern-day democracy. Rather, particular episodes will call for historically grounded explanations. This is not to say that adding to our understanding of the general dynamics addressed here is a waste of time. These dynamics alert us to distributive psychologies and subjective logics that can play themselves out in democratic politics, even if they must be triggered by historically specific events and institutional dynamics.

This raises, and settles, a second issue. Although many of the considerations identified here are mutually complementary, some live in tension with one another. Most obviously, the appeal to the widespread belief in the American Dream and the possibility of upward mobility stand in stark contrast to my discussion of empathy gulfs in accounting for the failure of the redistributive thesis. Perhaps this tension can be resolved by exploring the possibility that even when the poor expect to get rich, they understand this possibility in a modest way that is compatible with the persistence of empathy gulfs.⁷ Then again, perhaps the tension cannot be resolved. There is no reason to suppose

that a single explanation can be given for why the redistributive thesis fails. It seems likely to me that the possibilities of redistributive politics are differently limited in different circumstances, in which case the search for a general explanation will be chimerical.

A final point concerns my proclivity in this essay to reach for South African examples to illuminate distributive politics in the United States. As a white South African who is now a citizen of the United States, I have long been fascinated by the ways in which Americans view political events in my former homeland. In the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa was widely depicted as the embodiment of political evil by American liberals, socialists, and even many conservatives, and it became a focus of intense protest. Campaigns for divestment and, eventually, for sanctions were successful in much of the Western world. In the United States, campus demonstrations and other public pressure forced universities and pension funds to divest their South African holdings. Corporations found doing business in South Africa to be increasingly costly, and in 1986 even a recalcitrant Reagan administration was unable to muster enough support to sustain its veto of bipartisan sanctions legislation in Congress. The anti-apartheid movement resonated across a broad swath of opinion as a locus for judgments about regimes

7 Jonathan Kozol quotes a teacher in the South Bronx: "Many of the ambitions of children ... are locked in at a level that suburban kids would scorn. It's as if the very possibilities of life have been scaled back. Boys who are doing well in school will tell me, 'I would like to be a sanitation man.' I have to guard my words and not say anything to indicate my sense of disappointment. In this neighborhood, a sanitation job is something to be longed for." Kozol, *Amazing Grace* (New York: Crown, 1995), 125.

*Ian Shapiro
on
inequality*

that should be seen as beyond the pale.

This is perplexing, because on most measures of human-rights abuses and political killings, South Africa probably did not rank among the top twenty most repressive regimes in the world during this period. It suggests that, whatever the American reaction tells us about apartheid, it is also revealing of America's own political culture. Perhaps the shrill and self-righteous character of much of the American anti-apartheid movement had a good deal to do with a reluctance to peer into the mirror and face an uncomfortably similar reality at home.

Poem by Frank Bidart

Young Marx

*That man's own life is an object for him. That animals
build nests, build dwellings,*

whereas man contemplates himself

*in the world that he has created:
That you cannot find yourself in your labor*

because it does not belong to your essential being:

*That estranged from labor the laborer is
self-estranged, alien to himself:*

That your nature is to labor:

*That feeling himself fleetingly unbound only when
eating, drinking, procreating, in his dwelling and dressing-up,*

man erects means into sole and ultimate ends:

*That where he makes what he makes, he is
not: That when he makes, he is not:*

Thus the ground of our self-estrangement.

– Marx in 1844, before the solutions that he proposed
betrayed him by entering history, before, like
Jesus, too many sins were committed in his name.

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author most recently of "Desire," a finalist for the National Book
Award, Pulitzer Prize, and the National Book Critics Circle Award.
In April of 2002 he will publish a chapbook of poems about making,
"Music Like Dirt" (Sarabande Books). He is also currently at work on
an edition of Robert Lowell's collected poems.*

Fiction by Bharati Mukherjee

A wedding

In the mind's eye, a one-way procession of flickering oil lamps sways along the muddy shanku between rice paddies and flooded ponds, and finally disappears into a distant wall of impenetrable jungle. Banks of fog rise from warmer waters, mingle with smoke from the cooking fires, and press in a dense sooty collar, a permeable gray wall that parts, then seals, igniting a winter chorus of retching coughs and loud spitting. Tuberculosis is everywhere. The air, the water, the soil are septic. Thirty-five years is a long life. Smog obscures the

moon and dims the man-made light to faintness deeper than the stars'. In such darkness perspective disappears. It is a two-dimensional world impossible to penetrate. But for the intimacy of shared discomfort, it is difficult even to estimate the space separating each traveler.

The narrow, raised trail stretches ten miles from Mishtigunj town to the jungle's edge. In a palanquin borne by four servants sit a rich man's three daughters, the youngest dressed in her bridal sari, her little hands painted with red lac dye, her hair oiled and set. Her arms are heavy with dowry gold; bangles ring tiny arms from wrist to shoulder. Childish voices chant a song, hands clap, gold bracelets tinkle. I cannot imagine the loneliness of this child. A Bengali girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrow of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her. Even constructing it from the merest scraps of family memory fills me with rage and bitterness.

The bride-to-be whispers the "Tush Tusli Brata," a hymn to the sacredness of marriage, a petition for a kind and generous husband:

*What do I hope for in worshipping you?
That my father's wisdom be endless,*

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*My mother's kindness bottomless.
May my husband be as powerful as a king of
gods.
May my future son-in-law light up the royal
court.
Bestow on me a brother who is learned and
intellectual,
A son as handsome as the best-looking courtier,
And a daughter who is beautiful.
Let my hair-part glow red with vermilion powder,
as a wife's should.
On my wrists and arms, let bangles glitter and
jangle.
Load down my clothes-rack with the finest saris,
Fill my kitchen with scoured-shiny utensils,
Reward my wifely virtue with a rice-filled granary.
These are the boons that this young virgin begs
of thee.*

In a second, larger palki borne by four men sit the family priest and the father of the bride. Younger uncles and cousins follow in a vigilant file. Two more guards, sharp-bladed daos drawn, bring up the rear. Two servants walk ahead of the eight litter-bearers, holding naphtha lamps. No one has seen such brilliant European light, too strong to stare into, purer white than the moon. It is a town light, a rich man's light, a light that knows English intervention. If bandits are crouching in the gullies they will know to strike this reckless Hindu who announces his wealth with light and by arming his servants. What treasures lie inside, how much gold and jewels, what target ripe for kidnapping? The nearest town, where such a wealthy man must have come from, lies behind him. Only the jungle lies ahead. Even the woodcutters desert it at night, relinquishing it to goondahs and marauders, snakes and tigers.

The bride is named Tara Lata, a name we almost share. The name of the father is Jai Krishna Gangooly. Tara Lata is five

years old and headed deep into the forest to marry a tree.

I have had the time, the motivation, and even the passion to undertake this history. When my friends, my child, or my sisters ask me why, I say I am exploring the making of a consciousness. Your consciousness? they tease, and I tell them, No. Yours.

On this night, flesh-and-blood emerges from the unretrievable past. I have Jai Krishna's photo, I know the name of Jai Krishna's father, but they have always been ghosts. But Tara Lata is not, nor will her father be, after the events of this special day. And so my history begins with a family wedding on the coldest, darkest night in the Bengali month of Paush – December/January – in a district of the Bengal Presidency that lies east of Calcutta – now Kolkata – and south of Dacca – now Dhaka – as the English year of 1879 is about to shed its final two digits, although the Hindu year of 1285 still has four months to run and the Muslim year of 1297 has barely begun.

In those years, Bengal was the seat of British power, Calcutta its capital, its cultural and economic center. The city is endowed with the instruments of Western knowledge, the museums, the colleges, the newspapers, and the Asiatic Society. The old Bengal Presidency included all of today's Bangladesh, the current Indian state of West Bengal, and parts of Assam, Bihar, and Orissa. A reconstituted Bengal Presidency today would have over 330 million people and be the world's third most populous country. China, India, Bengal. There are more of me than there are of you, although I am both.

The eastern regions of Bengal, even before the flight of Hindus during the

subcontinent's partition in 1947, and its reincarnation as Bangladesh in 1972, always contained a Muslim majority, though largely controlled by a sizeable and wealthy Hindu minority. The communities speak the same language – Muslims, if the truth be known, more tenaciously than Hindus. But for the outer signs of the faith – the beards and skullcaps of the Muslims, the different dietary restrictions, the caste observances, the vermilion powder on the hair-parting of married Hindu women – there is little, fundamentally, to distinguish them. The communities suffer, as Freud put it, from the narcissism of small difference.

The Hindu Bengalis were the first Indians to master the English language and to learn their master's ways, the first to flatter him by emulation, and the first to earn his distrust by unbidden demonstrations of wit and industry. Because they were a minority in their desh, their homeland, dependent on mastering or manipulating British power and Muslim psychology, the Hindus of east Bengal felt themselves superior even to the Hindus of the capital city of Calcutta. Gentlemen like Jai Krishna Gangopadhaya, a pleader in the Dacca High Court, whose surname the colonial authorities lightened to Gangooly, and who, on this particular winter night, squats with a priest in a palki that reminds him of wagons for transporting remanded prisoners, was situated to take full advantage of fast-changing and improving times. He spoke mellifluous English and one high court judge had even recommended him for a scholarship to Oxford. Had he played by the rules, he should have been a great success, a prince, and a power.

Jai Krishna's graduation portrait from the second class of India's first law school (Calcutta University, 1859) displays the expected Victorian gravitas and

none of the eager confidence of his classmates. He is a young man of twenty-one who looks forty; his thick, dark eyebrows form an unbroken bar, and his shadow of a mustache – an inversion of prevailing style that favored elaborately curled and wax-tipped mustaches – reveals a young man more eloquent with a disapproving frown than with his words.

For ten years I kept the graduation photo of Biswapriya Chatterjee, my husband – Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur – on our nightstand. Last icon before falling asleep, first worshipful image of the morning. The countries, the apartments, the houses all changed, but the portrait remained. He had that eagerness, and a confident smile that promised substantial earnings. It lured my father into marriage negotiations, and it earned my not unenthusiastic acceptance of him as husband. A very predictable, very successful marriage negotiation.

Had Jai Krishna been a native Calcuttan, or had he come from Dacca, Bengal's second city, he might never have suffered the anxiety of the small-town provincial elevated into urbanity. In my mother-language we call the powerful middle class "bhadrā lok," the gentlefolk, the "civilized" fold, for whom the English fashioned the pejorative term "babu," with its hint of fawning insincerity and slavishly acquired Western attitudes. The rest of the population are "chhoto lok," literally, the little people. Jai Krishna Gangooly lacked the reflexive self-confidence of the bhadrā lok. In his heart, he was a provincial from Mish-tigunj, third son of a village doctor whose practice included the indigent and Muslims. He felt he'd been lifted from his provincial origins because of his father's contacts in the Calcutta Medical College. He was not comfortable in the lawyer's black robes and powdered wig.

And so, the story of the three great-

granddaughters of Jai Krishna Gangooly starts on the day of a wedding, a few hours before the palki ride where fates have already been decided, in the decorated ancestral house of the Gangoolys on the river in Mishtigunj town. The decorations signify a biye-bari, a wedding house. Beggars have already camped in the alleys adjacent to the canopy under which giant copper vats of milk, stirred by professional cooks, have been boiling and thickening for sweetmeats, and where other vats, woks, and cauldrons receive the chunks of giant hilsa fish netted fresh from the river and hold the rice pilao, lamb curry, spiced lentils, and deep-fried and sauce-steeped vegetables, a feast for a thousand invited guests and the small city of self-invited men, women, and children camped outside the gates.

The astrologers have spoken; the horoscopes have been compared. The match between Jai Krishna's youngest daughter and a thirteen-year-old youth, another Kulin Brahmin from an upright and pious family from a nearby village, has been blessed. The prewedding religious rites have been meticulously performed, and the prewedding stree-achar, married women's rituals, boisterously observed. To protect the husband-to-be from poisonous snakebite, married women relatives and Brahmin women neighbors have propitiated Goddess Manasha with prescribed offerings. All of this has been undertaken at a moment in the evolution of Jai Krishna from student of Darwin and Bentham and Comte and practitioner of icy logic to reader of the Upanishads and believer in Vedic wisdom. He had become a seeker of truth, not a synthesizer of cultures. He found himself starting arguments with pleaders and barristers, those who actually favored morning toast with marmalade, English suits, and leather shoes.

Now nearing forty, he was in full flight from his younger self, joining a debate that was to split bhadra lok society between progressives and traditionalists for over a century.

A Dacca barrister, Keshub Mitter, teased him for behaving more like a once-rich Muslim nawab wedded to a fanciful past and visions of lost glory than an educated, middle-class Hindu lawyer. Everyone knew that the Indian past was a rubbish heap of shameful superstitions. Keshub Mitter's insult would have been unforgivable if it hadn't been delivered deftly, with a smile and a Bengali lawyer's wit and charm. My dear Gangooly, English is but a stepping-stone to the deeper refinement of German and French. Where does our Bangla language lead you? A big frog in a small, stagnant pond. Let us leave the sweet euphony of Bangla to our poets, and the salvation-enhancement of Sanskrit to our priests. Packet boats delivered Berlin and Paris papers to the Dacca High Court, along with the venerated *Times*.

The cases Jai Krishna pleaded in court often cast him as the apostle of enlightenment and upholder of law against outmoded custom, or the adjudicator of outrages undefined and unimaginable under British law. The majesty of law was in conflict with Jai Krishna's search for an uncorrupted, un-British, un-Muslim, fully Hindu consciousness. He removed his wife and children from cosmopolitan Dacca and installed them in Mishtigunj. He sought a purer life for himself, English pleader by day, Sanskrit scholar by night. He regretted the lack of a rigorous Brahminical upbringing, the years spent in Calcutta learning the superior ways of arrogant Englishmen and English laws, ingesting English contempt for his background and ridicule for babus like him. He had grown up in a

secularized home with frequent Muslim visitors and the occasional wayward Englishman. In consideration of non-Hindu guests, his father had made certain that his mother's brass deities and stone lingams stayed confined in the closed-off worship-room.

On the morning of Tara Lata's wedding, female relatives waited along the riverbank for the arrival of the groom and his all-male wedding party. The groom was Satindranath Lahiri, fifth son of Surendranath Lahiri, of the landowning Lahiri family; in his own right, a healthy youth, whose astrological signs pointed to continued wealth and many sons. Back in Dacca, Jai Krishna had defended the ancient Hindu practices, the caste consciousness, the star charts, the observance of auspicious days, the giving of dowry, the intact integrity of his community's rituals. His colleague, Keshub Mitter, to be known two decades later as Sir Keshub, and his physician, Dr. Ashim Lal Roy, both prominent members of the most progressive, most Westernized segment of Bengali society, the Brahmo Sarnaj, had attempted to dissuade him. The two men had cited example after example of astrologically arranged marriages, full of astral promise, turning disastrous. The only worthwhile dowry, they'd proclaimed, is an educated bride. Child-marriage is barbarous. How could horoscopes influence lives, especially obscure lives, in dusty villages like Mishtigunj? Jai Krishna knew these men to be eaters of beef and drinkers of gin.

"I consider myself a student of modern science," Jai Krishna had explained, "and because I am a student of modern science, I cannot reject any theory until I test it." And so far, the tests had all turned out positive. His two older daughters, seven and nine, were successfully mar-

ried and would soon be moving to their husbands' houses and living as wives, then as mothers. They were placid and obedient daughters who would make loving and obedient wives. Tara Lata, his favorite, would be no exception.

In the wintry bright hour just before twilight blackens Mishtigunj, the decorated bajra from the Lahiri family finally sailed into view. The bride's female relatives stood at the stone bathing-steps leading from the steep bank down to the river as servants prepared to help the groom's party of two hundred disembark. Women began the oo-loo ululation, the almost instrumental, pitched-voice welcome. Two of Jai Krishna's younger brothers supervised the unrolling of mats on the swampy path that connected the private dock and Jai Krishna's two-storied brick house.

The bajra anchored, but none on board rushed to the deck railings to be ceremoniously greeted by the welcoming party of the bride's relatives. The bridegroom's father and uncles had a servant deliver a cruel message in an insulting tone to the bride's father. They would not disembark on Jai Krishna's property for Jai Krishna and his entire clan were carriers of a curse, and that curse, thanks to Jai Krishna's home-destroying, misfortune-showering daughter, had been visited on their sinless son instead of on Jai Krishna's flesh-and-blood. They demanded that Jai Krishna meet them in the sheltered cabin of the bajra.

Jai Krishna ordered the wedding musicians to stop their shenai playing and dhol beating. His women relatives, shocked at the tone in which the servant repeated his master's message to Jai Krishna babu, the renowned Dacca lawyer, had given up their conch shell blowing and their ululating on their own. For several minutes, Jai Krishna

stood still on the bathing-steps, trying to conceal at first his bewilderment, then his fury, that the man who was to have full patriarchal authority over his beloved daughter had called her names. Then he heard a bullying voice from inside the cabin yell instructions to the boatmen to pull up anchor.

"They're bargaining for more dowry," muttered one of Jai Krishna's brothers.

"No beggar is as greedy as that Lahiri bastard!" spat another brother.

Two boatmen played at reeling in ropes and readying the bajra to sail back.

"Wait!" Jai Krishna shouted. "Whatever the problem, I'm sure we can work it out!" He raced down the gangplank and boarded the bajra.

Members of the bridegroom's party, strangers to Jai Krishna, ringed him on deck. Their faces were twisted in hate or grief.

"Tell me, I beg of you," Jai Krishna pleaded, "please tell me what pain we have inadvertently inflicted." He stood, hands pressed together in a gesture of humility, among the hostile men entitled to his hospitality. "What discourtesy have we committed? How may I right whatever is currently wrong?"

Surendranath Lahiri stepped out of the cabin, as if on cue. Hammocked in his outstretched arms lay the limp body of a lifeless boy.

"What..." Startled, Jai Krishna took a step back. The bridegroom's relatives closed in on him, cutting him off from his own people, who remained, mute, aghast, on the riverbank.

"Your happiness-wrecking daughter is responsible." Surendranath affected the dazed calm of a man beyond grief and outrage. "May she die as horrible a death."

"Better a barren womb than a womb that produces such a luckless female!" someone shouted behind Jai Krishna.

Others added their hostile counsel. "Hang a rope around her neck!" "May she have the good sense to drown herself!"

"How did..." Jai Krishna couldn't finish his question. He could guess the answer from the pain-stiffened expression on the corpse's young face.

"Snakebite," a man in the groom's party screamed at him.

"When we were transferring from carriage to bajra," another, kinder, man explained.

"You had no light? No lamps and torches?" Jai Krishna demanded, the implications of that fatal snakebite for his daughter suddenly foremost in his mind. He imagined little Tara Lata, wrapped in a bridal sari of scarlet silk embroidered with heavy gold thread, weighted down with gold jewelry, sitting on display on a divan laden with dowry gifts in a room in the women's quarters. She'd be nervous, dreading the imminent inspection of the groom's party. The groom's folks were bound by custom to be even more critical of her appearance and her dowry than were the neighborhood women. They'd make loud remarks about her being too skinny, too dark, too fidgety. They'd complain about the dowry furniture, speculating viciously that it was not built of best-quality Burma teak. They'd scoff at the weight, quality, and size of the silver dowry utensils that filled a deep, wooden chest. The poor child had no idea that already she had been transformed from envied bride about to be married to a suitable husband into the second-worst thing in her society. She was now not quite a widow, which for a Bengali Hindu woman would be the most cursed state, but a woman who brings her family misfortune and death. She was a person to be avoided. In a community intolerant of unmarried women, his

Tara Lata had become an unmarriageable woman.

Around him elegantly dressed men were screaming. "There must have been augurs and signs!" "You didn't disclose what you must have known, Jai Krishna babu!" "You fancy city men, you have no respect for Hindu traditions. Some rite must have been omitted!"

He heard a reference to Manasha, the goddess who causes or prevents snakebites. "The goddess must not have been sufficiently appeased," someone accused. "You Westernized types think you are stronger than our Hindu deities!" Admonition swelled into vengeful judgment.

Jai Krishna assured them all rites had been faithfully observed.

"Why should we believe you when it is well known that all lawyers prevaricate?"

"You have my word," Jai Krishna said.

An elderly man in the groom's party came forward, pulling his embroidered shawl of fine wool tightly around his shoulders. "When the stree-achar rites were performed, some woman must have been unclean. You can deceive judges, but you cannot fool goddesses."

"The goddess exacts payment in mysterious ways." Others took this up as a refrain.

Jai Krishna Gangooly, the fiery-tongued pleader, had not thought of Manasha or any village goddess for that matter, not even Shitala, the goddess associated with smallpox, in decades. He'd defended Hindu tradition, with all its inflexibility and excess, against the scorn of progressive colleagues like Keshub Mitter as much out of his lawyerly love of debate as conviction or religious faith. Now he wondered about the lessons embedded in Hindu myths and folktales. The snake had not been charged to kill the thirteen-year-old

bridegroom by a goddess enraged at having been defiled by a menstruating devotee. The snakebite had occurred to remind Jai Krishna and Surendranath how precarious social order and fatherly self-confidence are. He had thought himself smugly in command of the wedding night's arrangements.

Finally Surendranath Lahiti, still holding the body of his son in his arms, spoke. "You will arrange posthaste for the dowry cash and the dowry gifts to be brought on board, Jai Krishna babu. What you do with your wretched girl, the killer of my son, I make your business."

And that was the moment when Jai Krishna Gangooly felt his wounded consciousness began to heal. The stars had been repositioned. The pleader knew Surendranath's claim to the dowry was untenable, nakedly greedy. But the reborn Hindu knew the working of fate was more complicated than English law and cared nothing about life and death, even of innocent children. His daughter's true fate, the fate behind the horoscope, had now been revealed: a lifetime's virginity, a life without a husband to worship as god's proxy on earth, and thus, the despairing life of a woman doomed to be reincarnated.

"The marriage did not take place," he said, his voice lawyerly, loud, authoritative. "Therefore, there is no question of dowry giving."

"His son is dead! The boy has been murdered!"

Jai Krishna turned his back on the avaricious man who would have been Tara Lata's father-in-law if fate hadn't intervened. "I will see my daughter married to a crocodile, *to a tree*, before you get a single pice! I give dowry only to one who does not demand it. There will be a wedding tonight, the auspicious hour will be honored."

*Fiction by
Bharati
Mukherjee*

And with that, Jai Krishna Gangooly, who would soon reclaim the ancestral name of Gangopadhaya and embark on a second lifetime of wondrous adventure, walked down the gangway to the dock. The women on the riverbank, uncertain of what had happened on board the bajra, began their ululation once more. The shenai players led the procession back to the wedding house. When the procession reached the walled compound, Jai Krishna himself threw open the front gates and welcomed in the assembled beggars and gawkers. At nightfall, the naphtha lamps were lit, the bride and her sisters were gathered up and placed inside a palanquin, and the marriage party set out, on foot and in palanquins and sedan chairs, to find a tree suitable as a bridegroom.

Howard Gardner

*on the
three faces
of
intelligence*

Once, at a Renaissance Weekend, I found myself on a panel with a U.S. senator, a congressman, and a policy wonk. As a cognitive psychologist with an interest in education, I was nonplussed to be surrounded by this distinguished but (to me) exotic company. About halfway through the hour, the mystery was abruptly solved. One of the panelists used the word “intelligence” and another immediately responded by citing the failures of the CIA during the last quarter-century. As was later confirmed, the panels had been constituted by noting key

Howard Gardner, the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor in Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric instruments. His most recent books are “The Disciplined Mind” (2000); “Intelligence Reframed” (2000); and (with Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and William Damon) “Good Work” (2001). Gardner has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 1995.

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words in our biographies, and both I and the other panelists had described ourselves as experts on “intelligence.”

While individuals from many backgrounds describe themselves as interested in intelligence, for those of us trained in psychology, “intelligence” has a quite specific history and connotation. For nearly a century, the word has largely been owned by psychometricians. These individuals devise, administer, and score short-answer tests of intelligence that require subjects to perform tasks associated with school: define words, select antonyms, remember passages, supply general information, manipulate geometric shapes, and the like. Those who consistently do well on measures of intelligence (often called IQ tests) are considered smart – and indeed, so long as they remain in school, they are likely to have that characterization confirmed.

A surrounding web of assertions often accompanies this seemingly objective information. As stated sharply in the best-selling book *The Bell Curve*, individuals are thought to be born with a certain intellectual potential; it is difficult to change that potential; and psychometricians can tell us from an early age how smart we are. Authors Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray go on to trace various social ills to those with low intelligence levels and to hint that IQ scores may be related to race. The latter claims led to the sales and the furor surrounding the book.

During the last two decades, the psychometric hegemony over intelligence has been increasingly challenged. Computer specialists have begun to develop theories and applications of artificial intelligence; some of their systems are general problem-solvers, while others have well-delineated expertise. Neuroscientists and geneticists have focused

on the evolutionary origins and the neural representations of various mental faculties. And within the field of psychology, alternative perspectives have been introduced as well: Daniel Goleman has written extensively and persuasively about emotional intelligence; Robert Sternberg has added practical and creative intelligence to the more familiar notion of analytic intelligence. And over the past twenty years I have developed a pluralistic “theory of multiple intelligences.”

According to my theory, it is misleading to think of humans as possessing but a single intellectual capacity, which almost always amounts to an amalgam of linguistic and logical-mathematical skills. Rather, examined from an evolutionary perspective, it makes more sense to conceptualize human beings as having several relatively autonomous mental faculties, including musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily kinesthetic intelligence, and naturalist intelligence. I also propose two forms of personal intelligence, interpersonal and intrapersonal: these latter are close to what Goleman means by emotional intelligence.

When I was developing this pluralistic theory, I still thought that intelligence was a singular concept. It has taken me until now to realize the importance of distinguishing between three distinct meanings of intelligence, which are captured in the following sentences:

- 1 In view of the close resemblance between chimpanzee and human genetic material, it has become challenging to delineate the defining characteristics of human *intelligence*.
- 2 On most dimensions of interest, Susan simply displays more *intelligence* than John.
- 3 What distinguishes Alfred Brendel’s piano playing is not his technique per se,

but the sheer *intelligence* of his interpretations.

When invoking the first meaning of intelligence, we attempt a *general characterization of human (or nonhuman) capacities*. We might, for example, speak of human intelligence as the capacity to solve complex problems, or to anticipate the future, or to analyze patterns, or to synthesize disparate pieces of information. A major disciplinary tradition, begun with Charles Darwin’s studies of the “descent of man” and continuing with Jean Piaget’s investigation of children’s minds, seeks to capture what is unique and generic about intelligence.

The second meaning of intelligence is the one that has been most widely employed by psychologists. Those in the psychometric tradition – whether unitarians or pluralists – assume that intelligence is a trait, like height or extroversion. Individuals can be usefully compared with one another on the extent to which they exhibit this trait or ensemble of traits. I term this tack *the examination of individual differences on a trait of interest*. Much of my own work on multiple intelligences has entailed descriptions of the differing profiles of intelligence across individuals.

The third meaning of intelligence has been the least explored, though it may be the most intriguing. As suggested in the Brendel example, the focus here falls on *the manner in which a task is executed*. We often speak in this way: we talk about whether a decision was wise or ill-advised, whether the manner in which the decision was reached was clever or foolish, whether a leadership transition was handled intelligently or ineptly, whether a new concept was introduced intelligently into a lecture, and so forth.

What distinguishes this third connotation of intelligence? We cannot characterize an act or decision as intelligent

without some sense of the goal or purpose at issue, the choices involved in a genre, and the particular value system of the participants. Alfred Brendel's playing may not be technically more accurate on some objective index. Rather, in view of his own goals, the choices available in piano performance, and the values of the listener, one can validly speak of his interpretations as intelligent or wanting in intelligence. Moreover, I could dislike Brendel's interpretations and still concur that they were intelligent, if you could convince me of what he was trying to achieve and why it made sense in his terms. Or I could convince you that Glenn Gould's performance of the same piece was intelligent, whether or not you personally liked it. There do not exist example-independent criteria for what constitutes a wise or foolish decision, planning process, leadership transition, introduction of a topic in a class, and so on. Yet armed with information about goals, genres, and values, we can make assessments about whether these tasks have been performed intelligently – even as we can agree to disagree about the conclusions reached.

How does the third sense of intelligence relate to multiple intelligences? I speculate that different tasks call on different intelligences or combinations of intelligences. To perform music intelligently involves a different set of intelligences than preparing a meal, planning a course, or resolving a quarrel.

So, one might ask, what is achieved by this exercise in the “semantics of intelligence”? Let me suggest three possible dividends. The first is indeed lexical. It is useful and important to distinguish the three distinct definitions of intelligence; otherwise we risk speaking past one another, with a Piagetian needlessly clashing with a psychometrician, or a

critic believing that she is engaged in the same kind of endeavor as a school psychologist.

The second dividend concerns research. There is little question that scholars and researchers will continue to examine the nature of intelligence. We can expect to read about new tests of intelligence, new forms of artificially intelligent machinery, and even about genes for intelligence. Some researchers will be quite clear about what they mean in using the term “intelligence,” but we can expect there to be considerable confusion as well, unless scholars take care to indicate which aspect of intelligence they are studying and how (or whether) it relates to the other ones.

Finally, and most important for me, are implications for education. When an educator speaks about intelligence in the first sense, she is referring to a capacity that can be assumed to exist in all human beings. Perhaps it is manifest more quickly or dramatically in one person than in another, but ultimately we are dealing with part of the human birthright and so no special measures are needed. In contrast, intelligence in the “individual difference” sense involves judgment about the potentials of individuals and how each might be taught in the most effective manner. If (following Herrnstein and Murray) one assumes that Sally has little intellectual potential in general, or (following the theory of multiple intelligences) little potential for the development of spatial intelligence, one is faced with clear-cut educational choices. These can range from giving up to working much harder to searching for alternative ways to deliver instruction, be the topic geometry, ancient history, or classical music.

And what of doing something intelligently or stupidly? The greatest educational progress could be achieved here.

Note by
Frank
Wilczek

All too often, we ignore goals, genres, or values, or we assume that they are so apparent that we do not bother to highlight them. Yet judgments about whether an exercise – a paper, a project, an essay response on an examination – has been done intelligently or stupidly are often difficult for students to fathom. And since these evaluations are not well understood, few if any lessons can be drawn from them. Laying out the criteria by which judgments of quality are made may not suffice in itself to improve quality, but in the absence of such clarification, we have little reason to expect our students to go about their work intelligently.

Frank Wilczek

*on the
world's
numerical
recipe*

Twentieth-century physics began around 600 B.C. when Pythagoras of Samos proclaimed an awesome vision.

By studying the notes sounded by plucked strings, Pythagoras discovered that the human perception of harmony is connected to numerical ratios. He examined strings made of the same material, having the same thickness, and under the same tension, but of different lengths. Under these conditions, he found that the notes sound harmonious precisely when the ratio of the lengths of string can be expressed in small whole numbers. For example, the length ratio

Frank Wilczek, Herman Feshbach Professor of Physics at MIT, is known, among other things, for the discovery of asymptotic freedom, the development of quantum chromodynamics, the invention of axions, and the discovery and exploitation of new forms of quantum statistics (anyons). When only twenty-one years old and a graduate student at Princeton University, he and David Gross defined the properties of gluons, which hold atomic nuclei together. He has been a Fellow of the American Academy since 1993.

2:1 sounds a musical octave, 3:2 a musical fifth, and 4:3 a musical fourth.

The vision inspired by this discovery is summed up in the maxim “All Things are Number.” This became the credo of the Pythagorean Brotherhood, a mixed-sex society that combined elements of an archaic religious cult and a modern scientific academy.

The Brotherhood was responsible for many fine discoveries, all of which it attributed to Pythagoras. Perhaps the most celebrated and profound is the Pythagorean Theorem. This theorem remains a staple of introductory geometry courses. It is also the point of departure for the Riemann-Einstein theories of curved space and gravity.

Unfortunately, this very theorem undermined the Brotherhood's credo. Using the Pythagorean Theorem, it is not hard to prove that the ratio of the hypotenuse of an isosceles right triangle to either of its two shorter sides cannot be expressed in whole numbers. A member of the Brotherhood who revealed this dreadful secret drowned shortly afterwards, in suspicious circumstances. Today, when we say $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational, our language still reflects these ancient anxieties.

Still, the Pythagorean vision, broadly understood – and stripped of cultic, if not entirely of mystical, trappings – remained for centuries a touchstone for pioneers of mathematical science. Those working within this tradition did not insist on whole numbers, but continued to postulate that the deep structure of the physical world could be captured in purely conceptual constructions. Considerations of symmetry and abstract geometry were allowed to supplement simple numerics.

In the work of the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1570–1630), this program reached a remarkable apotheosis –

only to unravel completely.

Students today still learn about Kepler's three laws of planetary motion. But before formulating these celebrated laws, this great speculative thinker had announced another law – we can call it Kepler's zeroth law – of which we hear much less, for the very good reason that it is entirely wrong. Yet it was his discovery of the zeroth law that fired Kepler's enthusiasm for planetary astronomy, in particular for the Copernican system, and launched his extraordinary career. Kepler's zeroth law concerns the relative size of the orbits of different planets. To formulate it, we must imagine that the planets are carried about on concentric spheres around the Sun. His law states that the successive planetary spheres are of such proportions that they can be inscribed within and circumscribed about the five Platonic solids. These five remarkable solids – tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, dodecahedron, icosahedron – have faces that are congruent equilateral polygons. The Pythagoreans studied them, Plato employed them in the speculative cosmology of the *Timaeus*, and Euclid climaxed his *Elements* with the first known proof that only five such regular polyhedra exist.

Kepler was enraptured by his discovery. He imagined that the spheres emitted music as they rotated, and he even speculated on the tunes. (This is the source of the phrase “music of the spheres.”) It was a beautiful realization of the Pythagorean ideal. Purely conceptual, yet sensually appealing, the zeroth law seemed a production worthy of a mathematically sophisticated Creator.

To his great credit as an honest man and – though the concept is anachronistic – as a scientist, Kepler did not wallow in mystic rapture, but actively strove to see whether his law accurately matched reality. He discovered that it does not. In

wrestling with the precise observations of Tycho Brahe, Kepler was forced to give up circular in favor of elliptical orbits. He couldn't salvage the ideas that first inspired him.

After this, the Pythagorean vision went into a long, deep eclipse. In Newton's classical synthesis of motion and gravitation, there is no sense in which structure is governed by numerical or conceptual constructs. All is dynamics. Newton's laws inform us, given the positions, velocities, and masses of a system of gravitating bodies at one time, how they will move in the future. They do not fix a unique size or structure for the solar system. Indeed, recent discoveries of planetary systems around distant stars have revealed quite different patterns. The great developments of nineteenth-century physics, epitomized in Maxwell's equations of electrodynamics, brought many new phenomena within the scope of physics, but they did not alter this situation essentially. There is nothing in the equations of classical physics that can fix a definite scale of size, whether for planetary systems, atoms, or anything else. The world-system of classical physics is divided between initial conditions that can be assigned arbitrarily, and dynamical equations. In those equations, neither whole numbers nor any other purely conceptual elements play a distinguished role.

Quantum mechanics changed everything.

Emblematic of the new physics, and decisive historically, was Niels Bohr's atomic model of 1913. Though it applies in a vastly different domain, Bohr's model of the hydrogen atom bears an uncanny resemblance to Kepler's system of planetary spheres. The binding force is electrical rather than gravitational, the players are electrons orbiting around protons rather than planets orbiting the

Sun, and the size is a factor 10^{-22} smaller; but the leitmotif of Bohr's model is unmistakably "Things are Number."

Through Bohr's model, Kepler's idea that the orbits that occur in nature are precisely those that embody a conceptual ideal emerged from its embers, reborn like a phoenix, after three hundred years' quiescence. If anything, Bohr's model conforms more closely to the Pythagorean ideal than Kepler's, since its preferred orbits are defined by whole numbers rather than geometric constructions. Einstein responded with great empathy and enthusiasm, referring to Bohr's work as "the highest form of musicality in the sphere of thought."

Later work by Heisenberg and Schrödinger, which defined modern quantum mechanics, superseded Bohr's model. This account of subatomic matter is less tangible than Bohr's, but ultimately much richer. In the Heisenberg-Schrödinger theory, electrons are no longer particles moving in space, elements of reality that at a given time are "just there and not anywhere else." Rather, they define oscillatory, space-filling wave patterns always "here, there, and everywhere." Electron waves are attracted to a positively charged nucleus and can form localized standing wave patterns around it. The mathematics describing the vibratory patterns that define the states of atoms in quantum mechanics is identical to that which describes the resonance of musical instruments. The stable states of atoms correspond to pure tones. I think it's fair to say that the musicality Einstein praised in Bohr's model is, if anything, heightened in its progeny (though Einstein himself, notoriously, withheld his approval from the new quantum mechanics).

The big difference between nature's instruments and those of human con-

struction is that her designs depend not on craftsmanship refined by experience, but rather on the ruthlessly precise application of simple rules. Now if you browse through a textbook on atomic quantum mechanics, or look at atomic vibration patterns using modern visualization tools, “simple” might not be the word that leaps to mind. But it has a precise, objective meaning in this context. A theory is simpler the fewer nonconceptual elements, which must be taken from observation, enter into its construction. In this sense, Kepler’s zeroth law provided a simpler (as it turns out, too simple) theory of the solar system than Newton’s, because in Newton’s theory the relative sizes of planetary orbits must be taken from observation, whereas in Kepler’s they are determined conceptually.

From this perspective, modern atomic theory is extraordinarily simple. The Schrödinger equation, which governs electrons in atoms, contains just two nonconceptual quantities. These are the mass of the electron and the so-called fine-structure constant, denoted α , that specifies the overall strength of the electromagnetic interaction. By solving this one equation, finding the vibrations it supports, we make a concept-world that reproduces a tremendous wealth of real-world data, notably the accurately measured spectral lines of atoms that encode their inner structure. The marvelous theory of electrons and their interactions with light is called quantum electrodynamics, or QED.

In the initial modeling of atoms, the focus was on their accessible, outlying parts, the electron clouds. The nuclei of atoms, which contain most of their mass and all of their positive charge, were treated as so many tiny (but very heavy!) black boxes, buried in the core. There was no theory for the values of nuclear

masses or their other properties; these were simply taken from experiment. That pragmatic approach was extremely fruitful and to this day provides the working basis for practical applications of physics in chemistry, materials science, and biology. But it failed to provide a theory that was in our sense simple, and so it left the ultimate ambitions of a Pythagorean physics unfulfilled.

Starting in the early 1930s, with electrons under control, the frontier of fundamental physics moved inward, to the nuclei. This is not the occasion to recount the complex history of the heroic constructions and ingenious deductions that at last, after fifty years of strenuous international effort, fully exposed the secrets of this inaccessible domain. Fortunately, the answer is easier to describe, and it advances and consummates our theme.

The theory that governs atomic nuclei is quantum chromodynamics, or QCD. As its name hints, QCD is firmly based on quantum mechanics. Its mathematical basis is a direct generalization of QED, incorporating a more intricate structure supporting enhanced symmetry. Metaphorically, QCD stands to QED as an icosahedron stands to a triangle. The basic players in QCD are quarks and gluons. For constructing an accurate model of ordinary matter just two kinds of quarks, called up and down or simply u and d , need to be considered. (There are four other kinds, at least, but they are highly unstable and not important for ordinary matter.) Protons, neutrons, π mesons, and a vast zoo of very short-lived particles called resonances are constructed from these building blocks. The particles and resonances observed in the real world match the resonant wave patterns of quarks and gluons in the concept-world of QCD, much as states of atoms match the resonant wave pat-

terns of electrons. You can predict their masses and properties directly by solving the equations.

A peculiar feature of QCD, and a major reason why it was hard to discover, is that the quarks and gluons are never found in isolation, but always in complex associations. QCD actually predicts this “confinement” property, but that’s not easy to prove.

Considering how much it accounts for, QCD is an amazingly simple theory, in our objective sense. Its equations contain just three nonconceptual ingredients: the masses of the u and d quarks and the strong coupling constant α_s , analogous to the fine structure constant of QED, which specifies how powerfully quarks couple to gluons. The gluons are automatically massless.

Actually even three is an overestimate. The quark-gluon coupling varies with distance, so we can trade it in for a unit of distance. In other words, mutant QCDs with different values of α_s generate concept-worlds that behave identically, but use different-sized metersticks. Also, the masses of the u and d quarks turn out not to be very important, quantitatively. Most of the mass of strongly interacting particles is due to the pure energy of the moving quarks and gluons they contain, according to the converse of Einstein’s equation, $m = E/c^2$. The masses of the u and d quarks are much smaller than the masses of the protons and other particles that contain them.

Putting all this together, we arrive at a most remarkable conclusion. To the extent that we are willing to use the proton itself as a meterstick, and ignore the small corrections due to the u and d quark masses, QCD becomes a theory with *no nonconceptual elements whatsoever*.

Let me summarize. Starting with precisely four numerical ingredients, which must be taken from experiment, QED

and QCD cook up a concept-world of mathematical objects whose behavior matches, with remarkable accuracy, the behavior of real-world matter. These objects are vibratory wave patterns. Stable elements of reality – protons, atomic nuclei, atoms – correspond, not just metaphorically but with mathematical precision, to pure tones. Kepler would be pleased.

This tale continues in several directions. Given two more ingredients, Newton’s constant G_N and Fermi’s constant G_F , which parametrize the strength of gravity and of the weak interaction, respectively, we can expand our concept-world beyond ordinary matter to describe virtually all of astrophysics. There is a brilliant series of ideas involving unified field theories and supersymmetry that might allow us to get by with just five ingredients. (Once you’re down to so few, each further reduction marks an epoch.) These ideas will be tested decisively in coming years, especially as the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN, near Geneva, swings into operation around 2007.

On the other hand, if we attempt to do justice to the properties of many exotic, short-lived particles discovered at high-energy accelerators, things get much more complicated and unsatisfactory. We have to add pinches of many new ingredients to our recipe, until it may seem that rather than deriving a wealth of insight from a small investment of facts, we are doing just the opposite. That’s the state of our knowledge of fundamental physics today – simultaneously triumphant, exciting, and a mess.

The last word I leave to Einstein:

I would like to state a theorem which at present can not be based upon anything more than upon a faith in the simplicity, i.e., intelligibility, of nature: there are no

arbitrary constants . . . that is to say, nature is so constituted that it is possible logically to lay down such strongly determined laws that within these laws only rationally completely determined constants occur (not constants, therefore, whose numerical value could be changed without destroying the theory).

David G. Nathan

*on clinical
research
&
the future
of
medicine*

Biomedical inquiry as it is practiced in America today is an amalgam of three different kinds of research: basic research, population research, and clinical research. While all three are of critical importance, it is clinical research that underpins our national medical efforts. Only clinical researchers are able to apply the knowledge of the cell and organ systems developed by basic researchers, and the population data gathered by epidemiologists and biostatisticians, to patients, making this knowledge and data relevant to medical practice by “translating” it into novel

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diagnostics and therapeutics.

Unlike basic researchers, who work with model systems in laboratories, clinical researchers work with patients in hospitals. It is clinical researchers, many of whom are also laboratory workers, who conduct research on human subjects, applying new technologies to the analysis of the mechanisms of human disease and evaluating the effectiveness of new therapies. It is clinical researchers, working with population scientists, who conduct trials of new drugs and epidemiological studies. They also evaluate the quality of health services and the outcomes of medical procedures.

Without basic research, of course, there would be no new medical advances to test in practice. But without clinical research, all the knowledge acquired through basic research would remain sequestered in books and journals.

A case in point is Gleevec, the new trade name for STI571, a drug produced by Novartis. It is an inhibitor of certain signal transduction molecules called tyrosine kinases. In creating Gleevec, the chemists at Novartis depended not only on the basic research produced in universities, but also on the clinical research done in a hospital. Basic scientists isolated the new chemical STI571. But it was a clinical investigator who first applied the new chemical in laboratory studies of the white cells in chronic myelogenous leukemia. He found that the leukemic cells stopped proliferating in vitro when the drug was present. He then launched a clinical trial that was remarkably successful. In twenty-five patients, the disease disappeared with almost no toxicity. Gleevec is the first "smart" chemotherapeutic agent: it works like an antibiotic and blocks a specific pathway that is not required by normal cells. But without the efforts of a clinical researcher, the therapeutic use of the new chemical

might have gone undetected.

Gleevec is not an isolated success story, and I am convinced that we can do even better in the future. But in order to quicken the pace of progress, we need to address some of the persistent problems faced by clinical researchers.

One problem is disciplinary: there has been a towering increase in the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in recent years. The number of Ph.D.'s applying for NIH research grants has risen *pari passu*, but the number of M.D. applicants has increased very slowly. These changes jeopardize the traditional composition of clinical research teams. At the moment the principal investigators holding clinical research grants from the NIH are evenly divided between those holding M.D. and Ph.D. degrees. Though new advances will require effective clinical research in all areas, particularly great strides must be made in the *translational* component of clinical research. By *translational*, I mean research that uses the findings of basic science and applies that new knowledge in the clinic – in patients with the very diseases that are being studied in the laboratory. Most translational investigators should hold the M.D. degree, because safe application of new therapeutic interventions requires the oversight of a trained physician.

The prospect of a shortage of clinical researchers with M.D.'s could be explained by several factors, including the effects of the managed care revolution in medicine. Managed care has minimized reimbursement of academic hospitals and clinical departments. The dwindling resources of academic health centers have deprived physician-investigators of the cushion formerly offered by their institutions to protect them from the vicissitudes of NIH funding, relieve them of administrative burdens, and provide

them with data managers, research nurses, information scientists, and core laboratories. Furthermore, aspiring physician-investigators must invest in at least twelve years of training at low salaries and with staggering tuition debts.

The era of molecular medicine has brought vast new scientific power to the medical researcher. However, the accrual of that power requires far more scientific experience and methodological skills than was the case two or more decades ago. Acquiring the necessary laboratory skills demands nearly the full time of the young physician-faculty member; at the same time, the complexities of modern clinical medicine have grown apace. A translational investigator must be highly skilled in both fields, an increasingly difficult task. Forced to choose, and often feeling undervalued, underpaid, debt-ridden, and priced out of the housing market, a growing number of promising young translational clinical researchers are dropping out in order to pursue more secure and, they hope, more lucrative medical practices that fully exploit the clinical skills they have developed over a very long period of training.

Given the stress on young clinical investigators and facing an era in which academic health centers struggle to find the financial wherewithal to help them, we need to rethink our research support policies. We simply cannot fund every worthy individual. Instead we should rethink our academic planning and evaluation process. We need to establish teams of basic, population, and clinical researchers, urge collaborations among the disciplines, define the contributions of a team, and then dissect the individual contributions of the team members. This would encourage cost savings and productive collaborations directed

toward the solution of important medical problems. Every team needs a leader, and perhaps the leaders should receive most of the recognition, but each of the contributing skills must be rewarded, because the project cannot succeed unless all of the participants, each of whom brings a unique skill to the project, are firmly motivated.

No matter what system of funding and academic evaluation we may adopt, we clinical researchers and academic health centers must constantly remind ourselves that the final arbiter of our value is the public. Throughout the postwar period, we have been blessed with remarkably strong public and political support in the United States. But there are signs that this support may be weakening – and that clinical researchers are partially responsible for the change.

Clinical research can inspire popular fear, especially if media reports suggest a callous disregard for individual patients. We encourage criticism if we fail to conduct clinical trials within strict ethical guidelines and with clear and unambiguous informed consent. Consider, for example, the recent gene therapy trials at the University of Pennsylvania. Because these trials resulted in a patient's death, they provoked a public outcry and reinforced the calls from critics for far more stringent external control if the public is to be properly protected.

Our relationships with the pharmaceutical industry can also leave us open to criticism. We depend on drug companies not only for the development of new drugs, but also for certain kinds of financial support. The terms of that support must be very carefully defined. Grants from pharmaceutical companies cannot be seen as endorsements by academic investigators for the products of the grant-making companies. Academic investigators must be free to publish

results, whether they are supportive or critical of a specific drug. Universities and their affiliated academic health centers must be scrupulously careful to protect the intellectual independence of their investigators. This can be difficult, particularly when companies not only support the specific research but also make large unrestricted gifts to the university or hospital.

Recent events at the University of Toronto drive this point home. At one of the university's affiliated institutions, The Hospital for Sick Children, a faculty member came under attack for expressing doubts about a drug produced by a relatively small company that had also given a major gift to the hospital. Angry colleagues harassed the investigator on the job. The hospital and university did little to support her, and the case continues to fester. The reputations of both the university and the hospital have been damaged. In another case involving the University of Toronto, it has been alleged that the university withdrew an offer to hire a well-known British psychopharmacologist immediately after he had publicly criticized the safety of a drug produced by a major pharmaceutical company that was also a major benefactor of the university.

These cases find their way regularly into the media and understandably provoke dismay. The financial stake of researchers in their own research can shake public confidence in the integrity

of that research. It is important for publicly supported academic health centers to do excellent basic and clinical research and to patent useful inventions that arise from the research effort. Standard patent and licensing arrangements enable pharmaceutical and biotechnical companies to produce the drugs and screening techniques necessary for developing new medical therapeutics and diagnostics. It is perfectly reasonable for the research institutions and their inventive investigators to profit from important basic discoveries. But institutions and funding agencies must develop thoughtful and rational guidelines in this contentious arena. I firmly believe that a central guideline should be a complete prohibition of any researcher receiving consulting fees or stock options from a company that produces a product if that investigator's research involves studying the product in his or her patients. It is not right for a physician to turn a research patient into a source of personal profit.

Despite all the problems I have described, clinical researchers still hold the future of medicine in their hands. If they work hard and honorably enough they will, in the next two or three decades, successfully lower the defenses of persistent diseases. That is a remarkable prospect – one that should inspire young physicians to join the clinical research teams that are committed to winning these victories.

Neil J. Smelser

*on compiling
a new
encyclopedia*

In late 2001, a new *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* was published by Elsevier Science. Almost six years in the making, the twenty-four volumes are meant to cover all relevant disciplines under the heading “social and behavioral sciences.” By convention, the more than four thousand entries are presented in alphabetical order, beginning with “Aboriginal Rights” and ending with “Zooarchaeology.”

This is the third rendition of such an encyclopedia. The first consisted of fif-

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teen volumes, edited by Edwin Seligman and Alvin Johnson, published in 1931–1935. Then came the seventeen-volume *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by David Sills, published in 1968.

Measured by number of words, the new encyclopedia is about double the length of its 1968 predecessor. The coeditors in chief are Paul B. Baltes of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (Berlin) and I. Of the dozens of academics and others we consulted about the feasibility of a new encyclopedia for these sciences, not one voiced a negative opinion.

Encyclopedias in various forms go back several hundred years and by now are generally regarded as a respected mode of representing and codifying knowledge. Often they have embodied some kind of “integrative impulse” – to symbolize civilizational progress, to express the unity of positive knowledge, to legitimize new areas of scientific inquiry, or to foster interdisciplinary research. More recently, encyclopedias have evolved into “self-contained reference works” meant to present knowledge via brief topical essays and to point readers to related knowledge inside and outside their pages.

Baltes and I justified the need for a new encyclopedia by pointing to the astonishing growth and specialization of the social and behavioral sciences in the past third of a century – we needed a new encyclopedia, we argued, because the older ones were hopelessly outdated.

We nevertheless knew how formidable a task it would be. We attacked the problem in three ways. First, we had thirty-nine separate sections and roughly fifty section editors, in contrast to the 1968 encyclopedia, which had seven associate editors. Second, we included not only the obvious disciplines –

anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology – but also many other fields and traditions of inquiry that incorporate some social and behavioral science research. (I will say more on this point later.) Third, we tried to make the encyclopedia as international as possible, recruiting, in the end, 55 percent of our authors from North America, 35 percent from Europe, and 10 percent from other areas of the world. Readers will ultimately decide whether or not the work is truly comprehensive, but we proudly regard the encyclopedia as a unique asset for students beginning an inquiry, for specialists wishing to gain knowledge of fields other than their own, and for generally educated readers wishing to improve their understanding of the social and behavioral sciences.

At a certain moment, however, it becomes necessary to ask even more basic questions about the capacity to comprehend and present the whole of the social and behavioral sciences in one publication. We observe not only growth and fragmentation in these sciences, but also a crisscrossing of research traditions, an interdisciplinary pursuit of understanding, and new applications of knowledge in many areas. Can all this be tracked, recorded, assembled, and coordinated? Can it be conveyed coherently and usefully by adhering to the conventions of alphabetical presentation and cross-referencing?

Baltes and I believed it could be done, but we knew the risks involved. For one thing, we were attempting to encompass the social *and* behavioral sciences. The two previous encyclopedias had accentuated the social, but we chose to include parts of evolutionary science, genetics, and neuroscience, in addition to psychology.

We also seemed to be swimming against the tide of contemporary trends

in the publication of reference works. There has been an explosion in the number of encyclopedias. Amazon.com lists six thousand of them for sale, and Barnesandnoble.com nine thousand. Most of these works, like the fields of knowledge they incorporate, are narrowly focused. They tend to cover subfields of fields (clinical psychology within psychology, higher education within education). One finds such improbable titles as the *Encyclopedia of Canadian Music* and the *Panic Encyclopedia*. We believe that the integrative impulse still has value, but in another generation it may no longer be possible, or desirable, to compile a new encyclopedia of the social sciences.

Encyclopedias are, after all, printed compendia of knowledge. A defining fact about a printed book is that it cannot be updated to incorporate new knowledge without considerable effort and cost. Encyclopedias are a species of printed books intended to be “state-of-the-art” representations of some range of knowledge. This understanding is valid only on condition that the art is not forever outrunning itself. However, in our own view, the state of the art *is* forever outrunning itself. We do not know the precise half-life of printed encyclopedias these days, but we do know that it is continuously shrinking.

Furthermore, the computer and the Internet have given us the capacity to update easily. We are already witnessing some encyclopedias that are exclusively online, with individual entries and groups of entries capable of being replaced continuously and at low cost. Our publishers recognized this by publishing, simultaneously, a hard-copy version (which many libraries and bibliophilic readers still prefer) and a Web version, which will be updated two years hence. This strategy must be regarded as

transitional, however, and if the encyclopedia survives as a form in the future, it will surely be in an electronic mode.

Still, compiling an encyclopedia does force one to reflect on how to organize the current state of knowledge. Our predecessors divided their world into academic disciplines and chose an associate editor for each discipline. This may or may not have been the correct approach even in their times, but it was clear from the start that we could not proceed in this way. The social and behavioral sciences have become messier, and many areas of inquiry resist ready categorization.

One reason for this messiness is that the development of knowledge in our day is fundamentally uncontrolled. Scientists and scholars are free to go where their curiosity takes them. Knowledge also grows in response to the rise of new social problems and issues, often as defined by national governments and other institutions able to fund research. In recent decades, we have witnessed a spectacular growth in hybrid fields (such as behavioral economics and economic sociology); the rise of interdisciplinary, problem-centered lines of inquiry (for example into the causes of poverty); and the pursuit of parallel substantive lines of inquiry in different disciplines (thus organizational studies conducted by both economists and sociologists).

Given this wealth of new developments, Baltes and I came to feel at moments that we were dealing with the first principle of Greek mythology: in the beginning there was chaos.

How could we create a conceptual architecture that would acknowledge the chaos, yet simultaneously introduce some order? Space forbids a full account, but it is possible to sketch our main strategies, arrived at after extensive reflection.

First, we could not ignore disciplines. They still have a certain logic behind them, and they are the bedrock organizing principle in most colleges and universities, defining the training and identities of professionals and the shape of labor markets. We developed sections and recruited section editors for thirteen disciplines, including the “mainstream” ones listed above and other fields that we judged to have a very strong behavioral and social science component (for example, history, law, and education).

To extend coverage, we also identified eleven areas we called “intersecting” – fields not “in” the behavioral and social sciences, but including some research that could be so described. Examples are behavioral and cognitive neuroscience, health, environmental sciences, and area and international studies. We freely acknowledge some arbitrariness in drawing an exact or even consistent line between “disciplinary” and “intersecting,” but we used the device anyway, as a way of incorporating as many relevant research traditions as we could.

To these intersecting topics, we added five fields that could be best described as “applications” of the social and behavioral sciences (for example, media studies, urban studies, and public policy).

We also took note of a number of areas of work that run through, however unevenly, all of the behavioral and social sciences. Three of these are methodological; we appointed section editors for statistics, mathematics, and computer sciences, and also included articles on the logic of inquiry and research design. Other overarching topics were institutions and infrastructure, ethics of research and applications, history of the behavioral and social sciences, and biographies; we appointed section editors for each of these topics as well.

That is how we got to our total of thirty-nine section editors, to whom

we assigned a variable number of individual entries for the encyclopedia. We are confident that this way of casting our conceptual net allowed us to catch most of the fish swimming in the social and behavioral science waters.

In the end, our conceptual efforts at comprehensive coverage, whatever their value, disappear from view, rendered invisible by the encyclopedic principle of listing entries alphabetically, even though we explain our logic in our introduction.

In some ways the virtual encyclopedias of the future will be easier to use than the multivolume compilations we currently have. But time will tell whether the integrative impulse behind these great encyclopedias will survive as well.

Gerald Early

*on Miles Davis,
Vince Lombardi,
& the crisis
of masculinity
in mid-century
America*

Miles Davis achieved fame as a jazz musician and cultural icon in the 1950s and 1960s – the era of the civil rights movement and the first stirrings of the women’s movement, and the era, too, of *Playboy* bunnies and the first national pro-football stars. Against this backdrop Davis appeared as a bona fide leader of men in a field of endeavor dominated, like pro football, by men: modern jazz.

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Many preach that jazz is democratic in its aesthetic, with the players adjusting to each other's inclinations and habits to create a whole that is both individual and collective. Yet the existence of a leader who hires the group and essentially defines its artistic mission implies a certain authoritarianism. (Small group jazz, in that respect, seems less democratic than the workings of a classical chamber group that, ostensibly, has no leader.)

From the start, Miles Davis had a vision about music, whether he originated it himself or borrowed it from the talented people around him, and this vision, which he filled with the energy of his own person and character, made him a leader. More than a musician, Davis became a figure to conjure with. He was a musical genius who was also one part amoral picaro, one part pimp, and one part African American tough guy.

On stage, he was famous for playing with his back to the audience, a gesture of defiant artistry, and the antithesis of Louis Armstrong's ingratiating smile. He began the 1950s by recording a series of artfully restrained chamber jazz masterpieces later released under the title *Birth of the Cool*. And by the time he ended the decade with the preternaturally poised sextet he featured on *Kind of Blue*, recorded in the spring of 1959, Davis had come to exemplify a certain kind of masculinity, as well as a certain style of leadership among men.

It is a noteworthy coincidence that Davis came to public consciousness as a masculine symbol playing serious and sometimes challenging music at roughly the time when professional football became a major spectator sport in the United States.

Indeed, historians can date precisely when professional football became, suddenly, the most popular sport in the

United States. It happened a few months before Davis recorded *Kind of Blue*, when the CBS network televised the 1958 NFL championship game between the Baltimore Colts and the New York Giants, considered by many the greatest football game ever played. In the years that followed, professional football experienced a heady growth in a way that professional baseball did not; indeed, baseball was virtually stagnant as football shot ahead. And it was in these years that a gap-toothed Italian Catholic coach, Vince Lombardi, emerged as a national sports hero – and a man even more famous than Miles Davis. An assistant coach for the Giants in 1958, Lombardi became head coach for the Green Bay Packers the following year. By the middle 1960s, he was in some sense the most visible emblem of pro football and its guiding values.

Like Miles Davis, Vince Lombardi exemplified a certain kind of masculinity and a certain style of leadership among men. Davis fascinated the public because he seemed to know the secret of how to be *cool*. Lombardi fascinated the public because he seemed to know a different kind of secret: how to instill a will to win in thirty-five men, and make these men give everything of themselves on a football field on any autumn Sunday in order to win something that, after all, in the big scheme of things, did not mean much. (In some sense, what in athletics does? What in art does?)

Lombardi was old-fashioned. He molded his men with clichés about pride, honor, character, and what he called “mental toughness,” or, put another way, a holy singleness of purpose: the will to prevail over an adversary. And as was true with any successful football coach, he was also an authoritarian and a workaholic.

It was during the heyday of Miles

Davis and Vince Lombardi that America suffered a crisis of confidence in its understanding of the masculine ideal. The crisis was ubiquitous and left no area of the culture untouched. It was evident, for example, among black Americans. The conflict between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. was one symptom of the crisis. And what were the heavyweight championship fights between Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston in 1962 and 1963 if not a dramatic representation of this larger crisis in black masculinity? A number of key black writers of the period, from Amiri Baraka to Eldridge Cleaver, from John A. Williams to Claude Brown, focused on the problem of the black male and his masculinity. And while black nationalists, from the Nation of Islam to the revolutionaries of the late 1960s, all authoritarians, did not get their ideas of pride, honor, character, and unwavering singleness of purpose from Lombardi and professional football (they rather thought they were getting them from Castro, Ho Chi Minh, or the ancestors), the reach and glamour of professional football in the 1950s and 1960s strengthened these ideas and certainly gave them a currency in popular culture they may not otherwise have had, and thus, I think, intensified the crisis.

Malcolm X's speeches on black unity, black male courage, and racial pride sounded very similar to Lombardi's pep talks about taking pride in being a Green Bay Packer and the need for teamwork, maximum effort, and sacrifice. John F. Kennedy, our young, seemingly healthy and virile president of the early 1960s, liked professional football and the toughness it represented for a nation on the verge of a new frontier. (There are those romantic pictures of him playing the Kennedy brand of rough-and-tumble touch football at the family compound

in Hyannisport.) Richard M. Nixon, our middle-aged, fairly neurotic, paranoid president of the late 1960s, loved professional football and often planned military strategy for the Vietnam War while watching NFL games. Like Lombardi, Nixon understood – and the Watergate scandal is a perfect perversion of it – that “winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.”

I spoke of a crisis of black male leadership, and I believe this crisis reflected, in part, a larger crisis in male identity in the 1950s and 1960s, and this crisis in male identity during these years reflected a general crisis in liberalism as a conflicted ideology of white male privilege in a democratic, so-called egalitarian society that neurotically mixed rights and taboos with perverse passion.

Lombardi represented one type of male desire for dominance in a democratic framework, largely centered on white ethnic, blue-collar virtues of masculinity as strength, stoicism, and loyalty: a deliberate reinscription of the democratic male heroism of World War II.

Meanwhile, the rise of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine, which was started four years before the big 1958 Giants-Colts game that made professional football a glamour sport, represented something distinctly different: a consumer-oriented, professional male of leisure and style, usually a WASP, with clothes, cars, and some veneer of cultivated taste, who easily took women as both sport and an expression of his power as a charismatic being. It was this *Playboy* impulse that gave us the popular male fantasy figure of the 1960s that combined heroism, schoolboy pride, and decadence: James Bond, the literary creation of English writer Ian Fleming. Bond was unquestionably masculine, and he clearly bowed to authority and had a British public-school morality of

purpose and honor that Lombardi would have liked; but he wasn't quite a Lombardi-type of man in other respects, and his missions seemed nothing more, on a psychological level, than the destruction of grandiose authoritarian male figures: Goldfinger, Dr. No, Blofeld, Hugo Drax, Mr. Big.

There were other competing masculine ideas as well: the white hipsters or Beats of the 1950s were essentially the reincarnation of the myth of Peter Pan, who was forever a boy, who hated authority and adulthood as symbolized by Captain Hook, who always lived completely in the moment of whatever sensation he was experiencing, without past or future, totally self-absorbed, remembering nothing except that he hated mothers while having an occasional need for a girl to play the role of one. Variations of this Peter Pan ideal were represented by the two most popular athletes of this era: Muhammad Ali and Joe Namath. Ali was the brash, bragging, boy-wonder fighter who feminized himself by calling himself "pretty" and who combined the boyish antics of Dizzy Dean with the rhetoric of the black male redemption politics of Elijah Muhammad and Marcus Garvey. Namath was the playboy quarterback Lombardi despised as a person who drank champagne and wore pantyhose in a commercial. Both seemed to bow to authoritarian rule, their sports depending on the rule of an older male teacher over a younger male student, while openly defying it.

Lombardi, who raged at his men's failures while he exalted in their successes (not always giving them the credit they were due) and cried – literally – over their illnesses and defeats, was something like the Great White Father of the 1960s. How can he be pleased?

Miles Davis, for one, evinced no inter-

est at all in answering that particular question. In his stage manner, he ridiculed the very idea of pleasing people, refusing to pander to his predominantly white audience, even as he took under his wing white musicians like the saxophonist and arranger Gerry Mulligan and the pianist Bill Evans. Davis resembled the football coach in one way only: like Lombardi, he was a leader of men.

He was, after all, a *bandleader*, who had to create a unity, an organization, from the disparate elements and personalities of his bands. He selected the venues where his men were to play, he decided what they would play and how they would play it, he hired and fired them, and he paid them. The men in the band could remain individuals (this was essential for their future as jazz musicians); they could write music for the band; but the band must be unmistakably understood by the public to be Miles Davis's and to be dominated by his aesthetic vision of jazz as a practice and as a theory.

One hallmark of jazz for Miles Davis was the act of willing a certain persona into existence. For Davis, it was an act of imposing himself on the public's consciousness through his music, and for any black man to do this in a way that the public, both black and white, would take seriously made him a leader, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, whether he wanted to be one or not. The fact that Columbia Records, the company that signed Davis in 1955, was willing to sell him to the public as a particular type of artistic black male visionary was important as well.

Miles Davis was deeply affected by the *Playboy* ethos of the 1950s and 1960s. He achieved a great deal of his identity as a public man of charismatic appeal through his conspicuous consumption:

he had tailored clothes, expensive cars, and beautiful women. In this respect, he differed little from his contemporary, Sammy Davis Jr., who publicly, even mythically, indulged the same appetites in much the same way. This was all part of being theatrically hip. But Miles Davis was different in that he was not a “light music” entertainer or a purveyor of philistine popular music and dance, like Sammy Davis Jr. Miles Davis was a craftsman, a virtuoso, a man publicly proclaimed as possessing genius. He reveled in this sense of himself as a master. He had something of the appeal of the heavyweight boxer Floyd Patterson to middle-class, establishment blacks (but he was less earnest and more defiant); he had something of the appeal of the cool to the young, much like a rock star might have today; and he had something of the appeal of the temperamentally artistic to the pseudo-intellectual and the middlebrow public.

The question of the worth of Davis’s music after 1969 when he “went electric” and courted rock fans as listeners is, I think, in great measure tied to one’s estimation of his virtues as a leader of men. After all, where did he lead them? A Lombardi-type view of the situation would suggest that Davis betrayed jazz as a profession because he betrayed its honor, pride, character, its quality of “mental toughness.” According to this view, by recording amplified and rock-flavored music, as he did from *Bitches Brew* on, he no longer asked for maximum effort, for sacrifice, for excellence. In this view, Davis stopped trying. Instead of struggling to prevail over his environment, he succumbed to it.

To people who think this way, Davis, in effect, became Peter Pan. His was the worst kind of perversion of the masculine ideal because he was middle-aged when he started playing at rock venues:

consumed by an unstoppable youth fixation, defying authority by refusing to acknowledge the glorious past of jazz, he became a preening object of authoritarian veneration for women (like Bond or a pimp) while also becoming the leader of the Lost Boys – in this case, the young fusion jazz players. (J. M. Barrie, tellingly, originally entitled his play about the boy who wouldn’t grow up *The Great White Father*.)

From the perspective of a Vince Lombardi type, Davis betrayed his calling as a jazz musician by betraying the moral tenets of manhood itself. In becoming an object of consumption, Davis simply consumed himself or allowed himself to be consumed. For it is the law of life of the Lombardi types that one either eats or gets eaten, as Captain Hook’s constant effort to escape the crocodile and destroy Peter Pan illustrates.

But Lombardi’s is only one perspective. And while it has unquestioned virtues, it was seen at the time by many as simplistic and restrictive. Its worship of authority, order, and the soil of tradition had the seeds of a fascist urge. Lombardi – devout Catholic that he was – assumed a certainty about male life and maleness that is comforting, sometimes even mythically striking, but ultimately false.

And there are, after all, other ways of being a man and other ways of seeing the issue of how men should be led, and Davis was never a man much taken with a Lombardi view of life. As Lombardi became increasingly conservative in the 1960s in light of the disordered, contrary times, Davis became more interested in liberating himself.

I think Miles Davis, unlike Lombardi, understood well what it means to live with uncertainty. Davis’s electric music raised a question that had no easy answer: What is jazz? After all, jazz has

been so many things – from Hal Kemp to Jelly Roll Morton, from Ornette Coleman to Najee. Who can be certain what it is?

Davis wanted to take risks, but he also wanted to make money, and he wanted to be fashionable, and he wanted to enjoy life in its sensual fullness, and he wanted to be an example of some sort of pride and integrity in an age when the charismatic appeal of male pride and black pride coincided. These things are not mutually exclusive, but they can produce enormous disjunctions, enormous confusion about what one wants. What seems amazing to me about Davis is that he struggled so fiercely, for so long, with these disjunctions and, indeed, tried to use the tensions of them to create music that, whatever its artistic merits, brilliantly dramatized the dilemma of his own desires and aims.

It is nevertheless true that by the mid-1970s, Davis had succumbed to his own fantastic, Peter Pan-like ideas about masculinity, particularly in his treatment of women. He had always been

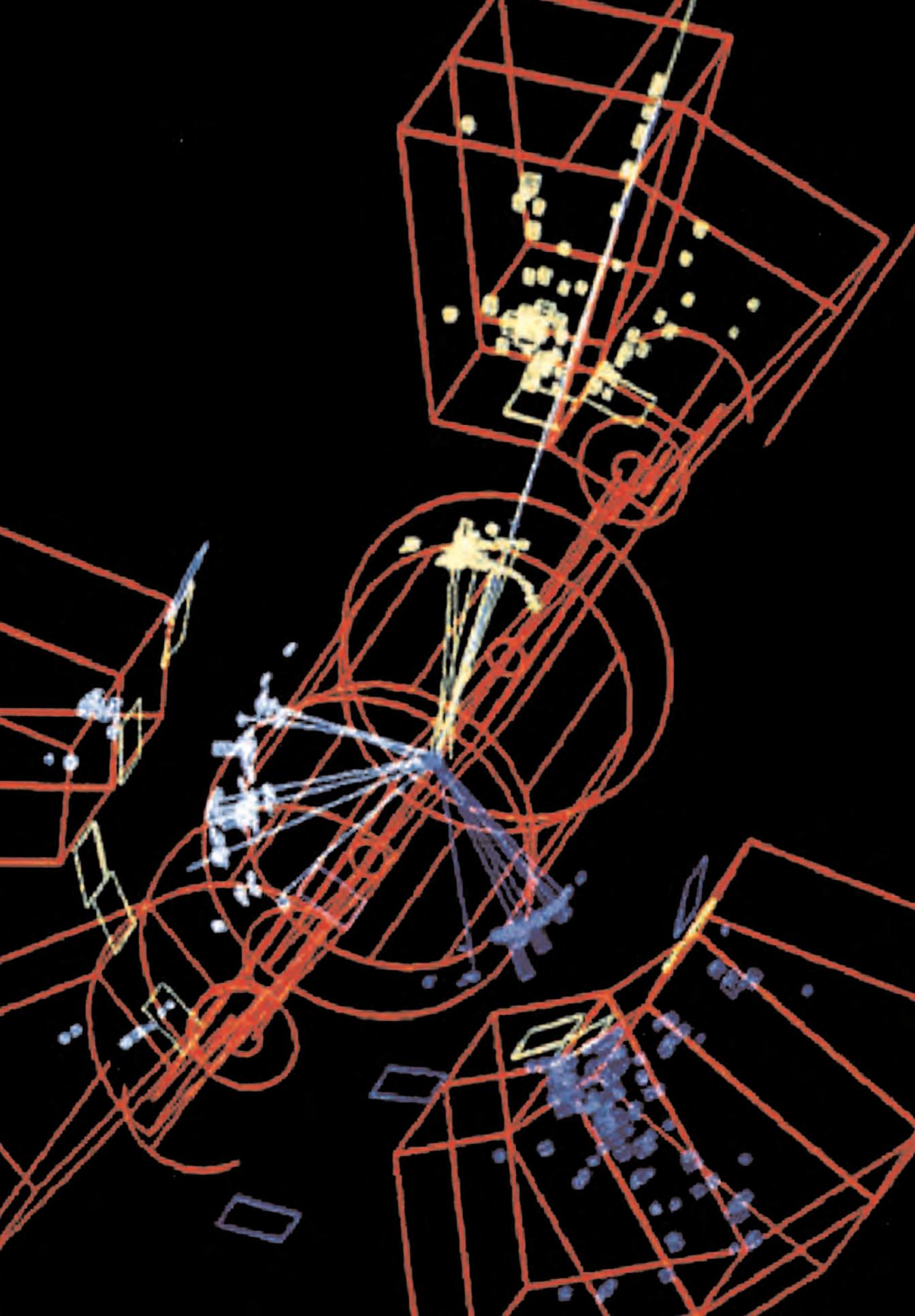
drawn to the street life, the hustler's élan. (After all, he met Charlie Parker and entered the bebop world of drug addiction when he was still a teenager.) His hustling, as much as anything, drove a good deal of the music he decided to play after 1970. I think it is fair to say that he had a McHeath fixation, intensified by his own middle-class upbringing. (Some blacks are of two minds about being middle class: it is a mark of racial achievement and a sign of cowardly acquiescence.)

Miles Davis, in the end, may not have been a better man than Vince Lombardi. He may not have had a better idea of manhood. But the idea of manhood he had was no worse than Lombardi's. And if we don't pose the complexities Davis represented as a man in light of the complexities of the times he lived in when masculinity in various guises was being simultaneously confirmed and undone, we run the risk of never understanding the man and never appreciating what he wanted to do.

The original seal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (reproduced on page 1) was designed in 1780. In 1954, a new seal (below) was introduced. In this version, the sun is rendered without a smiling face and Minerva is more fully garbed.



Inside back cover: The record of an event observed at the Large Electron-Positron Collider in Geneva in 1991. © 1991 by CERN. The colored lines emanating from the center indicate the tracks of strongly interacting particles, which group into three distinct 'jets' – manifestations of underlying quark, antiquark, and gluon. The number of such three-jet events and the 'antenna pattern' of the radiation can be predicted in detail using the equations of quantum chromodynamics. See Frank Wilczek on *The world's numerical recipe*, pages 142 – 147.



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