

Introduction

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Economic inequality has come to the fore of public awareness to such an extent that it now dominates political debate in much of the world. In many countries, including the United States, differences among various segments of the population in both income and wealth have grown dramatically. The United States, the world's largest and dominant economy, illustrates these larger trends in an extreme form. The United States has become the most unequal of all industrialized democracies. A deep "wealth gap" has opened between the wealthiest Americans—the now-infamous "1%," who have seen their incomes and wealth grow dramatically—and the rest of the population. Among the remaining "99%," things have not been nearly so good.

Only the upper fifth has seen a significant rise in income during the past three decades, and the top one percent has taken the lion's share of these gains. At the same time that the richest have seen vast growth in their "share of the pie," the poorest, a group that includes a full fifth of the population, or two out of every ten Americans, have seen their incomes

decline. Meanwhile, the majority of the population, the groups in between the poorest twenty percent and the most affluent twenty percent, the “middle class,” have not had a “raise” in their share of the nation’s income for decades, although they now work longer hours than before.¹ Long celebrated as a land of opportunity, economic opportunity has stagnated for most Americans. When it comes to chances for economic advancement, the American economy has grown sclerotic. Social mobility, like growth in wealth, is now monopolized by the upper-income groups, not because of different levels of skill or education, but because almost all the growth of recent decades has gone to the already wealthiest.²

Besides the attrition of social mobility, the inequality gap has been accompanied by rising economic insecurity. This threatens the ability of individuals and families to meet expenses and plan for future needs, such as paying for their children’s further education. Those concerns fostered the excessive debt that contributed to the economic collapse of 2008. For many, the increasingly harsh, competitive aspect of economic life has chilled their sense of sharing in the benefits of American life. The tightening competitive scramble for less-equal outcomes has helped divide and polarize electorates throughout the industrialized democracies. The rising anxiety has stoked distrust and resentment between groups, weakening the trust and cooperation on which democracy depends. This growing volatility has produced a “populist explosion” of anger that is destabilizing political life not only in the United States, but also across Europe.³

The negative effects of a high level of inequality are therefore not confined to the economic realm. They underlie the current disturbances in political life across the world. But such steep differences in economic inequality also have severe consequences for personal and social life. As all countries with a high degree of economic inequality, the United States is now experiencing a wide divide between the affluent minority and everyone else in regard to very basic aspects of human welfare. The affluent live longer, have better physical health, enjoy more stable family relationships, participate more politically and socially, and have better access to education than their less-affluent fellow citizens. This is true even when the population is ethnically homogeneous.⁴ But these trends, which have intensified wherever inequality has increased, are both ominous for the vitality of democratic institutions and make the successful inclusion of immigrants in a shared prosperity more problematic.

The recent growth of economic inequality in industrialized countries has reversed a trend toward greater equality amid stable growth that marked the post–World War II era. However, beginning in the 1980s, inequality accelerated—the consequence or at least the accompaniment of a major shift in public policy that has placed greater reliance upon international finance and open markets to foster growth, facilitated by the curbing of government regulation. This shift greatly intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, inaugurating what is now called the era of “globalization,” or sometimes the “neo-liberal” era. This period has been marked in the West by the continuation of the liberal order of constitutional government based on individual rights and the rule of law, but the rise of China shows that, for a rapidly developing country at least, authoritarian government may be as much or even more compatible with neo-liberalism than democracy. However, the greater reliance on less regulated and unguided market forces that operate across national borders and penetrate and constrain national political regimes has become increasingly controversial. While the United States and the United Kingdom have embraced these developments most enthusiastically, others have resisted them to various degrees. Partly as a result, the level and growth of inequality have been uneven across the developed world.⁵

For its celebrators, who generally view its most successful groups as valuable innovators, globalization, or neo-liberalism, represents the fulfillment of modern aspirations toward technological advance and individual freedom to shape one’s own life. Especially important, in this view, has been the success of more open market economies in China and India in enabling millions of their population to finally escape grinding poverty.⁶ At its imaginative core, neo-liberalism proclaims a vision of social progress through global markets, as enunciated at the annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos, attended by leaders of finance, industry, and governments from around the world. For its critics, however, when compared to the more regulated, national form of capitalism that preceded it, this regime appears deficient, due to its strong tendency to sharply divide societies into winners and losers, a process driven by an “unceasing stream of new technologies, unfettered market competition and weak or fractured social institutions.”⁷ The costs of having made unfettered market competition the primary decision mechanism for social development, say the critics, have proven to greatly outweigh the benefits, leaving the societies that

have experienced such globalization with few means of restoring a sense of national cohesion or of taking charge of their collective destiny.

By any standard, then, today's growth in economic inequality is a major historical trend affecting all parts of the world. Not surprisingly, reactions to these developments have been quite varied, both in the popular media and in scholarly analysis and debate. Few contemporary topics have stirred such strong opinion. Is inequality really a problem—and if it is, what kind of a problem is it? That is, how should we think about it, through what cultural and intellectual lenses should we view it? How can we make sense of it and decide from what perspective to judge the situation and formulate a response?

The premise of this book is that economic inequality, while clearly in need of analysis from the viewpoints of economics, sociology, and political science, is more than a scientific or technical problem. It is preeminently an ethical and moral issue. Addressing an earlier phase of world economic crisis before the Great Depression of the twentieth century, economist John Maynard Keynes presciently observed: "The fiercest contests and the most deeply felt divisions of opinion are likely to be waged in the coming years not round technical questions, where the arguments on either side are mainly economic, but over questions which, for want of better words, may be called psychological or, perhaps, moral."⁸ Keynes argued that modern capitalism was a transitional social form driven by an internal moral contradiction. Together with modern technology, it had greatly expanded productive capacity and wealth, but it had done so by inverting traditional moral values, sanctifying once-scorned vices such as rapacity and greed. What the simple celebrators of acquisition overlooked, however, was the social and moral price this inversion of moral values exacted. In order to grasp the larger picture, Keynes insisted that the parameters of the economic viewpoint had to be expanded toward a wider moral horizon than sheer expediency.⁹ Such is also the unanimous conviction of the contributors to this volume.

The Ethikon Approach

Part of the Ethikon series, this book is based on a dialogue between distinguished experts on liberalism, Marxism, feminism, natural law, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, and Buddhism. These are broad tra-

ditions of thought on how to understand and respond to moral problems, each developed within a particular community and passed down through generations while undergoing constant elaboration and reinterpretation by those who consider themselves members of that community. To give coherence to the dialogue and to the book, each author was asked to consider a common set of concerns from ethical standpoints regarding equality, property, natural resources, products, wealth, income, employment, and taxation.

Each tradition contains disagreements about these issues, but the parameters of such disagreements tend to differ across traditions. Each author was asked to present the range of disagreements within the tradition under consideration. Some of the authors had difficulties finding answers within their tradition to some of the common questions. This was because the questions best fit the modern philosophical traditions that have arisen within global modernity—liberalism, Marxism, and feminism. The fundamental ideas of justice developed in the religious traditions presented here arose out of reflection on relatively small scale, mostly agrarian economies. Yet globalized modernity seems to be generating problems that cannot fully be answered within modern secular philosophical traditions. The struggle to make earlier religious and moral traditions speak to the dilemmas of global modernity is extremely urgent, for we will need all of the moral resources bequeathed by our traditions if we are to address the controversies and discontentments engendered by rising modern inequalities.

After two days of very stimulating discussion at a workshop near Los Angeles, the authors revised their papers into the chapters of this book. Stephen Munzer then crafted a concluding chapter that systematically compares the arguments of each essay.

How to Read This Book—What to Expect

One way to read this book would simply be to compare how each author answers each of the common questions that structure each chapter. But the reader should also attend to the overall context in which these answers are given. A sense of this context is briefly discussed in the introductory section of each essay. Each ethical tradition draws on different assumptions about human nature and the relationship between the individual self and society; different forms of moral reasoning from basic assumptions to con-

crete circumstances; and different authoritative texts and different ways of interpreting them. None of the traditions supports absolute equality, but they differ in their ideas about what kinds and what degrees of inequality are legitimate or not and for what reasons—and if inequality is excessive, what can and should be done about it. In the following sections of this introduction, we set our ethical dialogue in the larger historical context of the making of the modern world.

The Unique Problematic of Global Modernity

Making moral sense of today's rising economic inequality requires taking a larger moral, rather than a purely technical, economic view. The steep rise in inequality is problematic for a number of reasons, as we have noted. But it is chiefly troubling because it contradicts a central moral premise of all modern societies: the idea that technological and economic advance is a good, because it enhances individual as well as collective well-being. This idea of progress stands at the core of the new civilization that arose in the Atlantic world in the wake of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and expanded around the globe with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that continues today. This civilization has measured progress by the material metrics of technological advance, economic growth, education, and improving population health. But the ultimate standard of progress has remained the degree to which these material advances have contributed, either in the present or in the expected future, to the enhancement of individual human lives.

Today's global society, linked by communications technology and economic interdependence, espouses individual and collective empowerment as paramount goals everywhere. So pervasive have the ideals of this civilization become that revolts and revolutions against Western imperialism have themselves largely been justified on the basis of these values, while authoritarian rule inevitably must base its legitimacy on its alleged movement toward material betterment and individual protection. The dominant articulation of these ideals remains the philosophy of liberalism, which traces its origins to the early modern era in Europe. This liberal philosophy has promoted and justified the market economy and representative government, the chief institutional innovations of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century "age of revolutions," as means toward the overarching

goal of universal rights to self-expression by autonomous individuals. It is the capacity of particular institutional arrangements to secure this moral and political aspiration that increasing economic inequality seriously calls into question today, in the societies previously most successful at achieving the goals of modernity.

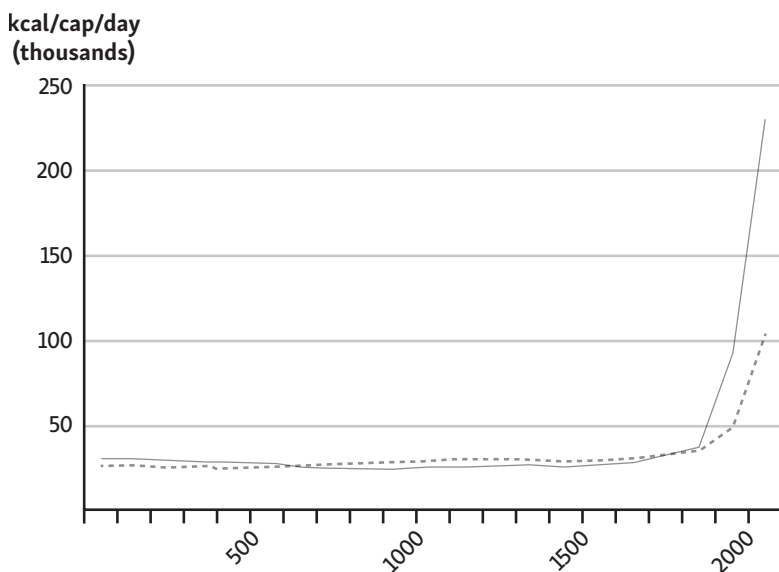
To understand the significance of growing inequality within societies, it is important to recognize the historical uniqueness of the contemporary situation. Since it started in the eighteenth century, in Europe, the spread of this increasingly universal civilization of progress has been made possible by a simultaneous explosion of the human capacity to capture energy resources and to use the captured energy to improve control over the natural environment. This rapid and unprecedented increase in technological capacity—the industrial revolution based on the use of fossil fuels—has set in motion a transformation of the human situation in the world so fundamental that it can rightly be understood as a break in historical continuity.

The change can be graphically illustrated. Before the invention of the steam engine in late-eighteenth century Europe, the amount of energy available to human societies everywhere was limited to what could be obtained by a combination of human and animal muscles, supplemented by a limited energy yield from wind and water power. The steam engine changed all that, setting in motion an increase in the amount of energy available per capita that has continued to rise at unprecedented rates to levels without parallel in the past.

If the aggregate amount of energy that could be mobilized in Europe or Asia before the age of steam is given a value of about 38,000 kilocalories per capita, by 1970 that figure had risen to 230,000 kilocalories—seven times more in just two centuries. And the available energy resources keep rising steeply.¹⁰

While the modern technological and economic regime greatly expanded wealth and the ability to mobilize and deploy resources, it did not spread these advantages equally, either among societies or within them. So, as Western societies industrialized during the nineteenth century, they became much more unequal economically. But those societies also became far wealthier than those that remained less industrialized, creating a great global imbalance in wealth and power among societies. In earlier centuries, the various agrarian societies had also been highly unequal internally, but the gap among nations was smaller.

**Per capita energy consumption in the core
regions of West and East AD 1–2000**



Source: Ian Morris, *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossils: How Human Values Evolve* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

More recently, as industrialization has spread around the world, this pattern of inequality in national wealth has reversed, so that the wealth gap between early industrializers and currently developing nations has shrunk substantially. However, inequality within societies has followed an opposite course. During the middle of the twentieth century, following depression and world wars, a “great compression” of wealth amid economic expansion significantly reduced inequality within societies. But in the present era, as economies have become more globally integrated, the economic divide within nations has grown, with destabilizing consequences, as noted earlier in the case of the United States.¹¹

These are the material changes that have made modernity so different from all that has gone before in human history, with vast, still-unfolding reverberations through the moral sphere. Traditional ways of life, ingrained in most human cultures until the age of fossil-fuel economies, provided individuals with a sense of being embedded in a cosmos that was thought to represent divine or sacred values. This was true of pre-modern

Christendom in Europe as well as of Islam, Judaism, Hindu India, and the Confucian and Buddhist societies of South and East Asia. For these traditions, the ethical task is to exemplify in individual and social living the patterns of value held up by their classic texts and traditions as paradigmatic for human existence.

Over the past two centuries, to an accelerating degree, these traditional, agrarian-based social and moral orders have been undermined. The intrusion of the highly productive Western forms of capitalist economy, as well as industrial and military technologies, was accompanied by new, apparently more successful understandings exported by the modern West—above all, natural science. These new perspectives were thought to embody “progress.” Their appearance weakened the credibility of the traditional paradigms. While the traditional paradigms did not suddenly disappear, the resulting clash between traditional moral understandings and modernity set in motion a variety of responses, first in the West and then throughout the world. Among these responses were new adaptations by adherents of the several great religious and moral traditions to the conditions of modernity, some of which provide the substance of chapters in this volume.

An Age of Innocence: Europeans Discover Liberal Economics

Just as the transition to fossil-fuel technologies was getting underway, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, European thinkers “discovered” the economy as a social sphere potentially independent of older forms of authority and regulation. As the cosmopolitan intellectuals of the Enlightenment outlined it, the economic realm followed its own laws of motion—an analogy to the laws of physical motion epitomized in the new mechanical sciences of nature. Individuals were the atoms of the new social physics. Driven by the “gravity” of self-interest, the “natural effort of every individual to better his condition,” famously described by Adam Smith, could be harnessed by the market to make possible a stable, growth-oriented society. At the moral core of this cosmopolitan vision of peaceful commerce stood the concept of the free individual, able to enter into contracts with other self-interested individuals for the sake of mutual benefit. The resulting “progress of opulence” would benefit all who took part in the buying and selling of the market, even if not equally so.

This was a new and sunny vision of human possibility. It was based upon confidence in a kind of secularized providence. Markets worked because they followed laws of supply and demand that were embedded in a harmonious natural order. This also provided a new angle of vision on history in which markets, commerce, and economic laws drove a narrative of progress. Thinkers of the Enlightenment, such as David Hume, Adam Smith, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant extended and systematized John Locke's earlier sketch of human progress into a scheme of social development. Progress had meant moving from formerly nomadic, hunting-and-gathering ways of life into pastoral society, and then to settled cultivation. The climax of history came with the emergence of a new kind of state, guided by enlightened opinion, which protected a legal sphere of free commerce, the true civilizing agent and source of enlightened morality and manners. In this eighteenth-century view, markets served to order and balance individuals' natural instincts so as to produce the general good. It was the theory of liberal capitalism in its first innocence.

Loss of Innocence: Challenges to the Classical Liberal Vision

Spurred by the new energy regime and confidently broadcast in the new theories of progress, the global race was on. The winners would be those societies best able to reshape themselves and their people's lives to take advantage of the new technologies. The universal goal was to achieve wealth, population, and power equal to that enjoyed by the early adopters of a fossil fuel-supported way of life. This global competition, which remains the basic global force in our own time, has led to ever more rapid transformation of social reality everywhere, though at very uneven rates of change and degrees of competitive success. With these fast-rising waves of change have also come widespread uprooting of traditional ways of life and, often, the eclipse of traditional institutions and authorities. These forces eroded confidence in traditional paradigms of social and moral order while stimulating a search for new ways to understand historical events. The resulting intellectual developments came to shape the horizon within which moral discussions of today's global economy, and so the issues of economic inequality, are largely taking place.

In the nineteenth century, the harmonious models of civilization promoted by the Enlightenment faced competing views of how social evolution really worked. Following the traumatic experiences of the French Revolution and vast European wars, a spate of new theorists, ranging from Georg Hegel and Karl Marx to Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, proposed conflictual, even violent conceptions of historical advance. The significance of these intellectual currents is hard to overestimate.

Their viewpoints were adopted and promoted by the most successful groups within the advanced, fossil-fuel economies, but they were also employed by critics and enemies of those groups throughout the increasingly interconnected world. Taken together, they restructured the way educated people the world over came to see themselves, their past, and their future possibilities. “New” or “advanced” suddenly displaced “good” or “righteous” as epithets of commendation. A new scale of development grew into place as the taken-for-granted background of discussions of social and political matters. This scale was used to rank nations, peoples, ethnic and racial groups, as well as their religions and moral norms, along a continuum from “advanced” to “primitive” or “fossilized.” As this conception became ever more hegemonic, first in European societies and then increasingly across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, it caused a still-reverberating cultural and intellectual crisis for all inherited moralities.

Yet, as the nineteenth century unfolded, all was clearly not well with the economic model that the Europeans had held up for universal emulation. One key underpinning of liberal philosophy—namely, the practical success of the unregulated global market and governments organized to protect it—was far from self-evident. In that first era of a globalizing, technology-based economy, even as production expanded and aggregate wealth grew, economic inequality was spiraling upward. Liberal confidence that properly channeled self-interest would benefit all by making societies more efficient and enlightened became a highly vulnerable target. This benign image of the free market would never again remain uncontested.

Karl Marx provided a historically very influential counter-image of the global market as a monstrous sorcerer’s apprentice destined to be undone by its own insatiable needs. Driven by ever-tighter competition, the capitalist system would inevitably self-destruct as its agents pushed to lower their costs of production, immiserating their workers. They thereby would

undermine the very demand on which their profits depended. Thus, as the system intensified its mobilization of human and natural resources on a global basis, it would eventually drive its workers to revolt. After the overthrow of capitalism, a planned economy run by and for the former proletariat would be able to direct the new productive capacities on a rational course toward general betterment. Marx's vision claimed a goal-directed logic of historical development that recast the moral ideals of the liberal Enlightenment, such as individual freedom and social equality, as the inevitable outcomes of world-historical struggle between classes.

Another, very different but also highly influential perspective on social development was promulgated by Herbert Spencer. Taking Charles Darwin's new scientific view of evolution as a model, Spencer viewed human history as an unguided process of random variation and natural selection of the best-adapted life-forms. In Spencer's view, markets were selective devices that promoted progress through competitive struggle, allowing the more efficient and "fit" to drive out the inefficient. Inequality among individuals, groups, and societies was therefore inevitable, because it was necessary for progress in the long run. Now, conceived as a Darwinian competition, the progress of technology and the capitalist, global economy—like the military struggles between nations and groups in the international arena—would inevitably produce winners and losers. But interfering with these natural processes in the name of older values, such as traditional justice or compassion, would only slow humanity's advance.

Powerful critiques like these, which stressed the social and historical determination of both ideas and human agents, challenged core liberal tenets. As individuals came to seem to be not so much autonomous rational actors as highly conditioned products of social processes, classical liberalism's basic premises were opened to new scrutiny and potential rejection. If markets were not necessarily harmonious natural formations—as the developing discipline of political economy had construed them—but social institutions whose rules embodied the interests of social classes or national communities, the earlier confidence in the natural providence of commerce and contract could be challenged.

Affirming Human Agency and Responsibility

Advocates of the liberal tradition have formulated several kinds of response to these challenges. To counter the problem of persistent inequality within societies organized according to liberal principles of voluntary contract and the rule of law, twentieth-century liberal governments began to improvise ways to bring social practices closer to liberal norms and ideals. Liberal governments began to intervene in the workings of the market to open up wider opportunity, as through publicly supported education; to redistribute highly unequal patterns of wealth and income through progressive taxation; and to provide greater security of personal and family life through public programs of health provision and social insurance. The thinkers in the liberal tradition also innovated intellectually, as in justifying active state-intervention in markets on the basis of creating more equality of opportunity.

More radically, liberals such as John Maynard Keynes challenged the reality of the self-regulating character of markets, that quasi-providential “invisible hand” idea inherited from the Enlightenment, and advocated the active shaping of market institutions by governments. Most radically of all, a new line of liberal thinking in the twentieth century accepted the premise that individuals were shaped and fulfilled by social relationships, so that protecting and enhancing forms of social membership came to be seen as inherent in promoting liberty and opportunity. This so-called social liberalism showed affinities with the ideas of social democracy that subordinated economic goals to the well-being of the members of a national community. These more activist forms of liberal thought clashed with the tradition’s earlier, residually providential belief in self-regulating markets, setting up major contemporary conflicts in response to neo-liberal globalization. Therefore, liberal thinking entered the twenty-first century not as a single intellectual position but as a family of views that, while sharing a lineage and key values, differed profoundly in how they framed the issue of inequality.

These differences within the liberal tradition illustrate a more general, unresolved problem that conditions contemporary debates about economic inequality. If a historical necessity of some type is not driving toward an inevitable outcome, there is need for ways to think about and evaluate possible responses. That is, there is a need for ethics, the disciplined inquiry

into what is good and right. But what viewpoint or viewpoints should guide such responses? Can Western liberalism provide the moral resources, conceptual and practical, to address the contemporary inequality challenge that application of its own principles have exacerbated, if not directly brought about? If these resources are not adequate to the challenge, then where to turn? Although the dominant theories of justice used by economic and political elites in Western democracies come from the liberal tradition, the public opinion of citizens of these countries is influenced directly or indirectly by other traditions, including Marxism, feminism, natural law, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, and Buddhism. And some of the latter religious traditions are predominant in countries seeking to challenge Western hegemony. Vast transformations in global communication and commerce over the past generation have not only helped bring about increasing inequalities but brought about new challenges to liberal governments, both from within and without. One manifestation is angry populist movements driven by a strong sense of economic injustice. Thus, there is an urgent need to attend to the diversity of ethical traditions.

The Organization of This Volume

The chapters that follow are intended to stimulate a critical dialogue among various ethical traditions. The greater problem in each case is how are these viewpoints to be made relevant to the problems raised by economic inequality? To meet this need, the chapters are organized to provide not only an overview of a particular tradition of thought but also specific responses to problems that today's economic inequality pose for all traditions. These problems concern public-policy issues that, while widely taken up, have grown out of the practice of liberal governments, often guided by the kinds of revised liberalism described in the last section.

The chapters can be thought of as divided between different ethical starting points. One set—liberalism, Marxism, and feminism—report on traditions that proceed from the moral premises of the liberal Enlightenment: the goods of human autonomy, dignity, and equality. The privileged place of liberalism in this discussion is due to its historical and normative place as the philosophical charter of modern political and economic life. However, along with the liberal tradition itself, these chapters also set out Marxism—a tradition that has radically criticized liberalism on its

own premises—and feminism, another modern tradition rooted in liberal ideals but highly critical of liberalism’s own application of those notions to matters of gender in the economic realm.

The second grouping of chapters includes traditions that proceed from persistent paradigmatic normative visions of social life that derive from premises other than the Western Enlightenment. These chapters report on the traditions of natural law, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as Buddhism and Confucianism. These chapters explicate how these inherited ethical traditions understand economic life, both traditionally and in response to the modern market economy, and then take up the same set of questions that the post-Enlightenment traditions also address.

For both groups of traditions, the operative question is the same, or at least analogous: how can this body of ethical thought be “applied” or “brought to bear” on the issues of contemporary inequality that this introduction has outlined?

In the first essay, William A. Galston shows how three different forms of liberalism have grown out of the tradition’s central preoccupations—a commitment to “liberty” from arbitrary authority, which included all authority not based on the consent of the governed. Liberals believe that all individuals should have equal liberty, but acknowledge that differences in talent, character, and drive will leave some individuals better off than others. What to do about these disparities? Classical liberalism, which Galston illustrates in its modern form with the work of Robert Nozick, rejects any interference by government in the distribution of wealth and income. Distributive liberalism, illustrated by John Rawls, would opt for the more equal distribution of economic values necessary to sustain a system of social cooperation for mutual advantage. Social liberalism, as exemplified by Leonard Hobhouse, emphasizes the “economic preconditions of human flourishing, to which every individual is equally entitled.”

As Andrew Levine then argues in his essay on the Marxist tradition, the distinctive theoretical positions of Marxism have led to a great variety of political economic movements, some bitterly opposed to each other. But classical Marxism would have difficulty answering Ethikon questions, because Marx “was not so much a moral theorist as a critic of morality, hostile not just to particular notions of justice and morality, but also to efforts at prioritizing those concerns.” Nonetheless, Marxism-inspired revolutionaries in the twentieth century did make moral arguments about

the need for social equality. Although Marxism-inspired regimes have collapsed, academic Marxists still carry on the concerns for social equality promised (and often betrayed) by those regimes. In practice, this academic Marxist theory of justice is like a “left-Rawlsianism.”

Christine Di Stefano shows how modern feminism critiques a “variety of co-implicated injustices that affect women and girls, resulting in gender inequity.” In seeking the goal of gender equity, feminism critically draws on a wide range of modern theories, including classical liberalism and Marxism. Gender inequity is defined in a broad sense that seeks “the empowerment of women . . . relative not only to men and patriarchal power but to other structures and mechanisms of power, domination, and oppression, including racism, homophobia and heterosexism, colonialism, and class stratification.”

The next essays are about traditions that originated in pre-modern streams of thought but are trying to give relevant guidance to modern problems.

Joseph Boyle writes on the theory of natural law, a rich body of thought that achieved an especially influential synthesis in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274). Although embraced by the Catholic Church, this tradition appeals to “right reason” rather than revelation, and has had influence far beyond Roman Catholicism. Natural law theory starts from a conception of basic human goods, which are dependent on cooperation within community. A flourishing community requires not only the provision of individual goods but the maintenance of a common good. The tradition can be applied to a wide range of societies and is indeterminate about the details of policies toward inequalities in the modern world. It offers a powerful basis for critique, however, of modern inequalities that would undermine the common good of communities and destroy the dignity of human persons.

D. Stephen Long takes on the “impossible task” of presenting a Christian perspective on economic inequality—impossible because the multiple versions of Christianity have adopted many different theories of economic justice. After summarizing the broad contours of this diversity, Long proceeds by adopting an approach that considers economics through “the practices of the church, its doctrines, liturgies, scriptures, and faithful exemplars, what I have called ‘ecclesial ethics.’” Although such an ethics can and does accept inequality, at a minimum it would say that no one should

live in poverty and that the pursuit of wealth should be subordinate to love of God and neighbor.

Joseph Isaac Lifshitz also notes that Jewish texts, especially the Talmud, contain many diverse opinions. “Thus, any contemporary claims about Jewish ethics and economic (or other) thought must be made with a sense of limits.” However, behind the diversity is a principle of the “sanctity of property rights, as an expression of divine justice.” Another principle, though, is charity, which can be seen as a “social-justice agenda for balancing class gaps.” Ethical debate often centers on how to resolve these principles in application to modern interdependent societies.

Islamic thought, as Mohammad H. Fadel presents it, is also the product of numerous and diverse traditions based on juridical interpretations of the revealed sources of Islam—the Quran and the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad. Those sources contain strong denunciations of the vices associated with private property and wealth, but at the same time condemn theft of property and affirm the rights of ownership. Revelation thus posits “an alternative ethic of property based on generosity and solidarity.” From such principles, Islamic thinkers in the twentieth century have tried to develop a particularly Islamic approach to economic justice that distinguishes it from market capitalism and socialism. “Instead of taking success as a sign of divine entitlement, a Muslim is supposed to reflect on the fortuitous nature of worldly success, and be spurred to acts of generosity that countermand the worse impulses of a market economy.”

The Confucian tradition, as Stephen C. Angle shows, is based not on divine revelation but on a body of rational reflection passing through three periods of creative growth, all proceeding from principles enunciated by Confucius and his disciples from the fifth through second centuries BCE. A key concern is for social harmony, which is achieved through respect for proper hierarchical relationships, and moral cultivation to transcend the selfish impulses to profit at the expense of others. In most respects, Confucians “are not egalitarians, but neither will they countenance extreme inequality: their goal is a harmony that is good for each and all.”

For Buddhism, as presented by Christopher S. Queen, “material wealth and poverty are regarded as utterly inconsequential in the quest for salvation.” Wealth is a consequence of good karma and is morally good insofar as it is gained without greed or harm to others and offers an opportunity to gain merit by being generous, especially to the religious community.

“In light of these principles, modern notions of equality, human rights, and distributive justice, particularly as they relate to economic opportunity and prosperity, do not find direct parallels in early Buddhism.” In the modern world, however, practitioners of various forms of “engaged Buddhism” in both Asia and the West have formulated strategies to combat the collective, systemic, and institutional causes of human suffering, including exploitive economic systems that cause gross inequality.

Finally, Stephen R. Munzer overviews the various traditions and discusses their relevance to critical contemporary policy debates. He outlines areas of moral agreement—notably agreement that poverty should be eliminated or at least reduced—but he finds considerable areas of disagreement—especially on the degree to which governments should redistribute wealth. He also finds “spaces that have been left empty”—in particular, “the chance to figure out what, if anything, is so attractive about economic equality.”

Notes

1. Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17–48. See also Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 11–40.

2. Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All*, 35–37.

3. John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York, New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2016), 12–17 *passim*.

4. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (New York, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), esp. 3–30.

5. This variety of ways of reacting to the expansion of neo-liberal policies—with continental Europe and Japan less enthusiastic than the United States and United Kingdom—is itself a subject of research. Michael Mann has provided a large-scale overview of these divergent pathways in *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 4: Globalizations 1945–2011* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

6. The argument for the overall positive effects of the neo-liberal regime was first spread widely by Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York, New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999).

7. John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London, Great Britain: Granta Books, 1998). It is perhaps noteworthy that both Gray’s and

Friedman's sharply opposing assessments appeared almost simultaneously at the close of the last century. For an overview of the longer historical context, see Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

8. John Maynard Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London, Great Britain: Hogarth Press, 1927), 50.

9. Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour, 1920–1937* (London, Great Britain: Macmillan Publishers, 1992), 233–238.

10. Ian Morris, *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels: How Human Values Evolve* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 95.

11. Ian Morris provides a synthetic overview of these processes, with attention to measures of economic inequality, in *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels*, esp. 36ff and 101ff.