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## Introduction

**A**lthough few say they agree with injustice, nevertheless we live in an unjust world. In the world's richest countries injustice is caused less and less by having too few resources to share around fairly and it is increasingly being maintained by widespread adherence to beliefs that actually propagate it. These beliefs are often presented as natural and long-standing, but in fact they are mostly modern creations. What appeared fair and normal yesterday will often be seen as unjust tomorrow. Changing what is understood by injustice today means telling some people, usually those in positions of power, that what they consider to be fair is in fact in many ways unjust.

This book aims to help redefine injustice. While no one would claim to be on the side of injustice, without the continued spread of beliefs in support of injustice it would not survive long in its present form. Now that we have enough resources for all, much that was previously seen as unfortunate has become unjust.

The five tenets of injustice are that: elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair is inevitable. Because of widespread and growing opposition to the five key unjust beliefs, including the belief that so many should now be 'losers', most of those advocating injustice are careful with their words. And those who believe in these tenets are the majority in power across almost all rich countries. Although many of those who are powerful may want to make the conditions of life a little less painful for others, they do not believe that there is a cure for modern social ills, or even that a few inequalities can be much alleviated. Rather, they believe that just a few children are sufficiently able to be fully educated and only a few of those are then able to govern; the rest must be led. They believe that the poor will always be with us no matter how rich we are. They have also come to believe that most others are naturally,

perhaps genetically, inferior to them. And many of this small group believe that their friends' and their own greed is helping the rest of humanity as much as humanity can be helped; they are convinced that to argue against such a counsel of despair is foolhardy. It is their beliefs that uphold injustice.

This book brings together evidence which shows that these beliefs are unfounded. The evidence also shows how people who end up in power come so easily to hold these beliefs, or become converted to them, and how their beliefs provide false justification for those who benefit most from injustice.

### **1.1 The beliefs that uphold injustice**

Within affluent countries, especially the more economically unequal of affluent countries,<sup>1</sup> social injustices are now being recreated, renewed and supported by five new sets of beliefs. These beliefs have old origins, but have taken new faces. Although they are beliefs which have now been publicly condemned as wrong, beliefs which most individuals claim not to support, the acceptance of these beliefs by just a few, and the reluctance of many others to confront those few, is crucial to maintaining injustice in such times and lands of plenty. This book brings together and updates many of the arguments against upholding these beliefs. It suggests that if injustices are to be reduced for all, it is important not just to claim that you do not hold these beliefs, but to positively reject them. But if the existence of injustice is actually at the heart of what you believe to be correct, then simply saying you reject the labels attached to these beliefs (elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair) will not be sufficient to reduce injustice. If you think that the beliefs themselves about each label are correct, then you must also believe that injustice is good.

The beliefs that uphold injustice in its contemporary form have been given many names and categorised in many ways,<sup>2</sup> but most of the categorisations can be simplified to the five beliefs: elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair is inevitable. Each belief also creates a distinct set of victims – the delinquents, the debarred, the discarded, the debtors and the depressed. Those who uphold these beliefs find it hard to see

possibilities beyond the current situation; they are, in effect, advocates for the continuation of injustice, arguing that the victims will always be with us in large numbers, the numbers suggested in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Proportions that suffer injustices of different kinds in affluent nations

Fraction	Subjects	Labelled	Description of group who suffer the injustice	%	Year
A seventh	Children	Delinquent	Found limited or simple at learning when tested	13	2006
A sixth	People	Debarred	Excluded from social norms in at least two ways	16	1999/2001
A fifth	Adults	Debtors	Admit not managing to get by financially (if asked)	21	1984–2004
A quarter	Households	Discarded	Have no car where car use has become assumed	26	2006/07
A third	Families	Depressed	Member suffers depression/chronic anxiety disorder	33	2000
A half	Citizens	Disenfranchised	Adults who did not or could not vote in the latest US presidential election	46	2008

*Notes and sources:* Data on children are taken from an OECD survey of the Netherlands and represent 13% as limited or simple, nearly an eighth, but in Britain the proportion is a sixth; the figure of a seventh is a geographically wider average (see Section 3.1 of this book). The next four rows are derived from British studies of poverty (Section 4.1), society (Section 5.1), wealth (Section 6.1) and psychiatric morbidity (Section 7.1) from surveys taken in the years shown. The final row is derived from dividing the 131 million people who voted in the US presidential election of 2008 by the population aged 15+, some 243 million ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)), equivalent to an 18+ estimate including all those not counted as resident in the US.

It is a sign of the duplicity of our times that institutions which often say they are against elitism do most to promote it; that governments which say they aim to reduce social exclusion actually create it; that movements which pretend not to be prejudiced foster hate; that academic disciplines where the orthodoxy is to advocate greed cannot say so explicitly; and that many experts argue that the best that most can hope for is a life of which they themselves would despair. They

do not say this explicitly, but it is implied in their accusation that those who argue against them are being utopian.

As those with most power continue to promote elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair, injustice will not be reduced – it is described as inevitable and as ‘practical’ politics. It is only in the most unequal of rich nations that those with power can explicitly say that they believe there is good in the inequalities sustained by this injustice. Elsewhere in the rich world most who favour injustice are more circumspect, but as the examples in this book show, the powerful have been effective in many countries where life chances are now less fair than they were just a few decades ago. However, those who support injustice are being opposed and exposed more and more as time passes, and social movements are gathering momentum to challenge their views.

Because belief in the five tenets of injustice is so widespread among people in power, these beliefs are then propagated through what they control. For instance, many of those who fund and manage educational institutions encourage teachers to present these beliefs as truths. The beliefs are also propagated by governments whose departments for social security increasingly label the poor as wanting, feckless, immoral and criminal. The beliefs are supported by the media, where stories are common which imply that some people are less deserving, where great city businessmen (and a few businesswomen) are lauded as superheroes and where immigrants looking to work for a crumb of the City’s bonuses are seen as scroungers. The beliefs are supported by a politics whose mantra is that without greed there would be no growth, and without growth we would all be doomed.<sup>3</sup> These beliefs are supported by industries, whose spokespeople say we must continue to consume more and more and which now manufacture pharmaceutical treatments to cope with the consequent despair on a mass scale – within rich countries and worldwide, mental distress and despair is the largest growth industry for pharmaceutical companies and frontline medical practitioners.<sup>4</sup> So in various ways academia, government, the media, politics and industry are each a key element in promoting injustice.

## 1.2 The five faces of social inequality

This book is concerned mainly with injustice in affluent countries, but it does touch on wider debates. If you had to choose one word to characterise the nature of human society as it is currently arranged worldwide, there is no better word than ‘injustice’. Across all walks of life, between continents and over the decades, injustice has been constantly prevalent. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the recent history and current extent of injustice in general in affluent countries, before Chapters 3–7 examine the domains most affected by each face of inequality, starting with education.

### *‘Elitism is efficient’*

The origins of the ideas that currently constitute the core beliefs of injustice can be traced back to when we last lived in times as unequal as today, during the last ‘gilded age’, which began at the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and ended in 1914 in Europe, and in the 1920s in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Chapter 3 suggests that elite prizes such as those established by Alfred Nobel came about when they did, along with the first intelligence (IQ) tests, because it was only at that point that there were spoils great enough to be shared out in rich countries, and those who had gained most needed to justify their positions in newly created hierarchies. Nobel prizes were first awarded in 1901 in the midst of that first gilded age of great wealth concentration, when it was unimaginable that there would not be a ‘natural’ elite.

The statistics produced by some international bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), suggest that they still continue the tradition of trying to defend elitism as natural (see Figure 2, page 74, and the discussion of its derivation in Chapter 3), but these bodies are now far more coy about their intent than those in the 1890s who first used social statistics to suggest that paupers mainly bred more paupers. That coyness suggests that in recent years some progress against rising elitism has been made because elitists now know to hide their core beliefs about the distribution of human ability in obscure technical notes. Although elitist views still underlie the beliefs of many in

power, they have also now been institutionalised in the form of bodies such as the OECD. Those destined to be paupers today are labelled children ‘limited in their ability’ (see Section 3.1) – a staggering seventh of all children born in the richest of countries are given this label today. Almost 70 years ago in the UK, William Beveridge named ‘ignorance’ as one of his five social evils, but as ignorance has been overcome across the rich world, widespread elitism has taken its place, and children who would have appeared of normal ability in the 1940s are now called ‘limited’ today.

### *‘Exclusion is necessary’*

The most terrible result of elitism is that it can be used to justify the exclusion of so many people from normal social activity. Chapter 4 suggests that it was in the most affluent of countries a century ago that the supposed scientific theories defending inequality began to be drawn up. The modern origins of exclusion can be traced to an academic paper of 1895 when data were first presented that showed the geographical distribution of English and Welsh paupers in a way that was designed to suggest that pauperisation was some kind of natural phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> The timing of this was no coincidence – this was the first time under a market system that such an abundance of wealth had emerged. It then became necessary to try to update feudal justifications for the unequal distribution of that wealth and to explain why so many should have to live with so little. The new justifications became dominant beliefs between the 1890s and the 1930s, but were then rejected for a generation before gaining ground again as social exclusion rose from the late 1960s onwards, alongside the great growth in personal debt when the old social evil described by Beveridge as ‘want’ was cut down in size. The cycles through which people fell into exclusion due to having too little were first established as we currently see them only in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Before then, to be truly rich was to be landed. To be poor was, for many, normal. Today, one in six of all households in rich countries are again excluded from social norms due to poverty and are poor in at least two ways of counting poverty.<sup>8</sup> What now makes those households poor is the effects of the riches of others.

*'Prejudice is natural'*

Elitism and exclusion have further causes and corollaries, and chief among these is prejudice. As elitism and inequality rise, and as more people become socially excluded, or are able to exclude themselves by using their wealth, those at the top more often look down on others with ever greater disdain and fear, as evidenced by growing social segregation.<sup>9</sup> Those at the bottom are also less likely to trust others and more likely to become fearful in a society that so clearly values them so little. Racism rises in just these kinds of circumstances, and a wider form of racism (a new social Darwinism) quietly spreads.<sup>10</sup> Chapter 5 documents this process. It shows how, over time, inequalities in wealth and health, and the widespread acceptance of bigoted views, all shrank from their height in the 1920s to reach minima in the early 1970s, before rising up again in that fateful decade of oil shock, inflation and overseas intervention (war). Just as one in seven have been marked as 'limited' by elitist labels and one in six as 'poor' by the economic circumstances of exclusion, as a result of new prejudices about how it is acceptable to treat others (which has overtaken the old social evil of 'idleness' in importance and effect), an even higher proportion of one in five households in rich countries were only just managing to get by with great difficulty, even before the financial crash of 2008. Chapter 5 outlines the material mechanism through which prejudice is transmitted between generations, how it is maintained by inherited wealth and the deep social polarisation that results.

*'Greed is good'*

The rise of elitism, exclusion and prejudice were all precursors of the age of greed, ushered in during the 1980s, seen as good, and not questioned seriously until 2008. Chapter 6 shows how at least a quarter of households are now disregarded in what is considered access to normal infrastructure, whether it be simply the ability to own and drive a car or having the means to access the internet.

In the US not to have a car these days is not to live as a 'normal' human being.<sup>11</sup> But in Britain almost half the children of lone parents

have no access to a car.<sup>12</sup> Many people who need a car, because they have young children or find it hard to walk or no longer live near shops, have no car, but many of the car journeys made by others are non-essential and the majority of cars contain only one person, the driver. There are actually enough cars currently owned for all those who need a car to have one.

Mass car driving is the simplest example of what happens when greed begins to be valued in its own right. When you next look at a congested street, with cars jostling to move a few metres forward, pedestrians dodging in between, cyclists weaving dangerously around them, children walking past at the level of exhaust pipes, no one getting anywhere fast, and all those petrol engines continuously running, this is both the symbolic but also the very real collective outcome of individual greed encouraged to grow by the mantra of personal freedom.

### *'Despair is inevitable'*

Unsurprisingly, growing despair is the result for those living in the most elite of affluent societies, where inequalities are allowed and encouraged to rise untrammelled, where more and more are excluded or live partly in fear of being ostracised, where prejudice towards the 'lower orders' begins again to become normal and where greed is commonly referred to implicitly (if not often explicitly) as good. Chapter 7 recounts how in the 1990s the fastest rise in despair occurred. This rise was not just in the growing use of prescription medicines, but in the growth of feelings that there must be more to life.<sup>13</sup> Even children were hit with a feeling of despair, with the fastest increases in adolescent depression being recorded in North America in the 1990s, a rise found not to be due to changing diagnostic practice.<sup>14</sup> In Britain this despair reached such levels that by 2006 it was being reported that a third of families had at least one family member who was suffering from depression or a chronic anxiety disorder.<sup>15</sup> The despair was also public, as shown by the publication of so many books criticising modern trends, the rise of the green movement and of new forms of social protest. Across Europe the majority of best-selling books on subjects such as economics were not

business manuals but alternative treatises on the woes of capitalism. By 2004 anti-globalisation books were almost the only books on business or economics that sold well in Europe.<sup>16</sup> The US was slower to catch the trend, but in 2008 voted in a president on a very different ticket to the usual. The promoters of individualism and acquisition were themselves beginning to be greeted with despair.

Chapter 8 brings the argument to a conclusion. It concentrates on the 2000s, on how we stumbled into a crisis that no one now denies was of our own making. In Chapters 3–7 questions are asked as to who, why, where, what and when each new injustice hit, while Chapter 8 instead just asks *how* it is possible to be optimistic in the face of rising social injustices and a financial crash. It concentrates on what is now different, on what we now know and on how many more people are now involved in the arguments about what happens next. Out of the many things that are different, the increase in education is the most important, with a majority of young people in the world being literate, and near majorities in more equitable rich countries now attending university. Compared with the end of the last gilded age it is now much harder to see who or what there is left to exploit, and how much harder it will be to fool so many better informed people this time round.

### 1.3 A pocket full of posies

With injustice, all is connected. From the depicting of 19th-century paupers, to the awarding of 20th-century peace prizes, and the mapping of 21st-century global income distributions, injustice is the common denominator. The same patterns of gross inequality are seen again and again. They appear when health inequalities are calculated and wealth inequalities are tabulated. Within rich countries, the portrayal of children's abilities as lying along bell curves (as if these are natural things) is unjust. The consequent curving upwards of rates of depression and anxiety is closely connected to how children are treated, are ranked, and expect to be treated as adults. Portraying large groups of adults as inferior is similarly unjust, as is promoting greed among a few as some kind of benefit to the many, or seeing the

distress of so many as a reflection of their ascribed failings. Injustice has always survived because of its support by the powerful. The same is true today, but never have the powerful had so little to fall back on.

Arguments against injustice used to be rare treatises. A single essay against slavery written in 1785 could be held up high as a shining example of such work two centuries later,<sup>17</sup> but it has largely only been within living memory that we have started to learn that it was not the essays of aristocrats that made differences in the past; it was the fact that their contributions were far more often recorded and preserved. Slaves made slavery uneconomic by not adapting willingly to slavery; they revolted. Similarly, it is only within the last century that the lives of the 'great men' of science, politics and business (men who are still so often put on pedestals) have been re-examined and found not to produce biographies of awe.<sup>18</sup> Their fallibilities, failings and, most importantly, their luck are all being revealed more frequently. In each case they are remembered for an achievement that was always just about to be made because of the circumstances or the actions of others around them, now mostly forgotten. The belief that human advancement is achieved by a few great people themselves standing on the shoulders of giants is misplaced. There is no such thing as superhuman people, and to say that they exist and to say that some people are more human than others is unjust.<sup>19</sup>

Men still pay homage to other men. The vast majority of that tiny group of humans who have had their histories recorded has been male, but a new generation of men and women is beginning to realise how it is both unjust and unrealistic to claim more than an immeasurably small impact as their personal contribution. One American scholar, Elvin Wyly, who was among the early group to document how sub-prime lending was unsustainable in the US, wrote of his writings recently that all he had done was to have '... gathered a posie of other men's flowers, and only the thread that binds them is my own'.<sup>20</sup> Even that phrase was not his own, he admitted. It was attributed to the title page of Peter Gould's book (on medical geography), who in turn was quoting from the title page of a book of poems collected during the Second World War, who in turn.... The earliest recorded version dates from over 400 years earlier and reads: 'I have here only made a nosegay of culled flowers, and have

brought nothing of my own but the thread that ties them together'.<sup>21</sup> And the only reason that this is the first recording is that printing had only just been invented then. The idea that we do little more than collect the flowers of others' ideas and simply tie them together in slightly different ways will have begun with the first picking of flowers, long before it could be recorded on paper.

Several years' careful research across many academic disciplines and the consequent documentation of many others' ideas and comments have come together in this book, which is the bringing together of others' posies with a few of my own thoughts to add to the call for greater levels of social justice. True social justice will both create and require much greater equality than is as yet widely accepted.<sup>22</sup>

# Notes and sources

## Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> The affluent or rich world consists of those countries where the best-off billion people live, that is, almost all of the countries in Europe and in North America, and Japan.

<sup>2</sup> Table 1, on page 3, gives an indication of how many people suffer most directly from each injustice in rich countries. On the categorisation of injustices see Wolff, J. and de-Shalit, A. (2007) *Disadvantage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 38, 39, 106 and 191, who in turn refer to Amartya Sen's listings; and for similar categorisations see Watts, B., Lloyd, C., Mowlam, A. and Creegan, C. (2008) *What are today's social evils? Summary*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation ([www.jrf.org.uk/publications/what-are-today's-social-evils](http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/what-are-today's-social-evils)). Both of these tend to produce lists of around 10 modern evils, or sources of injustice and disadvantage, but many are easily paired and so are collapsible to five (as is shown in Chapter 2, Table 2, page 17).

<sup>3</sup> A mantra exposed very clearly and recently in Lawson, N. (2009) *All consuming*, London: Penguin.

<sup>4</sup> Health budgets are raided (top-sliced) to fund armies of counsellors to tell us that all is not so bad, family doctors spend most of their working hours dealing with people whose problems are not physical, and the World Health Organization (WHO) ranks mental ill health higher and higher with every assessment it makes of the leading causes of death and distress worldwide, and specifically shows that the rates of prevalence of mental ill health are almost perfectly correlated with income inequality in rich countries. See WHO comparable psychiatric surveys, as reported in Wilkinson, R. G. and Pickett, K. (2009) *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*, London: Allen Lane, p 67.

<sup>5</sup> See Krugman, P. (2007) *The conscience of a liberal*, New York, NY: W.W. Norton, p 18. The height of excess in the last gilded age was seen in the 'Great Gatsby' summer of 1922. Money moved more slowly then and the financial crash came seven years later. The height of excess in the current gilded age was recorded in the autumn of 2007 as City bankers partied on their bonuses right up to Christmas. The hangover in 2008 was unparalleled: see Chakraborty, A. (2007) 'If I had a little money ...', *The Guardian*, 8 December. For the origin of the term 'new gilded age' see also Bartels, L.M. (2008) *Unequal democracy: The political economy of the new gilded age*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Pearson, K. (1895) 'Contributions to the mathematical theory of evolution – II. Skew variation in homogeneous material', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series A, Mathematical*, vol 186, pp 343–414: this paper may have contained the first histogram of human subjects by area.

<sup>7</sup> For the cycles to exist, enough people had to be given the opportunity to cycle up the social scales to then be available to fall back down in sufficient numbers, and that circumstance first occurred only in the 1960s, which is why the term 'cycle of deprivation' first came into widespread use in the 1970s. With the prejudice of those times it was more often, and erroneously, used to suggest 'family pathology' as a mechanism whereby poverty was passed down the generations. This was simply a rehashing of the old claim that paupers mainly bred more paupers. The phrase 'cycles of exclusion' here means those shown in Figure 8 (Chapter 4, page 120).

<sup>8</sup> The figure varies between times and countries. This particular fraction best fits Britain in 1999 as an estimate of the proportion of households found to be poor by at least two definitions. See Bradshaw, J. and Finch, N. (2003) 'Overlaps in dimensions of poverty', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol 32, no 4, pp 513–25.

<sup>9</sup> For the statistics see Dorling, D., Rigby, J., Wheeler, B., Ballas, D., Thomas, B., Fahmy, E., Gordon, D. and Lupton, R. (2007) *Poverty, wealth and place in Britain, 1968 to 2005*, Bristol: The Policy Press, and for the mechanism read Bauman, Z. (2006) *Liquid fear*, Cambridge: Polity Press, which provides a very succinct description of the process by which the social distancing between rich and poor occurs as inequalities rise.

<sup>10</sup> See Hayter, T. (2004) *Open borders: The case against immigration controls*, London: Pluto Press, p 151 for examples of what then results, ranging from the building of the Cutteslowe Wall between neighbourhoods within one city to the widespread toleration of an intolerance of international immigration.

<sup>11</sup> Bauman, Z. (2007) *Consuming life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p 147, quoting Neil Lawson on consumption.

<sup>12</sup> See Section 6.1, in Chapter 6, this volume, and Offer, A. (2006) *The challenge of affluence: Self-control and well-being in the United States and Britain since 1950*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 190–6.

<sup>13</sup> See Bauman, Z. (2008) *The art of life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp 57, 120, 132.

<sup>14</sup> See Figure 21 in Chapter 7, page 276, this volume. There are also data from Scotland showing similar results.

<sup>15</sup> CEPMHPG (Centre for Economic Performance's Mental Health Policy Group) (2006) *The depression report: A New Deal for depression and anxiety disorders*, London: CEPMHPG, London School of Economics and Political Science.

<sup>16</sup> Kay, J. (2004) *The truth about markets: Why some nations are rich but most remain poor* (2nd edn), London: Penguin, p 323.

<sup>17</sup> See Clarkson, T. (2001 [1785]) ‘An essay on the impolicy of the African slave trade’, in G. Davey Smith, D. Dorling and M. Shaw (eds) *Poverty, inequality and health in Britain: 1800–2000 – A reader*, Bristol: The Policy Press, pp 2–6.

<sup>18</sup> For an early example of the debunking of those who were supposedly especially great and good, see Strachey, L. (1918) *Eminent Victorians*, New York, NY: G.P. Putnam and Sons.

<sup>19</sup> We have traditions of telling fairy stories that do not state the mundane truth, that all inventions were of discoveries about to be made because it had just become possible to make them, and who exactly made them is largely inconsequential. We also rarely point out how constrained people are by their circumstances, and that ‘... the average newspaper boy in Pittsburgh knows more about the universe than did Galileo, Aristotle, Leonardo or any of those other guys who were so smart they only needed one name’ (Gilbert, D. [2006] *Stumbling on happiness*, London: HarperCollins, p 213). You can argue that most of the now forgotten toilers who were just beaten to the winning post of invention were also equally exceptional people, but that argument fails to hold recursively, as for every one of them, there is another. Elvis Presley is a good example of the right (white) man being in the right place at the right time to become seen as so special later.

<sup>20</sup> According to [www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/acknowledgments.html](http://www.geog.ubc.ca/~ewyly/acknowledgments.html), the home page of Elvin Wyly.

<sup>21</sup> According to John Bartlett (1820–1905) in his book of *Familiar quotations* (10th edn, published in 1919), quotation number 9327, this was attributed to Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533–92). It is attributed to *Of physiognomy* (book, 3, chapter 12) (see [www.bartleby.com/100/731.58.html](http://www.bartleby.com/100/731.58.html)).

<sup>22</sup> See Cohen, G.A. (2008) *Rescuing justice and equality*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.