

# **Economic Theory and the Social Question: Some Dialectics Regarding the Work-Dependency Relationship\***

By Richard E. Wagner\*\*

## **Abstract**

This article uses the 19<sup>th</sup> century concern with “the social question” to explore how theories shape our insights into our subjects of interest. Contemporary theory mostly construes economics as a science of rational action, which reduces the social question to a matter of material inequality. In contrast, this article treats economics as a form of social theory, with the social question revolving around the material and the moral qualities of societies. While redistribution may be a component of efforts to address the social question, primary focus rests on the institutional arrangements through which human capacities are formed and moral orientations generated.

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## **1. Society or Rational Action?**

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economists articulated “the social question” to focus their attention on the social problems that stemmed from the growth of industrialization and the migration of masses of people from farms to cities. What was described as the social question has since morphed into the problem of inequality, illustrated by such recent works as Atkinson (2015), Piketty (2014), and Stiglitz (2012). For a theorist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to assert the presence of a social question is not identical to a contemporary theorist asserting the presence of a problem of inequality. The con-

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temporary concern with inequality is a reduction from the older focus on the social question. As with any such reduction, some of the older themes are carried forward but others are lost. The division between what has been carried forward and what has been lost, moreover, tracks the significant change in the character of economic theory that transpired during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Where economic theory originated as a theory of society approached through the principle of economizing action, economics became a theory of rational action writ large during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This difference in scholarly orientations, moreover, is illustrated cogently by Ross Emmett's (2006) comparison of Frank Knight's classical orientation with George Stigler and Gary Becker's (1977) canonical statement of neoclassicism.

There are two textual references from the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that are highly relevant for the examination I wish to undertake. One source is Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (1890). The other and contrasting source is Francis Edgeworth's essay (1925 [1897]) setting forth a program for maximizing social utility by redistributing income from rich to poor. For Edgeworth, the social question resided in the unequal distribution of the utility people derive from consumption. Edgeworth's treatment set in motion a train of thought initiated by Frank Ramsey (1927) that led to the theory of optimal taxation summarized by James Mirrlees (1994), in which human flourishing is defined by the volume of consumption, in the aggregate as well as in its distribution.

By contrast, Marshall showed little interest in consumption and utility. For Marshall, economics fundamentally concerned the social organization of human activity, with consumption being but the tail that Marshall did not allow to wag his dog. Especially noteworthy in this respect is Marshall's assessment of socialism (as quoted by Talcott Parsons (1931, 155)): "I think the chief dangers of Socialism lie not in its tendency towards a more equal distribution of income, for I can see no harm in that, but in the sterilizing influence on those mental activities which have gradually raised the world from barbarism." Activity and not consumption is the analytical window through which Marshall's emphasis would lead someone to examine the social question.

Similarly, another prominent economist from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, William Stanley Jevons, presumed that "social progress implied a diminution in the social services as self-reliance and independence increased, rather than a steady expansion of public provision" (Hutchison 1953, 47). For Jevons as well as Marshall, societal betterment occurred fundamentally within the domain of the moral, and with the material conforming to the moral and not the other way around. In this common presupposition of Jevons and Marshall, we encounter a tacit presumption about the distribution of human capacities that was articulated by Adam Smith's assertion that there was little difference in human potential between street porters and philosophers (Levy and Peart 2008). Where Edgeworth's orientation would lead a theorist to explore programs dedicated to leveling peaks in the distribution of income, Marshall's orientation would lead a theorist to explore programs focused on raising the troughs in that distribution.

Furthermore, the two approaches are not simple obverses of one another, as the rest of this article will explain.

## **2. Leveling, Raising, and the Social Question**

The distinction between leveling and raising is simple to state, but it leads quickly to a number of perplexities as Wagner (2010a) explains. Suppose 100 runners in a 10,000-meter race are distributed across a ten-minute interval by the end of the race. Someone might think it would be better if the runners were more closely bunched, say within a five-minute gap. How might this sentiment be acted upon? There are two ways, one simple and one complex. The simple way is either to assign head starts to the slower runners or to assign delayed starts to the faster runners. This corresponds to the redistributive approach of taxing-and-spending. The other way is to induce the slower runners to train harder or more effectively. Both approaches seek to narrow the range of outcomes, only they differ in their presumptions about human capacities. Leveling reflects the presumption that natural differences among people are huge and, concomitantly, that everyone is doing the best they can with the capacities with which they were endowed. Redistribution is thus the only option for narrowing the gap between fast and slow or rich and poor. In other words, there is no social question because social outcomes are simple aggregations over the individuals who invariably use their given talents to the best possible effect within the context of contemporary societies with their extensive divisions of labor.

In contrast, raising is not expressly redistributive. Most significantly, raising does not construe society as a simple aggregation over the individuals who constitute the society. To the contrary, society is a real entity even though it is not a sentient creature, as Wagner (2007; 2010b) explains. Running is, of course, a quite different activity than participation in societal life; people aren't forced to run but they must participate in societal life. It is well recognized that the same set of people can generate different outcomes depending on the institutional framework within which they interact. Indeed, this was the central theme of Thomas Schelling (1978). This observation surely pertains to the social organization of welfare just as it pertains elsewhere. Simple observation throughout the world shows that flourishing is not an inexorable condition of social life but is rather a contingent feature. Some institutional frameworks are more consistent with flourishing than other frameworks.

How do theories of political economy relate to leveling and raising? Political economy within the Edgeworthian motif reflects patterns of thought that make leveling appear almost automatically as the only way to proceed. It is presumed that observed incomes reflect the best efforts of people to transform their talents into income. People are presumed not to misuse their talents, so low income means that those well-used talents are not highly valued by other people. Poverty is thus

something that can't be addressed by individual effort and can only be addressed through redistribution, for aggregate income is a simple addition over individual efforts and market prices.

Norbert Elias (1982 [1939]) reminds us that adults reach adulthood through some civilizing process, of which many exist within the same society. Some people might arrive at adulthood through a process that equipped them with the skills and talents necessary to flourish inside a market economy while others do not. Within this setting, it would be unreasonable to presume that everyone arrives at adulthood equally able to participate effectively in the economic life of a society. If such participation is not a type of involuntary reflex like breathing but rather is something that is learned and acquired, it is reasonable to ask how different institutional arrangements promote or impede that acquisition. The extent of flourishing, or of languishing, within a society would then be mediated through those institutional arrangements and the orientations toward economic activity they help to promote. The Jevons-Marshall contrast between independent and dependent living points in an analytically useful direction once it is recognized that society is not reasonably reducible to a representative or average agent.

### **3. Raising and Leveling within a Theory of Social Economy**

Walter Lippmann (1937) explains how the disintegration of feudalism led to the emergence of liberalism in an effort to understand how social coherence would be possible without the presence of lords of the manor along with adherence to custom and convention. This search for understanding led to the articulation of invisible hands and market economies where free individuals would generate orderly social patterns all the same. Much of the program of liberalism from the late 18<sup>th</sup> into the 19<sup>th</sup> century entailed the elimination of restrictions on the ability of people to choose their courses in life. Under primogeniture, for instance, only first-born sons could engage in agriculture because land could be acquired only through inheritance by eldest sons. Likewise, under coverture married women could own property only through their husbands, and so could not establish businesses on their own. Liberalism was in the vanguard of removing restrictions on individual autonomy, for which it received the designation *laissez-faire*. This version of liberalism maps readily onto the Stigler-Becker (1977) assertion that individuals will always do the best for themselves that they can with their endowed capacities. For the Stigler-Becker formulation, there can be no social question that cannot be addressed through income redistribution. In contrast, the Knight-Emmett (2006) formulation leads in a different analytical direction because society is not apprehended through simple addition over its members. Individuals exist inside various networks of social interaction, and those networks will promote various values and orientations that can influence the capacities that those

individuals acquire and carry forward in their lives. A genuine social question can arise once it is recognized that society is more than a summation over individuals.

In this respect, Friedrich Hayek (1948, 1–32) distinguishes between true and false individualism. True individualism, Hayek explains, “is *primarily a theory of society*, an attempt to understand the forces which determine the social life of man, and only in the second instance a set of political maxims derived from this view of society (6, emphasis added).” This view of individualism is alive in the Knight-Emmett formulation of individuals having the ability to use their reflexive ability to modify their modes of conduct. What Hayek characterized as the false view of individualism is central to the Stigler-Becker formulation, which is a theory about individual rationality and not a theory about society. In short, false individualism construes economics as a theory of rational action while true individualism construes economics as a theory of society, along with recognizing that you cannot get to society simply by creating an aggregate of individual actions. Individual rationality can be conveyed by models of Robinson Crusoe alone on his island. The presence of multiple Crusoes together on the same island generates social phenomena that entail more than aggregation over individual actions. For instance, property rights emerge through interaction. It is the same with quarrels, along with practices, conventions, and institutions for resolving conflict. So, too, do the talents that individuals acquire as they move from infancy to adulthood. Crusoe alone on his island might have some natural distribution of talents. When multiple Crusoes interact, however, the distribution of talents that people acquire will vary with their patterns and networks of interaction. It is at this point where the social question arises.

The political economy of leveling divides a society into two sets of people: those from whom taxes are taken and those who receive transfers. This division corresponds to the commonplace distinction between “haves” and “have-nots.” If one were to ask what it is that the haves have that the have-nots lack, the standard answer would be income or wealth. This follows from the formulation which holds that people are identical in all relevant respects except their ability to convert their natural talents into income. Everyone necessarily performs to their full capacities in the conduct of their lives, but some people just have more talent for transforming effort into income. One troubling feature of this analytical framework is the irrelevance of society to the conclusions reached about individual conduct. The orthodox presumption is that it is not meaningful to consider how people came to attain their positions, reflecting the Crusoe-like character of much economic theory. This is hardly a sensible procedure once it is recognized that the journey from infancy to adulthood occurs within a variety of social settings that influence the talents people acquire and the orientations they form about personal conduct inside society. The talents a person develops can be recognized as subject to influence through social practices and institutions without denying the relevance of genetics. For instance, a person who is short and has little ability to jump has no chance of making a living playing basketball professionally.

An alternative possibility, which is precluded by this standard formulation, is that the haves and have-nots can also differ in such qualities as attitudes, orientations, and activities, and with those qualities exerting a significant impact on income. Consider a variation on Henry Fawcett's (1871) tale of Robinson and Smith. For Fawcett, each started at the same point in life in similar occupations earning similar amounts of income. Robinson spent all of his income, a good part of it on amusement. Smith saved part of his income and put a good part of the remainder into personal improvement. As the years passed, Smith advanced into higher paying positions while Robinson stayed pretty much where he started. The incomes of the two diverged increasingly with the passing of time. If the two were compared after, say, 30 years, Smith could well be judged to be well-to-do while Robinson was poor. Yet the difference between the two is only a reflection of the different choices they made over the preceding years. Robinson could have been less of a spendthrift and saved more, as did Smith. Alternatively, Robinson might have been more energetic in his job and hence received similar advancements to what Smith received.

This tale of Robinson and Smith could have been told as a tale of two distinct civilizing processes through which infants become adults. For instance, the process inside of which Smith grew up might have promoted more fully the talents and capacities required for effective market action than did the process inside of which Robinson grew up. Similar to Becker and Mulligan (1997), time preference is not a piece of data but is something that emerges in some fashion. For Becker and Mulligan, time preference is an ordinary product of optimizing behavior. In contrast, time preference is a feature of the civilizing process within which young people form their visions regarding their future possibilities and prospects. For time preference to figure into treatments of the social question, it is necessary that individual orientations toward themselves and their environments are shaped by what they learn through their social interactions.

The political economy of leveling has emerged while theorists have looked through an analytical window wherein moral imaginations, like preferences, are data with which people are endowed for better or for worse. Within this analytical window there is no genuine social question but only a question of redistribution. For there to be a genuine social question, it is necessary to recognize that the content of the moral imaginations can be influenced through the civilizing processes within which people form their orientations toward life. Within this setting, the value of a person's human capital is influenced by the civilizing process inside of which an infant becomes an adult. In part, that process entails schooling and its impact on the prices of personal attributes, along the lines that James Heckman (2019) sketches in his survey of Jan Tinbergen's treatment of inequality. But more than schooling is in play as Jeffrey Alexander (2006) explores in considerable detail. To claim scope for societal sources of influence on human potentials is not to deny the importance of genetics. It's even possible to assign primary significance to genetics while still maintaining room for societal influence. The presumption of a blank slate (Pinker 2002) can be avoided without denying the ability of environmental situations to influence the content of

moral imaginations. For instance, it seems to be well recognized that children, young boys in particular, who grow up without a father present seem typically to be less suited to market activity than other children (Pruett 2000). Furthermore, social arrangements can influence the extent to which children are raised without fathers (Murray 1985).

A program of raising would commend a different locus of sympathy and obligation than would a program of leveling. The political economy of leveling contains a subtext that directs human sympathy toward those who have little materially speaking, and with the redistribution of income being a collective expression of that sympathy as illustrated by the effort of Hochman and Rodgers (1969) to place income redistribution within the framework of Paretian welfare economics. Having low income is a sufficient condition for receiving sympathy and transfers because this condition is an imposition of nature and not a consequence of choice. As an individual experiment, such a direction of sympathy is probably of little consequence. This inconsequential character evaporates, however, when we move to the societal level of market experiment. If there is any sympathy to be granted at the societal level, it is perhaps more effectively directed toward those who undertake efforts that contribute to societal flourishing rather than to those who act in dissipative and improvident fashion. To be sure, this might be a difficult and contentious distinction to make, for it unavoidably becomes involved with efforts to bring moral distinctions to bear on different patterns of life along the lines that Gertrude Himmelfarb (1983; 1992) illuminates.

The language of obligation speaks to who owes what to whom. The political economy of leveling holds that the haves are obligated to support the have-nots. This pattern of obligation arises because the haves and have-nots are presumed to differ only in endowments that are not of their making. In contrast, the social-theoretic telling of Robinson and Smith points to a different and more complex locus of obligation. For instance, Robinson might have grown up in an environment without a father present, which led in turn to Robinson having a weaker capacity for self-discipline than Smith. Among a set of such boys, moreover, some might receive succor from such offices of civil society as service clubs or churches that helps them to develop useful orientations despite the absence of a father, while others are just left to drift. As an individual experiment, low incomes are low incomes, and that is all there is to say. As a societal or market experiment, however, a good deal of observed low income surely reflects poorly understood social processes and institutions that shape individual orientations toward themselves in relation to other people.

Self-respect is surely a reasonable quality to find among the members of a flourishing society and is surely something that is acquired through activity and not through consumption, as Lawrence Meade (1986) explains. A society does not attain the quality of being flourishing independently of the actions of its members but rather attains that quality as a result of those actions. Flourishing is also largely a social and not an individual quality in being the outcome of a market experiment more than an individual experiment. What this suggests is the value of an inquiry into the relation



between welfare and flourishing. To speak of self-respect is to bring raising into the analytical foreground; however, raising cannot be accomplished without active participation by the person being raised. Raising requires changes in patterns of conduct, so raising involves relationships among participants that are not necessary for leveling. Leveling is a simple program to pursue. All that is necessary is for government to tax some people and distribute the proceeds to other people. It is obvious that governments possess the knowledge necessary to do this.

In contrast, a program of raising is difficult even to articulate, let alone actually to implement. In contrast to the unilateral action involved in leveling, raising requires active engagement among a set of participants. Raising is a complex quality of a system of human relationships and not a simple product of taxing-and-spending. A program of raising entails complex patterns of social cooperation organized within the precincts of civil society, and which are incapable of being duplicated by any single person or attained unilaterally through some singular act of planning.

#### **4. Polycentric Arrangements for the Political Economy of Raising**

Flourishing is more a societal feature than a matter of individual action. It is easy enough to state the central idea behind a program of raising: it means helping people to become more effective at making their way in a society organized within an extensive division of labor. While this idea is easy enough to state, it is not so easy to implement. A program of raising requires the use of knowledge that is not fully possessed by any single person and involves instead institutionally structured coordination among multiple participants. A program of leveling can be instituted through the monocentric imposition of taxes and transfers. In contrast, raising requires use of divided knowledge that no one possesses in its entirety. Within this setting, a polycentric process of open competition among ideas and programs will generally be more effective in promoting social flourishing than the monocentric political economy associated with conventional programs of redistributive taxation.

Among other things, a program of raising requires programmatic distinctions to be made between good and bad choices. The distinction between good and bad choices is easy enough to make at an abstract level: good choices are those that lead to individual actions that support societal flourishing. But how might that abstract character play out once it is recognized that families are the crucible inside of which the moral imaginations of children are shaped. Some parents pay attention to this and do it well, other parents don't. Political processes aren't at all adept at supervising or policing parental action, and children cannot be said to have chosen their characters or the contents of their moral imaginations. While Hillary Clinton's (1996) claim that it takes a village to raise a child raised a fair amount of controversy, it was accurate all the



same. What was not accurate, however, was the presumption that the ideal village operated in hierarchical fashion much like a Health and Human Services bureaucracy.

Children differ in the quality of the guidance they receive from parents, both directly through parental action and indirectly through the participation of children in the nurturing activities of various organizations that operate inside the precincts of civil society (Alexander 2006), and with that participation often propelled by parental guidance. Plato and Aristotle recognized the centrality of parents to the fortunes of children. This recognition that led Plato to advocate the socialization of parenthood by raising all children in common. Plato claimed that his scheme would lead all parents to act paternally toward all children, in contrast to acting with partiality toward their own children. In contrast, Aristotle explained that Plato's scheme would lead to every child being equally neglected by all parents. Equal neglect is the outcome of communal parenting, both with regard to Plato's scheme and with regard to Hillary Clinton's more modest proposal to move a public bureaucracy into the foreground of raising children.

Yet Plato and Clinton recognize a difficult problem in promoting flourishing societies: the period between infancy and adulthood is when individual attitudes and orientations are largely acquired, and parents differ in the qualities they bring to bear on their supervision of that acquisition. In consequence, some children arrive at adulthood better equipped to flourish within a modern division of labor than other children. If we ask whether the status of being a have-not rather than a have is a natural condition or is self-inflicted, as it was for Robinson, the reasonable answer is that both sources are present and with the relative significance of those sources differing among people. Robinson, in Fawcett's illustration, became a have-not by choice. A woman who has several children while living on welfare and without a father present similarly had choices, or perhaps she didn't, depending at how she entered that situation. However, she entered it, her children will likely face a restricted set of options regarding the mental and moral orientations they are likely to possess as they enter adulthood. As always, there are two types of errors in this situation: one error is to aid the Robinsons when they had the capacity to be like the Smiths; the other error is to fail to aid those Robinsons who had no capacity to be like the Smiths. Furthermore, it is misleading to characterize these errors simply in terms of an amount of aid, for that is the approach of leveling. The aid that accompanies a program of raising involves relationships aimed at promoting the orientations necessary for successful living inside a society characterized by an extensive division of labor. While there is no recipe for achieving perfection, it seems reasonably clear that the institutions of civil society have an underappreciated role to play along the lines Virgil Storr (2012) lays out in characterizing the social character of market institutions and processes.

The distinction between simple and complex phenomena (Hayek 1967) is vital in this respect. Leveling is a simple program that can be described by just two elements: (1) a distribution of tax extractions and (2) a distribution of transfer payments. It is easy to implement leveling. In contrast, raising is a complex program that has nu-

merous components that can be combined in myriad different ways. Each of these combinations represents a different approach to raising. The elements involved in raising can be combined in different ways to generate a huge number of distinct programs. This is a feature of the combinatorial arithmetic that pertains to complex phenomena. Suppose you ask how many different ways you can combine 13 cards out of a deck of 52. The answer is that it exceeds 635 billion. If a program of raising were to involve combining 13 components out of 52, you would likewise have over 635 billion distinct programs of raising.

Raising is predicated on the presumption that those classified as have-nots differ from those classified as haves in qualities that render them less effective in participating in the economic life of a society. This presumption differs sharply from that on which leveling is based, namely, that everyone invariably does the best they can with their talents, and it just so happens that some talents don't pay well. A program of raising must thus address numerous elements, and with the combinatorial complexity of the situation precluding any particular person or office from being able to implement some optimizing solution. There are numerous talents that can be combined in numerous possible ways to comprise a program of raising. Actually, a program of raising would contain a complex arrangement of activities within a division of labor and organizations that deal in particular with facilitating the transition from infancy to adulthood.

This part of the social division of labor would resemble a tree with many branches, and with different branches leading to yet further branches, just as characterizes any market process. For instance, one branch might concern whether to treat fatherless boys by leaving them with their mothers or by putting them into foster care. But each of these options leads to other branches in this road of complex possibility. The branch where the boy stays with the mother, for instance, could differ depending on whether the siblings are boys or girls, and also on the numbers of siblings involved. The branch where foster care is the option likewise might differ according to whether the home is proprietary, church operated, or an intact family. In the presence of such complexity, open experimentation is the best known procedure for generating knowledge, as Bergh and Höijer (2008) explain in their treatment of institutional competition. Such openness of experimentation, moreover, has little to do with central government grants for local programs, for such grants typically restrict rather than promote experimentation because they specify in advance particular branches that must be or cannot be explored.

Economists, and perhaps social scientists generally, fail to appreciate how fully it is that unarticulated practices contribute to the generation of patterns of individual action that would be denoted as beneficial. For instance, the ability of employers to dismiss employees who are late to work or are discourteous to customers or co-workers might induce such employees to set alarm clocks and to avoid carousing so late into the night. Even if that employee fails to acquire such discipline, other employees might be induced to do so to avoid a similar experience. Should misplaced concern about equity

restrict the ability of employers to dismiss mal-performing employees, it is reasonable to expect such rulings to weaken the forces of self-discipline by weakening the connection between actions and consequences (Schelling 1984).

## 5. A Peroration on Quantity, Quality, and Social Flourishing

Flourishing is a straightforward concept with respect to an individual and corresponds to the axiom that more is better than less. With respect to society and the social question, however, flourishing is a complex concept. That complexity could be eliminated by reducing flourishing to the pure materiality of a rate of economic growth. This reduction, however, is equivalent to reducing a society to a representative agent. Yet the notion of societal flourishing surely touches upon qualitative matters regarding such things as the intensity of interest people have in their lives (Wagner 2006). With respect to Alasdair MacIntyre's (1988) examination of the competing rationalities of effectiveness and excellence, and also Robert Pirsig's (1974) meditation to similar effect, it can be asked whether flourishing resides in quantity or in quality. A multiplication of Adam Smith's pin factory could be the road to flourishing if we let GDP accounting rule the day. Can we be sure that a system of economic organization where some people spend their entire days drawing wire while other people spend their entire days straightening wire, and with yet other people spending their entire days cutting wire, will be a flourishing society? It is here where the question of quantity and quality must be faced. If flourishing is associated with the active engagement of people in the full conduct of their lives, pin factories and assembly lines would not seem to provide a general framework for flourishing, as distinct from high measures of GDP per capita.

The extreme alienation of labor that is involved in staffing pin factories has to pay sufficiently well to attract people away from other uses of their talents. Hence there will be some limit on the extent of pin factories within a free economy. There will be plenty of people who choose to be carpenters, bakers, stevedores, and mechanics because those activities engage their entire beings throughout the day; such people will regard it as not worthwhile to exchange the higher pay the pin factory offers to embrace the somnambulant stupor the pin factory offers for much of the day. In this respect, Matthew Crawford (2009) is particularly engaging in explaining how many manual crafts and trades are able to engage a person's entire being throughout the day while many white collar and professional activities, particularly in large corporations, are reminiscent of high-paying pin factories. Joe Bageant (2007), moreover, offers a more visceral treatment of a theme similar to Crawford's. One of the significant themes of Schelling (1978) is that spontaneously generated outcomes are not universally beneficial.

Once we acknowledge the complex character of modern societies in the vein of Schelling, we necessarily butt against recognition that there is no magical or singular action that someone can take to remake society for the better. Many people advance proposals to improve society, and surely no one has ever advanced proposals that they thought or claimed would make society worse. Yet societies are complex organisms that can be subject to limited guidance as distinct from full-blown control. In the United States and western nations generally, poverty has generally been abolished as a condition of life, as judged by consumption with governmental transfers included. This dependence on transfers, however, is far different from the vision of a liberal society as comprised of free and responsible individuals who are living together in processes organized around their reciprocal indebtedness. A program of leveling is simple and so can be implemented and has been for more than a century. To be sure, the tax-transfer programs of leveling are resisted by many who would provide transfers, but such programs intellectually are simple matters even if they are difficult to enact. Short of collective planning, raising calls in good measure upon the normal human sympathies that form the basis for liberal societies, recognizing only that nation-wide programs of purporting actively to promote what are described as just distributions of income or wealth undermine their own objectives by repressing the self-help proclivities of the recipients of assistance. In contrast, Mikayla Novak (2018) sketches some significant contours of an alternative approach to inequality grounded on raising and not leveling. Recurring to Buchanan's (1977) articulation of the Samaritan's dilemma, Samaritans are valuable participants within the framework of civil society to expand the horizons of people who otherwise might suffer from tunnel vision, but only to the extent that the Samaritans can count on the willing participation of recipients in the co-production processes in which they all participate.

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