

Inequalities, social justice and the web of social interactions

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Abstract: Empirical analyses of inequality generally focus on resources, whereas philosophical theories of justice are divided between those that focus on resources and opportunities on one hand, and those that focus on social relations, on the other hand. This paper proposes a model of society that embeds both resources and social relations into a web of social interactions that determine how people flourish or struggle in life. This model suggests rethinking the analysis of inequalities and social justice, especially with the possibility of identifying trade-offs and synergies between the different components of the social web.

Introduction

The analysis of social justice and injustice must rely on a specific model of society and of what makes individuals flourish or struggle. In a society in which everyone depended on manna from heaven and no interaction took place, the distribution of manna would be the central issue, and people would find it unjust if some received less than others.

Our society is more complex than the manna model, but normative thinking is similarly shaped by a few visions of how people's lives are made successful or painful. The idea that resources are the key dimension of advantage for social justice analysis is particularly pervasive in the study of inequalities, with resources being understood to be multidimensional but often conveniently assimilated with income. Theories of social justice are divided into several schools, with an important opposition between those that define justice in terms of distribution and those that propose a relational approach. The distributive theories come in various stripes, depending on whether they focus on resources, on opportunities, or on outcomes. The relational approach focuses on the quality of social interactions and the power and status differences between individuals. The debate between the two schools is not reducible to but involves asking whether the relational approach can be translated into

a distributive language (presumably, it can), and whether the standard distributive approach is too superficial on social relations (arguably, it is).

In this paper I would like to propose a different way to look at these issues. The main limitation of these approaches, I will argue, is that they are too abstract. A more concrete model of individual and social life can enable us to be more specific about the normative principles that are relevant to the social structure. The model proposed here is inspired by the detailed analysis of contemporaneous social issues developed in IPSP (2018) with the contribution of most disciplines of social science and humanities. It turns out that the model proposed here encompasses both distributive and relational aspects, and therefore naturally unites the opposed schools of justice in a new way. But the most intriguing part of this project is that the unification brings a new dimension to the analysis of social (in)justice, due to the interdependence and spillovers between different spheres of interactions. Social justice is then not just a matter of promoting some good quality of a relevant object, but also a matter of optimally trading off between the various aspects. Another unexpected outcome of this line of thought is that the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic values is blurred because all aspects of the various social interactions generally combine both types of values.

The paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, a first section recalls how the study of inequalities is based on a particular model of the distribution of resources. The next section examines the divides between distributive and relational theories of social justice. Then, in two sections I propose a more concrete model of individual and social life, which involves a web of social interactions of different sorts. Finally, in two following sections, I revisit the measurement of inequalities and the definition of social justice in light of this model. The last section concludes.

Inequalities and redistribution

The empirical study of inequalities generally focuses on income or consumption, sometimes on wealth. Although the design of evaluation criteria for distributions of a unidimensional magnitude such as income produced a complex and technical academic field, there is a sense in which inequalities are easy to conceptualize in a single-dimensional universe. A fundamental normative principle is the Pigou-Dalton transfer axiom, stipulating that transferring income from someone to someone richer increases inequality (or is a bad thing, in a social welfare variant of the principle). Although it has been questioned for neglecting the role that the change in the inequalities between the two individuals and third parties may have in the assessment of a transfer, such a principle, nevertheless, does capture the obvious idea that people can be ranked by how much they possess of the relevant magnitude.

The analysis of practical redistribution brings up an additional complication, due to the fact that, unlike the simple Pigou-Dalton hypothetical setting, the size of the pie actually depends on its distribution. Introducing how income is produced brings two complications, actually, not just one. First, production incentives may be negatively¹ affected by redistributive interventions, making Pigou-Dalton transfers impossible, because a typical tax will apply to many agents at the same time, and even a strictly personal tax would change the level of earnings of the taxed agent, therefore altering the total amount of available resources. Second, incentives appear because production involves efforts and costs for individuals, implying that a second dimension of well-being should be introduced beside income or consumption. This forces inequality analysis to move into a two-dimensional universe.

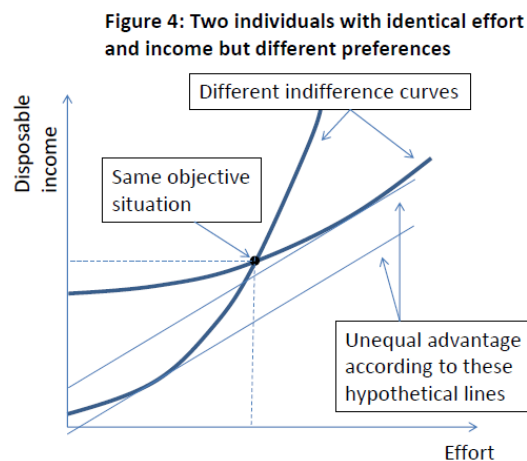
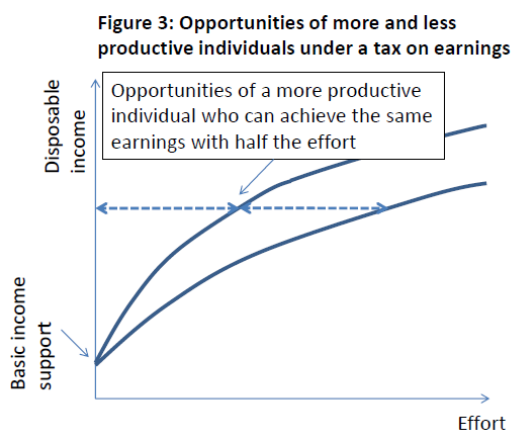
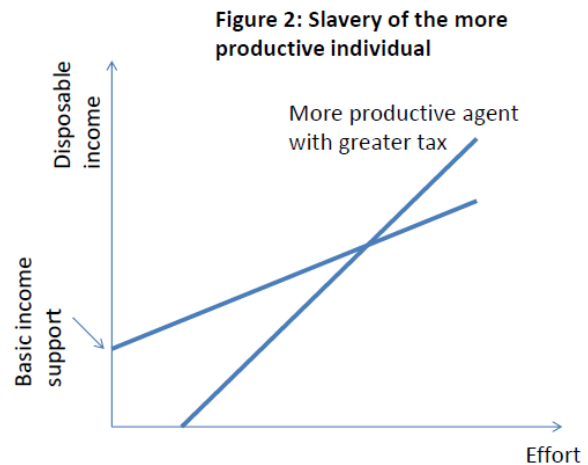
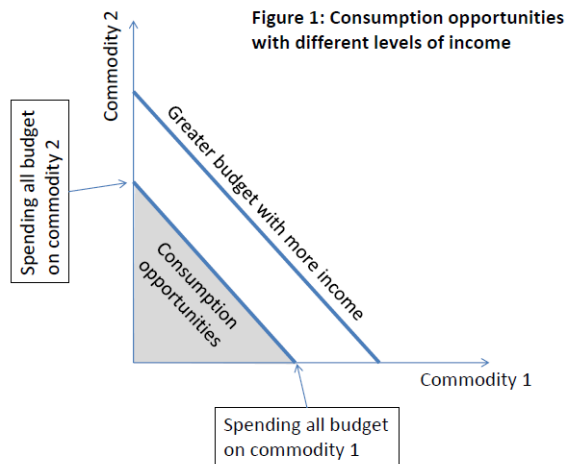
In fact, income was already a convenient proxy summarizing a more complex situation in the multidimensional world of commodities. When all agents face the same prices, the consumption opportunities offered by income monotonically increase with income (see Figure 1). The same graphical configuration can be obtained when the dimensions measure consumption at different time periods, and the opportunities are then well ordered in terms of wealth. Wealth and income similarly summarize consumption opportunities, over different time horizons.

When productive effort comes into play, the comparison of opportunities is made harder by the fact that effort is not rewarded at the same rate for people with unequal talent. It may then happen, in theory, that a more productive individual who is given a greater tax burden may be forced to work to pay the taxes and have part of his budget line below that of a less productive individual benefiting from income support (see Figure 2). However, this “slavery of the talented” (Dworkin 2000) does not occur in typical redistributive tax policies, because typical taxes do not target the productive individuals and only tax achieved earnings. Since it is always possible for a more productive individual to achieve any given level of earnings of a less productive individual while exerting less effort, the more productive necessarily have greater opportunities in terms of the possible combinations of effort and disposable income that they can obtain (see Figure 3).

Even if, under a tax on earnings, the more productive individuals are unambiguously better off, it is not obvious how to evaluate their advantage. Various measures have been proposed. A natural one takes inspiration from the simple situation depicted in Figure 1 and imagines hypothetical budget lines with the same slope for everyone, and determines which of these hypothetical lines would give any given individual the satisfaction this individual currently obtains with her actual effort and

¹ Redistribution may also encourage more production when people increase their efforts to maintain their disposable resources.

disposable income.² In order to obtain a numerical measure of people's advantage, one can then for instance pick the level of income on such hypothetical lines at a fixed level of effort. Note that this approach brings a serious conceptual and empirical shift, by relying on individual preferences. Two individuals with the same objective situation (same effort, same disposable income) may have different levels for this measure of advantage if their preferences differ, as illustrated on Figure 4.



The analysis of inequality has taken a more general turn toward multidimensional settings, especially to accommodate data on living conditions that contain non-market elements of quality of life. Four approaches can be distinguished. First, there are approaches that separately compute inequalities for each dimension, and then compute some summary measure. These approaches are criticized for failing to take account of the correlation of disadvantages. The second type of approach avoids this problem by first computing individual summary measures, applying fixed weights to the various components of inequalities, before computing inequality in these summary measures across individuals. The third type of approach does the same but relies on individual preferences in similar fashion as in Figure 4, so that the weights applied to various dimensions are individual-specific (or

² See Fleurbaey (2008, chapter 5) for a detailed analysis of this issue.

subgroup-specific, depending on available data). The fourth type of approach focuses on a synthetic measure of well-being, such as satisfaction expressed in subjective well-being surveys, or some other direct measure of well-being. The latter approach essentially advocates looking at well-being rather than any other underlying multiplicity of elements of quality of life.

Social justice between resources and social relations

Theories of social justice have naturally been influenced by the approaches prevailing in the study of inequalities. Rawls (1971, 1982) and Dworkin (2000), in particular, have adopted equality of resources as the core feature of a just society. Interestingly, however, Rawls had a quite comprehensive notion of resources, including the “powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility” and the “social bases of self-respect.” They both conceived resources in terms of opportunities offered to individuals to pursue their life plans. We have seen in Figure 1 that resources, even when restricted to a narrow notion of income, can indeed be interpreted as opportunities for various consumption possibilities.

However, other theories of justice have been proposed that are directly formulated in terms of opportunities, bypassing the notion of resources in order to directly relate choice to various achievements that people can obtain. Arneson (1989, 1990) and Cohen (1989a), in particular, have insisted on the fact that opportunities rely on a notion of genuine choice, in contrast with the shallow notion of opportunities represented on Figure 1, where it is assumed the whole set delineated by the budget is open to individual choice, ignoring that individual choice in such a set may not always be genuine and may reflect various inherited or acquired conditioning traits. Sen’s theory of “capabilities” (1985, 1992) and Nussbaum’s related approach are similar, though Sen insisted more on the principle of freedom than on the principle of personal responsibility to justify a focus on opportunities (capabilities) instead of achieved “functionings,” and likewise Nussbaum focused on basic capabilities that leave room both for flexibility beyond the basic level and for individual freedom not to use even the basic opportunities. Arneson’s second theory (1999, 2000) still involves a distribution, the distribution of well-being, with a modulation relying on individual desert evaluated *ex post* rather than a rigid focus on *ex ante* opportunities.

When one looks at Figures 2-3, it is tempting to see the opportunities in terms of accessible pairs of effort and income. Rawls famously objected to the idea that effort was equally accessible to all, insisting that most of the observed differences among individuals in terms of propensity to exert effort can be traced to inherited traits and personal background. An advocate of the opportunity approach would argue that one must distinguish between apparent effort and genuine effort, and

Roemer (1993, 1998) proposed to estimate genuine effort by looking at the distribution of effort (or outcome) in every subgroup defined by identical circumstances. Genuine effort is then estimated by the rank of an individual in this distribution – which amounts to assuming that the distribution of genuine effort is the same in all circumstance subgroups. It is of course possible to postulate that there is no such thing as genuine choice or genuine effort, and that an approach in terms of outcomes is more sensible than an approach in terms of opportunities. This is, in a way, only a limit case of such opportunity approaches when the role of personal responsibility is made vanishingly small.

All of these approaches conceive of social justice in terms of distribution of goods, either resources or opportunities, or outcomes. A forceful criticism has come from philosophers advocating a different focus on equality of dignity and on the quality of social relations (Anderson 1999, Scheffler 2005, Wolff 1998). According to this alternative approach, social justice is not a matter of haves and have nots, but a question of how people stand in the eyes of others and in interactions with them. “Democratic equality” is the label chosen to reflect the key feature of this approach where power and status are more important than resources and socio-economic outcomes.

Many philosophers have not been moved by this criticism, retorting that it is indeed possible to accommodate these dimensions into a distributive theory, simply by adopting a notion of goods to be distributed that is comprehensive enough. In fact, Rawls’ primary goods in terms of “powers and prerogatives” and “social bases of self-respect,” already cited, have already done so. Gheaus (2016) proposes a version of luck egalitarianism (i.e., justice as equality of opportunity) that includes relational goods.

Yet, it seems intuitively that translating the considerations of power and status into the language of goods and distributions is artificial and does not really take account of the difference between standard commodities, which are produced and distributed in the economic system, and power and status, which are fashioned and distributed in a totally different way through various institutions and formal as well as informal norms and customs. On the other hand, the theorists of democratic equality seem to take distributive issues too lightly. The allocations of the benefits and burdens of production have been at the core of social justice controversies and cannot be put aside as of second-order importance. Even if social equality was somehow more fundamental, distribution would still matter a lot. For instance, Cohen (1989b) derives distributional principles (the difference principle) from the idea of a democratic society of free and equal citizens. Moreover, it seems implausible that distribution has no intrinsic importance of its own.

The conclusion emerging from this discussion is that we need an approach that both recognizes the radical difference between distributive issues and social relations issues, while also accepting that both are central and equally important for the definition of social justice and the description of injustices. This double ambition cannot be achieved by an approach that is unified around either of these approaches: goods, even “social primary goods,” cannot provide the unifying language, but neither can social relations, power or status.

There is another complaint that can be levied against both approaches. They have generally remained too abstract to be as useful as one would like. It is not enough to talk about indeterminate lists of resources, opportunities, functionings or capabilities, and it is not enough to talk abstractly about social relations. In order to make progress in defining social justice, and in order to critique current institutions or propose relevant reforms, one needs a more structured, more concrete vision of the various components and mechanisms of the basic structure of society. This complaint may seem unfair, since many authors have tried to propose concrete applications. Rawls himself did propose a list of five different categories of social primary goods, with an articulation of principles of justice referring to them in a hierarchical way. Dworkin developed a model of equality of resources in terms of hypothetical insurance that he applied to health and disability issues as well as to the labor market. Van Parijs (1995) tied his theory of equality of resources to a vigorous defense of a universal basic income.

But the point of this complaint is not that these abstract theories are not applicable. They are, and have been applied to some extent. The point is that, by relying on too abstract a vision of society, they do not provide enough space to discuss a range of relevant issues and principles. In particular, a deep analysis of the relation between resource, power and status issues seems impossible with any of the prevailing theories. In order to examine it, one needs a model of society in which the three dimensions are clearly distinguished and are present in the description of the appropriate mechanisms.

The web of social interactions

There must be many ways of designing a model of society in which resources, power and status separately and jointly operate. Given that the purpose of the exercise here is to serve the development of normative theories of justice, it appears sensible to take as the center of attention the individual, whose flourishing is at stake in such theories.

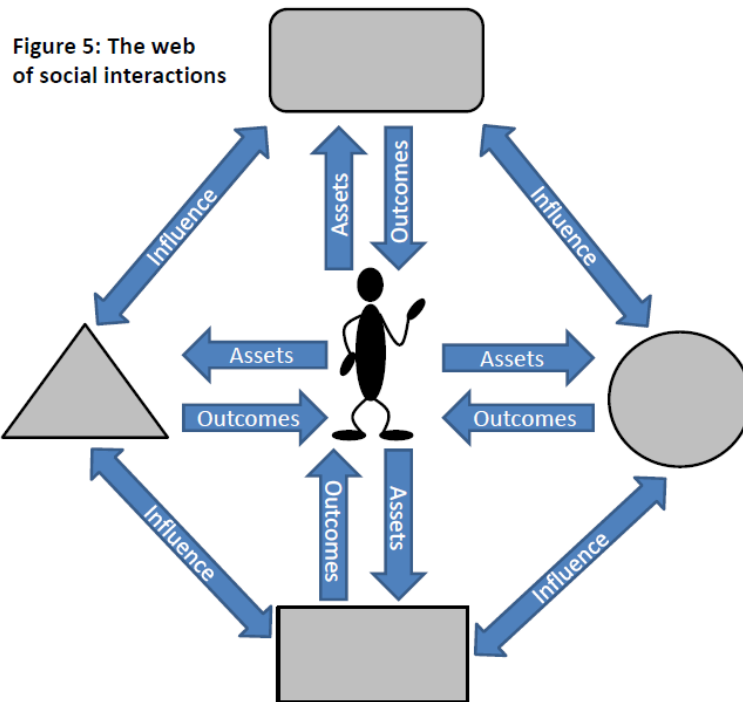


Figure 5 summarizes the model proposed here. The individual is at the center of interactions with various spheres. The main spheres, in most societies today, are:

- the household;
- friends and relatives;
- the local community;
- state institutions;
- parties, unions and other associations;
- the workplace or school;
- the labor market;
- the consumer market;
- the financial market;
- religious institutions.

Each of these spheres has different rules, symbolized by the different shapes in the figure. From the point of view of the individual, what matters most about these rules is that they transform certain specific assets of the individual into specific outcomes, and each sphere mobilizes different assets and delivers different outcomes.

Let us provide stylized descriptions of these various spheres. The workplace rewards skills and effort and provides earnings, a professional status, and puts the worker in a hierarchy of power relations. The school is similar in many respects, except for the earnings which are usually symbolic, in the form

of grades and diplomas. While people go to the workplace almost every day, they occasionally enter the labor market to seek a new workplace (the worker generally stays out of the market when under contract with an employer, unless she wants to change jobs). In this market, assets include skills, past experience, and networks of relations, while outcomes take the form of job offers, hiring and firing, which directly determine what happens in the workplace. In case no satisfactory job offer comes up, the outcome takes the form of unemployment.

The household is complex because it rewards kinship and miscellaneous personal qualities, and distributes consumption, care, housework, intimate relations and feelings, as well as status and a place in power relations which may be more or less hierarchical. Friends and relatives, as well as local communities, are less involved in economic activities than the household, from the viewpoint of the individual, but otherwise provide similar services and benefits in terms of status and feelings (friendship, esteem) based on similar assets, in a less intimate way than the household (kinship as an asset being replaced or supplemented by neighborhood, for instance). Parties, unions and similar associations provide power, responsibilities, status and various material and symbolic benefits based on the behavior and competence of the individual.

State institutions offer a diversity of situations. The citizen meets them as a voter in democracies, as a recipient of benefits, as a taxpayer, as the subject of law enforcement, and so on. The characteristics that determine the treatment received from the state include citizenship and socio-demographic characteristics such as income and age, the number of dependents, as well as behavior and knowledge (i.e., knowing how to deal with the administrative system).

The consumer and financial markets are similar to each other and reward the same characteristics, primarily income and wealth. The financial market is more sensitive to wealth and future earnings when the individual is borrowing money, whereas the consumer market simply rewards the ability to spend, although the consumer market often takes on a financial function for durable goods. But the rewards are not just material benefits in the form of commodities, loans, or capital income. They also involve symbolic status rewards for those who are able to access luxury and cultural consumptions, and those who are treated with special care by salespeople and financiers. There is a lot of status discrimination in the consumer market based on the type of place and goods, as well as personal characteristics such as clothing, race, and apparent social background.

Finally, religious institutions such as churches, mosques and synagogues, as well as religious schools and similar places, provide a variety of services of spiritual teaching, community inclusion, and social benefits, based on characteristics of declared faith and dedication as well as other community characteristics.

This model obviously enables the analyst to explore the quality of social relations in detail. In particular, one can list the main ills that can occur in social relations as follows. First, the individual may end up in a position of subordination that puts him under the orders of someone else. While this is sometimes convenient and comfortable when the boss is good, it generally gives the individual a lower status and creates the threat of abuse.

Second, the individual may be dependent on external forces without being subordinated. For instance, women who cannot safely take a walk in the neighborhood at night are dependent on a threat that they don't control, even if this is not direct subordination to someone who forbids walking at night. Similarly, the welfare recipient who must report or reapply every quarter depends on the good will of office clerks and social workers, or simply a volatile welfare budget, without being directly subordinated to them.

Third, the individual's control over his life may be restricted by obligations and duties that come from social norms. For instance, it may be very hard for a mother to invest a lot in her career if the prevailing norm is that child care should get priority. It may be hard for the last child of the family to move far away, especially if this is a woman, if the surrounding expectation is that she will take care of her aging parents.

These three examples have to do with the degree of control on one's life. The question of inclusion and social standing provides another set of undesirable cases. First, one can be outright excluded and shunned if one belongs to a category that people refuse to mingle with, such as the Dalit in India or the Roma in Europe. A different, milder form of exclusion takes the form of shaming, when one feels the disapproval and contempt of others without being excluded, e.g., for being unemployed or disabled. Yet another form consists in discrimination, when one is included but is assigned a lower role or position, due to one's gender, sexual orientation, race, or simply social background, way of talking, or physical appearance.

These six cases are key instances of social relations going badly for the individual who is on the worse end of these relations. They can occur to various extents and in different forms in relations with the family, with the community, at work, in the markets, or in relations with state agents.

The double arrows in the diagram that represent the back and forth movement between individual characteristics serving as assets and rewards coming in the form of outcomes is not just a one-time exchange. It is actually a continuous movement in which the outcomes of the previous period become assets in the current period. For instance, obtaining a position of power thanks to competence or performance in an organization gives leverage in the following period and changes

the way in which one's characteristics and behavior get rewarded. People build up their assets through these repeated interactions.

Moreover, and this is an important observation, the outcomes of one interaction with a particular sphere become assets or liabilities in interactions with other spheres. A diploma obtained at school becomes a key asset in the labor market. Earnings obtained in the workplace are important assets in interactions in the household, in the community, and in the consumer and financial markets. Family status is an asset that can serve in interactions with the community, the markets, the workplace, and religious institutions. Unemployment, as a status, can carry a stigma in the household, the community, and the market, representing therefore a much bigger blow than just lost income. People may refuse benefits to which they are entitled from the state because of the accompanying stigma in the community or the household, or the intrusion into their private life that some forms of monitoring entail. They may hide their misery by not sending their children to school, out of fear that their children might be sent to foster care and their family would be disintegrated. Individuals therefore invest in success (or try to avoid negative outcomes) in certain spheres with an eye on what this will bring them in other spheres.

As indicated in the figure, these various spheres also directly influence one another. In particular, the state regulates ownership, marriage rules and abusive relations in households, labor relations and working conditions in the workplace, curriculum in schools, transactions and contracts in all markets, and the rights of religious organizations. The state also provides funding and material incentives to these various spheres, in their collective capacity and not just through individual members. Certain institutions like parties, unions, and associations, including religious associations, are devoted to influencing other spheres such as the workplace, the state, or the household.

But indirect influence via the assets accumulated (or lacked) by the individuals is of considerable importance. In particular, state interventions that are designed to help individuals on one aspect such as consumption may have other positive or negative impacts in interactions between the beneficiaries and other spheres. Food stamps may alleviate deprivation in basic staples but also carry status problems (stigma) in the community and the consumer market. Child care provided to families may increase the free time of mothers and enable them to build better careers, which in turn enhances their status and power in the household and contributes to a different social education of the next generation. Basic income support may preserve basic dignity and liberate individuals from private philanthropy and non-neutral support (e.g., religious or political proselytism), but it may also contribute to stigmatizing the recipients as "free loaders" and harm their social interactions in the community.

This model encompasses resources and social relations, and moreover indicates where the two approaches are the most relevant. The resource approach is well adapted to describe what happens in the interaction between the individual and the consumer and financial markets, as well as the interaction with the labor market, the earning aspect of the workplace, and the redistributive function of the state. But it overlooks the power and status issues everywhere, in particular in the workplace where the resource lens is quite insufficient. The social relations approach is better able to capture status issues in markets (discrimination in particular), as well as power and status issues in the household, the workplace, and in relations with state agents. However, it cannot adequately describe the allocative mechanisms in markets, in workplaces, or even in the household. Naturally, the resource approach tends to emphasize the interactions with the markets, whereas the relational approach will focus on organizations such as the workplace, the household and the state, where power and status are important. The model proposed here makes it possible not only to accurately describe the various aspects but also to assign to each type of interaction the importance it has for the individual's flourishing.

A simplified version of the model

The model of social interactions and individual development proposed in the previous section is comprehensive but also hard to fathom given the multiplicity of interactions and the large number of dimensions of assets and outcomes. To make the analysis more tractable it is important to have a stylized version similar to the resource approach depicted in Figures 1-4. The simplified model proposed in this section is inspired by Western societies and is not as suitable to other societies in which religion and local community play a larger role. Different simplified models can be designed for different societies, and what is proposed here is just one example.

First, let us restrict the number of spheres to four: the family, the state, the workplace (merging it with the labor market), and the markets (except the labor market). The other spheres are not to be neglected altogether, but one can argue that they play a secondary role in most Western societies. The school will be ignored in this section, because the model will focus on adults, but it is easy to adapt the model to youngsters for whom the workplace is a school.

Second, let us restrict the number of assets-outcomes to five: resources, control, status, knowledge, and health. A few explanations are in order. Resources include only material resources, financial and non-financial assets that the individual possesses or consumes, including public goods and services. Control includes the power relations between people but also the degree of freedom and independence from others that the individual enjoys. Status is a wide notion gathering inclusion in a

social network, recognition by others, social position, vulnerability to shaming, exclusion, discrimination, and so on. Knowledge includes training and education, but also practical know-how, specific knowledge of an organization or a network, and information about relevant facts that can serve the individual in interactions. Health is a wide notion that encompasses not just medical health (physical and mental) but also strength and athletic ability as well as physical characteristics such as beauty and likability.

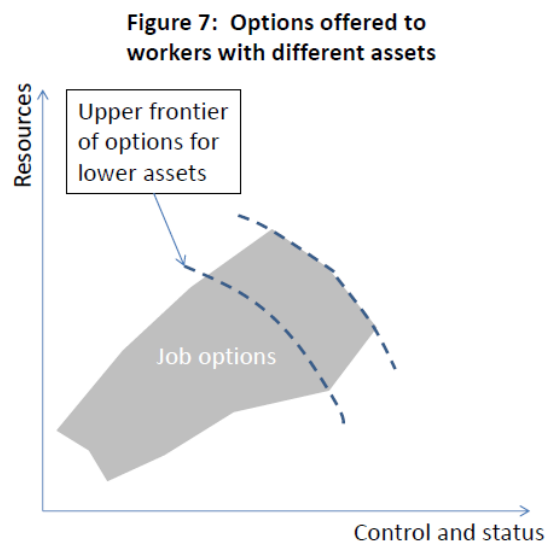
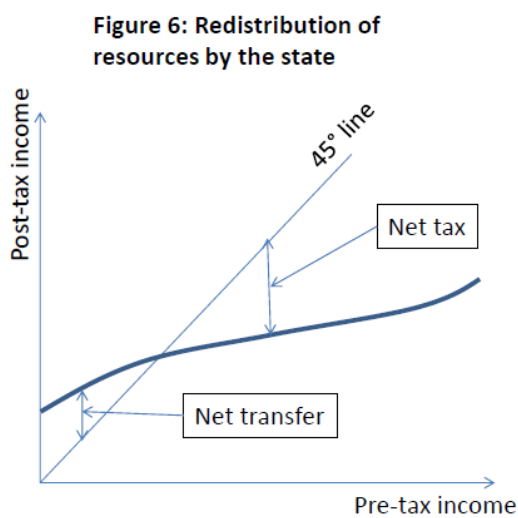
It may be useful at this juncture to provide some structure about people's goals in their lives. It is easy to say that they will seek to accumulate and preserve the assets listed in the previous paragraph, but a different taxonomy of goals in life will be helpful in the following analysis of this model. Three main categories of goals can be distinguished. First, *personal comfort*, both material and psychological, is a category encompassing the search for resources and health, but also a degree of control over one's life, social inclusion and self-esteem. Second, *the service of others and good relations with them* is a goal that cannot be reduced to personal comfort and for many people comes to the top of priorities. It implies seeking all sorts of assets insofar as they can help in providing good things to the targets of one's attention. Third, there is a third category of *discovery and self-realization* that includes seeking knowledge and all sorts of assets that enable one to try and exercise one's abilities. In summary, the three types of goals seek accomplishments with respect to oneself, the others and the world. Note that this threefold taxonomy does not respect Maslow's hierarchy, as all levels of his pyramid (physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualization) potentially contribute to each of the three goals to some extent. However, one can argue that the more basic needs in Maslow's list are more about the self, whereas the intermediate and superior needs give more room to the others.

The final stage of the simplified model consists in describing the interactions with the four spheres (family, state, workplace, markets) in terms of the five assets-outcomes.

The case of the markets is the simplest because resources are of primary importance there, although status lurks when discrimination appears. If one puts discrimination aside, the interaction with consumer and financial markets is simple: the individual brings material resources, and obtains access to a set of possible consumptions, in the form of different goods and services in the case of the consumer market, and in the form of monetary flows at different periods of the future in the case of financial markets. To describe both types of interactions, Figure 1 provides a suitable formal tool. When discrimination occurs, it either blocks access to certain goods or services altogether, or it limits the quantity that is accessible. It is then relatively easy, through a modification of the shape of

the budget line, to describe how status implies alterations of the outcomes provided by the markets for given resources brought by the individual.

Interactions with the state are more complex because they involve all sorts of assets. If we focus on the central redistributive role of the state, the description of redistribution of resources is easy and can be described as in Figure 6, with a “budget curve” relating the earnings of the individual to the disposable income obtained after tax and transfer. One can add specific transfers based on special needs (health and status assets, in our taxonomy) to this representation by drawing the set of different budget curves that correspond to different sorts and levels of needs.



Interactions with the workplace and labor-market nexus are more complex and quite interesting. The standard approach depicted in Figures 2-3 is not very satisfactory because it focuses on the dimension of effort (in particular labor time) which may not be such a central variable in describing the key aspects of the interaction. It is probably more reasonable, in order to identify the most important mechanisms, to assume that workers do what they can, and to focus on aspects of their situation that are more important for the pursuit of their goals.

Therefore, the alternative description proposed here involves the following interaction. Based on personal assets, in particular knowledge (skills), health (including physical ability and likability) and status (often a source of discrimination), the individual is offered a set of job positions and work options that vary along two key dimensions: resources (earnings, both monetary and in-kind perks) and a control-status combination that can be analyzed as a single dimension in first approximation, since both vary typically in tandem. The options offered are typically better for individuals with better skills, better health, and better status. They generally involve some possible trade-offs, where the individual can choose to have more independence at the cost of lower earnings. For instance,

one can be self-employed and earn less than a salaried worker for the same skills. But the trade-offs appear generally limited, so that the opportunities of individuals in the two-dimensional space of resources and control-status may generally take the form of a rather thin set with a rising shape. Figure 7 illustrates the pattern of options offered to individuals depending on their initial assets in terms of resources, health and status.

It is important, however, not to assume that the individual will always choose an option on the upper frontier of the set. Sometimes the individual may choose an option that is lower in the set, if this better suits his goals regarding the service of others or discovery and self-realization. For instance, someone may choose to work in the social and solidarity sector to promote a more humane form of economy and to work with co-workers who need social support. Or someone can prefer to stay in a technical job that suits his taste for concrete realizations better than a management job that would pay more and include greater power and status.

The analysis of what happens in the interaction with the household can borrow from the case of the workplace. The individual brings resources (income) and enjoys a certain status and degree of control, and the interaction gives back resources (consumption, housework and care) as well as a revision of status and control. Figure 7 can again serve to describe the set of options offered by the household to its member. Here again, the member may not necessarily choose an option on the outer frontier and may decide a more modest option out of a desire to serve other members of the household.

Equipped with this simplified model, it is not too difficult to describe how the individual, equipped with health and knowledge assets, as well as resources, status and control accumulated in earlier interactions, negotiates the various interactions with a concern for the spillovers and the trade-offs. The interaction with the workplace yields resources that, after reduction or augmentation by the state, are brought, together with a professional status, to the household and, via interaction on the markets for the resources, are transformed into consumption, status and control in the household. Care and status in the household, in turn, influence the set of options open to the individual on the workplace and the redistribution mechanism operated by the state.

Revisiting inequalities

Whether this new model is useful depends on how it can renew the analysis of inequalities and social justice. Let us start with inequalities, and consider social justice in the next section.

The natural idea that the model suggests is to study inequalities in the various assets-outcomes, and to try to construct indices for the five dimensions identified in the simplified model. There already exist studies of inequalities in education, but they would need to be supplemented by an assessment of inequalities in information and understanding of relevant things happening in the world and in the organizations of which the individual is a member. The fact that some people are dramatically ignorant about important facts that every citizen should know, or that they are deprived of information, e.g., about the stability of their job, that they would need to plan their personal investments, is clearly problematic and it would be very interesting to document it.

There are many surveys of health and physical functioning, which provide quite an accurate picture of people's situation in terms of medical health. Research has also been done about other physical characteristics such as height or beauty, which have a substantial impact on people's success in social interactions.

Regarding control, there are surveys about how much control people feel they have in their lives (such as the World Values Survey) or in their work. Such subjective measures are worth using more often, but they need to be combined with objective data about people's situation in hierarchies, and analyses must also bear on the social norms that impose constraints on people's actions depending on their characteristics. Again, simple surveys can record what people feel they have the right to do and what seems problematic because it would go against other priorities or obligations they feel they have.

Status is the most difficult of the dimensions, because it includes many different aspects. The degree of social inclusion and the various forms of exclusion are hard to evaluate in a quantitative way and this appears an important field for future research. There are studies of discrimination, for instance, but these typically bear on the consequences for earnings (which are indeed important) and do not help much in thinking about a synthetic measure of social inclusion.

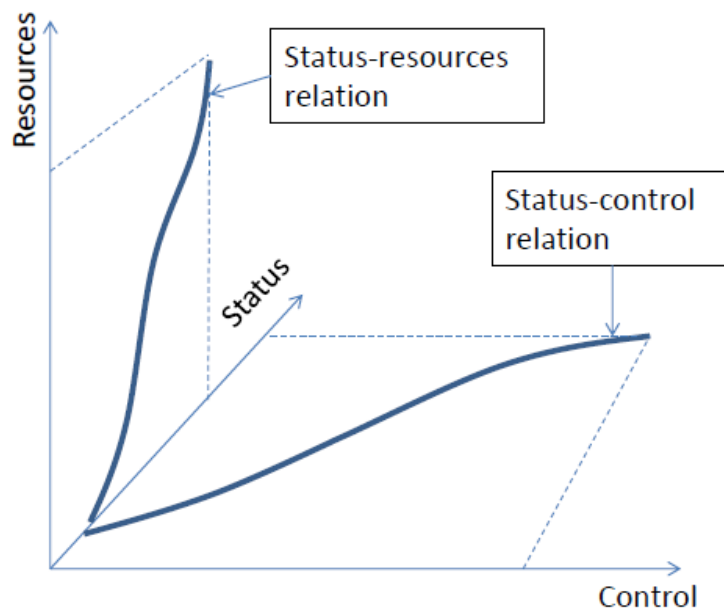
The key complication, empirically, is that what matters to individuals is the combination of these various assets, and the distribution of the combined assets cannot be estimated without a joint survey that tracks all the dimensions simultaneously at the individual level. As Figure 7 suggests, inequalities in resources, control and status are strongly correlated, because in both the workplace and the household, those who have access to more in one dimension typically end up with more in the other dimensions as well. There are variations around this general pattern, because people can choose situations with more independence and fewer resources, such as by becoming self-employed or moving out of one's parents' place. But Figure 7 shows that an exclusive focus on resources is likely to miss half (or more) of the social inequalities.

What would a combined analysis of the inequalities in the five dimensions of assets-outcomes bring that we do not already know? Subjective well-being surveys suggest that social status and family situation are strongly associated with well-being (Layard 2005), although the direction of causality is hard to ascertain. Insofar as people do care about these dimensions of their lives, it appears important to obtain a more accurate picture of the multiple aspects of inequalities. Moreover, the correlation between different dimensions may vary a lot depending on institutions and norms. The same inequalities of resources may play out very differently if they occur in a society of equal status, inclusiveness, and horizontal power relations, or in a society of strict hierarchy of status and power. Tocqueville's comparison between America and Europe was very much about this pattern of substantial economic inequalities associated with vastly different inequalities in the social hierarchy.

If one takes a stylized version of Figure 7, where the grey set is replaced by a curve, one can characterize different societies by looking at the distribution of the various curves offered to different people. Let us focus here on the simple case in which everyone faces the same curve except that the less advantaged people have access to a smaller portion of the curve. In this context, a steep curve corresponds to the archetypal Tocquevillian America, with high inequalities in resources but low inequalities in power and status. In contrast, a flat curve corresponds to a Stalinian society with strong inequalities in power and status but low inequalities in resources. A convex curve would be one that has strong inequalities in power and status at the bottom and high inequalities in resources at the top –this could correspond to a segregated society à la Jim Crow, with an underclass of dominated people below the normal stratification in terms of wealth. A concave curve would have the opposite pattern, reflecting a situation in which the disadvantaged are poor whereas the rich compete for power and prestige –this could be observed in a society of hierarchical urban life surrounded by poor peasants, as in Ancient China. It would be interesting to draw such curves and compare the societies of different countries or periods in this way.

Disentangling control and status offers new possibilities. While control and status typically go together insofar as power is by itself a marker of status, there are variations of status that can come from other characteristics, such as income, gender, race... Consider the three-dimensional space represented in Figure 8. The set of options offered to individuals is a more or less thick curve-like set in this space. If status depends only on control, then the status-control curve of this figure (on the "ground" of the space) tells us everything about control once one knows status and conversely, and one can then focus on one of them as we did in the previous paragraphs. Symmetrically, if status depends only on income, then the status-resource curve on the "wall" of the space makes it possible to focus on one of them and analyze things in a two-dimensional space.

Figure 8: Space of options offered to individuals with different assets



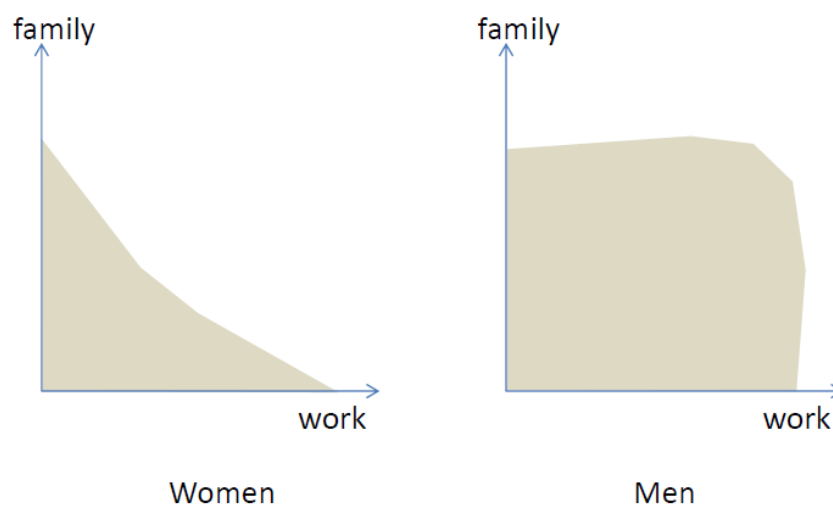
When status depends on both control and resources, then the curve offered to individuals in the three-dimensional space can be deduced from the observed pairwise relations on the “ground” and the “wall”.

But when status depends on other characteristics, then the situation becomes more interesting. Individuals from different races or genders, for instance, will then face different three-dimensional curves. Three cases are worth distinguishing. In the first case, the discriminated people face the same resource-control curve as the others, but every point of the curve is associated to a lower status due to their race. This is perhaps typical of women in many countries nowadays, or of the Jews in the early 20th century in the USA. In the second case, the curves are different at the low levels of resources and control, but tend to merge at high levels. This is a situation in which the successful from the discriminated group are no longer, or at least less discriminated. The situation of the Blacks in the USA, currently, might come close to that situation, as in other countries where successful minorities manage to enter the elite. The third case is the opposite of the second one. The curves are similar at low levels but diverge at high levels. This happens when the working-class populations are treated similarly independently of their race, for instance, but a glass ceiling makes it impossible for the successful among the discriminated to obtain quite the same status as the others. Women in the Catholic Church come to mind as an example. At the laity level, they are not discriminated, and actually they tend to have more engagement and responsibilities, but beyond a certain level they face a wall that prevents them from reaching the top status, reserved to men. The situation of female workers in Scandinavian countries might also be similar. They are well considered at low levels, as

well as in the public sector, but their participation in the jobs with highest status in the private sector remains inferior to men's.

Trade-offs between successes in different spheres point to another important locus of potential inequalities. Consider the family on one hand and the labor market-workplace on the other hand. Figure 9 shows the likely pattern of opportunities for success, in either sphere, for men and women. The axes represent a synthetic measure of success at work (horizontal axis) and with the family (vertical axis).

Figure 9: Opportunities for success in different spheres for men and women



For women, the set of possibilities is less favorable for a simple reason. In the family, a key contribution they are expected to provide is caring time. This comes directly in conflict with success at work, which also very much depends on providing time. In contrast, men's traditional contribution to the family involves resources and a social status coming largely from the professional status. In other words, they have a very promising outlook in their interaction with the family sphere precisely when they are successful at work. This puts them in a much better position to be highly successful in both spheres.

Another valuable insight that would come up with applying this model is about the worst off. For resource inequalities, it is standard to examine poverty, i.e., the extent to which people fall below a threshold. More inequalities are associated not just with the fact that some people have less than others, but also with the fact that there is more deprivation.

In the case of social inclusion and control, there is similarly a sense in which inequalities are not just about some people having less than others, but also involve observing more of certain bad

phenomena such as vertical power relations, strong subordination and dependence, as well as exclusion in various forms. Subordination, dependence, exclusion, ignorance and disability are the equivalents of “poverty” in dimensions other than resources.

The coping strategies of the poor can also be analyzed in this model. People may make sacrifices on certain fronts in order to preserve the essential on other fronts. For instance, people may accept degrading or dangerous jobs in order to obtain income for the family, or on the contrary, in order to become independent from the family and flee an abusive relation. They may stay in an abusive relation in the household in order to preserve other aspects of social inclusion in the community. They may engage in associations and political activities that give them a better status and access to useful assets.

An additional empirical direction can be explored with the assets-outcomes model. In principle, the rules of the game in a particular sphere relate the outcomes to the assets in an impartial way (equal outcome for equal assets) if the assets include all the characteristics that are (explicitly or implicitly) relevant to the particular rules of the game under consideration. But one can also isolate one asset (e.g., skin color or gender) and examine the outcome/asset ratio when considering the other assets. This is a way to show the unfairness done to certain types of people who receive less for the same assets (except the one that is the basis for discrimination).

Whether the analysis of inequality in the various dimensions of assets-outcomes should be concluded by a synthetic index that combines them all, with appropriate weights, is connected to the issue of the correlation between the various inequalities. Only a synthetic index that summarizes, at the individual level, the bundle of assets-outcomes enjoyed by every individual, can tell us how damaging it is to observe a positive association between the dimensions. Relying on individuals’ own weights may be the only way to avoid arbitrariness, but one may also prefer a more objective approach if one deems that people’s views are not respectable. For instance, people may become insensitive to social stigma or comfortable with dependence, and the analyst may not necessarily want to condone these views which are shaped by problematic social habits. A possible middle-of-the-road approach consists in calibrating the weights according to the average preferences of the population.

Revisiting social justice

Clearly, the proposed model implies that social justice is both a matter of resource distribution and a matter of social relations. An egalitarian or a prioritarian society must have a special attention to avoiding deprivation in resources as well as unequal dignity in power relations and in social standing.

Reducing inequalities in one dimension and neglecting the others would be insufficient and would also be somewhat counterproductive, since the remaining inequalities would tend to recreate the initial pattern.

The proposed approach goes beyond a general call for marrying resources and relations in a synthetic theory, and may help think about concrete ways in which social justice can be conceived.

In particular, one can think of social justice in terms of a better distribution of assets to prepare the individuals for the social interactions with the various spheres. This is the approach of A. Giddens' "third way", which embraces the market economy and thinks of social progress as giving people ammunition for the market game, in the form of training and health care in particular. Also, encouraging participation in the labor market may enhance people's status in their community and their household. This approach tries to act *before* people enter into economic activities, rather than *afterward* as in the traditional formula of the welfare state.

But it is also possible, additionally and not exclusively, to think of social justice in terms of adjusting the rules of the game in each of the relevant spheres of interaction. In particular, the rules of corporate governance and the admissible clauses of the labor contract may be subject to modifications protecting workers against subordination and dependence and ensuring their participation to the decisions affecting their work and job prospects. The authoritarian organization of work is inherited from a dark past where workers were submitted to severe constraints of bondage or slavery, and needs to be abandoned and replaced by a conception of work relations that treats all members of the workplace as partners bringing different inputs. It is really heartbreaking to see how dramatic it is for workers who devoted many years and invested their time and energy into a particular workplace to feel that nothing belongs to them and that they can be disposed of with little notice. It is all the more paradoxical as they are the lifeblood of the organization, whereas the financiers who pull the strings have only remote ties with the organization and have a very limited understanding of its concrete productive potential. This way of treating workers like objects or external agents is clearly against the most basic notion of human dignity. Many degrading practices (such as imposing humiliating urine tests to check for drug use, or sheer sexual or moral harassment) are the direct consequence of organizing work on the presumption that the workers are inferior humans not worthy of the same respect as the shareholders, the executives, or the customers. This hierarchical approach must be legally forbidden and both the purpose and the governance of the firm must be reformed, transforming it into a productive partnership in which all the contributors, as well as local stakeholders, have a say in the decisions in a democratic fashion. With such a governance, its purpose can no longer be limited to maximizing the revenue of a subcategory of

stakeholders, but will expand to seek the benefit of all members, with due respect to externalities on external stakeholders.

Similarly, the forms of welfare provision must avoid making recipients the dependent subjects of paternalistic and invasive support or the potential victims of social stigma. Certain forms of welfare support are direct heirs to the paternalistic charity once provided by lords, churches, and poor houses. It should be out of the question to make poor people wait for weeks under great uncertainty when they urgently need support. It should be out of the question to give them vouchers that put them in shameful situations when they have to use them with certain providers. It should be out of the question to send inspectors at dawn to check if the beneficiary has a lover. It should be out of the question to separate children from their parents when the sole abuse they suffer is poverty.

Rethinking welfare support involves considering universal formulae which better avoid stigmatizing the recipients than targeted aid, and combining various forms of support in order to better assist the recipients, especially when their life has been disrupted by economic or other difficulties. It appears interesting, following Atkinson (2015), to consider a combination of income support, capital provision, and employment guarantee. Income support protects against the volatility of market income, for instance when people start a business and fail to make it profitable. Capital support, distributed early in life, may help young people to invest in education, lodging, or business. Employment guarantee, possibly in the form of retraining, may be useful to avoid letting people fall into a state of isolation when they endure long spells of unemployment. It must be set up in a way that avoids stigmatizing its beneficiaries or setting them apart from the rest of the workforce.

It is harder to regulate the inner workings of the household beyond basic ownership, inheritance and divorce rules, but many policies, in the fields of education, health care, and in particular access to contraception and child and elderly care, can indirectly affect the balance of power in the household and the formation of role models for the next generation.

Social justice is also about the trade-offs between the various dimensions. A just society must avoid putting individuals in front of Faustian bargains in which they are offered resources in exchange for their dignity. It must guarantee them access to resources as well as protect them against harmful social relations, and minimize the trade-offs between the two dimensions. Neither an exclusively resource-oriented theory nor an exclusively relational theory can capture this joint requirement. The reforms to the rules of the game proposed above for the various spheres, and most especially for the workplace, should protect individuals against degrading trade-offs.

But some trade-offs may be inescapable, and it may be that inequalities in certain spheres are helpful for the realization of other goals. For instance, a division of labor and a specialization of skills (distinct

from an authoritarian hierarchical relation) is generally needed to optimize productivity. It would be nice if everyone could “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner” (Marx, 1845), but people may prefer a greater productivity, and therefore a greater consumption, at the expense of more horizontal relations in production, and a wider set of skills. Similar issues arise in families when it is hard to find the optimal sharing of time and tasks between partners due to non-divisibility constraints on labor commitments (concretely, if a certain job requires a full-time commitment, it is hard for the partners to remain egalitarian in home duties without outsourcing them, which they may be loath to do). Similarly, it may be very costly for government agencies to provide effective administrative services to their citizens while relying on forms of interaction that are maximally respectful or friendly, and tax payers may prefer some inconvenience in their interactions with the state to higher taxes.

Trade-offs between spheres (as distinct from trade-offs between dimensions, discussed in the previous paragraphs) have been mentioned around Figure 9. Trade-offs can be more or less favorable or severe depending on whether spheres compete for the same assets from individuals (e.g., family and work competing for women’s time, but not for men’s time to the same extent). A just society can seek to change the rules of the game within spheres to avoid such competing situations putting high demands on individuals. For instance, a better division of caring labor within the family between genders, combined with a greater flexibility about time commitments of workers in the workplace, can contribute to reducing the disadvantage of women in this trade-off. Another trade-off between spheres afflicts the elected representatives whose career suffers from the leaves they have to take to fulfill their political missions. Such a trade-off is much harder for ordinary workers than for independent professionals and civil servants, contributing to a very strong bias in the political representation of different occupations in parliaments. Alleviating this inequality requires imposing special accommodations in the workplace, similar to those granted for union work, or special assistance in job search for those who have occupied political responsibilities.

The vision of social justice that emerges in this section remains sketchy and depends on factual assumptions that need to be ascertained. There are important issues, such as the articulation of local and global justice, that are beyond the scope of this paper. But, hopefully, it should now be apparent that the model proposed in this paper offers new and more concrete ways to think about social justice both in terms of resource distribution and in terms of the quality of social relations.

Not only are the two dimensions jointly relevant, but they are interdependent. Inequalities in the distribution of resources generate, and are reproduced and reinforced by, an economic organization in which it is possible for an elite to capture power in key organizations, in particular the firm and the

state, enabling it to entrench its privileges and engage in rent-seeking activities, both in the firm and in the jurisdiction at large. The search for social justice requires curbing both the inequalities in resources and the inequalities in power that reinforce each other and lead to unacceptable inequalities in dignity. It is utterly naïve to think that one can bring about social justice simply by redistributing resources while leaving social and power hierarchies in place, or simply by hoping for equal dignity and democratic relations while leaving resource inequalities in place. Just as the individual sees resources, control and status as a combination of assets and outcomes that matter in determining personal success, social mechanisms combine these different factors into a loop mechanism that either preserves equality of dignity or produces unequal dignity.

In this approach, it is hard to separate the instrumental from the intrinsic value of the assets and outcomes of the social web. One may seek control both for the true enjoyment of the deployment of one's autonomy and for the ability to secure other outcomes. One may seek education both for the wisdom it provides and for the prestige and resources it gives access to. And so on. In the sequence of interactions in which assets produce outcomes that modify the assets and continue the cycle, individuals build their life track in a way that makes the goals of one day the means of the next day.

The reader may wonder, in this approach, what happens to a central concept of the theories of equality of resources or opportunities, namely, personal responsibility. I think that personal responsibility is mostly a distraction from the important issues. While it may be politically expedient to embrace this idea in a context in which it is popular, it is dangerously associated with the dark political project of undercutting the undeserving poor, and it distracts attention from the important social issues which are the inequalities in resources and the unacceptable prevailing social relations in which dignity is negated routinely and structurally. The only form of personal responsibility that is acceptable and worth promoting is the respect for freedom and for the expression of people's life plans. This is encompassed in the model proposed here, under the "control" label, which indeed covers how much control over their lives people can enjoy.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed an informal model of society that combines resources and the quality of social relations in a web of social interactions at the center of which sits the individual. This model suggests a vision of inequalities and of social justice in which these various dimensions are jointly important. By offering a more concrete description of the various aspects of individual life and social interactions, it makes it possible to discuss the institutional conditions for social justice in a way that is more comprehensive than with more abstract theories of justice.

What is the way forward? The proposal made in this paper remains quite preliminary in many ways. The approach needs to be tested through empirical measurement and experimentation, and refined to make sure that the taxonomies of spheres and assets-outcomes are convenient and sufficiently accurate, and that the rules of the game of the various spheres are indeed roughly as described here. More concrete refinements of this model can also be explored.

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