

Essays on Social Justice

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Real Social Justice

Born in 1793, Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio was an Italian Jesuit scholar who co-founded the theological journal *Civiltà Cattolica* and served as rector of the seminary *Collegio Romano*.

Taparelli wrote frequently about social problems arising from the Industrial Revolution, and his influence was significant. Pope Leo XIII's social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891, drew on insights from his former teacher, Taparelli.

Today, political activists often use the phrase "social justice" to justify government redistribution of wealth. In the mid-1800s, however, Taparelli prefaced "justice" with "social" to emphasize the social nature of human beings and, flowing from this, the importance of various social spheres outside civic government. For Taparelli, these two factors were essential in formulating a just approach to helping those in need.

He understood that human beings naturally join together in groups. "The social fact, considered at its maximum generality, presented us subjects as intelligent beings and human society as men, that is to say made of intelligence and sense," Taparelli says, and because of his intelligence and sense, men are able to share common ideas which produces a "unity of will" to achieve various ends and this is "the essential idea of society." Some of these societies, however, are more natural and intimate than others. We come together not just in cities and states, but first and most importantly in families, neighborhoods, religious bodies, clubs (or, in his day, guilds) and a variety of informal organizations. Through these natural associations, people strive to meet the basic goals and goods of life.

Taparelli believed that people have the right to freely form different levels of association and to interact through them to fulfill needs and accomplish necessary tasks. Each of these social spheres, institutions, or consortia has its own proper identity and purpose. According to Taparelli, "every consortium must conserve its own unity in such a way as to not lose the unity of the larger whole," but at the same time "every higher society must provide for the unity of the larger whole without destroying the unity of the consortia."

Indeed, he understood that a just society depends on these different forms of association each being able to do what they do best. He not only insisted on freedom for these various spheres, but especially for those closest to the ground: the associations that because people are most directly involved in them, encourage personal relationships and local responsibility.

His vision of social justice, then, emphasized freedom and respect for human beings and the small institutions through which they pursue basic needs. He held that true justice can't be achieved without doing justice to our social nature and natural forms of association. Social justice entailed a social order in which government doesn't overrun or crowd out institutions of civil society such as family, church and local organizations. Rather, they are respected, protected, and allowed to flourish.

Today, well-meaning policy makers and activists often do just the opposite as they try to overcome social challenges. Rather than viewing society as a network of smaller associations and communities, they mistakenly equate society with the state, centering its identity upon civic government.

As a result, these policy makers and activists conceive justice in terms of how much government directly addresses the needs of individuals. They too often bypass the web of intermediary institutions or deem those institutions irrelevant—or detrimental—in addressing and solving large social problems.

Take poverty, for example. Today, many of those who pursue “social justice” for the poor simply call for more government spending on welfare programs. Yet federal welfare programs continue to discourage marriage and work—the two most important factors for escaping poverty, as much research shows.

The kind of aid to the poor that does justice to the social nature of human beings and our basic social institutions seeks to strengthen rather than weaken marriage and family. And it makes gainful employment more possible.

Americans live in a different time and place than Luigi Taparelli, but we face many of the same challenges he faced. His outlook was shaped by the Italian unification movement; he witnessed the drive toward government centralization at home and throughout Europe. He fought resulting threats to local administrative structures, and he defended local guilds and charitable associations against inappropriate government interference.

We also live amid increased calls for the state to meet people’s needs. We ought to heed Taparelli’s warning about the tendency of centralized government to push local organizations from roles of public relevance: “Deprecating or weakening the inferior is to deprecate and weaken even the superior.” When we ignore, crowd out, or weaken nongovernmental institutions in the name of social justice, we hurt not only those institutions but the larger society as well. Those hit hardest, too often, are the very people Taparelli desired to help.

Source: <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2010/11/real-social-justice>

Dream of Total Justice

One of the most dangerous of ideas that have dominated men's minds is the dream of total justice. This is a humanistic dream. The humanist has only one world, this present life, and he is determined to make a heaven out of earth. The result is consistently hell on earth.

The menace of the dream of total justice is that it requires perfect people and a perfect social order and state to establish itself. The fact is that man is a sinner; he is also unwilling to change, content with himself although discontented with the world, and, by virtue of his fallen nature, a slave to sin and hence a slave by design (John 8:31-36). As result, every dreamer of a world of perfect justice, a habitation for supermen, and a realm of triumph for humanistic dogmas of justice, must begin to eliminate men as they are to make way for men as they should be. The French Revolution planned the reduction of France's population to a malleable fraction of what it was; Nietzsche called for the death of man to prepare the world for superman; the Russian Revolution and its exported revolutions have meant the planned murder of all who represent the old order. In Cambodia, since 1975, half the nation has been killed to eliminate all who cannot be reshaped in terms of the Marxist dream of a perfect order. The Cambodian Khmer Rouge leaders have killed off all who worked for the old order, all Christians, all who were educated, all who lived an urban life, all who had been abroad, and all who had worked for foreigners.

No more murderous force has ever been unleashed by man against man than the humanistic dream of justice. Tyranny and evil have governed most of history, but never more rigidly and thoroughly than by those who bring in totalitarian controls in the name of total justice. In 1931, Charles Pettit's *The Impotent General*, a brief and light novel, was translated into English. When the old war lord is replaced by an ideologue, the peasants are unhappy. A peasant is asked if it is because of affection. "By no means... Tan Pan-tze was an infamous robber, who shamefully harassed the countryside, thrashing inoffensive folk and raping women of all ages and conditions..." "Then may I ask why you appear to mourn him?"... The peasant replied: "Simply because his successor, General Pou, is very much worse than he was... he extorts his tribute methodically, which is even harder to endure... and, moreover, he now exacts the death penalty for non-payment and he does so in a legalized manner which has multiplied the executions" (p. 171).

It is not surprising that, in the quest for total justice, the humanistic regimes have instituted total terror. The people are whipped into line, "for their own good." They are ruthlessly subjected to savage repressions and forcible changes, all designed to make them conform to the new model man for the new model society.

All this is logical. A better world does require better men! The question is, how to get better men, how to produce them? In the final analysis, two choices appear before men as the instruments whereby men can be changed: revolution or regeneration.

If men deny the possibility of regeneration then their only logical option is revolution. Since 1660, and the birth of the Enlightenment, the logic of humanism has moved the world steadily and more deeply into revolution. Every continent is now in the grips of a faith which demands the coercive remaking of men.

But total justice on earth is an impossible dream. Man does not have God's omnipotence nor omniscience: he cannot control nor see all things. Lacking total knowledge, his institution of justice, even in godly hands, is at best partial and incomplete. Not every wrong can be righted, nor every balance restored. Men can live, under God, in a just society, but never in this world in a totally just society. For the humanistic state to seek total justice means claiming God's omnipotence: the state must exercise total power for total justice. Likewise, it must claim God's omniscience: it must have total knowledge of all people, institutions, and things. A bureaucracy is created to exercise these "divine" powers.

In the Biblical perspective, man as sinner needs regeneration. As a sinner, he cannot establish a just order, only an evil one. By the regenerating power of God in Christ, he is a new creation. He is now able to serve God, to institute an order in terms of God's law, and to know what godly justice is, and to pursue it. He knows that only in God's eternal Kingdom is total justice attainable, so that, even as he strives to obey God in all things, he knows that he cannot expect of imperfect men and societies a perfect and total justice. All the same, only a new creature can make for a new creation. A law order and state dedicated to a humanistic faith in total justice will create total revolution. An order dedicated to the whole word of God and Christ's regenerating power can give justice, because it rests on a new man of God's making, not man's.

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony, *Roots of Reconstruction*, p. 1047; Chalcedon Report No. 180, August, 1980

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/dream-of-total-justice>

Understanding the legal precedence for lifetime servitude in the New World

What makes John Casor's story distasteful is the fact that he was not only the first slave but was actually owned by another black man believed to be from Angola named Anthony Johnson.

Johnson was brought to Virginia as an indentured servant in 1619 and by 1623, he had worked out his period of indenture and had obtained his freedom.

Britain's first North American colony, Virginia, at the time, offered land to any of their colonists who could import more colonists.

Many people were willing to make the trip but did not have the money for the passage. Hence Virginia introduced the concept of 'indentured servants:' those who offered their labour for free in return for their benefactor having paid their passage over.

It is reported that by the time most indentured servants had completed their term of service, they had learned a skill that could help them make a living, and Johnson was one of them.

After working his way to freedom, he managed to acquire 250 acres of land and started farming.

He soon became an accomplished tobacco planter and later employed five indentured servants of his own, one of them being John Casor.

Historical accounts state that for bringing in servants, Johnson was given another 250 acres of land as headrights.

When Casor later completed his seven years of service and asked for his freedom, Johnson refused but was eventually persuaded by the family of Casor to allow him to work for a white colonist named Robert Parker.

Johnson later changed his mind and took matters to court, arguing that Parker had taken his "negro servant."

County Court of Northampton County, Virginia on March 8, 1655, ruled in favour of Johnson, demanding that Casor is returned to his original owner and damages be paid.

As a result of the court decision, Casor became the first person ever to be legally declared as a slave, working for Johnson for the rest of his life.

He also became the first recorded instance of a man being declared a slave without committing a crime.

John Punch, who had earlier been declared indentured servant for life, had earned his sentence by trying to escape his servitude, and the court found him guilty of breaching the contract.

But Casor, in his case, did not commit any crime.

Meanwhile, Johnson, through the court decision, became the British colonies' first slaveholder. He further set a precedent that resulted in the years of slavery in North America.

When he died in 1670, his 300 acres of land was passed to white colonists and not his children because the courts declared that as a black man, Johnson was not a citizen of the colony .

Around this period, the slave trade was also developing into a major business, as more and more African men and women were being brought in by slave ships to cater to the labour needs of the colonies.

Source: <https://face2faceafrica.com/article/john-casor-the-black-slave-owned-by-a-black-master-in-america-and-first-to-be-declared-slave-for-life-in-1655>

The Politics of Resentment and Revenge

What's wrong with the world? Chesterton famously said, "I am, yours sincerely G.K. Chesterton."

However, two thinkers can help us understand the chaotic state of modern society: the German philosopher Max Scheler—born the same year as Chesterton—and René Girard. Scheler and Girard's main theses help to explain the underlying psychology and psychosis of our crumbling society.

Scheler's important little book, *Ressentiment*, outlines the contours of the mind and soul driven by Resentment. (Henceforth I will distinguish this specialist term by capitalizing it as I dislike the introduction of foreign parlance.) Resentment is not just being annoyed because Jimmy got a bigger piece of pie or Sally won first prize. It is deeper and more resistant than that.

Tony Esolen has defined it: "It is caused by impotence and envy, when you see something great and good which you cannot attain, whose goodness remains as it were transparent to you, bringing you agony, but which you learn to denigrate, to slander, to try ineffectually to destroy. You end up living for that enmity."

Nietzsche had first diagnosed the problem and linked it with his idea of the "slave revolt of morality." The slave is powerless, and resenting his condition, turns his lowly condition into a virtue and therefore claims moral superiority over his master. Nietzsche saw this as the foundation of Judeo-Christian morality and condemned the Resentment as pusillanimous and its results as despicable. Those driven by Resentment would always operate out of envy, anger, and fear, and not only see their lowliness as a form of superiority, but would actually nurture such obsequiousness as a virtue. The Sermon on the Mount is an example of what Nietzsche would sneer at as a morality of weakness.

Scheler provides the philosophical response to Nietzsche. He agrees that Resentment drives people and that, in its religious manifestation, it is odious. However, Scheler says this is a false expression of the virtue of Christian charity. True Christian virtue is not rooted in resentment and envy. Instead it is rooted in gratitude and is evidenced by a confident, luminous, and graced strength—the strength of true self-sacrifice and service. The lives of the saints illustrate his point.

Resentment may drive a form of distorted religion, but in a secular society, Resentment becomes the reaction against the raw exercise of power. In other words, Resentment drives the protest movements. In his fourth and fifth chapters Scheler expands his theme and shows how modern progressivism with its drive towards egalitarianism, utilitarianism, and socialism are all driven by Resentment. The protest movements for the validation of sexual alternatives—indeed any social justice protest movement—are rooted in Resentment.

Scheler explains how Resentment becomes the prime source of energy and meaning in the Resentful person's life. Eventually the negative feelings of Resentment flip and become positive values. The Resentful campaigner comes to see himself as a victim, and martyr to the cause. This self-righteousness raises their self-esteem, and the rush of self-worth, like any stimulant that produces false euphoria, becomes addictive. Like any other drug, every high is never as high as the previous one and one must return for an ever increasing dosage.

Their cause becomes a holy crusade, and when they join with others caught in the same psychological dynamic they become a fearsome political force—an ideological whirlwind that gathers up all the others who are driven by Resentment. Once the revolution of Resentment gathers steam it cannot be corrected or criticized. It can never be wrong and can never be appeased.

The ideological warrior will never be appeased because their whole identity is now determined by their Resentment. If you give them everything they demand they will simply shift ground, demand more or move on to the next social justice battleground. Those caught up in this force can never be corrected because their cause is right and crucial to the dynamic is the conviction that someone else is always to blame.

When Scheler's analysis of Resentment is combined with Girard's dissection of the scapegoat mechanism the light shed on modern politics is complete. Girard considers the group dynamic which leads to true victimization and violence.

When there is a crisis in the tribe, because of pride, the members of the tribe look for a cause of the problem. If the tribe is hit with a plague, famine, or drought, they search desperately for a solution. The instinct of pride means they cannot be at fault. Therefore someone else must be to blame.

If there is no rational explanation for the crisis, and no one is clearly to blame, the members of the tribe instinctively turn to the foreigner in their midst, the members of the other tribe or the oddball, the crippled, mentally ill, or the person who is abnormal in some way. The blame is shifted to the scapegoat, and to solve the problem the cause of the problem must be eliminated. Once the scapegoat is identified, the final solution is necessary.

The scapegoat mechanism is, at its heart, driven by Resentment or what Girard gathers up in his somewhat more complicated concept: "mimetic desire." That this is foundational to human nature is established by the story of Cain and Abel being placed directly after the fall in the Garden of Eden. Driven by Resentment, Cain blames his brother and rises up to kill him. It is noteworthy that after this primal murder Cain is not repentant. His reply to God's accusation is the self-righteous, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

When these deeply rooted behaviors are extended from the individual to the societal level we see the driving forces of every aspect of social phenomena. Politics especially are driven by the actions and reactions of Resentment, rivalry, revenge, blame, scapegoating, and finally violence.

The cycle of Resentment, Revenge, and Scapegoating is so fundamental to human nature that it cannot be cured by humanistic solutions. All humanistic solutions to this systemic sickness will only ever be a band-aid on cancer.

The answer is simple but not easy. Resentment, envy, and revenge can only be countered by the grace of forgiveness. Scapegoating can only be countered by accepting blame and this can only be accomplished through the grace of humility. Sadly, these graced virtues are not only absent from the vocabulary of our society—they are increasingly absent in the contemporary form of Christianity: moralistic, therapeutic Deism. Moralistic, therapeutic Deism, like all humanistic solutions only masks the problem.

This unholy trinity is countered by the theological virtues. Instead of moralism: Charity. Instead of therapy: Hope. Instead of Deism: Faith. Charity is that gift that is as soft as moonlight and hard as diamonds. Its radiance banishes shallow good works and polite manners. Hope replaces therapy because it is the stubborn belief that divine providence will bring good out of every evil and grace will be given to overcome. Faith is the solid conviction that God is not asleep, but living and active in the world—infusing the grace that is needed to break the cursed cycle of Resentment and Revenge.

Source: <https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2019/04/politics-resentment-revenge-dwight-longenecker.html>

Freedom and the Vote

Never in all of man's history has a country gained freedom by voting it in. Freedom is not a product of the ballot box.

Tyranny has a long history, and the cruelties practiced by some tyrants over their subjects present sickening reading. No tyrant ever gave his subjects an opportunity to vote him out.

How then has the change been made? By revolution? The long history of revolutions indicates that almost invariably one tyrant is traded for another, usually a far more fearful one. How then does society change?

Society changes only as the members of society change, only as men and women are regenerated by Jesus Christ. Apart from regeneration, a society can have some material progress, but no real advantage or freedom for most men as a rule. The areas of freedom have been the areas of Christian faith, and, as that faith wanes, freedom wanes.

This leads to some very important conclusions. The ballot box has a very important function in a free society, but it can never be expected to do anything more than to reflect the character, the desires, and the will of the people. If the people who vote are of weak or bad character, if their desires are larcenous and envious, and if their will be perverse and evil, the election results will merely reflect their own nature on a broader scope.

This means too that people who expect to reform the state or country by means of the vote, by elections, are headed for failure and disillusionment. Reformation must begin in the lives of the people in order to show up in the ballot box.

Freedom has only come to a people, as they have become, one by one, free men in Jesus Christ. As a people advance into freedom in Christ, they move their society and country into that freedom, and as a people drift into unbelief and sin, their country declines into slavery.

Some years ago, the poet James Oppenheim summed up the issue of freedom in his poem "The Slave," when he wrote in part:

They can only set men free
And there is no need of that: Free men set themselves free.

Is there a free man in your mirror?

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony, CA Farmer 235:4 (Sept. 18, 1971), p. 38.

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/freedom-and-the-vote>