

Social Injustice

Also by Vittorio Bufacchi

VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VIOLENCE: A Philosophical Anthology

RETHINKING VIOLENCE

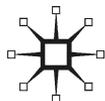
Social Injustice

Essays in Political Philosophy

Vittorio Bufacchi

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In memory of Brian Barry (1936–2009)

*Ma a noi piace pensarlo ancora dietro al motore
mentre fa correr via la macchina a vapore
e che ci giunga un giorno ancora la notizia
di una locomotiva, come una cosa viva,
lanciata a bomba contro l'ingiustizia,
lanciata a bomba contro l'ingiustizia,
lanciata a bomba contro l'ingiustizia!*

Francesco Guccini, 'La Locomotiva', 1972

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is motivated by a desire to place social injustice at the forefront of our moral and political concerns. It wants to encourage more contemporary political philosophers to prioritize the question of social injustice, and theorize solutions to this ubiquitous problem. A sound understanding of the nature of social injustice is ultimately the foundation upon which the discipline of political philosophy rests. And yet, while so much is assumed about social injustice, very little is written on social injustice, especially by political philosophers.

In the opening pages of *A Theory of Justice* John Rawls famously claims that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, and that laws and institutions must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. He goes on to say that ‘these propositions seem to express our intuitive conviction of the primacy of justice’ (pp. 3–4). I concur with Rawls’s hypothesis, and I endorse his undertaking. My only reservation is that I would express my intuitive conviction in terms of the primacy of injustice, not justice.

This book aims to address the disproportionate attention received by social justice compared to social injustice. Justice is derivative upon injustice in the same way that medicine is derivative upon illness; a theory of justice sets out to overcome or surmount injustice, which suggests that before a theory of justice can do any work, indeed even before a theory of justice takes form, the nature and meaning of injustice must be understood and explained. Injustice is the fundamental problem towards which a theory of justice is the solution. Indeed, if injustice was not a problem, or if it did not exist, there would not be any need for a theory of justice; in philosophy as in plumbing, it is nonsensical to discuss solutions independently from problems. By putting into focus the problem of social injustice, the hope is that in the future more political philosophers will devote their energies on recommending institutional reforms that will avert the persistence of social injustice, both domestically and globally.

With the exception of [Chapter 1](#), ‘Making Sense of Social Injustice’, and [Chapter 13](#), ‘Socialism in the 21st Century: Liberal, Democratic and Market Oriented’, all the other chapters in this book were published previously, over a period of eight years between 2000 and 2008. With a PhD (1994) under my belt from the London School of Economics, written under the strict supervision of Brian Barry, in the early stages

of my career I set out to solve puzzles in a vast range of areas, including social justice, liberty, equality, contractualism, exploitation, torture, moral motivations, democratic theory, and voting behaviour. It is only recently (and after publishing three books on violence and social justice: Bufacchi 2007, 2009, and 2011) that I realized that what was driving me all through this time was a strong sense of social injustice, and a desire to understand its nature and implications.

This book is dedicated to Brian Barry. While best known for his work on social justice, there is no doubt in my mind that what got Brian interested in political philosophy in the first place, and sustained his focus throughout his career, was the desire to make a contribution towards the fight against the endemic social injustice in our world. While he never wrote specifically on the topic, social injustice was the main thread of all his works, from *Political Argument* (1965) to *Why Social Justice Matters* (2005). We all miss him, for his scholarship, guidance, and friendship. And we also miss his remarkable wife, Anni.

The vast majority of the chapters that make up this book were written in the period when I met my wife, Jools Gilson. I am extremely grateful to her for all the support she has given me over the years. More than any other person I know, she is an expert on the injustice of being married to a man who struggles with the technicalities of changing a light bulb.

Different chapters of this book draw on the following publications:

- ‘Why Political Philosophy Matters’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2008, pp. 255–264. © 2008. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd.
- ‘Empirical Philosophy: Theory and Practice’, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 39–52. © 2004. Reprinted by permission of Philosophy Documentation Center.
- ‘The Injustice of Exploitation’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2002, pp. 1–15. © 2002. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis.
- ‘Torture, Terrorism and the State: A Refutation of the Ticking-Bomb Argument’ (with Jean Maria Arrigo), *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2006, pp. 339–357. © 2006. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- ‘The Enlightenment, Contractualism, and the Moral Polity’, in N. Geras and R. Wokler (eds) *The Enlightenment and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2000, pp. 204–224. © 2000. Reprinted by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

- 'Motivating Justice', *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 2005, pp. 25–41. © 2005. Reprinted by permission of Palgrave Macmillan.
- 'Justice, Equality, Liberty', in R. Axtmann (ed.) *Understanding Democratic Politics: An Introduction* (London: Sage), 2003, pp. 31–40. © 2003. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd.
- 'Sceptical Democracy', *Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2001, pp. 23–30. © 2001. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 'Political Scepticism: A Reply to the Critics', *Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2003, pp. 137–140. © 2003. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 'Voting, Rationality and Reputation', *Political Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, 2001, pp. 714–729. © 2001. Reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- 'Deliberative Democracy among the Communities of Population in Resistance', *Report on Guatemala*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2001, pp. 9–12.

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