

INJUSTICE

why **social inequality** persists



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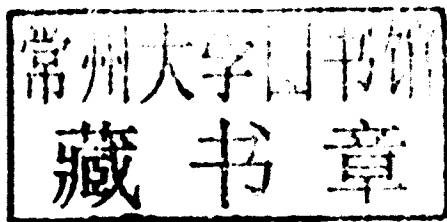
DANIEL DORLING

With a new Foreword by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett,
authors of *The Spirit Level*

INJUSTICE

Why social inequality persists

Daniel Dorling



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INJUSTICE

Why social inequality persists

“For decades researchers have shown the damage inequality does to all society and Dorling’s wonderful book extends this. With brilliance and passion Dorling analyses the mind-set of entitlement among those who hold ever tighter to money, power and life’s best rewards, generation to generation.”

Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*

“His attack on elitism and despair is impressive, his factual evidence undeniable.”

Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP

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“A powerful and passionate book. Useful contribution to the policy debate.”

Diane Coyle, *Enlightened Economist blog*

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Peder Clark, *Public Health Today*

“This is a high content, high value book, to be recommended to anyone interested or involved in anything to do with poverty, inequality and injustice and attempts to redress them.”

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“It occupies a place on my bookshelf where I can reach it easily, looking for the many neat arguments which carry the egalitarian cause forward.”

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“One of the foremost thinkers on the issue of social inequality today.”

Labour briefing

“An excellent, sharp and at times poignant analysis of the political, social and economic situation that capitalism as a social system is in today.”

Counterfire

To my parents,
Bronwen and David Dorling

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Danny Dorling, Sheffield

A full bibliography, tables and the Excel spreadsheets that were used to create the figures in this book are available on the Injustice webpages at www.policypress.co.uk

¹ See pages 9 to 11 for an explanation of ‘posies’. All other notes appear at the end of the book (pages 333–88) rather than as footnotes and so can be skipped (although you won’t know what you’re missing if you do).

Foreword

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

Money exists objectively as coins and bank notes. But it only works as money, as a medium of exchange and store of wealth, while people have confidence in its value and other people's willingness to accept it as payment. Without that subjective element, coins, banknotes and cheques are nothing more than a collection of metal discs or piles of paper. The same is true of the social structure and functioning of our society. Our society has an objective, physical reality – the existence of rich and poor, living in larger or smaller houses, the different schools their children go to, the towns and villages, police, hospitals, judicial systems, prisons, and so on. What holds them all in place, like the mortar between bricks, and gives each society its particular character, is the subjective collective beliefs and behaviour of the people in that society.

What Danny Dorling has done in this book is to show that these subjective elements – the beliefs and conceptions which justify the wealth differences, elitism, and structure of inequality in our modern society – are based on falsehoods. He has, in effect, shown that the bricks of society are held in place not with proper mortar containing cement, but with wet sand. It is, for instance, false to think that we have to go on paying the rich huge salaries and bonuses because they have rare talents which we will not be able to replace if they emigrate. It is false to think that their greed somehow benefits the rest of society. It is false to think that elitist societies which stigmatise a large proportion of the population as inferior are more efficient. And it is false to think that people's position in the social hierarchy reflects how they have been sorted according to genetic differences in ability. How could we have fallen for a set of such improbable stories so obviously promulgated to justify and support privilege? In showing these stories to be false, Dorling reveals that the bricks of the social structure are held together by nothing more than sand.

As individuals we tend to understand ourselves, and to explain our actions to others, in ways which are self-justifying. We try to

present ourselves in a good light, as if trying to recruit people to a personal supporters' club. The same thing happens at a societal scale. The dominant ideology in society always favours beliefs, conceptions and interpretations of reality which justify the system of social organisation and the position of the privileged. Societal ideologies typically suggest that their structure is simply a reflection of human nature, and so could not be other than it is.

But of course humans have lived in every kind of society, from the most egalitarian to the most tyrannical hierarchies. Throughout at least 90 per cent of the time that we have existed as 'anatomically modern' humans, we appear to have lived in remarkably egalitarian societies, based on food sharing and gift exchange with little or no formal recognition of differences in rank. Hierarchical class societies seem to have developed with agriculture, which in some parts of the world may date back around 10,000 years, but which in most places is very much more recent.

The characteristics which have enabled human beings to adapt to, and accept, living in highly unequal stratified societies are almost certainly pre-human in origin. Dominance hierarchies, like animal ranking systems and pecking orders, are pre-human and were succeeded by a long period of remarkably egalitarian pre-historical development.

The social structures based on dominance hierarchies within which we live should probably be seen as a throwback to something essentially pre-human which we should perhaps regard as primitive and sub-human. Recent scientific evidence of many kinds makes it increasingly clear that great inequality in modern societies is damaging: damaging to human abilities, performance and happiness. We can now see that most of the differences in outcomes between rich and poor, whether in measures of IQ, health, violence or educational attainment, which are so often used to justify elitism, hierarchy and social exclusion, are in fact caused by social status differentiation itself. That is why more hierarchical societies with bigger income differences between rich and poor have so many more of almost all the health and social problems which tend to be more common lower down the social ladder.

In his book *A Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith said:

The disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though both necessary to establish and maintain the distinctions of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.

Even if it seemed essential to members of the privileged classes in 18th-century England to ‘maintain the distinctions of ranks and order of society’, modern living standards which put the diet, health and comfort of the majority of the population above those enjoyed by the aristocracy of the past have surely made greater equality less threatening. Adam Smith saw the debilitating effects inequality had on both the rich and powerful and those of ‘poor and mean condition’: he recognised how it corrupts us all. And now the evidence shows that the very fabric of society is stronger when great ‘distinctions of rank’ are replaced by the warp and weft of greater equality, social cohesion and trust.

To discover that the foundations, brick walls and social pyramids of our society are held together with nothing more than sand, rather than mortar, allows us to develop a more sociable and equal society, a more fully human – and humane – society, in which we are less ranked, devalued, psychologically shaped and constrained by status, in which our position in the social class hierarchy imprints itself on us less indelibly from early life onwards, in which the purpose of life and the idea of ‘success’ are less dominated by and reduced to the idea of being better than or superior to our fellow human beings. Even Conservative prime ministers have aspired to creating a classless society. What they have failed to understand is that class distinctions are built on the material foundations of differences in income and wealth.

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Introduction

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

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

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