DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY: ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

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Abstract

In this treatise, some aspects of the relationship of religion to economic questions are examined, particularly those associated with wealth distribution, because of their inevitably close association with societal common good. Utilitarian philosophers argued that all decisions could be made according to the principal of the greatest “utility,” or benefit, to the greatest number of people. In this work therefore, the authors examined how it related to concepts of justice and fairness and to the doctrine of utility with the aim of building an inclusive society. The study noted that the ways in which scarce time, skill, and resources are used are often affected by religiously motivated decisions. For instance, a study of a Hindu caste, or a medieval manor, or some labour unions may reveal that economic questions concerning the production of goods and services are conditioned by religious values. A second economic question – the description of the way in which comparative values are ascribed to be products of society – is also influenced, at least to a small degree, by religious considerations. Some goods and services are worth more, have a higher economic value, because they have a religious value, and others are worth less because religion places a negative value upon them. The study discovered that religion affects the demand side of the familiar supply demand equation and on the other hand, may influence the supply side, if the values it upholds encourage or discourage the production of various goods and service.

Keywords: Distributive Justice, Inclusive Society, Religion and Wealth

Introduction

Despite some perceived historical and cultural contingencies, there are particular religious attitudes and practices as well as common ethical values that can be identified for broadening and deepening economic and environmental perspectives. Therefore, we affirm the actual and potential contribution of religious ideas for informing and inspiring economic theology, environmental ethics, and grassroots activism. Religions are now reclaiming and reconstructing these powerful religious attitudes, practices, and values toward re-conceiving mutually enhancing human-Earth relations. Careful methodological reflection is needed in considering how to bring forward in coherent and convincing ways the resources of religious traditions in response to particular aspects of our current economic and environmental crisis. It entails a self-reflexive yet creative approach to retrieving and reclaiming texts and traditions, reevaluating and re-examining what will be most efficacious, and thus restoring and reconstructing religious traditions in a creative postmodern world. All of this involves a major effort to evoke the power and potential of religious traditions to function even more effectively as sources of spiritual inspiration, moral transformation, and sustainable communities in the midst of the environmental challenges faced by the Earth community. That is because world religions are being recognized in their great variety as more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. Rather, religions are seen as providing a broad orientation to the cosmos and human roles in it. Attitudes toward nature thus have been significantly, although not exclusively, shaped by religious views for millennia in cultures around the globe.

In this context, then, religions can be understood in their largest sense as a means whereby humans, recognizing the limitations of phenomenal reality, undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context. Religions thus refer to those cosmological stories, symbol systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration. Religions connect humans with a divine presence or numinous force. They bond human communities and they assist in forging intimate relations with the broader inclusive community.

The distribution of wealth is, however, less frequently and less systematically studied than the distribution of money income. Partly, this is because wealth can be hard to measure. Much wealth is held in the form of unrealized capital gains. A household receives a capital gain if sells an appreciated asset, such as shares in a company, land, or antiques, for more than the price at which it purchased the asset. An asset may appreciate in value for a long time before it is actually sold. No one, however, will know exactly how much such an asset has really gained or lost in value until the owner actually does sell it, thus "realizing"—turning into actual dollars—the capital gain. Another reason why it is harder to get information on wealth is that—while people are required to report their annual incomes from wages and many investments for tax purposes—the government does not require everyone to regularly and comprehensively report their asset holdings. One study estimates that the Gini ratio for the distribution of wealth in the United States was 0.83 in 2001—indicating much more inequality than is found in the distribution of income. It has been estimated that in 1998 the top 1% of U.S. households owned about 38% of all household assets, and the top 10% owned about 71%, while the bottom 40% owned only 0.2% (DPSD/UNDESA, 2007).

Equity in the distribution of wealth and resources is another critical element of inclusive societies. How the resources are allocated and utilized will significantly affect the orientation of a society, either towards a more integrated, inclusive society, or an exclusive, polarized, and disintegrated one. Therefore, socio-economic policies should be geared towards managing equitable distribution and equal opportunities. Inclusive policies, instructions and programs that are sensitive to and cater to the less advantaged and vulnerable need to be put in place in all areas/sectors, including public health, and effectively implemented. There is a need for a strong monitoring and evaluation tools to demonstrate whether inclusiveness was actually achieved, as well as highlight areas for improvement.

Concept of Wealth

Wealth, in economics is an accumulation of goods having economic value. Economic value has several characteristics. First, an object must have utility. It must have, or be suspected of having, the capacity to satisfy some human want. Wealth can be increased by discovering uses for things previously not regarded as useful. Thus, the discovery of uses for petroleum in the 19th century added enormously to wealth. Second, economic goods must be in scarce supply (Clark, *et al*, 2008). Air does not normally have economic value because it is freely available. Air that is artificially conditioned is economically valuable, however, because it is relatively scarce. Third, economic goods must be transferable; that is, it must be possible to buy and sell them at definite market prices. Finally, an object must have measurable economic value. Because the only common unit of value today is money, the worth of goods must be expressible in monetary terms. Some economists also regard a definite skill in performing a job as human wealth as such skill has a determinable market value.

National wealth is the sum total of economic goods in the possession of the national, state, and local governments; business and nonprofit institutions; and the individual inhabitants of a country (Clark, *et al*, 2008). Systematic study of what constitutes a nation's wealth was begun in the 16th century by the mercantilists (Clark, *et al*, 2008). They advanced the thesis that a nation's stock of precious metals forms the most important part of its wealth. This view was generally accepted until the 18th century, when a reaction against the narrowness of mercantilist doctrine set in. It became evident that precious metals, particularly in the form of currency, were claims on wealth rather than wealth itself. Mercantilist doctrine was gradually replaced by the view of the physiocrats, a group of French economists of the 18th century that only farming, mining, fishing, and other extractive industries could contribute to the real wealth of nations. The Scottish economist Adam Smith broadened the physiocratic concept by stressing that wealth not only can be extracted but also can be created by manufacturing.

This view was systematically formulated in the 19th century by the British economist John Stuart Mill (Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997). His formulation, with certain relatively minor modifications, is the one generally accepted today According to the modern version of Mill's concept, a nation's wealth comprises only its measurable physical assets—that is, its land and other natural resources; the structures, roads, and other improvements on the land; the machinery and other durable goods used in production and distribution; inventories of goods in the possession of enterprises; and the goods accumulated at any one time in the hands of consumers. Paper money and securities are not included in estimates of a nation's wealth, because such assets are only claims against the physical assets that actually constitute wealth. Holdings of money and securities are counted, however, when these holdings represent claims against governments or nationals of foreign countries. If a nation's aggregate claims against foreigners exceed the claims of foreigners against the nation and its inhabitants, the difference is a net addition to national wealth. If claims by foreigners exceed claims against foreigners, the difference is a net decrease of national wealth. In the determination of national wealth, definite skills have a calculable market value. Currently, economists tend to give consideration to such items in socioeconomic accounting. Examples of factors that contribute to wealth but are not considered wealth are the good will and similar intangible assets of a firm, the institutions and traditions of a nation, and such attributes of a people's character as the pride they possess in their skills.

A Philosophical Argument for Distributive Justice

Distributive justice concerns the fair, just or equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. These benefits and burdens span all dimensions of social life and assume all forms, including income, economic wealth, political power, taxation, work obligations, education, shelter, health care, military service, community involvement and religious activities. Thus, justice arguments are often invoke d in connection with minimum wage legislation, Affirmative Action policies, public education, military conscription, litigation, as well as with redistributive policies such as welfare, Medicare, aid to the developing world, progressive income taxes and inheritance taxes. Distributive justice enjoys a long and honored tradition in political, economic and social thought. It is central to Aristotle's Nichomachean and Politics (in Thomson, 1997). In modern political philosophy, it has been construed in broad terms and seen as a foundational for policy formation and analysis. Michael Walzer (1986), for example, writes that "Distributive Justice is a large idea," and for John Rawls (1971) "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions." Thus, it is widely regarded as an important concept and influential force in philosophy and the social sciences.

This description begs the question, however, of what, exactly, constitutes a "fair," "just" or "equitable" distribution (we will use these terms interchangeably). It seems that justice terminology is employed with considerable flexibility, and fairness arguments are sometimes even made by both parties on opposite ends of a dispute. There are at least three reasons for this. First, a large part of the literature on justice involves prescriptive theories: theories attempt to characterize a phenomenon in general terms, and prescriptive theories concern what "ought to be" (Neal, 1984). They can be contrasted with descriptive theories that seek to describe in general terms what "is."

Plato's theory of Ideas and his rationalistic view of knowledge formed the foundation for his ethical and social idealism. The realm of eternal Ideas provides the standards or ideals according to which all objects and actions should be judged. The philosophical person, who refrains from sensual pleasures and searches instead for knowledge of abstract principles, finds in these ideals the basis for personal behavior and social institutions,. Personal virtue consists in a harmonious relation among the three parts of the soul: reason, emotion, and desire. Social justice likewise consists in harmony among the classes of society. The ideal state of a sound mind in a sound body requires that the intellect control the desires and passions, as the ideal state of society requires that the wisest individuals rule the pleasure-seeking masses. Truth, beauty, and justice coincide in the Idea of the Good, according to Plato; therefore, art that expresses moral values is the best art.

In his rather conservative social program, Plato supported the censorship of art forms that he believed corrupted the young and promoted social injustice.

That first of judicial virtues, impartiality, is an obligation of justice, partly for the reason last mentioned; as being a necessary condition of the fulfillment of the other obligations of justice. But this is not the only source of the exalted rank, among human obligations, of those maxims of equality and impartiality, which, both in popular estimation and in that of the most enlightened are included among the precepts of justice (Carpenter, 2009). In one point of view, they may be considered as corollaries from the principles already lay down. If it is a duty to do to each according to his deserts, returning good for good as well as repressing evil by evil, it necessarily follows that we should treat all equally well (when no higher duty forbids) who have deserved equally well of us, and that society should treat all equally well who have deserved equally well of it, that is, who have deserved equally well absolutely (Carpenter, 2009). This is the highest abstract standard of social and distributive justice; towards which all institutions, and the efforts of all virtuous citizens, should be made in the utmost possible degree to converge. But this great moral duty rests upon a still deeper foundation, being a direct emanation from the first principle of morals, and not a mere logical corollary from secondary or derivative doctrines. It is involved in the very meaning of utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle. That principle is a mere form of words without rational signification, unless one person's happiness, supposed equal in degree (with the proper allowance made for kind), is counted for exactly as much as another's.

The equal claim of everybody to happiness in the estimation of the moralist and the legislator, involves an equal claim to all the means of happiness, except in so far as the inevitable conditions of human life, and the general interest, in which that of every individual is included set limits to the maxim; and those limits ought to be strictly construed. As every other maxim of justice, so this is by no means applied or held applicable universally; on the contrary, as I have already remarked, it bends to every person's ideas of social expediency. But in whatever case it is deemed applicable at all, it is held to be the dictate of justice. All persons are deemed to have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse. And hence all social inequalities which have ceased to be considered expedient, assume the character not of simple inexpediency, but of injustice, and appear so tyrannical, that people are apt to wonder how they ever could have been tolerated; forgetful that they themselves perhaps tolerate other inequalities under an equally mistaken notion of expediency, the correction of which would make that which they approve seem quite as monstrous as what they have at last learnt to condemn. The entire history of social improvement has been a series of transitions, by which one custom or institution after another, from being a supposed primary necessity of social existence, has passed into the rank of a universally stigmatized injustice and tyranny. So it has been with the distinctions of slaves and freemen, nobles and serfs, patricians and plebeians; and so it will be, and in part already is, with the aristocracies of colour, race, and sex.

It appears from what has been said, that justice is a name for certain moral requirements, which, regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of social utility, and are therefore of more paramount obligation, than any others; though particular cases may occur in which some other social duty is so important, as to overrule any one of the general maxims of justice (Marx, 1993). Thus, to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal, or take by force, the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap, and compel to officiate, the only qualified medical practitioner. In such cases, as we do not call anything justice which is not a virtue, we usually say, not that justice must give way to some other moral principle, but that what is just in ordinary cases is, by reason of that other principle, not just in the particular case. By this useful accommodation of language, the character of indefeasibility attributed to justice is kept up, and we are saved from the necessity of maintaining that there can be laudable injustice.

The considerations which have now been adduced resolve, I conceive the only real difficulty in the utilitarian theory of morals. It has always been evident that all cases of justice are also cases of expediency: the difference is in the peculiar sentiment which attaches to the former, as contradistinguished from the latter. If this characteristic sentiment has been sufficiently accounted for; if there is no necessity to assume for it any peculiarity of origin; if it is simply the natural feeling of resentment, moralized by being made coextensive with the demands of social good; and if this feeling not only does but ought to exist in all the classes of cases to which the idea of justice corresponds; that idea no longer presents itself as a stumbling-block to the utilitarian ethics. Justice remains the appropriate name for certain social utilities which are vastly more important, and therefore more absolute and imperative, than any others are as a class (though not more so than others may be in particular cases); and which, therefore, ought to be, as well as naturally are, guarded by a sentiment not only different in degree, but also in kind; distinguished from the milder feeling which attaches to the mere idea of promoting human pleasure or convenience, at once by the more definite nature of its commands, and by the sterner character of its sanctions.

Equitable Distribution of wealth to Attain Inclusive Society

Most people own relatively little wealth, relying mainly on labor income and/or government, nonprofit, or family transfers to support their expenditures. It is possible to have negative wealth. This happens when the value of a person's debts (such as for a car, house, or credit cards) is greater than the value of her assets (*Barron's Business Dictionary*, 2013). For people in the middle class, the equity they have in their house is often their most significant asset. On the other hand, those who do own substantial physical and financial wealth are generally in a position to put much of it into assets that increase in value over time and/or yield flows of capital income—which can in turn be invested in the acquisition of still more assets. A fair and just meting out of property between interested parties for example, a constitutional provision requiring an "equitable distribution" of income of a school fund requires distribution thereof to the several districts in proportion to school children enumerated and living in each district.

An inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity as well as capability of all members of the society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction (Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, 2008). The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) defines an inclusive society as a "society for all in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play". Such an inclusive society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. It is promoted by social policies that seek to reduce inequality and create flexible and tolerant societies that embrace all people. Elements of Inclusion include (Konow, 2003):

- Inclusive policies and legislation
- Access to clean and safe places for living, work and recreation
- Access to information and communication
- Access to public spaces
- Access to resources
- Access to basic services, education, health care, clean water and sanitation
- Access to transportation
- Transparent and accountable decision-making processes
- Adequate income and employment opportunities
- Affirmation of human rights
- Opportunity for personal development
- Respect for diversity of Freedom (of choice, religion, etc.
- Participation in decision-making
- Social protection
- Solidarity

Broader Ethical Context for Equity: The Principle of Utility

The focus of ethics in the world's religions has been largely human centered. Humane treatment of humans is often seen not only as an end in itself but also as a means to eternal reward. While some have critiqued this anthropocentric perspective of world religions as rather narrow in light of environmental degradation and the loss of species, it is nonetheless important to recall that this perspective has also helped to promote major movements for social justice and human rights (Weimin, 1985). While social justice is an ongoing and unfinished effort of engagement, the challenge for the religions is also to enlarge their ethical concerns to include the more than human world. Social justice and environmental integrity are now being seen as part of a continuum. For some decades environmental philosophers have been developing the field of environmental ethics that can now provide enormous resources for the world's religions in considering how to expand their ethical focus. Emerging bio-centric, zoo-centric, and eco-centric ethics are attentive to life forms, animal species, and ecosystems within a planetary context. A new "systems ethics" of part and whole, local and global, will assist the religions in articulating a more comprehensive form of environmental ethics from within their traditions. This is a major part of the development of religions into a dialogue with the sustainability movement. Humans are seeking an ethics to respond not only to suicide and homicide but also biocide and ecocide.

Thus religions are gradually moving from exclusively anthropocentric ethics to eco-centric ethics and even to anthropo-cosmic ethics. The latter is a term used by T. Weiming (1985) to describe the vibrant interaction of Heaven, Earth, and humans in a Confucian worldview. In this context, humans complete the natural and cosmic world and become participants in the dynamic transformative life processes. This idea can extend ethics to apply to the land-species-human-planet-universe continuum. This is a fruitful yet still emerging path toward a comprehensive ethics for sustainability. This path has various challenges, including within the religions themselves.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure.* It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire, but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility* recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work: it will be proper therefore at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever; and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government. By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness (all this in the present case comes to the same thing), or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community; if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.

The interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals: no wonder that the meaning of it is often lost. When it has a meaning, it is this. The community is a fictitious *body,* composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members.* The interest of the community then is—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it. It is in vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what the interest of the individual is. A thing is said to promote the interest, or to be *for* the interest, of an individual, when it tends to add to the sum total of his pleasures; or, what comes to the same thing, to diminish the sum total of his pains.

An action then may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility, or, for shortness sake, to utility (meaning with respect to the community at large), when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.

vii. A measure of government (which is but a particular kind of action, performed by a particular person or persons) may be said to be conformable to or dictated by the principle of utility, when in like manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it. When an action, or in particular a measure of government, is supposed by a man to be conformable to the principle of utility, it may be convenient, for the purposes of discourse, to imagine a kind of law or dictate, called a law or dictate of utility; and to speak of the action in question, as being conformable to such law or dictate.

A man may be said to be a partisan of the principle of utility, when the approbation or disapprobation he annexes to any action, or to any measure, is determined by and proportioned to the tendency which he conceives it to have to augment or to diminish the happiness of the community; or in other words, to its conformity or unconformity to the laws or dictates of utility. Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility, one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may say also that it is right it should be done—at least that it is not wrong it should be done; that it is a right action—at least that it is not a wrong action. When thus interpreted, the words *ought,* and *right* and *wrong,* and others of that stamp have a meaning: when otherwise, they have none. Has the rectitude of this principle been ever formally contested? It should seem that it had, by those who have not known what they have been meaning. Is it susceptible of any direct proof? It should seem not; for that which is used to prove everything else, cannot itself be proved: a chain of proofs must have their commencement somewhere. To give such proof is as impossible as it is needless. Not that there is or ever has been that human creature breathing, however stupid or perverse, who has not on many, perhaps on most occasions of his life, deferred to it. By the natural constitution of the human frame, on most occasions of their lives men in general embrace this principle, without thinking of it: if not for the ordering of their own actions, yet for the trying of their own actions, as well as of those of other men. There have been, at the same time, not many perhaps even of the most intelligent, who have been disposed to embrace it purely and without reserve. There are even few who have not taken some occasion or other to quarrel with it, either on account of their not understanding always how to apply it, or on account of some prejudice or other which they were afraid to examine into, or could not bear to part with. For such is the stuff that man is made of: in principle and in practice, in a right track and in a wrong one, the rarest of all human qualities is consistency.

When a man attempts to combat the principle of utility, it is with reasons drawn, without his being aware of it, from that very principle itself. His arguments, if they prove anything, prove not that the principle is *wrong,* but that, according to the applications he supposes to be made of it, it is *misapplied.* Is it possible for a man to move the earth? Yes; but he must first find out another earth to stand upon. To disprove the propriety of it by arguments is impossible; but, from the causes that have been mentioned, or from some confused or partial view of it, a man may happen to be disposed not to relish it. Where this is the case, if he thinks the settling of his opinions on such a subject worth the trouble, let him take the following steps, and at length, perhaps, he may come to reconcile himself to it:

(1) Let him settle with himself whether he would wish to discard this principle altogether; if so, let him consider what it is that all his reasoning (in matters of politics especially) can amount to?

(2) If he would, let him settle with himself whether he would judge and act without any principle, or whether there is any other he would judge and act by?

(3) If there be, let him examine and satisfy himself whether the principle he thinks he has found is really any separate intelligible principle; or whether it be not a mere principle in words, a kind of phrase, which at bottom expresses neither more nor less than the mere averment of his own unfounded sentiments—that is, what in another person he might be apt to call caprice?

(4) If he is inclined to think that his own approbation or disapprobation annexed to the idea of an act, without any regard to its consequences, is a sufficient foundation for him to judge and act upon, let him ask himself whether his sentiment is to be a standard of right and wrong with respect to every other man, or whether every man's sentiment has the same privilege of being a standard to itself?

(5) In the first case, let him ask himself whether his principle is not despotically, and hostile to all the rest of human race.

(6) In the second case, whether it is not anarchical, and whether at this rate there are not as many different standards of right and wrong as there are men? And whether even to the same man, the same thing which is right today may not (without the least change in its nature) be wrong tomorrow? And whether the same thing is not right and wrong in the same place at the same time? And in either case, whether all argument is not at an end? And whether, when two men have said, 'I like this,' and 'I don't like it,' they can (upon such a principle) have anything more to say?

(7) If he should have said to himself, No: for that the sentiment which he proposes as a standard must be grounded on reflection, let him say on what particulars the reflection is to turn? If on particulars having relation to the utility of the act, then let him say whether this is not deserting his own principle, and borrowing assistance from that very one in opposition to which he sets it up; or if not on those particulars, on what other particulars?

(8) If he should be for compounding the matter, and adopting his own principle in part, and the principle of utility in part, let him say how far he will adopt it?

(9) When he has settled with himself where he will stop, then let him ask himself how he justifies to himself the adopting it so far? And why he will not adopt it any farther?

(10) Admitting any other principle than the principle of utility to be a right principle, a principle that it is right for a man to pursue; admitting (what

is not true) that the word 'right' can have a meaning without reference to utility, let him say whether there is any such thing as a *motive* that a man can have to pursue the dictates of it: if there is, let him say what that motive is, and how it is to be distinguished from those which enforce the dictates of utility; if not, then lastly let him say what it is this other principle can be good for? (Burtt, 1939).

Influence of Religion on the Equitable Distribution of Wealth: An Analysis

A primitive man may invest a great deal of time and skill - an economic decision – to carve the appropriate symbols or designs on a sacred drum, because they contribute to its religious efficacy. Were it not for their religious meaning, he would not value them so highly and would be unwilling to spend so much for them. Similarly, a church may invest a great deal of moneyed a stained glass window, because of the meaning it has for the members. These are rather specific economic problems, and we shall not, therefore, give them further attention. It is in the influences on the distribution of wealth and income that religion has its most significant economic effects; and it is also at this point that the economic consequences of religion are most important for society, culture, and personality. Hence the sociologist of religion must explore this question carefully.

In the first place, religious activity everywhere receivers a certain share – often a fairly large share – of the wealth of a society. Even those groups that live on the edge of subsistence devote part of their substance to the maintenance of holy places, sacrifices, ceremonial feasts, sacred objects, and the like. Indeed, if there is any correlation between the amount of wealth of a society and the proportion of its wealth that is spent for religion, it may be an inverse one: the poorer the society or group, the higher the proportion of its wealth that is devoted to religious activity. Part of this expenditure, in societies where religious specialists have appeared, is used to support the priestly class. This adds a new dimension to the question of the economic significance of religion, especially where there is no clear-cut determination by the religious values themselves of the appropriate share of the income that should go to the religious professionals. The traditions may encourage mendicancy, as with the early Buddhists or some Christian monastic. But more commonly the religious norms encourage, or at least permit, the group to strive for a large share of the wealth. The religious views may then combine with secular ambitions among the clergy, to bring them substantial incomes. As mediators, if not as dispensers, of salvation, they are often in a commanding position. If their religious authority is combined, by a churchly decision, with the power of secular authorities, they may dominate or share in the ruling of the society and even acquire substantial wealth. Some will say at this point: this is not a description of the economic power of religion, but of the transformation of religion into a secular quest, under religious guise. But it is precisely in the possibilities of such transformation, in the frequency with which religious institutions take on secular power that many of the implications of religion for society reside. Sometimes it is the religious professionals themselves who gain wealth and power: sometimes it is a secular group who acquire religious sponsorship for their claims to hold, or to win, wealth and power; often it is both.

Analysis of the conditions under which these various possibilities occur is an important task. The following variables seem to be involved as some of the evidences relating to religion and the distribution of wealth (Tucker & Grim, 2009):

i. The Degree of Secularization. Where most of the questions of life have a religious aspect, the importance of religion for economics is likely to be large, and the priestly class likely to be well supported. Where many important questions- e.g. health, technology – are thought of primarily in secular terms, as in the united states today, the economic influence of religion is reduced.
ii. The Nature of the Religious Traditions and Organizations. Religious in which ethical questions are least important, those in which the means to salvation are most thoroughly institutionalized, most under the domination of one ecclesiastical group, and least under the control of the individual believer, are those that aid the acquisition of power by the professional religious leaders.
iii. The Nature of Power Distribution in the Secular Aspects of society. When economic and political powers are highly concentrated in the hands of a small ruling group, the higher clergy are likely to occupy positions of influence and to share generously in the income of a society. Under such circumstances, churchly compromise with ‘’the world’’ is carried very far; the rulers and their practices are upheld and defended with a minimum of criticism. This is partly because the dilemma of religious leaders which we have discussed is particularly sharp in authoritarian societies: and it is partly because the secular gains for the clergy, if they will support the ruling group, are large in such societies. In democratic situations, where power is diffused, the dominant group is less willing to share influence and income with religious leaders if they will sanctify their dominant position. Powerful secular groups have little to gain thereby, because the lower strata of society have other means – political action, labour unions, etc. – of making their claims in any event. It is of little value to block one hole in a sieve, of little value to inhibit the claims to a greater share of life’s goods under religious auspices if they are going to

have other auspices anyway. Moreover, the lower classes, in a democratic society, are less likely to accept a religious system that has accommodated itself thoroughly to the dominant groups, because they have other means of working for their goals.

These three variables are closely interrelated. Their combined effect can be to influence strongly the wealth of the churches and the income of the clergy. In Nigeria, for example, religious professionals are not, on the average, well paid. Their income is below that of industrial workers. Each of the above variables contributes to this result: Many questions that formerly had a strong religious aspect have been substantially secularized; there is a strong emphasis on religious toleration and the right of an individual to be his own religious interpreter – the opposite of a monopoly on the means of salvation; and a secular power is quite extensively diffused. When such a situation is compared with that of medieval Europe, the importance of the three factors in affecting the wealth of the church and the income of the clergy is well shown. In medieval times, the interpretation of medical, agricultural, astronomical, and other kinds of events was far less secularized. One church, organized into an elaborate hierarchy with a monopoly over sacraments, using a language unknown to the masses of people, dominated the religious scene. Individual initiative in religious matters, the expression of the belief that the layman could have dealings directly with God, without the need for the intercession of the church, were heretical acts justifying server punishment. Finally, the secular setting was one in which power was highly concentrated in the hand of the hereditary nobility. Under these circumstances, the churches and the clergy commanded a great deal of wealth. It was very from affluent; but the total wealth, especially in land, was great. Preserved Smith writes:

In the analysis of the influence of religion and religious institutions on the distribution of wealth, however, it is not the effects on the priestly class that have received most attention or are most important, for they are generally a fairly small proportion of the population. The use of religion to hold or to acquire a greater share of the wealth by secular classes and groups, from all levels of society, is the more fundamental phenomenon. The analysis of the factors affecting the income of professional religious leaders can be brought within this larger question, for it is the nature of their association with the secular groups that is largely responsible for their income position.

Description of the use of religion by secular groups to hold or acquire scarce values is very closely related to the topic of religion and social stratification. Our concern here, however, is not so much with the variations in beliefs, rites, and religious group structure among social strata and the several reasons for the these variations. It is more with the processes of interaction by means of which religion is used to justify specifically economic claims. This will require that we explore, more fully than we have up until now, the churches of the middle and upper classes, as we have already mentioned the sects of the lower classes. The sects have seldom, at least for long, made direct economic claims on the basis of frustrated their desires for improving their status by appeals to therefore, have been more inclined to redefine the meaning of their economic status (poverty is a sign of virtue; this life is scarcely significant anyway) than to attack it. The consequences of their religious beliefs for economic matters have been more indirect than direct, latent rather than manifest functions. This is true whether those consequences have been to make them less rigid, by encouraging frugality and industry.

It is otherwise with the middle and upper classes. They face many serious difficulties, to be sure, but their economic hopes have been substantially rewarded, not frustrated. Their task is not to adjust to poverty and powerlessness, but to feel justified in their good fortune. This too can be a difficult problem, particularly among those who share a religious tradition that embodies a large measure of the insights and responses of persons who were dealing with ill – fortune. This is true of all major religions. They are substantially the products of suffering, of a sense of evil, of unhappiness, often as these problems have been developed in the minds of people peculiarly sensitive to them. The well-to-do share these religions because they are brought up in societies where they prevail, but more importantly because they too, in the last analysis, face the problems of suffering and evil, even if in somewhat different ways. So they embrace religions that help them struggle with these difficulties. But they do not suffer from poverty. Can they get religious sponsorship for this lack of suffering? They succeed in doing so in the churches; but this cannot be done without transforming them, to a greater or lesser degree, into secular institutions, reducing their ability to help other classes, and in the long run, weakening their ability to deal with the particularly religious problems of the dominant classes themselves.

Concluding Remarks

Clearly stated religions have a central role in the formulation of worldviews that orient us to the natural world and the articulation of ethics that guide human behavior (Ottuh, Ottuh & Aitufe, 2014). The size and complexity of the problems societies face today require collaborative efforts both among the religions and in dialogue with other key domains of human endeavour. Religions, thus, need to be in conversation with sectors such as science, economics, education, and public policy that can address economic and environmental issues. Economic and environmental changes will be motivated by these disciplines in very specific ways: namely, economic incentives will be central to adequate distribution of resources, scientific analysis will be critical to understanding nature's economy, educational awareness will be indispensable to creating modes of sustainable life, public policy recommendations will be invaluable in shaping national and international priorities, and moral and spiritual values will be crucial for the transformations required for life in an ecological age. Thomas Berry has observed that assisting humans by egocentricizing the natural world cannot lead to a sustainable human community. The only sustainable community is one that fits the human economy into the ever-renewing economy of the planet. The human system, in its every aspect, is a subsystem of the Earth system, whether we are speaking of economics or physical well being or rules of law. In essence, human flourishing and planetary prosperity are intimately linked.

In alignment with these "ecojustice" and equity concerns, religions can encourage values and ethics of reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility, and renewal for formulating a broader economic ethics that includes humans, ecosystems, and other species. With the help of religions humans are now advocating for a reverence for an inclusive society and it's long evolutionary unfolding, respect for the human species who share the society with other inhuman. Restraint in the use of natural resources on which all life depends, equitable distribution of wealth, recognition of responsibility of humans for the continuity of life into future generations, and renewal of the energies for the great work of building a sustainable inclusive society. These are the virtues for sustainability, equity and justice which religion can contribute for the attainment of human economic fulfillment.

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