

[CN] YANLI FENG

Contact Information:

Address: (1) Academy of Marxism, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 5 Janguomen inside Avenue, Beijing 100732, China
(2) School of Political Science and Public Management, Southwest Normal University , Beibei ,Chongqing City, 400715, China.

Email Address: sdfyl821@sina.com

Yanli Feng got Doctor Degree of Philosophy in Marxism of Department of Philosophy, Suzhou University in June 2002. Now, he is vice dean of Department of Contemporary World Socialism, Institute of Marxism, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

His recent publications include:

Book

1. Scientific Concept of Development and the New Culture of Southern Jiangsu Province, Central Party Literature Publishing House, September 2007.
2. Justice of Global Development: Problems and Answers, China Social Sciences

Publishing House, December 2006.

3. *Marxism and Human Nature*, Translated, the Oriental Press, November 2007

Paper

1. “Marxist Ideology of Human Rights”, *Journal of Marxist Research*, June 2006

2. “On Human Rights and Sovereignty”, *Journal of Political Research*, March 2006.

3. “Justice of Global Development: Rights and Obligations”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, January 2005.

4. “Review of Practical Materialism Studies”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, August 2003.

5. “Global Development: Theory, Problem and Trend”, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, August 2001.

On the Concept of Justice in “Capital”

[CN] Yanli Feng

It is true that Karl Marx’s analysis of practical problems is not based on his version of justice and no books of his discussed justice exclusively, but it does not mean that Marx ignored the problem of social justice. On the contrary, we can find lots of remarks regarding justice in his works. Scholars in China and other countries have contributed a lot to the study of Marx’s concept of justice, but few focus on Marx’s idea of justice in his book *Capital*. This paper will explore Marx’s idea of justice in *Capital*.

I. Main Points Regarding Justice in “Capital”

1. Justice as an evaluation of distribution and profit of one’s own

Generally, justice is getting what you deserve. But further questioning the meaning of “getting what you deserve”, we find that it is an evaluation of distribution and one’s own profit. People believe a distribution is just when it fills their demand and profits them; if the distribution causes a loss of their profit, they think it is unjust. Marx’s quotation of a lawyer O'Connor, a champion of slavery in the United States, offers us a good explanation

—“nature itself has assigned this condition of servitude to the negro. He has the strength and is fit to work; but nature, which gave him this strength, denied him both the intelligence to rule and the will to work. Both are denied to him! And the same nature, which denied him the will to work, gave him a master, who should enforce this will, and make a useful servant of him in a climate, to which he is well adapted, for his own benefit and that of the master who rules him. I assert that it is no injustice to leave the negro in the position, into which nature placed him; to put a master over him; and he is not robbed of any right, if he is compelled to labor in return for this, and to supply a just compensation for his master in return for the labor and the talents devoted to ruling him and to making him useful to himself and to society.”¹

2. Taking whether it coincides with the mode of production as the standard of justice

Every version of justice is based on a standard though the versions may be different at different times or in different communities at the same period of time in the history. Marx suggests that a transaction is just if it coincides with the mode of production; if not, it is unjust. He argues, “To speak in such a case of natural justice, as Gilbart is doing, is nonsense. The justice of the transactions between the agents of production rests on the fact that these transactions arise as natural consequences from the conditions of production. The juristic forms, in which these economic transactions appear as activities of the will of the parties concerned, as expressions of their common will and as contracts which may be enforced by law against some individual party, cannot determine their content, since they are only forms. They merely express this content. This content is just, whenever it corresponds, and is adequate, to the mode of production. It is unjust, whenever it contradicts that mode. Slavery on the basis of capitalist production is unjust; likewise fraud in the quality of commodities.”²

3. Criticism of social injustice

The concept of justice in *Capital* originates from Marx’s criticism of social injustice. In *Capital*, Marx depicts a vivid picture of capitalist society, in which a small group of people live in luxurious comfort while the number of people in poverty gets larger and larger because the wealth of the poor gradually flows into the package of the rich. He writes, in a capitalist society, “Capital cares nothing for the length of life of labor-power. All that concerns it is simply and solely the maximum of labor-power, that can be rendered fluent in

1 Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Part V, Chapter 23 (V.XXIII.41) Translated by: Ernest Untermann, from the First German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1909. First published: 1894.

2 Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, Part V, Chapter 21 (V.XXI.5) Translated by: Ernest Untermann, from the First German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1909. First published: 1894.

a working day. It attains this end by shortening the extent of the laborer's life, as a greedy farmer snatches increased produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility. The capitalistic mode of production (essentially the production of surplus value, the absorption of surplus-labor), produces thus, with the extension of the working day, not only the deterioration of human labor-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labor-power itself. It extends the laborer's time of production during a given period by shortening his actual life-time." This no doubt shows us the injustice of capitalist society."¹

Marx has severely criticized the injustice of capitalist system in *Capital*. He claims that justice is the highest stage of the development of human society as well as the prime value of socialism and communism. But real justice can only be achieved after all the systems of exploitation are eliminated on the condition of highly developed economy and all people are free from exploitation and oppression. Marx asserts that real freedom and fairness can only be accomplished in communism and such system is what justice requires.

II. Main Characteristics of the Concept of Justice in “Capital”

1. Scientific perspective

The concept of justice in *Capital* is scientific because it is based on materialistic view of history and can stand the test of practice. Enlightenment philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Denis Diderot, and utopian Socialists such as Thomas More and Saint-Simon, have all contributed significant ideas about justice, but their understandings are not scientific in general due to the lack of both historical evidences and current economic evidences and the limitation of their study in that field as well. Similarly, John Rawls' and Robert Nozick's ideas of justice are not completely scientific because they are short of historical evidences and current economic evidences, even though John Rawls and Robert Nozick both have systematically analyzed the connotation of justice and problems involved and both enjoy the reputation of the most prominent philosophers on justice. Therefore, it is necessary that we take Marx's concept of justice as our guide when studying problems related. Besides, further development of the concept is needed under new circumstances so as to enrich Marx's theory of justice.

2. Class consciousness

Marx's concept of justice in *Capital* concerns the profit of proletariat, which is totally different from the notion that the bourgeoisie has preached. Marx points out the essence of

1 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part III, Chapter 10 (III.X.55-56) Translated by: Ernest Untermann, from the First German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1909. First published: 1894.

bourgeois concept of “justice” in *Capital*, that is, “equal exploitation of labor-power by all capitalists”.¹ He pinpoints that “the cry of the capitalists for equality in the conditions of competition” is “for equal restraint on all exploitation of labor”.²

3. Social and historical basis

According to Marx, justice, as a concept, derives from practice; it is the product of the development of history and society. The bourgeois notion of “justice” was established during the battles against feudal privileges. Different from the idea of fairness in feudalism, the bourgeois reckon that “justice” is the fairness between commodity owners. “The contract by which he (the worker) sold to the capitalist his labor-power proved, so to say, in black and white that he disposed of himself freely”; nevertheless, “the bargain concluded, it is discovered that he was no ‘free agent’, that the time for which he is free to sell his labor-power is the time for which he is forced to sell it, that in fact the vampire will not lose its hold on him so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited.”³

III. Importance of Marx’s Concept of Justice in “Capital”

Marx’s concept of justice in *Capital* has far-reaching significance in both academic and practical fields.

1. Academic value

Academically, Marx’s concept of justice in *Capital* is superior to the feudalist and bourgeois notions of fairness because it is the unity of scientific perspective and class consciousness — it is based on a scientific view of history and it concerns the profit of the majority — the proletariat.

On the one hand, the study of Marx’s concept of justice in *Capital* contributes to further development of Marxist theory of justice, strengthens our critical awareness of the essence of bourgeois “justice”, and provides a theoretical guide for the construction of a just and modern socialist society in today’s China. China’s development of market socialism demands the principle of justice, and Chinese people yearn for the guidance of the spirit of justice.

1 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part III, Chapter 10 (III.X.100) Translated by: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, from the Third German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1906.

2 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part IV, Chapter 15 (IV.XV.142) Translated by: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, from the Third German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1906.

3 Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Part III, Chapter 10 (III.X.114) Translated by: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, from the Third German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1906.

On the other hand, Marx's critique of previous philosophers' abstract notions of justice in *Capital* is of great theoretic value to the development of human society. Marx's theory of justice has directly resulted in a worldwide socialist revolution and construction, facilitated the labor movement in western capitalist countries, and greatly enhanced the development of national liberation movement. In the new century, Marxist theory of justice will help all nations and regions to find agreement on profit to some extent and promote the development of social justice to a new stage.

2. Practical value

First, Marx's concept of justice in *Capital* is of significant practical value to the promotion of social development and the construction of a harmonious world. Marx's concept of justice in *Capital*, his critique of social injustice, along with his argumentation of the basic route of the development of society and prediction of the future of human society and, has brought about a great social change worldwide. It has promoted the improvement of social environment and the spread of socialist values, and therefore contributed a lot to the development of human society.

Next, Marx's concept of justice in *Capital* is particularly important for China's construction of socialist modernization. After decades of revolution and construction, we now see an embryonic form of justice in China — exploitation system is eliminated, people's basic rights, especially the right to life, are guaranteed, gender equality is greatly improved and so is the mass education. Undeniably, serious mistakes have been made during the process of construction, which indicates the necessity of a further development of Marxist theory of justice. Since China's Economic Reform and the adoption of Open-door Policy, Marx's concept of justice in *Capital* has shown more and more practical significance — the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics requires a fundamental orientation, and a set of efficient and reasonable rules must be established to solve social injustice. In short, China's development needs the guidance of Marx's concept of justice in *Capital*.

Bibliography

Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, II, III Translated by: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, from the Third German Edition (of *Das Kapital*). Published: Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1906.

Yong JIANG, Research on Marx and Engels' Concept of Equity and Justice, *Guangdong Social Science*, 2004, No.3.

Zhongming WU, A Preliminary Study of Justice in Marx and Engels, *Research of Marxism*, 2001, No.4.

Zhongqiao DUAN, On Marx and Engels' Concept of Justice, *Philosophical Research*,

2000, No.8.

[IT] GIOVANNA VERTOVA

Contact Information:

Address: Department of Economics, Hyman P. Minsky, University of Bergamo,
Via dei Caniana, 224127, Bergamo Italy

Telephone: +39-(0)35-2052-566

Fax: +39-(0)35-2052-549

Email Address: giovanna.vertova@unibg.it

Giovanna Vertova, PhD in Economics, is visiting lecturer of Faculty of Engineering, University of Bergamo and assistant professor of Political Economy, Department of Economics “Hyman P. Minsky”, Faculty of Economics, and University of Bergamo. She is member of International Joseph A. Schumpeter Society (ISS), European Society of the History of Economic Thought (ESHET), and Associazione Italiana per la Storia dell’Economia Politica (STOREP), Regional Studies Association (RSA), and European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy (EAEPE). Her Research fields include: Economics of globalisation, Regional and local economics, Economics of innovation, National systems of innovation, Italian economic development.