

IF VIRTUE FALLS FROM HER HEIGHTS?



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Some Non-Aristotelian Approaches to Ethics

❑ DUTY/RELIGION/CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES:

Ten (or more) Commandments?

❑ EQUALITY:

Rawls's *Theory of Justice*.

❑ SOCIAL JUSTICE, DEI, WOKENESS, ETC. ?:

The influence of the **Frankfurt School**.

Exodus 20: KJV

1. Thou shalt have no other G-ds before me
2. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven Image
3. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy G-d in vaine
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy
5. Honour thy father and thy mother

Exodus 20: KJV (continued)

6. Thou shalt not kill

7. Thou shalt not commit adultery

8. Thou shalt not steale

9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour

10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbours wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his asse, nor his oxe, nor anything that is thy neighbours

King James Bible



Moses & the Tablets



Rawls Theory of 'Justice'

- ❑ As already mentioned, the 'meme' about equality has been, and still is, highly influential (and often decisive) in North America and the West generally, in recent decades. Some intellectual underpinnings are found in **John Rawls's** (1971) book *A Theory of Justice*.
- ❑ There is an old saying that you cannot judge a book by its cover (in this case, the title) and this seems true of Rawls's work. The use of the term 'justice', in particular, requires comment. Traditionally 'justice' was interpreted as implying that people should 'get what they deserve'. It did not necessarily mean that everybody should be equal, or that outcomes should be equal. But now the notion that justice requires more-or-less equal shares for all - regardless of their 'deserts' – is commonplace. A better title for Rawls's book might have been something like *A Theory of Equality* or *A Justification for Equality*.
- ❑ The argument was that income equality would actually be *chosen* by rational individuals in a hypothetical situation of a social contract drawn up beforehand, by individuals ignorant both of their eventual standing in society, and what their endowments of talent, ability, drive, *etc.* will turn out to be. In effect, Rawls is saying that people who are born with some sort of exceptional talent or ability do *not* really deserve it. It all a question of the genes and the luck of the draw.
- ❑ But how compelling is this argument from the either the logical point of view - or in political economy? Income distribution (for example) is not necessarily a zero-sum game. It is possible that the lowest absolute level of income in a competitive society might be higher than the average in the egalitarian case. In general, does it make sense for society to deliberately handicap or dis-incentivize potential high achievers?

John Rawls and the Scales of 'Justice'



‘Social’ Justice?

❑ In the decades since the publication of Rawls book the somewhat different concept of (so-called) **Social Justice** has become prominent in discussions of ethics and politics. Here the emphasis is on the adjective - rather than on the traditional meaning of the noun. Justice is supposed to apply mainly to social groupings based on such things as such age, class, ethnicity, gender, national origin, physical disability, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or some other collective attribute. There is much less attention paid to the contribution of each individual to the society as a whole.

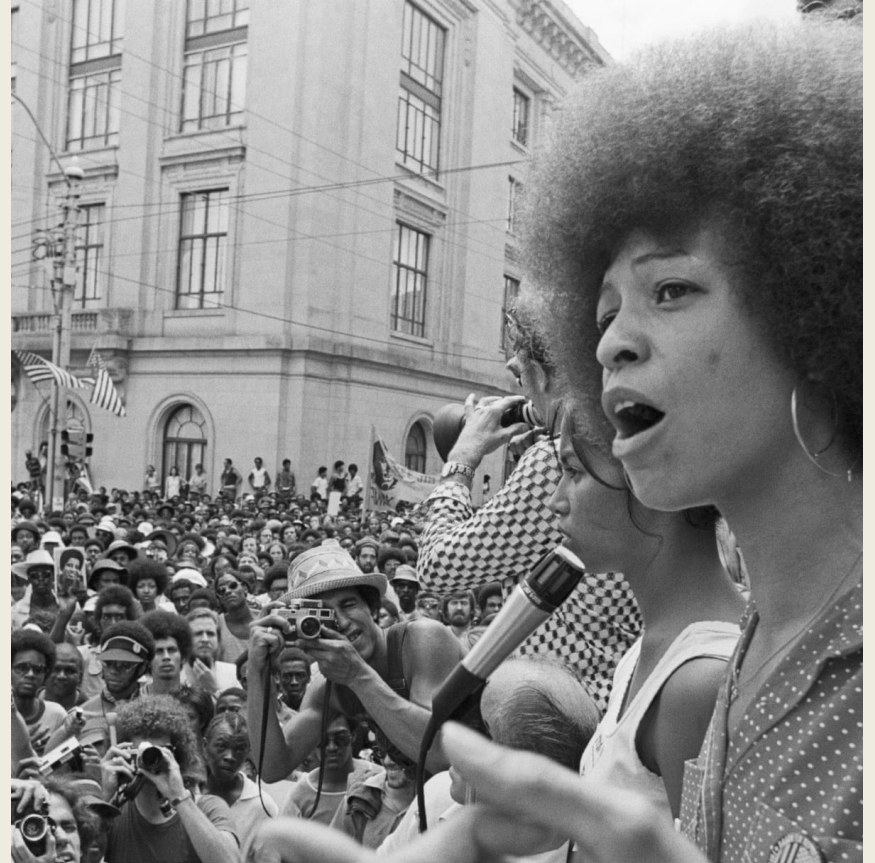
❑ There are many similar ideas which have gained currency in the last half-century, and more, with labels such as **Political Correctness, Intersectionality, Wokeness, DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)**, and so forth.

❑ This is the legacy of the so-called ‘**cultural Marxism**’ of the **Frankfurt School**.

The Legacy of the Frankfurt School

- ❑ After WW1 the emphasis in Marxist intellectual circles shifted away from ‘classical Marxism’ (with ideas about the class struggle, ‘workers of the world unite’, *etc.*) to dealing primarily with social and cultural questions.
- ❑ Two important early thinker were Antonio Gramsci (1891 - 1937) in Italy, & György Lukács (1885 – 1971) in Hungary. Piero Sraffa (1898 - 1983), a close associate of Gramsci, moved to Cambridge University in the 1920s at the invitation of Keynes.
- ❑ In 1923 the Institute for Social Research was founded at Goethe University, Frankfurt.
- ❑ When Hitler came to power in Germany in the 1930s prominent members of the Frankfurt School, scholars such as Adorno, Fromm, Horkheimer & Marcuse, were exiled to the USA. There they were well received. There was a sympathetic hearing in New York (*e.g.*, at Columbia University), also in Washington DC, and in Southern California *via* Hollywood & the universities.
- ❑ The role of Herbert Marcuse (1898 - 1979) who remained in the United States after WW2, when his colleagues returned to Germany - and eventually retired as a Professor at the University of California at San Diego - was particularly important in shaping opinion on the left in America.
- ❑ There was a direct influence from the Frankfurt School on the ‘New Left’ in the USA in the 1960s - and forward to many of the political trends and issues of the present day.
- ❑ In Germany/Europe an influential later member of the School is Jurgen Habermas (b. 1929).

Herbert Marcuse & Angela Davis



‘Keeping it Real’: The Realist Turn Again?

❑ In a recent book, *The Realist Turn*. Ramussen & Den Uly (2020) make the connection between metaphysics & epistemology and ethics & politics as follows:

We hold that *metaphysical realism* is vital both for arguing that individuals have basic, negative, natural rights ... and for ... a non-reductive naturalistic account of human good ... ‘*individu[al] perfectionism*’

❑ By implication the other approaches to ethics do *not* do this.

❑ What are the consequences for politics & geopolitics?

