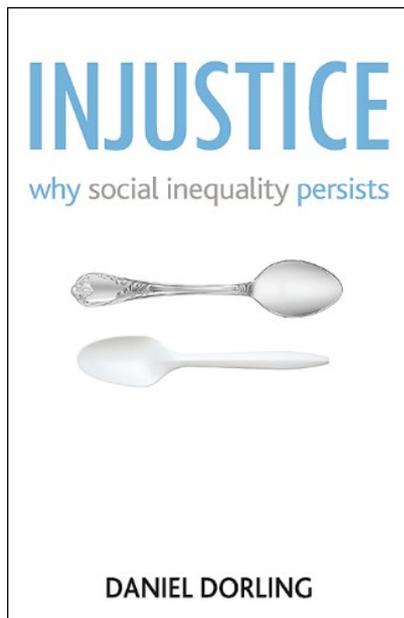


Injustice: Why Social Inequality Persists

Dorling, Daniel
Policy Press, Bristol
2010
9781847424266 (hb)

[Order this book?](#)



This is a thought-provoking book about the contemporary nature of inequality. The book is timely and authoritative and continues a wealth of data and useful illustrative material and evidence. Dorling argues that Beveridge's five giant evils - Disease, Idleness, Ignorance, Squalor and Want - have been replaced by five modern social evils. These are elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair. The main chapters of the book are organised around these key themes, with swathes of research and evidence of different sorts given in each. The book is ambitious and forthright and very interesting to read. Dorling starts by suggesting that there 'is something wrong with the ideological fabric of the society we live in' (p13) and that these new social evils are central to understanding the rise and continued sustainability of inequality. It is argued that injustice, in these various guises, has become part of parcel the accepted norm and furthermore, injustice is often hidden away

behind the pretence of fairness.

The book offers a global as well as a more local perspective and there is a good deal of historical discussion too. Dorling argues that relatively few people are keenly aware of just how deeply unequal and unfair our society is, or perhaps more worryingly many are able to observe inequality, but they believe this itself is actually fair. To give just one example, from the chapter on 'prejudice as natural', Dorling points out that 'a homogenising myth of our times is that people fall to the bottom because they are undeserving' (p.115). That people tend to believe that inequality is largely fair and reasonable and that the poor are poor because of their own failings rather than as a consequence of structural inequality, is something which tends to be widely accepted, even by those who are themselves poor and Dorling is quite right to draw attention to this sort of paradox. Moreover, the ways in which we think about (talk about and understand) facets of inequality is central to Dorling's whole argument. Indeed his final point, that, 'what matters most is how we think' (p.320) portrays an interesting and relatively new way of trying to understand inequality and this is an important argument.

The central chapters take the reader through the different facets of injustice identified by Dorling and each offers a wealth of data and evidence to support the central arguments. There

are many different issues covered here, from inequalities in education, to ill health and debt. Each chapter is comprehensive and packed with evidence. The final chapter draws together Dorling's central argument and for me, he offers a surprisingly upbeat end to what might otherwise be a somewhat depressing read. Raising awareness and challenging beliefs is, for Dorling, crucial in tackling injustice. Busting some of the myths about how we understand inequality and its making is indeed crucial if inequality is to ever be properly challenged and addressed. Although, as Dorling rightly acknowledges, this is only a first step on what is quite a complex road to change. Dorling ends the book on a curious and illuminatingly positive note. He is clear, that for him, there is no 'great conspiracy' at work which aims to actively perpetuate inequality and he argues that positive progress to challenge and tackle injustice is being made. This is an important argument and was worthy of more discussion than there was space for at the end of the book.

Overall, the book is a fascinating read. It is dense in parts and sometimes the sheer volume of data slightly overshadows Dorling's authoritative and lively style of writing. Dorling should not be criticised for his clever use of data however, as he certainly would have been had he failed to include evidence in support of his arguments. At the same time the style might be off-putting for non-academics and this would be a shame as this is a book which deserves to be widely read. It is a powerful and entertaining read, which sets forth a bold, innovative and for me at least, a largely convincing thesis about contemporary inequality. Some may disagree with Dorling's viewpoint, but few could fail to be entertained and challenged by what he has to say.

Tracy Shildrick

University of Teesside