Injustice: why social inequality persists
Daniel Dorling
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Reviewed by Ludi Simpson in Environment and Planning A

Danny Dorling challenges our thinking throughout this book, backed by careful and thorough reporting of evidence. For those not affronted by the frequent rejection of accepted ideas, this will be a refreshing opportunity to reconsider evidence of social inequality, how inequality arises and how it may be reduced.

The book identifies five beliefs that unfairness springs from human nature, "that elitism is efficient, exclusion is necessary, prejudice is natural, greed is good and despair is inevitable. Each belief also creates a distinct set of victims – the delinquents, the debarred, the discarded the debtors and the depressed" (p2). elitism, prejudice, greed, exclusion and despair.

Dorling's book attempts to debunk each of these beliefs, whose demise will be all the easier once their guilt is exposed and the lessons of historical periods of greater equality are learned.

There have been other books about inequality and its consequences, notably Wilkinson and Picket's *The Spirit Level* (2008). But Dorling is at pains to make the case that inequality is unnecessary, and he succeeds more often than not with innovative use of social statistics.

Describing in detail the lack of women among Nobel prize winners he rejects the idea that women are inferior, for women do appear but less in some subjects and none in the period 1948-1962. He surmises that the climate of cold war, communist witch-hunt and macho politics kept clever women from prizes in those years. More generally, a consistent discouragement of women in particular in the sciences and economics, starting long before academic and other distinctions are reached, is responsible for the high male-female prize ratio. The first woman to win the Economics prize after 40 years was Elinor Ostrøm in 2009. Elitism and prejudice are not inevitable.

The share of all income in Britain received by the richest 1% (p191) is one of those graphs that tells a hundred stories. But there is a plain message in the reduction of that share (post-tax) from 16% in the 1920s, to 4% in the 1970s, and its subsequent steady rise to 12% in 2005, a level not seen since the 1930s: greed is not a necessary evil. Dorling's evidence frequently points to 'the gilded age' after the second world war as an example from Britain when the belief in the five natural causes of inequality was partly suspended and resulted in greater equality, a higher standard of living for millions of families, and lower rates of mental illness for all social classes.

This book is also challenging for what it says about the practice of statistics, which Dorling claims has often wittingly or unwittingly supported beliefs in natural inequality. He uses the OECD's international assessment of pupil

skills to expose how the transformation of social data to fit the normal curve labels some as outstanding and some as dunces. Many will wince, for whom such studies are their bread and butter. But this is Dorling's point: that the accepted ways of looking at things are based on an unequal society and help to support it. The paradigm of a bulk of middling experience and tails of low and high achievers is associated with acceptance of inequality as natural.

Beveridge's five evils of Disease, Idleness, Ignorance, Squalor and Want have been replaced by five beliefs in inequality. According to Dorling, world economic prosperity has been achieved but beliefs that it cannot be used to everyone's benefit sustain inequality. "Unjust thoughts have seeped into our everyday thinking out of the practices that make profit" (p308). And the final words of the book suggests how this might change: "Although none of us is superhuman, neither are any of us without significance. Everything it takes to defeat injustice lies in the mind. So what matters most is how we think." (p320).

This is rather like the pacifist's pledge, that wars will stop when men refuse to fight. It is clearly true that beliefs lie in the mind, but it doesn't quite identify what will change beliefs sufficiently to change practice in substantial and long-lasting ways.

Fernando De Maio (2010) has contrasted 19th century social surveyors' exposure of social relations of property as the power behind inequalities with more recent social surveyors identification of policy (and beliefs) as the solution.

Dorling's book is one of the best in a crop that expose the insistent degenerating malaises that have accompanied free market progress and rapid development of technology.

Can statistics offer anything to take these analyses beyond the establishment of unnecessary inequality, to measure the powers, social relations and institutional responsibility for inequality, and their alternatives that would eliminate or forever limit them?

Injustice provides many exposures of inequality and the beliefs that unnecessarily sustain that inequality. There is a need for a pocket-book edition, which might also consider those questions of power.

Fernando De Maio (2010) From Engels and Virchow to Wilkinson: an analysis of research on helath inequities. Radical Statistics 101: 3-9.