

Comparative view of Sandel's Distributive Justice Theory

-- Based on the Marxist Principle of Distributive Justice

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Abstract: In Western political thought, distributive justice has always been an important issue. Utilitarianism, liberalism and communitarianism represent three different views of distributive justice, but they try to solve the same problem, the inequality of income and wealth. Utilitarianism aims at welfare maximization, liberalism takes respect for freedom as its starting point, and communitarianism, represented by Sandel and MacIntyre, advocates Aristotle's deserved theory with the aim of promoting virtue and taking unity as the banner against inequality. This paper takes Sandel's Liberalism and the Limits of Justice as the core of the study, captures the central proposition of distributive justice from the standpoint of communitarianism, introduces the Marxist distributive justice principles of Marx and Cohen, and compares and interprets the characteristics of Sandel's communitarian distributive justice theory from a perspective different from utilitarianism and liberalism. Finally, based on the principles of Marxist view of justice, this paper briefly expounds the theoretical value, limitation and practical possibility of Sandel's distributive justice theory and communitarian view.

Keywords: Distributive justice theory, Communitarianism, Marxism.

1. Introduction

The discussion on the topic of social justice has never been interrupted in the history of human society. Both Eastern and Western sages have demonstrated the progressive significance of justice to social development in their studies. From the perspective of social value, we can easily see that the development of human society is the process of constantly pursuing social justice, and distributive justice, as a core issue of social justice, has been deeply interpreted by many political thinkers. Since ancient times, there has been a saying in Chinese political thought, "not suffering from oligarchy but suffering from inequality, not suffering from poverty but suffering from insecurity." In the western political circle, whether it is the utilitarians who advocate maximizing utility led by Bentham and Mill, or the liberals who follow equality represented by Rawls and Nozick, or the communitarians who follow deserved theory such as MacIntyre and Sandel, the core purpose is to solve the problem of social distribution of unequal income and wealth.

Since its birth, distributive justice is not a single issue of political thought, but a complex issue mixed with political science, economics, sociology, ethnic demography and other practical factors. Back to the time node when communitarianism grew stronger, in the 1970s, the US economy was Mired in the trough of stagflation, the unemployment rate rose rapidly, people's life was difficult, and social inequality expanded sharply. In the 1980s and 1990s, under the anti-Keynesian economic policies, Western countries realized the combination of capital, technology and labor in developing countries, the government fiscal deficit exploded, and the benefits flowed to monopoly capitalists and plutocrats, directly affecting the income and consumption level of residents, and once again widening social inequality. This is also the reason why communitarians led by Sandel oppose the neoliberal concept of justice and distributive justice theory, re-examine social phenomena and explore the

root cause of social justice.

Sandel's view on distributive justice is based on Rawls's distributive justice. By analyzing Nozick's qualification theory and his criticism of Rawls's difference principle, Sandel launched a critique of liberal distributive justice. The principle of distributive justice advocated by Sandel is based on "deserved" and stands in the position of communitarianism against the principle of liberal distributive justice. He believes that Rawls' distributive justice theory is flawed, and puts forward the view that the premise of building a just society lies in people's "common good" and "identity of life". Sandel's criticism of the liberal self-view and the principle of distribution, especially the slogan of communitarianism, has made him an unshakable position in the field of political philosophy, and he has become one of the most influential scholars of communitarianism[1].

By combing through the existing literature, we can find that most domestic and foreign articles on communitarianism focus on the debate between liberalism and communitarianism, the comparative study of the internal ideas of communitarianism, the interpretation of Sandel's thought on the premise of republicanism, or the comparative study of Marxism and communitarianism. However, there are still few researches on Sandel's theory of distributive justice, which is also an important basis for the topic of this research adopting Marxist distributive justice thought to interpret Sandel[2].

Distributive justice is an important part of Marx's theory of justice. From the point of view of political philosophy, Marx himself did not systematically discuss distributive justice, but his concern and research on distributive justice carried out the interpretation of historical materialism, the criticism of political economy on distribution mode, and even can be said to be an important source of scientific socialism. In the Critique of the Gotha Program and the Poverty of Philosophy, Marx criticized Proudhon and Lassalle's petty-bourgeois view of eternal justice, and divided his understanding of

distributive justice into five parts: the root cause of distributive injustice, the premise, the realization path, the social basis and the principle of distribution. The above principles were gradually perfected under the interpretation of the analytical Marxist school represented by Cohen, and gradually formed the concrete thoughts of Marxist distributive justice such as "equality of advantages" and "world resources theory".

Before making a comparative analysis of the two distribution theories, we should first note that the concept of distributive justice is a compound concept composed of distribution and justice. We have to consider whether it is possible and necessary to compare the distributive justice of Marxism and Sandel. From the point of view of social production and the economy, Marx argues that distributional injustice is a difference within a unity; From the point of view of the distribution of products, distribution is subordinate to production, and it is itself an element of production. From the root of social production, what kind of mode of production is what kind of distribution relations, and thus the corresponding concept of distribution justice has emerged, which allows us to connect the distribution practice in the economic attribute with the distribution justice in the political thought attribute. On the other hand, distributive justice can be regarded as a whole concept, a value category, and a moral value evaluation of certain distributive relations. In terms of the history and realization conditions of distribution, these two thinking dimensions are based on social production and benefit distribution, so they have the basis of connection and comparison.

In addition, the author believes that the understanding of distributive justice can be understood neither from the conceptual level in itself, nor in isolation from distributive relations, but requires a historical examination of the material conditions under which it arises the mode of production at a given stage. Therefore, it is logically scientific and practical to compare and interpret Sandel's distributive justice theory by putting the distributive justice thought of Marxism in the comparative perspective.

2. The Logic of Sandel's Distributive Justice Theory

Rawls argues that individual talent is a common wealth, and society has a claim to the overall right of this common wealth. Sandel questions this social demand, which he classifies into two categories: one is the claim of entitlement, the other is the claim of qualification. If this social demand is a deserved one, then this demand is itself undermined by Rawls's own theory. Since he has assumed the rationality of society's control over natural wealth, this also leads to and dictates that society must have a status independent of the individual. This view is opposed to Rawls' individualism, in which society cannot exist independently of the individual.

In the above aspects, this paper agrees with Mr. Yao Dazhi's cognition of Sandel's critical logic[3]. That is, Sandel emphasizes that Rawls faces a dilemma before answering distributive justice. Is it the original state that produces all and claims of society on the wealth of nature? Or vice versa? Yao Dazhi explains: In order to solve the former, Rawls must explain how the principle of difference can be established under this undeserved logic. On the contrary, Rawls would have to answer whether he recognized the social community by relying on social deserve, which would have a certain

deviation from his individualism and even liberalism.

Nozick uses the qualification theory to counter Rawls' difference principle. He argues that no other person, group or state has the right to take away personal property as long as it comes from a proper way and conforms to the principles of acquisition and transfer of justice. In this regard, Sandell does not criticize Nozick at great length. Nozick argued that inequality should not be solved by the state through redistribution, which would infringe on the rights of individuals. Gong Qun also pointed out in his research that Sandell's failure to criticize Nozick's qualification theory at length may be due to the fact that Rawls's theory was more prevalent in the 1960s and 1980s, while Nozick's theory was more open to the time after the book was written. It is also argued that Sandel's concern is not whether Rawls and Nozick's principles are feasible in practice, but whether they have moral grounds in theory.

Sandel is critical of the widely known theory of distributive justice, in which much of the current debate revolves around whether people deserve their "market gains" and that questions about distributive justice need to focus not only on civic morality, but also on the good life of people.

Through the analysis of utilitarianism and liberalism, Sandel put forward his own theoretical conception, and he inherited and developed Aristotle's view of virtue. Aristotle advocated the role of virtue in life, focusing on teleological thinking and civic participation in political life. According to Sandel, distributive justice should be based on moral deserve, so that justice can be truly realized.

On the one hand, Sandel agrees with Rawls that "deserve" is "moral deserve" which precedes and is independent of institutions. In moral discourse, the good qualities of the individual are virtue, and the justice of others. It is a right to respect virtue and justice, and it is a right to condemn immorality and injustice. Based on this, it is assumed that the distribution of resources, power, wealth, etc., should conform to "moral entitlement." It is widely believed that this endorsement of moral merit stems from Sandel's study of Aristotle, which argues that justice is honorable and that merit is a reward for moral character[4].

But Sandel rejects Rawls's argument that "deserved" is divorced from the principle of distribution. Liberalism insists that "deserve" has nothing to do with the principle of distribution, and that "deserve" is either pre-institutional or exists within the institutional framework and is equivalent to "qualification." Sandel advocates "deserved" as the principle of distributive justice. He believes that performance is related to talent, because talent makes better performance, so talent should be the basis of "deserve". And if "deserve" is merely a reward for performance and does not involve virtue, then the distribution system is inevitably in trouble.

Sandel's concept of individual rights is different from Rawls's, and he advocates the idea of equal value. Liberal justice is based on individual rights, individual rights are supreme and inviolable, and tries to avoid the influence of morality and good on individual rights. Sandell pointed out that Rawls' pursuit of equal rights ignored value because he believed that goodness had nothing to do with value, but was only the satisfaction of a rational desire, and rationality referred to the free nature of individuals to pursue rights and equality, so goodness became a just desire to defend individual rights and freedom. Rawls constructed a right framework under which people's desire activities are carried out, and the interests outside the framework are worthless. In

other words, Rawls's way of proving that rights take precedence over justice is to complement the exaltation of individual rights with the derogation of value and good status. Therefore, the rule of justice trumps the goal of value. Sandell points out that according to Rawls' thinking, moral concept is the emotional factor of the execution of the principle of justice, and virtue is the quality with a sense of justice, because only what conforms to the principle of justice is moral.

According to this, Sandel insists on the priority of equality of values, arguing that good takes precedence over justice and that rights and the moral values of the practices they protect cannot be substantively distinguished. Although absolute equality and justice are difficult to achieve, Sandel also concluded in summarizing his concept of value equality that "a country cannot have both super-rich and beggars at the same time" and that "a more civic liberalism maintains public provision less for the purpose of achieving distributive justice and more for the purpose of maintaining citizenship and shaping the same civic identity for the rich and the poor".

3. Distributive Values of Marxism

Marx's distributive justice theory is first of all historical. Marxists believe that the bourgeoisie advocates eternal justice, claiming that capitalist society is the most ideal society, but the abstract eternal justice theory they promote does not exist. The modern utopian socialists cast justice on the utopian society in their imagination, fully reflecting the modern utopians' yearning for a beautiful society, but because of the lack of scientific worldview and methodology of historical materialism, these beautiful ideals can only be a fantasy and can not become reality. Marx believes that justice is the product of history, and any type of justice needs a certain historical basis and exists in a certain stage of historical development. With the development of history, people have different understandings of justice. Marx believes that the productive forces determine the relations of production, the ultimate cause of historical development and social change is the transformation of the mode of production and the mode of exchange, spiritual factors can not change the development of society and the changes of The Times, "should be discovered through the mind from the ready-made material facts of production."

From the perspective of historical materialism, Marx revealed the way to realize distributive justice, that is, distributive justice exists in communist society, requires proletarians to unite to subvert the rule of the bourgeoisie, transform the private possession of the means of production into the common possession of the means of production by the whole society, and achieve the common ownership of social wealth and the distribution of social products according to needs. Finally realize the free and all-round development of mankind.

Marx's understanding of distributive justice in practice is the starting point of his interpretation of social justice, which may not be fully achieved by other political thinkers, so it has certain theoretical implications and practical value. The most primitive understanding of the concept of distributive justice refers to the absolute equality of distributive results in quantity, which only exists in primitive societies in human history. In that kind of society, everyone can get the same food, there is no distinction between people's status, complete equality. However, Marx has his own unique views on the concept of distributive justice, which is different from the equal distribution that existed in primitive society and the

distribution of means of production in capitalist society. It is a new distribution outlook for the future society.

Marx cleverly combined the idea of distributive justice with social reality. His conception is not only a narrow understanding of the concept of distributive justice based on income and wages, but more importantly, Marx realizes that distribution should not be recognized and understood unilaterally and in isolation, because in essence, distribution is not something that people can decide according to certain moral concepts and political agreements, but is determined by production. It is an integral part of total social production.

If we want to examine distribution, we should actually pay attention to the relationship between distribution and production. First of all, Marx recognized that distribution itself is the result of production, and that production is in a decisive position in distribution. At the same time, Marx also recognized that the mode of distribution is constantly changing, and once the new mode of production appears, the new mode of distribution will follow. For example, at the beginning of its emergence, the capitalist system undoubtedly met the objective requirements of the development of social productive forces at that time, and the capitalist system replaced the slave system, allowing slaves to have the right to participate in social distribution, which was a great progress. However, with the continuous development of the social productive forces, the capitalist mode of production began to show more and more contradictions with the new social productive forces, which meant that a new and more progressive mode of distribution was about to be born. Secondly, Marx also realized realistically the tremendous counter-effect that distribution can have on production. As Marx put it, "Certain production determines certain consumption, distribution, exchange, and certain relations between these different elements... With changes in distribution, for example, with the concentration of capital, with the different distribution of population between town and country, etc., production also changes." This not only affirms the fundamental determining role of production, but also shows the importance of distribution, and also has a positive dynamic effect on the mode of production and the relations of production.

To conceive from the practical level, this is the essence of our continuous exploration of distributive justice and other political ideas; The thought of distributive justice has extremely important practical value in influencing social development and people's self-understanding. Its development can not only satisfy people's own material needs, but also promote the society to be fair and reasonable, and people's understanding of themselves and objective reality to be realistic and comprehensive.

4. Two Views of Distributive Justice from A Comparative Perspective

Marx's egalitarianism is the equality of socialist nature, and its gist is that as long as people recognize what they have the right to own, even if it is their own labor, it will lead to inequality. According to this logic, in order to truly achieve equality and eliminate inequality, we must pay attention to the differences in character and ability between the owners of the means of production and other people, and between owners and owners. In Sandel's criticism of Nozick, he acknowledged that a person's body, labor and ability are self-owned, and acknowledged the inequality caused by the differences in

these factors. Therefore, the capitalist distribution according to contribution is the result of self-owned, with the character of asset class.

Cohen believes that to solve the problem of equal distribution, it is necessary to blur some concepts, such as not recognizing that self-produced and created things belong to themselves, and people with strong talent and ability should distribute more. The ideal system, he argued, would be a system of fiscal and tax policy through government intervention to redistribute income so that everyone would be completely equal. The essence and purpose of Cohen's equality of available benefits is to eliminate involuntary disadvantages, i.e., "disadvantages for which the sufferer is not responsible because they do not adequately reflect the choices he has made or is making." In Cohen's view, welfare is in a broad sense. Besides ordinary welfare, it also includes opportunity, ability and so on. In everyday life, people do not regard a lack of ability as a lack of opportunity, because everyone has equal opportunities regardless of talent, but the ability to grasp opportunities varies from person to person. So people have access to valuable things, but they don't necessarily actually have them.

Obviously, Sandel's view is not entirely so, and based on the above Marx's view of equality generated by the reflection on Sandel's view of equality, I do not think of a good description to describe, so in this paragraph choose to use teacher Yao Dazhi's counterevidence: the question of Sandel's "talent and effort of basketball player Jordan". "We can also think the other way around: there may be some people who have the same or better basketball talent as Jordan, but they don't train as hard as Jordan, so they don't achieve as good results as Jordan." In this case, the basis of entitlement becomes effort. It shows that what is directly related to deserve is performance, and performance can be based on talent or it can be based on effort."

In general, Sandel has some commonality with Marxist scholars and agrees with a distribution principle based on community value, but his pursuit of equal value is different from that of Marxist scholars. While Marxist scholars emphasize the effects of social institutions, Sandel focuses more on the inequalities created by choice, especially ability and talent.

In the first aspect, Sandel's distributive justice principle overcomes too much economic factors. He insists on the basis of "moral deserve", maintains the interests of the community, and hopes to achieve equality in value. Compared with individualistic liberalism and rights-oriented liberalism, it is progressive to a certain extent, but it is still a community system under the capitalist system in essence, and its purpose is still to maintain the capitalist system. Marx's distributive justice principle is always based on the starting point of political economy, insisting that each according to his ability and according to his needs. Its content is more rich, is the hope that everyone can get free and comprehensive development, everyone under the developed productive forces to meet their own needs, reflecting the real and substantive equality under the communist conditions. Distributive justice under the guidance of Sandel's view of justice does not break away from liberalism in a fundamental sense, but is a supplement and harmonization of capitalist distribution mode.

As communitarian Walzer pointed out, Sandel's theory is a higher doppelganger of liberalism, and even though it was strongly attacked and criticized from the beginning, it "still does not leave the category of liberalism." Other

communitarians also only stayed at the theoretical level for distributive justice, not verified in practice and development, and tried to rely on moral reconstruction to pursue a good life, so as to save various social contradictions and crises in the West, and essentially stayed at the improvement of the existing system. From the institutional level, Sandel's theory is based on the premise of capitalist community, and has essential differences and limitations with the distributive justice of Marxism, and ultimately can not make up for the lack of late development of the capitalist system and the essence of inherent exploitation.

Secondly, Marxist distributive justice thought emphasizes the combination of political thought and practice view, and believes that justice should serve practice. Social justice is rooted in the soil of real life. Only by calling for changing the poor living conditions of the people at the bottom of society can justice, as a measure of value, show practical significance. Marx's thought of distributive justice not only presents practical features, but also gives birth to a new social conception. This ideal feature is manifested in calling for the establishment of a communist society without exploitation and oppression, in which everyone has achieved free and comprehensive development, making national boundaries disappear, and realizing the liberation of all mankind.

5. Summary

To sum up, the emergence of Sandel's distributive justice theory prompts people to think about distribution principles other than economic factors, such as the role of morality in distribution, strengthens the cognition of national neutrality, and promotes the discussion and reflection on justice and distribution in the political thought fields of the East and the West.

Secondly, in terms of comparative vision, Sandel's logical starting point is similar to that of Marxists in emphasizing the historicity of justice and equality. But his understanding of "history" is somewhat different from the materialist history of Marxism. Sandel regards history as "environment, good, culture, emotional ties", etc., while Marxists believe that real history is the historical process of material living conditions and their generation, and that the material means of production and the property nature formed in the course of historical development are the ways in which justice works.

Third, distributive justice is not a one-dimensional political proposition. Through the comparison of Marxist distributive justice theory, we find that Sandel's distributive justice theory is spiritualist in nature because it has no deep foundation of political economy: On the one hand, Sandel incorporated all social activities into practice, and at the same time placed history, culture and political morality beyond practice, which is in contradiction with Marx's materialism and practice view.

Finally, from the standpoint of Marxism, Sandel does not touch the root of the problem of changing social inequity-changing the social system. "The prescription prescribed by communitarianism is wonderful, but its fundamental weakness is how feasible it is in the contemporary society with a very developed market economy", he rescues the current social crisis through the pursuit of morality and goodness, in the final analysis, in order to maintain the capitalist system[5].

But the defects cannot obscure the defects, we must affirm Sandel's role in the foundation of communitarianism and his contribution to the reflection of distributive justice theory. This respect and admiration is not only because Sandel has

injected new vitality into the field of political thought; It is also because he tried to reflect on and change the increasingly serious moral deficiency in Western society, the increasingly intensified social contradictions, and the unequal distribution of wealth, which has certain enlightening significance for China to deal with the homogeneous social contradictions with the West at present.

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