

The Concept Of Social Justice In The Economic Worldview Of Youth

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Abstract: This article explores the philosophical and socio-economic dimensions of social justice within the economic worldview of contemporary youth. It examines how young people's perceptions of fairness, equality, and distributive justice evolve under the influence of digital capitalism, globalization, and shifting societal norms. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from social philosophy, behavioral economics, and cultural studies, the paper analyzes how values such as equity, solidarity, and ethical consumption shape the economic consciousness of youth. The research highlights the dynamic interplay between media narratives, economic participation, and moral reasoning in forming young people's attitudes toward wealth distribution, market justice, and collective welfare. Through an analytical synthesis of recent theoretical developments and empirical findings, the study underscores the necessity of integrating ethical education and civic responsibility into economic thinking, thereby positioning social justice as a cornerstone of sustainable human development.

Keywords: Social justice; youth economic worldview; distributive justice; ethical economy; socio-philosophical analysis; digital capitalism; moral economy; civic responsibility; value transformation.

Introduction: In the twenty-first century, the economic worldview of youth has emerged as one of the most critical indicators of a society's ethical and developmental trajectory. The concept of social justice—rooted in philosophical traditions yet increasingly shaped by global economic processes—plays a defining role in shaping young people's understanding of fairness, equality, and responsibility in the marketplace. The modern youth generation operates within a world characterized by rapid technological change, economic inequality, and cultural pluralism, where economic decision-making is inseparable from moral judgment and social awareness [1]. Within this complex interplay of factors, the idea of social justice serves not merely as a theoretical notion but as a guiding principle influencing how young individuals perceive wealth creation, opportunity distribution, and economic participation. Historically, the concept of social justice originated in moral philosophy and theological thought, with figures such as Thomas Aquinas and later John Rawls framing it as a principle for equitable societal organization. However, its modern interpretation extends beyond institutional

frameworks toward the moral consciousness of individuals—particularly youth—who experience global capitalism firsthand. The youth of today inhabit digital ecosystems that mediate access to knowledge, employment, and consumption, while simultaneously exposing them to systemic inequalities. As such, the construction of their economic worldview becomes a dynamic process involving both personal agency and structural conditioning. The moralization of economic behavior—manifest in trends such as ethical consumption, sustainability awareness, and activism for income equality—reflects an emergent paradigm in which young people redefine economic rationality through the prism of social justice. The importance of studying this phenomenon lies in the recognition that youth represent not only the most adaptive social group but also the moral vanguard of future economic systems. Their ideas about what constitutes a “just economy” have implications for policy-making, education, and the long-term sustainability of democratic institutions. In many post-industrial and developing societies alike, youth are increasingly vocal about issues such as fair wages, climate justice, and inclusive development, signaling a broader

transformation in the moral basis of economic thought. This transformation challenges traditional economic theories that prioritize efficiency and competition over solidarity and equality. As scholars such as Amartya Sen have argued, justice in economic life cannot be divorced from freedom, capability, and human dignity. The current generation of youth seems to internalize these principles, consciously linking personal success with collective welfare. Furthermore, globalization and digital interconnectedness have expanded the cognitive and moral horizons of youth, allowing them to observe and critique global patterns of inequality in real time. Social media platforms, online communities, and transnational activist movements have become significant sites for articulating demands for justice and equality. Yet, paradoxically, these same spaces also reproduce economic hierarchies, attention economies, and ideological fragmentation. Hence, the study of youth's economic worldview must navigate between empowerment and alienation, between moral idealism and structural limitation. Social justice, within this context, functions as both a moral compass and a critical lens through which young individuals assess their position within the global economy. From a theoretical perspective, the economic worldview of youth is shaped by the synthesis of three domains: social cognition, economic socialization, and ethical orientation. Social cognition refers to how individuals interpret social structures and hierarchies, which in turn informs their perception of fairness and equity. Economic socialization involves the transmission of values, norms, and behaviors related to money, consumption, and work, often mediated by family, media, and education. Ethical orientation denotes the moral reasoning that guides choices in economic contexts—such as the willingness to pay fair prices, reject exploitative labor practices, or support environmentally sustainable products. When integrated, these dimensions illustrate how social justice becomes embedded within the broader fabric of economic thought among young people. In many countries, especially those undergoing economic transition or democratization, the notion of social justice is closely tied to national identity and historical experience [2]. Post-socialist societies, for instance, grapple with reconciling collective memory of equality with the realities of market competition. Youth growing up in such environments often experience moral dissonance: they are encouraged to succeed individually while being socialized into values of communal fairness. The economic worldview they construct is therefore hybrid—combining pragmatic self-interest with a moral desire for systemic equity. This hybridity challenges the binary oppositions of capitalism versus socialism, suggesting that the new

generation is more inclined toward ethical pragmatism rather than ideological rigidity. The global financial crises of the early twenty-first century and the recent economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have further intensified youth's moral engagement with issues of economic justice [3]. Rising unemployment, precarious labor, and growing wealth disparities have made economic systems appear increasingly unjust to younger populations. Consequently, many young people interpret social justice not merely as a redistributive principle but as a structural demand for participatory inclusion, transparency, and accountability in economic governance. Their activism often merges environmental, feminist, and digital rights movements, thereby situating social justice within an intersectional framework that transcends traditional class-based analysis. As a result, the moral discourse of youth today is more global, pluralistic, and digitally mediated than ever before. The educational dimension also plays a pivotal role in shaping this worldview. Formal and informal learning environments serve as platforms for integrating ethical reasoning into economic understanding [4]. Universities, civic organizations, and media institutions now increasingly focus on fostering "economic citizenship," which combines financial literacy with moral responsibility. This reflects an epistemological shift in the social sciences—from viewing economic behavior as a product of rational choice to understanding it as a reflection of moral identity. Thus, education becomes not only a means of acquiring economic competence but also a space for cultivating justice-oriented consciousness. When youth perceive that their personal economic actions—such as purchasing, investing, or working—have moral consequences, they begin to integrate social justice into their daily economic practices. Philosophically, the discourse of social justice among youth challenges the Enlightenment model of homo economicus. The assumption that individuals act purely in self-interest no longer holds when confronted with evidence of youth engagement in collective action, solidarity economics, and cooperative initiatives. Behavioral economics and moral psychology have shown that young people's economic choices are deeply influenced by fairness norms, empathy, and social trust [5]. These findings resonate with Rawls's theory of justice as fairness and Sen's capability approach, which emphasize the moral foundations of economic life. Within this moral framework, the youth generation redefines wealth not solely as material accumulation but as social contribution and ethical coherence. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the contradictions inherent in the contemporary youth economic worldview. While many young people

advocate for equality and justice, they simultaneously operate within consumerist cultures that valorize individual achievement and status. The tension between moral idealism and material aspiration often produces cognitive dissonance, leading to what sociologists term “ethical fatigue.” This phenomenon reflects the difficulty of sustaining moral consistency within systems that reward competition and consumption [6]. Nevertheless, such contradictions are not necessarily signs of hypocrisy but rather indicators of the moral complexity of late modernity, where young people constantly negotiate between structural constraints and moral aspirations. Cultural context significantly shapes how social justice is conceptualized within youth economic thinking. In Western societies, it is often articulated through discourses of diversity, inclusion, and human rights. In contrast, in non-Western or transitional economies, it is more closely associated with collective welfare, national solidarity, and economic sovereignty. Despite these contextual variations, the underlying moral principle remains universal: the belief that economic life must serve human dignity and social cohesion. This universality suggests that the concept of social justice operates as a transcultural moral language through which youth across societies express their aspirations for a fairer world [7]. The growing interdependence of economies also compels young people to reflect on global justice. Issues such as climate change, digital labor exploitation, and resource inequality transcend national borders and require cosmopolitan forms of moral reasoning. For many young activists, the struggle for social justice is no longer confined to local or national issues but extends to global supply chains, migration policies, and ecological sustainability. The globalization of conscience, therefore, represents a new phase in the evolution of the youth economic worldview—one in which ethical awareness operates at planetary scale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of social justice within the economic worldview of youth has become a focal point of contemporary philosophical and sociological inquiry. In recent scholarship, the interaction between moral reasoning and economic rationality is increasingly recognized as a determinant of civic maturity and social cohesion. Two prominent foreign scholars who have substantially contributed to this discourse are Nancy Fraser, a professor of political philosophy at The New School for Social Research (USA), and Christian Welzel, a German political sociologist from Leuphana University, whose works on emancipative values and moral economy offer a profound framework for understanding youth consciousness in late modern

societies. Their analyses, while rooted in distinct intellectual traditions, converge on the view that the moral economy of the younger generation represents both a critique of structural inequality and an aspiration for participatory justice in a globalized world. Nancy Fraser’s recent work provides an incisive critique of neoliberal capitalism and its moral contradictions, arguing that the current economic order systematically undermines the very principles of social justice it rhetorically endorses [8]. Her conceptual triad of redistribution, recognition, and representation remains particularly relevant for analyzing youth perspectives. Redistribution concerns the equitable allocation of economic resources, recognition addresses cultural and identity-based inequalities, while representation pertains to political participation and agency. Fraser contends that young people today are increasingly aware of the interdependence of these dimensions, as their lived experiences in precarious labor markets and digital economies expose them to intersecting injustices. She suggests that youth activism around climate justice, gender equity, and anti-racism movements reflects a new synthesis of economic and moral rationalities. The younger generation no longer views justice merely as a question of welfare or income but as a holistic moral architecture encompassing ecological sustainability, cultural dignity, and democratic accountability. Christian Welzel, in his most recent publication

[9], extends the theory of emancipative values by empirically demonstrating how moral cognition and value change drive democratic resilience and social responsibility. His cross-cultural analyses of the World Values Survey reveal that younger generations across diverse societies are progressively aligning economic aspirations with ethical self-expression and humanistic solidarity.

METHOD

This study employs a multidimensional methodological framework that synthesizes philosophical hermeneutics, critical discourse analysis, and comparative sociological methods to explore the conceptual and empirical dynamics of social justice in the economic worldview of youth. The philosophical hermeneutic method serves as the interpretive foundation, allowing the researcher to decode the moral and ideological meanings embedded in youth perceptions of fairness, equity, and responsibility, as articulated through economic behavior, public discourse, and media representation. Complementing this, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is utilized to examine how social justice narratives are linguistically and symbolically constructed across digital platforms, educational settings, and civic movements, thereby

uncovering the underlying power structures that shape youth moral cognition in the age of digital capitalism. Additionally, a comparative-sociological approach enables the examination of cross-cultural variations in how youth internalize economic justice, drawing from global survey data, international reports, and qualitative ethnographies to contextualize the moral-economic reasoning of young people in both Western and non-Western societies. The integration of these methods facilitates a holistic understanding of the interplay between structural factors (such as inequality, governance, and globalization) and subjective dimensions (such as empathy, ethical self-reflection, and civic consciousness).

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that the economic worldview of youth in the contemporary era is undergoing a profound moral transformation in which social justice functions not as a peripheral ideal but as a constitutive principle of economic rationality itself. The analysis demonstrates that young people increasingly evaluate economic phenomena—such as wealth distribution, labor relations, and market participation—through ethical lenses grounded in fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability. This moralization of economic thought indicates the emergence of a justice-oriented economic consciousness, characterized by the fusion of self-interest with collective responsibility. Empirical evidence derived from comparative analyses of youth attitudes across different cultural contexts shows a growing alignment between personal economic aspirations and communal well-being, suggesting that global youth no longer perceive prosperity as a purely individual achievement but as an ethically contingent social condition.

DISCUSSION

The dialectical engagement between Nancy Fraser and Christian Welzel on the moral foundations of youth economic consciousness represents one of the most stimulating intellectual debates in contemporary social philosophy. Both scholars address the transformative relationship between justice and economic participation, yet they diverge significantly in their conceptual emphasis and epistemological assumptions. Fraser, operating within the critical-theoretical tradition, views the moral engagement of youth as a reaction against systemic injustice—an ethical resistance to what she terms “cannibal capitalism,” wherein economic structures exploit care, nature, and democracy [10]. From her perspective, social justice emerges not from cultural evolution but from political struggle; it is a counter-hegemonic praxis

driven by moral indignation and collective mobilization. She argues that the moral vocabulary of today’s youth—fair wages, climate justice, inclusivity—reflects a deep awareness of capitalism’s contradictions rather than a spontaneous value shift.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis undertaken in this study demonstrates that the concept of social justice has become a defining axis in the economic worldview of contemporary youth, reshaping not only their perceptions of prosperity and fairness but also the moral architecture of economic life itself. The investigation reveals that young people across diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts are increasingly integrating ethical reasoning into their understanding of economic participation, transforming what was once an instrumental rationality into a moral discourse of responsibility, equality, and sustainability.

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