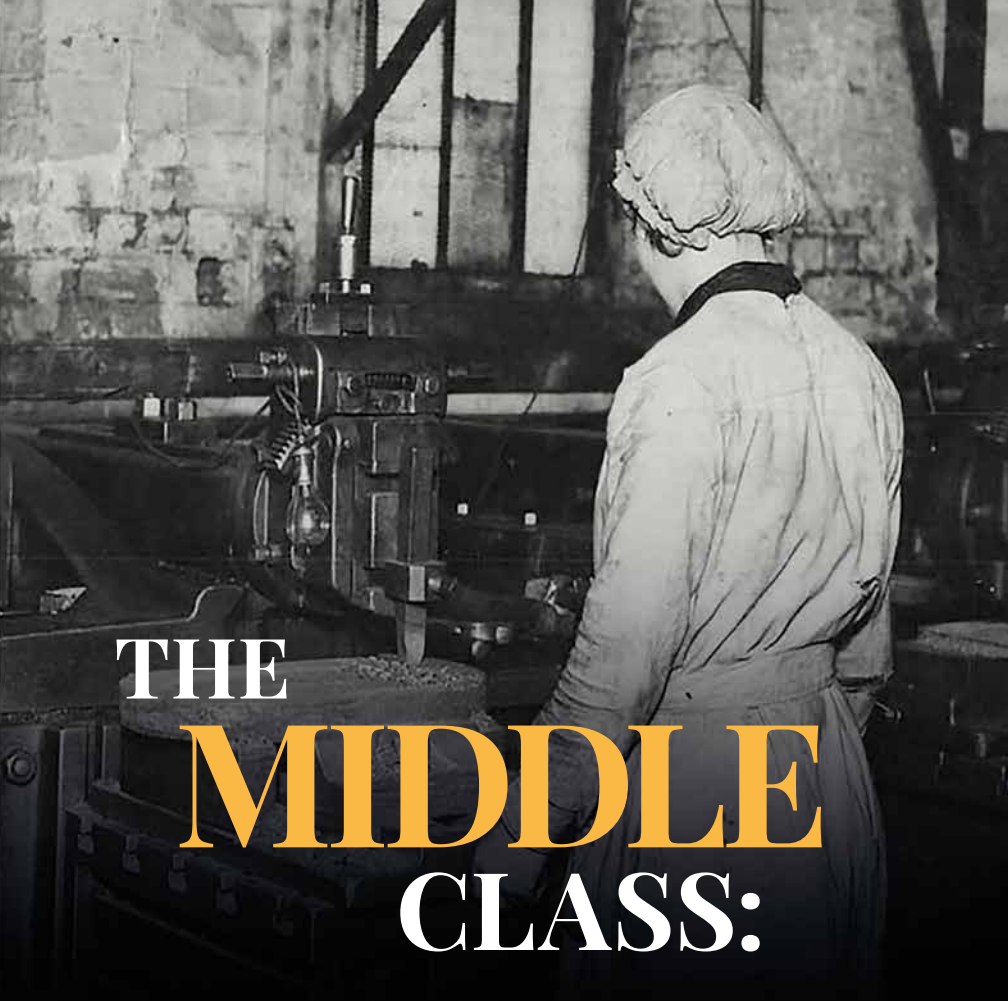

THE MIDDLE CLASS:

Philosophical, Political, and Historical Perspectives

José Espericueta • Philipp W. Rosemann
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Foreigners to Human Nature[1]

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A Hegelian proposition will help me define my topic: "What is 'familiarly known' is not properly known, just for the reason that it is 'familiar'" (Hegel, 1967, p. 31). My claim is that precisely because wealth is so familiar to us, there is no room to question its benefits, that is to say, it is not properly known.

Is there a relation between wealth and human nature? Does the Delphic maxim "know thyself" have anything to do with being affluent? When one lacks wealth, one's human dignity suffers a debasing effect named "misery", but is more wealth truly better? This seems obvious, which is why it is so hard to give an answer. Now, can our human nature give us a clue about well-being and wealth? Are scholars in the humanities able to say anything about wealth that might be appreciated by economists, administrators and accountants?

The contemporary global ideology of wealth produces arguably unsolvable social problems. In this paper, I advance the hypothesis that the Aristotelian concept of "real wealth" and the related idea

1 A special thanks to Marc B. Sable, Ph. D. for his style corrections and suggestions.

of the "middle class" provide a powerful prescription for modern societies. These concepts do more than legitimize policies aimed at reducing income inequality; rather, they aim at creating a "truly well-off," "middling" society, one that is composed, as far as possible, of equals and similar, one in which friendship can flourish. (For earlier treatments, see McCadden, 1992 and McCadden and Orozco Garibay, 2008).

Strangers to Human Nature: The Spanish-Mexican First Encounter

However, let me start elsewhere. The first contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples in the Americas (for which see O'Gorman, 1973) and the subsequent arrival of Hernán Cortés and his men in Mexico led to a "novel experience of new worlds" (García Martínez, 2002, p. 3) which could easily be labelled an encounter of foreigners, strangers or even aliens. However, one should recognize that these terms do not properly describe what took place, because to speak in these terms implies that one actually recognizes the shared humanity of the other. Although this ultimately did occur (Castillo, 1968, p. 145), initially neither Mexica nor Spaniards recognized their shared humanity. The Mexica and Spaniards came to their encounter with clearly defined self-conceptions, which shaped how they viewed the other. Because of the centuries-long Reconquest from the Moors, the Spaniards identified themselves as ardent Christians and believed they must fight all those who did not profess the Catholic religion (Sierra Moncayo and Sordo Cedeño, 2007, pp. 48-9). The Mexica were likewise religious, considering themselves the people of the Sun (León Portilla, 1979, p. 126). In this belief rested both their strength and their weakness. They believed in their divine mission of becoming a great nation, but their religiosity, as we will see, was full of myths, magic and legends. The result of each of these preconceptions was that the other was perceived as either *beneath* or *beyond* human nature; while neither Mexica nor Spaniards considered the other as equals, the perceptions were quite asymmetric.

Spaniards, Beyond Human Nature

While an exact idea of the Mexica conception of the Spaniards is difficult to form almost five hundred years later, the reactions of Emperor Moctezuma II (León Portilla, 2000, pp. 35-46) show that the Mexica struggled to see the Spaniards as human; rather, they tended to view them as superhuman. When he was informed of the arrival of people mounted on "large deer" (horses), Moctezuma recalled mysterious signs that had appeared a dozen years earlier, signs associated with fire falling from heaven, as strong as the aurora (León Portilla, 2000, p. 31). The most impressive omens originated from the interpretation of a luminous mist, which appeared three hours before dawn, and a whirlwind that rose to the sky. All these were seen as manifestations of the gods who supposedly were descending from the heavens. Thus, when the Spaniards landed on the Mexican coast, Moctezuma was certain they were the gods announced by the omens (León Portilla, 2000, pp. 31-33). Specifically, the Mexica thought they were dealing with Quetzalcoatl (León Portilla, 1973, p. 33), the deified mythical king who, after having committed a crime, exiled himself and promised to return (León Portilla, 2000). Furthermore, the Mexica tradition imagined Quetzalcoatl as very similar to the Spaniards' light-skinned and hairy appearance. This seemed to confirm the newcomers' divine origin.

Moctezuma was in fact convinced that he was facing gods who had to be worshipped (León Portilla, 1973, pp. 29-30). Trying to discover what kind of being was before them, the Indians overlaid them with their beliefs and preconceptions. Thus, wizards were assigned to cast spells upon the newcomers, and Moctezuma ordered the sacrifice of prisoners in front of them, thinking that the Spaniards would ask to drink the victims' blood (Cortés, 1995, pp. 72-73; Motolinía, 1979, pp. 32-3). The result was unexpected. Witchcraft had no effect, and when the Spaniards saw the sacrifices and the food stained with human blood they were disgusted; they vomited and covered their eyes (León Portilla, 1973, p. 33).

Only by carrying out these experiments did the Indians come to know that the Spaniards were not gods, but –to a certain degree– men just like themselves. It is told that an Indian who helped a Spaniard cross a river kept him with his head underwater for several minutes to see how he tolerated it (Durán Ayala, n.d., p. 1). And only when the Indian saw that the Spaniard was dead did he realize that the latter was not a god! There are also accounts by an Indian woman who testified, after having sex with a Spaniard, that he was neither more nor less human than others were. In the bellicose terms of Fray Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, one of the first twelve Franciscans who arrived to evangelize Mexico, some Indians

> Thought that man and horse were altogether one, although this was only in the early stages, because afterwards everyone knew they were men and that horses were beasts … the Spaniards were called *tetehuv*, which means gods, and the Spaniards corrupting this word said *teules*. This name stayed with them for more than three years, until we found the way to have the Indians understand that there is no more than one God, and that they should call the Spaniards Christians. (Motolinía, 1979, p. 115)

The Indians' beliefs about the Spaniards evolved the more time they spent around them. If at first they regarded the Europeans as gods, soon the natives discovered that they were mere men (Muñoz Camargo, 1947, pp. 185-186), albeit very ambitious and unsavory men.

Indians, Beneath Human Nature

How were the Aztec perceived by the newcomers? Upon their arrival, Spaniards were hardly interested in the ontological status of the inhabitants of the newly discovered lands. Mostly, indigenous peoples represented a cluster of ignorant, superstitious and barbaric inferiors, to be used for personal enrichment. On the other hand, from the beginning, some good Spaniards considered American Indians, far from being mere means for enrichment, above all

persons who merited the proclamation of Jesus Christ (Ricard, 1966). Thus, one can speak of a certain dual Spanish mentality. One approach underestimated the Indians and reduced them to sub-human inferiors, which provided grounds for considering them slaves by nature. The other approach considered Mexican Indians as children of God, called to receive the good news of salvation (Motolinía, 1979, pp. 78-9, 82). Let us consider these two ways of understanding the Mexica.

Economic motives led some to deny the Indians their human dignity. Columbus had already resorted to using the Indians to alleviate the manpower shortage on Hispaniola, reducing them to slavery. After the death of Queen Isabella, King Ferdinand ratified the practice of using Indians as slaves by arguing that they were prisoners of war. Another argument was that the natives had no souls, so that the question of salvation became superfluous: they could be treated purely as an economic resource. Again, humanist scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490-1573) understood the relationship between Spaniards and Indians as analogous to that between Greeks and barbarians (De las Casas, 1965, vol. 1, p. 218). A "classical" underpinning for slavery was thus restored, using the theory of natural slavery developed in the *Politics*, Book I, chapter 9.

Beginning with the arrival of the first twelve Franciscan priests (García Martínez, 2002, p. 124) Cortés's conquest was challenged from a more spiritual and peaceful angle. Pope Paul III's 1537 encyclical *Sublimis Deus* strongly condemned slavery, declaring unequivocally that the indigenous peoples of America were rational beings with souls. To believe the contrary, he wrote, was an inspiration of Satan. Although the exploitation of indigenous people continued, Bartolomé de las Casas helped develop laws that aimed at the protection of their freedom. The Valladolid debate (1550-1551) was the first moral debate on both the rights and the treatment of colonized people by colonizers. De la Casas argued in favor of the Indians despite their (prior) practice of human sacrifice. Opposing this view were a number of scholars and priests who included the above-mentioned Ginés de Sepulveda, who combined Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery with additional religious arguments. Thus, the controversy over

the rights and humanity of the Indians extended to mainland Spain, where it became of interest to the most remarkable intellectuals of the time, such as Vitoria, Soto, Vázquez de Manchaca, Acosta, Bañez and Suárez. If, at first, the Spaniards had undertaken no inquiry into the status of Indians, they eventually did so with great energy.

In sum, then, the knowledge that the conquerors and the conquered had of each other went in different directions. At first, the Spaniards in a very pragmatic manner simply admitted some humanity to the colonized, particularly the right to be evangelized. Conversely, the Indians were originally uncertain of the nature of the newcomers, but they ultimately discovered the bittersweet human nature of their conquerors, some of whom were thirsty to exploit them while others craved to save their souls.

The Mestizo Dilemma

The Spanish conquest of Mexico, Peru and the rest of the continent altered the Americas permanently. Among the novelties, surely the most radical was miscegenation. Never before in human history had the world seen the fruit of the union between people of these two different worlds, that is to say, a Euro-American or an Americo-European. Although miscegenation is in itself a biological confirmation of the humanity of both Indians and Spaniards, one would have to say categorically that among mestizos the alien or foreign element of identity, far from disappearing, turned inward. In a very peculiar way, this individual is someone "alien" to both Spaniards and Indians, and thus remains somehow "foreign" to himself. The "opposites" inscribed in him mean that a mestizo usually does not perceive his own dignity as a human person in a straightforward manner. He is both conquered and conqueror, both servant and master, poor and rich, Indian and Spanish. Mestizos live in their own person the conflict generated by the conquest, and this conflict is still alive in Mexican culture today.

In his work *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1987), the Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos wrote that Mexicans have not yet had access to their being as persons. Mexicans in general, Ramos tells us, suffer from an inadequate self-assessment of their value (Ramos, 1987, p. 58). They continually underestimate themselves by comparison with other cultures and models (Uranga, 1990; Portilla, 1985). They flee their own personality (Ramos, 1987, p. 60) and dare not be honest, neither to themselves nor when facing others.

The Mexicans' struggle to consider themselves as "human beings" has been further aggravated by the context of violence in which both cultures met at first. As Nobel laureate Octavio Paz says in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Mexicans are the bastard sons of "La Malinche" (Paz, 1967, pp. 77-78). La Malinche was the female Indian lover of Hernán Cortés, the great conqueror of Mexico (García Martínez, 2002, pp. 5-6). Paz concludes that each Mexican mestizo is the creation of a morganatic marriage between a male member of a Spanish family and an indigenous person considered, by definition, of inferior rank. Mexican mestizos were half-and-half children of such marriages, but they were never awarded the titles, fiefs or property of the parent of higher rank. This was usually the case even if originally the mother belonged to a royal or noble Indian family. Since the sixteenth century, the ranking within the pair has remained unchanged. To this day Indians are despised and are treated differently in Mexico.

Mestizos therefore have an enormous task: not only do they live in two worlds at the same time, but they must also cope with two occasionally conflicting cultures. This is why contraries survive inscribed in every mestizo, contrasts that the mestizo must overcome. They embody the vanquisher and the vanquished, the betrayer and the betrayed (Paz, 1967, p. 64). They were forced to create a new bicultural and bilingual realm. This task is still left to be accomplished. Many minds have sought to provide solutions for this challenge.

One such attempt was offered by the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos. According to him, mestizos are the men of the future, the new race that he calls the "Latin-American race," the "bronze race," and even the "cosmic race" (Vasconcelos, 1966, p. 27). This "cosmic race" will be a fifth race, built with the finest of all the other races: the ultimate achievement of all races. This race has the mission to rethink and reinterpret the world after its own sensibilities and perceptions (Vasconcelos, 1963, pp. 43-44).

Where does such a strange –indeed racist– way of understanding Mexico and Latin America come from? In effect, Vasconcelos was drawing on his knowledge of Mexico's colonial history, a history whose effects are felt even today. This phenomenon is analogous to the image that the United States has of itself as a "melting pot." Colonial Mexico was a place where different types of people lived together and gradually created a single community. From the sixteenth century onward, Mexico experienced a blending of cultures and peoples. Charles C. Mann offers one of the more positive ways to portray Vasconcelos's idea:

> Mexico City's multitude of poorly defined ethnic groups from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas made it the world's first truly global city … it was a place where East met West under an African and Indian gaze … it was an amazingly contemporary place, unlike any other then on the planet. It is the first 21st-century city, the first of today's modern, globalized megalopolises. (Mann, 2012, p. 419)

Mann describes the lived situation of Mexicans in the early seventeenth century. This situation was captured in some beautifully painted canvases, which defined the various racial mixtures in viceregal Mexico, as in the following eighteenth-century "caste" painting:

Figure 1.1 Anonymous *cuadro de castas* from the Museo Nacional del Virreinato (Tepotzotlán), 18th century
Source: Museo Nacional del Virreinato.

Dozens of such caste paintings still exist and are well known. Other testimonies also provide evidence of this phenomenon of racial mixing. Bernardo de Balbuena's poem, *La Grandeza Mexicana*, portrays the Mexico City of his time (the early seventeenth century) as a place where:

> Spain is joined with China,
> Italy with Japan, and finally
> an entire world in trade and order.
> In thee, we enjoy the best of treasures
> Of the West; in thee, the cream
> Of all luster created in the East.
> (Mann, 2012, p. 419)

Mexico City in 1604 was the American crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia: the "grandeur of Mexico" consisted in the fact that peoples from four continents lived together in the first global city –Mexico City.

Yet, no matter how beautiful, modern and cosmopolitan Mexico City was in the seventeenth century,

> Europeans were fascinated and repulsed by New Spain's exotic inhabitants. The portraits were intended to parade their fellows like specimens in a zoo. Yet at the same time most show *castizos*, mestizos, and mulattos dressed sumptuously, moving happily about their daily business, tall and robustly healthy each and every one. Looking at the smooth, smiling faces now, one would never know that on the streets of the cities where they were painted these people were scorned for their very diversity. (Mann, 2012, p. 410)

Scorned! This would be very difficult to understand for anyone who has never lived in a tightly stratified society in which the purity of blood determines public exclusion through the hereditary transmission of lifestyles and customary social interaction. To this day, Mexico has not erased its colonial caste system, which is a socio-cultural system that pays much attention to differences of wealth, inherited rank, privilege and occupation.

Enduring Social Stratification in Mexico

Mexico's inequality is a product of the way it was colonized, along with the rest of Latin America. The abundance of land and natural resources in Mexico favored the intensive use of native labor and even African slaves. The military power of the Spaniards led to

the creation of closed elites that dominated production, leaving quasi-enslaved local labor with few privileges and opportunities (Hernández Licona, 2016, p. 246). The evolution of viceregal institutions resulted in even greater prerogatives for elites. These privileges have survived to this day. Although there are dissimilarities between Latin America and Africa, the common denominator is that both were colonized for centuries, and this colonization has created significant inequality that reigns still today (Hernández Licona, 2016, p. 246).

Social inequality in Mexico has taken various forms. During the colonial era, legal links between ethnicity and class generated a society that allocated to individuals different rights and duties, producing well-defined strata. Social classes were defined by blood inheritance (*jus sanguinis*). In colonial Mexico, there were Spaniards with different degrees of nobility, creoles born in New Spain of Spanish parentage, mestizos of mixed European and Amerindian descent, varied Asian-born individuals, Native Americans of different ethnic groups, and African slaves.

The Mexican War of Independence from Spain was inspired by the Enlightenment and its new conceptions of reason, authority and legitimacy, and thus sought the suppression of castes and racial hierarchies. At the very start of the war, in 1810, Mexico's founding father Miguel Hidalgo abolished slavery. "Sentimientos de la Nación" ("The Sentiments of the Nation") of 1813 then envisioned the suppression of both castes and slavery. It is no accident that "The Sentiments of the Nation" was written by the second leader of the *Insurgentes*, José María Morelos y Pavón, who was born to a humble indigenous family of African and Spanish descent. Likewise, in 1829, when Mexico definitively ended slavery thirty-five years before the United States, its president was the third leader of the *Insurgentes*, Vicente Guerrero, of Afro-mestizo descent.

Remaining legal inequalities finally vanished in the Mexican Constitution of 1857, which was clearly influenced by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and both the Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States. The Constitution of 1857 mandated equality for all citizens.

It recognized human rights as the basis and purpose of social institutions. Nonetheless, its use, misuse and abuse undoubtedly triggered great economic inequality, as a review of the Porfirian dictatorship confirms (Katz, 1976). Despite the influence of Enlightenment ideals of human equality, Mexican society, since its independence, has recreated hierarchical stratification.

Inequality in Mexico Today

While contemporary Mexico is ethnically diverse, income distribution is highly unequal. The richest 10% earn 38% of total income while the remaining 90% receives only 62% of total income:

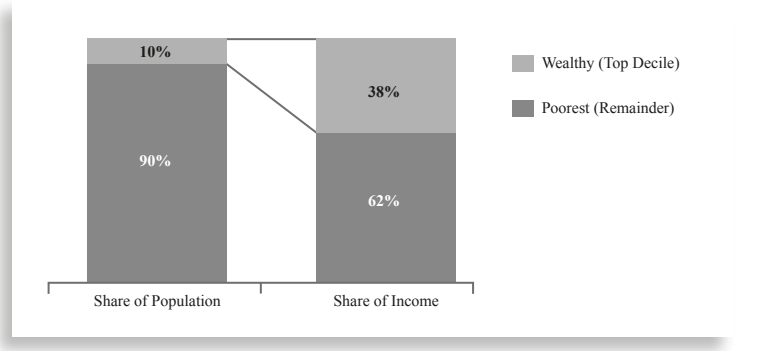

Figure 1.2 Income distribution in Mexico
Source: Prepared by author based on data supplied by 2012 INEGI Official Data.

The majority of the population is poor and works under a subordinate employment relationship, without fringe benefits. This is reflected in the following graph, which shows that income distribution in Mexico is skewed. The median 8832 pesos (US$691) per month, a value that divides the income distribution into two halves, is lower than the mean 13 000 pesos (US$1017).

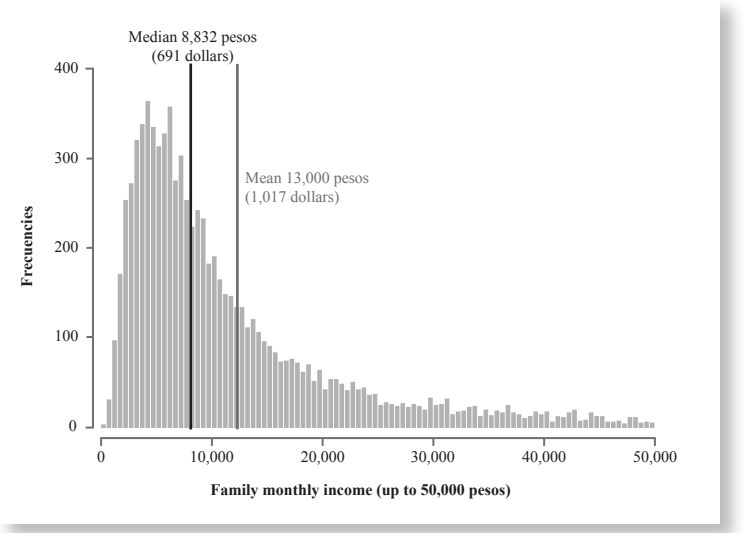

Figure 1.3 Household total income in 2012
Source: Prepared by author based on data supplied by 2012 INEGI Official Data.

The National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, an independent government entity in charge of measuring poverty), has adopted a twofold poverty methodology: 1) an economic approach, which fixes a poverty line equivalent to the combined value of the food basket and the non-food basket; and 2) a human-rights perspective. This last one measures the level of deprivation relative to the household's access to food, education and health; job security; and quality of basic services in the home (Hernández Licona, 2010).

This second approach is also based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and has been incorporated, together with other international human rights treaties, into article 1 of the Mexican Constitution. The article 3 guarantees a right to education, article 4 to nourishment, healthcare and housing, article 123 to "a decent and socially useful job," disability and unemployment benefits and medical care (United Mexican States, 2013). In this way,

instead of simply seeking a higher gross domestic product (GDP), higher per capita GDP or income equality in terms of a normal distribution, Mexico is also obliged to provide for the well-being of its population. If we use this additional criterion, Mexico turns out to be not only a country with high inequality, but also one that has substantial poverty under the terms established by its Constitution.

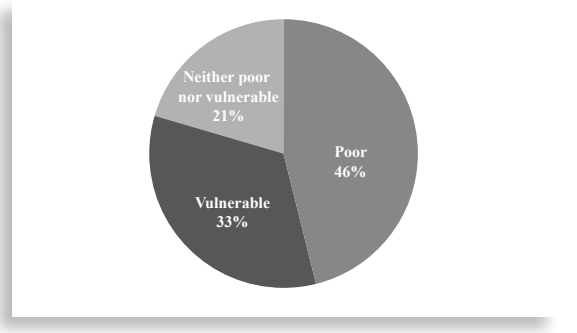

Figure 1.4 CONEVAL, 2014 multidimensional poverty measurement
Source: Prepared by author based on data supplied by 2014 CONEVAL multidimensional poverty measurement.

Measured by food, health, education, employment and other such gaps, almost half of Mexico's population is poor and another one-third is vulnerable.

Regrettably, the social diversity generated by the centuries-long Mexican "melting pot" has almost been reduced to two clusters: a minority of rich and a majority of poor. Despite a certain social mobility, ethnic groups that were considered inferior now constitute the poor majority while the ancestral ethnic minority is now the wealthy minority. Just as in the past, today Mexico is not a society in which the majority of its population belongs to the middle class.

Inequality as an Aristotelian Problem

This takes us to another question: How can one expect Mexicans to coexist peacefully, given such a high level of inequality?

Contemporary Mexican social structures favor a minority over the majority throughout the whole social order in a way that recalls the fourth-century B.C. Athens, which Aristotle described so painfully when he said:

> The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves. Thus arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and nothing can be more fatal to friendship and good fellowship in states than this: for good fellowship springs from friendship; when men are at enmity with one another, they would rather not even share the same path. (*Pol*., 1295b15-24)

The current deep division between rich and poor in Mexico is thus unfair, and it renders a true sense of national community –of civic friendship– impossible.

In *Principles of Political Economy*, John Stuart Mill put his finger on the problem of the contemporary capitalist system:

> To work at the bidding and for the profit of another, without any interest in the work–the price of their labour being adjusted by hostile competition, one side demanding as much and the other paying as little as possible–is not, even when wages are high, a satisfactory state to human beings of educated intelligence, who have ceased to think themselves naturally inferior to those whom they serve. (Mill, 1929, p. 761)

Mexico can be described as a class society if one categorizes the parties in supra-ordinated and subordinated labor relations, that is, as independent and dependent workers. A person who works for another has a completely different social stance from the one who works for himself, either because he is professionally independent or a shareholder of a company.

An exchange in 2000 between Antonio Villaraigosa and Carlos Slim illustrates the problem. Villaraigosa was then president of the California State Assembly and former mayor of Los Angeles, California; Slim was the wealthiest businessman in Mexico and one the wealthiest men in the world. Slim asked Villaraigosa to explain from his perspective as a Mexican-American the difference between the United States and Mexico. Villaraigosa answered:

> It is very simple, he said, if my family had remained in Mexico [City] I would now be serving you food … Instead they went to the United States and today you offer this dinner in my honor … [W]here the middle class can grow and develop … there is fertile ground for the creation of a prosperous and democratic society. (Valero, 2005, p. 22)

The successful political career of the forty-first mayor of Los Angeles who came to the United States without finishing high school brings to mind immediately a disturbing reality in our country: Why do more Mexicans develop their talent in the United States and not in Mexico? Villaraigosa suggested that the "key to prosperity and the foundations of our [American] democracy is the creation of a strong middle class. Our strength is that America has been a place with a large and strong middle class in a vibrant democracy" (Valero, 2005).

A majority of Mexicans consider themselves members of the middle class, due to all the symbolism that this concept implies; according to the World Values Survey Association in 2005 eight out of ten persons in Mexico said they belonged to the middle class: 20,9% middle high, 41,7% middle medium and 18,4% middle low. In addition, in 2012, 61,5% of the persons surveyed said they belonged to the middle high, or middle low middle class (World Values Survey Association, 2015). However, a serious analysis of

this topic clearly shows that they are mistaken (McCadden and Del Castillo Negrete, 2015). In fact, the Mexican social structure is made up of a small upper class and a large majority of poor. The middle class is no majority in Mexico. Mexico cannot be considered a country consisting mostly of a middle class.

From the above CONEVAL 2014 percentage pie chart, one can see that the Mexican middle class consists of the 21% who are neither poor nor vulnerable. Unfortunately, this 21% includes the rich Mexicans. Thus, if there were a Mexican middle class, it would be less than 21%. However, if Mexico is not composed of middle-class citizens, then it is not constituted of the elements of which a solid fabric of the state should naturally consist. In Mexico, the middle class is not stronger than the other two classes. This is contrary to what Aristotle recommends:

> Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant. Great then is the good fortune of a state in which the citizens have a moderate and sufficient property …. (*Pol.*, 1295b 34-40)

Mexico is not a fortunate state in which most of its citizens own moderate and sufficient property. It is, rather, a country where some possess much and the others nothing. Moreover, when a minority has property in excess while a majority lacks property, this imbalance cannot prevent either of the extremes from being dominant:

> [T]here may arise an extreme democracy or a pure oligarchy or a tyranny may grow out of either extreme –either out of the most rampant democracy, or out of an oligarchy; but it is not so likely to arise out of the middle constitutions and those akin to them. (*Pol.*, 1296a 1-4)

Mexico is thus prone to the extremes of a populist democracy or a pure oligarchy, that is, the tyranny that can arise from of these

two extremes. It suffices to see the history of Latin America to confirm what happens without a sufficient middle class.

True Wealth and the Aristotelian Middle Class

The Athens of the fourth century B.C. suffered a similar problem, as it was characterized by a severe social crisis resulting from the Peloponnesian War. The war had left the fields in bad condition. Small farmers thus abandoned their lands due to lack of funding and lived in misery. The impoverished rural population migrated to the cities, surviving on meager wages or through welfare. Production and trade also declined. However, the crisis hit different segments of the population differently. Along with increased poverty, wealth increased for people who speculated in land and trade.

Aristotle was a keen social observer. He thought balance could be restored to Athens by reducing inequality, which had ethical as well as social implications. Some authors like Claude Mosse (1970) have argued that Aristotle aimed to restore the middle class in Athens, but, as M. I. Finley has noted, when Aristotle refers to the "the middle," the idea of a middle-class interest is definitely not present in his work in the modern sense of this notion:

> In the *Politics*, "to meson" appears only in a few normative generalizations … of little practical significance … We must therefore restrict ourselves to the ancient connotations of the word-pair, rich and poor, and we must sedulously avoid the modern corollary of a substantial middle class *with its own defined interests*. (Finley, 1983, pp. 10-11; emphasis added)

"The middle" was part of Aristotle's ethical view of life and his conception of virtue as the middle between extremes. According to the philosopher, those who have the virtue of courage are neither fearful nor reckless. Similarly, righteousness is located between injustice by excess and injustice by absence: "For if it has been rightly said in ethics that the happy life is the life that is lived without impediment in accordance with virtue, and that virtue is a middle course, it necessarily follows that the middle

course of life is the best" (*Pol.*, 1295a36-8). For Aristotle, every society has three divisions: the very rich, the very poor and those in the middle. The very rich have more than they need; the poor are in need because they have the minimum required to live, or even less. Only in the middle is there true wealth. Those who possess it are truly wealthy; they have what they need, neither more nor less: "But surely the ideal of the state is to consist as much as possible of persons that are equal and alike, and this similarity is most found in the middle classes" (*Pol.*, 1295b 24-5).

Human beings, Aristotle said, can use only a limited amount of goods and services:

> They are the elements of true riches; for the amount of property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited … there is a boundary fixed, just as there is in the other arts; for the instruments of any art are never *unlimited*, either in number or size, and riches may be defined as a number of instruments to be used in a household or in a state. (*Pol.*, 1256b30-6; see also 1257b 32-1258a18)

You could use eight beds in one night, one hour each, but it would be foolish. There is thus a natural wealth of those goods necessary for life and useful for domestic or political community. When Ferdinand Marcos ruled the Philippines as president and later as dictator in the sixties, seventies and eighties, his wife Imelda accumulated more than 1,200 pairs of shoes. Those 1,200 pairs were not real wealth for one person: human wealth is limited because human beings are limited. That is why true wealth, the natural wealth, has limits.

True wealth, from Aristotle's point of view, does not refer to money. Wealth in cash certainly seems to know no limitation, but Aristotle invites us to put aside money and consider wealth in terms of things. Real wealth does not consist in coins (money):

> Indeed, riches is assumed by many to be only a quantity of coin, because the arts of getting wealth and retail trade are concerned with coin … But how can that be wealth of which a man may have a great abundance and yet perish with hunger, like Midas

> in the fable, whose insatiable prayer turned everything that was set before him into gold? Hence, men seek after a better notion of riches and of the art of getting wealth than the mere acquisition of coin, and they are right. *For natural riches and the natural art of wealth-getting are a different thing; in their true form, they are part of the management of a household*; whereas retail trade is the art of producing wealth, not in every way, but by exchange. (*Pol.*, 1257b5-22; emphasis added)

Imagine for a minute the very desirable wealth of Bill Gates, which amounts to some 60 or 70 billion dollars. Then imagine this wealth in terms of the things that the money represents. Imagine owning, for example, seventy thousand houses, each worth a million dollars. As soon as we stop thinking in terms of money and imagine the things themselves that such a level of money could buy, it turns out that 70 billion dollars is unnecessary. That much wealth would be irrational, and the proof of this is that Bill Gates, like many other billionaires, has given it away (Wattles, 2015).

Aristotle believes that wealth seeking coincides with the intention of merely living, and not of living well. It is as though one could satisfy desires without limit: "For, as their enjoyment is in excess they seek an art which produces the excess of enjoyment, and if they are not able to supply their pleasures by the art of getting wealth, they try other arts, using in turn every faculty in a manner contrary to nature" (*Pol.*, 1258a6-9). This belief is the currently accepted and prevailing mentality, but it cannot withstand even minimal analysis. International economic practices, however, make this mentality difficult to eradicate. It remains an inhumane ideology, foreign to human nature: Today *inhumanity* is all too human!

For this reason, Aristotle offered, as a solution to the social problems of his time, a wide middle sector of Athenian citizens, who would have enough wealth to satisfy their needs. This would generate a community of free men, with neither slaves nor masters, just friends living in real democracy. Aristotle says:

> The mean condition of states is clearly best, for no other is free from faction; and where the middle class is large, there are least likely to be factions and dissensions … And democracies are safer and more permanent than oligarchies, because they have a middle class which is more numerous and has a greater share in the government … A proof of the superiority of the middle class is that the best legislators have been of a middle condition; for example, Solon, as his own verses testify; and Lycurgus, for he was not a king; and Charondas, and almost all legislators. (*Pol.*, 1296a6-20)

This Aristotelian analysis helps us find what we should look toward, if not (yet) in Mexican social reality, then at least in the future projects of Mexican political and social thinkers; Aristotle's view pinpoints what constitutes a truly wealthy middle class.

Conclusion

The master of estrangement was Berthold Brecht, who made use of it in his experimental theater: "What is estrangement? … [To] take the process or the character of what is self-evident, familiar, and plausible, and to produce astonishment and curiosity about it" (Brecht, 1967, p. 79; see also Ewen, 1969, p. 218). Today almost nobody would disagree with the belief that having an unlimited amount of money is the final purpose of human life. This belief is considered self-evident in the contemporary world market economy: "Money makes the world go around!" But it is precisely this view that should produce astonishment and curiosity.

Because of their history and the resulting miscegenation, Mexicans today are the product of a very interesting "melting pot." In their contemporary culture, Mexicans remain somehow foreign to themselves, but the opposites they have to overcome are minority-majority, rich-poor, and supra ordinated versus subordinated labor relations. Mexicans usually do not perceive belonging to one of these opposites as damaging to their dignity as human persons. The poor want to become ultra-rich, the employee an employer,

a member of the majority, part of the select minority, and so forth. Says Aristotle:

> [B]y reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they [the wealthy] never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, *are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves*. Thus, arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and *nothing can be more fatal to friendship and good fellowship in states than this: for good fellowship springs from friendship.* (*Pol*., 1295b 15-22; emphasis added)

Contemporary Mexicans have inherited different ways of being estranged from human nature, so that they live without fully understanding how poor the human social order turns out to be when negative mutual relations dominate it (Hegel, 1967, pp. 288-90). In Mexico seeing each fellow citizen as a person is problematic; it is not part of the everyday culture. Because of this obliviousness, democratic life becomes impossible.

Therefore, an invitation must be extended here to social scientists–among whom should be included economists, business managers and lawyers –to devise and implement new forms of business organization that enable the dissemination of private property to achieve the reduction of the gap between the social classes. New and successful companies, such as cooperatives, which redistribute the wealth they produce positively and fairly, should constitute the basic economic entities of any country, and particularly Mexico.

Questioning, as Aristotle does, the idea of wealth without limits –rendering it strange–points us to a middle-class society that is both ethically and socially desirable.

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In the summer of 2016, the University of Dallas and the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México organized a conference to discuss the topic of the middle class and its continued decline-recognizing that, despite some historical, political and cultural differences, healthy democracies throughout the hemisphere depend upon a strong and prosperous middle class. This volume brings together contributions by nine scholars from both institutions. The chapters reflect diverse disciplinary perspectives that are historical, political, economic, anthropological and philosophical. Despite this diversity, the volume possesses a conceptual unity that stems from its foundation in Aristotle's approach to the middle class. On this basis, the topic is given a rigorous study that is both theoretical and data-driven.

The chapters include treatments of Aristotle, Montesquieu, Adam Smith and Sir James Steuart, Catholic social teaching, the problem of inequality in the US, the definition and measurement of the middle class in Mexico, as well as its values and political attitudes, the rise of middle-class politics in early-twentieth-century Latin America, and a comparative analysis of health care for the middle class in North America.

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