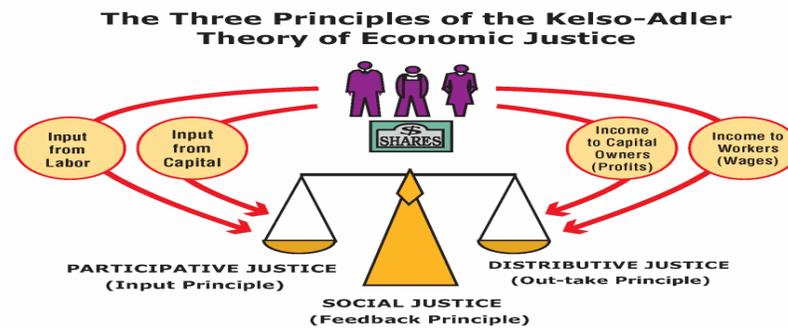


# Defining Economic Justice and Social Justice



## Defining Justice

One definition of justice is “giving to each what he or she is due.” The problem is knowing what is “due”. Functionally, “justice” is a set of universal principles which guide people in judging what is right and what is wrong, no matter what culture and society they live in. Justice is one of the four “cardinal virtues” of classical moral philosophy, along with courage, temperance (self-control) and prudence (efficiency). (Faith, hope and charity are considered to be the three “religious” virtues.) Virtues or “good habits” help individuals to fully develop their human potentials, thus enabling them to serve their own self-interests, as well as work in harmony with others for their common good.

## Defining Social Justice

Social justice encompasses economic justice. Social justice guides us in creating those organized human institutions, that when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for people, both individually and in our associations with others, such as education, adequate nutrition, housing, healthcare, voting rights, etc. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.

## Defining Economic Justice

Economic justice, which touches the individual person, as well as the social order, encompasses the moral principles which guide us in designing our **economic institutions**. These institutions determine how each person earns a living, enters into contracts, exchanges goods and services with others and otherwise produces an independent material foundation for his or her economic sustenance. ***The ultimate purpose of economic justice is to free each person to engage creatively in the unlimited work beyond earning a living, that of the mind and the spirit.***

## The Three Principles of Economic Justice

Like every system, economic justice involves input, output, and feedback for restoring harmony or balance between input and output. Within the system of economic justice as defined by Louis Kelso and Mortimer Adler, there are three essential and interdependent principles: **Participative Justice** (the input principle), **Distributive Justice** (the out-take principle), and **Social Justice** (the feedback principle). Like the legs of a three-legged stool, if any of these principles is weakened or missing, the system of economic justice will collapse.

### Participative Justice

“Participative Justice” describes how one makes “input” to the economic process in order to make a living. It requires equal opportunity in gaining access to private property, as well as equality of opportunity to engage in productive work. ***The principle of participation does not guarantee equal results***, but requires that every person be guaranteed by society’s institutions the equal human right to make a productive contribution to the economy, both through one’s labor (as a worker) and through one’s

productive capital (as an owner). Thus, this principle rejects monopolies, special privileges, and other exclusionary social barriers to economic self-reliance.

### **Distributive Justice**

“Distributive Justice” defines the “out-take” rights of an economic system matched to each person’s labor and capital inputs. Through the distributional features of private property within a free and open marketplace, distributive justice becomes automatically linked to participative justice, and incomes become linked to productive contributions. The principle of distributive justice involves the sanctity of property and contracts. It turns to the free and open marketplace, not government, as the most objective and democratic means for determining the just price, the just wage, and the just profit.

Many confuse the distributive principles of justice with those of **charity**. Charity involves the concept “to **each according to his needs**,” whereas “**distributive justice**” is based on the idea “**to each according to his contribution**.”

***Confusing these principles leads to endless conflict and scarcity,  
forcing government to intervene excessively to maintain social order.***

Distributive justice follows participative justice and breaks down when all persons are not given equal opportunity to acquire and enjoy the fruits of income-producing property.

### **Social Justice**

“Social Justice” is the “feedback” principle that detects distortions of the input and/or out-take principles and guides the corrections needed to restore a just and balanced economic order for all. This principle is violated by unjust barriers to participation, by monopolies or by some using their property to harm or exploit others.

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