

**Economic Justice and the Alleviation of Poverty  
In J. S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy***

Economic justice and the alleviation of poverty have been central issues in political philosophy since the early 1970s. In spite of a great revival of interest in Mill's thought during this time, little attention has been paid to Mill's views on these subjects. The reason is that they appear in his *Principles of Political Economy*, a work that has been mostly ignored.

In this paper, I discuss some of Mill's ideas on justice and the economy, stressing the centrality of the principle that people's resources should be proportionate to what Mill called their "exertions." While the "exertion principle" sounds like a non-utilitarian principle of desert, it is clear that Mill's basic view is form of rule utilitarianism and that he favors the exertion principle because it contributes to increased productivity. Mill's overall discussion includes additional principles along with consideration of specific matters such as forms of land ownership, inheritance, wage levels, direct state assistance to poor people, and the importance of population control.

Much of Mill's book is motivated by his desire to abolish or alleviate poverty. His discussions are relevant both to improving our understanding of Mill's thought and to tackling these enduring problems ourselves.

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