



PROJECT MUSE®

The Moral Economies of Early Modern Europe

Francesca Trivellato

Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism,
and Development, Volume 11, Number 2, Summer 2020, pp. 193-201 (Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/761027>

The Moral Economies of Early Modern Europe

To say “moral economy,” especially in reference to early modern Europe, is to summon the work of Edward Palmer Thompson (1924–1993). Other contributions to this dossier situate his work in the intellectual and political climate of his lifetime and trace his influence on other scholars. Here, I address his concept of the moral economy for what it does and does not tell us about how markets operated and how inequality was understood in early modern Europe. As the only premodern historian in a special issue of a journal primarily concerned with contemporary issues, I hope to introduce nonspecialists to lesser-known principles of economic justice that governed Old Regime societies and have far-reaching implications for how we analyze and critique modern capitalism in its liberal and neoliberal guises.

Since Joseph Schumpeter maintained that the Scholastic economic analysis of value and price “lacked nothing but the marginal apparatus,” scholars have debated whether medieval and early modern theories of “just price” approximated the modern concept of the free-market competitive price.¹ Schumpeter’s provocative thesis engendered fecund revisions of earlier portrayals of the Roman Church as inexorably adverse to profit. But it also distorted the essence of medieval and early modern economic thought by framing it as part a progressive trajectory toward free markets. This oversimplification bypasses the fact that moral theologians mixed economic analysis with normative directives: they recognized the role of supply and demand in the mechanisms of price formation, but also affirmed the need to preserve the inequality that defined societies of order. They did not conceive of the existence of one just price that connected all product and factor markets, but only of a plurality of just prices associated with specific markets, institutional arrangements, and social settings.

This observation is crucial to any assessment of the relevance of pre-industrial Europe to the ways in which we understand the morality of the market today. In his recent *Capital and Ideology*, Thomas Piketty insists on the cultural and legal justifications that buttress different regimes of economic inequality across human history. I suspect that any historian will welcome this call by an economist to stress the role of ideas in determining the levels of inequality that each society values or tolerates, and historians of early modern Europe should be especially impressed by Picketty’s effort to reach back in time. Doing so leads him to conclude that modern meritocracy never cleared away the inequalities linked to status, religion, ethnicity, and gender that structured all social relations in Old Regime Europe.² The scale of Piketty’s analysis of pre-industrial European societies, however, also leads him to regard the tripartite division between nobility, clergy, and commoners as their one and only ordering logic.

In what follows, I wish to argue that in early modern Europe, the dominant discourse

of economic justice did not assume the existence of a one-dimensional hierarchy but rather sought to harmonize individuals' contractual freedom with groups' social status. The uneasy coexistence of both principles, more than Thompson's more bluntly conceptualized account of a transition from an eighteenth-century "moral economy" to nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism, forces us to rethink evolutionary models of the rise of Western capitalism and best defines the legacy of early modern Europe to modern capitalism.

Thompson's "Moral Economy of the Poor"

After completing *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson turned his attention backward in time and depicted the eighteenth century as the period of slow, uneasy, but inexorable evolution from "the doctrine of a fair price" that had governed transactions for centuries to "the free market economy of the nineteenth century."³ "Moral economy" is how Thompson describes the anticapitalist mentality that, before the industrial revolution, bound together the English gentry and "the labouring poor" in a conflictual dependency. His subjects are rural dwellers, from yeomen to domestic servants, cottage artisans, and paupers, whom he also refers to as "working people" or "the plebs."⁴ During agricultural crises, when the prices of wheat, flour, and bread skyrocketed, they engaged in collective, anonymous, and ritualized acts of insubordination and violence. The villains in this story are Whig government ministers and merchants, promoters of a proto-capitalist commercialization, who come in for Thompson's trenchant sarcasm.

The eighteenth-century "plebian culture" that fueled this "moral economy" lacked the self-consciousness of working-class politics but was not a culture of deference and resignation. It was, Thompson writes, "a *rebellious* traditional culture"—traditional because it resisted the encroachment of the free market by invoking rights to grain provisioning that were rooted in age-old "customs"; and rebellious because it endured the gentry's paternalism "without the least illusions" and contested it whenever it felt that the gentry did not keep its part of the bargain.⁵

Peter Laslett's description of pre-industrial England as a "one-class society" was one of Thompson's chief targets.⁶ But he also repudiated the economic determinism of both Marxism and modernization theory, and aimed to bring culture into the fold of Marxist analysis. Whereas Marxist historians at the time sought to identify class conflict in pre-industrial settings, he endeavored to recover the lived experience of the laboring classes. His emphasis on the plebs' ability to enlist the support of the agrarian gentry who opposed Whig policies of commercialization revealed the existence of forms of reciprocity that defied any orthodox and monolithic concept of cultural hegemony.

Thompson was always forthcoming about the intimate connections between his scholarship and his political activism, including his critical stance toward the British Communist Party during the Cold War. By contrast, he rarely acknowledged that in the 1960s and '70s, he shared a topic—early modern popular culture—and a method—the toolbox of cultural anthropology—with influential historians of Continental Europe, notably Natalie Zemon Davis and Carlo Ginzburg. Much like Thompson, they searched for the voices of illiterate or semiliterate peasant men and women in a vast arsenal of written and visual sources (broadsides, proverbs, ballads, graphic depictions meant to shame a group or individual, anonymous letters indicting local lords, court records, and

more). Like Thompson, they sought to rescue those peasants from “the enormous condescension of posterity”—from the charges of atavism and irrationality to which contemporary elites and later folklorists had confined them.⁷ But unlike Thompson, they were more interested in synchronic analysis than in dating the transition to capitalist modernity.

By placing Thompson’s work on the eighteenth-century English moral economy of the poor in the context of these historiographical debates of the 1960s and ’70s, we can see that his real contribution is the skillful recreation of a lost oral culture of anonymous crowds. His critics at the time did not attack his approach to popular culture—an area in which he was truly innovative—but rather questioned the broader conceptual framework in which he inscribed it. They claimed that he posited too stark an opposition between an eighteenth-century “moral economy” and a nineteenth-century “political economy,” and that in so doing he romanticized the former and neglected centuries of disquisitions among medieval and early modern European thinkers about the social and political principles of market regulation. In his lengthy, and at times acerbic, 1991 response to critics, he defended his positions strenuously and dismissed all these legitimate claims. He conceded that “one cannot think of an economy without a market,” for surely the peasants who rioted against spikes in grain prices bought flour and bread at local markets, but he insisted that “the market” is first of all a metaphor, masking class interests and the socially uneven benefits brought by deregulation.⁸ In the end, he simply reiterated his belief in the validity of the dichotomy between moral and political economy for which he had been criticized, and continued to contrast the eighteenth-century English moral economy of the poor with Adam Smith’s ideal-type *laissez-faire*.⁹

Economic Justice in Early Modern Europe

Thompson’s analysis omits any discussion of the mechanisms and the authorities that regulated bread prices, and thus the principles and political choices that led to the consensus on which gentry and plebs could agree.¹⁰ This omission explains some of the reservations he elicited. Because he assumed that commercialization was pervasive in the English countryside, he did not inquire into the ways in which it operated on a day-to-day level. But if we wish to understand what economic justice meant in hierarchical societies of early modern Europe, we cannot pass over the examination of actual transactions, nor can we ignore the learned discourses and administrative policies that informed market regulation.

Historians of economic thought have dissected virtually every aspect of medieval and early modern theories of “just price,” a subject that those who study the provisioning of food supplies to large urban centers also broach, some more explicitly than others. The degree to which doctrines and realities of price formation converged is one of the matters of dispute, and varied enormously. For the purpose of this brief piece, we only need to accept that the governing principle of all debates and policies was what Thompson calls “paternalism,” namely, the assumption that social hierarchies were natural before they were codified by law. The consequences of this principle were visible both in the marketplace and in the realm of charity, and blurred the line between the two. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities, in both Catholic and Protestant regions, distinguished between more and less deserving poor. Charity did not aim solely to alleviate hunger, but also to preserve the

social order, as when preference was given to the so-called “shamefaced poor,” aristocrats who could no longer afford a lifestyle that conformed to their rank.¹¹

Legal status determined the economic rights of individuals and groups. Thus, a woman in fifteenth-century Florence was permitted neither to inherit nor to bequeath her dowry, a nobleman in sixteenth-century France lost his fiscal privileges if he engaged in commerce or manual labor, a Muslim captive in seventeenth-century Valencia was not entitled to payment for his or her work, and a Jewish man in eighteenth-century Metz could not join a craft guild. In recent decades, however, scholarship on early modern Europe has highlighted the margins that these norms left open to the initiative of some individuals and the finer demarcations that mattered to contemporaries. In so doing, they have also disaggregated and moved beyond Thompson’s concept of “the plebs.” In periods of economic expansion, groups connected to the fastest-growing sectors or workers employed in areas with labor scarcity leveraged their position in order to advance their status. Moreover, rank never elided individual characteristics altogether, even in status-based societies. Physical appearance as well as family connections mattered in setting a woman’s dowry; a merchant with an impeccable track-record could obtain a loan at lower interest than an outsider lacking a reputation; an able-bodied worker could extract a higher compensation than an older person.

The coexistence of status constraints and contractual freedom in premodern markets was not the outcome of the primacy of practical over normative concerns. Rather, it responded to the dual notion of Scholastic justice that permeated the entire system, in both Catholic and Protestant countries, and that natural law theories in the eighteenth century did not reject outright. By the dual notion of Scholastic justice, I mean the concepts of commutative and distributive justice inherited from Aristotle: commutative justice (*aequalitas*) conformed to a mathematical proportion that implied an equivalence between what was given and what was received in return, regardless of the status of those involved in the transaction; distributive justice (*aequitas*) assumed instead that there was a geometrical disproportion between social groups and that economic treatment depended on one’s place in society. These two principles map onto the modern concepts of contract and status: *aequalitas* was rooted in contractual freedom and commensurability, whereas *aequitas* took account of an individual’s legal status and extra-economic attributes.¹² Rather than mutually exclusive or part of a stadial historical evolution, both ethical norms influenced the setting of prices and wages, and the government actions aimed at implementing the common good. Two examples from early modern Italy elucidate this point.

Just Prices and Just Wages between Doctrine and Practice

To be an early modern state meant to manage bread provisions. The spiritual leader of a world-wide religion, the pope was also the ruler of a territorial state that extended over central Italy and whose capital, Rome, like any other European city, was recurrently threatened by food shortages. To feed the inhabitants of Rome, the papacy relied first and foremost on wheat grown by lay and ecclesiastical landowners in the Roman countryside. A host of producers and intermediaries carried wheat to the city. There, they had access to one of two marketplaces. Small producers and poor consumers were only admitted to a specific square in town, where peasants felt pressured to sell whatever little above

subsistence they had been able to grow to buyers whose limited resources kept prices low. By contrast, merchants carrying grains from large parcels of land to town could sell them in any neighborhood, mostly to bakers who then made bread products available to consumers. Together with other measures, including tax exemptions for the bakeries of certain monasteries and a state-run cereal distribution apparatus (*Annona*), the papal politics of bread aimed at more than guaranteeing subsistence for the entire population of Rome. They adhered to Scholastic notions of justice by segmenting the market so as to leave room for voluntary transactions but also to ensure that different products be offered at different prices to different social groups.¹³

Wages are less central than grain prices to Thompson's definition of the English moral economy, but he mentions "the erosion of half-free forms of labor, the decline of living-in, the final extinction of labor services and the advance of free, mobile wage labor" as further evidence that a profound transformation from a paternalistic to a free-market economy was underway during the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Thompson identifies three specific changes that guided this transformation: the rise in monetary rather than in-kind compensation, the rationalization of economic tasks assigned to wage laborers, and the expansion of those segments of the work force (urban artisans, textile workers, and small food sellers) whose relation to the market was not mediated by the patrician household. In fact, all three changes began long before the eighteenth century.

The mechanisms that governed wages in pre-industrial Europe are still poorly understood. Few quantitative series exist intact in the archives and scholars often use disparate data points or selected groups (with a preference for low-skilled male workers in construction) to assemble their series. Women's compensation is even less documented. These limitations have not deterred economic historians from measuring the purchasing power of the laboring classes, but for the most part they construct average wages per sector more than they examine the fluctuations of wage levels within the same sector.¹⁵

In a study of glassmaking in Murano, Venice, I pursued a different approach and called attention to the dispersion of wage levels among high-skilled laborers belonging to the same guild, and even to the same career step.¹⁶ The quantitative analysis of 456 masters' and journeymen's employment contracts registered between 1638 and 1692 reveals that compensation was stipulated individually for a ten-month period, that wages varied greatly from one worker to another (and more so among masters), that some masters and journeymen received the same wage, and, even more surprising, that a few journeymen were paid more than any master. All four facts are at odds with widely held ideas about the hardening of professional hierarchies within artisanal guilds after the sixteenth century and the presumed strict correlation between professional hierarchy and compensation level.

Craft guilds have been alternatively accused of capping wages or keeping them artificially high. Both claims are true in some instances, but neither warrants generalization. In high-skilled manufacturing such as Murano glass, individuals' productivity emerged as a key factor in the determination of wages. At the same time, individual negotiation was not the only means through which workers secured economic benefits. Masters had considerably more collective bargaining power than journeymen, both within the guild and vis-à-vis the state. After foreign competition in the 1660s began to dethrone Murano from its primacy in high-end crystal glass, master glassblowers obtained an unemployment subsidy for all licensed masters who were not hired at the beginning of each working

season. The subsidy was lower than the minimum observed wage but not at all insubstantial, and it was not granted to journeymen who failed to find work.

In a phase of economic contraction, neither the guild nor the state questioned workers' ability to stipulate their individual wages, but they intervened to reaffirm the status hierarchy between masters and journeymen. A dual notion of commutative and distributive justice undergirded this system, in which the former governed the formation of individual wages and the latter warranted the additional security offered to masters over journeymen.

The everyday administration of justice validated this settlement. Masters and journeymen were allowed to bring their grievances concerning the terms of their employment before the civil tribunal in Murano, where judges consistently enforced masters' demands for their unemployment subsidy and punished those journeymen who left their workplace. These rulings conformed to seventeenth-century jurisprudence, which recognized that wages had to reflect both a worker's skills and his rank, but did not give judges the right to establish a "just wage" that differed from the amount agreed upon voluntarily by a worker and his employer.¹⁷

It is impossible to determine whether the balancing act between individual negotiations and collective bargaining was satisfactory to all those involved to the point of preventing revolts, but it is a fact that the Republic of Venice enjoyed unparalleled social peace, and glassworkers never rioted.¹⁸ It is also plausible to imagine that Thompson would describe Murano guild members as "labor aristocracy" and not assimilate them to the rural crowds he studied, even if his "plebs" in fact encompassed a wide spectrum of working people whose internal economic stratification he rarely addressed.¹⁹ Finally, it is legitimate to wonder whether the Second Scholastic moral philosophy shaped Roman and Venetian regimes of paternalism more than it influenced the English one. Here, suffice it to say that eighteenth-century natural law theories challenged some Scholastic notions of consent and coercion but not the duality of commutative and distributive justice. At any rate, social historians have demonstrated that bargaining for wages long preceded eighteenth-century natural law theories.²⁰

So far, I have spoken of people in gender-neutral terms or of workers as men.²¹ Women were almost universally forbidden from joining artisanal guilds, though not from working for a wage. They did not participate in any phase of Murano glass production (which consisted of luxury finished goods and semifinished products destined for the workshops located in Venice), but played a significant role in the making of downstream goods in the city. In fact, they dominated the final stages of all glass bead manufacturing. Their labor was acknowledged and exploited by the urban guilds, which banned women from entering the formal apprenticeship system that allowed men to progress in their career and thus relegated most of them to what historian Olwen Hufton calls "an economy of makeshifts."²²

Women's remunerations are particularly hard to come by in surviving records, but ample evidence shows that Venetian guild masters relied on large pools of skilled yet underpaid women. There was nothing exceptional about this gendered division of labor. Across Europe, especially in the textile sector, women acquired informal training and found employment in disadvantageous conditions.²³ Nor were women the only group to be relegated to this underprotected labor market. Venetian glass mirrors, for example, were

a specialty of immigrant men hailing from the region of Friuli, who were equally deprived of guild assistance. In other words, in Venice as elsewhere, women, immigrants as well as Jews (baptism was a prerequisite for guild membership in both Protestant and Catholic areas) comprised a sizable fraction of the labor force but suffered additional exploitation in the name of distributive justice. Because of the scattered nature of wage data, however, it is particularly difficult to ascertain whether and how individual skills mattered to the compensation levels of those workers who did not belong to a guild.

Conclusion

The plural in my title—moral economies—displaces Thompson’s binary construction that pits early modern paternalism against nineteenth-century free markets and at the same time underlines the dual logic of economic justice that prevailed in early modern Europe. These critiques are interrelated and bear on contemporary debates about liberalism and inequality.

When fending off criticism in 1991, Thompson enlisted the work of Amartya Sen to prove his point that the competitive price mechanism does not ensure a fair allocation of food staples during famines, but he stopped short of embracing the Indian economist’s broader conclusions. While Sen stresses that famines are not the result of environmental catastrophe so much as political choices, he also insists that democratic governments are more effective than both colonial rulers and early modern crowds at curbing food insecurity. This is why, he maintains, people living in democratic countries do not die of hunger en masse.²⁴ Sen is far more sensitive than most economists to structural discrimination.²⁵ But he reasons from a widely held consensus among social scientists: there exists not one type of capitalism; all free-market economies involve regulation, which is why one role of economic theory is to show policy makers the potential redistributive outcomes of different proposals.

Thompson, by contrast, rejects this consensus, and because he defines the market as a metaphor that couches class interests in the seemingly impartial vision of a Smithian division of labor, he associates the market in eighteenth-century England solely with Whig proto-capitalist interests. This definition leads him to center his analysis of the eighteenth-century moral economy on bread riots at the expense of any consideration of how large-scale merchants, aristocratic landowners, and poor consumers could agree on some price levels and not others, at least in times of regular grain supplies.

A closer examination of how grain and labor markets worked in early modern Italy suggests that those markets achieved a fragile compromise between elements of status and elements of contract, at least for the most protected categories of goods and workers. I believe that by insisting on this fragile compromise we come closer to an accurate description of how markets worked in societies of order in prerevolutionary Europe than by drawing from Thompson’s concept of the moral economy.

This emphasis on the coexistence of status and contract in premodern markets also helps us to understand their multifaceted legacy, because it shows that a version of democracies’ most vexing problem—how to balance meritocracy with social justice—already existed in the pre-industrial period. The disadvantages that most women, descendants of enslaved Africans, immigrants from postcolonial countries, and the poor experience in today’s Western liberal democracies are the most direct vestige of the historical discrimination to which these groups have been subjected for centuries. But

manifestations of the fragile compromise between elements of status and meritocracy that predates modern capitalism are everywhere around us. To cite just one example, the 9/11 Compensation Fund computed economic loss “with reference to the future earnings potential of the victim” (earnings that included income, pension benefits, stock options, and more) and adopted a particular methodology to calculate “a presumed economic loss figure for victims with incomes that exceeded the 98th percentile.”²⁶ Even if the threat of lawsuits rather than a legally sanctioned right to economic privileges underpins this and other insurance compensation schemes, the arrangement speaks to the complicated mixture of equality, merit, and entitlement with which liberal democracies continue to struggle.

Early modern institutions that oversaw market operations enacted redistributive measures that valued the existence of pre-assigned social hierarchies. But this paternalism did not suppress individuality or consent in market negotiations. This complex interplay of contractual freedom and status-bound inequality ought to be at the center of our scholarly agenda if we are to understand the moral economies of the past and remedy the injustices in those of the present.

NOTES

I wish to thank Jeremy Adelman and Samuel Moyn for the opportunity to engage with an audience that rarely includes historians of premodern Europe, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments. At various stages, my thinking on this subject has been enriched by conversations with Carolyn J. Dean, Natalie Zemon Davis, Martha Howell, Naomi Lamoreaux, Giovanni Levi, Emma Rothschild, Andrew Sartori, and Judith Walkowitz. Given the nature of this essay, I limit my bibliographical references to the essential.

1. Joseph Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1054.
2. Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020, esp. 63). Gender is my addition to the disenfranchising characteristics listed by Piketty.
3. E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971): 76–136, reprinted in and cited from his *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993), 253. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).
4. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 188.
5. E. P. Thompson, “Introduction: Customs and Culture,” in Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 9. E. P. Thompson, “Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture,” *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 382–405, reprinted as “The Patricians and the Plebs” in Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 15–96, at 85.
6. “One-class society” is how Peter Laslett defined pre-industrial England in 1965 and many times thereafter: Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost: Further Expanded*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner’s Sons 1984), esp. 22–31. Both Christopher Hill and Thompson took him to task for the conservative nature of such characterization. Christopher Hill, “A One Class Society?” in *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. Christopher Hill (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), 205–18; E. P. Thompson, “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?” *Social History*, 3, no. 2 (May 1978): 133–75.
7. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 12. See also “Rough Music and Charivari: Letters Between Natalie Zemon Davis and Edward Thompson, 1970–1972,” *Past and Present* 235, no. 1 (May 2017): 243–62; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983 [Italian orig. 1973]); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980 [Italian orig. 1976]). When Thompson revised his 1972 French article on the rituals occasioned by sexual and marital unions that threatened the unwritten rules of gender and age balance in early modern communities, he excised the engaged discussion with Davis’s work on the same subject and added two references to Ginzburg: E. P. Thompson, “‘Rough Music’: Le Charivari anglais,” *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 27, no. 2 (March–April 1972): 285–312; E. P. Thompson, “Rough Music Reconsidered,” *Folklore* 103, no. 1 (1992): 3–26. An expanded version of the latter appears as a chapter titled “Rough Music” in *Customs in Common*, 467–538.
8. E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy Reviewed,” in Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 304.
9. Since the appearance of Thompson’s work, a revisionist portrait of Smith’s views has gained footing among historians of economic thought, especially those who bring his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to bear on the reading of *The Wealth of Nations*. See, in particular, Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

10. On the unwritten rules governing the allocation of scarce resources aside from what the law and judges might have said, see also E. P. Thompson, "Custom, Law and Common Right," in his *Customs in Common*, 97–184. A more sustained, if critical engagement with the written law informs E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).

11. Brian Pullan, "Catholics, Protestants, and the Poor in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 441–56, esp. 446.

12. For a succinct introduction to the adaptations of Aristotle and Aquinas' conceptions of justice to the new economic conditions of sixteenth-century Europe, see Cecilia Font de Villanueva, "The School of Salamanca: Some Thoughts on the Subject of Justice," in *Humanism and Religion in the History of Economic Thought*, ed. Daniela Fernanda Parisi and Stefano Solarì (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010), 96–111. Although reductivist, for our purposes, we can accept the synthesis of Second Scholasticism according to which commutative justice aligned with private transactions and distributive justice with the state: John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 185–86. More generally, see Giovanni Levi, "Aequitas vs. Fairness: Reciprocità ed equità fià età moderna ed età contemporanea," *Rivista di storia economica* 19, no. 2 (2003): 195–203.

13. Monica Martinat, *Le juste marché: Le système annonnaire romain aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2004).

14. E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 36.

15. In recent years, Robert C. Allen's thesis that high wages were a primary cause of the technological innovations that spurred the British industrial revolution has generated heated debates among economic historians about his methods of calculating the average male wage and his omission of women's and children's wages, which were significantly lower than men's. Robert C. Allen, "The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War," *Explorations in Economic History* 38, no. 4 (October 2001): 411–47; Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jane Humphries, "The Lure of Aggregates and the Pitfalls of the Patriarchal Perspective: A Critique of the High Wage Economy Interpretation of the British Industrial Revolution," *Economic History Review* 66, no. 3 (August 2013): 693–714; Jane Humphries and Benjamin Schneider, "Spinning the Industrial Revolution," *Economic History Review* 72, no. 1 (February 2019): 126–55.

16. The following paragraphs summarize arguments and examples illustrated in Francesca Trivellato, "Salaires et justice dans les corporations vénitienes au 17^e siècle: Le cas des manufactures de verre," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 54, no. 1 (January–February 1999): 245–73; and Francesca Trivellato, *Fondamenta dei vetrai: Lavoro, tecnologia e mercato a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Rome: Donzelli, 2000).

17. See also Ed S. Noell, "Bargaining, Consent and the Just Wage in the Sources of Scholastic Economic Thought," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 20, no. 4 (December 1998): 467–78.

18. The one known instance of unrest in early modern Murano was small in scale and directed against political authorities rather than employers: Claire Judde de Larivière, *The Revolt of Snowballs: A Microhistory*, trans. Thomas V. Cohen (London: Routledge, 2018 [French orig. 2014]).

19. Thompson uses the expression "labor aristocracy" in *The Making of the English Working Class*, 237.

20. Among the earliest to do so was Bronislaw Geremek, *Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIII–XV siècles: Étude sur le marché de la main-d'œuvre au Moyen Âge*, trans. Anna Posner and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1968 [Polish orig. 1962]), esp. 170. Thirty years later, acknowledging his debt to Thompson but reaching different conclusions from him, Michael Sonenscher argued that journeymen invoked natural law rather than customs in their recourse to civil courts in eighteenth-century France; Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xxiv.

21. For a piercing critique of Thompson's representations of women, see Joan W. Scott, "Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*," in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 68–90.

22. Olwen H. Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth Century France 1750–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

23. Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

24. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). In a footnote (*Customs in Common*, 299n1), Thompson acknowledges Sen's emphasis on the difference between democratic and nondemocratic political regimes in handling subsistence crises, but treats that insight as incidental. What he takes (correctly but incompletely) from Sen is that "given a shortfall in harvest, the way in which the supply is distributed between social groups is decidedly man-made" (298). When he suggests that "the comparative absence of riot in nineteenth-century Ireland and India was one factor (among others) which allowed dearth to pass into famine" (302), Thompson implies only half-jokingly that riots are as effective as institutional action in redirecting food allocation, a point with which Sen would disagree because he values protests in democracies more than riots in colonial empires.

25. Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

26. *Final Report of the Special Master for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund of 2001*, vol. 1, 28, 35, <https://pca-cpa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/01/September-11-Victim-Compensation-Fund-Final-Report-Volume-1-1.pdf>.