

"To each according to ability":
Saint-Simon on equality of opportunity

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My presentation will draw on the attached two papers:

pp. 2-16:

“To or From Each according to What?

Biblical Origins and Development of Early Socialist Slogans”

This is a joint paper with Adrien Lutz. In particular section 3

“To each according to his ability” is relevant.

pp. 17-31:

“The Difference Principle and the Distribution of Education and
Resources *versus* the Redistribution of Revenues”

This is a joint working paper with Caleb South with input from
Marc Fleurbaey. It is an attempt to spell out a model inspired
by Saint-Simon’s slogan “To each according to his ability”. It is
very much early work.

Comments are much appreciated.

To or From Each according to What? Biblical Origins and Development of Early Socialist Slogans

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1. Three Slogans

Marx writes in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* in 1875 that the Communist society can write the following slogan on its flag: “From each according to his abilities; To each according to his needs”. There are earlier versions of the same slogan in Louis Blanc in 1848, Étienne Cabet in 1845, and of the second half of the slogan in Constantin Pecqueur in 1842.¹

Before that there were versions of a different slogan in the early socialist literature, viz. “To each according to his ability; To each according to his works”. We find versions of this slogan in the writings of the followers of Saint-Simon in the late 1820s, the 1830s, and up to Constantin Pecqueur in 1842.²

¹ In Marx (1875a: 21) we find “Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen!” in the *Kritik des Gothaer Programms*, which was written in May 1875 by Marx and first published in Marx (1890-91: 567). But the slogan is much older than 1875. Blanc’s version is in *Le catéchisme des socialistes*: “De chacun selon ses facultés, à chacun selon ses besoins.” (1849a: 19) A variant also occurs in Blanc’s political discourses in April 1848 in which he argues: “que chacun doit travailler selon ses aptitudes et ses forces, que chacun doit consommer selon ses besoins.” (Discourse of April 3rd 1848 in Blanc 1849b: 72) and close variants (Discourses of April 3rd in Blanc 1849b: 75 and of April 29th 1848 in De Girardin 1849: 199). Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* (1840) was first published in England under a pseudonym, allegedly as a translation into the French of a fictional English travel report. On the front cover of the 1845 edition (but not in the 1840 or 1842 editions): “A chacun suivant ses besoins” and “De chacun suivant ses forces.” This is the earliest occurrence of the complete slogan that we have been able to locate. As early as 1842, we find the second half of the slogan in Pecqueur’s *Théorie nouvelle d’économie sociale et politique*. He distinguishes between (i) ranking; (ii) remuneration and (iii) consumption and the distribution of riches. With respect to the last category, he writes: “... en ce qui regarde la CONSOMMATION et la REPARTITION des RICHESSES, [la formule] est: *A chacun tout-à-la-fois selon ses goûts ou ses besoins, et selon ses moyens, ses ressources exprimés et mesurés par la MONNAIE qu’il possède.*” (1842: 675).

² We find the Saint-Simonian slogan in the introduction of the *Doctrines de Saint-Simon*: “à chacun suivant sa capacité, à chaque capacité suivant ses œuvres” (Bazard et al.,

Skipping one century forward we see yet another slogan in Stalin’s Constitution in 1936, which combines the first part of the later slogan with the second part of the earlier slogan, substituting the singular “work” for “works”: “From each according to his ability, To each according to his work.”³

Hence, we distinguish between three slogans, with the last one being somewhat of a hybrid version of the first two. Each slogan does not precisely occur word for word in the French, the German and the Russian as it is expressed in Table 1, but we individuate slogans by their content and there can be multiple versions of the same slogan.

	Authors	Part One	Part Two
Slogan 1	Saint-Simonians, Pecqueur [1825-1842]	To each according to his abilities	To each according to his works
Slogan 2	Cabet, Blanc, Pecqueur, Marx [1842-1875]	From each according to his ability	To each according to his needs
Slogan 3	Stalin’s Soviet Constitution [1936]	From each according to his ability	To each according to his work

Table 1. Three Slogans

This series of slogans raises many questions. First, what is the origin of each part of each slogan? Second, what motivates the shift from “To each according to ability” to “From each according to ability”? Third, what motivates the shift from “To each according to *works*” to “To each according to *needs*”? Fourth, how can we progress towards the ideal of “To each according to *needs*”? And finally, what is

1829: xxvii) and as an epitaph on the front cover of the Saint-Simonian journal *L’Organisateur* (1830): “A chacun selon sa capacité, à chaque capacité selon ses œuvres”. This epitaph changes in 1832: “A chacun selon sa vocation. A chacun selon ses œuvres.” In 1842, Pecqueur writes with respect to (i) ranking and (ii) remuneration: “Ainsi, en ce qui regarde le CLASSEMENT, la formule est: *A chacun selon sa force relative, ou sa place dans le concours universel.* [New Paragraph] En ce qui concerne la RETRIBUTION, la formule est: *A chacun selon sa fonction et sa conduite dans cette fonction.*” We consider this to be a version of the Saint-Simonian slogan, taking “conduite dans cette fonction” to be similar in meaning to “works.” Hence, with Pecqueur in 1842, we find a version of the Saint-Simonian slogan combined with a version of the second part of the Cabet-Blanc-Marx slogan.

³ This slogan is part of the English translation of the *Constitution* (December 1936) and published in 1938 in the USSR. We find it at the end of the first chapter entitled “The organization of Soviet society” following Art. 12: The principle applied in the U.S.S.R. is that of socialism: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.” (1936 Constitution of the USSR).

the difference between “To each according to *works*” and “To each according to *work*”?

2. Origins

The first slogan was coined by Saint-Simonians and the second slogan roughly a decade later by Cabet in an epitaph and by Blanc in writings and speeches. The writings of these early French socialists contained many religious references and was driven by a religious vision. The Saint-Simonian Gustav D'Eichtal goes as far as to say that with Saint-Simon's social theory “God's reign has arrived on earth” (Bazard et al., 1829: 11) and Saint-Simon's last book, which lays out his views on social justice, was titled *Le Nouveau Christianisme* (1825). Hence it is reasonable to suspect biblical sources as inspiration. We can hardly claim religious fervour for Stalin, but also the third slogan builds on a particular biblical passage which he takes over from a letter to the workers of Petrograd entitled “On the Famine” by Lenin.⁴

To back up origins, we will look at actual wordings in the French bible translations available to the Saint-Simonians, Cabet and Blanc at the time. But it is no less important to establish that there is an affinity in meaning – the biblical passage should be such that it could reasonably be taken to promote an ideal that is close to the ideal that the authors of the slogan wish to promote. In table 2, we list four of the parts of the slogans and we link each to a corresponding phrase in the bible (English Standard Version except when otherwise indicated).

⁴ Lenin (1918: 391–2).

To each according to his abilities	Matthew 25:15	To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability . Then he went away.
To each according to his works	Romans 2:6	He will render to each one according to his works :
From each according to his ability	Acts 11:29	So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability , to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.
To each according to his needs	Acts 4:35	34. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35. and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need .

Table 2. Biblical Origins of Constitutive Parts of the Slogans

Matthew 25:15 is a phrase in the Parable of the Talents. A man gives his three servants respectively five, two and one bag of gold and takes off. When he returns the servant with five bags has earned five more bags, the one with two bags has earned two more, but the one with one bag has buried the one bag and dug it back up to return to the master, saying that he was afraid to lose it. The former two servants are praised and the latter is dismissed.⁵

Romans 2:6 is the oft quoted passage in support of the Catholic Doctrine of Works. God will reward people for their good deeds on Judgment Day.⁶

Acts 11:29 is about charity. Peter reports that the prophet Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted a severe famine. The congregation of the Church of Antioch sent relief to the people of Judea.⁷

⁵ Matthew 25:15 is translated as “selon la capacité différente de chacun d’eux” in the Lemaistre de Sacy translation (1667, vol. 1: 100) and “a chacun selon sa capacité” in the Bausobre et Lenfant translation (1719, vol. 1: 109), which matches the quotes in the Saint-Simonians.

⁶ Romans 2:6 is translated as “selon ses œuvres” in Lemaistre de Sacy (1667, vol. 1: 12) and in Bausobre et Lenfant (1719, vol. 2: 20).

⁷ Acts 11:29 is translated as “selon ses forces” in Bausobre et Lenfant (1719, vol. 1: 428) as we find it in Pecqueur (1842: 674) and “selon son pouvoir” in Lemaistre de Sacy (1667, vol. 2: 468).

Acts 4:35 describes early Christian communities. New members would sell off goods and the proceeds from the sale would be divided to meet needs.⁸

There are two additional biblical references in the source materials that cast some light on the slogans.

Blanc (1849a: 8–9), in his discussion of “from each according to his ability”, quotes Mark 10:44 (“and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all”) and illustrates this with a story that the stronger one of two neighbours should carry more weight.

Article 12 of The Soviet Constitution states: “In the U.S.S.R. work is a duty and a matter of honor for every able-bodied citizen, in accordance with the principle: ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat.’” The phrase “He who does not work, neither shall he eat” is the contrapositive of “[food] to each according to work”. Lenin (1918: 391–92) quotes the phrase in “On the Famine” (without making the biblical reference) and argues that the link between work and eating is both self-evident and at the core of socialism. The phrase is taken from 2 Thessalonians 3:10 which is part of a passage in which Paul tells fellow believers to shun the idle and to set an example by working for their food.

From each according to his ability	Mark 10:44	and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all ⁹	Quoted in Blanc
To each according to his work	2 Thessalonians 3:10	For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.	Phrase in the Soviet Constitution

Table 4. Other Biblical References

Finally, Blanc explicitly attributes divine authorship for the second slogan: “Equality is but proportionality, and will not genuinely exist until each WILL PRODUCE ACCORDING TO HIS FACULTIES AND CONSUME ACCORDING TO HIS NEEDS, according to the law, which is, as it were, written by God himself into the¹⁰ [social] organisation.” (1850: 72 [Capital letters in original]).

3. “To each according to his ability”

⁸ Acts 4:35 is translated “à chacun ce qui lui étoit nécessaire” in Bausobre et Lenfant (1719, vol. 1, p. 400) and as “selon qu’il en avoit besoin” in Lemaistre de Sacy (1667, vol. 2: 436).

⁹ We use the American Standard Version here because it is closer to Blanc’s rendering of the text in French.

¹⁰ The text actually states “son organisation sociale” which can both be rendered as “God’s social organisation” or as “the law’s social organisation.”

The Saint-Simonians are foremost opposed to any form of inheritance. In the France of Saint-Simon's time, nobility was being handed wealth and privileges by birth and Saint-Simon accused them of being idle and not putting this wealth and privileges to work for the good of society. The lottery of birth leaves it to chance who will be assigned functions and this is to the detriment of the poor. (Bazard, et al., 1830: 15–42)

The Saint-Simonians want to put the state in charge of offering “the means of production, an education, functions in line with his vocation, and retribution in line with his works” (Anonymous 1831) so that individuals will be able to contribute to the social good and the state will discharge of this function through the banks. They do not approve of communal property or communal ownership of means of production. Rather, functions controlling the requisite means of production must be placed in the right hands so as to advance the social good. And it is these functions and means of production that need to be apportioned to people in accordance with their ability and as the outcome of an open competition.¹¹

Rawls' (1971: Section 12) Fair Equality of Opportunity clause in the Equality Principle states that offices and positions should be open to talents under fair equality of opportunity. Fair equality of opportunity stipulates that, following Arneson (1999: 77), given equal native ability and equal ambition people should have an equal chance to obtain these positions. This requirement squares with the Saint-Simonian programme. For Saint-Simonians, it is not sufficient that functions should be formally open to all, but the state should provide the opportunities required to take up these functions. Putting the banks in charge of redistributing the wealth of the deceased addresses this concern. The state should provide people with education and the means of production so that they can take up the positions that permit them to realise their native abilities given their level of ambition.

Offices and positions open to all is already inscribed in the last sentence of Article VI of the *Déclaration du Droit de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789: “All titles, positions and public employments are equally admissible to all citizens, who are equal in the eyes [of the Law], according to their ability and without distinction other than the distinction between their virtues and their talents.”

Aside from offices and positions open to talent under fair equality of opportunity, we also find Rawls's difference principle, viz. “Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are (...) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged,” (1971: 83) in Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonians. Saint-Simon (1825: 3185) considers what the objective should be of a social arrangement: There is a single principle given from God to men and this is to organise society so that it will be “most advantageous to the greatest numbers.” Hence it seems as if Saint-Simon is connecting to the utilitarian tradition, aiming for the greatest happiness of (or for) the greatest number, as we find it in Hutcheson (1729: 180) or Bentham (1843:

¹¹ Bazard, et al., 1830 discuss the role of banks (1830: 112–39) and property (1830:139–169).

142). But this is not true to the text. Rather, Saint-Simon (1825: 3205) identifies a class of people who are the poorest and says that it is this class of people which is everywhere the most numerous and we should be working towards improving the conditions of this class. The Saint-Simonians publication *Le Globe* (1830–32) has the epitaph: “All social institutions should aim to improve the moral, physical and intellectual situation of the most numerous and poorest class.”

Saint-Simon considers two alternative arrangements. There is the current arrangement with an idle nobility inheriting top functions. This he rejects because it leaves the poor destitute: First, the poor cannot access these positions and second the production is too limited with an idle nobility at the wheel. Saint Simon (1821: 2462) also considers an arrangement in which leading positions are assigned on a rotating basis. This he says is “Turkish-style Equality” contrasting it with “Industrial Equality,” which follows his slogan. He rejects Turkish-style Equality because it also leaves matters to chance and fails to connect social functions with the ability to contribute to the social good.

The Matthew 25:15 passage squares well with this interpretation. The Master offers his servants different amounts of money because he knows that they have different abilities – one can handle greater investments than the other. The Greek unit of money is *τάλαντον* and is translated as ‘talent’ in some bible translations. The master gives them differential amounts of talents because he knows the servants to have differential abilities to handle the money. One can also think of it as an allegory of God providing differential natural abilities and expecting people to treat these natural abilities as opportunities to build on. So there is a close connection between “talent” and “natural ability” and already in the fifteenth century the word “talent” has come to mean natural ability in English based on Matthew 25:15.¹²

4. “To each according to works”

Saint-Simon is not an egalitarian when it comes to social status or remuneration. Inequalities will remain because people bring different abilities and levels of ambition into the association. Now both social status and benefits should be proportional to achievements which will lead to inequalities. It would be absurd, says Saint-Simon, to deny such inequalities.

In earlier writings Saint-Simon defends proportionality both to ‘*mise*’ or ‘*mise sociale*’ as well as to capacities. (Saint-Simon 1821: 2464 and 1819–20: 2188) The ‘*mise*’ is the stake that a gambler puts into the game. Benefits should be proportional to this social stake. This social stake is the utility that a person generates through his resources – both his human resources (ability and effort) and his financial resources (capital).

¹² In the OED, entry III for “talent” is: mental endowment; natural ability [from the parable of the talents, Matthew XXV: 14–30 etc.] with a first occurrence in the English language in this meaning dating back to 1430.

The Saint-Simonians introduce the slogan in the following form: “To each ability according to his works” (Bazard et al. 1830: xxvii, xxviii, 11). We also find: “Each should be (...) remunerated according to his works.” (Bazard et al. 1830: 111) And at one junction there is mention of proportionality to “personal merit.” (Bazard et al. 1830: 89)

The religious connection to God’s reward according to works is overly clear. The Saint-Simonians compare “celestial punishments and compensations ... according to works” with the retributions within our “terrestrial hierarchy” which should not be “according to birth” but “according to ability and personal merit”. (Bazard et al. 1830: 89)

What Saint-Simon wants is remuneration proportional to one’s contribution to social good. The Saint-Simonians and later writers will try to delineate what goes into this contribution in ways that are congruent with Saint-Simon’s own thought. Fourier bases remuneration on work, capital and talent with a division key of 5/12th for labour, 4/12th for capital, and 3/12th for talent (Fourier 1846: 303–23). Similarly, in Pecqueur, a worker’s remuneration should be “according to his function and his conduct within this function,” whereas functions are assigned on grounds of “relative power and one’s placement in the *concoirs universel*” (which is an exam that will determine their function in society). (1842: 675)

We should not expect a clear algorithm from the early 19th century thinkers about how to measure contribution to the social good – a question which is still very much with us. They found some mixture of talent, ambition, effort, work, and capital to be relevant. The capital could be capital acquired as remuneration on grounds of earlier contributions to the social good. It could also be capital acquired through inheritance in the transitional stage. The Saint-Simonians rejected the violence of the French revolution and favoured gradual change. They did not favour confiscation of wealth and even the abolition of inheritance should be introduced gradually. Hence present financial capital acquired through inheritance would stand and could be part of one’s social stake.

5. “From each according to ability”

We find the first occurrence of “From each according to ability” as an epitaph on the 3-th edition of Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* (1845 (first edition 1840)). The precise text of the epitaph is “from each according to his powers” (*de chacun suivant ses forces*) and is preceded by “First Duty: To Work”. Cabet’s book is a social allegory of a community of the imaginary country of *Icarie* whose inhabitants practice a cooperative economic system based on collective ownership. It was the inspiration for a number of Icarian communities that were founded in the US with variable though typically short-lived success.

A few years later Blanc uses the phrase “from each according to his faculties” (*de chacun selon ses facultés*) in his *Catéchisme des socialistes* (1849a: 19) and in *Plus de Girondins* (1851: 92). This was what was expected from the workers in the government-owned social workshops (*ateliers*).

And then Marx “each according to his abilities” (*Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten*)¹³ proposes it as a slogan on the flag of a Communist society in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875b: 10).

As mentioned earlier, Blanc provides a moral justification for the principle basing it both in scripture (Mark 10: 44) and illustrates it with the analogy that the stronger neighbour should carry more. Blanc (1849a: 8) also writes “who can do the most, must do the most” (*qui peut le plus doit le plus*) which is reminiscent of Luke 12:48: “Everyone to whom much was given, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.” The principle expresses an emphasis on social responsibility.

Cabet picks up this idea in *Le vrai Christianisme* and he expounds on the Christian emphasis on the *good will*: “Thus, for Jesus, duties are proportional to capacity; each must do, and the more one can do or give, the more one should give or do.” (1846: 153) He bases this interpretation on Mark 12: 40 and Books of Wisdom 6: 9-10 which both play on the theme that greater punishments await more powerful people for wrongdoings.¹⁴

The actual phrasing “from each according to his abilities” is closest to Acts 11:29. This passage also expresses the idea that each should contribute to charity what they can for the benefit of the social good.

¹³ Marx uses a nominative for “each” (*jeder*). This is translated into the French as “de chacun” (1875c: 32) and into the English as “from each.” (1875b: 10). One might object that this is not quite correct, because (i) what is at stake is the distinction between “to each” in the first slogan and “from each” in the second slogan of Table 1 and (ii) Marx could have clearly written “from each” (*von jedem*) in the German, but he did not. However, we do think that “from each” is a reasonable translation of the nominative “*jeder*” within this context, both on hermeneutic and linguistic grounds. First, the Saint-Simonian interpretation of “to each” makes no sense given the preceding section in which Marx praises the joys of work in a Communist economy, and second, if Marx had wanted to write “to each” he would have used the dative “*jedem*” as he did in the second phrase “to each according to need”.

¹⁴ Cabet’s rendering of the texts is not quite accurate. Mark 12:40 states: “[The scribes] will receive greater condemnation.” Cabet renders the quote as: “A Pharisean, says [Jesus], a doctor of Law, who sins against the Law, will be more harshly condemned.” The translation freely integrates and adds to materials from Mark 12:38 and 12:40 as found in Lemaistre de Sacy: 1667: 176–7. As to the Books of Wisdom, Cabet quotes from *La Sagesse* 6: “9. Mais les plus grands sont menacés des plus grands supplices. 10. C’est donc à vous, ô rois, que j’adresse ces discours, afin que vous appreniez la sagesse (...)” (Lemaistre de Sacy: 1846: 478) The passage maps onto Wisdom of Solomon “6:8 But a sore trial shall come upon the mighty. 6:9 Unto you therefore, O kings, do I speak, that ye may learn wisdom (...)” (King James)

What brings about the shift from “To each according to ability” to “From each according to ability”? As long as the social organisation is organized around rank and private property, each must be offered the proper rank and private property in order to have the opportunity to contribute to the social good. But once we abolish rank and private property there is no need any more to insist that the right assignments are made *to* the right people. No rank or private property needs to be assigned anymore. All we need to do is insist on the moral principle that people will contribute in accordance with their capacities. Cabet’s Communist society is inspired by a Christian ideal of social equality. And also Blanc resists social status, following his quote of Mark 10: 44, which contains Jesus’ intervention in a quibble between the apostles about who is more important. Blanc does acknowledge that there needs to be leadership in the social workshop (1839: 24). Hence functions will still need to be assigned *to* people but this assignment is no longer the “*to*” of assignments of entitlements which is what is expressed in the Saint-Simonian phrase.

6. “To each according to needs” and “To each according to work”

Both in Blanc and in Marx remuneration according to needs is taken up as an ideal for the future communist society, but as off now, they say, we should strive for remuneration according to work, which squares with the phrase in the Soviet constitution.

Blanc’s discussion of remuneration is complicated. To make sense of the various texts, we distinguish between four stages.

The *first stage* is the non-cooperative mode of production in which wages are presumably determined by the labour relations in France at the time and to institute wage equality under these conditions would be an incentive for idleness. (1850: 75)

Blanc (1839: 23) discusses what remuneration should be like in the social workshops. He starts off by saying that the difference in salaries should be on a gradient as a function of the hierarchy of functions, with the subsistence minimum as a lower bound. However, a few lines below this passage, he writes that the part of the revenues earmarked for remuneration should be divided in *equal portions* (1839: 24). When he is questioned about this in a review of his work, he responds as follows. (1841:97–173).¹⁵

Due to the false education that the masses have received about what constitutes fair remuneration, the best we can do at first is to let wages be in line with a ranking of functions. To do otherwise would be “too much of a shock.” (1841: 109) This is our *second stage*.

¹⁵ On this point, see particularly 1841: 108–110 (see also 1844: 364–65 and 1850: 72–77).

Only in a *third stage*, we can move to wage equality. Blanc (1849a: 9) says that equal wages serve to avoid jealousy and hatred between workers. Wage equality should also be understood in terms of purchasing power parity, since “the conditions of the material life are not the same at all points in France.” (1849a: 53)

Finally, in a *fourth stage*, we should move to a system in which remuneration can satisfy needs as much as possible. A new education is meant to change ideas and morals in this respect and people will come to acknowledge the limits of their needs “indicated by nature and assigned by morals.” (1849b: 72) Hence they will no longer proclaim to have excessive needs.

Blanc is explicit that we cannot move to a system of remuneration on grounds of needs today. Robert Owen, Blanc (1839: 22) writes, is not a “practical reformer” because he wanted to move to a remuneration according to needs, “in a society in which this repartition is not even based on services [rendered]”. Hence, Owen’s mistake seems to be that he wishes to jump from stage one to stage four, without passing through stage two and three. “[...] history,” Blanc says, “is not made in one day.” (1849b: 72)

Marx also envisions that in the Communist Society, the distribution should be “according to needs.” But he spells out three reasons why the time is not ripe for this yet (1875b: 10). To distribute according to needs the following three conditions need to be fulfilled.

First, we should abandon labour relations of subordination that are grounded on the idea that mental labour is superior to manual labour. Blanc’s argument as to why remuneration should be proportional to function in the second stage is a psychological version of this: We currently think in terms of remuneration as an incentive and in terms of differential merit attached to a hierarchy of functions and our thinking in this regard needs to shift (1839: 23).

Second, labour should acquire a different meaning, viz. it should come to have intrinsic value rather than instrumental value. Blanc (1850: 73–4) also argues against labour as a mere means to increase our personal consumption. But for Marx, the alternative is that labour acquires intrinsic meaning, whereas for Blanc, the alternative is that we come to see labour as a means to serve our community.

Third, through an all-round education, labour should have greater productive power so that there will be an abundance of goods. Marx does not tell us why abundance of goods would enable the distribution according to needs. We can see two responses. First, it makes it possible to satisfy everyone’s needs. And second, if there is no scarcity, then there is less reason for envy towards a person who receives more. Note that in Blanc (1849b: 72), the problem of scarcity is tackled differently: We should educate people to recognize the limits of their needs.

There is a marked difference between Blanc and Marx in their determination what stands in the way of “to each according to needs.” For Blanc, we should change the

person through education: People should be taught not to attach differential value to functions, to think of their labour as service to the community (1849a: 9), and to reassess the limits of their needs. For Marx we should change the world: Subordination in labour relations needs to be abolished, the nature of work should be non-alienating which will make it intrinsically rewarding, and the production needs to be increased by tapping into our human resources to create abundance.

How should we reward labour in the transitional phase for Marx? Marx argues that we should reward people for their labour and that the relevant measure is an aggregative function of the intensity and the duration of labour. Marx's standard for the traditional phase is what is taken up by the Soviet constitution in the phrase "To each according to work."

In the Soviet Constitution, the inclusion of the phrase "To each according to work" and the phrase from 2 Thessalonians 3:10 ("If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat") goes back to a speech from Lenin during the famine of 1918. Unlike Marx, Lenin represents the link between work and remuneration as (i) self-evident and (ii) at the core of socialism (1917: 44).

The historical connection between the bible passages and the slogans "to each according to needs" and "to each according to work" is obvious. Acts 4:35 which contains the phrase "to each as any had need" is in line with the communal ownership of goods and the mutual care in early Christian communities which early socialists such as Cabet saw as a model for social justice in Icarian communities. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 ("If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat") and "[food] to each according to work" are logically equivalent and occur in close vicinity in the Soviet Constitution (1875b. Chapter 1, Article 12 and following).

Within the biblical text 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is difficult to interpret. In 2 Thessalonians 3:9 Paul says that they actually *would have had a right to support*, even if they had not worked, but that they worked for their food nonetheless, because they wanted to set a model and because they wanted to distance themselves from idle and disruptive elements who wanted to free-ride on the early Christian community. Commentaries¹⁶ suggests that Paul thinks that he would have had a right because the apostles had a right to be maintained by the Church – ministry is a sufficient contribution to the social good. Still, it is a stretch to read the passage as a principle of proportionality. Paul's intent was to exclude the idle elements in the communities by cutting their free food supply. This falls short of endorsing a principle that makes food (or remuneration in general) proportional to a measure of work performance.

7. From "Works" to "Work"

"To each according to work" seems to echo "To each according to works" of Saint-Simon, but the singular-plural distinction is not as innocent as it seems.

¹⁶ Commentaries on 2 Thessalonians 3:9. URL: http://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_thessalonians/3-9.htm

Remember how in Saint-Simon, “works” was determined by social stake (*mise sociale*) – viz. by what you put into the game.

Part of this social stake is capital. This drops out once we move to collective ownership of the means of production, starting with Cabet. Another part of this social stake is ability, which determines a person’s function. Remuneration for abilities also drops out in Cabet and Blanc. For Blanc, abilities are not a ground for reward because in so far as they are innate talents, they are God-given (1839: 83–84, 148). For Cabet, abilities are not a ground for reward because in so far that they are skills acquired in education, they are provided for by society (1840b: 497). So abilities do not provide the basis for a personal merit that could ground remuneration.

Hence, if we revisit Fourier’s triad that grounds remuneration, viz. work, talent and capital, then all that is left is work. That is, work is all we put into the game that can form the basis for reward.

Another difference between “To each according to works” and “to each according to work” lies in what it is that constitutes this reward. For Saint-Simon, it is not just about remuneration, but also about social status, one’s place in the social hierarchy. We need to understand this within Saint-Simon’s objections to nobility. It was a radical idea at the time to make one’s place in the social hierarchy not contingent on birth, but on one’s own personal contribution to the social good. But Saint-Simon was not critical of a social hierarchy and social status as such.

An early exponent of this tradition can be found in Étienne-Gabriel Morelly’s *Code de la nature* (1755): “... each individual must be ranked according to his social status, titles, and honours, [measured] by degree of zeal, capacity, and the utility of the services [rendered].” (1755: 56) We also find the emphasis on social status in the *Déclaration de Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen*, with Article 1 stating that *social distinctions* should be based on the common good and Article 6 that *titles (dignités)* should be based on ability, virtue and talents.

But this social status hierarchy becomes suspect in Cabet who is under the influence of a biblical ideal of social equality. He comments on Luke 2:14, which, following the Latin Vulgate translation, reads “Peace on earth to people of good will.” Jesus, he says, is more impressed by good will than by ability, talent and power, and that ability (only) grounds duties, with the implication being that it does not ground social status. (1846: 151-52) In the Icarian communities, following Cabet, leadership positions in the workshops are by election (1840a: 173) which is also what Blanc defends (1839: 24). In Marx, social subordination is precisely what will be abolished in the Socialist society.

Marx is worried about incongruities due to remuneration on the basis of labour on the one hand and the difficulty of meeting needs on the other hand. He considers a case in which the labour of two people is equal on a measure of duration and intensity, but one person has a larger family to feed than the other. (1875b: 9) He does not have any solution to this problem in the transitional phase

though. A solution needs to wait for the Communist society in which remuneration will be according to need.

Blanc does make accommodations for needs in his transitional phases. The revenue of the social workhouses will be split in three parts. One part is for the remuneration of the workers, a second part is to cover the needs of the aged, sick and infirm and to bail out social workhouses in less successful sectors covered by workhouse, and a third part is to invest in new means of production to expand the workhouse (1839: 24). Social security for the aged, sick and infirm and support for industries in need is a limited form of reward according to need. And it would then be a small step to introduce transfer payments to families to solve Marx's problem – addressing the needs of larger families.

8. Conclusion

(...)

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The Difference Principle and the Distribution of Education and Resources *versus* the Redistribution of Revenues¹⁷

Work in Progress – Seminar version

Luc Bovens and Caleb South
20 July 2016

1. A Saint-Simonian Challenge

The Saint-Simonians argue for a position that is close to Rawls' second principle stating that social and economic equalities should be attached to positions and offices open to all under fair equality of opportunity. First, high-ranking jobs should not be restricted to nobility but should be awarded according to abilities (*à chacun selon ses capacités*). Inheritance is to be abolished and the banks are to secure that the inputs, that is, the funds for education and resources that are required to do these jobs, are allocated to people who have the native abilities and ambition to do well in these jobs. Remuneration should then be in accordance with how well one performs in one's function, that is, according to works (*à chacun selon ses œuvres*). (Bazard, et al., 1830: 15–42 and Anonymous 1831)

Saint-Simon says that this arrangement would “improve the moral, physical and intellectual situation of the most numerous and poorest class.” (Epitaph of *Le Globe* (1830–32), see also Saint-Simon 1825: 3205) It would indeed take care of an underclass of people who do not have access to education or resources today. But clearly, it would still leave an underclass of people who do not have the native abilities and ambition.

¹⁷ We have benefitted greatly from discussions with Marc Fleurbaey.

How can we institute a social arrangement that would make sure that the worst off people are at least as well off as the worst off people under any other social arrangement, following Rawls' difference principle?

There are three routes. For short, let us call the people with lower native abilities and ambition 'less able' people. We can do so by giving more education and resources to less able people than to more able people so that they are able to catch up. We can give more education and means to the more able people and redistribute through taxation to secure the welfare of the less well off. Or, we can try some combination of both.

Our question is: Under what circumstances is one or another such policy more advisable? Circumstances are characterised by the relative levels of ability and disincentive effects of taxes. Hence, we can rephrase our question: If we aim for a social arrangement that leaves the worst off at least as well off as the worst off would be under any other social arrangement, then what is the optimal tax rate and the optimal division of education and resources given relative levels of ability and disincentive effects of taxes?

2. A Simple 2-Person Model

We present a simple model to address this question. Suppose that the government has to divide a *section* (or a square mile) of land between two farmers. The farmers are characterized by their *abilities*. The ability of farmer i determines her average yield \bar{Y}_i [X_i] if allocated X_i section for $0 < X_i \leq 1$ and $i = 1, 2$. There is a tax rate $t \in [0,1]$ and remuneration after taxation and redistribution equals the untaxed yield from farming plus an equal division of the assets that were taxed away. Due to disincentive effects, the average yield \bar{Y}_i typically drops as the tax rate increases. α_i is a measure of this disincentive effect as defined below.

Our question is: What division X_i and what tax rate t should a policy maker implement if she wishes to improve the lot of the poorest farmer, given the abilities $\bar{Y}_i [X_i]$ and the disincentive effects α_i ?

As to capacity, let us assume that, for all farmers, the more land that is being farmed is, the lower the average yield is and that there is a linear negative relation between the amount of land farmed and average yield:

$$(1) \quad \bar{Y}_i = (1 - X_i) a_i + X_i b_i$$

The yield for each farmer equals:

$$(2) \quad Y_i = \bar{Y}_i X_i$$

The marginal yield then equals

$$(3) \quad mY_i = \frac{dY_i}{dX_i} = a_i - 2(a_i - b_i)X_i$$

We may, but need not, impose the constraint that $mY_i > 0$. This is tantamount to setting $b_i > a_i/2$.

We can draw a distinction between greater and lesser abilities, all other things equal. Farmer 1 is at least as capable as farmer 2, all other things equal, just in case $a_1 \geq a_2$ and $b_1 \geq b_2$.

And we can also draw a distinction between intensive and extensive farming. Farmer 1 is a more effective intensive farmer and farmer 2 is a more effective extensive farmer, just in case $a_1 > a_2$ and $b_2 > b_1$.

The sensitivity to the tax rate $\alpha_i \in [0,1]$ is a measure of the disincentive effect. The drop in average yield is proportional to the product of tax rate and the sensitivity to the tax rate. Let \bar{Y}_i^d be the average yield as it impacted by disincentive effects.

$$(6) \quad \bar{Y}_i^d = (1 - t\alpha_i) \bar{Y}_i$$

And so, as impacted by the sensitivity, the yield for each farmer and the total yield, equal:

$$(7) \quad Y_i^d = (1 - t\alpha_i) Y_i$$

$$(8) \quad Y^d = Y_1^d + Y_2^d$$

Let the revenue R_i of each farmer be his net yield, as impacted by his or her sensitivity, plus half of the tax portion of the total yield, as impacted by the sensitivities of both farmers.

$$(9) \quad R_i = (1-t) Y_i^d + \frac{1}{2} t Y^d$$

We aim to maximise the revenue of the worse off farmer.

3. No Disincentive Effects

Let us first look at the case in which $\alpha = \alpha_1 = \alpha_2 = 0$. In this case the best we can do is to maximise production and to set the tax rate at 1, that is, to distribute the total yield equally.

To maximise the total yield $Y = Y_1 + Y_2$, we should divide the section so as to equalise the marginal yield of each farmer:

$$(4) \quad \frac{dY}{dX_1} = \frac{dY_1}{dX_1} + \frac{dY_2}{dX_1} = \frac{dY_1}{dX_1} + \frac{dY_2}{d(1-X_1)} \frac{d(1-X_1)}{dX_1} = 0$$

$$\frac{dY_1}{dX_1} - \frac{dY_2}{dX_2} = 0$$

$$mY_1 = mY_2$$

$$a_1 - 2(a_1 - b_1)X_1 = a_2 - 2(a_2 - b_2)(1 - X_1)$$

$$X_1 = \frac{1}{2} \frac{a_1 + a_2 - 2b_2}{a_1 + a_2 - (b_1 + b_2)}$$

We can then see that

$$(5) \quad X_1 \geq X_2 \Leftrightarrow b_1 \geq b_2$$

Hence, more land goes to the farmer with the greater yield for maximally extensive farming.

For Louis Blanc (1849: 9) there is a particular stage on the route between ‘to each according to work’ and ‘to each according to needs’ that is characterised by the equal distribution of the social production in the workshop. At this stage, education has overcome disincentive effects. But unequal distributions on grounds of needs between workers are still problematic because they set off envy.

4. Disincentive Effects

Suppose now that at least one of the farmers is sensitive to the tax rate.

Case 1. Let there be one more-able farmer 1 and one less-able farmer 2.

Then there are three ways to secure that the revenue of the less able farmer is as high as it could possibly be. Either (i) we can set the tax rate low but secure that the less able farmer has a larger plot of land or (ii) we can give a larger plot of land to the more able farmer and secure that the less able farmer is as well off as she could be by setting the tax rate high or (iii) we can aim for a combination of both (i) and (ii).

Let us look at a case in which farmer 1 has four times the average yield of farmer 2 for any allocation of land and for the tax rate set at zero. We set $a_1 = 40$, $a_2 = 10$, $b_1 = 20$ and $b_2 = 5$.

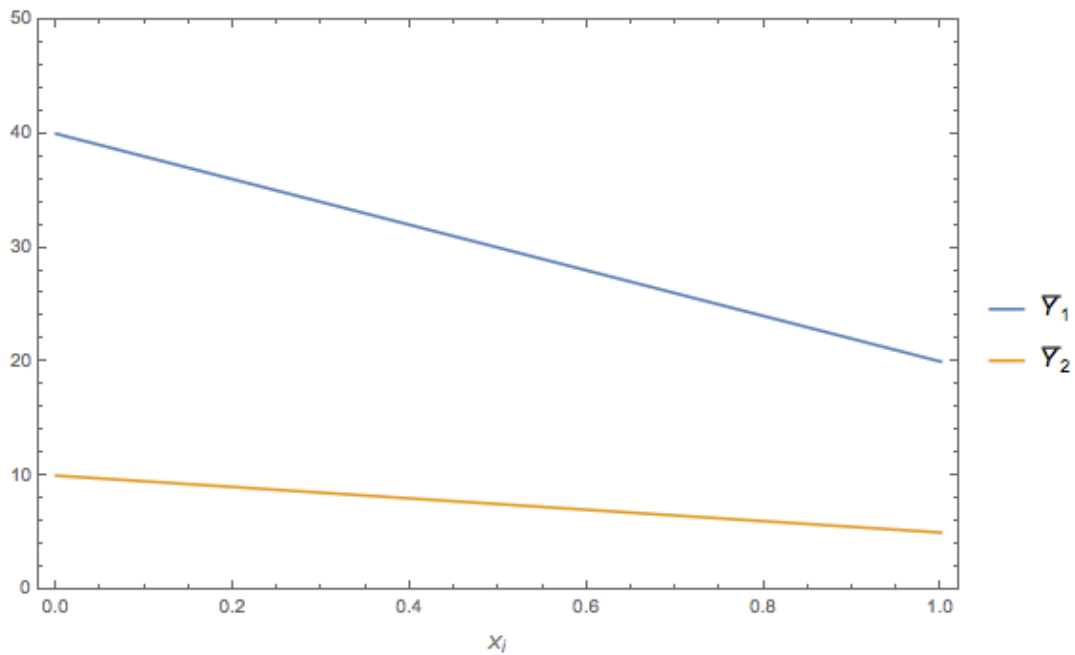


Fig. 1. Farmer 1 with four times greater ability

To start off, let us suppose that both farmers are equally sensitive to the tax rate, i.e., $\alpha = \alpha_1 = \alpha_2 > 0$. Then Figure 2 provides the optimal tax rate and optimal distribution of the land for sensitivity levels ranging from 0 to 1.

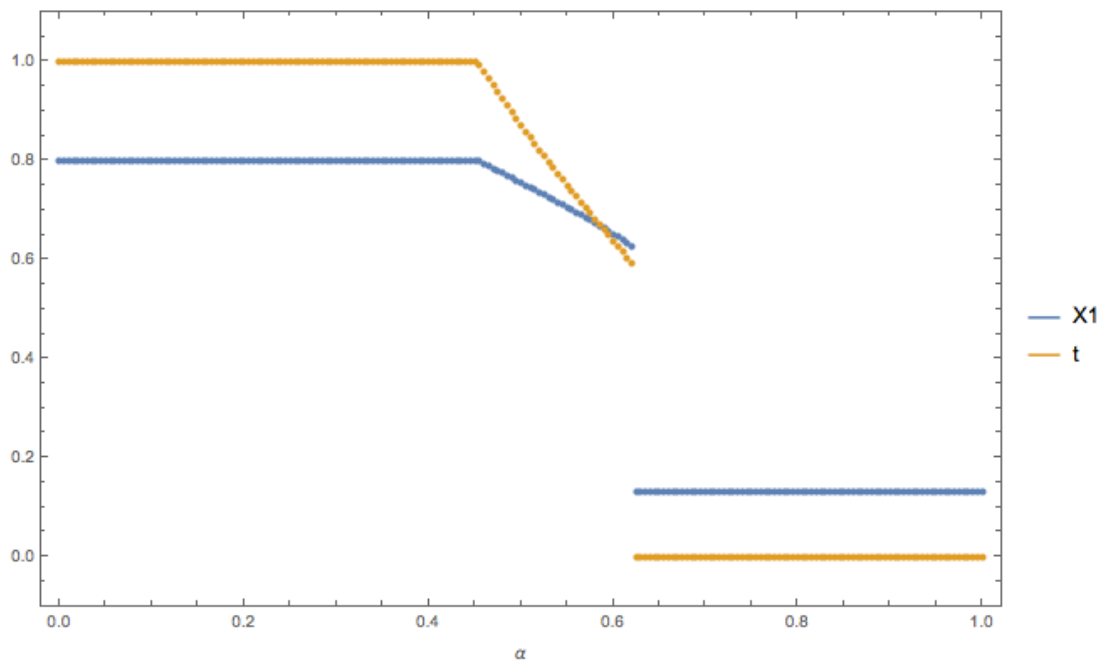


Fig. 2. The optimal allocation to farmer 1 and the optimal tax rate as a function of the sensitivity to the tax rate for farmer 1 with four times greater ability

Note how, for low sensitivity α , the tax rate is 1 and the more able farmer receives more land. For high sensitivity, the tax rate is 0 and the less able farmer receives more land. For intermediate sensitivities we have non-extreme tax rates and more equitable distributions.

What if we vary the relative abilities?

If farmer 1 has the same ability as farmer 2, then the optimal solution is a tax rate of zero and an equal distribution of the land.

As we make farmer 1 exceed farmer 2's ability to a lesser extent, the range of sensitivities at which the tax rate is zero is broader. We have plotted the case in which farmer 1's ability is only twice greater (Fig 3) greater than farmer 2.

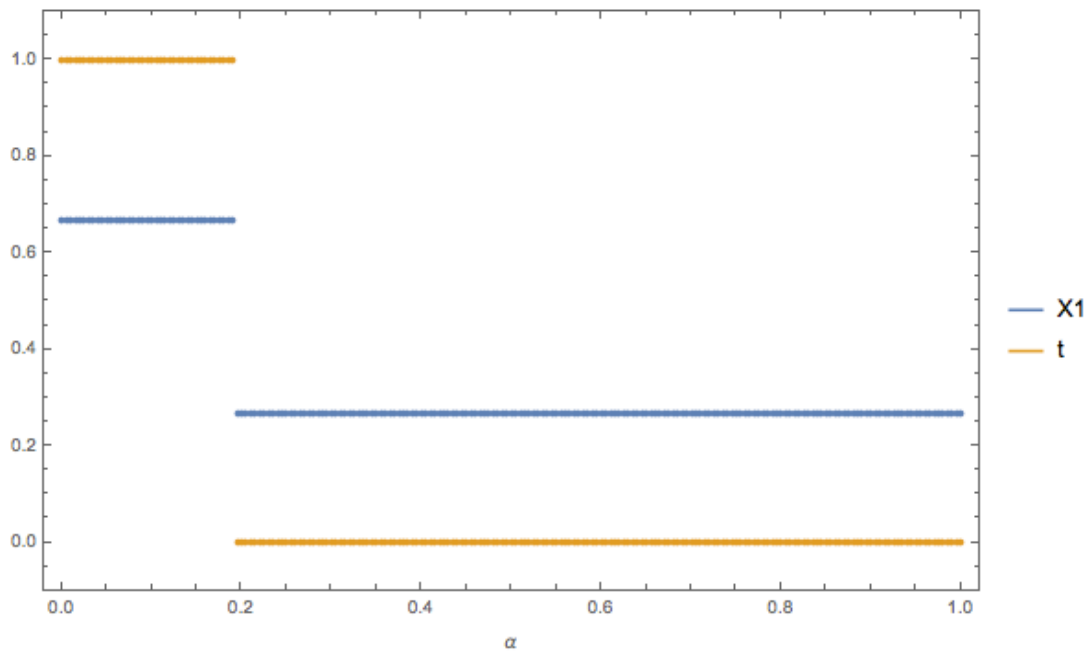


Fig. 3. The optimal allocation to farmer 1 and the optimal tax rate as a function of the sensitivity to the tax rate for farmer 1 with two times greater ability

As we make farmer 1 exceed farmer 2's ability to a greater extent, the range of sensitivities at which the tax rate is non-zero becomes broader. We have plotted the case in which farmer 1's ability is eight times (Fig 4) greater than farmer 2. Notice that the tax rate never goes to zero.

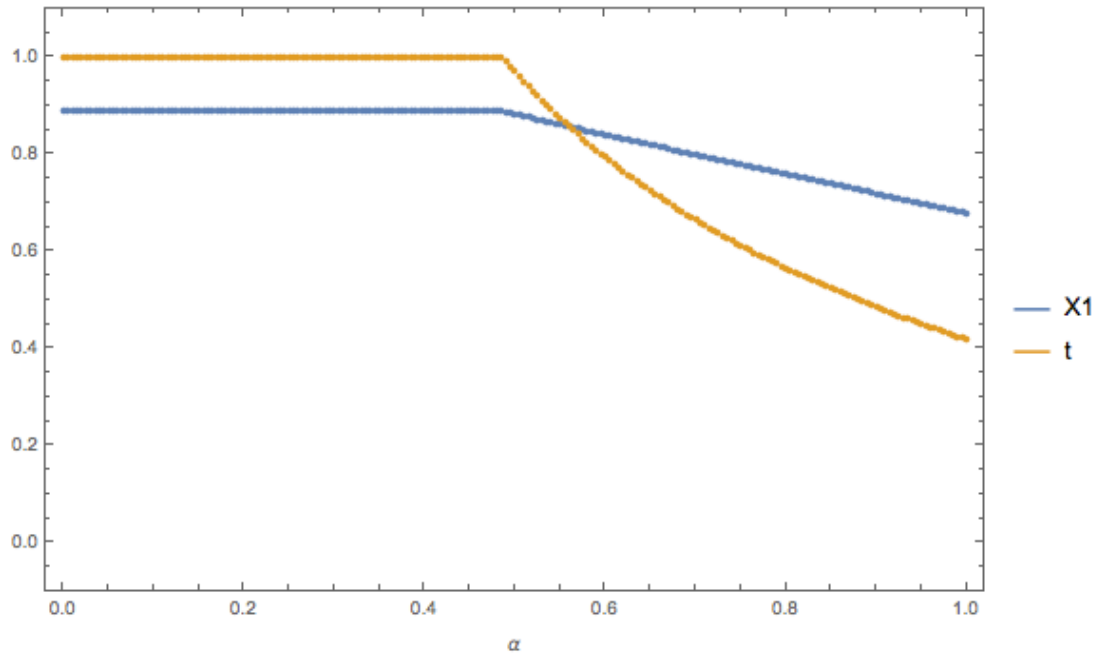


Fig. 4. The optimal allocation to farmer 1 and the optimal tax rate as a function of the sensitivity to the tax rate for farmer 1 with eight times greater ability

We return to our original case in which the farmer 1's ability is four times greater than farmer 2's ability. What happens to the revenues of each farmer and the total revenue? In figure 5 we plot the individual revenues of each farmer. At low sensitivity, we set the tax rate at 1, allocate the land to the more able farmer, and equalise the revenue through the taxes. As the sensitivity goes up and the tax rate remains at 1, the revenues of both farmers drop. At some point, the sensitivity becomes so strong that the tax rate has to drop below 1. Now the more able farmer will receive greater revenue than the less able farmer. And then at one point the sensitivity becomes so strong that the tax rate has to drop to 0. In this range we need to give the less able farmer more land so as to equalise the total revenue. In figure 6 we plot the total revenue.

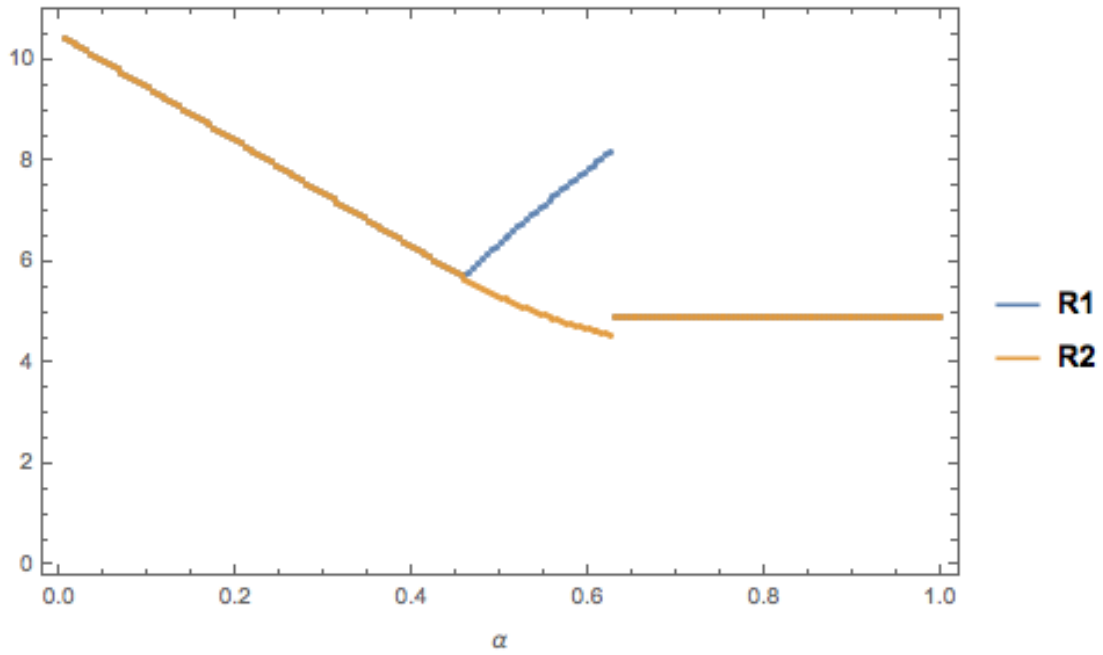


Fig. 5. The revenues to farmer 1 and 2 as a function of the sensitivity to the tax rate for farmer 1 with four times greater ability

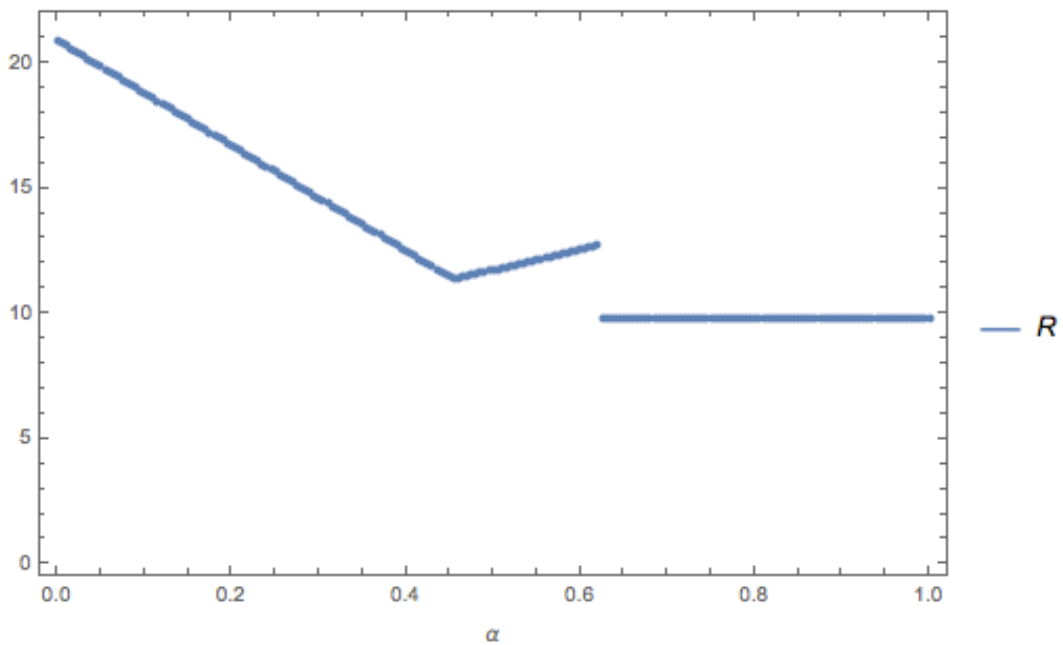


Fig. 6. The total revenue as a function of the sensitivity to the tax rate for farmer 1 with four times greater ability

Let us now give up the assumption that $\alpha_1 = \alpha_2$. In figures 7 and 8, the rows are the sensitivities of farmer 1 and the columns are the sensitivities of farmer 2, ranging from 0 to 1 with step .125. Fig 7 represents the optimal tax rate and Fig 8 represents the optimal allocation of land to farmer 1. Note that we have non-extreme values for the optimal tax rate for lower sensitivities of the less able farmer and higher sensitivities of the more able farmer. The greater the optimal tax rate, the more land goes to the more able farmer.

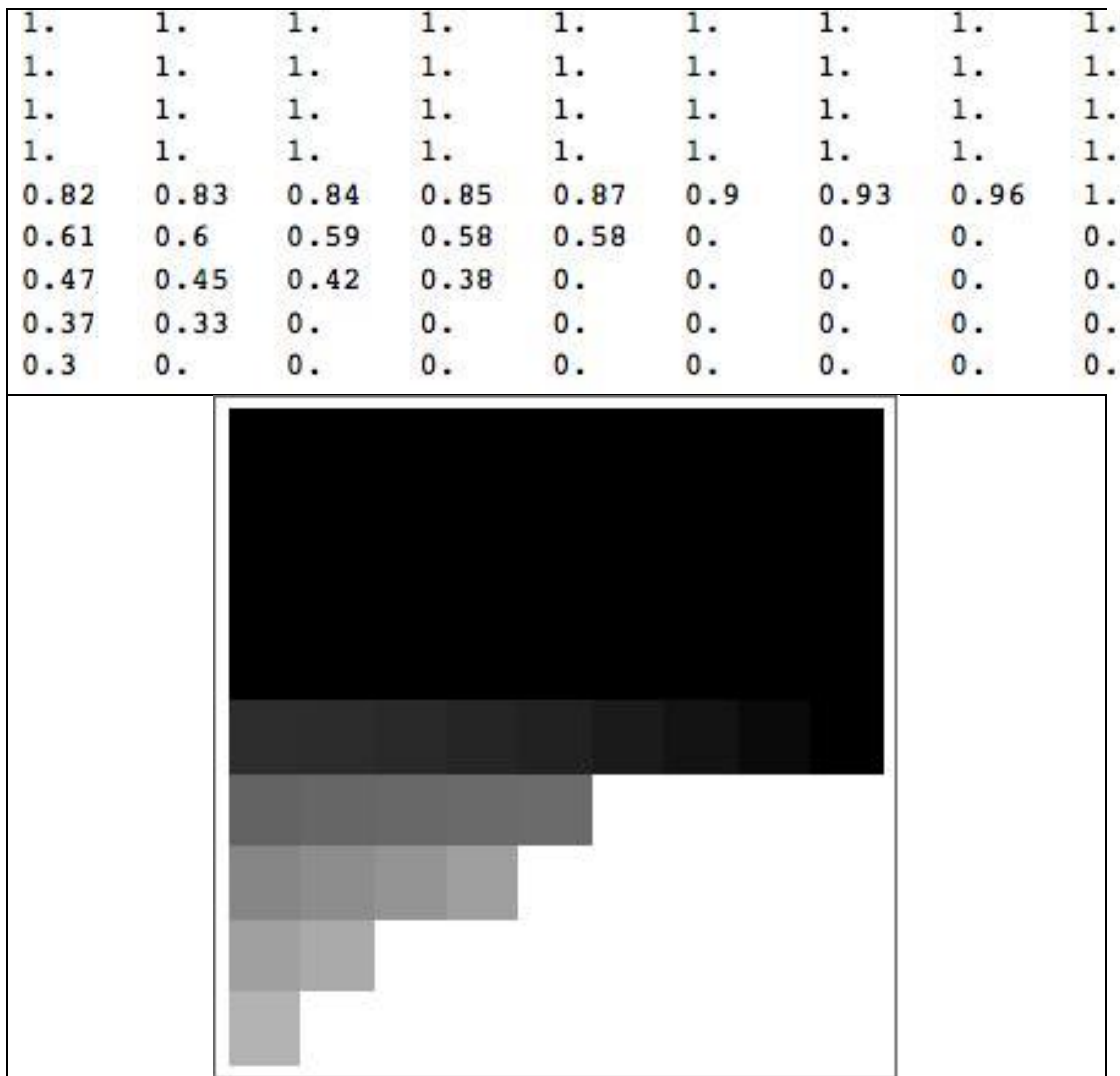


Fig 7. Optimal tax rates for $\alpha_1 = 0, .125, \dots, 1$ (rows) and $\alpha_2 = 0, .125, \dots, 1$

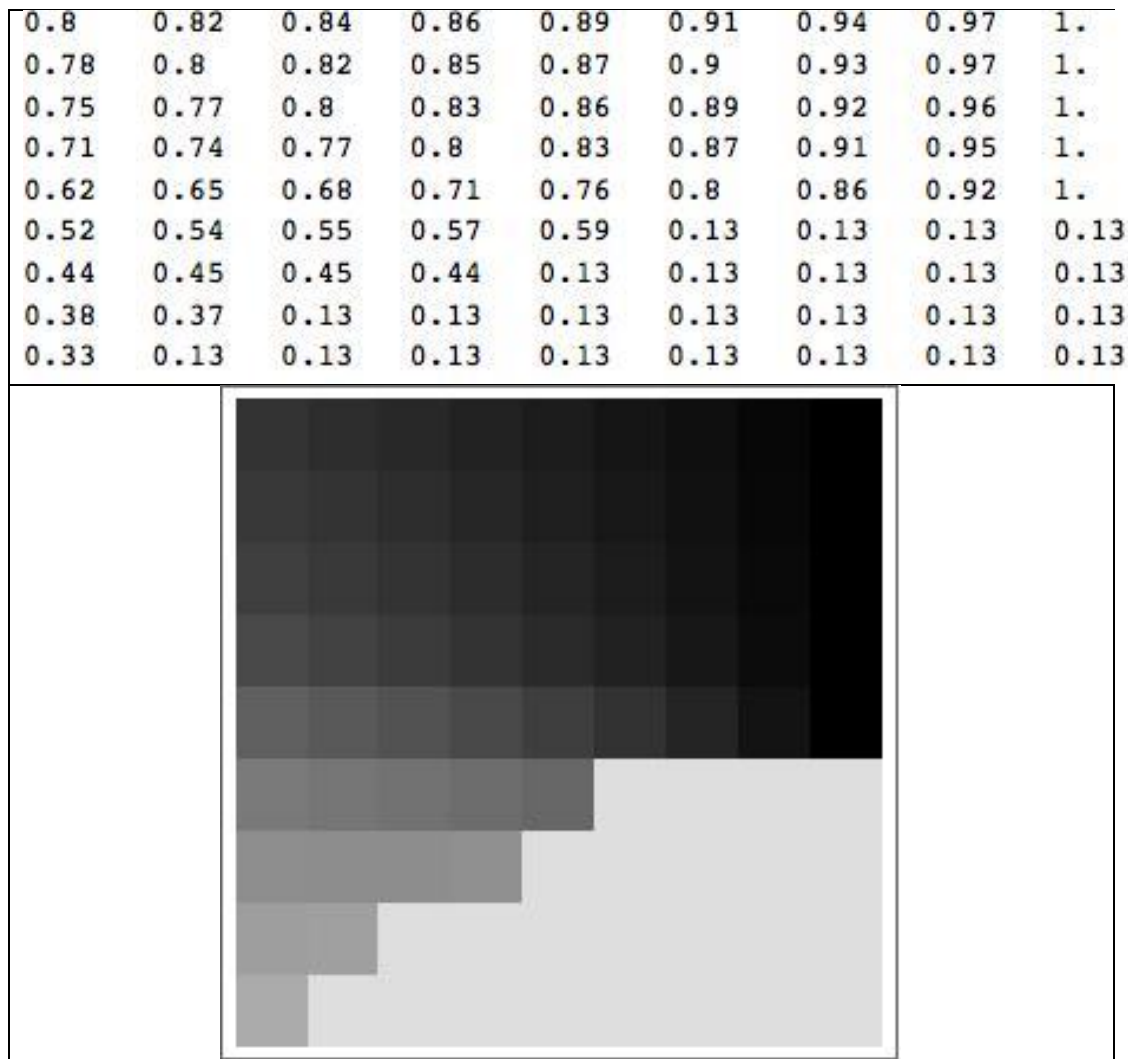


Fig 8. Optimal allocation of land to farmer 1 for $\alpha_1 = 0, .125, \dots, 1$ (rows) and $\alpha_2 = 0, .125, \dots, 1$

Further work:

1. We will investigate the case of intensive *versus* extensive farming.
2. We will investigate the case of $n > 2$ farmers.
3. We will compare our results to the seminal work in Arrow 1971.
4. Questions: Has any empirical work been done comparing the distribution of inputs (education and resources), redistribution of outputs (incomes), and taxation rates? Is it the case that jurisdictions with less output redistribution

(e.g., minimal income, unemployment benefits, child benefits, etc.) place more emphasis on input distribution (e.g. widening participation, entrance conditions on start-ups), given equal levels of inequality, and *vice versa*? How do tax rates and inequality levels compare relative to preferences for output redistribution policies and input distribution policies?

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