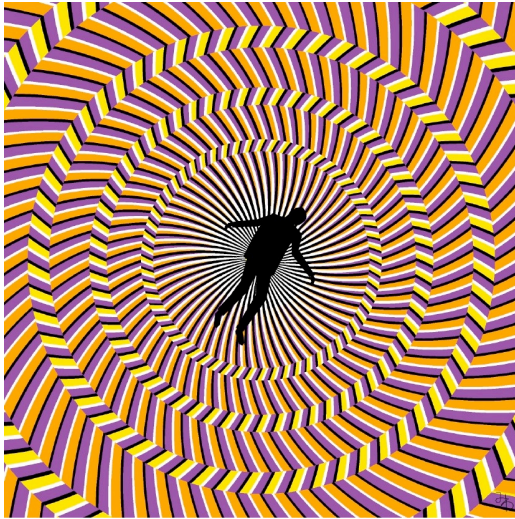


ideas to embrace

Inequality as Vertigo



There is a positive model of inequality as imbalance, an lack of stability, dizziness or vertigo, for the economy as a whole that gets spoken about as if it were an individual:

- ☑ “every human has some **sense of balance** and when that **gets disturbed** it gets **out of balance**.”
- ☑ “an economy that has **gotten off kilter**.”
- ☑ “excessive inequality leads to inequality; patterns of **economic instability**, bubbles and busts, and that it’s inefficient, very unequal economies tolerate much more technically regressive dangerous unsafe and from a competitive standpoint more backwards processes and industries than more egalitarian ones.”

INDICATE THE IMBALANCE IS OF INTERNAL DISORDER, NOT DISEQUILIBRIUM

This notion of inequality as vertigo gets dangerously close the the other kind of imbalance described in models to avoid -- that of a scale of seesaw. To ensure you remain firmly within this model and don’t *tip* into the other one, keep these things in mind:

- Don’t suggest or say **two** things are compared - ~~“when one goes up the other goes down”~~
- Don’t use words like scale, high/low, tilt - ~~“the two sides of the scale are off-balance”~~
- Don’t bring in concepts about weight - ~~“when you take weight off, it rises”~~
- Do focus on imbalance itself as the core concept - “a sense of internal rightness”
- Do suggest an ambiguous number or only one entity - “an economy in balance”

Benefits of Internal Imbalance/Vertigo Language

This model came up only in interviews, there isn’t much language to go on. Nevertheless, there’s much to recommend it:

1. It conveys interdependence -- it presents the economy as a single, unified, thing
2. It implies there’s an economic system that can be externally *swayed* or put off its axis
3. It’s tangible and part of lived experience, we’ve all lost our balance
4. While it’s unfortunately silent on causes of inequality, it at least avoids hierarchical notions or blaming the individual for bad outcomes.

ideas to avoid

Inequality as Scale



This version of imbalance in discourse on inequality sometimes explicitly mentions a scale, and at other times alludes to it with concepts like weight, balance point (or fulcrum):

- “at the **poor end of the scale**, they have no money and can’t consume”
- “at the **high end of the scale**, they’ve got so much money it doesn’t circulate into anything productive.”
- “I find the **fulcrum of inequality** actually debilitating for political discourse”
- “**balance the economic burdens** among all of us, rather than **piling them onto** people of color, the poor.”
- “**tilted** toward the haves against the have nots”
- “our **top-heavy** era has evolved from a heavily bankrolled effort by conservatives and corporations”

This model is also where we get the wide-spread concept of a level (or unlevel) playing field:

- “part of it is a continuing **unlevel playing field** that creates a more difficult first step, and even second and third steps”

What’s problematic about the scale?

Speaking about inequality as imbalance in the sense of a scale was far more common than the vertigo model just explored. Nevertheless, it’s not a helpful construct:

- It triggers zero-sum thinking, when you win, I must necessarily lose
- People currently benefitting from imbalance are even more committed to maintaining the status quo
- It reinforces some of the hierarchical ideas of deservedness that are part of the top/bottom model – the “good” people are on top, the “bad” ones aren’t

IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT INEQUALITY AS IMBALANCE, DON’T TALK ABOUT A SCALE