

trenched and sometimes growing divisions in such areas as social mobility, health, politics, and well-being.

This book is written out of my sense that inequality does indeed open a crucial, pathbreaking agenda that speaks to the broader ills of our time. And yet, the term has also become massively overloaded, piled with more freight than it can possibly bear. We may have grasped the scale, but we have not yet understood the full nature of the challenge that inequality poses. As a label, inequality proliferates across so many axes, in such varied contexts, that it can degenerate into a relentless listing exercise. Far from being productive, this can then lead to an infinite regress toward a fatalistic pessimism: Inequality is so entrenched, it's everywhere, so what can we do about it? In this respect, as in others, it can echo the climate crisis debate. Or, in contrast, it can facilitate an overly eager set of policy tools designed to "fix" the problem—what has been identified as a nascent inequality industry. As Atossa Araxia Abrahamian (2018) put it, "since 2008, wonks, politicians, poets, and bankers have all started talking about inequality. But are they interested in making us more equal?" Has inequality simply become the latest banner around which experts can mobilize new kinds of professional skills (commanding good salaries and career prospects as they do so)? And what do we make of the fact that inequality has risen to the top of the agenda at the same time that economic growth in many parts of the world has reduced poverty to its lowest level in recorded history? Is there a danger that inequality seems like distant and irrelevant bleating to the many people around the world whose economic and social situations have actually been improving, sometimes substantially? Is it simply the latest manifestation of a liberal elite bubble mentality—a symptom of the very problem that critics of inequality are supposed to draw attention to?

My book is animated by the view that we need a more robust sociological framing of the inequality debate to broaden our understanding of the full scale of the challenge it entails. I pursue the ambitious argument that we are witnessing the emergence of an inequality paradigm, which fundamentally unsettles long-term assumptions about the direction and nature of social change.

Truly bringing out the challenge of inequality therefore requires us to disrupt conventional paradigms—what the eminent historian of science Thomas Kuhn identified as "normal science"—by provoking a revolutionary