


This special issue aims at clarifying the normative import of considerations of global justice for the theory and practice of development or, more precisely, of social development. For some, this topic may seem outdated. After all, prominent theorists of global justice, such as Charles Beitz, emphasized long ago that one central implication of accepting duties of global distributive justice is to stop viewing development assistance as a practice of international charity. Thus one could think that the relation between theories of global justice and the theory and practice of development would have been treated carefully ever since. However, there seems to remain up to now a curious neglect of this relation.

Consider, for instance, the recent and continuing transnational political deliberations about how to assess development, such as those of the ‘Sarkozy’ Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. These deliberations take little note, if any, of contemporary theories of (global) justice. This is remarkable given that many of these theories not only represent a kind of public philosophy that is meant to be practically action-guiding, but also have as their subject matter the reasonable evaluation of our social and political orders.

Thereby these deliberations overlook one central philosophical insight of recent theorizing about justice, namely, that the fundamental guiding principles of our social and political orders should not express one particular conception of the good life. Following John Rawls we must recognize that due to the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’ of understandings as to what makes our lives go well, it is unacceptable to ascribe special importance to one of these understandings, such as happiness.

A  political conception of justice takes the fact of reasonable pluralism as its point of departure, and only then asks what fundamental normative principles people could agree on despite this pluralism. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum are right that we need to view a political conception of justice as the normative source that tells us which standards we should employ for assessing social development (and progress).

Contrary to such an approach, however, the deliberations take very seriously the idea that people’s happiness may be an apt standard for evaluating development. In fact, one result of these discussions has been the United Nations (UN) General Assembly’s decision in 2011 that a World Happiness Report should be published annually from 2012 onwards.

This, however, is but one brief and suggestive example of the way in which paying close attention to the relation between justice and development matters. The articles in this special issue exemplify in very distinct ways that thinking in tandem about global justice and the theory and practice of development generates insights that would remain unexplored otherwise.

In this special issue’s first article, Thomas Pogge and Mitu Sengupta agree with the UN High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda that it is

of utmost moral importance to eradicate – and not only to alleviate – poverty. Yet they criticize that this panel neglects that from the point of view of justice it is crucial to overcome the unjust institutional arrangements that engender poverty in the first place. Accordingly, Pogge and Sengupta formulate eight institutional reform goals that ought to be part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The article by Nicole Hassoun focuses on the claim of development economists that assisting countries simply because they are poor creates an incentive for poor countries' governments to maintain poverty. These economists recommend the allocation of official development assistance to countries with good institutional quality. Hassoun, however, argues that this recommendation may be ill-founded because we do not have sufficient reason to believe that poor countries' governments will, in fact, act on said incentive.

Aram Ziai's article suggests that the notion of 'development', which is usually associated with social progress or 'good change', merely serves the purpose of disguising economic growth promoting policies as something that is in everyone's interest. Thereby, to Ziai, 'development' experts de-politicize social change and obstruct the realization of justice.

The last article by Johannes Plagemann and me emphasizes that recent economic and political power shifts – due to the growing importance of countries like Brazil, India and South Africa – fundamentally change our global economy and world politics. We argue that this development justifies making a more positive justice-based assessment of global affairs than would be otherwise warranted.

Bas Van der Vossen's review of Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's influential book *Why Nations Fail* completes the treatment of this issue's topic. *Why Nations Fail* puts forward the thesis that inclusive domestic institutions are decisive for economic development. Van der Vossen's acute review explains why this thesis puts into question the kind of thinking of what is owed to the very poor that Peter Singer has been advocating for a long time.

The idea to edit this special issue arose in the course of organizing and participating in an international conference on the theme of 'Justice and Development', which took place from December 13 to 14, 2012, at Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany. This conference was hosted by the Centre for Advanced Studies 'Justitia Amplificata: Rethinking Justice – Applied and Global' and was generously supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). I would like to thank the directors of this Centre, Prof. Stefan Gosepath and Prof. Rainer Forst, for their encouragement, and the DFG for its financial assistance.

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