

Global Justice

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Theories of justice provide principles to guide the moral assessment of existing or hypothetical social arrangements. Principles of distributive justice in particular assess the terms on which social arrangements make important economic advantages accessible to people (such as property in productive assets, income, wealth, and opportunities for employment). Until recently, philosophical discussions on distributive justice tended to focus only on the assessment of rules and institutions framing the interactions of individuals within a domestic social structure. There is, however, increasing discussion about principles that address the global level. These principles would orient supra-national rules and institutions that affect international markets in capital and labor, international trade and monetary arrangements, the access to natural resources, and the conditions and limits of the sovereignty of states.

This entry articulates current debates on global justice in reference to three kinds of issues. The first concerns the identification of plausible distributive principles. The second focuses on the formulation of conditions under which the global application of these principles would be morally justified. The third area of discussion concerns the issue whether the implementation of global principles of distributive justice is feasible.

Three kinds of distributive principles

The first area of debate concerns the identification of distributive principles. We can identify at

least three kinds of principles:

Basic Sufficientarianism: We should, to the extent that we reasonably can, pursue social arrangements in which everyone has enough access to certain important advantages, thus avoiding absolute deprivation.

Egalitarianism: We should, to the extent that we reasonably can, pursue social arrangements in which everyone has equal access to certain important advantages, thus avoiding relative deprivation.

Intermediate Inclusion: We should, to the extent that we reasonably can, pursue social arrangements in which everyone has a level of access to certain important advantages which secures the avoidance of absolute deprivation and the absence of glaring forms of relative deprivation.

According to Basic Sufficientarianism, we should try to secure that everyone has access to what they need to avoid severe poverty. A standard way of construing this demand is in terms of basic socioeconomic human rights to basic alimentation, housing, health care, and education. These rights range over objects people need to live a minimally decent life. Although most political philosophers now agree that a global version of Basic Sufficientarianism is a valid demand, they disagree on its precise status. Some see it as a strict demand of justice (Pogge 2008; Blake 2001) whereas others construe it as a weaker humanitarian duty (Nagel 2005). Another disagreement concerns the nature of the fundamental duties of justice associated with basic sufficientarian claims. For some, such duties are negative duties to refrain from depriving others of access to the objects of their basic human rights (Pogge 2008). Other philosophers construe the fundamental duties as being also positive, demanding that we provide others with what they need to live minimally decent lives (Rawls 1999; Miller 2007). The first view can yield positive duties of

justice but only derivatively: X may have a derivative positive duty to help Y avoid severe poverty when X has been involved in the causation of the poverty that Y suffers. A typical example occurs when Y suffers poverty partly as a result of an international order (supported by X and others) which encourages corrupt elites to oppress and dominate vulnerable people like Y in poor areas of the world (e.g. by allowing such elites to sell natural resources from their countries in the global markets or to contract debt in the name of the people they rule) (Pogge 2008). Although the second view need not reject this way of yielding positive duties, it can more directly say that X should help relieve the poverty of Y simply because X can do so at reasonable cost. An advantage of this approach is that it does not need to rely on empirical claims about the history of the current world order and counterfactual hypotheses about how it would have proceeded had different political choices been made, which are quite hard to assess. Another advantage is that it can in principle address all kinds of unchosen poverty, including those for which the global rich are not causally responsible. Its polemic weakness, however, is that in some cases it has less motivational power. Other things equal, most people feel more ready to act to attend to the needs of others when they are responsible for their suffering than when they are not. Another advantage of the negative duties approach is that it seems more likely to have ecumenical appeal. It might, for example, be convincing even to libertarians who are normally reluctant to accept distributive demands that are based on putative positive duties to improve the economic condition of others (Narveson 2003).

Consider now the two kinds of supra-sufficientarian principles: Intermediate Inclusion and Egalitarianism. Both principles go beyond Basic Sufficientarianism, demanding that we be concerned not only with people having enough, but also with people being more or less equally well-off. Principles of Intermediate Inclusion are less demanding than egalitarian principles.

Egalitarianism calls for a pursuit of strict economic equality of opportunity or the elimination of inequalities in income and wealth for which people cannot reasonably be held responsible. Intermediate Inclusion demands, instead, that differences in economic prospects not be so wide as to make economic cooperation a matter of sheer exploitation. Natural applications of Intermediate Inclusion arise in the assessment of policies and decision-making procedures of institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (Cohen and Sabel 2006). Although less demanding than Egalitarianism proper, the global implementation of Intermediate Inclusion would still make a significant difference. Many authors indeed argue that in a world of deep economic inequality, international institutions tend to be controlled by the global rich, who routinely use their overwhelming superiority in bargaining power to impose exploitative terms of cooperation on the global poor (Miller 2007).

Moral Justification

The second area of debate concerns the issue of what makes the global application of distributive principles morally justifiable. Although the arguments articulated below apply to the three kinds of distributive principles, we will focus on supra-sufficientarian principles and in particular on Egalitarianism. Indeed, the most contentious issue in contemporary philosophical debates on global justice concerns the question whether Global Egalitarianism (hereafter GE) is justified. Many authors argue that Egalitarianism is appropriate for domestic contexts, but not for the global level. There are two kinds of arguments for this conclusion. The first tries to show that the implementation of GE is simply infeasible (Freeman 2006); whereas the second attempts to show that even if it were feasible, the implementation of GE would not be obligatory at the bar of justice. In what follows, we consider some debates on the issues raised by these strategies,

beginning with the second.

The relevant question is: What has to be true of any two individuals for it to be morally appropriate to claim that principles of egalitarian distributive justice apply to them? There are two broad answers to this question. The first is the *humanist* answer, according to which principles of egalitarian justice apply to all persons qua persons, regardless their country of provenance (Buchanan 2004; Caney 2005; Fabre 2007; Tan 2004). A route to this view proceeds along the following lines. We start by affirming the moral equality of all individuals as ultimate units of equal moral concern for everyone. This is the standard moral axiom of cosmopolitanism. We then proceed to note that an appropriate demand for concern arises when people are disadvantaged through no fault of their own. We proceed to trigger obligations of egalitarian distributive justice by identifying serious cases of this kind of disadvantage that result from people being born in poorer rather than richer countries. Consider two children: Maria, who was born in Nicaragua, and Judith, who was born in the United States. Maria's educational opportunities are significantly lower than Judith's. Is this fair? On the humanist egalitarian view this inequality in educational opportunities is not fair, as it results from factors beyond Maria's and Judith's control. Equal concern would demand that we do not let unchosen circumstances impose inequalities of access to important advantages such as education, wherever these arise.

The second answer to the question about the scope of egalitarian justice is the *associativist* view according to which principles of egalitarian distribution apply only among those who share an associative framework of the relevant kind. There are of course many versions of this kind of approach, depending on which associative framework is deemed relevant. The following are some examples formulated by Cohen and Sabel (2005). According to Statism, the relevant associative framework must be co-membership in a political community

involving a centralized use of legitimate coercion (a state). According to Institutionalism, duties of distributive justice exist where there are institutions that can be charged with the responsibility of assigning the relevant advantages. According to Cooperativism, the relevant associative framework is some consequential regime of mutually beneficial cooperation. According to Interdependence, the triggering condition is present “whenever the fate of people in one place depends substantially on the collective decisions taken by people in another place, and the fate of people in that latter place depends substantially on the collective decisions of people in the former” (Cohen and Sabel 2005: 153). Another important form of Associativism is, of course, Nationalism, according to which people have duties of justice to each other only if they are co-nationals (i.e. they share a certain set of institutions, a language, and a collective history).

The associativist approach qualifies Egalitarianism’s scope by saying that its appropriate application tracks certain facts of association. Now, philosophers endorsing associativist views are divided on the issue whether GE is justifiable. Some claim that there is no associative framework of the relevant kind that is global in nature, concluding that GE must be rejected, at least until the relevant global associative framework emerges (Blake 2001; Nagel 2005; Risse 2006; Sangiovanni 2007). Others argue that associativist premises need not yield a rejection of GE. On these approaches, a rich description of the current trends of global economic and political interaction, including overt or covert military interventions, international institutions like the WTO and the IMF, multiple regional organizations, international social movements, etc., suggests that some version of Institutionalism, Cooperativism, or at the very least Interdependence, in fact yield global egalitarian demands. Some of these views, for example, argue that analogues of Rawls’s domestic principles of justice as fairness including global fair equality of opportunity and a global difference principle are warranted (Beitz 1999).

It is worth noting that some associativist philosophers who reject GE can nevertheless endorse certain global supra-sufficientarian demands, advocating a form of Global Intermediate Inclusion involving, for example, the full spectrum of human rights, fair governance of international institutions, and global labor standards. The demand here is not to secure equality of opportunity or condition, but certain (higher than sufficientarian) minima of advantage and a more fair (although not strictly egalitarian) distribution of benefits resulting from some international cooperative ventures (James 2006).

The cogency of these associativist arguments for global principles depends, of course, on how we characterize the current trends of globalization. They also depend on how frequent and intense global interactions must be for different supra-sufficientarian global principles to be deemed morally appealing on an associativist view. Here it seems important to avoid too stringent a view of the depth of the requisite global interactions because this would lead to an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. But it also seems important to avoid an account which is so lax as to dissolve the specificity of associativism. Mere interaction and the possibility of creating schemes of more inclusive distribution may not be enough. Thus a crucial but difficult task for associativist approaches is to provide criteria for the precise level of depth of international interaction needed for each kind of global principle to be triggered. This is not a problem faced by humanist views, for which it may be enough to show that the implementation of global principles is feasible.

Feasibility

The implementation of a principle may be feasible either because we already possess the institutions needed to fulfill it or because we can create them. Some conceptions of justice

favoring global principles claim that there is a natural duty of justice to uphold institutions implementing those principles when they exist and to create them when they do not (Buchanan 2004; Gilibert 2008; James 2006). Both associativist and humanist conceptions may endorse a natural duty of this kind, although they would construe it in slightly different ways. For example, associativists would not demand that we create new associative frameworks that could make feasible the implementation of principles of justice that are more exigent than the ones warranted by currently existing associative frameworks. A humanist would, on the other hand, be ready to entertain transitions of this sort, at least insofar as their pursuit does not impose unreasonable costs on anyone.

The issue of what is currently feasible and what can, and perhaps should, be made feasible in the future has increasingly become a focus of discussion as philosophers begin to consider the demands of global justice in the nonideal circumstances of our current world (Gilibert 2008). Circumstances are nonideal when people are unable or unwilling to honor demands of justice. Examples of circumstances like these are the absence of robust international institutions and the lack of a strong ethos of cosmopolitan solidarity. These institutional and motivational deficits pose feasibility obstacles for the implementation of principles of global justice. A response to them would require that we address issues of global *political* justice. Besides the question of what principles should guide the distribution of economic advantages there is the issue of how decisions regarding such distributions should be made. How should political power be construed in the current context of globalization? What global political practices and institutions are needed to progressively approach the fulfillment of demands of global distributive justice? If we were to face tradeoffs between global political justice and global distributive justice, how should we calibrate them? Many political theorists are starting to

address questions such as these. For example, many claim that although it may be true that for the foreseeable future a world government would be both undesirable and infeasible, we can and should move beyond a Westphalian framework that fails to limit the sovereignty of states in order to approach global justice. They propose, instead, that we introduce a multilayered system of governance including global authorities and sub-state institutions besides state-level decision-making (Caney 2006; Goodin 2007; Held 2004).

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See also Cosmopolitan Democracy, Cosmopolitanism, Global Civil Society, Globalization, Human Rights, Theories of Justice.

Further Readings

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