

Global Justice

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There is an argument that we cannot achieve justice at a national level unless we attend to justice at a global level. There are various issues concerning global justice at the present world order.

Globalization is a complex phenomenon with many facets. For our purposes we need note only some of its characteristic central features. These include (i) an increasingly globally integrated economy, (ii) dominated by transnational corporations engaged in activities (such as production and distribution) that span multiple countries, (iii) increasing regulation of economic matters by supranational institutions (such as the World Trade Organization), (iv) general commitment to removal of barriers to “free trade,” and (v) higher levels of economic interdependence.

While there is much debate about the long-term effects of globalization and whether they are on balance good or bad, at this stage, the effects of globalization have been mixed. For some, globalization has brought improvements, while it has worsened the position of others.

Economists have been concerned with answers to a range of questions such as: What kinds of economic arrangements are just? Should our international institutions be reformed to better reflect fair terms of cooperation in our globalized world? Can globalization be better managed so that it works to assist the global poor more effectively? Is protectionist policies in trade justified or, rather, is free trade required by considerations of justice? Should poor working conditions in developing countries be a matter of concern for citizens and consumers in affluent, developed countries? If so, how might harmful employment conditions be effectively improved?

The World Trade Organization has been an important focal point for discussion about global economic justice. In particular, critics argue that some of its policies, such as those that generally advocate free trade but allow protectionism in affluent developed countries, involve grave hypocrisy and unfairness to some of the world’s most vulnerable people. There are also

large disparities in the resources at the disposal of various parties such that weaker parties often suffer huge disadvantages in being able to negotiate agreements that work well for them. In these sorts of ways agents in developed countries can take unfair advantage of those in developing countries.

Generally discussion of global justice matters often invokes concern for human rights. Human rights can and does therefore serve as an important discourse for furthering discussion about our global responsibilities. Respecting human rights is an important requirement in much international law and can be a key criterion in evaluating whether governments are considered legitimate by the international community. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a highly influential account of all human beings' basic entitlements and this document often plays an important role in real world debates about justice matters.

Within the field of global justice, issues concerning war have one of the longest histories. The just war framework has been influential in setting the terms of much debate about the proper use of force in international affairs. Theorists often disagree about which additional conditions must be satisfied for a war to be characterized as a just war. The most common additional conditions proposed are that the war should be undertaken by a proper authority, with the right intentions, only as a last resort, and when there are reasonable prospects of success. On the first, it is not legitimate to use force against civilians and, even though some collateral civilian damage may occur, it is wrong to deliberately target non-combatants. On the second, combatants may only use the force necessary to achieve their ends the force used must be proportional to the ends that are to be secured in conducting the war. There are further requirements governing fairness, such as requirements to comply with international laws and treat prisoners fairly.

There is a question that under what conditions, if any, may we engage in military intervention aimed at stopping genocide. In recent years this issue has become salient as large-scale human rights violations and suffering unfolded in Rwanda, the Sudan, the former Yugoslavia, and Libya. International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty argued that we

may engage in war aimed at protecting those who suffer at the hands of governments unwilling or unable to stop large-scale human rights abuses.

The issue of global gender justice is also relevant here. In general, poverty makes the lives of women and girls harder than their male counterparts. This can significantly thwart women and girls' well-being, as education, health care, and food are routinely withheld in favor of distribution to men and boys. These include "honor killings," infanticide, legal recognition of property and inheritance rights that significantly disadvantage women and girls.

Some important policy has been influential in international discourse concerning combating gender injustice. The Millennium Development Goals includes as a third goal the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action set the stage for several International Covenants and before that the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women afforded some important protection for women's human rights.

Climate change is another important aspect of global justice. Patterns of human behavior that destroy habitats, accelerate species extinction, exacerbate toxic levels of pollution, contribute to ozone layer destruction, or increase population levels are all issues of global environmental concern. But it is also widely acknowledged that human development is an important way to address high levels of global poverty, that such development is energy intensive, and the cheapest sources of energy available are not likely to be clean energy types. These considerations significantly affect efforts to deal with problems presented by climate change.

There is much discussion about the principles that should inform a fair treaty aimed at dealing with addressing climate change that also gives appropriate weight to concerns for human development. We have not all contributed equally to the problems created by emissions; industrialized nations have contributed historically at much higher levels than those that are still developing. And so we should endorse the guidelines that those who have polluted more should pay more to help redress current problems.

Health is another important feature of global justice. One striking feature of the state of global health is that there are large inequalities in health outcomes and opportunities for

health. Consider that life expectancy can vary a great deal. A person born in Sierra Leone can expect to live about 40 years whereas one born in Japan can expect to live for 80 years. Malaria has been almost entirely eradicated in high-income countries, but it still kills about a million people in developing countries. In fact many of the countries that suffer from the greatest burdens of disease have the fewest skilled healthcare workers.

In addition, pharmaceutical companies do not spend their research and development budgets in ways that match where the needs are greatest. Rather, seeking the most profitable ventures, they are much more likely to spend resources developing drugs for lucrative markets where the payoffs are greatest, even when the marginal benefits to consumers are small. The poor in developing countries are also often more vulnerable to disease and less able to resist disease because of poor living conditions related to poverty. Living in overcrowded houses can facilitate the spread of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis. So, a number of issues that sustain poverty or increase people's vulnerability to disease as a result of poverty should be of concern.

There are also increasingly worrying practices of experimentation on disadvantaged subjects in developing countries. Increasingly, clinical research has been outsourced to poor, developing countries with populations that are often highly vulnerable. We might wonder about whether these populations are being exploited and whether the participants have compromised abilities to consent to drug trials.

Discussion of natural resources often figures prominently in several topics of global justice. Some relevant questions include: Are national communities entitled to the resources they find on their territories? Should principles of global justice apply to our arrangements for justly distributing natural resources? Charles Beitz was an early proponent of a resource distribution principle, according to which natural resources should be allocated such that each society is able to provide adequately for its population.

Legitimate resource sales should require general agreement from citizens. Evidence of agreement requires that: (i) owners must be informed about sales, (ii) owners must be able to express dissent freely should they have doubts about sales, and (iii) owners should be able to stop resource sales without fearing grave consequences such as violence and intimidation.

Prominently, can we hold nations responsible for global injustices or remedying such injustices? Philosophers are contributing in important ways to discussions of global justice policy issues. There are as several institutional reform proposals for addressing global injustices which have enjoyed widespread attention, both within the academy and beyond. These include Thomas Pogge's Health Impact Fund proposal along with his proposal for a Global Resources Dividend, Christian Barry and Sanjay Reddy's Just Linkage Proposal to help improve working conditions, and Allan Buchanan and Robert Keohane's institutional innovations to secure accountability in the use of military force.

In addition to those illustrations already highlighted in this article, scholars are also having an impact on policy discussions in a wide range of areas including climate change. They have discussed rampant abusive tax practices by corporations and wealthy individuals and how this deprives developing countries of much-needed income for human development in developing countries.

Hence various scholars continue to make an important contribution to policy debates and this is also likely to be an area in which considerable useful future work on global justice will concentrate.