

LIBERA UNIVERSITÀ INTERNAZIONALE DI STUDI SOCIALI GUIDO CARLI

Ph.D. Program in Political Theory
Cycle XX

GLOBAL JUSTICE
BETWEEN
JUSTIFICATION AND FEASIBILITY

Ph.D Thesis
by
Eszter Kollár

Thesis Advisor
Prof. Sebastiano Maffettone

Rome, October 2008

SUMMARY

The aim of this dissertation is to address the problem of global poverty and inequality through a philosophical defense of what I take to be the most appealing normative view with respect to these problems, namely *global egalitarianism*. In the first chapter I outline the theoretical essentials of a theory of distributive justice and defend an *institutional* or *practice dependent* approach to global egalitarianism.

According to a practice-dependent methodological commitment, justice is a virtue of social institutions and reasoning about justice starts from existing practices. Principles of justice are thought to be yielded by a suitably characterized method of reasoning, the so called original position. The characterization of the original position, however, importantly depends on the nature and purpose of the social practice in question. First of all, one needs to identify a social practice and account for its relevant characteristics. Then, based on these characteristics that constitute the grounding elements for a constructivist argument, reasoning about the requirements of justice can begin. It proceeds by setting up a hypothetical choice situation among the relevant agents whose choice is constrained by the nature and purpose of the

existing practice. If reasoning from justice starts from existing practices then requirements of justice vary according to the social practice in consideration.

Such an institutional or practice dependent approach to distributive justice relies on the substantive claim, according to which our present international order and the institutions comprising it significantly shape people's life prospects and have important distributive effects in determining terms of ownership, production and transfer, access to global public goods and life opportunities across the globe. Insofar as these distributive effects are morally significant in shaping people's life prospects, their normative underpinnings must be made explicit and ought to be subjected to standards of justice, which are moral constraints on the permissible inequalities in the effects of those global institutions.

Among the different essentials of a theory of distributive justice this thesis focuses on the question concerning the appropriate *scope* or boundary of distributive justice. It aims at convincing the reader that not only domestic institutions of the nation state but also global institutions are relevant domains of distributive justice, albeit the difference that might occur concerning the requirements of justice. While the focus of the thesis is on the scope of justice, other theoretical essentials, such as the grounds of justice and the subject of justice are scrutinized.

The idea that the scope of distributive justice is global was first developed three decades ago. Scholars such as Thomas Scanlon, Charles Beitz and Thomas Pogge have argued that the relevant kind of social cooperation that triggers the demand of distributive justice is present in the global context due to the level of interconnectedness brought about by globalization. The distributive effects of global institutions and practices should, therefore, be morally constrained by a global difference principle worked out through a global original position among free and equal moral persons. This view has become known as the *global basic structure* view.

The global basic structure view has been strongly contested either by charging the thesis of insufficient empirical grounding of a strong analogy between the domestic and the global institutional contexts, or charged with a flawed understanding concerning the normatively relevant features of the basic structure. Critics point out that the justice-triggering feature of the domestic basic structure is either absent, too weak or irrelevant in the global institutional context. Recent theories of global justice have become much more sophisticated, both with respect to the empirical underpinnings through lessons from the practices of international law, global institutions and global social movements; and in their normative underpinnings concerning the reasons that trigger distributive egalitarian concern.

The idea of global justice, that is to be defended throughout this dissertation, is strongly inspired by John Rawls' domestic *political liberalism*, and at the same time aims at challenging his *international* thesis. Firstly, it follows the Rawlsian institutional or practice dependent view of justice, according to which principles of justice are to regulate social and political institutions and their distributive effects on people's life chances. Secondly, it is an *egalitarian* view, in the broadest sense of the term, according to which inequalities in life chances are to be morally assessed through standards of justice. That is to say, what matters morally is not merely how people fare in absolute terms, but how they fare vis-à-vis each other. Thirdly, it endorses the idea of Rawlsian *political* justification, according to which, under conditions of pluralism, standards of justice are to be justified on *public* grounds, starting from commonly shared political ideals. The departure from Rawls consists in a challenge to the *domestic scope thesis*, according to which principles of distributive justice apply to the basic structure of a closed, self-contained society. Finally, it aims to complement the Rawlsian idea of justification with a moral defense of why public justification is the appropriate justification to offer to others under conditions of pluralism.

The idea of global justice supported in this dissertation, then, is an *institutional egalitarian* conception of global justice that is justified on *public* grounds. The conception rests on four fundamental claims:

- i.) A practice dependent methodological commitment according to which global institutions and practices are the primary subjects of justice;
- ii.) A principle of global justice is an egalitarian principle, i.e. inequalities in the distributive effects of those institutions on people's life prospects require moral justification;
- iii.) Justification of a global egalitarian principle of justice must rest on global public grounds;
- iv.) All persons are equally valid sources of moral claims upon global institutional arrangements.

Global egalitarianism has been subject to various philosophical challenges. Prominent amongst them is the claim that duties of egalitarian distributive justice are confined to members of a nation-state due to the normative features underlying the scheme of domestic social and political institutions, the so called, basic structure. In the second chapter of this dissertation I address three different variants of this critique. The *bounded contribution view* assigns special importance to the domestic basic structure on grounds that its members mutually contribute to the production of the relevant social goods. As a result they owe each other fair return on the goods that they jointly produce. The *bounded constituency view* maintains that

members of a political association owe each other egalitarian concern based on the idea that its members are participants in a legal and political system of self-legislation, and they are co-authors of coercive laws through which they mutually determine each others' fates. On the *bounded cooperation* view the institutions of the basic structure are necessary for the development of our moral powers and social capacities that make social cooperation possible. I argue that none of these critiques warrant restricting the scope of justice to the domestic context. While these underlying normative features might be relevant reasons that ground distributive duties, they either do not constitute necessary conditions for the application of egalitarian duties, or the morally relevant feature in question can be shown to be equally compelling at the global level.

In the third chapter I make an inquiry into the appropriate form of justification a global egalitarian conception requires. Global egalitarianism has been most notably justified through an extension of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, by grounding global principles of justice in comprehensive liberal commitments. I challenge this view, by demonstrating that global egalitarianism, so construed, would fail to appeal to a global justificatory public, characterized by doctrinal and religious disagreements, and argue that a global egalitarian conception of justice must rest on global public grounds. Drawing on Rawls' political conception of justice in his *Political Liberalism*, I

explain why the appropriate way to justify principles under conditions of moral and religious pluralism is reasoning from political ideals embedded in the public culture of a society. Then, I proceed by demonstrating that public justification ought to be taken seriously not only in the domestic case, but even more so in the global case, due to a rich diversity of moral and religious doctrines characterizing the international public sphere.

I then argue that global egalitarianism must rest on an egalitarian theory of justification, which I call *justificatory egalitarianism*. Justificatory egalitarianism is a form of justification that treats people as equally valid sources of moral claims, and does so by taking people seriously in their plurality of moral views and religious beliefs. Under conditions of global pluralism, this doctrine requires us to justify the norms underlying a social scheme to others on global public grounds, to reason from broadly shareable global public ideals, thereby offering justification the relevant others cannot reasonably reject. While this requirement of global public justification is a plausible conclusion for normative theorizing, whether those global public ideals are robust enough to support a global egalitarian conception is a case that still needs to be made. I will limit myself to theoretical speculations about the problem, although a strong scientific proof would require an extensive case study on global public culture, its relevant sources and actors.

In chapter four I address the, so called, feasibility challenge to global egalitarianism, according to which the normative ideal it promotes or the institutional scheme it envisions is infeasible. The feasibility challenge for a theory of justice is the following. Certain aspects of our social world are relevant in order normative theory to be action guiding, while other aspects of our social world are exactly what we need to be critically assessing. Therefore, a theorist needs to discern which facts to account for as unchangeable, hence as relevant feasibility constraints on the theory, and which ones to consider as object of critical assessment and social change. Some feasibility constraints are related to facts about human psychology and motivation while others are related to facts about our social world, institutions and resources. Given the scope and focus of my dissertation, I address one type of feasibility constraint, the fact of pluralism about moral views, which is likely to constrain the kinds of principles that can be accepted by others and hence the kind of justification that can be given in their support. Feasibility critics challenge global egalitarianism at the level of application and institutional design. Taking pluralism as a feasibility constraint, however, I aim to show that part of the feasibility charges can be already addressed at the level of justification. I argue that public justification is the kind of justification that is able to account for pluralism as a feasibility constraint, and brings a normative political ideal closer to a feasible ideal.

The originality of the thesis advanced here consists in the idea that global egalitarian principles must be justified on global public grounds. While maintaining that the scope of justice must be global, it challenges those theories of global justice that justify their conception on cosmopolitan or comprehensive liberal grounds. Global egalitarian conceptions of justice, in particular the ones that promote a global difference principle have been developed already in the very first theories of global justice. I believe that these views are on the right track in the normative requirements they promote, however, they are insensitive to the problem of justification under conditions of pluralism. In my view they fail to respond to the fact of global pluralism, a relevant fact which limits the kind of justification that can be offered to global agents of justice. In order for global egalitarianism to be properly egalitarian in its justification, it must treat people as equals by accounting for their different moral views and systems of beliefs. In other words, global egalitarianism must take global pluralism seriously in the kind of justificatory argument it advances.

Working out the concrete normative requirements of justice for the global institutional order is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the purpose of this thesis, I limit my inquiry to the philosophical analysis of the reasons that ground the extension of the scope of justice, followed by an account of the appropriate kind of justification global egalitarianism requires

under conditions of global pluralism, and finally to working out the conditions that need to be met globally for global egalitarianism to be a feasible ideal.