

5. THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Philosophical understanding of the problems of global justice has grown over the years, especially in ethics and political philosophy. Different proposals and recommendations have been made on how to achieve human equality across borders. Global justice, as justice across humanity has made different proposals in the areas of world hunger and poverty, humanitarian intervention, international governance, immigration policies and climate change, among others. However, it appears that the more such efforts are made, the more solution eludes humanity; thus, the problem which global justice set to tackle persists. In this paper, I want to argue that the targeted solutions will continue to elude humanity because there is a fundamental problem about the motive and methodology of global justice in the world order.

Keywords: Challenges; Global Justice; Problems; Prospects; Limits.

Introduction

The problems of global justice arise because we live in an unequal and unjust world. Global justice as an issue and subject of discourse arises in ethics and political philosophy from the concern about unfairness and unequal distribution of resources in our contemporary world. It is presumed, and rightly so, that global problems should have global solutions which demands global justice. There are myriads of solutions meant to be tackled by global justice ranging from global peace, world hunger and poverty, food security, the permissibility of humanitarian intervention, just distribution, just and unjust war, good governance, elimination of human suffering, the grounds of sovereignty, emigration and immigration, self-determination, etc. This paper aims to argue that these targeted solutions still elude humanity both at national and international levels as a result of the motive and method being employed in the pursuit of global justice as a goal and solution to the prevailing myriads of world existential quagmire confronting humanity. Also, the world regime has been rigged against the poor and in favor of the rich both at national and international levels.

In order to argue this position, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section is this introduction where the outline of the paper is stated. This introduction serves to outline and introduce the anatomy and different sections of the paper. The second section is a brief explanation of what global justice is and the problem (s) it is meant to tackle. This will be followed by the third section which is about the covering areas or *modus operandi* of global justice. The next will be an articulation of the argument of the paper in the fourth section. The methodological problem of global justice which limits it from fully achieving its aims will be launched and discussed as well as possible recommendations for remedy in this section. This will be followed by the summary and conclusion of the paper.

What is Global Justice?

Global justice is a ubiquitous subject and theoretical framework that focuses on how to address myriads of issues concerning just distribution of benefits and burdens as well the examination of those institutions saddled with how to secure just distributions. It aims at helping policy makers, actors in public governance and world leaders to understand the world better and the expected responsibilities. It is the pursuit of justice across borders which involves humanitarian duty to help ensure that all persons attain a minimally decent and adequate nutrition and food security, shelter, education and healthcare. According to Charles Beitz, "... global justice is a legitimate subject of philosophical inquiry"³ It is meant to subject all persons around the world to the same system of fundamental principles which assign the same fundamental moral benefits and burdens to all persons. These fundamental benefits and burdens are not meant to give privilege or disadvantage to certain groups intentionally or arbitrarily. This is anchored on the Universalist view of morality whereby impartiality defines the point of view of morality and consequently every moral agent deserves equal moral consideration. Consequent upon this, there is common human solidarity for all human beings notwithstanding sex, religion, race, sex, nationality, among others.

Traditionally, debates about global justice have been divided into two camps between the statist and the cosmopolitans. On the one hand, the statist are of the view that principles of justice can only be held among those who share a state, such that those who fall outside this realm like noncom patriots are only owed charity and not entitlements. That is, the resources of a nation are an entitlement to the nationals or compatriots to such nation but only a charity to non-nationals. On the other hand, the cosmopolitans hold the view that justice applies equally to and among all human beings because humanity is one. This is the universalist view. Global justice has been adjudged as one of the essential components in normative international theory that focuses on the moral and political obligation of the world's rich to the world's poor or better put from the Global North to the Global South. It aims at the redistribution of wealth to reduce poverty, hunger and inequality. In the words of Kok-Chor Tan:

A theory of global justice is one that is able to take into account not just negative duties (for example, those of non-interference, non-aggression, and non-coercion) but also positive duties (to provide relief, to provide development and, to redistribute resources and wealth, and so forth) between different communities and countries of the world⁴

The major target of global justice is how to achieve balance amidst the apparent and perceived imbalance in our contemporary world. And one of the ways to achieving this aim is through wealth redistribution across global communities, not just within one community or nation but also an obligation to distance people and even unborn generations. In the same vein, Shmuel Nili captured the major questions and concerns of global justice this way:

Global justice seems to be all about "us" treating "them": how should we, the citizens of liberal democracies through our elected governments, approach problems in other societies? Should we offer to "distant" individuals who suffer from extreme poverty? What should we do about those who want to escape hardship and suffering by becoming our fellow citizens? Do we owe equal respect to conceptions of human rights different from ours? These

³ Charles R. Beitz, "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice", *The Journal of Ethics*, 2005, Vol.9, No.1/2, Current Debates in Global Justice, p.13.

⁴ Kok-Chor Tan, "Kantian Ethics and Global Justice", *Social Theory and Practice*, 1997, Vol. 23, No. 1, p.53.

questions constitute the core of what contemporary philosophers refer to as “the problem of global justice”⁵

The focus of global justice is on the relationship between citizens and nations at international levels on how to remedy the unjust and unequal condition that has been created by both natural phenomenon and artificial factors. This was aptly captured by Uchenna Okeja’s assertion that:

Global justice explores the unjust nature of the inequality of the world in which we live. Its central question pertains to how global inequality should be addressed from the perspective of justice.⁶

Similarly, Bruce Landesman raises questions and concerns at the heart of global justice. To him:

Global Justice asks the following questions: ‘Should we have a more equal world?’, ‘Should we have a world in which everyone can provide for their basic needs and have their basic rights protected?’, ‘Should we have a world in which people are roughly equally well off regardless of where they live?’, ‘Or is the global inequality that now exists, or some ameliorated version of it, morally acceptable?’⁷

The questions above are deep-seated in the discourse of global justice debate. Justice generally involves a fair measure of economic distribution but there is little value in distributive justice if there is nothing to distribute. The questions also are meant to define the focus and issues targeted at tackling global justice. Having defined global justice and the concerned questions, the next section deals with some of its prospects and challenges. I now turn to the discussion of the prospects and challenges of global justice.

Prospects and Challenges of Global Justice

This section deals with the task of showing the challenges that limits the operation of global justice. These challenges serve as impediments to global justice achieving its goals satisfactorily. Notwithstanding its challenges, global justice has been helping us to come to the realization that the world as we have it today is characterized by inequalities in both wealth production and distribution. It has made it conspicuous to us that there is a need to remedy the world by taking intentional steps towards creating a better and happier world through the instrumentality of the principle of justice. According to Sandra Rubli (2012), a fundamental belief which underlies most policies is that global justice is a necessary and purposeful development on the way to the construction of a liberal society and the establishment of the rule of law and a democratic state. This teleological approach of global justice assumes that all countries will, or should, converge in the long run towards a liberal democratic state. This has proven not to be the case across countries and continents.

The first challenge to global justice is the difficulty of delineating its scope. That is, the problems of global justice are often not well defined and articulated. There is lack of well-established traditions of thought to guide reflections on global justice. For example, who defines it; the paradigm and the scope? Who defines who should get what, in what situation and what quantity of what is to be gotten? In response to this, there is urgent and pressing need

⁵ Shmuel Nili, “Our Problem of Global Justice”, *Social Theory and Practice*, 2011, Vol.37, No. 4, p. 629.

⁶ Uchenna Okeja, “Introduction: Globalizing or Transcending Global Justice?”, *Philosophical Papers*, 2017, 46: 4, 1-11, DOI: 10.1080/05568641.20.

⁷ Bruce Landesman, “Global Justice” in Deen K. Chatterjee (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, Dordrecht Springer, 2011, p. 421.

for philosophers (ethicists and political philosophers) and other professionals to define and clearly delineate the scope and boundaries of global justice. This involves the task of working out a theoretical understanding of the problems of global justice, the issues it is meant to tackle and how it has fared vis-à-vis the matters arising from it. This will go a long way to redefine the focus of global justice. Global justice claims to be subjecting all persons around the world to the same system and the same benefits and burdens to all persons. This is almost impossible considering the empirical evidences bifurcating the world into north and south, and consequently determining different treatment for differently people and location, sometime on frivolous reasons of race, and colour of the skin. Global justice ought to be a kind of solidarity which is already an important component of African culture that would contribute to the liberation of Africa and other regions from underdevelopment and destructive bad governance thereby moving towards economic and social change but the present scope of Global justice does not enable or enhance this because who defines the scope and for what purpose and to whom matters a lot.

Further, it appears that priorities of global justice have not yet been well set out. This is because global justice cannot solve all problems of humanity. For global justice to achieve its purpose, its goal and targets, its priorities must be well streamlined. The problems persist despite all the efforts put in place because the question about priorities has not yet been well identified and articulated. In line with this, Helena de Bres buttresses this point by asserting that:

In order for global justice or injustice to exist, there must be something in global politics that is just or unjust: something to which the moral assessments at issue attach. Which thing or things should play that role in our theory? What should be the “target” of principles of global justice?⁸

The above assertion is a demonstration that something germane is conspicuously lacking in the operational mechanism of global justice. There must be a guiding principle to which action must be focused. It has often been said that “the global basic structure” is the guiding principle of assessment but this structure is not well articulated. For example, who defines the global basic structure? Who benefits from such basic structure; the poor or rich nations? A critical look into such global basic structure, if any, will reveal that the rich nations are behind it and define the paradigm. This often manifests in the form of humanitarian aids and interventions which in most cases do not work, hence world poverty keeps increasing rather than abating. There should be action guidance on how to achieve the goals or targeted ideals of global justice. It must be focused and well-articulated such that no country or section of the world hijack or manipulate it to their own advantage thereby causing more injury. This is important because often times some rich western nations do prefer to give priority to military intervention rather than giving assistance to tackle poverty-related and human right issues. It has been observed that such military interventions are rooted in the self-interest of such rich nations. The simple and singular motive behind such intervention is that such rich nation wants to market their weapons. In recognition of this self-interest-based intervention, Thomas Pogge rightly observed that “western self-interest has deeply flawed the moral presentation of economic cooperation”.⁹ And this should not be in anywhere the motive of global justice; otherwise, it amounts to exploitation rather than economic cooperation or emancipation. In some cases, more countries and nations are further impoverished since the earth resources is finite and

⁸ Helena de Bres, Disaggregating Global Justice, *Social Theory and Practice*, 2013, Vol. 39, No. 3, p.422.

⁹ Thomas Pogge, “Priorities of Global Justice”, *Metaphilosophy*, 2001, Vol. 32, No. ½, Special Issue: Global Justice, p.6.

limited in nature whereas human wants are without limits of any kind, that is, unmeasurable in extent of space, duration and time.

In line with the above, Sandra Rubli maintains that it is a widespread assumption that global justice will be accepted as a legitimate and neutral weapon, since it is guided by and based on international norms and standards. Underlying this assumption is the belief in the universality of those norms and standards, such as human rights (Rubli 2012:9). It is expected that global justice should pursue equal consideration of human rights and treatment but even the the scope of global justice in the world order glaringly contravenes that assumption.

Another salient issue that needs to be critically looked into or reconsidered is the issue of obligation. How do we determine obligations? Whose correlative duty is it to help the other and how is it to be determined? This needs to be well spelt out for global justice principle to work out effectively. Global justice should not just be about proposals and justification of goals at policy levels. It must go beyond such value justification to the level of action by defining whose duty and obligation it is and at what point. Thomas Pogge captured this worrisome concern thus: "... thinking about global justice must not be confined to the exposition and justification of goals, values and ideals, but must be extended to the question of obligation".¹⁰ The problem of how to determine these obligations in global justice is still a serious challenge that needs attention, probably urgently. The obligation ought to be defined so that the rich nations willing and ready to assist would do so as a matter of obligation which should not be conditional but unconditional. Also, it is important that the obligation be defined so that the assistance from rich nations should not see it as a matter of favor or generosity that could be exploited at the detriment of the poor nations at any point in time. If the issue of obligation is well delineated, it would go a long way to close the gap existing between North and South. This is corroborated by Kai Nielsen "To overcome the great disparities between north and south... there would have to be significant and varied redistribution from North to South"¹¹ This needs to be done bearing in mind the antecedent events and experience of most countries of the Global South from colonialism and slavery.

And it is indisputable that there is a great disparity between north and south in terms of wealth creation and distribution. Most of the countries of the global south are still agonizing and attributing their perpetual poor governance, malnutrition, and poverty to the effects and aftermath of colonialism. How true or false this claim is does not come within the purview of this paper. But in reacting to such treatment and dichotomy, Adetovi (1972, 304) warns that: In the aspiration to build a truly human global world embedded in global justice, it is imperative to note that when digging the grave of the weaker than yourself, make it larger, for you do not know if you will not be pulled into it yourself.

Conclusion

In this paper, the subject of global justice and its challenges has been examined. In doing this, an attempt was made to conceptualize global justice. The major questions and concerns of global justice were discussed. This was followed by the prospects and challenges of global justice for international communities and the world at large. It was argued that there is a serious problem impeding the success of global justice as a result of unclear motive and undefined methodology of global justice. This fundamental problem has manifested in the following challenges to global justice: no well-defined scope for global justice; no guidance

¹⁰ Thomas Pogge, "Introduction: Global Justice", *Metaphilosophy*, 2001, Vol.32, No. ½, Special Issue: Global Justice, p. 2.

¹¹ Kai Nielsen, "Global Justice, Capitalism, and the Third World" in John Arthur and William H. Shaw (eds.), *Justice and Economic Distribution*, Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991, p.52.

principle for action; and no well-articulated view of obligation. The paper concludes that there is urgent need to attend to these challenges in order for global justice to effectively achieve the desired goals; otherwise, the purpose would be defeated.

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