

INTERNATIONAL
JUSTICE
A N D T H E
THIRD
WORLD

Edited by
ROBIN ATTFIELD
and
BARRY WILKINS



International Justice and the Third World

International Justice and the Third World is a collection of essays on the philosophy of development. Contesting the view that there is no such thing as justice between societies of unequal power, and that there is no obligation to assist poor people in distant countries, it helps make good the lack of philosophical literature about global justice and the conceptual and ethical issues surrounding the idea of development.

Together, the essays affirm that a notion of global justice is both necessary and possible, and respond to theories which deny the existence of obligations to all human beings. It is variously argued that these obligations are based on human needs, on human rights or on social relations. Liberal and Marxist approaches to universal responsibilities are discussed, and their ability to manage global issues of equity assessed. As many millions of women in the Third World suffer special oppression, it is stressed that any adequate theory must respond to their plight. At the same time the presuppositions of the various economic and political models of development are explored in a chapter which argues for a democratic and participatory approach.

Another chapter argues for a convergence of the platforms of environmentalists and developmentalists. *International Justice and the Third World* thus relates Third World development to sustainability, to issues of gender, and to environmentalism, questioning throughout the sufficiency of market mechanisms to cope with these issues. The concluding chapter, building on earlier contributions, argues that current Third World indebtedness is profoundly exploitative, and that the debts of Third World countries should be unconditionally cancelled.

International Justice and the Third World

Studies in the Philosophy of
Development

edited by

Robin Attfield and Barry Wilkins



London and New York

First published 1992
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
a division of Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc.
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
International justice and the third world: studies in
the philosophy of development.
I. Attfield, Robin II. Wilkins, Barry
179

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
International justice and the third world: studies in the philosophy
of development/edited by Robin Attfield and Barry Wilkins.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Social justice. 2. Economic development—Moral and ethical aspects. 3. Economic development—Environmental aspects.
4. International economic relations—Moral and ethical aspects.
5. Economic assistance—Developing countries—Moral and ethical aspects. I. Attfield, Robin. II. Wilkins, Barry.

JC578.I58 1992
320'.01'1—dc20 91—38394

ISBN 0-203-42177-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-42237-6 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-06924-6 (Print Edition)
0-415-06925-4 (pb)

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Kai Nielsen and to the Society for Applied Philosophy for permission to reprint 'Global justice, capitalism and the Third World', from the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1984.

We are also grateful to Onora O'Neill and to Oxford University Press for permission to reprint 'Justice, gender and international boundaries', from M.Nussbaum and A.K.Sen (eds), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Our thanks go also to Andrew Belsey for some helpful comments on an earlier draft of the Introduction, to Geoff Boden for preparing the Bibliography and the Index, to Miles Litvinoff for helpful and constructive copy-editing and to the publishers and all the contributors for their obligingness and co-operation.

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Introduction

While almost everyone is in favour of development, not many people could readily specify what this commits them to. And while everyone is in favour of justice for themselves, many are puzzled about whether its claims extend to global society, in a world as inequitable as our own. Yet for the poorer countries, predominantly the countries of the 'South', or (to use the now customary expression) the Third World, both development and a more equitable form of international relations are pressing matters; nor are they pressing for the poorer countries alone.

Yet till recently there has existed comparatively little philosophical discussion of the concept and the implications of development; indeed, one of the aims of this book is partially to make good this deficiency. Since the very concept of development is a site of struggle, a definition cannot yet be offered; at this stage it may suffice to point out that underdevelopment is present in a society in which a number of mutually reinforcing evils are present, such as high rates of infant mortality and morbidity, low rates of productivity, poor provision of health care and of educational opportunities, illiteracy, and (centrally) poverty. Thus whatever else development involves, it consists, minimally, in moves away from this cycle of evils. And this is already enough to show that, for hundreds of millions of people alive today, development is a requirement of the satisfaction of basic needs, and thus, we maintain, of international or global justice.

Another aim of this book is to clarify and defend the notion of global justice, and to apply it to issues of development, not least with regard to the Third World. Here the issue is not so much the concept of justice (which is at least as widely acknowledged in theory as it is disregarded in practice), controversial as it often is, as its scope and thus its significance. While considerable diversity will be found in the accounts of justice which follow, the central issues cluster around the sense in which justice is global or universal, and thus has undeniable practical

significance for people worldwide.¹ The various rival accounts of justice (Kantian, Marxian, rights-based and consequentialist; objectivist, relativist and communitarian) make their appearance in answer to these issues, and are further discussed below.

While some of the current contributors have pioneered the subject of the philosophy of development (Onora O'Neill and Nigel Dower not least),² mention should also here be made of the important contributions of Peter Singer, with his seminal 'famine relief argument',³ and, more particularly, of Amartya Sen. Besides his contribution to the understanding of how famine is due to inaccessibility rather than to shortage of food⁴ (a crucial point underlined below by Kai Nielsen), Sen has contributed importantly to the ethical basis of justice and of development, which he locates not so much in needs, interests or rights but in human capabilities and their facilitation.⁵ While the approach of the current editors turns rather on satisfying needs, a close correlation can nevertheless be maintained between needs and capabilities, at least where human beings are concerned. Thus much of Sen's work can be regarded as complementary to the positions upheld both in this introduction and in many of the contributions which follow, whether grounded in interests (as with Nielsen and with Andrew Collier), in needs (as with Andrew Belsey) or in rights (as with Dower). Meanwhile Sen's recent work linking the elimination of hunger with participation and democracy⁶ coheres well with the participatory accounts of development here from O'Neill and from Geoffrey Hunt, while the contributors to this volume would without exception support Sen's advocacy of the role of public action in overcoming poverty, 'against the current' of the orthodoxies of the 1980s as that may be.⁷

In the current collection, the subject of global justice is ably introduced by Kai Nielsen, who first presents in a challenging manner some of the key facts about global malnutrition and its social and political background. This enables him to counter the neo-Malthusian claim that a massive redistribution of resources would only cause greater harm through the insufficiency of food and the growth of population. Hunger, malnutrition and famine depend not on food supply but on distributions of income and on entitlements to food. The basic causes of famine are poverty, the world economic system and associated western policies. While this chapter was written in the early 1980s, and while Nielsen's remarks about the political sociology of food may be open to qualification, the passage of time has in no way detracted from the contemporary relevance of his conclusions.

Turning to global justice, Nielsen effectively refutes the belief that justice among societies only applies to relations between societies of similar power which co-operate to mutual advantage. The requirement of reciprocal advantage is far too strong. The Kantian conception of moral equality in which all people are to be treated as persons calls, instead, for a willingness to ask whether we should be willing for roles to be reversed with those on the receiving end of the relation wherever there is interdependence or interaction. In view of the nature and extent of current inequalities, this conception of the moral equality of people already shows the current international food order to be fundamentally unjust. Global justice is a plain extension of domestic justice, granted that in the international as well as the national arena we stand in conditions of interdependence, of moderate scarcity and of interests which sometimes conflict.

Further, the injustice is so great that extensive redistributions are in place. Those who believe in moral equality have to accept that the interests of everyone matter, and matter equally; this much is common to many liberal as well as socialist thinkers. To those right-wing liberals who take respect for equal interests to issue mainly in rights to non-interference, Nielsen replies that the current system very deeply harms many people in the Third World, and further that moral equality also issues in rights to fair co-operation and to non-subordination, rights which can conflict with non-interference. Thus people's very liberty to guide their own lives in accordance with their own 'unmystified preferences' often calls for public interventions; and to put an end to the conditions of immiseration of people in the South, which for them nullify this liberty, requires significant intervention and redistribution.

In the matter of priorities between rights of non-interference in matters of property and other rights, Nielsen argues for a hierarchy of interests. Bodily integrity, and also the kind of moral integrity associated with the intactness of one's civil liberties, are much more vital than property interests; and it is the latter rather than the former which would sometimes be overridden by moves to collective ownership, which Nielsen takes to be necessary to 'overcome starvation, malnutrition, domination, subordination and great poverty and ignorance' on a global scale.

Here, in a confessedly outspoken concluding section, Nielsen spells out what he takes to be the practical implications. As no adequate redistribution can take place within the present socio-economic order, which allows at best of lessening the severity of injustice, a necessary condition of global justice is the shedding of capitalism, unclear as it

may be how this is to be done. The alternative is 'reformist tinkering inside bourgeois parameters'. Some of the other contributors are more disposed to regard efforts at amelioration of the system as consistent with the moral seriousness to which Nielsen appeals. But all would support the essential moral case for changes of structure on a global scale.

The case for universal obligations with far-reaching global implications is independently argued by Andrew Belsey, who buttresses it against a range of familiar objections. With Nielsen, he points out that poverty is the product of the current global system of power relations; and this system, being traceable to human choices, is therefore open to challenge, not least from advocates of justice. But the applicability of talk of justice to these matters is resisted by those who make justice in one way or another local or particular.

Belsey first tackles the view that there are no obligations without reciprocity, meaning by this not the moral reciprocity on which much of Nielsen's case is based, but the power to reciprocate. This view miscarries partly because the very power relations which deny poor countries any appreciable power over rich ones can themselves be challenged, and partly because in the modern world peoples are all in many ways interdependent.

Another objection to the universality of morality claims that the special obligations which we owe to our kin relegate obligations to people in distant continents to insignificance. The loyalties arising from special relations are among the grounds sometimes cited for this view; such accounts of morality are further discussed below by Onora O'Neill. For his part Belsey robustly charges unqualified arguments of this kind with being rationalizations of selfishness. At the same time the position is different where special obligations are conditional, as they are with John Stuart Mill, on the interests of others not being imperilled; in the interdependent modern world, preference for family or friends frequently harms distant people, and thus forgoes whatever support (let alone immunity) acceptance of the conditional status of such obligations might have seemed to afford.

Belsey then turns to the claim, representatively put forward by James Fishkin, that people are not morally obliged to give up institutionalized ways of life to which they have become accustomed. Fishkin's appeal to the optional nature of sacrifice fails, however, as there is no moral sacrifice in giving up what you have no right to, or what you hold in consequence of exploitation; as Northern affluence is based on

exploitation, its forfeiture might be a psychological blow, but, far from being a sacrifice, is morally obligatory.

Global justice, however, does not call for an abandonment of 'our' way of life (an ideological distortion of morality, this), but calls for the moral bases of this very way of life (such as care and concern for others and belief in human equality) to be taken seriously. What global justice involves is a network of relationships between people who are equal in their needs—equal not mathematically but in that similar needs must be met before any worthwhile life can be lived. The vision which comes when our moral blinkers are removed discloses the moral equality of 'the observed and the observers', of 'the sufferers and those who are in a position to provide assistance'. Justice thus involves equality of consideration, under which basic needs are trumps, whoever's they may be.

Belsey's argument is not based on existing relationships (as is Collier's), but instead brings out something of the character which just relationships would have. Nor is it Kantian, unlike the arguments of Nielsen from respect for personal liberty or of O'Neill from sharability (see below), or, come to that, rights-based, like Nigel Dower's. Its basis is rather an enlightened version of consequentialism, in which not happiness but the satisfaction of needs is the criterion of morality. Consistently harnessed to a Kantian-like belief in moral equality, it generates principles which are both forceful and difficult to resist. But are such principles too abstract, as Collier for one would hold? These are among the issues tackled both by O'Neill and later implicitly by Dower.

Reflecting on the debate about development, Onora O'Neill insists that, when principles of justice and of the relations between members of different societies are in question, the predicament of 'impoverished providers' in the Third World should not be overlooked. Abstract principles all too easily assume an idealized form, for example as if agents were always, or typically, both rational and independent. Such principles are prone to be so framed as to fail to provide for people who are seen as dependent and whose options in life are severely constrained by social structures and by the power of others, people who include countless millions of Third World women.

As O'Neill points out, it is often claimed by feminists that gender bias is integral to liberal justice. Some go so far as to reject talk of justice as 'male', as neglectful of 'the actualities of human difference' and as if it devalued the virtues of love and care. To this she rightly replies that justice and care should not be presented as alternatives, nor

either of them as complete approaches to moral issues. Justice and care are virtues of different (if overlapping) spheres; and where social structures are defective, talk of justice is likely to be indispensable.

Yet liberal justice still confronts the objection of being too abstract and unrooted in social reality. This can be a point of entry for relativized theories, which seek to derive justice from 'history, tradition or local context'. Sensitive as such communitarian approaches may be to context, however, they tend to relegate women's lives to a private sphere, and to validate the weakness of the weak and their oppression by the strong; within such theories the critical role of appeals to justice is thus liable to disappear. Thus theories of justice need to retain their universal scope (something which requires abstraction), but to abstract without adopting ideals biased towards one gender, nation or race.

O'Neill proceeds to lay the foundations of such a theory, a theory abstracting from cases without idealizing the individual, and framed so as to apply to interacting parties. (Here there is an echo of Andrew Collier's claim that peoples who seldom interact bear only the most marginal of obligations towards one another.) It is also intended to be sensitive to local contexts and to real differences of capacity and of opportunity, and to avoid that uniformity with which universal theories are sometimes charged. One criterion of such a theory (and here O'Neill's Kantianism emerges) is held to be sharability. Principles unable to be universally adopted are indefensible; and this rules out, to say the least, deception and the kinds of coercion which undercut other people's independence. Further, structures will be just if and only if those affected by them are free alike to consent to them, to refuse them or to renegotiate them; or so O'Neill maintains.

At this point some would want to point out that people's perceptions are often so moulded by disinformation and by ideology that their consent is insufficient to legitimate what they consent to—and may not be necessary for legitimation either, in that structures neither consented to nor even dreamed of may still be more just. Justice, it might be held, is concerned with need rather than with consent. But to dwell on such an objection would obscure something crucial: the kind of theory defended by O'Neill already requires a radical restructuring of social and intersocietal arrangements on a global scale, and in the interests of the poor and the vulnerable. The restructuring required adds a further and vital dimension to that required by Nielsen, in that it calls for a change of power relations between genders as well as between economic classes.

While it is liberal theory which O'Neill seeks to apply to international justice, Andrew Collier attempts the like with regard to Marxist theory. Can a Marxist who holds that obligations arise out of historically specific shared interests and shared motivations uphold universal interests and obligations, extensive enough to include the emancipation of the proletariat on a global scale? On the face of it, the flow of wealth to the Third World which would be required is contrary to the interests of western workers. Moreover, historical materialism requires loyalties to be based on actual ties, and not on merely possible ones, nor again on abstract ethics such as utilitarianism or Kantianism, which, in common with F.H.Bradley, Collier dismisses as utopian.

Collier thus undertakes the task of rescuing a communitarian ethic from the conservatism and the narrowness to which, as O'Neill points out, such theories are prone. Existing roles, he claims, can be criticized on the basis of values implicit in other roles in which people participate within the network of relationships which comprise society. (Even Bradley, holds Collier, could in principle support such criticism, despite both his conservatism and his justified rejection of abstract ethics.) Thus we need a 'social ontology' richer than social atomism, the view which regards society as constituted by nothing but individuals, and which Collier associates with utilitarianism and Kantianism. (But note that O'Neill, a Kantian, rejects such an atomistic posture.) The relational ontology of Marx allows us to see how the lattice of social relationships, which makes us what we are and which will nowhere be wholly corrupt, allows of dissent from a corrupt state or even a corrupt society.

The worlds by which people define themselves are importantly shared worlds, naturally generating obligations towards other beings. Furthermore, universal obligations arise from there being one shared world, constituted as such by the facts of economic and ecological interdependence. Emancipation for workers in these circumstances means taking power collectively over the interlocking global system; and the ties of global interdependence, which make us what we are, supply for this both a natural motivation, and the grounds of a matching universal obligation.

Some, however, consciously choose a different option, the preservation of a neo-imperialist system of oppression; and there are, according to Collier, no arguments whatever available to Marxists to persuade them of contrary obligations. The obligations of proletarians as proletarians are universal in that they are obligations *to* all; but, since obligations arise from historical ties which make people what they are,

there are no obligations incumbent on oppressors. Genuinely universal obligations depend on sharing in the aim of class emancipation.

Anyone who believes that even oppressors have obligations to desist from cruelty, injustice or despotism will find difficulty with this close association of obligation, motivation and material interests. In face of such criticism, Collier falls back on the multiple roles which agents usually occupy; non-oppressive roles may generate humanitarian scruples even in those prone to connive in oppression, and therewith a conflict of obligations. This move would seem to allow for the emergence of a sense of universal obligation in virtually anyone; and, undeniably, it supplies a ground for belief in such possibilities.

Yet Collier would still have to say that for an agent lacking relationships liable to generate such motivations, there is no obligation to resist oppression or to desist from oppressing the weak and the powerless. Readers unable to accept this must, it seems, reject his communitarian belief that obligations arise solely out of ties and relationships. A potential chasm opens up between, on the one hand, communitarian systems of ethics and, on the other, belief in global obligations—global both as to their beneficiaries and as to the agents and agencies to whom they apply. Many Marxists, however, would allow of no exceptions to the universality of obligations, appealing either to a common human nature and common human needs or to the hoped-for future world community as the basis of their claims.

Nigel Dower, too, upholds belief in universal ('cosmopolitan') obligations, grounding them on human rights; rights which, for the poor, underpin a right to development. Avoiding the pitfalls of abstract generalization, he argues for a right to development which is significantly qualified, yet strong enough to generate obligations to realize it on the part of everyone in a position to do so. It is also a right to sustainable development, since no other kind is worthy of the name.

This right may, however, seem problematic, even if the existence of human rights is granted. The case for the corresponding global obligations has to be made out, and the case for governments being subject to them; nor are these tasks left unshouldered. There are also questions about what can count as development, and problems about whether self-determining countries, having decided their own path to development, are morally entitled to assistance from others in pursuit of whatever path they have chosen. There are problems too about the right to aid for development where the beneficiaries are not primarily the deprived or the disadvantaged. Yet tackling the objections to belief in development rights serves to bring out how difficult it is to deny such

rights in cases of unacceptable poverty and of the deprivation of basic needs.

Dower's appeal here is ultimately to universal human rights, which are argued to include positive rights of subsistence if negative rights such as rights to liberty are also admitted. These rights are held to involve a claim upon the rest of humanity, and are shown to require much more of governments than the norms of the existing international order recognize. While there is no right of richer countries to aid for the sake of continued development, the subsistence rights of the poor and of the exploited vindicate the right to development of countries in which these rights cannot be exercised without it.

Yet not every change which those in power favour is recognizable as development. While development consists in the kind of socio-economic change which ought to happen, general economic growth can easily fail to deserve this accolade; and unsustainable processes invariably fall short of it. Sustainability, indeed, concerns not just processes which can be sustained but ones which deserve to be sustained; and thus it excludes both exploitation and environmental destruction, whether domestic or exported. It thus also excludes practices (like the emission of carbon dioxide at current levels) which would undermine sustainable conditions globally even if pursued by no more than those countries currently in a position to pursue them.

Indeed, the only way to discover whether processes which are domestically sustainable are justifiable is to consider whether they are sustainable globally and from the point of view of world development. Only those policies and practices which could fit into a sustainable global package are genuinely sustainable and justifiable. These include some forms of economic growth for poorer countries, but not perpetual economic growth for rich countries, even though the need to realize basic rights exists there too. The requirements of sustainability thus clarify the nature of the right to development, which is a right to sustainable development if it is anything; at the same time the global perspective makes sustainability of development something which everyone has a right to claim of all agents and agencies, governments included.

Geoffrey Hunt's distinctive claims are that people interested in development need to get clear about the theoretical framework which they knowingly or unconsciously adopt, and that there are five current types of framework, to one or another of which all such people are more or less affiliated. The key role for a philosopher is to bring these frameworks to consciousness; to claim impartiality for one's approach

is to bear an unacknowledged allegiance, almost invariably, to one or another liberal model. Hunt makes clear his own allegiance to a Marxist model of the participatory kind; he also argues for it as both explaining and rising above the others. (So it is possible to step back and compare models, at least in point of explanatory adequacy.)

In describing the models, Hunt also draws out the characteristic attitude of their holders towards environmental protection. Thus among liberal frameworks the Market Model regards the unalloyed free market system as capable of coping with environmental problems, and environmentalist demands for intervention as ideological ploys of critics of this system. By contrast the Regulation Model recognizes imperfections in both national and international markets, ascribes environmental problems to misallocation of resources and favours interventions by states and by international agencies to remedy poverty, to rectify the consequent environmental damage and to stabilize the global system.

According to the Green Model, by contrast, environmental problems are due to industrialism, overconsumption and the pursuit of economic growth, and development would involve moves towards 'small-scale self-sufficient ecologically benign co-operative and communalistic production' (p. 124), albeit within a social-democratic, capitalist framework. Moves away from world-scale industrialization involve countries delinking from world markets and opting for self-reliance. (Already internationalist advocates of sustainability such as Dower seem to bestride the Regulative and Green frameworks.)

According to Hunt, both Marxist models involve a deeper understanding of growth. According to the Statist Model underdevelopment results from colonialism and subsequently from the structural inequalities of neo-colonialism, and the growth necessary for independent development can only be ensured by state control and the replacement of small-scale communal production with production which is centrally planned. The solution to environmental problems is accordingly better planning. Without deviating from the underlying economic analysis of this model, the Participatory Model advocates a different approach to development, through participatory democracy and industrialization of a kind suited to the needs of Third World peoples. Environmental problems are caused by globally divisive social relations of production, and not by ecological factors, and they can only be resolved through the democratic, participatory control of production at local, national and ultimately global levels, to foster the 'collective human good'. This form of growth, in which 'the development of the

free creative powers of each' is, at last, 'the condition of the freedom and welfare of all' (p. 144), would employ ecologically benign technology, protect or restore the environment (e.g. retrieving deserts with newly engineered species of plants) and promote harmony both ecologically and within human society.

This model combines an understanding of some of the structures underlying both underdevelopment and environmental problems with the participatory elements of Green solutions. Hunt is also able to show how the other four models plausibly embody distorted reflections of the social relations of various historical phases; and could also claim that the Participatory Model has in no way been discredited by recent events, unlike the Statist Model. Yet this would not immunize the Participatory Model from criticism itself. Criticisms might comprise the charges of technological optimism, or of the irresponsible rejection of piecemeal ameliorative measures which might avert localized hardship or save lives. Alternatively the Participatory Model might be accused of virtually ignoring the beneficial role which could be played in promoting development by a Third World state genuinely committed to meeting the needs and aspirations of its people; or, as will shortly emerge, of ignoring the collective good of everything *but* humanity—the charge of anthropocentrism. The possibility of yet other models should also be mentioned, such as O'Neill's vision of a restructured world economy (defended on a Kantian basis), or Dower's of a world restructured for globally sustainable development (grounded in human rights, which Hunt admits to be decreasingly controversial); socio-economic elaborations of these visions might easily bestride two or three of Hunt's models. Yet a human-centred bias might be discerned in these approaches too.

Robin Attfield argues that in view of the problems of underdevelopment environmentalists are obliged by consistency, as well as by morality, to support sustainable development in the Third World; or rather that this is so to the extent that their own principles are themselves morally defensible, as the principles of misanthropic environmentalism are shown not to be. These obligations apply to environmentalists of the 'deeper' as well as of the 'shallower' kinds. Thus where environmentalism is grounded on a rejection of unjustified discrimination, or on egalitarianism, or again on the liberation of oppressed creatures, the same grounds require support for resistance to injustice and oppression in inter-human relations, both within and between human societies.