

On Brock's Account of Global Justice

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Those who embark on an account of cosmopolitan justice have to navigate their way past more than one set of hazards. They have to eschew idealised accounts of justice that have no bearing on the world as it actually is, but at the same time avoid a theory which makes too many accommodations to present states of affairs. They have to show how a morality that centres on individuals and their equal entitlements can be realized in a world where nationalist motivations predominant and nation-states remain the principal agents. They have to explain how just global governance is possible short of establishing a world government – which almost no one wants or thinks is possible. Gillian Brock is well aware of these hazards and her book, more successfully than most recent literature on global justice, makes a concerted effort to avoid them.

Her book advances the discussion of global justice in a number of ways. It puts forward a plausible view of what those concerned with global justice should be aiming for. It contains insightful criticisms of the views of those who have written on the subject. But its most important contribution is that it explores the ways in which a conception of global justice could be realized in the world as it is or could become. Her accomplishment is to show how moral cosmopolitanism can be combined with a concern for the creation and operation of effective and just global institutions. Other theorists and reformers may have different ideas about how this should be done. But the pragmatic turn that Brock's work represents is welcome and necessary.

Her conception of global justice is derived from a thought experiment. Imagine that you are a randomly selected delegate to a global convention with the aim of determining 'what would be a fair framework for interactions and relations among the world's inhabitants' (49). Since you are behind a veil of ignorance you do not know what position you will occupy when the veil is lifted, what country you come from or even what generation you belong to. You do however know relevant facts about global problems. Brock does not

think that the requirements of justice that you and the other delegates agree to will include an egalitarian principle of distributive justice like Rawls's difference principle. Instead the delegates will favour social and political arrangements that ensure that every individual is able to meet his or her basic needs and enjoys a reasonable range of opportunities. She thinks that this result is backed up by the experimental work done by Frohlich and Oppenheimer showing that groups who are asked to choose a conception of justice for their society generally favour one that ensures that everyone is able to meet their needs but does not put limits on inequalities that can result from ability or fortune.

This thought experiment raises a number of questions. In Brock's version of the original position what is up for grabs are not only principles of justice for global society, but also the very existence and nature of this society, the institutions it ought to contain and the way people ought to cooperate. It is not so easy to see how an agreement about global justice is possible when different institutional frameworks might result in different conceptions of justice. For example, people who think that global institutions similar to those that now exist in liberal democracies are possible and desirable might favour a more demanding conception of global justice. Those who think that sovereign states should continue to be the principal agents of world society would probably not.

An appeal to Frohlich and Oppenheimer's attempts to simulate Rawls's original position cannot be a decisive reason for favouring the result that Brock reaches. The experimental groups, no doubt influenced by the ideology of their own societies, could not be expected to realize Rawls's requirement of rationality in the limited time that they had to debate the issues. Did their widespread indifference to social inequality stem from a belief in the highly debatable notion that the rich deserve their good fortune? Or did it rest on the equally contentious idea that large incentives are needed to encourage productivity? Did those who participated in the experiment sufficiently consider the social problems caused by inequality or the fact that inequalities tend to be perpetuated through the generations?

Despite doubts about Brock's starting point, there are good reasons for favouring her conclusion: that we ought to aim for a world in which everyone is able to live a decent life. Those who support welfare rights or the satisfaction of basic needs or the achievement of human capabilities all endorse this objective (as she points out). The data from Frohlich and Oppenheimer's experiments at least show that this is an idea that most people can be induced to support. And those who favour a more demanding idea of global justice will admit that ensuring that everyone is able to satisfy their needs is a good first step.

So what is the use of Brock's thought experiment? Is it a troublesome device that should be jettisoned? It seems to me that it has one important function. It forces people to think as cosmopolitans and thus recognise that satisfying basic needs of the world's people is a priority – not something that members of wealthy nations are only obligated to do after they have ensured a high standard of welfare for themselves. This is the point that Brock makes when she considers what forms of national favouritism are compatible with global justice. So understood, her thought experiment is a way of positioning a debate about global justice – it does not provide a definite conclusion. Thinking as cosmopolitans is compatible with having disagreements about what global justice is or what global institutions we should favour.

However, Brock's own view about the nature of global justice serves the principal aim of her book: to explain how justice for the world's people can be achieved in a reasonably short time without radical changes to global society. To use Rawls's phrase, her aim is to be 'realistically utopian'. Most of her discussion concentrates on how presently existing institutions can be made more accountable to all of the world's people, more effective, and thus more just, or how new institutions might overcome some of the obstacles that stand in the way of people meeting their needs.

In one of her best chapters she explains how trained health workers from poor countries are recruited, sometimes *en masse*, to work in developed countries, thus depriving people in their homeland of health care and taking advantage of the efforts it put into training them. She proposes that the codes of practice adopted in the UK – codes that require government to government agreements about recruitment – be made more general, that developed countries should aim to train their own health workers, and meanwhile provide compensation to countries that supply them. Brock concentrates on ways in which recruitment of health workers diminishes the chances of people in poor countries meeting their health needs. But the problem is much more general. Most developed countries now concentrate on attracting immigrants with valued skills or with capital. Such policies deserve critical attention from the perspective of global justice.

To provide poor countries with more funds to overcome poverty, she proposes that multinationals that operate in their territory pay their fair share of taxes, that tax havens be abolished, that transfer pricing be eliminated, and that proposals for taxing world trade, email traffic, use of carbon, or international goods for the benefit of poor countries be considered. She proposes the creation of an international body, or the extension of the powers of existing organizations, to collect and distribute the funds. To deal with corrupt governments who exploit and abuse their own people she proposes measures that will protect liberty – above all, freedom of the press,

which can be promoted by internal and external pressure groups. In the worst cases humanitarian intervention may be necessary. Ideally, intervention should be decided on and managed by an accountable organization dedicated to protecting vital interests of individuals and funds should be made available for this purpose and for preventative measures. Many other ideas for institutional changes are discussed in her book – all with the aim of removing injustices that prevent people from satisfying their needs.

This brief survey shows that there are two kinds of reforms to global society that Brock proposes. The first are those that could be brought into existence without significant changes to existing international or national institutions. To provide compensation to countries that are a source of supply for health workers, to impose a resource tax or do away with tax havens, to make terms of trade more fair are things that governments could do right now if they had the will. The second type of reform requires new institutions: for example, to distribute the proceeds of a tax so that it benefits the needy or to sanction and control intervention. Such institutions, as she points out, must be effective and accountable and she argues that they are more likely to be so if they are democratic and truly representative of all the world's people.

A sceptic is likely to wonder whether a just world, according to Brock's conception, is really possible. The will to make changes that would favour the world's poor is far from evident in the policies of leaders or the opinions of citizens of wealthy democracies. And new world institutions, democratic or not, are likely to be as divided by ideological differences and national self-interests as present institutions. What is needed, it seems to me, is more attention to developments that might encourage people to think more like the delegates in her thought experiment. Is the development of a global 'civil society' likely to have this result? And if so, how? Can the internet make a contribution, or the growth of non-governmental organizations? Or do we need a democratic politics that transcends national borders?

Brock cannot be expected to solve all the problem of global governance. Her book is useful because it opens up space for debates about how global problems might be solved. By resisting the tendency of those who talk about global justice to concentrate on an ideal conception without considering how it might be put into practice, she invites other philosophers to follow her example. The aim of her book, as she states it is to allay the worries of the sceptics who doubt the very possibility of a just global order as well as the concerns of nationalists who fear the power of global institutions. Nationalists are likely to worry about the nature and power of the global organizations that she recommends. Radicals will accuse her of not sufficiently remaking the global order. And, as I have suggested, there is

plenty of wiggle room for sceptics. Nevertheless her book is a laudable attempt to go beyond these theoretical dead ends and to force philosophers and others to engage in a more productive discussion about the possibilities for a just global order.