

Conference: "Global Justice"
Global Challenges in Chinese and European Perspective

Until recently, political philosophy and theory addressed issues of justice related, for example, to the distribution of resources or the question of basic rights primarily as domestic issues, i.e. as issues that are to be dwelt on exclusively within the framework of an integrated and sovereign state. Meanwhile, the solitary political and economic importance of state borders has substantially eroded. We witness the emergence and the growing influence of global institutions, such as the UN and the WTO, as well as other transnational actors and power structures. As a consequence, globalization has incited an increasing number of political philosophers and theorists to approach issues of justice globally; that is beyond the borders of particular states. In a world where transnational institutions, agents and practices deeply affect the domestic life, concerns for justice or international legitimacy can no more be shielded from the altered international order. Somehow, political theorizing has to take into account the new challenges of the global order: But on what (transcultural) basis could we criticize global injustices and how would a (transcultural) consensus about a minimally just global order look like?

The conference will focus on the following interrelated framing topics:

(1) A first topic concerns the concept and the normative ground of global justice, namely the basis on which the question of justice can be said to apply globally. Whereas relationists assume that principles of justice are binding only among persons who stand in relevant social relations, non-relationists (or "cosmopolitans") take the principles of justice to apply to everyone regardless of the social relations they happen to have. Statists, for example, will tend to stress the normative importance of borders. For them, membership in a state is the relevant ground of justice. From this perspective, principles of justice do not apply outside the particular state and hence do not figure as critical standards for the global political and economic order. Does this entail that the only viable way to defend global principles of justice is to adopt non-relationism, i.e. a universal ground for justice? Or is it possible to ground global principles of justice from a relationist or particularist perspective as well? If so, to what extent does this affect the range of principles, the relation between domestic and global principles or the proposals of reforms of the political and economic world order?

(2) Besides the grounds for a global justice perspective, one has to specify the principles of justice that shall guide criticism and calls for reform of existing institutions and practices. For some, human rights seem to be the first candidates for global principles of justice. For others, they are either too "thin" (non-egalitarian) or too "thick" (culturally biased). Can they nevertheless be defended as the common currency through which claims of justice can globally be brought forward? If so, how is the relation between these principles and the domestic principles of justice to be understood – especially when it comes to conflicts between them? And if not, how do we have to proceed to identify other principles we can converge on?

(3) With regard to the application of global standards of justice, whatever they turn out to be, the identification and distribution of the related global responsibilities come to the fore: Who should do what to make the global political and economic order match global principles of justice? However, ascribing responsibilities to respective agents in the global arena (such as governments, citizens, consumers, international organizations or corporations) will very much depend on a prior clarification of the backward- and forward-looking aspects of political responsibilities. A useful starting point is here to find consensual and plausible descriptions of global injustices, such as global poverty, inequality, exploitation, post-colonialism, or international domination. From there, we may look for overlaps in different conceptions of justice and identify proper addressees for institutional progress – and ultimately clear-cut reform proposals.

(4) Today, in the light of global risks and worldwide challenges, it seems to be necessary to start a real transcultural discourse on global justice. By this we mean a platform which allows for different, if not contrary, experiences, concerns, and traditions to be tackled. What then is needed, both institutionally and intellectually, to establish a truly transnational discourse? How can different narrative and theoretical approaches enrich each other and is there any substantial or procedural denominator for integrating these discourses? How far can and should such an integration eventually be pushed, i.e. to what extent can and should we change our own narrative framework and guiding theoretical concepts to accommodate other perspectives? And last not but least: What does toleration require when our best attempts to rapprochement fail?

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