Justice: My Arguments For Redistribution Of Citizens' Wealth

I will argue that it is just to redistribute a portion of citizens' wealth to those who are the least advantaged. I'll establish this with three premises. The first premise that I will consider is that justice cannot exist when people's basic needs are not being met. The second premise I will consider is that a Collectivity with moral agents must support those who are least advantaged, through Distributed Justice. The third premise I will consider is how the Original Position promotes equality and subsequently supports those least advantaged. The objection I will consider is the idea of Desert Based principles; that is distribution of goods according to the desert.

Firstly, I will define the terms of my argument. I will use the term justice to mean, what is fair and what is reasonable. This is supported by John Rawl's definition of justice: that justice should be seen as fairness (Davies, 2018). I will use the term wealth to mean, those who have a high monetary income. Lastly, I will define what it means to be the least advantaged. The Decent Living Standards: Material Prerequisites for Human Wellbeing (DLS) is a tool for assessing levels of advantage. It is self-described as a resource for "material commodities and conditions that household societies require, at a minimum, for overcoming poverty and supporting a decent life for all" (Narasimha D. & Jihnoon, 2018). The DLS identifies the needs of an individual including, physical and social wellbeing, household requirements: basic amenities, phone/internet access, motorized transport; on a community level: access to health care clinics and physicians, quality of air, access to schools/teachers and public transport facilities; and on a national level, such as quality of: public space, utilities, health care; general infrastructure, budget for education and health and also the human requirement of natural resources. I have chosen to use the DLS as a way to identify those who are least advantaged due to its comprehensive and contemporary nature. Differences in privilege exist. Some people live beyond the DLS criteria while others fail to meet it. Those who are least advantaged do not meet the DLS. The United Nations found that 1.3 million people or 23.1% are multidimensionally poor (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). I have a limited understanding of the economy; however, people who earn wealth are only able to do so provided the society that they are part of allows it. Therefore should those who benefit from their society be required to help that society? I believe that a way to benefit the least advantaged would be to re-distribute a portion of citizen's wealth. Then at minimum, the DLS could be achieved. Now that I have defined the terms of my thesis statement I will continue to develop my argument using the aforementioned premises.

The first premise I will consider is that justice cannot exist when people's basic needs are not being met. Rawl's explains there are two principles of justice. The first being: every person has an equal claim, to equal basic rights. The second principle of justice explains that social and economic inequality can exist provided (a) all people are able to fairly obtain these positions of power (b) these positions provide the most benefit to the least advantaged (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017). The following statement I find to be very powerful; "Some people are multi-billionaires; others die because they are too poor to afford food or medications" (Davies, 2018). This is injustice. There is no justice if people are not provided with a fair and reasonable standing point, from birth. Humans do not choose to enter this world. If you are

bought into a place with no water or food you will suffer. It seems logical that the way we provide these basic rights to those who are least advantaged is by distributing the current wealth. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25 states that: everyone has a right to a standard of living that is adequate. This includes health, food, clothing, housing and medical care (more basic criteria than the DLS.) This declaration has been constructed by the United Nations (UN) (United Nations, 1948). Of the 195 countries in the world, 183 are member states of the UN. I need not argue much when the majority of the world believes all people should be entitled to basic standards of living. Being provided with the basic standards of living is a human right as per the UN. To summarize, justice cannot exist if basic human needs are not being met. Justice as defined by Rawls is essentiality equality. This brings me to my next premise, Collectivity and Distributive Justice.

The second premise I will consider is that a Collectivity with moral agents must support those who are least advantaged through Distributed Justice. A Collectivity is “groups constituted by some procedure for making group decisions” (Edmundson A., 2018). A country’s government could be considered a Collectivity. Edmundson states Collectivities can be moral agents provided they value and act upon moral reasons. Moral agents can be described as one that can distinguish right from wrong. Therefore a Collectivity as a moral agent would be required to act in a just manner. Distributed Justice is the act of distributing burdens and benefits amongst society; done so in a manner that is guided by moral principles. Both Collectivity and Distributed Justice are governed by moral concepts. A Collectivity with moral agents has a responsibility for those who are least advantaged. Therefore it can be said that a Collectivity with moral agents would engage in the practice of Distributive Justice; that is the distribution of wealth.

The third premise I will consider is how the ‘Original Position’ supports the idea of distributing wealth to the least advantaged. In the ‘Original Position’ in conjunction with the ‘Veil of Ignorance’ (Davies, 2018), we would have no concept of who and where we would be in life. Acting with self-interest, one would not allow a group to have a greater advantage over another. This concept encourages a shift of perspective; initiating empathy and encouraging the idea that the least advantaged should be the most supported. In the ‘Original Position’ equality is chosen. This position is a clear demonstration to why wealth should be distributed to the least advantaged.

An objection to these premises focuses on contemporary desert-based principles. This is the distribution of goods according to desert. To expand on this principle: people deserve the economic benefit as a result of their actions (Edmundson A., 2018). If one were to earn their money in a fair and just manner should you then be able to spend your earnings as you please? People with wealth may argue that it is not fair, nor reasonable and it is unjust, to redistribute wealth provided they acquired the wealth (holdings) in a just manner. This concept is explored in the principle of justice in acquisition. Nozick (Kaufman, 2004) proposed the Entitlement Theory where:

- a) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in acquisition is entitled to that holding.
- b) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, from someone else entitled to the holding, is entitled to the holding.
- c) No one is entitled to a holding except by (repeated) applications of (a) and (b) (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017)

However, it is difficult to apply this principle to current transactions. A person may have acquired wealth by selling a commodity; where the product was designed in a developed nation and the product was created in a developing nation. This, generally, would reduce costs thereby increasing profit margins. The holdings owned (wealth acquired) may be unjust due to: the factory creating the product may not provide a safe environment for their employees or the materials selected to create the product could be unsustainable.

It may be the case that in order to provide basic rights, people that do have wealth would be required to re-distribute this amongst those who are least advantaged. The way in which wealth is redistributed would need to be just. Seizing of assets and money would result in animosity. It would provide equality for a short time but people's mindset would remain the same. Tax evasion is proof that people will aim to retain as much individual wealth as possible. Society would be more just and favorable place to live if people had decent standards of living.

It is just to redistribute a portion of citizens' wealth to those who are the least advantaged. As justice cannot exist when people's basic needs are not being met. A Collectivity with moral agents must support those who are least advantaged through Distributed Justice. The 'Original Position' promotes equality and subsequently supports those least advantaged. The objection of Desert Based principles is a fair argument. However if a person can generate wealth, they do so within a society that allows it. The society that allows this wealth to be generated should also benefit, especially those least advantaged. Therefore it is just to re-distribute a portion of citizen's wealth to those who are least advantaged.

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