The Search for a Liberal Moderate Theory of International Distributive Justice

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Abstract

In this article, we focus on part of the debate concerning the issue of international distributive justice. We compare minimalist (David Miller) and maximalist (Simon Caney) approaches that justify responsibilities in international relations in different ways. Simon Caney refers to the principle of global equality of opportunity, defending non-relational approaches to global justice and arbitrariness of nationality. We can identify at least two objections to Caney’s approach using Miller’s theory. First, it can be argued that the moral arbitrariness of nationality is misleading. Second, global equality of opportunities across communities is questionable because in one community the good \( x \) is not valued the same as in the second community. We examine the arguments of both sides in a broader and more systematic way. We also offer a solution that reconciles the minimalist and maximalist approaches. In constructing our positive answer, we refer to Kok-Chor Tan’s idea of limited patriotism, Henry Shue’s idea of basic rights and Thomas Pogge’s idea of negative duties.

1 Introduction

In this article, we refer to the contemporary debate regarding the scope and the principles of global distributive justice. We compare the assumptions of minimalist liberal nationalism (David Miller) and maximalist cosmopolitan universalism (Simon Caney) concerning the rules that should govern international relations, as well as the theorists’ understanding of global distributive justice. Thus, our goal is to describe how minimalists and maximalists justified the scope of distributive justice. Secondly, we show the possible common ground between them referring to chosen arguments from Kok-Chor

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1 This work was supported by a grant from the National Center of Science in Poland [grant number 211/01/D/HS5/01463]. I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their thoughtful comments.
Tan’s and Henry Shue’s theories. This common ground is characterised by a non-universal, relational approach to global distributive justice based on institutional negative duties. So, in the first part of the article, we describe the methodological framework for our analysis. In the second part, we confront Caney and Miller’s approaches to international relations. In the third part, we discuss elements of the possible compromises between them, which we call moderate global justice.

2 Methodological Framework

In this paragraph, we reconstruct the main thesis of liberal minimalists and maximalists and later in the text, we define the key notions that are essential in order to better understand the particular arguments and reasoning given by Caney and Miller for the scope of justice.

Starting from the general description of minimalists and maximalists, we must first create the framework of analysis. There are at least four possible ways to identify and distinguish minimalist from maximalist: (1) according to the quantity and quality of the contents granted as universally valid, (2) according to the criterion of the scope of their spatial validity demands, (3) the way of their justification (autonomous or relational), (4) the way of their implementation (institutional or non-institutional). Although analytically separated these ways of describing differences between minimalists and maximalists are interweaved through the text. We narrow our attention on the one hand to liberal theories and on the other to the justification of scope of justice (whether the same or different rules ought to regulate the domestic and international realm). In order to better catch the differences between these two approaches we also refer in some parts of the article to the ways of justification and implementation of their theory, seeking the possible field of compromise between them.

In saying that we turn to the minimalist liberal understanding of the scope of just equality. This approach states that global injustice occurs when some people do not have enough to lead their lives with dignity. Thus, one’s goal is to be secure and inequalities for the distribution of various goods above that level will not be perceived as being unjust. Minimalists, such as Rawls (1999a), Miller (2007b), and Nagel (2005), tend not to reject the idea of equality, but instead, they just stress the importance of equality within societies at the domestic

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2 I owe this distinction to one of the anonymous reviewers.