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Reaction Paper 2: Clashing Visions on International Justice

In response to “One World, Many Peoples: International Justice in John Rawls’s *The Law of Peoples*” by Michael W. Doyle

In today’s world, gross inequality has risen to an extent that calls for the development of a new model of international justice. The implication of such inequality is two-fold. There is a disparity in political rights and economic wealth. International justice entails a set of standards that countries abide by to ensure fair distribution of political rights and material wealth among countries, just like the social contract developed between individuals within a society ensures that each of its members gets a fair share. Doyle in his analysis argues that the proposed justice system should only apply to democratic states and exclude non-liberal states.¹ However, I believe that just redistribution should apply indiscriminately to states regardless of their democratic status because of increasing interdependence between countries and the liberalizing effect of just redistribution on non-democratic states.

We live in an ever more inter-connected world. Enormous amounts of economic interactions among countries take place each year and vast amounts of wealth and goods are created as a result.² Because countries act more and more like interdependent

¹ Doyle 1983, 205-235.

² Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2016.

individuals in a society, it warrants a global extension of Rawls's domestic egalitarian principles, which include Maximum Equal Liberty and Equal Opportunity.³ Countries, whether democratic or not, should enjoy equal political rights on the international stage and be guaranteed fair competition free from discrimination. Furthermore, the economic inequality that arises from such interdependence should be resolved through the just redistribution of goods among nation states.

Additionally, considering the arbitrary distribution of natural resources among countries,⁴ it is even more imperative to apply just redistribution indiscriminately so that countries lacking in natural resources can prosper and stabilize. This approach draws on Rawls's proposition of the Difference Principle where people "would receive equal income unless differences in income helped the people at the bottom of the social ladder improve their condition."⁵ When there are economic and social interactions between states, with inequality arises from such interactions, we should, like individuals within a domestic setting, uphold just redistribution among nation states. It is crucial to understand the arbitrariness of national borders and one's citizenship. Then behind the Rawlsian veil of ignorance, the concept of distributive justice as fairness on a global scale becomes justifiable.

Lastly, just redistribution of political power and wealth, regardless of whether a state is democratic, can move non-democratic states toward democratization. There exists

³ Doyle 2006, 110.

⁴ Beitz 1975, 368-373.

⁵ Rawls 1971, 65-72.

a strong correlation between a country's development and the strength of its democracy.⁶ Inglehart argues, “[Modernization] tends to penetrate all aspects of life, bringing occupational specialization, rising educational level, ... bringing rising mass participation in politics and—in the long run—making the establishment of democratic political institutions increasingly likely.”⁷ As a result, an egalitarian international justice system that respects all states equally and redistributes justly can help underdeveloped non-democratic states develop. Such economic and social development, Inglehart argues, can provide an environment conducive to fostering democracy. As a result, instead of excluding non-democratic states from just redistribution in fear of ideological differences, the inclusion of those states can help facilitate their democratic development and improve their compatibility with liberal states.

The most prominent counterargument that argues against the global extension of Rawls's egalitarian principles is presented in his own subsequent work *The Law of Peoples*. Rawls argues that nation states will not share a global scheme of cooperation, because in any given society people tend to place significant weight on independence and self-determination.⁸ The self-determination of a nation state can be undermined if the state enters a social contract that dictates redistribution of wealth to other poorer states. Peter Singer, however, critiqued Rawls's reluctance to extend distributive principles in his book *One World*. Singer downplays the concept of state sovereignty and essentially argues that everyone is an equal member of the global society. Therefore, it should be

⁶ Pei 1999.

⁷ Inglehart and Welzel 2009, 33-48

⁸ Rawls 1999.

condemned if one places higher value on his moral obligations to his compatriots than to foreigners.⁹ The outcome of the “we are all humankind” mentality is the weakening of the urge for self-determination by any individual state, and therefore acceptance for a global justice system.

As the nation states become more interdependent and act more like individuals in a society, there is a strong rationale to apply Rawls’s distributive principles on a global scale indiscriminately to address inequality resulted from interactions and interdependence between nation states. Moreover, by including non-democratic states in the justice system, we can actually cultivate conditions conducive to democracy in those states. Just redistribution on a global scale is in fact a morally sound and theoretically feasible strategy to promote shared prosperity.

⁹ Peter 2004, 153-173.

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