

Justice and Food Production

1. Food Sovereignty, again

Before when we talked about *food sovereignty* (Kyle Powys Whyte reading), the main issue was the protection of a way of life, a culture. In the Thompson reading, the issues broaden to economic justice. As he says,

...the global food system should be understood as a systemic nexus that functions to extract the last shred of economic value from the production, distribution, and consumption of food and to repress any form of political action against it. Everyone needs to eat. Therefore, control of food is a powerful locus for both profit-taking and the exercise of social control. Food sovereignty is, on this view, a mode of resistance against this totalizing food regime. (163)

What are some of the wrongs that have been documented in the food regime?

- Slaughterhouses
 - See also Pachirat “Slaughterhouse Workers” in *FES*, pp. 546-555.
- Tomato pickers, other farm workers
 - See also Seth Holmes, “Farm Workers” in *FES*, pp. 532-546.
 - See also article in yesterday’s *Guardian*:
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/mar/12/slavery-sicily-farming-raped-beaten-exploited-romanian-women>
- Restaurant workers

What precisely are the wrongs here? What makes these things wrong? Are these forms of oppression?

Consider again Young’s categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, systematic violence.

Who is responsible for the harms?

Who (what groups?) are primarily the victims of these harms? Does that matter?

2. Harm to workers

Slavery: Chattel slavery, forced labor, debt bondage

Limited options/forced options

Mistreatment, brutality

Exploitation

In thinking about this it is useful to draw a distinction between *coercion* and *duress*. To be coerced into doing something is to be forced to do it on pain of severe harm or death. If someone hold a gun to your head and says “Your money or your life!”, that is coercion, and when you hand over your money it is arguable that you don’t actually consent to giving the money, you do it just to save your life. Duress (though it can be defined in different ways) is different from coercion in several ways: (i) there may be no one forcing you (it may be circumstances that cause your duress), (ii) the threat may be not be immediate serious harm or death (it may be serious harm over the long term), and (iii) you may consent to the actions taken under duress (you may enter into a disadvantageous contract to avoid the long term threat of hunger, homelessness, etc).

Questions:

1) Are you acting freely when you are coerced? It seems that you are acting of your own free will in some sense – you could have chosen to be killed instead of giving up your money – but your liberty is clearly being compromised.

2) Are you acting freely when you are under duress? Again you are clearly acting of your own free will when you choose to enter into a disadvantageous contract, but if others can take advantage of the threats that circumstances pose to your well-being, are you free? Do you have the liberties that society should aim to protect?

3. Complicity

...when asked if it is reasonable to assume that an American who has eaten a fresh tomato from a grocery store or food-service company during the winter has eaten fruit picked by the hand of a slave, Malloy said, "It is not an assumption. It is a fact." (Estabrook 2009, *FES*, p. 13)

Months after I stopped working on the kill floor, I argued with a friend over who was more morally responsible for the killing of the animals: those who ate the meat or the 121 workers who did the killing. She maintained, passionately, and with conviction, that the people who did the killing were more responsible because they were the ones performing the physical actions that took the animals' lives. Those who ate the meat, she claimed, were only indirectly responsible. I took the opposition position, holding that those who benefited at a distance, delegating this terrible work to others while disclaiming responsibility for it, bore more moral responsibility, particularly in contexts like the slaughterhouse, where those with the fewest opportunities in society performed the dirty work. My friend's position was the "120+1" argument [the +1 is the person who pulls the trigger to shoot the animal], an argument replicated across myriad realms where morally dirty work is performed by a select few, out of the sign of the many who implicitly or explicitly authorize it but manage to evade responsibility for it by virtue of the citizenship, the taxes they pay, their race, their sex, or the actions of their ancestors. (Pachirat 2013, in *FES*, p. 555)

What is the consumer's moral responsibility for harms to workers?

What is the state's responsibility?

4. Political philosophy

Moral theory considers right action, and how individuals ought morally to act. But of course, individuals live in societies, and in societies there are many individuals simultaneously acting and pursuing a good life. So two questions emerge:

- What is an individual entitled to in their pursuit of a good life *among others*, given that there are limited resources?
- How should a just society be organized? In particular, how can a society best enable its members to flourish, compatible with justice for all? What moral principles should constrain and guide the organization of society?

Of the three moral theories we considered, *utilitarianism* is the one best suited to provide an immediate response to these questions: society should be organized in such a way to maximize happiness for all; an individual is entitled to all and only whatever maximizes happiness for all. A common complaint against utilitarianism, however, is that it does not take seriously enough the rights of the individual. So what other theoretical options are there?⁵ The Big Three (Political Theories)¹

Libertarianism provides another approach to the organization of society that focuses heavily on rights. Libertarians maintain that the most important political value is *personal liberty*. Personal liberty is absolute:

¹ Another part of political theory, not covered here, is *political economy*. Political economy concerns the relationship between the political structure of a society, e.g., the state, and the economy. Famous political economists include: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek, John Maynard Keynes, et al.

an individual's liberty cannot be violated to maximize happiness or any other good, even the overall amount of personal liberty in a society. The only legitimate restrictions on individual liberty are those necessary to protect the liberty of others.

The right to liberty is a cluster of *negative rights*. Violation of such rights would include (a) being killed or assaulted or other physical violence against one, (b) being coerced, being prevented from activities that do no harm to others, (c) having your property taken or controlled, providing that you are not violating the rights of others. Libertarians believe that the cluster of negative rights that constitute personal liberty determine that only a minimal state is justified. A minimal state cannot go beyond protecting its members from violence, theft, fraud; distributive justice in such a state is a matter of historical entitlement to property. We saw before that guaranteeing such liberties does not ensure freedom, if we conceive of freedom as a capacity to live decently according to one's values, for a minimal state would not provide any safety net or protection from exploitation. Robert Nozick is a paradigm libertarian.

Egalitarianism comes in a variety of forms. But the main idea is that the value of individual happiness and the value of liberty do not exhaust the values that a society has an obligation to protect and foster. In addition, a society ought to manifest the value of equality amongst its citizens. Egalitarians differ in how they answer the following questions:

- (a) Equality of what? Equality of wealth? Equality of opportunity? Equality of respect?
- (b) What are the legitimate means for creating equality, compatible with other values?

Equality and liberty are often thought to be in tension. Suppose the goal is equality of wealth. Achieving and maintaining equal wealth amongst citizens would seem to require violations of liberty. To consider a simplistic example, suppose I gave you each \$100. Some would save it; some would spend it; others would invest it. Maintaining equality of wealth would require a redistribution of resources over time, i.e., taking wealth from some and giving it to others. But this seems to violate the right to private property: if I create wealth through my effort, am I not entitled to keep it? Is it not a violation of my rights to have it taken from me? Although this concern is vivid when aiming for equality of wealth, it is less obviously so when equality of respect or opportunity is the goal.

Libertarianism seems to do too little to protect our well-being and a robust sense of freedom; egalitarianism seems to do too little to protect our liberty. Are there other options?

Liberal egalitarianism attempts to articulate a balance between equality and liberty. Typically, liberal egalitarians will articulate a domain of negative rights that are inviolable (even to achieve equality), a domain of positive rights that promote freedom (e.g., the right to education), and principles of distribution that respect the value of equality.

John Rawls is a paradigm liberal egalitarian. He suggests that:

- A just society is fair.
- A test of a fair distribution is whether everyone could reasonably consent to it.
- People should reasonably consent to an arrangement that is mutually advantageous.
- The best way to come up with a mutually advantageous arrangement is to be impartial.
- Impartiality is best achieved through abstracting away from our particular differences.

Idea: ignorance is a good tool for achieving impartiality.

Example: dividing a pizza. If I don't know which slice I'm getting, I'll divide it evenly.

“The Original Position”: In Rawls, he calls the framework of supposed ignorance from which we are to decide on the principles of justice, the “original position.” In the original position

- We don't know what our society is like because we want to be impartial across cultures, and across generations.

- We also don't know what our individual natural talents or social advantages are, because we don't want to skew the society to favor those who just happen to be lucky to be born to rich parents or with special talents.
- We also don't know our religion or fundamental conception of the good because we want our social framework to be tolerant of the full range of conceptions of the good.

Rawls argues that from this "original position," it would be rational to (a) be concerned most with the distribution of what he calls "primary goods," i.e., goods that would be good for you regardless of what else you value, e.g., basic liberties, health, money, opportunity, and (b) to decide that primary goods should be distributed according to two principles, with the first given priority over the second:

The liberty principle: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others," where such liberties include:

- Freedom of speech & assembly
- Freedom of conscience & thought
- Freedom of the person
- The right to hold property

The maximin principle (or in Rawls' terms: the Difference Principle): social and economic inequalities are permissible only to the extent that they are attached to positions open to all, and they benefit the least well-off.

Objections:

a) The liberal egalitarian approach is biased towards the disadvantaged; those better off deserve their advantages and they shouldn't be taken away. In fact, "fairness" comes from the unrestricted working of market forces. Reply: If fairness requires that we level the playing field so that no one is disadvantaged by bad luck, then the successful don't deserve their advantages and the market will not yield fair results. Is there a better conception of fairness? What is it?

b) It is not the responsibility of society or government to make things "fair". Reply: What is the responsibility of society? Why isn't it to make things "fair"? Won't fair societies also be more stable, more democratic, more just? How *ought* we organize society if not to achieve these aims?

6. Neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is a globalized political economy that favors privatization, free trade, deregulation, and such to avoid government spending and government "interference" in the social sphere.

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24.03 Good Food: The Ethics and Politics of Food Choices
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