

Justice in an unjust world: a uniquely Bahá'í Perspective

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JUST AND UNJUST WORLD BELIEFS

Lerner (1980) defined belief in a just world as “a theory of justice that has as its basic premise the notion that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get”.

People want to believe that the world is just and fair and that they will be rewarded with positive outcomes if they invest time and effort into attaining their goals.

But the reality is different from expectation.

People often invest tremendous time and effort into goals, such as in marriages and careers, but fail to attain them or gain satisfaction from them. What happens to people's expectations that the world is just and fair when they are faced with unexpected failure or perceived unfairness in their own lives?

Although what constitutes justice may vary from time to time and from culture to culture, or depend on historical context, all forms of justice are founded on the basis of ethical assumptions that include ideas about morality, fairness, and the law.

Justice defined

Justice can be defined as the simultaneously fair treatment of individuals in a given situation with the result that everybody gets what they deserve.

Andrew Crane and Dirk Matten, Business ethics.

Unjust: unfair or not morally right

The crucial ethical issue with this definition is the question of what exactly 'fairness' means and by what standards we can decide what a person might reasonably deserve.

What about disabled people

What about those with no opportunity

What about those who are discriminated

What about unjust laws

Hence, justice requires ethical assumptions that include ideas about morality, fairness, and the law.

The egalitarian

- **Justice** is the same as **equality**.
- The burden and rewards should be distributed equally.
- Deviation from equality is considered as unjust.
- Consequently, the situation that 80% of the world resources are owned by 20% of the world population is clearly unjust to egalitarian.

Beauchamp and Bowie, 1997

The Non-egalitarian

Justice in economic system is ultimately a product of the **fair** process of free markets.

Buyers with certain needs would meet sellers who can respond to the needs. If the two parties agree on a transaction, then the market forces of supply and demand determine justice.

Adam Smith, 1776

Justice in modern time

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of him (her)self and his/(her) family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The crucial impact of justice

“There can be no doubt whatever that if the day star of **justice**, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed.”

Bahá'u'lláh

Justice versus Equity

Equality vs. Equity

Equality assumes that we are all equal, not because we are the same, but because we are all created by God. Each person has certain rights. The right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, equality in dignity and worth.

Equity assumes the diverse and unique individuality of each person. While people are different, they are to be treated equally before the law. The celebration of 'unity in diversity'.

We are all equal, unless there is a reason for being unequal.

Equality vs. Equity

The view that we are all created in the image of God means each person has certain rights granted by God. These rights include the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But, aside from equality in dignity and worth, human beings are not born the same. The Bahá'í writing makes it clear that every human is unique, but human beings are not the same. The hallmark is 'unity in diversity'. Hence, equality and equity are very different. Equity assumes the diverse, unique individuality of each person. While people are different, they are to be treated equally before the law. The Bahá'í view is that the diversity of people is a cause for celebration.

When discussing distributive justice from Bahá'í perspective equity is preferred to equality. However, it is the equality in opportunity that is suggested, to ensure that opportunity and access to material and social resources are justly and fairly distributed.

“Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

“Justice and equity are twin Guardians that watch over men. From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the **well-being** of the world and the **protection** of the nations.”

Bahá'u'lláh

“We entreat God to deliver the light of **equity** and the sun of **justice** from the thick clouds of waywardness, and cause them to shine forth upon men. No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of **order** in the world and the **tranquillity** of the nations depend upon it.”

Bahá'u'lláh

Justice versus Mercy

Justice provides the means capable of using human potential to eradicate poverty.

How?

through the implementation of laws

the redistribution of wealth

creating opportunity

the right to work

the right to education

the right to good health

Mercy is “compassion, kindness or forgiveness shown especially to someone

Justice is the Golden Rule
in the past religions.

Mercy is the Golden Rule
in the Bahá'í Faith.

“O son of man! If thine eyes be turned towards **mercy**, forsake the things that profit thee and cleave unto that which will profit mankind. And if thine eyes be turned towards **justice**, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself.”

Bahá'u'lláh

Justice and mercy in Islam

“And if you [O Muhammad] judge, judge between them with justice. Indeed, God loves those who act justly.” (Quran 5:42)

“And We have not sent you [O Muhammad] but as a mercy to all the worlds.” (Quran 21:107)

Economic Justice

Issues of economic justice are among the key factors discussed in the Bahá'í writings, as well as by the contemporary writers.

If economics is defined as 'the best use of resources', and justice as 'giving to each one what he or she is due', then the two principles of economics and justice are partners both functionally and morally.

Definitions

- Absolute poverty:

Inability to purchase the basic necessities of life.

- Relative poverty:

A situation of being poor relative to others.

Deliberate poverty

People live in poverty when they are denied an income sufficient for their material needs and when these circumstances exclude them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in that society.

(Scottish Poverty Information Unit)

Poverty in history

Vast majority of people were poor over history: short lives, limited education, health challenges, poor nutrition, limited possessions, limited mobility, and inequality.

The observation is that poverty was a normal condition.

Ending Poverty is good

- Ending poverty is without question one of the top issues facing the world today.
- Allowing people to live in poverty when we are capable of addressing the problem is morally wrong.
- Reducing poverty is good for democracy.
- Reducing poverty creates consumers who can participate in economic life.
- Ending poverty will reduce violence, both within and between countries.

“Social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of man. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be abolished...”

Shoghi Effendi

“Apart from principles of social justice, which doubtless motivated a significant number of those committed to this task, the economic dislocations produced by the events of the previous three decades had made it clear that existing arrangements were outdated and ineffective.”

(Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, p. 74)

“Every system, short of the unification of the human race, has been tried, repeatedly tried, and been found wanting...crisis has succeeded crisis.”

Shoghi Effendi

“A world
spiritually destitute,
morally bankrupt,
politically disrupted,
socially convulsed,
economically paralyzed...”

Shoghi Effendi

The solution

Distributive justice along with sustainable production and consumption, and effective role of government.

“It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood.”

Shoghi Effendi, DG, p. 74

The responsibility for promoting and establishing economic justice belongs to both individual and the society. Individuals have the responsibility to do their part by making ethical decisions, such as having a moderate lifestyle or living a more simple life. At the same time, governments also have a responsibility to devise policies to ensure that all people have the adequate education and training to earn a living and that there are suitable employments and opportunities for them.

Thank You

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