

Our Moral Obligation to the Poor: Freedom, Justice, and Duty

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In many modern discussions regarding our moral obligations to the poor, leading thinkers place their primary emphasis on negative duties. Such duties, like those not to harm others, are obviously critical to the existence of a morally acceptable society. However, an issue as pervasive and intricate as poverty requires a more complex evaluation than this paradigm allows. With regard to poverty, one may or may not be able to make a stronger case to society in general for the obligation to fulfill negative duties than the obligation to fulfill positive duties. Regardless, the nature and extent of human morality cannot be adequately expressed within such a limited perspective, nor should our theoretical understanding of and practical approach to poverty be so limited. The question of what a given individual, community, or society can be reasonably and practically expected to do to eradicate poverty is in many ways contingent upon their circumstances and their culture. The problem of poverty is, nevertheless, morally relevant to all individuals and cultures that take part in the global economic and social marketplace. Thus, some description a universal framework of common human morality is necessary to establish guidelines for what we can expect of society in approaching this problem.

My research draws upon varying philosophies and moral systems that have significant implications for our duties to both the domestic and the global poor. This methodology resembles that of Thomas Pogge in *World Poverty and Human Rights* in that the basis for these duties will be a dominant moral system, or an aggregate of several prominent moral systems. Essentially, I seek to evaluate fairly disparate

philosophies in order to suggest that their understandings of freedom and justice are highly compatible. Furthermore, I will suggest that there are strong ethical implications for politics to be drawn from this evaluation, and specifically for the economic and social structure of society and its effect on the poor. Within the philosophical discussion of poverty, there is a dichotomy between moralists who espouse the moral primacy of negative duties, and moralists who, directly or indirectly, express the necessity of positive obligations in human society. I believe that this dichotomy reflects a deficient understanding of human nature, and the interaction between politics and philosophy. By understanding the psychological and philosophical basis of human nature, we can more comprehensively understand the meaning and basis of concepts like freedom, justice, as well as the duties that they entail.

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Pogge highlights an initial concept of core justice worth exploring, but to understand his reasons for emphasizing negative duties and the positive obligations that they sometimes entail, one must first work through his basic argument. His philosophical endeavor begins with a brief but telling account of the moral advancement of Western Civilization since the Enlightenment and information on the breadth and depth of the global catastrophe of poverty. He immediately raises two questions in response to these seemingly contradictory yet simultaneous occurrences. How can half of humanity still live in severe poverty in spite of the incredible economic, technological, and moral progress of our heavily dominant Western Civilization? Furthermore, why do citizens of affluent societies not find it at least morally troubling

that a world clearly dominated by us burdens so many others with such inferior starting positions?¹ These two questions provide the impetus for his philosophical venture.

His second question suggests at least a partial answer to the first. Poverty continues on a severe and massive scale because those with the power to eradicate it do not find this task to be morally compelling. We do not find this task to be compelling because of two extremely dominant societal prejudices: that the persistence of severe poverty in other countries doesn't require our moral attention, and that there is nothing seriously wrong with our conduct, our policies, and the global institutions that we create.² The first prejudice, probably the more common one, can be quickly dismissed as the product of extremely superficial reasoning that does not stand up to any honest attempt at critical reflection, especially given that its very nature is to avoid giving any critical attention to the problem in the first place.

The second prejudice is more insidious and has more and better defenders than the first. The more compelling defenses of this prejudice hold that we have a primary responsibility to our compatriots that conflicts with any proposed moral responsibility to eradicate global poverty. Implied in this viewpoint is the notion that a) it is not wrong to fail to benefit foreigners by not preventing as much severe poverty abroad as we might because that may conflict with our duty to our compatriots, and b) while it may be wrong to harm foreigners by actively causing their severe poverty, we are not doing so. There are obvious moral problems with the first notion, namely that allowing someone

¹ Pogge, Thomas. *World Poverty and Human Rights: Second Edition* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 5-7.

to die of hunger when you can prevent it at marginal personal cost does not seem significantly less wrong than killing them. But Pogge goes another route and instead presents a compelling case that affluent Western states are, indeed, actively causing severe poverty and directly harming the poor.

While national and regional factors play an undeniably important role in the persistence of poverty, in today's increasingly globalized society it is impossible to deny that the global institutions like the WTO, the IMF, and powerful states like the U.S. play an extremely disproportionate role in controlling the fates of the world's vulnerable, including those in other countries. In the context of diachronic harm, there is an extremely fervent debate about whether more people are better off because of global institutions. Pogge manages to avoid this debate by calling into question this entire conception of harm as whether something makes you better or worse off. Instead, he suggests a subjunctive conception of harm that focuses on whether harm is being done at all, rather than whether it is being increased or decreased. This is what should be morally relevant when considering our responsibility for global poverty. Even if we are enacting policies that are supposedly aimed at helping the poor, we are still responsible for their situation if we consent to an arrangement of political, social, and economic institutions that continues to unjustly burden them with insurmountable obstacles to an acceptable level of human dignity.

In spite of this seemingly extreme proposition, Pogge employs an extremely minimalistic and restrictive set of qualifications for determining if our behavior is indeed

violating the human rights of the global poor. Our conduct must create human rights deficits that are causally traceable to social institutions. Furthermore, one must actively cooperate in designing and/or imposing these institutions in order to be morally obligated to provide compensation for their effects. Finally, our cooperation can only be held to harm the poor if it is foreseeable that it will result in human rights deficits, that these deficits must be reasonably avoidable, and that this avoidability must be knowable.³

Here it is appropriate to bring up Pogge's explication of the role of human rights in assessing the justice of social institutions. Pogge believes that a conception of human rights is probably the most appropriate construct through which to evaluate whether an institution is just or not. It is sufficiently non-specific, but he believes it can still provide a compelling moral argument. Given Pogge's stated goal of presenting an argument that will challenge the most apathetic and morally minimalistic among us to reconsider their role in perpetuating global poverty, it is somewhat easy to see why he limits his argument to negative duties not to violate human rights rather than attempting to justify positive obligations. Again, I do not believe this approach turns out to be sufficiently compelling. Pogge states that he "does not address the ontological status of human rights – the sense in which they may be said to exist and the way in which their existence might be known and justified," but focuses instead on "an issue that is best examined before the others. How should human rights be conceived? What does the

³ Ibid., 26.

assertion of a human right assert, especially in regard to correlating responsibilities?"⁴ I, on the other hand, do not believe it to be worthwhile or even possible to discuss the issue of how to conceive of human rights without a compelling account of their ontological status. If we are attempting to morally justify the right type of socioeconomic system that "does not harm" according to Pogge's understanding, then we must understand the nature of politics, freedom and virtue, concepts that are the basis for any conception of human rights and morality, or any argument will be deficient. Surprisingly, Adam Smith provides a contrastingly compelling explanation of human morality, and how it relates to our global economic order, and thus to poverty. I believe, however, that his account of morality and the proper nature of social and economic interaction is best understood in the context of existential freedom, which I will now explain.

A distinct theoretical conceptualization of freedom is central to Pogge's modernist conception of justice as founded on the obligation not to harm others. Existentialism, I believe, provides a better basis for understanding the relationship between freedom, justice, and duty. Simone de Beauvoir defines being free as having an open future, rather than simply having a choice in a situation. Although her discussion of freedom is primarily in the context of the human situation, it is extremely relevant to the role of politics, and thus of individual actors as well as political institutions, with regard to poverty.

⁴ Ibid., 59.

Beauvoir supports the existential hypothesis that “the meaning of the situation does not impose itself on the consciousness of a passive subject, [instead] it surges up only by the disclosure which a free subject effects in his project.”⁵ Thus, a mature consciousness is always actively involved in assigning meaning to her situation through reflection. However, “it is not impersonal, universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself.”⁶ Furthermore, she claims, “an ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny that separate existants can [...] be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all.”⁷ These two assertions are the root of Beauvoir’s existential ethics. One of the fundamental tenets of existentialism is the fact that it is humanity who assigns meaning to the world to establish a future open to infinite possibilities rather than the world which imposes its meaning on humanity. Because this freedom is inseparable from the situation, it is the responsibility of the individual to continually and actively make choices in the context of this freedom, in the direction of this freedom, and with the intention of increasing the possibilities of themselves and others in the world through one’s project or ends. Moreover, she suggests here that the recognition of others as subjects and objects, as opposed to only being objects, is necessary for them to have true meaning for us, and thus to aid our own consciousness in growing and developing toward an open future, and thus toward freedom.

⁵ Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948), 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

Ultimately, for Beauvoir “freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring. It is the original condition of all justifications of Existence.”⁸

This conception of freedom has obvious implications for a comprehensive understanding of the ethical requirements of social justice for any individual, black or white, male or female, wealthy or impoverished. Furthermore, it is interesting that existentialism, which is typically held to place almost all of its emphasis on the individual, provides one of the strongest justifications for the obligation to pursue the freedom of others, particularly groups like the proletariat or the impoverished in modern society, who are unjustly burdened by the choices of those with economic, social, and political power. De Beauvoir claims that for any choice or action to be ethical, or even meaningful, it must be made in the context of one’s own freedom, and with regard to how it will affect the freedom of others. Thus, any thought that seeks to allay personal responsibility, or any action that restricts one’s own or another’s freedom, is patently unethical. Furthermore, making decisions out of the context of this notion of freedom is morally reprehensible, so failing to actively promote the personal and social freedom of others is also unethical, in addition to being restrictive to one’s own freedom. This understanding of freedom and the responsibility that it entails contrasts to Pogge’s minimalistic view of negative duties in several interesting ways. Perhaps most importantly, De Beauvoir’s philosophy suggests that it is the relationship to the other that creates the free individual. Insofar as politics is understood as the relationships

⁸ Ibid., 24.

between free, equal, moral individuals, this means that freedom, the basis of our humanity, is determined by politics. Pogge's view of freedom as access to certain human rights is extremely limited, both in scope and in content, in comparison to the representation of freedom put forth by de Beauvoir. It represents an understanding of freedom as merely the fulfillment of certain basic needs. Such a view cannot be a legitimate foundation for an understanding of justice that has power and relevance to the issue of poverty.

While Pogge is not one of them, there are contemporary social theorists whose conceptions of freedom resonate well with that of de Beauvoir. Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to poverty provides an excellent example. Sen represents freedom as a fundamental aspect of the human experience, basing his understanding of economics on the idea that wealth and income are "desirable not for their own sake, but because, typically, they are admirable general-purpose means for having more freedom to lead the kind of lives we have reasons to value."⁹ The understanding of freedom as the capability to choose some combination x of functionings from a set S of possible combinations implies the importance to an individual's well-being of both the choice made and the fact that it was a reasonably "open" choice.¹⁰ According to Sen, this set S , or "the overall freedom a person enjoys to pursue their well-being,"¹¹ can be understood as only having instrumental value for individual well-being, or as something that is also good in and of itself. Given his position, it seems likely that he is of the latter

⁹ Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

opinion, but he takes no definitive stance on the issue. However, this understanding is very obviously compatible with de Beauvoir's conception of freedom as an open-future in which the individual makes choices and assigns values as they see fit, within the confines of recognizing the equal freedom of others. Furthermore, while Sen is theoretically open to both the instrumental and fundamental understanding of the importance of freedom to the individual, he argues that "individual freedom can be seen as being constitutive of the goodness of *the society* which we have reasons to pursue." Thus, he grants freedom a fundamental importance, at least within the domain of politics as understood in this paper. This recognition is one of the particular strengths of Sen's position, and it greatly informs our understanding of poverty as capability failure, or in other words, an unjust deficit (or difference) in freedoms within society. Sen's capability approach to justice states that "individual claims are not to be assessed in terms of the resources or primary goods the persons respectively hold, but by the freedoms they actually enjoy to choose the lives that they have reason to value."¹² By distinguishing this capability as freedom that is actually enjoyed from both primary goods and from achievement, he provides a more individualistic viewpoint on issues of freedom and distributive justice (in the sense of the term that refers to the proper distribution of social goods).

It is still necessary to further explore the notion of politics suggested by this understanding of existential freedom, and to explain the interaction between justice

¹² Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 81.

and politics in a more comprehensive manner. Before moving on, however, we can get some direction and support from the father of politics himself, Socrates. Socrates' political philosophy searches for what human things are, as such. This search necessarily leads to a grander search for a new understanding of all things, and for the place of the human condition within a comprehensible whole. Platonic political philosophy posited that all knowledge exists in the context of a comprehensive whole that serves as the basis for that knowledge. Furthermore, any knowledge within that horizon must include a fundamental awareness of the whole. One cannot truly understand a part of something without understanding the context of the whole in which it exists. Socrates suggests that an understanding of the whole must be guided by human opinions. The *eidos*, the shape, form, character, or idea of a thing, arises primarily in man's opinion of those things, rather than in any possible nature of the thing in and of itself. Every opinion is based on some awareness that cannot be disregarded because it operates as our most fundamental access to reality. The multiplicity of opinions regarding virtue then does not imply that virtue does not exist. Since each articulation of human experience is an inadequate articulation of the whole, all opinions and articulations point beyond themselves to an adequate articulation, which we can suppose has something to do with a conception of the good that can have meaning for all of humankind.

This philosophy suggests an understanding of virtues like freedom and justice that resonates with de Beauvoir's position on the collectivity of human individuals, as

well as Sen's focus on individual capability within society. For example, in Plato's *Republic*, Socrates seeks to explain the role of justice in individual behavior by first observing justice in a broader context, i.e. justice in the city.¹³ In doing so he further implies that the nature of man is somehow fundamentally connected to politics, or the interactions between individuals. If we accept the existential idea of freedom as contingent upon both personal choice and collective interaction, then he can be reinterpreted as acknowledging freedom (as well as justice) as a fundamental part of man's nature. Furthermore, Socrates puts forth the idea that the right system of government, and thus the proper role of government in treating the universal issue of poverty, is dependent on an accurate account of the nature of man.

Adam Smith provides such an account, at least according to my evaluation. Furthermore, his account takes a "natural" view of man that reinforces our understanding of freedom through others as the foundation for humanity, and simultaneously suggests a compelling conception of justice with regard to the structure and function of society (or government) as they pertain to the treatment of poverty.

The quest to evaluate the political endeavors of humankind through the lenses of freedom and justice necessitates the type of moral system that takes this natural view of man. Therefore, there are three basic claims we must be willing to make if we are to allow for the possibility of finding a foundation for these virtues in human thought: "that there are pervasive features of human experience ... that are significant

¹³ Bloom, Allen, trans. *The Republic of Plato* (United States: Basic Books, 1968), 45.

for political philosophy; that these experiences have a determinate and thus intelligible character; and that we may judge the works of the political philosophers in part according to the accounts they offer or fail to offer of these experiences.”¹⁴ We must attempt to open the possibility of a rational discussion of the arational human experience, a possibility that is critical for the creation of a just socioeconomic order with foundations in the true nature of the human experience. Adam Smith uses the lenses of psychology to establish the nature of man as a fundamentally socioemotional (rather than rational) being. This understanding of man provides a strong basis for our understanding of politics, political virtues like freedom and justice, and our duties regarding poverty.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith suggests that the nature of man is best explained in a psychological account of man as a socioemotional creature. Essentially, he posits that we understand ourselves, others, and the external world primarily through our sympathetic sentiments. Smith defines his notion of sympathy, in contrast with pity or compassion, as “our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.”¹⁵ This sort of fellow-feeling, or attempted understanding of another person’s rationale for behavior, is an act of the imagination, since we cannot directly experience another person’s thoughts or sensations. This means that, “as agents or moral beings, other people are, therefore, the creation of our imagination.”¹⁶ However, consistent with the

¹⁴ Ward, James F. “Experience and Philosophy: Notes on Reading Leo Strauss,” *Polity* (Summer 1981), 671.

¹⁵ Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv.

view of human nature thus far suggested in this paper, our own existence as moral agents is also a creation of our imagination, because we only gain self-consciousness through our interactions with other consciousnesses. Essentially, “when we observe others, we notice that they observe us, and one of the most urgently felt needs for sympathetic understanding is to appreciate how others see us.”¹⁷ Thus, it is only through sympathetic sentiments based on interaction with others that a conscious self can exist, and that ideas about morality and virtue can come about. This understanding of human nature leads to Smith’s explanation of morality as the psychologically universal tendency to evaluate both our behavior and that of others through the lens of an idealized impartial spectator. Our notions of virtues are thus based upon the rational execution of socioemotional tendencies to judge the propriety and merit of actions by context (time, place, and other aspects of the situation) and imagined understanding of intent. These virtues are the naturally good ideals of human behavior, and should be the basis for a good political system for man.

It is in this manner that Smith’s virtues tie directly into our treatment of others with regard to poverty. Smith, along with other social theorists, suggests that the core of politics, both in the governmental sense and in the sense of personal interaction, is the virtue of justice. Justice, according to Smith, is “the last and greatest of the four cardinal virtues,” the first three being propriety, prudence, and benevolence.¹⁸ There are two senses of justice in Smith’s work that are relevant to the question of poverty.

¹⁷ Ibid., xiv.

¹⁸ Ibid., 317.

One is commutative justice, justice of the typical negative view, “which consists in abstaining from what is another’s, and in doing voluntarily whatever we can with propriety be forced to do.”¹⁹ The second he calls distributive justice, “which consists in proper beneficence, in the becoming use of what is our own, and in the applying it to those purposes either of charity or generosity, to which it is most suitable, in our situation, that it should be applied.”²⁰ It is the first sense of justice, and not the second, that Smith believes is naturally the founding principle for humankind, or “the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice” of human society.²¹ Because it is impossible for society to exist among individuals who are always ready to hurt or injure one another, he suggests that Nature has “thought it necessary to guard and enforce the practice of [justice] by the terrors of merited punishment in case it should be neglected.”²² This is why almost all human beings hold the punishment of injustice, like the exploitation of the vulnerable poor, to be proper and merited, while the fulfillment of almost any other virtue is usually unenforceable. Although Smith does not define a specific view of freedom in relation to this view of justice, Sen’s account of freedom as capabilities can be applied while remaining consistent with Smith’s natural virtue of justice.

The second view of justice is significantly broader. In an extreme form, it basically conceives of justice as constitutive of a perfect harmony of all of the lesser virtues. However, it is probably better understood as a reflection of the different, non-

¹⁹ Ibid., 318.

²⁰ Ibid., 318.

²¹ Ibid., 101.

²² Ibid., 101.

enforceable virtue of beneficence. Beneficence is distinguished by the fact that it goes beyond protecting the freedoms necessary to live an unimpoverished life. Smith would argue that such a virtue is more worthy of merit, but is less proper, than the observance of the virtue of justice. The strongest objection to the application of this virtue is that we shouldn't help those who have not helped themselves; however, virtues of magnanimity and beneficence, are, as Smith shows, outside the realm of political enforcement because they are not absolutely critical to the existence of a functional society. While people tend to respect such virtues, they are considered inferior, in a sense, to the virtue of justice. It should be noted however, that while these virtues aren't strictly necessary for the operation of a functional society, it might be that they are necessary for the existence of a good society. It is also important to take note of the fact that such virtues do not include basic obligations to ensure other's freedoms in the context of the first view of justice.

These obligations, along with that to "do no harm," are the strict duties reflected by a comprehensive view of freedom and justice based on a substantial understanding of the nature of man and politics. We can now draw the conclusion that a political system must be based on justice, which can be understood as ensuring the capabilities of others, without demanding other virtues in return. This is not just theoretically good, but naturally good. This is why Pogge, among others, is unable to convincingly argue for his conception of justice. He does not offer a legitimate or compelling explanation to substantiate his conception of justice; he merely explains his conception of justice. This

significantly hinders his philosophical endeavor. De Beauvoir presents a notion of freedom as the basis for societal interaction and thus as being fundamental to the human experience. This makes morality contingent on both not infringing upon and actively pursuing the freedoms of others. Sen echoes this understanding of freedom as an open future in his presentation of freedom as the capability to make a legitimate choice in how one can live their life. Socrates reinforces the connection between societal interaction and the nature of humankind, and suggests that a good and just society must operate in accordance with this nature.

Finally, Smith explains this nature through the psychological phenomena or socioemotional sentiments, identifying justice as the core sentiment/virtue of politics. His view of justice essentially consists in protecting/not infringing on the freedom of others, and if we understand freedom in the capability sense, then Justice, according to Smith, is ensuring the capabilities of every individual in society, particularly the poor. Justice in this sense is outside of, and superior to, virtues like beneficence, magnanimity, and humanity. Therefore, instead of duties regarding poverty being understood in the negative/positive dichotomy, they should be understood in terms of the natural moral virtue of justice. Poverty must be addressed anywhere that capabilities are not being ensured, and because the very existence of poverty is evidence that this is the case in every society on Earth, and particularly in impoverished nations, it is evident that poverty is a compelling moral issue regardless of issues of harm. Putting the treatment

of poverty solely in the domain of the virtue of justice also ensures that actions taken to eradicate poverty are not subject to the limitations of other, weaker virtues.

Stuart White has a theory of justice that is largely compatible with the one presented here, and which are specifically tailored to the issue of poverty. Thus, it would now be worthwhile to examine some of his general practical arguments regarding this kind of conception of justice on poverty policy. So, while his justification for his theory is not set on so wide a base, his argument reflects the idea that justice requires society to strictly ensure at least certain capabilities. White establishes the idea of a civic minimum, or a set of policies and institutions that would satisfy his conception of fair dues reciprocity in its non-ideal form. Using the concept of democratic mutual regard as the starting point for his just society, he outlines an account of non-ideal fair dues reciprocity as providing for non-immiseration, market security, self-realization, and minimization of class inequality. These specific factors are a reflection of a set of basic minimum capabilities, or freedoms, that he believes should be ensured by society. Both thinker deals extensively with the integrity and opportunity interests of impoverished individuals, and they also all distinguish between the “formal” conceptions of equality and freedom and the “fair” or “actual” conceptions.

White conceives of justice as fair reciprocity. The thesis that the good society is one in which individuals exhibit democratic mutual regard (DMR), or “when individuals seek to justify their preferred political and economic institutions to others by appealing to shared basic interests, and to related principles that express a willingness

to cooperate with their fellow citizens as equals,” is the starting point for this conception.²³ White presupposes the fundamental equality of individuals in the discussion of what the principles of justice ought to entail. His methodology is somewhat different in that his idea of DMR is an elaboration and application of the idea that citizens share “an intrinsic dignity rooted in their common humanity,”²⁴ as opposed to Smith’s appeal to natural moral justice. The other key principle in White’s conception of justice that follows from his conception of DMR is that of fair reciprocity. His philosophy holds that citizens are properly possessed of various social rights that are instrumental to a radically egalitarian distributive goal. Following from this, “where these rights work to secure citizens a sufficiently generous share of the social product, and sufficiently good opportunities for productive contribution, citizens have definite, potentially enforceable obligations to make a productive contribution to the community in return.”²⁵

In its ideal form, this conception of justice would result in policies and institutions that entirely protect against brute luck inequalities. Given the impracticality of this form, White suggests a non-ideal form that satisfies a civic minimum of economic opportunity. This non-ideal form has four basic tenets that protect the basic integrity and opportunity interests of citizens. It provides for non-immiseration, meaning that no citizen suffers from poverty due to forces outside their control. It provides market security, protecting citizens against unjust vulnerability, exploitation and abuse at the

²³ White, Stuart. *The Civic Minimum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

hands of the market system. It allows for self-realization, giving citizens the real opportunity to relate to their work as an intrinsically valuable challenge. And finally it minimizes class inequality, reducing initial inequalities in wealth and educational opportunity to a reasonable minimum. When these provisions are made by society, any citizen that then claims a share of the social product has an obligation to make a decent productive contribution to the community in return. White characterizes this obligation in the context of DMR and the related ethos of reasonable mutual advantage, in which “any member of the community who is a willing beneficiary of cooperative industry must make a reasonable effort, given his or her endowment of productive capacities, to ensure that other members of the community also benefit from and are not burdened by their membership in this scheme.”²⁶

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This position is entirely consistent with the implications of Smith’s explanation of morality for the socioeconomic structure of society. Sen offers a compelling evaluation of Smith’s position on this structure:

Smith viewed markets and capital as doing good work within their own sphere, but first, they required support from other institutions—including public services such as schools—and values other than pure profit seeking, and second, they needed restraint and correction by still other institutions—e.g., well-devised financial regulations and state assistance to the poor—for preventing instability, inequity, and injustice. If we were to look for a new approach to the organization of economic activity that included a pragmatic choice of a variety of public services and well-considered regulations, we would be following rather than departing from the agenda of reform that Smith outlined as he both defended and criticized capitalism.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 62.

²⁷ Sen, Amartya. “Capitalism Beyond The Crisis,” in *The New York Review of Books* (March 25, 2007).

Thus, Smith essentially endorses the type of capitalist welfare state outlined by many contemporary, liberal, egalitarian social theorists. However, understanding the metaphysical foundation of our moral sentiments, as well as their psychological ramifications, gives us a much more compelling account of justice understood through the lens of freedom.

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