

The idea of justice: A response

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Amartya Sen

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Abstract

The articles included in this symposium on my book *The Idea of Justice* cover a wide variety of issues, which is not surprising since my book too addresses a number of distinct problems, reflecting very different concerns connected with the idea of justice. In my response I have discussed each article individually. While most of the authors have been very kind to my attempt to reshape the theory of justice, there are also important critical issues raised in some articles, and I have discussed how some of these concerns can be – very fruitfully – accommodated. In other cases, I have offered clarificatory discussion, and in a few cases also counter-arguments. I have also responded to suggestions for practical application of my approach to justice. Altogether, I have benefited greatly from the symposium, and would like to record my appreciation.

Keywords

Inequality, injustice, power, rights, social realization

I have much enjoyed and benefited from reading – and thinking about – this splendid collection of papers, commenting on my book, *The Idea of Justice*. I feel very privileged to be able to read the reflections of the distinguished contributors to this issue, and it is very useful – and sometimes exciting – for me to re-examine my understanding of the idea of justice in the light of the points made in these rejoinders. So I begin by expressing my deep appreciation. I am also very touched by the kindness and reach of Jane Gordon's 'Introduction'.

The articles cover a wide variety of issues, which is not surprising since my book too delves into a number of different problems, reflecting distinct concerns connected with the idea of justice. There is rather little overlap of themes among the articles. So I discuss each article individually.

Corresponding author:

Amartya Sen, Harvard University, 1805 Cambridge Street, Littauer Center 205, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.

Email: asen@fas.harvard.edu

Drucilla Cornell on Kantian imagination

It comes to me as no surprise that I learned a great deal from Drucilla Cornell's thought-provoking article, and from her basic contention that 'there is a reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that can be used as an important ally of Sen's own realization-focused comparison approach to justice'. I am altogether persuaded by her thesis. However, to explain my own position, it is not so much that I did not think that Kant was an ally in many important ways – Kant is indeed the third most cited author in *The Idea of Justice*, following Adam Smith and John Rawls. My debt to Kant is not in dispute. Rather, Cornell establishes that going beyond the points on which I acknowledged Kant's ideas and their influence on my thinking, there are also other things in Kant, particularly what she calls 'Kantian imagination', from which I could have fruitfully drawn more – indeed a great deal more. I accept Cornell's contention, and I am grateful to her for steering me in this direction.

Kant's concept of the 'sublime' is a far-reaching idea, which cannot but influence people's thinking, including 'realization-sensitive' thinking, about justice. Cornell explicates – and illustrates (her citing of Toni Morrison is hugely appropriate) – how important it is 'to imagine the sublimity of what has been lost by centuries of oppression against women' and against so-called 'sexual deviants'. It reminds us, as Drucilla points out, 'just how much we have to remedy'.

Going beyond the particular relevance of the sublime, the general – and pervasive – importance of 'Kantian imagination' is important to stress. There is indeed no conflict between focusing on social realizations we have reason to value (as I have tried to do), and drawing on Kant's imaginative programme to evaluate what we have reason to treasure – and why. As Cornell puts it, as 'a regulative ideal' in the sense of 'Kant . . . in the *Third Critique*', the idea of justice must be sensitive to 'aspirational, imagined possibilities by which we seek to live justly together'.

I have no difficulty in accepting – indeed stressing – that the understanding of 'the idea of justice' could benefit from a better appreciation of many things that I did not succeed in fitting into my book. I was concerned with making some basic distinctions which separated my approach to justice from that of many others in the 'social contract' tradition, particularly the powerful ideas of John Rawls (even though, as I also made clear, I am greatly indebted to Rawls for inspiring and influencing my thinking on justice). For a more comprehensive account of the idea of justice we can surely make much greater use of Kantian reasoning than I have been able to do in my book.

Drucilla Cornell not only points out how I can borrow from Kant to move my account towards a more complete structure, but also how critically important these additions might be for thinking about practical issues of injustice that need urgent remedying. I have no difficulty in accepting her thesis, though I am also comforted by the fact that she is in agreement, as she says, 'with almost all of Sen's critique of Rawls' own hypothetical experiment in the imagination'. I am also happy to see that Cornell's focus on Kantian imagination involves its role in understanding 'the standpoint of others', which has a lot of affinity with Smith's invoking of the 'impartial spectator' – a profound exercise in imagination, which I did discuss quite extensively in my book, and used in

developing my own approach to justice. Cornell's article is a powerful contribution to the idea of justice, and I am very grateful for her constructive suggestions and proposals.

Mathew Forstater on the right to employment

Mathew Forstater is concerned with human rights, and in particular with the right to employment with a decent wage–benefits package. Not only does he examine and scrutinize the contents of employment rights and their profound importance, he also shows why many other social concerns depend greatly on the extent to which the right to employment is realized. As he puts it, in pursuing our social concern with improving ‘the lives of real people’, it would be ‘difficult to think of a better place to start than with a government-guaranteed job’ at ‘a living wage–benefits package for all’.

Forstater discusses, with clarity and reach, how the values that motivate my analysis of the idea of justice link closely with this priority. He also points out that my past work is closely connected with the thesis he develops and defends in his article (in fact, chapter 17 of *The Idea of Justice* is particularly concerned with showing the importance of human rights to economic and social claims including employment). Indeed, Forstater quotes me fairly extensively in having argued for the importance of employment in general (including the usually neglected ‘recognition aspect’ of employment on which I have been writing from 1975 onwards) and for the critical importance of accepting the human right to decent employment in particular.

However, he also argues that even though I have been a radical critic of ‘mainstream neo-classical theory’, I have ‘never made a complete break’, and that while I have been committed to ‘bringing ethics back into economics’, I have not, unlike him, insisted on a guaranteed employment for all provided by the government. I think Forstater is right in this diagnosis. Is there a puzzle here?

This is perhaps not the occasion for discussing my assessment of different schools of economics – I have done that elsewhere, for example, in *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), *Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) and *Rationality and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). But I will point to the fact that particular parts of what are seen today as ‘neo-classical theory’ have a much larger domain of applicability than is provided by the narrow box of neo-classical economics (not to mention the still narrower and bigoted position of what has come to be called ‘neo-liberal economics’). In fact, the origins of particular features of neo-classical theory stretch much further back (for example, to the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo) than the emergence of neo-classical economics as a discipline. Indeed, Karl Marx’s critical selection of specific elements of inherited economic theorizing (from both Smith and Ricardo), while rejecting many other features of ongoing understanding current at his time, illustrates the plausibility and usefulness of a selective approach (no ‘complete break’ there).

The question – and it is an important one – that arises from Forstater’s elegant and forceful reasoning is whether there is something of an artificial ‘block’ in preventing me from moving from (1) arguing for employment as a human right (which I have done strongly) to (2) insisting on a universal ‘government-guaranteed job’ at ‘a living wage–benefits package for all’. Given Forstater’s inclination to be generous – and his kindness

is impressively clear throughout his article – he suggests that my disinclination to ‘make a complete break’ with mainstream economic theory is ‘perhaps in the hope of bringing as many fellow travelers as possible along with him’ in hopes of improving the lives of all. I appreciate both Forstater’s powerful line of critical questioning (on an extremely important subject) and the friendliness of his style in opting for generosity (which, sadly, can be quite rare in academic disputations).

So why the block, if there is one? I do not think there is a block – not to mention an artificial block. In developing my conception of human rights, I have not confined my reasoning merely to what is feasible right now, but what can be made feasible through reform, and when necessary, even revolutionary change. There is a difference between ‘immediate feasibility’ and ‘achievability through social change’. In chapter 17 of *The Idea of Justice* I discuss why we must reject the artificial demand that for a human right to be seen as viable and important, it must have immediate feasibility. I expressed my strong disagreement with, for example, Maurice Cranston’s argument for rejecting ‘economic and social rights’ on the ground, as Cranston argued, that it is not feasible to guarantee those rights to all at this time. As Cranston put it, in what he thought was his winning argument to clinch the rejection of economic and social rights: ‘How can the government of those parts of Asia, Africa, and South America, where industrialization has hardly begun, be reasonably called upon to provide social security and holidays with pay for millions of people who inhabit these places and multiply so swiftly?’

A ‘guaranteed living wage–benefit package for all’ may not be feasible in many countries in the world right now, but that does not negate the importance of the value of seeing these just claims as human rights, nor disestablish the case for working for the realization, through social change, of what we have reason to value. The main point here, in the context of Forstater’s extremely pertinent question, is that in recognizing human rights we have to distinguish between (1) what we have good reason to want on grounds of justice and what can be made feasible with necessary social change (this helps to identify the domain of human rights), and (2) what can be achieved here and now, and would be an improvement in the realization of justice (this helps to identify priorities of immediate public policy – an exercise over a much more limited domain than that of human rights).

To illustrate the distinction, I may take the liberty of citing Marx again (this time from *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* – his last work, dated 1875). Among other things, Marx discusses here the competing ethical principles of payments and income distribution for a socialist economy, contrasting in particular (1) the right to a social share in line with our ‘needs’, and (2) the right to one’s product in line with the value of people’s respective ‘work’. Marx emphasized sharply the need to see the distinction and the relevance of both kinds of ethical reasoning (he chastised the German Workers Party for failing to distinguish between the two). Marx’s immediate advocacy of distribution according to work did not, he explained, in any way reduce his commitment to the ultimate value of distribution according to needs – nor weaken in any way the necessity of working for those social changes that would help to make a needs-related distribution system more feasible. Similarly, to make it feasible to have a ‘guaranteed job at a living wage–benefits package for all’, we will certainly need many social reforms going well

beyond what we have today, and yet the lack of immediate feasibility does not compromise the possibility of including a decent employment for all to be among the human rights to be cultivated.

Alistair Macleod on human rights and justice

Alistair Macleod, like Mathew Forstater, is concerned with human rights, but he considers the discipline of human rights in general, and not a specific right, like that to employment on which Forstater focuses. Ever since I first had a chance of talking with Alistair Macleod during a visit to Queen's University many decades ago, the relevance and excellence of his critical scrutiny have greatly benefited me. One of the great qualities of Macleod's critical scrutiny – going beyond its power and reach – is the remarkable transparency of his exposition (in a field that is not always blessed with easy communication).

My response to Macleod's expository section I is extremely easy, and consists of my appreciation and gratefulness to him for making the different elements in my writings on human rights easy to understand. I could not have asked for more help and support. So all I need to say here is 'thank you'.

In his section II which is more critical, Macleod raises some difficult and engaging questions. Given his well-known generosity, Macleod's contrary points are typically presented in the form of asking for more 'clarification and defense', which my exposition certainly needs. In fact, going beyond that, his critical reflections also contain serious doubts of great relevance to the viability of my claims on human rights. I am very grateful for the opportunity to join Macleod in this critical examination.

The first major issue taken up by Macleod is whether or not there really is a big difference between my claims on the nature of human rights and those made respectively by Joseph Raz and John Rawls, two philosophers and legal theorists whose ideas have been of great interest to me but with whose formulations I have had disagreements. Am I making too much of the differences that might or might not exist?

After his analysis of the issues involved, Macleod concludes that there is, in fact, good reason for my claim that we have to go well beyond Raz's attempt to base a theory of rights on the importance of the right-holder's *self-interest*, and he accepts the plausibility of my claim that some rights are not based on the personal interests of the right-holders, but on the importance of their freedom to pursue objectives that they see reason to pursue (which may or may not be tied with their respective self-interest). For example, the issues involved in the right to 'free speech' can have a much bigger foundation than what can be readily seen as the self-interest of the speakers themselves.

Macleod has been careful to note that I see my criticism of Raz's theory to be a 'qualified' one. In fact, I have benefited greatly from Raz's writings for a long time (ever since we were colleagues together at Oxford and interacted in regular seminars), and I am quite ready to accept that the gap between his interest-based theory and my approach could be much reduced if we are ready to broaden sharply what can be fitted into the contents of 'self-interest' (as used in Raz's theory). The difference between Raz's approach and mine on human rights really does turn on how broadly self-interest can be defined, without violating the rules of language.

If Macleod seems to give me a ‘pass’ in my qualified distancing from Raz’s theory, he questions deeply whether my understanding of rights is really significantly different from that of Rawls. He sees my critique of Rawls’ focus on primary goods as a rejection of ‘Rawls’ misplaced emphasis on the mere *means* to the achievement of the valued ends of life’ (in Macleod’s words). Macleod notes that this cannot be a fair criticism of Rawls. Nor is it a correct representation of where my idea of rights differs from Rawls’, since I too am concerned, as Macleod rightly points out, not only with the exact achievement of the ends of the right-holders, but with ‘the role played by “opportunity” and “substantive freedom” in the achievement of “reasoned ends”’. He concludes this part of his argument by noting that ‘opportunity’ and ‘substantive freedom’ are also the ‘*means* to the achievement of the valued ends of human life’. He claims that ‘opportunity’ and ‘freedom’ in my allegedly alternative analysis are really ‘means’, ‘no less than “primary goods”’ (on which Rawls focuses).

Do I accept this characterization of ‘opportunity’ and ‘freedom’ as different types of ‘means’, similar to Rawls’ ‘primary goods’? I would have to say that I do not. A person’s ability to achieve something does certainly depend on the means he or she has, but the ‘freedom’ or ‘opportunity’ to achieve something cannot themselves be sensibly seen as ‘means’ – and, in particular, means in the form of what Rawls calls ‘primary goods’. Indeed, ‘opportunity’ is a feasibility feature of being able to do something, but it is not in itself a means. There is a ‘category’ issue here, and furthermore, the feasibility of doing something – or *being* something – need not even depend only on features that can be plausibly taken to be ‘means’.

Take a case where a person is considering whether he is able to go and see a soccer match that will be taking place in an hour’s time somewhere else, a little distance away from where the person is. A bike ride would make that possible, but a walk – no matter how ferociously rapid – would not. If the person is able-bodied and proficient with bicycle-riding, then the ability to be at the match would depend on whether or not he has a bike (or at least the use of one).

Now consider a variation of the case in which the person can have a bike for his use but has a disability that makes bike-riding totally infeasible for him. Would it be right then to say, in line with Macleod’s usage, that being able to get to the match in time is itself a ‘means’ in the sense in which a bike is a means? I would doubt that this is a plausible way of thinking about means in general, and about Rawls’ ‘primary goods’ in particular. The ability to get to the match is not a means in the sense in which a bike certainly is.

One issue here, which is ultimately minor, is the permissibility of using the language of ‘means’. There are linguistic constraints on ‘rule-following’ that communicate the idea of means, and it is hard to see the overall feasibility to be present at the match as fitting those rules. This issue, while important in some ways, is not ultimately my main concern (since linguistic considerations can be accommodated through novel use). What is really important – and centrally involved in the contrast to which I am pointing – is the gulf between (1) an everything-considered feasibility, and (2) what Rawls calls primary goods as general-purpose means that can be distributed justly among the people, without taking any note of their personal characteristics. In the Difference Principle of Rawls, the ‘just’ arrangement is sensitive to people’s incomes, wealth, etc. but not to other features

of human circumstances that influence people's ability to do something, or achieve some result (in this case, being able-bodied enough to be able to ride bikes).

Having or not having a bike is easily covered by the reach of Rawls' primary goods, in a way that being able-bodied is not. Nor is it really a means, in this Rawlsian sense, to have the actual ability and freedom to do something. I would submit that 'opportunity' and 'substantive freedom' are not 'means' in the sense in which primary goods are means. And to include personal and social circumstances that allow a person to make use of primary goods with varying effectiveness in the assessment of distributive justice, as is incorporated in the theory I am trying to advance, cannot but be a substantial departure from the means-orientation of Rawls' Difference Principle.

So Macleod and I may have to part company here, but I wholly endorse his point that the contrast between Rawls' view and mine on rights *cannot* be seen in terms of an alleged summary (not, I believe, mine) that 'Rawls is emphasizing mere means to the achievement of the ends of life while Sen is focusing on the ends themselves'. The distinction surely is not that (though in rapid speech I have heard that line of distinction – and I myself may sometimes have been careless enough to live without protest with that oversimplification). Rather, the distinction can be seen (to put it in a concocted sentence) as 'Rawls is focusing on means in the form of primary goods whereas Sen's theory focuses on people's respective capabilities to achieve what they have reason to value (taking into account the means they have, but also their personal and social circumstances)'. Substantive freedoms depend on means like primary goods, but also on a lot else, varying from personal features (like disability, old age, or conditions like pregnancy) and social circumstances of a different kind from primary goods (such as the epidemiological surrounding to which a person is confined, and the social climate in which a person lives – an issue taken up by Shatema Threadcraft in her article in this collection).

Turning to Macleod's other critical points, he discusses why some of the claims I make about the nature and basis of human rights 'call for amplification'. In fact, he himself provides some of the amplification splendidly, for which I am very grateful and with which I can find no reason to disagree. His amplification of the 'social importance' of a freedom, for it to count as a putative human right, includes his reference to my argument that the freedom in question has to be 'within the effective reach of social policies'. If I were to elaborate on this issue, I should have to go further on how the 'effective reach' of social policies should be assessed, and no doubt that line of investigation would enrich the approach I have been trying to present.

To illustrate the issue involved, we may consider a case in which a particular person both values, with good reasoning, the opportunity of having enough food for nutritional adequacy, and the ability to write good poetry. Consider a case in which the person actually gives priority to the latter (that is, poetry), over the former in her own valuation. Despite her own priorities, the case for a social policy in dealing with the former (eliminating involuntary food deficiency, because of poverty) is a lot easier to work out and devise than social policies for making people successful in writing good poetry. So, aside from the basic importance of food and nutrition in one's survival and flourishing, the policy relevance of a social concern, along with the tractability of specific policies, for the prevention of starvation and under-nutrition, helps the candidacy of a right to food over any alleged right to write good poetry.

There are other issues of clarification that Macleod has also flagged. He is right that a lot of my justificatory arguments for human rights are ‘procedural’. That is certainly so. I am, however, not inclined to see this as something that undermines the force of the claims involved. A procedurally appropriate conclusion may be valued either because its procedural sanction itself *makes* it socially acceptable, or because the truth lying behind a claim can be *diagnosed* only through an appropriate procedure for such diagnosis. There is room for both types of justificatory reasoning, as I have discussed in *The Idea of Justice*. Procedures may sometimes have normativity in themselves (one does not have to be a no-nonsense libertarian to leave some matters to an agreed procedure), but as used in my work, the procedures are also very often designed to bring out what is true and what is false through an appropriate diagnostic process (for an analogy, consider that procedures of science are not judged by the normativity of the procedures themselves, but mainly by their effectiveness in uncovering an underlying reality). The capability perspective makes extensive use of the latter role of procedures. The dual use of procedures is quite important for my approach to human rights, and I very much appreciate having the occasion, given by Macleod’s critique, to make this clarificatory observation.

Sanín-Restropo and Méndez-Hincapié on the reversal of the panoptic

I fear I could not reach the austere intellectual height of the article by Ricardo Sanín-Restropo and Gabriel Méndez-Hincapié on ‘Manifest Injustice from the (De)colonial Matrix: The Reversal of the Panoptic’. I also had particular difficulty in understanding why they attribute to me ideas that are definitely not mine. I am amazed to learn from them that ‘Sen takes western democracy as a direct derivative of capitalism’, and that this is to be ‘the only foreground for any theory of justice’. Since I have extensively disputed the often-repeated claim that democracy is a ‘western contribution’ to the institutional world (chapter 15 of *The Idea of Justice* is particularly concerned with showing the hollowness of that claim), and have never seen capitalism as a foundation of any kind of democracy, I am baffled by their criticism of the ‘enormous blind side’ of my theory of justice (as misdescribed by them).

The distance between what I have said and what these two authors attribute to me grows further and further as the article proceeds. Since I have written more than once on the need to reject the exaggerated claims that have been made about the uniqueness of what is called ‘western science’ as the repository of all wisdom. My book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (Penguin Books, London: Allen Lane, 2006; New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), scrutinizes the intellectual blunder involved in such a diagnosis. I am surprised to be told that ‘Sen’s theory . . . cannot but repeat the gesture of imposition and exclusion’ since allegedly my view of reality aims at expelling ideas departing from ‘western knowledge as inept or as “barbaric” or “unreasonable” ways of constructing the world’. I can cite more than 20 other extraordinary misattributions in this joint article, and it is not clear to me what would remain of the article if those errors were to be removed.

I wonder whose writings have been read by Sanín-Restropo and Méndez-Hincapié. About four decades ago, I discovered that the Library of Congress was listing, in its

much-used catalogue, some books written by an ‘Amar Sen’ as my work, with a delicate reference to ‘Sen, Amar[tya]’. The library quickly corrected the wrong annotations as soon as I wrote to them. Something in the deeply angry tone of the essay of Sanín-Restrepo and Méndez-Hincapié makes me think that I may have a harder time in correcting wrong attributions in this case. I will not hold my breath to find out whether the reversal of the ‘reversal of the panoptic’ would take place.

Shatema Threadcraft on injustice and social climate

Shatema Threadcraft’s splendidly written article breaks fresh ground in bringing out concretely how social circumstances influence the lives and capabilities of people, through the impact both of institutional arrangements and of attitudinal variables. Since I have nothing but admiration for this illuminating article, my response can be quite short.

Threadcraft is particularly concerned with racially segregated societies (though her general arguments have much wider applicability). She discusses why established institutional arrangements like ‘New York’s City’s policy of “stop and frisk”’ not only impact on the well-being of those more prone to be stopped and frisked, but also how the policy erects a huge barrier to ‘young black men’s ability to move about in civic space’. Threadcraft brings out how large and extensive an area of scrutiny is brought about by the idea of ‘social realizations’, an idea on which I had focused, but perhaps without adequate illustration – a gap that Threadcraft’s discussion goes a long way in remedying. As she discusses:

In a racially segregated society, we must consider members’ proximity to environmental hazards, the relative security provision on offer, the nature of their contact – whether more or less violent or punitive – with police and other state agents, members’ access to transportation, relative time spent traveling from employment centers to their residences, and access to nutritious food within their environment.

As a book in philosophy, *The Idea of Justice* has tended to focus on relatively general distinctions and conflicting concerns, but the social importance of the approach I have been hoping to advance cannot really be established without empirical applications, developed with a clear linkage with the underlying theory. I have reason to be delighted to see Threadcraft’s empirically informed arguments, but most importantly I am hugely impressed by her ability to bring out so many considerations of relevance and importance with admirable brevity, clarity and force.

Graham on Jamaican and South African contexts

Using the framework of ‘postcolony’ as developed by Achille Mbembe, Greg Graham discusses the informational focus of my theory of justice, with careful reading of Jamaican and South African contexts. In responding to Graham’s very interesting article, I would like to distinguish between what he constructively says about Jamaican and South African situations (in line with the concerns of my theory), and his skepticism

about ‘whether Sen’s comparative capabilities approach sufficiently grapples with the continued ways in which domestic options in the postcolony are overdetermined by the unequal positions of states in a global capitalist order the priorities of which are increasingly dictated by a small set of multinational corporations and multilateral lending agencies’. The former contribution is easy to understand (and I personally learned a lot from it), though obviously I lack the empirical expertise to be able to evaluate Graham’s diagnostic analysis. The latter issue – Graham’s question – does, however, raise an interesting methodological query on which I should comment.

To have general relevance, any approach to justice has to have the ability to allow quite different empirical situations to be incorporated within that approach, with corresponding readings of the injustices involved in the respective cases. A theory of this kind – and this would apply as much to Rawls or even Kant as it does to my more modest theory – has to allow the recognition of empirical parameters, which would vary over space and time. The parameters that would apply to discussing issues of injustice, for example, in France today, would tend to differ quite a bit from the issues of primary importance in post-colonial situations in Africa or Latin America or Asia. And the post-colonial situations can themselves differ vastly from each other.

There is nothing in itself problematic – or embarrassing – in accepting this variability. And Graham himself shows full grasp of the nature of this variability, and applies the theory with specific attention to circumstances that seem to be prevalent in Jamaica and South Africa. The power and role of multinationals as well as the lesser strength of post-colonial states are part of the specifications that a theory of justice should be able to accommodate when the empirical situation demands that, and if these empirical diagnoses are correct, the theory thus specified would be ready to generate relevant political and social conclusions.

There is nothing that emerges from Graham’s illuminating analysis that points to any great difficulty in reflecting the implications of the diagnosed empirical situation for comparing capabilities – whether of different groups of people, or in alternative situations. It is worth remembering that all applications of any theory with some generality must depend on the specification of particular circumstances. This parametric dependence does not in any way undermine the relevance of a general framework that can accommodate many alternative particular cases. The application of any theory must invariably depend on the context, and the theory must allow variations of the contexts in different situations. That is what I tried to do (as have other theorists of justice), and while learning many things from Graham’s analysis, I was impressed to see how he uses the comparative capabilities framework with perfect ease with particular empirical specifications.

The incorporation of ‘even more concrete political reality’, which Graham wants, need not pose any particular difficulty that is immediately obvious – Graham does not point to any specific problem in particular. It is hard to guess, given the lack of explanation, what kind of difficulty in the application of capability-based reasoning Graham is exactly afraid of. But, of course, if some problem were in fact encountered, it would have to be discussed how and why it arises – so that the theory can be correspondingly broadened. That is a programme of work, if the need for it were to arise, that both Graham and I would have reason to welcome.

Terreblanche on public reasoning

I am delighted that Sampie Terreblanche brings out the powerful relevance of public reasoning, which is central to my theory of justice, and illustrates several cases in which a deficiency of public reasoning contributes to the persistence of manifest injustice. He discusses how the penalty of inadequate public reasoning falls unequally on certain disadvantaged groups, related particularly to racial dividing lines. Terreblanche shows how severely unequal income distribution can bias public reasoning and introduce ‘unbearable tensions into the viability of our democratic system’.

The resulting limitations can take different forms, including the lack of challenge to the continuation of economic inequality, but also, Terreblanche argues, the political tendency to support the ruling government is enhanced by the supporting grants that the poor receive which are often seen as coming from the existing government. To the extent that the ruling government ‘remains a captive of corporate dominance and globalism’, the result of this bias can be very serious for the continuation of prevailing injustices. Terreblanche applies his critique both to the domestic politics of South Africa and to the hold of established power of corporate business and the influence of international lending institutions on policy-making in South Africa.

This is certainly a powerful critique, with particular use of the approach to justice in adverse initial circumstance. If the reading of the empirical situation as presented by Terreblanche is correct (on which he has much more expertise than I have), his distressing conclusions would certainly seem to follow. It is also instructive to see how different problems relate to each other, and adversity of one kind can contribute to the continuation of adversities of other kinds, yielding ‘a vicious and self-perpetuating cycle of inequality’.

Deen Chatterjee on just war and just peace

The article of Deen Chatterjee is on a very different subject from the rest of the articles in this collection (which is why I have left it to the end of my rejoinder). But the article is also a delight for me to read, and in this case, I cannot claim to have any significant disagreement, or the need for any particular explanation of my own position. In fact, Chatterjee’s work on war and peace and mine on justice and injustice run on closely parallel lines, with many interconnections, as he has explained with admirable clarity and reach (and kindness).

I have found Chatterjee’s article to be both illuminating and stimulating. I am very impressed, among other things, by his discussion of ‘just peace’. The connections of this idea with my own thinking on comparative justice are well brought out by Chatterjee. We are much in agreement about the need for an interpretation of the *Bhagavadgita* very different from its standard religious reading, with its simple story of Krishna’s wisdom allegedly triumphing over Arjuna’s ‘crisis of faith’. As Chatterjee discusses, there is much more in Arjuna’s ethical arguments than that.

I am grateful for the gracious acknowledgment that Chatterjee gives to my analysis of the epic document, but his analysis actually goes well beyond my own discussion, taking it beyond my principal focus of attention, in particular the need to take note of the

consequences of one's action (in the broadest sense of "realizations," including deontological and agent-relative concerns). Chatterjee's suggestion that Arjuna's arguments also amount to a powerful thesis about 'the futility of war itself' is surely a very significant possible line of enquiry. This is one of many new insights I am grateful to have received from Chatterjee's innovative contribution.

A final remark

I end by thanking the contributors to this issue for writing such interesting articles and asking such cogent questions. I am very grateful for this opportunity to comment on a number of important issues that are central to my approach to justice. It has also been both engaging and instructive for me to reflect on the critical issues that have been raised in these articles.

In addition to my debt to the authors, I am also extremely grateful to the organizers of the symposium (including Drucilla Cornell, Jane Gordon and Kenneth Michael Panfilio, among others) for carefully planning this symposium and for generating these splendidly engaging contributions.