Gender and Global Justice
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Edited by Alison M. Jaggar
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Introduction

Gender and Global Justice: Rethinking Some Basic Assumptions of Western Political Philosophy

Alison M. Jaggar

0.1 Philosophical questions of distributive justice

Concerns about the gendered dimensions of global justice have been articulated only recently within the discipline of philosophy. In this introductory essay, I explain how raising such concerns brings into question some of the most basic assumptions of Western political philosophy. I begin by situating reflections on global gender justice in the context of earlier philosophical thought about justice.

Central to justice is the idea of moral balance. Broadly speaking, to be concerned about justice is to be interested in assuring that all claimants should give and receive whatever they are justly due. Normative debate among political philosophers focuses on how the abstract idea of what is justly due should be interpreted substantively and applied in practice.

Western philosophers usually distinguish three main branches of justice, corresponding to three main types of concerns. One branch, retributive justice, addresses questions regarding the appropriate punishment of wrongdoers. A second branch, reparative justice, addresses questions of how to correct or rectify past wrongs. The third branch, distributive justice, addresses questions concerning the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of participating in a co-operative enterprise. This is the branch that has received most attention from Western philosophers and the essays in this volume mostly fall within
this category, although it should be noted that questions of retributive and reparative justice also have gender dimensions and can also be raised in global contexts.

Alternative normative theories of distributive justice are structured as sets of answers to several framing questions. Those questions are, briefly: where, when, who, what, and how?

*Where?* asks what is the domain or sphere of life within which the moral demands of justice have application.

*When?* asks what are the social circumstances within which the demands of justice apply.

*Who?* asks which entities should be regarded as subjects of justice, meaning who or what are entitled to make justice claims deserving of moral consideration.

*What?* asks which entities should be regarded as objects of justice, meaning which kinds or categories of things should be distributed in a just manner.

Finally, *How?* asks which principles are the most morally appropriate for guiding the allocation of various objects to various subjects in various circumstances.

Any convincing answer to these questions requires a rationale. In other words, it requires addressing the further question, *Why?* Philosophical theories of justice not only offer answers to the central questions of justice but—like all theories—they also explain why they advocate these particular answers.

### 0.2 Western political philosophy from the sixteenth to mid-twentieth centuries

Between the late sixteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, Western political philosophers, sometimes termed “modern” political philosophers, developed answers to these questions that were widely accepted by the end of the period.

*Where?* Modern Western philosophers agreed that the moral demands of justice held only among people who shared a common way of life, and they typically identified the external boundaries of this moral community with the frontiers of the sovereign state. They also identified “internal” limits to the moral demands of justice, drawing these boundaries around areas of supposedly personal life such as religion, household, and family. In these areas, the demands of justice were thought to be inapplicable.
When? Most modern philosophers agreed that the circumstances in which the principles of justice had applicability were those of moderate scarcity. That is to say, they assumed that questions of justice arise only when the necessities of life are not so plentiful that all legitimate claimants can have as much of anything as they want and not so scarce that it is impossible to reach any satisfactory agreement about distributing the available objects.

Who? Modern philosophers tended to regard the legitimate claimants or subjects of justice as those human individuals residing within a particular jurisdiction. Prior to the advent of universal citizenship, even slaves and serfs were thought to be the source of some legitimate justice claims, but foreigners and animals were typically excluded as subjects of justice.

What? The main objects of justice or kinds of things thought appropriate for just distribution were typically taken to be political rights and responsibilities, on the one hand, and economic obligations and access to resources, on the other.

How? Typically assuming certain answers to the questions of where, when, who, and what, Western philosophical debate about justice focused mostly on the question of “how.” In other words, it sought to identify morally acceptable criteria to guide just distributions of available goods among legitimate claimants. Popular candidates to ground principles of just distribution have included: equal distribution, distribution according to need, and distribution according to desert.

Why? Underlying much of the thinking of modern Western political philosophers have been basic moral commitments to individual liberty and equality. Throughout the modern period, these values increasingly came to be regarded as default standards. Limits on liberty and departures from equality were both thought to require further justification and this was often presented as the best way of balancing these fundamental values.

0.3 Western political philosophy after World War II

The last half of the twentieth century saw a new flowering of political philosophy, responding to striking changes in the post-war world. The changes included extensive decolonization, the Cold War, and the establishment of social democracy in much of Western Europe. In many countries, new demands for equality were made by women and by the members of previously marginalized or stigmatized