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Fairness, Globalization, and Public Institutions

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society, nature, and gender. That done, a dialogue can emerge and spaces created for other civilizations.

Globalization, even as it leads to uneven development, has been one of the modes of increased multicultural hybrid music, food, and identity. As the non-West has clawed, through immigration, back to the West, this has created hybrid identities. These have the potential to create planetary notions of fairness. Hybrid identities and the softening of the past are necessary factors of global fairness, but not sufficient. For that, a new view of the future and a globalization far more sensitive to the quadruple bottom line than we have now is required.

Globalization and Fairness

Edgar Porter

CAN FAIRNESS BE understood in a global context? Does culture still matter when striving to define fairness in an era of global relationship, or have we become so global in our lives that culture evaporates and we see a clear sky of universal truths writ large? The answer, I think, is that universal truths are not to be found, and culture still matters. A lot.

The story is told of American philosopher Mortimer Adler attending an international conference on philosophy in Honolulu, eager to engage his Asian colleagues in a dialogue on the “great ideas” of justice and freedom. But all they wanted to talk about, he reported, was *harmony!* To the Asian philosophers the search for harmony was paramount, well ahead of justice and freedom. To Adler, it was just the opposite. How does one convince “the Other” of the absolute, universal importance of his or her view when each is tied to rich and diverse cultures built on distinct core ideals? One does not, even in these heady days of globalization.

Does this mean that globalization has no impact on our ability to address the “big” questions such as fairness, justice, and harmony? No, it means that addressing them in order to agree on a common definition is fruitless. Globalization does not guide us to universal truth, or even universal agreement. Globalization does, however, thrust up moral dialogue in an exploring, intimate, cross-cultural environment never imagined before. Therefore, diverse cultures sitting down to discuss globalization and fairness can agree on fairness as a universal “concept.” What globalization cannot do is lead to an agreement on what constitutes fair behavior.

How in this globalizing age do we guide the discussion of ideas and values toward an even more positive and constructive exchange? We might start by organizing the next conference. It will be called “Globalization and Harmony.”

Notes

1. S. Milius, "Unfair Trade: Monkeys Demand Equitable Exchanges," *Science News* 164.12 (September 20, 2003): 181.
2. Duen Hsi Yen, www.noogenesis.com/malama/fairness.html.
3. www.calvertnet.k12.md.us/instruct/justfair.shtml.
4. Fredrik Bendz, www.update.uu.se/~fbendz/philo/fairness.htm.
5. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). More recently, a collection of his essays has been published. See John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). In addition to focusing more directly and exclusively on fairness, this newer book contains numerous "corrections" that Rawls made in response to some of the criticisms of his earlier book.
6. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 4.
7. *Ibid.*, 14f.
8. *Ibid.*, 15.
9. *Ibid.*, 16.
10. *Ibid.*, 42f.
11. Steven Suranovic, "International Trade Fairness," <http://internationalecon.com/fairtrade/index.html>.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Joseph Henrich, Robert Boyd, and Samuel Bowles, "In Search of *Homo Economicus*: Behavioral Experiments in 15 Small-scale Societies," *American Economic Review* 91 (May 2001): 73–78.
14. Colin Camerer, "Strategizing in the Brain," *Science* 300, (June 13, 2003): 1674f, commenting on the research paper by Sanfey et al., www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/short/300/5626/1755.
15. *Ibid.*, 1674.