

## The Many Faces of Injustice

Written by Administrator  
Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---



While it is difficult to give a complete and adequate definition of justice, most observers can recognize clear examples of serious injustice when they arise. Such injustice comes in various forms, wherever the norms of distributive justice, procedural justice, or human rights are violated.

Some actions, such as theft and murder, are commonly recognized as unjust by governments and prohibited by domestic law. However, there are also systemic forms of injustice that may persist in a society. These traditions and structures give rise to profound injustices that can be difficult to recognize. In some cases, these unfair conditions are imposed by the ruling party itself, whether it is an authoritarian government or an outside aggressor. Those in power sometimes use the state's legal and political systems to violate the political, economic, and social rights of subordinate groups.

**Political injustice** involves the violation of individual liberties, including the denial of voting rights or due process, infringements on rights to freedom of speech or religion, and inadequate protection from cruel and unusual punishment. Such injustice often stems from unfair procedures, and involves political systems in which some but not others are allowed to have voice and representation in the processes and decisions that affect them. This sort of procedural injustice can contribute to serious social problems as well as political ones. If voting or litigation procedures, for example, are perceived to be unjust, any outcome they produce is liable to be unstable and produce conflict. In addition, any procedures that are carried out in a biased manner are likely to contribute to problems of religious, ethnic, gender, or race discrimination. When the procedure in question has to do with employment or wages, such issues can lead to serious economic and social problems.

## The Many Faces of Injustice

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

Economic injustice involves the state's failure to provide individuals with basic necessities of life, such as access to adequate food and housing, and its maintenance of huge discrepancies in wealth. In the most extreme cases of maldistribution, some individuals suffer from poverty while the elite of that society live in relative luxury. Such injustice can stem from unfair hiring procedures, lack of available jobs and education, and insufficient health care. All of these conditions may lead individuals to believe that they have not received a "fair share" of the benefits and resources available in that society.

Even more serious than the injustices discussed above are war crimes and crimes against humanity. During wartime, individuals sometimes perform acts that violate the rules of just war set forth in international law. When soldiers engage in wars of aggression, attack non-combatants or pursue their enemies beyond what is reasonable, they commit not acts of war, but acts of murder. However, these are not the only injustices associated with war and protracted conflict. Such conflict can also lead to severe human rights violations, including genocide, torture, and slavery. These crimes violate individuals' most basic rights to life and physical safety.

When political or legal institutions fail to protect individuals' fundamental rights and liberties, members of the unjustly treated group feel disempowered. They are likely to view the institutions that impose such conditions as unjust, and thus find themselves in the midst of a justice conflict. If the subordinate group believes that it lacks the power to change things through political or diplomatic means, it may conclude that the only effective way to pursue justice is through violent confrontation. However, such confrontations tend to produce even more injustice. In addition, because the dominant group typically has more power to inflict harm, such struggles often fail. Therefore, violence is often an ineffective way of

addressing injustice, and many believe that it should be used only as a last resort.

### Responding To Injustice

Many scholars and activists note that in order to truly address injustice internationally, we must strive to understand its underlying causes. These causes have to do with underdevelopment, economic pressures, various social problems, and international conditions. Indeed, the roots of repression, discrimination, and other injustice stem from deeper and more complex political, social, and economic problems. It is only by understanding and ameliorating these root causes and strengthening civil society that we can truly protect human rights.

There are various ways to address the political, economic and social injustices mentioned above. Whether a response proves to be appropriate and effective depends on the nature of the grievance.

Addressing political injustice is often a matter of developing institutions of fair governance, such as an accountable police force and judiciary. Legislative action and executive decision-making should likewise be held accountable. Such measures are sometimes a matter of reforming state institutions or revising state constitutions.

In cases where some groups are excluded from political participation, the state can remedy violations of political rights by promoting political inclusion

## The Many Faces of Injustice

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

and empowering subordinate groups. Public decision-making should respond to the will of the citizens, and members of the society should have the opportunity to participate in the formulation, execution, and monitoring of state policies. In other words, a culture of political involvement and public participation should be fostered. In addition, there are various social structural changes that might give groups more social, economic, and/or political power. This is often accomplished through the strengthening of the economy and civil society in conjunction with democratization efforts. In some cases countries require outside assistance for election monitoring, nation-building programs and the development of governmental infrastructure to make their political system more stable.

Addressing systemic economic injustice is often a matter of economic reforms that give groups better access to jobs, health care, and education. In many cases, lack of access to basic services stems from enormous inequalities in resource distribution. Redistribution of benefits and resources can thus be an important component of social structural changes to remedy injustice. There are various institutional and economic development reforms that might be put in place to raise living standards and boost economic growth. In addition, by creating social and economic safety nets, states can eliminate tension and instability caused by unfair resource allocation.

For example, development of programs that provide assistance for the poor, pensions for the elderly, and training and education for workers help remedy injustice, tax reform, giving workers the right to unionize and demand a fair wage, advancing ecological policies to protect and preserve the environment, and improving access to land ownership can also help in particular cases.

Balancing out gross inequalities in wealth might also be part of

## **The Many Faces of Injustice**

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

compensatory justice after periods of war. During periods of postwar adjustment and peacebuilding efforts, long-term economic policy must aim to achieve equity, or balance in the distribution of income and wealth. Such efforts to ensure a just distribution of benefits following conflict are typically accompanied by democratization efforts to ensure a more balanced distribution of power. When neglect of economic rights stems from the destruction caused by protracted conflict, countries may require outside aid to remedy injustice and avoid future instability. Humanitarian aid and development assistance are often needed to help a society build its economic resource base and ensure that the needs of its citizens are met. Issues of distributive justice are in this way central to any reconstruction program that aims at economic vitalization and rebuilding post-war economic systems.

### **Responding to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity**

Severe violations of basic rights to life and physical safety are sometimes enacted through government policies or inflicted during the course of warfare. It is commonly recognized that government leaders and soldiers, as well as civilians, must be held accountable for perpetrating such injustices.

International humanitarian law has been enacted to preserve humanity in all circumstances, even during conflicts. Various international committees are in place to monitor compliance with human rights standards and report any violations. When breaches occur, the perpetrators must somehow be brought to justice.

According to the notion of retributive justice, past acts of injustice or

## The Many Faces of Injustice

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

wrongdoing warrant punishment. Those who perpetrate war crimes or crimes against humanity should be brought to justice. When injustices are committed in the initiation or the conduct of warfare, retribution is typically accomplished through international courts or tribunals that carry out war crimes adjudication.

In other cases, human rights violations form part of national policy. Most believe that government officials should be held accountable for institution policies of apartheid, forced disappearance, torture, or genocide. Such breaches are typically brought to the attention of international tribunals or tried in an international court. Punishment is thought to reinforce the rules of international law and to deny those who have violated those rules any unfair advantages. In addition, many believe that punishment deters other would-be offenders from committing similar crimes in the future.

However, international law and adjudication is often insufficient to address grave injustice. When breaches do occur, they are brought to the attention of international tribunals or a war crimes tribunal. As conditions escalate in violence and more individuals are taken prisoner, tortured, or executed, it becomes more difficult to resort to the legal path.

Some maintain that the vigilant observance of the international community is necessary to ensure justice. Various nongovernmental organization (NGOs), including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, are devoted to bringing injustice to light and pressuring governments to address the injustice. Historically, the United Nations has likewise played a central role in dealing with international justice issues.

## **The Many Faces of Injustice**

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

Many maintain that massive violations of human rights, such as genocide and crimes against humanity, warrant military intervention. If, through its atrocious actions, a state destroys the lives and rights of its citizens, it temporarily forfeits its claims to legitimacy and sovereignty. In such cases, outside governments have a positive duty to take steps to protect human rights and stamp out injustice.

However, this sort of response is limited, because governments are often reluctant to commit military forces and resources to defend human rights in other states. In addition, the use of violence to end human rights violations poses a moral dilemma insofar as such interventions may lead to further loss of innocent lives. It is imperative that the least amount of force necessary to achieve humanitarian objectives be used, that intervention not do more harm than good, and that it be motivated by genuine humanitarian concerns. Otherwise, such interventions are likely to simply cause more injustice.

### **Restoring Justice Once Conflict Has Ended**

A central goal of responding to injustice is paving the way for future peace. Once conflict has ended and policies of oppression have been repealed, society members face the task of rebuilding their society. Many believe that measures aimed at restorative justice are well-suited for this task.

Restorative Justice is concerned with healing wounds of victims and repairing harm done to interpersonal relationships and the community. It can play a crucial role in responding to severe human rights violations or cases of genocide. Huge advances are made when governments tell the truth about past atrocities carried out by the state. It is thought that true healing requires remembering the atrocities committed, repenting, and forgiving.

## The Many Faces of Injustice

Written by Administrator

Saturday, 16 November 2013 23:16

---

War crimes inquiries and truth commissions can aid in the process of memory and truth telling and help to make public the extent to which victims have suffered.

Restoration often becomes a matter of restitution or war reparations. In cases where clear acts of injustice have taken place, some type of compensation package can help to meet the material and emotional needs of victims and remedy the injustice. Repentance can also help to re-establish relationships among the conflicting parties and help them to move toward reconciliation. In some cases, conflicts can end more peacefully when parties acknowledge their guilt and apologize than when formal war crimes adjudication or criminal proceedings are used.

In cases of civil war, because the line between offenders and victims can become blurred, a central goal of peacebuilding is to restore the community as a whole. Restoration often becomes tied to the transformation of the relationship between the conflicting parties. However, such restoration cannot take place unless it is supported by wider social conditions and unless the larger community makes restorative processes available.

Many note that an adequate response to injustice must involve social structural changes, reconstruction programs to help communities ravaged by conflict, democratization and the creation of institutions of civil society. Only then can the underlying causes of injustice be remedied.