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DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

JULIAN LAMONT

Distributive Justice

Edited by

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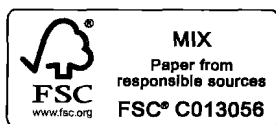
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Series Preface

Justice is one of the most enduring and central concepts within applied philosophy, and generates a vast and varied literature. This six-volume *International Library of Justice* series meets a number of distinct needs. The first volume, *Theories of Justice*, edited by Tom Campbell and Alejandra Mancilla, comprises a selection of some of the most important essays on the general theory of justice published over recent decades. One interesting aspect of this literature is the renewed attention that is being given to the notion of desert within theories of justice. Two further volumes, edited by Larry May and Paul Morrow, and Julian Lamont, respectively, deal with two traditional topics in justice that have undergone significant development in recent years – namely procedural justice, particularly with respect to constitutional law, and distributive justice, taking in important recent work on egalitarianism. Another two volumes, edited by Christian Barry and Holly Lawford-Smith, and Lukas H. Meyer, respectively, focus on the application of justice to less familiar areas, such as global institutions as they bear upon contemporary problems relating to extreme poverty and intergenerational justice. The sixth volume, *Justice and the Capabilities Approach*, edited by Thom Brooks, concentrates on the recent influential work by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum on the relevance the concept of human capabilities in the formulation of policy on distributive justice, especially in developing countries.

Given the political priority that accrues to those matters that are categorized as having to do with justice, there is a tendency to extend the term beyond its distinctive uses and incorporate a very wide range of social values that relate to the proper ordering of social and political relationships. While the editors of each volume have striven to resist this inflation of the term ‘justice’ to cover all aspects of right human relationships, inevitably there is, in each volume, a substantial overlap with the bodies of literature concerned with the ideals of equality, reciprocity and humanity.

One such overlap arises with respect to rights, particularly human rights. Indeed, in some fields the discourse of justice has been largely overtaken by that of rights. The significance of this shift in emphasis within political rhetoric, which is one of the themes that features in *Theories of Justice*, recurs within the subsequent selections, raising interesting questions concerning contemporary political priorities and differing institutional approaches to social order.

The volumes in this series will assist those engaged in scholarly research by making available some of the most important contemporary essays on particular topics within the contemporary discourse of justice. The essays are reproduced in full, with the original pagination for ease of reference and citation.

The editors have been selected for their eminence in the study of law, politics and philosophy. Each volume represents each editor’s selection of the most seminal recent essays in English on an aspect of justice. The Introductions present an overview of the issues in that particular volume, together with comments on the background and significance of the selected essays.

TOM CAMPBELL

Series Editor

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Introduction

Distributive justice is the study of the morality of the distribution of economic goods and services. As a philosophical topic, distributive justice only really came to life in the modern era. Until then, few questioned reigning economic structures, because the vast majority of the population believed that the distribution of economic goods was either naturally or divinely ordained. People were born into an economic place in society, where they almost invariably remained throughout their lives, often even in the same occupation as their parents. The social immobility of the pre-modern era helped support the belief that one's economic position was fixed by nature or the divine, a belief that largely precluded debate about distributive justice.

The topic of distributive justice began to blossom under two influences: awareness of other economic structures and greater social mobility. First, people became more aware of alternative economic structures in other nations and realized that social and economic structures are largely a matter of choice for every society. That realization sparked moral consideration not just of other existing economic structures, but also of new and better ones. Social mobility increased significantly with the European settling of the Americas. This was true both with respect to the pre- and post-economic position of the immigrants themselves and also within the new societies. Most dramatically, social mobility increased as a result of the industrial revolution.

John Locke was one of the earliest and most influential modern philosophers to discuss the topic of distributive justice extensively (Locke [1689] 1988). With the land in the Americas in apparent abundance from the point of view of the Europeans, he was particularly interested in the distribution of the land and its products. He argued that one's productive labour is what justifies property rights in previously unowned economic goods, particularly land or the 'commons'. Moreover, Locke argued that people deserve all the product of their labour and so he opposed, for instance, the landed gentry collecting land rent from the productive labour of others. Locke's reasoning was based on his belief that we each own ourselves, and so when we labour, we mix ourselves with the land or other objects, thereby coming to own them. Lockean property rights were not absolute, being constrained by what has come to be called the 'Lockean proviso' – that is, after the property claim has been effected, 'enough and as good' must be left in the commons for others (Bogart, 1985; Mack, 1995; Steiner, 1997).

Locke's idea, that it is labour that produces most of the value in things and so should be the pre-eminent factor in a just distribution of economic goods, has been central to many theories of distributive justice ever since. In terms of modern theories of economic justice, which are the focus of this collection, we particularly see a series of developments and interpretations of Locke's original insights in both the libertarian and the desert theories. Other traditions appeal to considerations such as equality, need or welfare. Locke is only one among a multitude of theorists over the last couple of hundred years who have developed theories about which distributive system is the most just. The purpose here, in this and the related volumes, is to

examine some of the most influential of the modern theories, some relationships between them, and also some of the problems with them.

Of course, no existing economic systems conform, in a systematic way, to the prescriptions of any of the modern distributive theories. This is hardly surprising, given the complexity of the real world and the purity of the world of theory. This fact does not undermine the practicality of distributive theories, which are, and should remain, practical theories about what we ought to do. Rather than interpreting them as empty utopian ideals, the moral injunctions of distributive theories are best thought of as relevant contributions to debates to move each country's economic system in a particular direction, thereby making that system more just. With this in mind we will examine each of the groups of theories.

Right Libertarianism and its Critics

Libertarian political philosophers differ in important respects, in some cases so much that they span a wide spectrum of political views, but they are drawn together under the libertarian banner by their belief in two fundamental (and related) values: individual liberty and self-ownership (Haworth, 1994; Hayek, 1960; Hospers, 1971; Otsuka, 2003). Many libertarians also believe that as long as people have not gained their economic goods through morally illegitimate means – for instance, force or fraud – then they have an absolute moral right to those goods. The economic system usually recommended to achieve this set of ideals is laissez-faire capitalism (Narveson, 2001; Nozick, 1974; Reiman, 1981). A free market provides a mechanism by which individuals can exchange goods and services to meet their goals, thereby protecting and enhancing individual liberty. Ideally, it also ensures that individuals have control over themselves, how their bodies are used, what choices they make about their labour, under what conditions they will part with the products of their labour and so on. Of course, no real world economies fully conform to the laissez-faire ideal. Among developed economies, probably none have a government sector of less than 30 per cent of GDP so they are all a long way from laissez-faire capitalism; they are more accurately described as mixed capitalist economies. Libertarians, then, are best viewed as providing moral arguments for moving the world's economies closer to laissez-faire capitalism.

Most other contemporary distributive theories also allow a role for the market, but usually as a means of achieving some desired distributive pattern, such as raising the level of the least advantaged, maximizing utility, giving people what they deserve and so on. By contrast, advocates of libertarian distributive principles defend markets as just, not as a means to some pattern, but insofar as the exchanges permitted in the market satisfy the conditions of just exchange described by the principles. Libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick, in his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), describes such principles as historic, rather than patterned, defining a historical principle as one that permits any distribution arising from just steps.

Nozick's 'entitlement theory' is a modern classic, drawing on the ideals of liberty, self-ownership and historical principles to argue against the legitimacy of taxation and, indeed, of almost all of government except that minimal part concerned with protecting people against direct harm and protecting private property. Nozick's entitlement theory entails property rights that are stronger and more absolute than most other libertarians think are defensible, but

his arguments, along with socialist philosopher G.A. Cohen's two famous critiques, provide a classic exchange that has influenced later libertarians and socialists alike.

In Chapter 1 Nozick offers his famous Wilt Chamberlain example to show that all patterned principles of justice (whether the pattern is equality, desert, need or something else) will inevitably require restrictions of freedom, or redistribution of wealth, in order to maintain the preferred pattern. To the extent the argument works, it works by generating the intuition in many readers that it is simply unjust to prohibit free exchange or force the benefits of such exchange to be shared equally (or according to some other favoured pattern). Cohen, however, believes the example generates the intuition Nozick is after only if readers unwittingly set aside their commitment to the initial pattern and its implications, something they would have no reason to do, unless they were already convinced by the libertarian programme Nozick is defending. Cohen goes on, in Chapter 2, 'Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain: How Patterns Preserve Liberty', to argue that patterns preserve, rather than violate, liberty, because the choices made in a free market are not really free if they are made unaware of the way in which large numbers of free market choices will drastically change distributive outcomes for people in the society. In dispute in this exchange is really the nature of individual liberty or the sort of liberty that is valuable, and the types of social interactions, government authority and distributive outcomes that are compatible with it.

Nozick also appeals to self-ownership in his defence of libertarian property rights and in his arguments against taxation, taking his inspiration from Locke's idea that everyone 'owns' themselves and, by mixing one's labour with the external world, self-ownership can generate ownership of some part, even potentially very unequal parts, of the material world. In Chapter 3, 'Self-Ownership, World-Ownership, and Equality', Cohen explores the way in which Nozick relies on Locke to generate property rights from self-ownership. Cohen argues that Nozick relies on an unacceptably weak version of Locke's proviso to 'leave as much and as good for others', concluding that Nozick's argument fails to justify the very strong property rights associated with classical libertarianism. Cohen does concede, however, that even socialists will need to recognize the role of some form and degree of private property in protecting self-ownership and freedom. Hence, this important exchange between Cohen and Nozick has given rise to more moderate forms of libertarianism, including 'left' libertarianism, which has a separate entry in the *Theories of Justice* volume in this series. It has also influenced more egalitarian philosophers to take seriously the role of private property and the market in balancing equality with the importance of individual liberty.

One of the central ideas from Locke was that what people *do* should determine their economic benefits. This idea is central to some libertarian theories and is central to the desert theories which are covered in Part III of this volume. David Schmidtz, in Chapter 4, addresses the issue of the provision of social welfare. He is critical of many social welfare programmes on the grounds that they have a tendency to encourage individuals to rely on others for meeting their needs. In Part IV of this volume are two essays that defend the collective provision of basic needs or a decent minimum. Although Schmidtz stops short of rejecting any collective provision for basic needs (as Nozick would), he here emphasizes the importance of individuals' internalizing responsibility for their own welfare. Since prosperous societies are those in which individuals do the most part internalize responsibility for their own welfare, Schmidtz believes that our focus should be on figuring out which institutions make

people less likely to need help in the first place, and ensuring that we foster those institutions. Even if some people do at some moments require help from others, he argues that the help we give must be carefully chosen to ensure that people are led to take responsibility for themselves. Pre-eminent among the institutions Schmidtz believes do foster the expectation of responsibility is that of private property (see also Schmidtz, 2006).

Distributive Justice, Fairness and Equality

Part II starts with the only essay in the volume with an empirical focus rather than a focus on arguing for a particular theory of distributive justice. David Miller argues that the justificatory framework commonly relied upon by political philosophers, coined by John Rawls as the method of reflective equilibrium, requires that philosophers take into account people's actual beliefs about justice, and attempt to develop theories consistent with them. Hence, in Chapter 5, 'Distributive Justice: What the People Think', Miller provides an overview of the evidence and analysis of people's beliefs about distributive justice, particularly with respect to the principles of desert, need and equality.

He finds that people's thinking about distributive justice is both pluralistic and contextual. People have a number of different criteria which they use either singularly or in combination, depending on the nature of the distributional situation. Also, the criterion or criteria people are apt to apply will vary according to the social background against which the distributive decision is being made, especially the character of the group within which the allocation is going to occur. Miller's claim is not that the empirical findings prove popular beliefs correct, but rather that we need to examine the principles underpinning those beliefs if we are to improve the justice of our societies.

According to Miller, any plausible interpretation of the evidence requires the assumption that, for most people, what people deserve plays a significant role in their assessments of distributive justice. However, people are uncertain about what should be the proper basis for desert in situations where it is clear that people's overall performance is partly influenced by luck and partly influenced by their voluntary choices. The three essays in Part III pick up on this concern with desert, as does the related appeal to responsibility in Part I by David Schmidtz.

In the case of need, Miller sees the evidence as clear that people see an important distinction between genuine claims of need and things people simply would like to have. Moreover, there is a reasonable degree of consensus about what are the genuine claims of need that should be met by any just society. Most people think that claims of need set a baseline that provides a 'safety net' for all and can be readily met without most of society's resources. Moral arguments in support of this commitment to a decent minimum are given by Philippe Van Parijs and David Copp in Part IV (Chapters 16 and 17, respectively).

In terms of equality, there is evidence that people believe that modern societies would be better with less inequality. However, equality is sometimes favoured only because of a lack of evidence about people's different deserts or needs, or out of a belief that large inequalities cannot be justified by desert or need. In the area of citizenship, however, people seem strongly committed to equality before the law and equal access to political decision-makers.

All the essays in Part II represent a range of ways in which equality has figured in debates about distributive justice. Michael Walzer's approach in 'Complex Equality' (Chapter 9) is that which perhaps most straightforwardly mirrors the plurality of beliefs about justice represented in Miller's empirical review. Walzer's novel and important contribution to the contemporary distributive justice literature is his recognition of the differences in our beliefs about how different goods should be distributed. So, for example, we may be happy for fine clothes or automobiles to be distributed only to those who can pay for them, but the right to vote or hold political office should never be determined by who can pay most for them. The distributive principle for health care may be need, while that for educational opportunities might be equality, or else merit. Walzer develops this insight by arguing that the criteria for just distributions depend on the good being distributed, as well as the particular society's values about that good. He understands injustice as occurring when the distributive criteria for one good encroaches on that of another, as in the case where money is used to buy political votes or one's position of influence is used to secure a scarce educational place for a candidate who does not meet the entry requirements. Following Walzer's development of his idea of complex equality (1983), a significant literature on 'commodification' has developed which explores the increasing distribution of all goods and services via market mechanisms (Andre, 1995; Radin, 1996; Walsh and Giulianotti, 2007).

Probably the most influential English-speaking political philosopher of the twentieth century was John Rawls. In the two essays included in the collection by Allen Buchanan and Brian Barry, we have both a broad introduction to Rawls' theory of justice and a distillation of one of the most fecund and powerful arguments for the two main elements of Rawls' distributive theory: equality of opportunity and the difference principle.

Rawls argues for the basic structure of society to embody what he calls 'justice as fairness'. A crucial part of this basic structure is the principle of equal basic liberty for all. Rawls argues against sacrificing these liberties even if it could be shown that such a sacrifice would increase average happiness. This argument of Rawls is well-characterized by Buchanan in Chapter 6 (also see Rawls, 2001).

In Chapter 7 Barry reconstructs an argument in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) that begins by considering a society with no formal equality of opportunity principle. He then argues that the reasons for such a principle – a principle instantiated in all modern liberal democracies – surprisingly support a much stronger egalitarian system. He argues that the moral motivation to achieve formal equality of opportunity in a society is that without it we allow morally arbitrary factors over which we have no control, such as race and gender, to have fundamental effects on people's life prospects. However, once formal equality of opportunity is achieved, factors over which we have no control, such as the superior educational opportunities some families are able to provide, will still have fundamental and unequal effects on people's life prospects. Hence, a fairer society will incorporate a more substantial equality of opportunity principle, with opportunities for education, health care and so on provided equally.

As Barry shows, Rawls' next step is that even with a more substantial equality of opportunity principle in place many factors remain over which people have no control and which will have fundamental and unequal effects on people's life prospects. These factors include social and familial circumstances that cannot be covered by even a more substantive equality of opportunity principle. They also include the influence of luck in life such as that which occurs

through accidents, disease or good fortune in the distribution of natural talents. In response to this, Rawls argues that we should arrange the basic social structure in accordance with his proposed difference principle, which permits only those social and economic inequalities that work to the maximum benefit of those most disadvantaged by society's inability to provide fair background conditions.

An explosion of literature followed Barry's discussion of Rawls' argument, addressing its many aspects, to produce what is now commonly called the 'luck egalitarianism' literature (Knight, 2011; Sher, 2010; Swift, 2008; Vallentyne, 1997). The selections by Ronald Dworkin in the *Justice and the Capabilities Approach* volume in this series, and the selections by Richard Arneson and G.A. Cohen in the *Theories of Justice* volume, also form part of that literature. The central related questions are (i) how much should we, as a society, allow luck to play a role in the economic distribution in society and (ii) what is the nature of the luck in (i) that is morally significant for distributional questions? Further related to these questions is the moral significance of responsibility in economic distribution and this will be taken up in a moment. Marc Fleurbaey has been a significant contributor to this luck egalitarian literature and in Chapter 8, 'Egalitarian Opportunities', he discusses in detail (ii), in particular the common distinction between option and brute luck. Relatedly, he explores the nature of what 'equal opportunities' are morally required.

Desert, Distributive Justice and the Market

The obverse of emphasizing the minimization of the influence of luck in determining economic benefits is emphasizing responsibility in the distributive system. This responsibility tradition, like the libertarian tradition, also has its origins in Locke's writings and we have mentioned the development of it already in Schmidtz' essay in Part I. What are now referred to as 'desert theories' represent a strong thread in this tradition, with desert theorists emphasizing the moral role of responsibility and the creation of value in designing a just distributive theory. They argue that what people do should play a significant role in determining what economic benefits they receive. Desert theories are not usually 'complete' theories of distributive justice. They commonly require just background conditions, such as some form of equality of opportunity and 'safety net' welfare system. With such background conditions in place, desert theorists argue that economic benefits should be distributed according to what people deserve.

Desert theorists view people as largely having a choice about, and responsibility for, how they contribute to the production of economic goods and services (Olsaretti, 2003; Pojman and McLeod, 1999; Sher, 1987). People come to deserve varying levels of income by providing goods and services valued by others (Feinberg, 1970; Olsaretti, 2004). Contemporary desert theorists almost all view the market as providing, with qualification, some reasonable approximation of economic value created by people's efforts. We see this view strongly defended in Chapter 10 by David Miller. He argues that the market is the most defensible mechanism for distributing economic goods according to what people deserve. Miller, in his broader work (Miller, 1976, 1991, 1999), argues that markets must be regulated, and supplemented, in order to achieve their distributive goals. Jonathan Riley (Chapter 11) follows John Stuart Mill ([1848] 1965) in recommending market distributive systems, but

similarly argues that a full desert-based system would require substantive changes in current modern market economies and would greatly reduce the inequalities characteristic of them. David Miller and Julian Lamont argues in Chapters 10 and 12 that a significant part of the inequality existent in current market economies is mistakenly believed to be deserved when it in fact arises not because of differences in desert but because of differential economic rents, which are undeserved.

Different desert theorists have different views about the basis upon which people come to deserve economic benefits. Both Miller and Riley believe that the basis should be people's economic contribution to the society. Miller argues that people should be rewarded in proportion to the value they create. Riley argues that they deserve the product of their labour which they then should be free to keep or sell via the market. Lamont argues that people should be rewarded according to the costs they incur in their work activity (see also Dick, 1975). Such a basis may partly overcome one of the main moral objections to contribution-based theories – that people's contributions are significantly influenced by luck. However, compensation-based and effort-based distributive theories have some difficulty in being able to measure accurately the differing costs that are voluntarily incurred by people in their productive work (Lamont, 1995; Sadurski, 1985).

Welfarism and Needs

Distributive systems that emphasize increasing welfare or meeting needs do not typically view responsibility as a primary value for such systems. Indeed this is particularly the case with welfare theories that take the only morally relevant characteristic of any distribution to be the welfare resulting from it. For welfare theories, the promotion of equality, desert or liberty is valuable only insofar as it increases welfare. Alongside this value claim – that only welfare or utility matters morally – is often an empirical belief that people have little control over their economic contributions to society.

The most famous class of welfare-based theories is utilitarianism, which directs us to choose distributive systems that maximize welfare (Glover, 1990). The various versions of utilitarianism differ in how they understand welfare. Some conceive of it as happiness. Modern economic versions measure welfare in terms of the preference-satisfaction of the population. Still other versions appeal to objective concepts of welfare, not particularly tied to subjective states of happiness or desire.

Although the welfare approach has had enormous influence in public policy settings, utilitarians have had trouble providing convincing replies to a number of now standard criticisms. Utilitarianism takes consequences alone to be morally relevant, with welfare its only moral goal. So, the only moral consideration utilitarians can take to be relevant to how goods are distributed is the total welfare any particular distribution achieves, with the result that vast inequalities or exploitation cannot be ruled out as inherently wrong (Schroth, 2008). Critics claim the effect of these features is that, at least in some empirical conditions, utilitarianism could lead to morally counterintuitive outcomes, such as permitting unjust acts, demanding too much of individuals or producing intuitively unfair distributions of goods (Sen and Williams, 1982).

More recently, in defending utilitarianism against these criticisms, utilitarians have drawn upon interdisciplinary work in economics and the social sciences regarding institutions and game theory. In this literature, utilitarians further develop the basic moral directive to act so as to maximize welfare in light of the fact that the consequences of individual actions are rarely determined in isolation, but rather in conjunction with the actions of many others (Goodin, 1995; Hardin, 1988).

The essays by James Wood Bailey, 'A Skeletal Theory of Institutions' (Chapter 13) and 'Basic Distributive Institutions' (Chapter 14) from his book *Utilitarianism, Institutions, and Justice*, contain a novel attempt to develop institutional utilitarianism. Bailey conceives of institutions as sets of rules that partly define the expectations of individuals in certain situations and so structure the strategic choices of agents. He sees institutions as the 'solution to the strategic problems of morality' and argues that the institutions utilitarians would endorse do show that utilitarianism is not so morally counterintuitive after all. In these two essays, he sets up his understanding of institutions and shows that the institutions that would be defended by utilitarians in the areas of property and contracts, in any worlds close to our own, would forbid the morally horrible outcomes critics have feared utilitarianism would sanction.

Gerry Gaus (Chapter 15) rejects utilitarian-based distributive systems and, more generally, the pursuit of policies to increase welfare. His argument against welfare theories is novel in that he does not focus on the commonly cited counterintuitive consequences of welfare theories but instead argues that because of the complexity of the task involved in trying to increase welfare, it is unreasonable for a government to try to pursue it. The complexity comes from multiple sources. First, the welfarist programme requires descriptions of the causal structure of social processes which underpin the society. Second, it requires somewhat reliable predictions of the consequences of alternative policies. So far, the social sciences of sociology and economics have been unable to yield either. Third, and relatedly, it requires an ability to measure the welfare effects of different policies. Each of these three components involve considerable complexity in themselves, but the complexity multiplies manifold when they combine, as they are required to do, in the pursuit of policies that are supposed to be welfare-enhancing. Given this problem, Gaus argues that legislators have no reasonable choice but to stick to principles whose implementation is more reliable.

So far we have focused on standard welfare maximization theories. The most popular other forms of welfare theories, while also sharing a diversity of conceptions of welfare, differ from the utilitarian forms in so far as they do not seek to maximize average welfare, but rather give priority to the welfare of the poor. So they have as their goal some distribution of welfare whose primary, or only, focus is on increasing the welfare of the poor.

Some of what might be called 'needs' theories are really just welfare-based theories whose welfare function prioritizes the welfare of the poor (variously defined narrowly or more inclusively). However, there are a range of needs-based theories and also other distributive theories that include some meeting of needs in their more comprehensive distributive system, where the conception of needs is not readily assimilated into standard welfare theory. These include theories that have as part of their conception a 'decent minimum' or 'welfare net'. As Buchanan points out in Chapter 6, even if Rawls convincingly argues in favour of his own theory over utilitarianism, it is not clear that the same argument is also convincing against theories that, unlike utilitarianism, guarantee a decent minimum for the least well-off.

In Chapter 17, 'The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living: Justice, Autonomy, and the Basic Needs', David Copp defends the right to an adequate standard of living, postulated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Copp's version of the right is that it is best understood as a conditional right against the state to be enabled to meet one's basic needs, as a matter of social justice, so long as one's society is in favourable conditions. Such a right involves a duty of the state to enable citizens to meet their basic needs. Such rights have priority over the ordinary goals and duties of the state and over the goal of promoting the general welfare. Copp appeals to our interest in autonomy and rational agency both to ground the right and to understand an adequate standard of living as one which meets our basic needs. Basic needs are, for Copp, requirements of rational autonomy. Furthermore, the argument that there is a right to be enabled to meet one's basic needs means that people are entitled to seek help in meeting their basic needs, and that the need to seek help should not undermine people's self-respect.

The 'capabilities' approaches, which are explored in the *Justice and the Capabilities Approach* volume in this series, also fit into this tradition. Their goal is for distributive systems to be designed to ensure that citizens achieve certain minimum capabilities without arguing that the goal is the maximization of some collective sum of people's capabilities. A focus on minimums rather than maximization makes the task somewhat less complex and thereby reduces the target of Gaus' original argument mentioned earlier. The task though is still massive, and the more expansive the conceptions of the needs or capabilities are, the more susceptible it is to the type of argument developed by Gaus.

In Chapter 16 by Philippe Van Parijs we have a quite different and interesting approach, relying on the liberal ideas of equal respect and equal concern to argue for a decent minimum for all. Since its publication, and the elaboration of the role of freedom in the argument by Van Parijs (Van Parijs, 1995) and others, what has become known as the 'basic income' movement has flourished. As in Lamont's desert essay (Chapter 12), the idea of economic rents also plays a crucial role in Van Parijs' argument. Van Parijs argues that the economic rents earned by those lucky enough to be employed in the business cycles of capitalist societies should be shared by all through the provision of an unconditional basic income.

The development of theories of how to make our distributive systems more just continues unabated. Although the rate of change in real world economies in response to these theories sometimes seems frustratingly slow when measured in yearly terms, it is worthwhile reiterating the point, made at the beginning of this introduction, that concern with distributive justice is a relatively recent phenomenon. The improvements in distributive justice that have been achieved in societies, when measured over the last couple of hundred years, have been massive. Their achievement has depended on the theorists, the politicians, the activists and, most importantly, the people as a whole. Fortunately, more and more of the world is coming under the influence of political systems that allow both for the free debate of competing theories of distributive justice and for the increasing political power of the general population to achieve greater justice in their societies.¹

¹ Many thanks to Christi Favor for a great deal of help in conceptualizing all the different theories.

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