Recognition in Redistribution: Care and Diversity in Global Justice

Carol C. Gould
Temple University

1. Introduction

In an exchange with Axel Honneth and in other writings in the late 1990s, Nancy Fraser argued against privileging recognition in social and political philosophy without a concomitant consideration of the requirement for redistribution. Thus she argued for coupling the recognition of identities—racial, gender, cultural, etc.—with attention to the need for economic redistribution. In reply, Axel Honneth suggested instead that recognition itself is at the root of the theory of justice. However divergent their approaches, both theorists discussed this issue in the context of a nation-state or political society, leaving open the question of the applicability of these notions in a more global perspective. And although Fraser has recently turned to consider norms for this transnational domain, the question remains not only how to conceive the general interrelation of these two concepts of recognition and redistribution but also more specifically which sorts of differences should be recognized as playing a significant role within redistributive principles themselves or in their practical application. This problem becomes acute in the context of global justice and transnational recognition, where a multitude of differences comes into play—not only between the global south and north, but also in terms of culture, nationality, and gender, among others.

In this article, I will make some suggestions for addressing this general issue but will especially analyze the role of care in this connection as well as the related notions of empathy and solidarity and the contributions they can make to transnational recognition and redistribution. Whereas some theorists have considered the role of recognizing groups, particularly cultural minorities, within the framework of distributive justice, a focus on care and solidarity points to an important mode of attending to relevant differences among individuals or groups insofar as it draws attention to people’s particular needs and vulnerabilities. Beyond its role in thematizing a way of attending to differences, care has also been connected to globalization in other significant ways, particularly in feminist analyses such as those of Fiona Robinson. In an article in the Journal of Global Ethics,
Robinson criticizes theories of global justice and human rights for omitting the crucial role of caregiving within the ethics of globalization.\textsuperscript{4} Robinson highlights the ways in which global restructuring has proceeded without attention to women’s unpaid labor and their double work burdens.\textsuperscript{5} Her analysis resonates with Arlie Hochschild’s critique of “global care chains,” through which women from the global south are led to migrate to the United States and other distant and more affluent countries to take on paid but exploitative care work in households so that women there may work, while the careworkers in turn have to leave their own children for years on end in the care of others.\textsuperscript{6}

A rather different relation of justice to care is evident in the work of Honneth, who implicitly links recognition (and therefore justice in his account) to care. Specifically, he talks of one of his three forms of recognition as involving love, including in that category the caring activities involved in child raising.\textsuperscript{7} In a parallel way, I will suggest here that there is a close relation between one important type of recognition and care, along with the related modes of empathy and solidarity. The overall aim of this article, then, is to help illuminate the interconnections among recognition, care, and global justice and, thereby, cast light on the transnational framework of norms needed in the coming period. Although there is much work on each of these concepts within social and political philosophy, the interrelations among them could use considerably more elaboration. My analysis of them in this article will necessarily remain primarily heuristic and conceptual, although I hope to suggest a few practical directions for their further development.


In previous work, I have argued for a conception of justice as equal positive freedom understood as prima facie equal rights to the conditions of self-transformation or self-development.\textsuperscript{8} It should be noted that these latter notions of agency (where agency is understood to be both individual and collective) differ in some ways from the notion of autonomy, even when the latter is understood relationally.\textsuperscript{9} In the view here, self-transformative activity involves the development of capacities and the realization of long-term projects, whether individual or shared. This conception thus recognizes the role of the growth and development of people over time and the significance of their common or joint activity. The conditions for self-transformation include both material and social conditions, and both negative conditions of freedom from various sorts of constraint (including freedom from domination), as well as positive access to the means of agency, such as social and economic conditions.
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These conditions—whether negative or enabling—can in turn be specified in an account of human rights, both basic and nonbasic, where the basic ones represent conditions for any human activity whatever and the nonbasic include conditions for fuller development of this activity, or what has come to be called flourishing. In my view, human rights represent moral and social claims by people that in principle hold on all others (and that subsequently come to be recognized as legal claims). Yet such rights need to be realized through more particularized and localized forms of social, economic, and political institutions, and the rights hold not only within nation-states (as on existing understandings) but increasingly in various ways across them as well. Thus, whereas Thomas Pogge argues for a conception of global justice in terms of a conception of institutional but not interpersonal human rights, I suggest instead that human rights are institutional in virtue of more fundamental social relations of interdependence that we have with each other.10 We can provisionally say too that care and solidarity are necessary to such a relational view of rights, by way of the motivation for them, as well as for their diffusion, and for their fulfillment. I will develop this point further below.

It would seem, however, from the standpoint of demanding egalitarian theories of justice, that arguing for the fulfillment of human rights is in fact too minimal a strategy for achieving global justice, even where social and economic rights—including means of subsistence—are given a central role. In this way, luck egalitarian theories of global justice or those arguing for the application of a global difference principle might regard an emphasis on human rights as too undemanding or incomplete. Such alternative theories are in a certain sense more fully egalitarian in calling for a thoroughgoing redistribution that is truly cosmopolitan or global.

Some human rights theorists do not regard this minimalist implication as a criticism but instead welcome it. For example, Henry Shue approvingly suggests that human rights provide only “a morality of the depths.”11 Specifically, such a putative minimalism is sometimes held to be desirable inasmuch as it points to the practicability of a human rights approach, while anything more demanding would be unrealistic. And certainly it is evident that even fully establishing basic rights worldwide (Shue lists security, subsistence, and political liberties, including rights of social participation12) would be a very great accomplishment and is clearly an idealistic notion at present.

The alternatives discussed here—whether of a demanding global luck egalitarianism or a global difference principle on the one hand or a “minimalist” account of basic rights on the other—in various ways challenge the approach I have advanced and require its clarification. Certainly, we can highlight the usefulness of advocating a human rights approach to global justice
from the standpoint of its relative practicability (compared to more demanding views) as well as its philosophical cogency. Further, while I do not subscribe to Shue’s restriction of human rights to “a morality of the depths,” we can agree that it is indeed helpful to give priority to the fundamental requirements of a human life—what I point to in a notion of basic human rights—and to distinguish these from nonbasic human rights. I argue that the fulfillment of basic human rights (interpreted and grounded differently from Shue) properly represents the main focus for global justice, at least for the present. Moreover, besides aiming at fulfilling basic human rights worldwide, it is required that we refrain from blocking other people or groups in their own efforts at fulfilling them, as Pogge argues, and further that we should attempt to move to the realization of nonbasic human rights as well. With the addition of the latter set of rights—invariably at a more distant point—we would in fact achieve a more complete form of egalitarianism. Of course, drawing a viable distinction between the basic and nonbasic human rights poses problems of its own and may be taken to imply (incorrectly) that the latter set of rights is inessential. However, the view here has the practical advantage of prioritizing certain of the human rights rather than regarding all of them as rigorously interdependent and as of equal importance.

We can also observe that the norm of equal positive freedom, when interpreted in a way that incorporates attention to differences, including cultural ones, can provide a regulative ideal for global justice. It enunciates a strongly egalitarian norm as a goal to be achieved through the construction of suitable economic, social, and political institutions. Given the existence of disparate political communities (whether national or transnational), the specification of institutional frameworks, along with the interpretation of the conditions included within human rights, can vary nationally and regionally. Such conditions for transformative human activity are themselves somewhat differentiated in social and cultural terms, as they are also among individuals (although it is not often possible in politics to take direct account of strictly individual differences, because of the need to deal with groups of people). The principle of equal positive freedom therefore should not be taken as one that counsels sameness in distribution or rigorously equal shares. In fact, it requires a range of quite disparate conditions, including security and liberties, the overcoming of oppression, and wide rights of democratic participation, along with attention to material goods, health, education, and an environment adequate to sustain well-being. Further, the modes of realizing these conditions require a degree of differential specification depending on the particularities of social context and also require substantial innovation in reforming existing institutions and developing new ones. Such reform can
variously extend also to property law, to new modes of democratic procedure, and to a new emphasis on the provision of care and support for those who provide it.

3. Justice, Care, and Solidarity

In the view here, there is an interconnection between justice and care, a position for which other feminist theorists have also argued. The justice approach is sensitive to differences and focuses on the social provision of the conditions for development and the meeting of needs, as required by care ethics in its social applications. In an analogous way, this approach sees an interrelation, perhaps even an essential one, between human rights (the fulfillment of which is required by justice) and solidarity. Solidarity here points to relationships among individuals or associations oriented to the elimination of oppression and systemic suffering, in which people act to support others in the ways they request, or stand ready to do so. New forms of solidarity relations are often cross-border and networked rather than simply holding among members of a given national or cultural group (as in more traditional interpretations of the concept). In this reading, solidarity as a readiness to act or assist grows out of feelings of what we might call “social empathy,” where there is an attempt to understand the particular situation of oppression of the individuals or group in question along with a shared commitment to achieving justice.

In this way, caring for people at a distance and feeling solidarity with these individuals or groups not only provides needed motivation for taking their human rights seriously but also contributes to an understanding of their specific needs within given social contexts and thus is important to any transnational efforts at supporting the fulfillment of human rights. It also alerts us to the impact of decisions on the human rights of distant others and can help prevent decisions that seriously curtail their rights or the possibilities of realizing them. In terms of considering such wide effects of decisions, I have also suggested that human rights importantly specify when people at a distance need to have input into the decision in question. That is, my proposal is that people can be regarded as importantly affected by these decisions and should have input into them if their capacity to fulfill their basic human rights is seriously affected by the decisions or policies in question. This in turn gives rise to the need for devising forms of transnational representation of these affected people in a way that goes beyond solidaristic empathy or individual solidarity actions, although I would suggest that it presupposes such solidarity. That is, social empathy with the situation of distant others, along with solidaristic action oriented to justice and the elimination of oppression and poverty, generates greater attention to the specific needs of
others. Institutional reform and innovative design can then go on to address concrete ways of taking their needs into account within the emerging forms of global governance and eventually of transnational democracy. Needless to say, none of this implies that human rights are based in solidarity, but, rather, that solidarity provides the motivation necessary to take human rights seriously as well as aids in their interpretation and diffusion.

4. Recognition and Differentiation in Global Justice

Contemporary conceptions of human rights and their articulation in the existing international covenants that give them force revolve around notions of freedom and dignity. The idea of freedom is familiar, though I have suggested it needs to be interpreted not only in terms of negative freedom with its attendant emphasis on civil liberties and political rights (along with new weight on freedom from domination and oppression), but also in terms of positive freedom as requiring access to the economic and social conditions for agency. The idea of dignity is less often discussed in this connection, but we can note that it is highly cross-cultural in its importance. In my view, dignity speaks to the significance of equality of agency and rights, including the meeting of basic needs, but also points to the crucial role of recognition. That is, for human dignity to be recognized it is necessary that equal respect be accorded to all persons (as human) along with an affirmation of their equal worth. In addition, I suggest that such recognition requires the overcoming of domination, oppression, and exploitation. Of course, we cannot expect that all personal cases of oppression or domination can be eliminated but rather that systemic or institutional forms will be overcome, as Iris Young and others have emphasized.19

In recent decades, recognition has been taken more widely to highlight the importance of cultural group differences and, as in Fraser’s reading, other aspects of individual and group identities. In Hegel’s original analysis in the master-slave dialectic of the Phenomenology of Spirit, individuals as self-consciousnesses have a need for recognition, which initially gives rise to a struggle for power—indeed, a life and death struggle—when one confronts another self-conscious individual who has a similar need. We do not have to follow Hegel in the presumption of the inevitability of such conflicts, which in his view initially lead to one-sided modes of recognition before eventually and through the course of history becoming reciprocal, at least in terms of the recognition of persons in law. I will return to the analysis of recognition, its modes, and its ties to care in the next section. Here, we can observe the ways in which the normative concept of recognition,
which is involved also in human rights, makes room for differences, particularly for benign differences such as affirmative cultural ones, and also requires the critique of systemic domination and oppression. Thus recognition of a being as free and as possessing inherent dignity is incompatible with such structures of subordination, which are in fact its opposite inasmuch as they deny people’s equal freedom and standing. Moreover, the need for recognition is in fact a need for people to be acknowledged as free and as distinctive in the modes of expressing agency. In this way, it is not in principle a conception that requires strict sameness but, instead, includes the recognition of people’s specific needs and interests. Further, insofar as human rights to be recognized and fulfilled requires such attention to different needs and interests as I have suggested, and given that human rights are partly constitutive of our conception of global justice, it is evident that such differentiation also has to play a role within the notion of global justice itself.

More specifically, we can analyze equal positive freedom and human rights as taking diversity and difference into account in both theory and practice in several ways, some of which have been well discussed while others are less obvious. I will indicate them in summary fashion here before moving to the analysis of care and solidarity in relation to recognition and redistribution.

As indicated, the principle of equal positive freedom as a principle of justice builds in equality through differences in its very formulation—it entails prima facie equal access to differentiated material and social conditions and requires the lack of constraining conditions and the availability of the enabling conditions that people need for their different modes of self-development and self-transformation. Insofar as these modes of self-transformation are socially, culturally, and historically variable, this principle requires attention to these various forms of diversity, where the conditions required will vary somewhat as well. And though there is a certain commonality of needs across cultures, the interpretations of them can differ socially and historically and an account of global justice has to make room for that. An analogous point can be made about human rights, which are also subject to interpretations from different cultural perspectives. 20

Inasmuch as equal positive freedom presupposes the critique and overcoming of forms of oppression and domination, this overcoming also entails different remedies in different contexts. This bears on establishing gender equality, which requires countering the disadvantages accruing to women because of both traditional forms of male domination and structural forms of injustice that often lead them to have a double burden of work within and outside their homes. Feminist social movements have paid increasing attention to these issues of structural injustice,
which often seem to be exacerbated rather than lessened by economic globalization, at least in its neoliberal mode.

We can also take note of the ways that the global justice (or alter-globalization) movement has called for remedies that build difference into responses to neoliberal globalization. Thus in Alternatives to Economic Globalization and other documents, writers associated with the global justice movement have called for a new role for local communities—which may choose to resist the powerful globalizing forces—and they have embraced subsidiarity, or the notion that decisions should be taken at the most local level possible. Likewise, they have called for democratic accountability of the institutions of global governance, which goes considerably beyond transparency, as emphasized by liberal critics like Joseph Stiglitz. (Such transparency is of course itself an important value to be implemented in these and any new institutions, particularly in allowing those impacted by the decisions to understand the considerations involved and to have some input into the decisions themselves.)

Beyond such proposals, radical theorists have called for institutional innovation in developing new forms of economic functioning and a new role for participatory democratic decision making. I have also argued strongly for democratic management at work and for democratic participation in decisions in a wide range of social and political institutional contexts, not only because of the intrinsic value of such opportunities for participation and their educative function, but because of the contribution such participation can make to the realization of justice and human rights. As I argued in discussing what I called the democratic personality (in Rethinking Democracy), such participation requires not only agency but also responsiveness and receptivity. This emphasis on responsiveness in turn brings us to a consideration of care, empathy, and solidarity in these relatively public domains.

5. Forms of Recognition and Social Empathy

It is hard to imagine giving a feminist reading of Hegel's struggle for recognition as a life and death struggle. Although women have not been absent from combat over the centuries, Hegel's model of violent struggle as humanizing is far from the sort of maternal thinking that Sara Ruddick describes as a fundamental aspect of women's socially constructed activities and identities. Even Hegel's more benign elevation of the role of reciprocal recognition of equal rights through law has been subject to critique by several feminist theorists. We can say that although Hegel erred by emphasizing only equality in law to the detriment of equality in politics, the economy, and the family, it does not follow that the recognition of equal rights
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should be replaced by a care ethic. Rather, I have argued for the interconnection of care, empathy, and solidarity with human rights (as a form of equal rights). We can now briefly point to some ways that this interconnection can impact the analysis of recognition itself.

It is helpful to consider in this connection Axel Honneth’s influential distinction among types of recognition, as based on love, or respect, or esteem. The first of these, in which people gain self-confidence through being loved, including as children within their families, clearly entails a substantial role for care (although Honneth does not put it this way). The second form of recognition, respect, he sees as established in the recognition of equal rights in the law. The third type—namely, esteem— involves recognition through achievement and accomplishment, as part of a career, and is differentially allocated, especially in contemporary capitalist societies.27

I find Honneth’s distinctions interesting and helpful. But I would instead propose another distinction, which in some ways resonates with two of his categories, between what I have called rigorous recognition and generous recognition, or the recognition of abstract equality as against what I call empathic recognition or solidaristic recognition.28 The first of these, the rigorous mode, involves a rational recognition of each person’s equality and gives rise to notions like the equality of citizens, with attendant norms of equal political rights and equal treatment before the law. The second, more generous type—empathic or solidaristic recognition—includes a more feelingful (as well as cognitive) understanding of the distinctiveness of others in their concrete circumstances and the difficulties they face, along with an acknowledgment and appreciation of their agency in that context. I suggest that a fully adequate recognition of the human rights of others requires not only the first of these forms of recognition but also the second, more differentiated, solidaristic type of recognition. We can add that this sort embodies a caring attitude toward others, though when applied broadly it does not entail the strong senses of care relevant to interpersonal contexts close to home. At the institutional level of society and politics, recognition of human rights cannot require the recognition of others in the full richness of their individuality, nor a fully caring attitude toward every single individual worldwide. Nonetheless, I suggest that it requires attention to the particular cultural differences and economic needs of others in application to groups within the society. Moreover, it requires a range of interpretation and application of human rights norms that is sensitive to the particularities of societies and to cultural contexts of association.

When speaking of solidarity here, it is important to emphasize that it is used in a distinctive sense, namely, what I characterize as transnational network solidarities.29 Thus, we are not
dealing here with the usual sense of belonging together or affiliation among the members of a group. Rather, as suggested above, this sort of solidarity develops among people who share an orientation to justice and the elimination of suffering and oppression. Hence solidaristic recognition itself needs to be informed by justice and some notion of equal rights. It presupposes equal rights but goes beyond them in the recognition of some specificity of needs and contexts of application.

6. Care Work, Transnational Solidarity, and Global Justice

In this final section, we can turn to briefly consider the role of care and of solidaristic recognition in global or transnational justice. First of all, analytically and by way of a critical social theory of globalization, it is essential to bring in an account of women’s care burdens and the double load of unpaid and paid work they often perform. This needs to be explicitly theorized in an approach to global inequalities and within the political economy of globalization.30 Our norms of global justice accordingly should take into account more than simply the issues of redistribution of wealth and income, resource transfers, or even the role of global corporations and property rights, however important these are. There is a need to consider as well how to rectify the structural injustices that give rise to the inequalities implicit in the situation of women, to the degree that women are most often the responsible caregivers, both inside and outside of families. Concomitantly, it is necessary to find new ways to explicitly support care work, whether performed by women or by men, and whether inside households or in more public contexts. Obviously, the motivation for some women to participate in global care chains is closely connected to unjust discrepancies between the global north and south in resources, income, and wealth, along with differential positions within neoliberal globalization, and the theory and practice of global justice has to address this situation. Phenomena like sex trafficking, with its economic motivations and pernicious personal effects, also need to be explicitly addressed within such a feminist global justice approach. In addition, the effects of structural adjustment programs along with the actions of global corporations on women’s care burden have to be analyzed and dealt with, as Fiona Robinson has effectively argued.31

Attention to these considerations regarding care work thus supports the idea proposed earlier that global justice requires more than redistribution, whether achieved through resource dividends or new global taxation schemes, although these are clearly important as well. The unequal allocation of care responsibilities points to the centrality of analyzing and criticizing social, economic, and even political institutional arrangements
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as part of an approach to global justice. New institutions that function in more egalitarian ways, including in regard to the burdens of care, would thus be essential for the realization of human rights worldwide, particularly economic rights to means of subsistence (though not only those). It is clear that in this use, human rights are taken as goals to be realized through new social, economic, and political institutions, beyond their role as constraints on states or other actors in the public sphere. This reading also follows new moves to see human rights as pertaining to nonstate actors, including both individuals and corporations, and as extending to the private sphere.

At a more general level, a focus on care should help to raise the status of economic and social human rights, so they can have real purchase within the emerging, but still weak, human rights regimes, whether at national, regional, or global levels. And a care ethics approach lends support as well to taking the differences of individuals and groups seriously into account, to the extent that this is possible in politics. It thus suggests a role for casuistry and context in the interpretation of norms for particular cases. An emphasis on care also points to the importance of devising new ways to increase the democratic responsiveness and accountability of national and transnational organizations and institutions, beyond the by now established notion of transparency that has been extended to them. It supports as well a certain devolution of power to local communities, including cross-border ones, where possible.

In conclusion, we can return to the observation that transnational solidarity networks can be understood as helping to implement human rights across borders. We can now see the solidaristic recognition entailed in such networks as an important aspect of movements for global justice. And given the interconnections that I have proposed between care, empathy, and solidarity, and their connection to justice and human rights, it is perhaps suitable to call these care movements as well. It certainly suggests that global justice theory and practice need to find ways to facilitate care work in diverse contexts globally. Finally, it implies that movements to bring about global justice need to instantiate caring, responsive, and solidaristic modes not only in their goals but also in their own practices and methods.

Notes

Originally presented at the 2007 Spindel Conference, the University of Memphis, October 19, 2007. I would like to thank my commentator Serena Parekh and the participants in the conference, as well as my research assistant Francis Raven, for helpful comments and suggestions.

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See, for example, Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, eds., Multiculturalism and the Welfare State: Recognition and Redistribution in Contemporary Democracies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).


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See Gould, Rethinking Democracy, chapter 7, and Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights, chapters 1 and 9.


Ibid.

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22 Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002). It should be noted that Stiglitz has also called for new forms of representation of those affected within the institutions of global governance.


27 Honneth, “Recognition or Redistribution?”


29 See also Gould, “Transnational Solidarities.”

30 See Robinson, “Care, Gender and Global Social Justice.”

31 Robinson, “Care, Gender and Global Social Justice.”

32 See the discussion in Gould, “Transnational Solidarities.”