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THE PHILOSOPHY OF EQUITY: RETHINKING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN POST-PANDEMIC RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated prevalent economic inequalities and social injustices that are unmasked vulnerabilities in global and local systems. This paper discusses the philosophy of equity as a lens towards understanding the underlying structural problems that exacerbated these crises, and the post-pandemic reconstruction of our societies. It starts out by defining key terms like economic inequality and social justice, but then jumps to discussing the foundational ideas and theories of equity, underscoring fairness, redistribution and the dismantling of structural barriers to opportunity. Reading: Pandemic and Economic Disparities Analyze the pandemic's impact on economic disparities, focusing on how vulnerable populations faced disproportionate challenges. Moreover, the paper delves deeper into how the economic systems both have to be rethought in a post-pandemic world, emphasizing the role of government, markets, and other social institutions to build a more fair society. We explore ethical frameworks for this post-pandemic social justice using various moral philosophies including utilitarianism, Rawlsian justice and capabilities theory, and more. This is complemented by case studies from around the country and across the world of equity-based responses in practice. Ending the paper, it critically assesses the problems and critiques with regards to equity-based approaches, proposing measures for future economic justice and social inclusion policies in a post-COVID-19 society.

Keywords: Equity, Economic Inequality, Social Injustice, Covid-19, post-pandemic Reconstruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis provides a unique opportunity to rethink the current state of economic inequality and social justice. This essay will explore the philosophy of equity to provide insights into a more sustainable recovery from the pandemic. One of the possible topics that it will cover is the effects of the current health crisis on macro and micro societal structures

being linear or magnifying/eradicating the existing inequalities. This exploration aims to shed light on potential paths to build fairer economic systems. The social and economic disruptions brought by the global health crisis have irreversibly reshaped everyday life, exposing the fragilities and vulnerabilities of existing structures. While the nature and the scope of these changes will reinforce the shells of the global society, some of these consequences have initiated the hegemonic understanding and practices are too uncertain and indeterminate to be contained (Linsenmaier et al.2021). Notwithstanding, it is already evident that the upheaval caused by COVID-19 has posed an even greater threat to the disadvantaged and the marginalized whose pre-existing vulnerabilities have been further exposed. It is, then, imperative to refocus on a progressive and equitable transformation to ensure the emergent societies eventually foster sustainable growth.

The newfound significance of rethinking economic inequality and social justice has prompted an interest in feasibility and adaptability of philosophical insights to real-world contexts in rebuilding fairer economic systems (MALAYSIA). Concentrating on the philosophy of equity, this essay will elaborate on how justice, fairness, and equality can serve as the pillars to navigate illuminated recovery efforts. Insights will be drawn from various philosophical traditions and historical contexts to provide an inclusive consideration of equity. By combining theoretical inquiries with practical discoveries, it is hoped that this philosophical exploration of equity will inspire responsive and insightful actions to initiate and advance recovery for the societal wellbeing.

2. Defining Economic Inequality and Social Justice

During the past year and a half, as the COVID-19 pandemic has surged through countries and communities worldwide, intensifying pre-existing conditions and begetting new crises, the multiple facets of the interaction between economic inequality and social justice have become even more complex and multifaceted (Nielsen & Albertsen, 2023). Many of the personal and group experiences and social movements in response to the pandemic have highlighted pervasive, embedded disparities in income, wealth, access to health care, education, work security, safety nets, and social capital. It seems apt, therefore, to review and re-examine some of the varied aspects, contexts, conflicts, and—profoundly contested—normative foundations of these economic and philosophical conceptions. It is hoped that these reflections will have broad relevance and resonance, which are based—consciously—in local and transnational, Hispanic/Latinx, feminist, and aging perspectives, but focused on recent and ongoing experiences and preoccupations in the Americas, especially Mexico and the United States. The sustained national and global urgency and fervor also motivates this intervention. Some kinds of (in)equality may have expanded, while others have been territorially redefined or subsumed into more encompassing ones, while new demands and movements signal or enact countervailing or novel configurations of economic inequality and social justice (Goodwin, 2003). But the paradoxes, ambiguities, and selective blindness of the pandemic still provide an opportunity for transgressive or alternative (re)visions of such relationships. The present discussion emphasizes, rather, the plurality and interplay of unequal distribution of material resources and social goods, institutions, public policies, and social practices entailed or enabled by socio-economic structures and cultural traditions, with postulation about fairness, equity, entitlement, and requirements, divided into a social and ethical complex—intellectual

and non-repressive—cross-border and outward-looking exploration and innovation amidst prevailing disparities and societal fragmentation.

3. The Philosophy of Equity: Key Concepts and Theories

A profound shift in public discourse concerning the relationship between economic inequality and social justice is currently taking place. The paradigm of neo-liberal economics, stressing the efficient allocation of resources and economic freedom has been critically reassessed. Instead, disparities in income distribution are increasingly questioning democratic systems' ability to promote a fair life between Britain and Germany (Alì & Caranti, 2021). The latter in particular has historically been regarded as the positive example of a coordinated market economy that fosters the integration of social partners in decision-making processes concerning social and industrial issues. However, the dire situation of both countries calls for a reexamination of the conduct and desired results of state intervention in the economy.

There is a persistent confusion between the concept of equality and equity. While the former denotes identical quantities of resources, the latter has been defined as the fair distribution of resources in the economy. Often in the existing socio-political discourse, the terms equality and equity are used interchangeably, disregarding the conceptual disparity between the two notions. This article argues that questioning the fair distribution of a nation's resources is fundamental. A primer of the fundamental viewpoints on equity, the historical development of inequities, and the concrete application to the existing economic disparities is made. Broadening the spectrum of possible distributions of revenues and resources enhances the understanding of the ethically concerned state intervention in economies. As the capacity approach emphasizes the equality of opportunities for the expansion of choice, Rawls' Difference Principle has been paralleled with the idea of a Basic Income. (Goodwin, 2003) (Benmoussat, 2018)

4. The Impact of the Pandemic on Economic Inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on economic inequality. It accentuated existing disparities in various sectors including income, wealth, gender, race, healthcare, education, and employment. Key workers, the informal sector, and the socially and physically vulnerable were exposed to greater risk (Sayed & Peng, 2021). The differentiated effects on marginalized communities, people of color, and the lower income brackets in advanced and emerging economies have gained international attention. This event drove millions of wage earners and the poor into long-term poverty precisely at the moment when they were beginning to escape it. Not only did the middle class disappear, but the nascent welfare state collapsed, leaving millions of newly poor and destitute households exposed to the effects of reduced social benefits. At the same time, the influx of migrants returning to their home countries has generated a new underlying set of social and political problems that have become exacerbated with COVID-19. (Murzakulova et al., 2021).

Key workers, the informal sector, and the socially and physically vulnerable were exposed to greater risk. Slums, townships, and other densely populated settlements have been significantly hard hit by the pandemic; up to 80% of some communities have lost their jobs. People of color, lower income, and marginalized communities are likely to have differential

vulnerability and impacts. The relentlessly rising death toll is likely to drive similar social and psychological distress and may also engender some form of social resistance (Mitchell et al.2021). At the global level, the middle-income countries are most at risk. Workers already living precariously along fast-fashion supply chains or producing light manufactures in "special economic zones" were left destitute. While companies situated in these zones did not face the same city-wide shutdowns as those in initially more egalitarian production centers, as global demand-strongholds disappeared, they too shut up shop. By September 2020, there were 495 million job losses. This context has furthered the concentration of economic opportunities in the hands of the wealthy. Gender-based violence and labor exploitation in these newly-reconfigured economic landscapes has also risen markedly. This period saw a doubling of job losses in textiles for instance, leaving factory owners, workers, and families plunged into debt and misery.

5. Rethinking Economic Systems in Post-Pandemic Reconstruction

The global economy is experiencing its worst downturn since the Great Depression. A discussion of how the economy can recover from this gravest economic contraction is very crucial. With the dislocation of economies faced by drastic changes from the pre-COVID era, the ongoing pandemic thus prompts for a new voice to rethink and propose a plea for rearranging the post-COVID world. To raise a more equitable economic system post-COVID, it is of discussion of the heritage of current economic model that daily confronts with, some innovative approaches that can be taken, as well as a discussion about the prospective of technology in radically reshaping the economic paradigm. Last but not least, a grand question and a call to action is for policymakers about their role in fostering such economic strategies, as well as a plea for advocacy upholding equity on the economic recovery agenda (Elyassi, 2021). The COVID-19 outbreak has uncovered and escalated a series of systemic shortcomings in economic and social systems globally. Health systems varied from country to country and inequalities of income, which went through disorientation, have become more severe and acute during the pandemic, frequently depending on fragile gig economy or informal works. Decades-long cost-cutting and privatization efforts of healthcare pioneers—characterizing neoliberal economic governance—and the cost competition within the global market have reduced the promotion of public health and indispensability of sanitation programs in some countries, limiting even the protection measures. Under neo-liberalism, the economy has faced not only the commodification but it has been democratized in favor of improper hands so that the inequality derived from market has become reality (Hynes et al., 2020). To make matters worse, the social welfare system has been dismantled or at least eroded over the years. Ill-advised austerity policies addressing for the protection of fiscal strength have left vast populations without social assistance in their time of dire need to be protected from further calamities resulting from the pandemic.

6. Ethical Approaches to Post-Pandemic Social Justice

COVID-19 has wrought disruption and suffering on a global scale and changed the world irrevocably. Many changes, shifts in mindsets, and practices like remote work and learning, intensified automation and digitalization or even re-politization of biotechnologies, will have ongoing societal implications (Mark et al., 2022). And facing such complex and multifaceted changes will require comprehensive analyses and outcomes will be subject to ethical scrutiny.

Since economic matters are central to public policymaking and are of moral significance, equity will play a multilayered role in this examination. This involves, for instance, not only economic inequalities as a facet of social injustice or fair distribution of private goods. Equity is sometimes taken to refer, in a very general sense, to fairness, justice, impartiality, rightfulness, or moral good (Jamrozik, 2022). Consequently, ethical approaches to justice imply different normative frameworks and empirical evaluations than strictly economic or political projects for the distribution of wealth among members of society.

At the most general level, when contrasting a liberal with an egalitarian edge of various theories of justice, sharp debates arise on the extent to which social inequalities are acceptable and overall social resources should be allocated (Kelly-Irving et al.2023). More specifically, however, every public policy is premised on some ethical principles, theories or beliefs about what is morally right or wrong, just or unjust, and how individual and collective goods are weighted, prioritized or traded off. Receiving and analyzing various perspectives on distributive arrangements and equality may therefore enkindle or promulgate political projects on democratization, such as participatory governance and decision-making. Meanwhile, public health governance, its strategic goals and ethical principles will unavoidably serialize broader ideologies or conceptions about justice. But regardless of the specific approach or practice of justice, it will appear that crafting more fair, equitable and legitimate policies is essential for the post-pandemic world to tackle these extreme, slow-burning, and hidden challenges effectively.

7. Case Studies: Equity-Based Responses to Post-Pandemic Inequality

As the inequality violations of the COVID-19 crisis are endured, two metaphors accurately illustrate the process and purpose of the equity preparation and feedback cycle. The first image is that of rows of perfectly aligned dominoes, nearly toppling over with the slightest external prodding. Inequity bears close resemblance to this array of standing dominoes—leveraging small imbalances among components of a system to maintain a tenuous balance of power that relies on a tilted structure (Jakob Sadeh & Mair, 2024). The domino effect of disaster-based crises—such as a pandemic—requires communal feedback to stabilize the system and shift various resources and opportunities among agents. In this metaphor, these material effects of prejudice and discrimination can act as nudges, toppling the pillars upholding centuries of inequity, thereby allowing the tables to transform role and power dynamics and disallowing the dominoes from maintaining semblance of order (Manzi et al., 2022). The second metaphor that characterizes and guides the development of preparedness initiatives is the rotary telephone. Its dial rotates slowly, each notch sliding a tad deeper into the mechanisms beneath the receiver until each number aligns with the display. This slow and cyclical loop of empowerment mimics the equity-based feedback process—designed from marginalized perspectives. To adapt the phone, a recurrent re-alignment of numbers is required, depending on the demographic and geographic nature of the system, to allow the transfer of information and resources from one to another. Likewise, equity-based systems must adapt to the ever-evolving mesh of forces and dislocations within and beyond their markets.

8. Challenges and Critiques of Equity-Based Approaches

Economic inequality is an ongoing reality in society. Mid-pandemic updates from Asia report poverty risk to have risen during the pandemic while the richest continued adding to their fortunes amidst lockdowns and social distancing. Hence, post-pandemic reductions and considerations of economic inequality are very pertinent (Goodwin, 2003). Currently, activism focuses on healing "social wounds" to create more equitable societies. Besides financial redistribution, demands to eliminate platforms for potential spread or support of economic capital are prominent. Considerations of economic inequality are based on materialist arguments and depend on survey results that find people generally recognizing the concentration of resources during and after their creation (D Adler, 2005). Given these findings, protests to challenge the current social structures in which these inequalities are reproduced are emerging. Numerous initiatives and policies reflect a response to such grassroots demands for more equity, particularly amongst the most vulnerable populations. Unfortunately, some also advocate for equity-based approaches in order to avoid political resistance that will leave economic inequality unaddressed. Such approaches, relying on the philosophical foundation of distributional justice, aim to give everyone what they are due, with contributions towards society's public goods forming a key distributional principle. Relying on the ideal theory of Rawls, these approaches also advocate for the presence of equity as a basic structure of society that six criteria or principles should follow and propose a redistribution of resources in cases of inequality such that it benefits the least well-off.

This seemingly simple advocacy for the redistribution of resources hides challenges that can hinder the effective materialization of these principles. Responding to such challenges needs acknowledgment and a politics that carefully considers these critiques and adapts – typically without watering down the principles of equity in general. The four equity principles have defense mechanisms in this form of equity, but challenges are unavoidable. There are legal challenges in critical settings when the equity principles are perceived as preferential treatment. Resource constraints can make it impossible to engage fully with all communities. There is the potential to share resources without demonstrating the presence of equity risk. Goods demanding inflation investments (Challoumis & Eriotis, 2024). Merkel disputes Rawls' theory as an overall conception of justice because its principles are not addressable immediately but read as content-independent. Implementing the equity principles also faces challenges regarding school policies. Generally unfavorable contexts complicate equity policies. However, they bring out a more general critique regarding the feasibility and implementation of equity principles. Efforts to establish and manifest the equity criteria are greatly appreciated by specific states, while simultaneous outlets against other ways to address the Gini coefficient are important to spur an important cross-disciplinary debate. Constitutional eclecticism implies that there are a variety of different principles of justice that might be used as a constitutional basis, provided an interpretation of these principles yielding a substantive program. Such a need to proudly display the distribution and reward policies arrests exorbitant distancing when combined with very far-reaching lordliness is unacceptable. Meanwhile, the trend towards a skewed market economy mirrors a department and casts a dark shadow on the equilibrium (Kahyalar et al., 2024).

This encourages biting the bullet in formulating the SPP and in discussing possible borderlines. This limited discussion of the specific political ethos potentially permissible under the CER leaves less flesh on the bones than is desirable for proper assessment. Implementing the equity principles can have a range of ruling implications to do with the setting of permitted limits on income arising from certain paragraphs of equity-based social justice (Avanceña & Prosser, 2021). A prime focus concerns how to populate the original position and the consequences of different interpretations of this procedural device. Focusing on informational conditions shifts attention to the 'fundamental preferences' the subjectivity of which is not otherwise accounted for. A somewhat overly narrow construal of which of the parties to the CER might have certain knowledge of the social and natural world risks depriving the device of critical force (Chen et al.2024). Additionally, 8.1 contends that two of the simpler promises a party might want to make to remove a certain parcel of his beneficence might plausibly take the form of policies that are directly contradictory. Another and more serious issue is the residual uncertainty of how inequalities would be addressed outside the domestic frontiers. Seizing on these several under-documentary impediments as a businessman's excuse for a consummation defect risks failing to fulfill the 8.2 commitment of what should be submitted to the CER. By extension the delineation of the equity criteria to be entered for Procheion, which are of much wider import than the use of the CER, may be less well pinned down than is desirable. However, the reply might be introspective and readily displays the balance between the effects of solidity and the risk of over-commitment in expectant relation to the latter. Discrepancies in the disciplined world itself may lead to reinterpretation, but the erg of adapting this revision to still recent events may require uniting more depth of clarity regarding how to take the proposals forward. A further response is to see the selection of PrP as a readiness opinion but to step back from the suggestion that it might be something distinct.

9. Conclusion

Economic inequality and social justice need to be rethought with equity in mind, a fundamental goal that is firmly grounded in popular ethics. Drawing mainly upon the history of public health, the philosophy of equity is outlined and implications for policy options are discussed, with a particular focus on countries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions of post-pandemic 'building back better', and of health care financing in low-income countries, are improving options for reducing economic inequality.

Derived from the Latin verb *aequo,* meaning to make equal, 'equity' might be thought of as an even-handedness that includes but also goes beyond the classical liberal demand that like cases be treated alike. In public health terms, equity entails careful attention to how and why diseases are distributed in populations. Yet for now almost three decades now, economic inequality has been increasing not just between countries, but also within some. The COVID-19 pandemic has in many countries confronted governments with what (Schrecker, 2023) have termed wicked policy problems. A key strategic question is the approach a national government should take to addressing the pandemic. At least 4 broad options present themselves.

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