



JUSTICE AND A SENSE OF PLACE NANCY FRASER

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I arrived in Grunewald in September 2004, somewhat the worse for wear following a bicycle accident the previous spring, surgery, and three months in a cast. I was physically hobbled and still in shock. I didn’t plan it this way, but the Wissenschaftskolleg proved the ideal setting to heal the body and restore the spirit, in good part because it was such a perfect environment in which to stimulate the mind.

A good part of my fellowship year was devoted to finishing up old work. My immediate task was to write a reply to ten critics of the theory of justice I had developed in the course of the previous decade. Prepared for an author-meets-critics type volume titled *Adding Insult to Injury*, this undertaking would have been daunting in any case, given the challenging and varied character of the ten critiques. But the problem was compounded by the fact that

I no longer fully believed in my own theory. Having argued for a “two-dimensional” conception of justice that integrated “redistribution” and “recognition”, I now considered this account to be incomplete. Aiming to grasp the changed character of disputes about justice in a rapidly globalizing world, I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg intent on revising my theory by incorporating a third dimension of justice, which I call “representation”. In replying to my critics, therefore, I found myself having to walk a fine line. On the one hand, I had to defend features of the older theory that I still deemed sound; on the other hand, I had to acknowledge, and explain, a far-reaching structural revision. I ended up striking a delicate, and not wholly comfortable, balance between self-defense and self-critique.

Difficulties aside, the process served to advance my thinking on “post-Westphalian democratic justice”. This was the working title of the new project to which I devoted the rest of the fellowship year. Focused on what I call the problem of “the frame”, the work is concerned with the question what is the appropriate unit for thinking about justice in a globalizing world? Not so long ago, the answer seemed obvious – so obvious that it barely needed mentioning: the modern territorial state. Today, however, that “Westphalian” framing of justice has lost its aura of self-evidence. Faced with global finance and transnationalized production, global warming and the spread of AIDS, many people now understand that their chances for living good lives depend at least as much on processes that trespass the borders of territorial states as on those contained within them. The result is a new uncertainty about who is entitled to address claims to whom concerning what; about where and how such claims should be adjudicated; and about who is obliged to redress them if and when they are vindicated.

Struggling to understand this uncertainty, my work at the Wissenschaftskolleg led me to conceptualize the present as an era of “abnormal justice”. In this situation, disputes about justice proceed in the absence of shared assumptions on three crucial points. First, the contestants often lack a shared understanding of *what* precisely is at issue in justice contests; where some see economic inequities of maldistribution, others see cultural or legal harms of misrecognition, while still others see political injustices of misrepresentation. Second, today’s disputants often lack a shared understanding of *who* precisely is entitled to consideration; where some limit standing to their fellow citizens, others envision justice on a broader scale – regional, transnational, or global. Finally, current contestants often lack a shared understanding of *how* precisely disputes about such matters should be resolved; where some invoke the balance of power, others appeal to the United Nations, the will of God, popular struggle, or global public opinion. Absent agreement on these three points, current

disputes about justice lack the structured shape of normal discourse. No sooner do first-order disputes arise than they become overlaid with meta-disputes about the “what”, the “who”, and the “how”. Not only first-order questions of normal justice, but also the grammar of justice itself, is up for grabs.

In work that remains “in progress”, I have tried this year to develop a theory of justice that can illuminate this triple uncertainty. Taking my distance from standard approaches, which presuppose contexts of normal justice, I have begun to elaborate an account of abnormal justice, which assumes ongoing disagreement, endemic to globalization, about the “what”, the “who”, and the “how”. If all goes well, the result should be a theory that can guide us in resolving meta-disputes about the frame, as well as first-order disputes about distribution, recognition, and representation.

Recently, I have found myself applying the schema of the “what”, the “who”, and the “how” in an entirely different way to my experience at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Seeking to understand *what* has made my year here so special, I have been led to reflect on the utopian character of a community of scholars and artists, whose living together generates an ascending spiral of creativity and solidarity. In this dialectic, social interaction deepens individual inventiveness, while individual inventiveness leavens social interaction. Even if it cannot be universalized, such a community represents a powerful and attractive vision of the good life. To be reminded of this ideal when thinking about justice has been a privilege and an inspiration. Liberal philosophers (among whom I count myself) tend to be abstemious when it comes to expressing their own views of the good life, leaving such matters to “ordinary folk”, while positioning themselves as referees who seek to adjudicate competing ideals from above the fray. Holding their tongues and denying their desires, they abandon utopian thinking and impoverish their theorizing. A year at the Wiko represents a powerful antidote to such self-denial. I only hope I can carry something of the utopian spirit I found here into my philosophical work.

Equally important was the “who” of the fellowship experience. I was inspired by the mix of Fellows, whose varied geo-cultural itineraries, bodies of expertise, styles of thinking, and personal qualities often made me think about the multidimensionality of human being. This, too, was a salutary corrective to the thinness of much political-philosophical theorizing. Daily encounters with self-identified Muslims, secular Arabs and Israelis, and even an “Arab Jew” made my habitual academic life in New York seem parochial, while discussions with the “globalization girls” (a reading group that included a Chinese literary theorist, an Iranian feminist anthropologist, a Bulgarian cultural historian, a white Anglo-

Saxon Protestant Africanist, and me, an American Jew) embodied performatively the very multi-perspectival worldliness that was their intended subject. Meanwhile, thoughts about differences among expressive media were provoked by the strong musical presence among the Fellows and by the work group on "Bildwissenschaft". Although it is doubtless too soon to know exactly how my thinking has changed as a result of sharing the fellowship year with this extraordinary group of people, one thing at least is clear: in theorizing abnormal justice in globalization, I shall try to do justice to the kaleidoscopic complexity of the world I encountered at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

As for the "how", finally, the fellowship experience led me to appreciate the importance of taking one's time in communicative relations. In academia, usually, the most intense intellectual exchanges occur at conferences, where discussion explodes in brief spurts and soon fades away. At the Wissenschaftskolleg, in contrast, the ability to converse well developed slowly, building in the course of a year's worth of Tuesday colloquia and other discussions. The result was a process in which the expansion of trust and the deepening of intelligence went hand in hand. For a philosopher who identifies with discourse ethics, this experience seemed to vindicate the hypothesis that solidarity and understanding needn't rest on pre-given similarities or affinities, but can be generated through the process of communication itself, given sufficient time and a facilitating environment. As I leave the Wiko to return to "real life", I am determined to keep faith with this important lesson about the "how" of justice.