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## Charity

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From the point of view of justice, there are two main questions concerning charity. Is charity an enforceable duty and should all redistribution in response to need and poverty be characterized as “charity”? To better appreciate the contemporary treatment of these philosophical issues with respect to global justice, it is helpful to look back to discussions of justice and charity in John Locke and Immanuel Kant.

Locke appears to affirm two opposing views on the enforceability of charity in his different writings. In both the *First Treatise on Government* and in “Venditio,” Locke appears to affirm an enforceable right and duty to charity in response to extreme need. Here Locke clearly seems to argue that charity gives those in extreme need a title to resourceful persons’ private property insofar as this is necessary for the poor persons’ subsistence. But such a right and duty to charity is not without problems for Locke, since in the *Second Treatise on Government* also argues that justice gives persons private property claims in the products obtained by means of their labor on a fair share of natural resources. Yet if Locke argues that the charity-right is enforceable, then private property rights appear to be undercut. For an enforceable right to charity

implies that some people have nonconsensual access to the values created by other persons’ labor. Locke acknowledges and addresses these consequences in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Here Locke argues that charity belongs to a large group of moral virtues, which the state cannot legally enforce, because doing so is incompatible with the natural right to the values created by one’s own labor. The sticking point with this view is that Locke then cannot allow that charity will do the work of providing for those in extreme need. Hence, unless Locke’s theory includes some special rights protecting the poverty stricken, their preservation is left to the arbitrary choices of others.

Kant also argues that charity or beneficence is not an enforceable right or duty of justice, and instead considers it an imperfect duty of virtue. To be charitable or beneficent we must help others because it is the right thing to do, which Kant describes as acting on a maxim of assistance from a moral motivation (from duty). Hence, charity or beneficence is an unenforceable duty of virtue and not an enforceable duty of justice. In addition, Kant argues that we have a certain latitude when it comes to fulfilling duties of beneficence or charity. When and how we should be charitable depends on our current economic situation and other obligations we have.

Both Locke’s and Kant’s philosophical arguments inform much of the contemporary discussions of justice and charity both with regard to domestic and global justice. Some affirm the view expressed by Locke in the *First Treatise* and in “Venditio” that extreme need as such gives rise to enforceable duties. Positions that affirm an enforceable duty to assist those in dire need are often described as adhering to a “positive duties” conception of justice. The most prominent Lockean scholar in this camp is A. John Simmons. Simmons argues that although people cannot be forced to be moral, namely to perform the right actions based on the right motivations, they can be forced to act charitably. Charity is considered enforceable when a lack of charity entails that some are deprived of their fundamental rights to self-preservation (having subsistence means) and self-government (having some means with which to set ends of one’s own). The strictness of any instance of fulfilling the general duty of charity is seen as proportional to the proximity of the people in need as well as to the “risk, cost, or inconvenience” incurred by helping them. Other prominent non-Lockean scholars join Simmons and other left-wing Lockeans in holding a “positive duties” approach to charity. These include, most notably, utilitarians such as Peter Singer, thinkers in the capabilities tradition such as Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, Marxist thinkers such as G. A. Cohen, and care theorists such as Virginia Held. All these scholars



are unified in thinking that at least minimal equality with regard to some good, whether the satisfaction of basic needs, material resources, capabilities, or care, can justify coercive redistribution of resources from rich to poor domestically and globally.

Other Lockeans, however, are more convinced by the kinds of arguments Locke pursues in *A Letter On Toleration*, namely arguments according to which an enforceable duty of charity is denied. These Lockeans are often described as affirming a “negative duties” conception of justice. Robert Nozick is probably the most influential of this group. Nozick argues that charity cannot be enforceable, since it would entail the enslavement of property owners. That is, an enforceable right to charity violates individuals’ rights to freedom – to set and pursue ends of their own with their resources. Other, prominent right-wing libertarians such as F. A. Hayek and Jan Narveson affirm this basic conception of economic justice, even if they are more radical than Nozick with regard to the issue of an original fair share. Nozick views his conception also as consistent with the position offered by Kant.

Some Kant interpreters, such as John Rawls (1999a) and Thomas Pogge (1988), agree with Nozick that Kant affirms a right-wing conception of economic justice. But in contrast to Nozick, they consider this a drawback of his view and so try to overcome it by finding ways to protect the rights of the poor. Others, most notably Onora O’Neill, agree that it is right to see Kant as having a right-wing libertarian (“negative duties”) conception of economic justice in the Doctrine of Right. Nevertheless, Kant’s account of charity in the “Doctrine of Virtue,” she argues, can yield a supplemental, institutional argument to justify redistribution of resources to the needy and vulnerable. Yet others, such as Sarah Holtman, Arthur Ripstein, and Helga Varden, challenge these readings by arguing that Kant neither held a right-wing libertarian conception of economic justice nor did or can he (for the reasons outlined above) deem duties of virtue as in principle enforceable. Instead, they argue that Kant understands the right to poverty relief as a claim citizens hold against their public institutions. It is for this reason, they conclude, that liberal states’ provisions of poverty relief are a matter of justice and not a matter of charity for Kant.

Variations on the above “negative duties” and institutional arguments about justice are found in much liberal thought on global justice. Consequently, much liberal thought on global economic justice distinguishes between humanitarian aid and poverty relief since they require different justifications. Providing humanitarian aid to victims of natural disasters and other uncontrollable environmental factors is often justified by several prudential

and “negative duty” arguments. For example, a prudential argument sometimes given for humanitarian aid points to the likely positive correlation between peace and the absence of starvation, whereas related moral arguments include appeals to the natural disaster victims’ fundamental right to a fair share of natural resources. In contrast to humanitarian aid, poverty relief is seen primarily as a problem related to systemic dependency and inequality. When a set of (coercive) institutions both sets the framework within which people interact and results in poverty, then, it is argued, the resulting problems are seen as problems of systemic justice – and not charity. It seems fair to say that these prominent liberal thinkers on global justice, Charles R. Beitz, Michael Blake, Thomas Nagel, John Rawls (1999b), Mathias Risse, and Thomas Pogge (2008), are concerned to analyze and justify exactly what constitutes a fair share of the globe’s natural resources as well as the role and responsibilities of global institutions. In fact, one of their most important disagreements concerns the question of whether or not there is a basic, possibly coercive, system of global institutions that justifies and requires global, coercive redistributive efforts in the name of justice rather than charity.

## Related Topics

- ▶ [Absolute Poverty](#)
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- ▶ [Capabilities Approach](#)
- ▶ [Care Ethics](#)
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- ▶ [Duties, Perfect and Imperfect](#)
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- ▶ [Humanitarian Aid](#)
- ▶ [Kant, Immanuel](#)
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- ▶ [Nagel, Thomas](#)
- ▶ [Nussbaum, Martha C.](#)
- ▶ [Pogge, Thomas](#)
- ▶ [Rawls, John](#)
- ▶ [Sen, Amartya](#)
- ▶ [Singer, Peter](#)
- ▶ [Utilitarianism](#)

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## Child Labor

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Work contributed by children runs along a continuum that ranges from the destructive and exploitive to the beneficial. Many children help with family businesses and farms, sometimes without pay, and in paying

part-time jobs when they reach a certain age. Some scholars use the term “child work” to designate work by children that does not detract from other activities of childhood such as play and education and offers a positive contribution to a child's development.

The term “child labor”, on the other hand, implies serious human rights abuses and (a) is conditional upon the age of the child, (b) includes activity that impedes the natural physical, emotional, and mental development of the child, (c) denies educational opportunities, (d) endangers the child, (e) impairs a child's health, and/or (f) denies freedom of movement to the child. Exploitive employment of children under 18 in factories, mines, the sex trades, food services, entertainment, domestic labor outside the home, textile manufacturing, farms, and military service is generally characterized as child labor. The International Labour Organization and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) estimate approximately 250 million children between 2 and 17 qualify as child laborers.

Instances of child labor include 4-year-olds who are tied to rug looms for long hours each day, 10-year-olds who work in marble quarries, where it is so hot that film melts in cameras, and 8-year-olds who disappear into offshore fishing operations. Some children, taken from their homes and transported across the world, work in the dangerous sport of camel racing in the Gulf States. Other children are put to work in hazardous workplaces such as explosives factories, coal and diamond mines, pesticide-laced coffee plantations, commercial farms, and brick yards. The domestic and sex trades engage the service of many children worldwide.

Social reformers recognized the abuses systemic in the use of child labor at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, when countless children were irrevocably harmed by working conditions in factories and sweatshops. Karl Marx was one of the first to call for the abolition of child labor in the factories of Great Britain. Economist Milton Friedman defends the use of children in the general workforce with his claim that children's work is a necessary requirement in poor and developing countries. He theorizes that as net wages increase, reliance on working children declines. Other theorists contend that while one might expect a reduction in child labor as developing states become more prosperous, the opposite is happening as child labor is reemerging even in the affluent developed world, where it is largely invisible and unacknowledged. Consumers, unwittingly, may exacerbate the situation as they avoid moral complicity by boycotting the products of child labor. UNICEF has determined that such boycotts often deny gainful