Relocating social protection within a radical project of social justice: towards a relational approach

Abstract

This paper argues that the theory and practice of social protection should be relocated within a project of social justice. However, different theories of social justice can and do shape social protection in different ways and this paper argues that a radical approach, which focuses on the relational basis of injustice, has more to offer than the conservative and liberal approaches that have tended to be influential in the field. However, with a radical notion of social justice as the primary reference point, it becomes clear that some forms of social protection may obstruct rather than promote social justice.

1. Introduction: making the case for a social justice approach to social protection

"The World Day of Social Justice is a call for all countries to take concrete actions that give meaning to the universal values of human dignity and opportunity for all. The focus of this year's commemoration - **achieving social protection for all** - is critical to building fairer, more inclusive and equitable societies" (Ban Ki-moon, 18 February 2011)

"Central to a social justice approach in contemporary policy discourses on poverty and inequality is the concept of social protection" (Taylor 2011: 4).

The case for locating social protection within a broader project of social justice appears to be growing stronger, and is located within broader calls for international development to be recast in terms of social justice (Corbridge 1994, Hickey and Bracking 2005, Maxwell 2008, Morvaridi 2008). As the above quote from the UN Secretary General suggests, the strong synergies between social justice and social protection are already being recognised, and some proponents of social protection already draw, both implicitly and explicitly, on social justice thinking to advance their claims (e.g. Robeyns 2003, Standing 2005). For example, "The rationale for cash transfer programmes is partly derived from Amartya Sen's entitlement theory, which states that famines are sometimes caused by an inability to gain access to, or purchase, food rather than an overall lack of food availability (Sen, 1981)" (cited in Peppiat et al 2001). This makes intuitive sense: the starting point for theories of social justice derives from a concern with problems of injustice and the assault this makes on a basic sense of *fairness* (Sen 1995, 2009), something that social protection interventions are always in some way seeking to overcome, from offering safety nets to prevent descent from external shocks or more radical or 'transformative' efforts to overcome more structural forms of injustice (Barrientos forthcoming, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004).

Social justice thinking has a strong resonance with social protection in both substantive and procedural forms. In substantive terms, social justice thinking is concerned with establishing the ethical case for intervening and with identifying who and what the particular focus of interventions should be, from different aspects of well-being to different categories of citizen. Theories of procedural

justice, meanwhile, are concerned with securing 'fairness' around who gets what, and also how; this goes beyond the issue of which categories of persons are considered to be 'deserving' of support, and includes debates over targeting, the enforcement of conditions, the institutional treatment of people through the act of social provisioning and mechanisms for appeal regarding specific interventions (e.g. around inclusion/exclusion).

However, building a more rigorous case involves offering a clearer sense of which particular theories of social justice are particularly appropriate to the field of social protection. This is not merely a theoretical exercise but one with real implications for policy and practice, given that different theories can point towards very different forms of public action.¹ For example, the philosophical assumptions that underpin the promotion of conditional cash transfers differ significantly from those underpinning other forms of social protection instruments, so it matters greatly which version of social justice theory is being adopted here. Indeed, the main argument of this paper is that current efforts within international development to understand and promote social protection from a social justice standpoint are often biased towards particular ideological readings of justice, most notably from 'conservative' and 'liberal' perspectives. In different ways, these approaches offer limited frameworks for understanding how injustice occurs and how it might be tackled, through social protection or through other means. This in turn leads to a bias towards more ameliorative and less transformative approaches to social protection which are likely to leave the underlying causes of injustice in place. Going beyond a call for greater clarity here, then, this paper argues that a more *radical* and *relational* approach to social justice thinking, one that takes politics, political economy and culture more seriously, can offer a stronger grounding for social protection than either conservative or liberal approaches to social justice. However, the paper also argues that adopting a social justice perspective is no easy-fix or panacea, and may involve reconsidering the role of social protection vis-à-vis other forms of intervention as the most appropriate approach to tackling particular forms of injustice.

The next section briefly elaborates the main theoretical approaches within social justice thinking as a basis for discussing their relative merits in shaping the theory and practice of social protection. Sections Three and Four critically assess the competing claims of first liberal and then radical theories of justice, before Section Five draws together the paper's main arguments.

2. Competing theories of social justice

Social justice thinking stretches across the full ideological terrain, with conservatives, liberals and radicals all proposing alternative approaches that differ in substance and orientation not only between but also often within these broad traditions. These different theories of justice offer very different orientations regarding the theory and practice of social protection. For example, conservative thinking on social justice (Friedman, Nozick) has tended to argue strongly against

¹ As argued elsewhere, the tendency of international development to adopt new, broad-brush and warm-sounding terminology tends to mask important ideological differences within political philosophy that have real consequences in terms of the different policy positions and approaches that tend to be derived from each (Hickey 2011).

the level of public interventionism that would flow from more liberal and radical approaches to social justice, which tend to suggest a much stronger role for state-led public action. This conservative approach, which overlaps with what some refer to as a 'meritorian' notion of justice, suggest that the proper basis for social justice concerns that which emerges from existing social relations on basis of individual merit. From this perspective, the key is to protect individual autonomy and avoid any deliberative attempts to re-order the basis for existing social relations (e.g. existing property rights must be protected etc). As argued elsewhere (Hickey 2011), this position tends to offer support for only the most minimal of social protection responses. A similar level of contestation can be identified between liberal and radical approaches to social justice, whereby radicals tend to dismiss liberal theories of social justice for being overly individualistic and failing to address the deeper, more structural causes of poverty and inequality. And to further muddy the waters, there are several different schools of thought *within* each of these broad traditions, particularly within the liberal and more radical approaches. For example, liberal theories of justice exist along a spectrum that includes a degree of overlap with both conservative approaches at one end, largely through a shared disposition towards a libertarian approach and a strong insistence on individuals taking responsibility for themselves (e.g. Ronald Dworkin), and more radical approaches at the other, such as what might be termed the 'critical liberalism' of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

Such disagreements within political philosophy make it very difficult for social policy theorists and practitioners to "take a definitive notion of social justice from political philosophy and use it to assess, or even generate, social policy" (Wolff 2008: 17). Rather, there is a need to examine critically the ways in which different schools of thinking on social justice might shape and direct social protection and work through the implications of these, and to be more explicit about the reasons for adopting one approach vis-à-vis the others. Table One below is intended to help start this process, by differentiating between five theories of justice drawn from within three broader ideological perspectives. The table delineates one of the key dimensions along which the approaches differ, in terms of the identification or diagnosis of injustice, the space within which social justice should be discussed and promoted and the procedural basis for doing so, and (somewhat schematically) the archetypal form of social protection which can be aligned with these theoretical perspectives.

Table One: competing theories of social justice and their implications for social protection

Philosophy / <i>Dimension</i>	Conservative/ neoliberal	Responsible liberalism	Social liberalism	Critical liberalism	Radical
Key advocates	Friedman, Nozick	Dworkin	Rawls	Sen, Nussbaum	Forst, Fraser, Young
<i>Diagnosis</i>	Market	Risk	Basic	Social	Power

<i>of injustice</i>	failure; individual frailty		structure of society	arrangements / behaviour	relations
<i>Procedure</i>	Reason, judgement	Reason	Social contract; reason	Reason	Deliberative democracy
<i>Space</i>	Circumstances (not choice); risk	Circumstances (not choice); risk	Primary goods	Capabilities	Relations
<i>Policy approach</i>	Minimalist, targeted, limited role for state	Targeted, behavioural changes	Welfare state	Enable individual, change world; universal	Transformative; universal
<i>Social protection exemplar</i>	e.g. SRM, SAFs	e.g. CCTs	e.g. Basic Income Grant	e.g. Social minimum	e.g. full welfare, decent work, anti-discrim'n law

Given the limited support that the conservative tradition offers to social protection, the rich terrain of thinking on social justice in the liberal tradition and its identifiable level of influence within current debates on social protection, and also the growing challenge from the radical perspective, the main focus here will be on the distinctions between and within liberal and more radical approaches. The next section discusses the relative and (where relevant) collective strengths and weaknesses of these three liberal approaches before Section Four explores the more radical position.

3. Linking liberal notions of social justice to social protection: a critical appraisal

Liberal approaches to social justice tend to marry together the tradition's foundational concerns with individual rights, equality and the general good into composite theories of how to understand and pursue the 'good society'. From this perspective, the particular forms of poverty and inequality that are evident in society must, from an ethical perspective, be either minimised or justified with reference to wider social principles. This tradition is most strongly associated with the work of John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* has provided the key touchstone for thinking about social justice for nearly half a century now (Rawls 1972). For Rawls, the only reasonable basis to expect people to live together in the same society is on the basis of a shared agreement that there will be protection in place for the worst off in society. According to his 'Difference' principle, any deviation from securing the institutional arrangements and forms of distribution that would work best for the worst-off in society can only be justified if it can be shown that the poorest will benefit from such inequalities, as with the example of higher salaries being paid to doctors because of the critical social function they fulfil

(Buchardt and Craig 2008: 3). The reasoning here, that reasonable individuals would be keen to ensure that a basic standard of living for all is secured given the risk that they may end up needing such support, offers strong grounds for social protection.

However, Rawls has been challenged by at least two other approaches within the liberal tradition, both of which have significant implications for social protection. The first challenge comes from a more libertarian strand of liberal thinking and is most directly associated with the work of Ronald Dworkin. Dworkin (2000) criticises the Rawlsian tendency for ignoring the importance of individual responsibility in determining welfare outcomes, as with choices made around particular lifestyles or habits (Burchardt and Craig 2008: 3). As such, Dworkin advocates that public policy should concern itself only with those problems associated with the circumstances that individuals find themselves in and ignore any conditions more closely associated with individual 'choice'. The second and more recent challenge concerns Amartya Sen's (2009) critique of Rawls, and particularly his attempt to relocate discussions of justice in the space of 'capabilities' rather than the 'primary goods' emphasised by Rawls. There is then a high degree of contestation within liberal thinking on social justice, much of it with real import for our concerns here with how social protection should be conceived and delivered. To bring some order to this discussion, the three approaches identified here are discussed in comparative terms along the dimensions identified in Table One, namely analysis, space and procedure.

Diagnosing the causes of injustice

The analytical framing of how injustice comes about forms a critical part of any theory of justice, and directly informs the types of prescriptions proposed. For Rawls (1972), injustice inheres in the nature of institutional arrangements that order life in any society, or what he calls its 'basic structure': it is this which distributes the benefits and burdens of social life (Miller 1999). However, for both Sen and Dworkin, this tends to obscure what the former refers to as "The Inescapable Relevance of Actual Behaviour" (Sen 2009: 67). For Dworkin, the key problem is that Rawls needs a more thorough analysis of why people are badly off in the first place before redistributing goods to them, especially given that this may derive from their own choices (Wolff 2008: 19). Sen agrees, noting that this move by Rawls limits his theory of justice to one of 'just institutions' rather than 'just societies' (Sen 2009: 67).

However, problems also exist with the analytical basis offered by both Sen and Dworkin. As Wolff (2008: 40) notes, Sen, and also the closely related thinking of Martha Nussbaum, shows less interest in how problems of unfairness come about than with how to ensure all individuals can gain a certain set of capabilities. Indeed, even some sympathisers of Sen's approach point out that his failure to identify the specific dimensions along which injustice occurs, in favour of a 'pluralist' but unspecified approach to the causes of injustice (Sen 2009: 2), makes his theory much less operational than it would otherwise be. The other key criticism of Sen's approach in an analytical sense is that it possesses a degree of methodological individualism that prevents it from offering a fuller sense of the social as opposed to individualised basis of injustice. This is particularly true when the capabilities approach is being used for evaluative (rather than proscriptive)

purposes, as in evaluative mode it necessarily focuses narrowly on the capabilities of particular individuals (de Herdt and Deneulin 2007: 179). As discussed below, this is a key point of contention between liberal and radical approaches, with the latter offering a more robust focus on the structural underpinnings of injustice.

Although Dworkin emphasises the need for a stronger analytical basis for considering problems of injustice, the distinction he proposes to order this search is problematic. In particular, he tends to assign certain aspects into the category of bad luck that are more appropriately considered as being ingrained within underlying and structural inequalities (Wolff 2008: 19). Dworkin's approach to diagnosing the problems of injustice relates to his distinction between 'choice' and 'circumstance' (Dworkin 2000). However, this is not an easy distinction to make, not least as people's choices also influence their social position and it is not clear as to when the effects of choice evolve into what might be termed circumstance. Both critical liberals and more radical theorists of justice have pointed out that 'choices' are closely shaped by circumstances, in terms of Sen's notion of 'adaptive preferences', and through the fact that serious structural inequalities closely shape and constrain the choices that people are able to make (Young 1990, also Wolff 2008: 19). As such, "Perhaps the most obvious difficulty is that the degree of weight that the luck egalitarian places on the distinction between choices and circumstances seems, on its face, to be both philosophically dubious and morally implausible" (Scheffler 2003: 17), not least as it presumes that individuals have adequate information regarding the consequences that their choices may bring.

Importantly, one effect of Dworkin's approach is to support the oft-made distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor when it comes to public policy-making (Buchardt and Craig 2008: 4). There is a close correlation between a belief that the poor deserve of high levels of support for government action in a range of areas, from social policy to employment, and particularly in terms of social protection (Hickey 2012, Standing 2005: 25). In encouraging a closer focus on whether or not people deserve support on the basis of their individual 'choices', there is a risk of encouraging the stigmatisation of poor people and (related to this) a higher rate of exclusion errors regarding the more loaded and stringent targeting of social protection interventions (see below).

Within which space should justice be pursued?

This discussion of how liberal theories of justice diagnose the causes of injustice relates closely to how each approach identifies different *spaces* within which injustice should be addressed. In Sen's terms, 'spaces' refers here to the attributes of human life that should provide our focus in terms of identifying problems of injustice: those good and bad things that are unevenly distributed within society. For more conservative liberals (or 'luck egalitarians') such as Dworkin, public policy should seek to address 'bad luck' in terms of circumstances but not in the space of ambitions where people can be considered to have choice. However, Dworkin's theory also presumes initial conditions of equality of opportunity (Scheffler 2003: 9) and (as with Nozick) places undue moral importance on people being allowed to fully attain the benefits that can accrue to them by virtue of their original position in the social hierarchy. Rawls instead directs us towards a concern with the distribution of what he terms 'primary

goods', which are required for people to attain "the social bases of self-respect" (1971). These are generally taken to include things such as income and education, goods which are unevenly distributed as a result of the basic structure of society. Famously, however, it is this focus on goods which provides Sen with one of his most foundational critiques of the Rawlsian approach to justice as a guide to policy. For Sen (1995), focusing on 'goods' as the basis for assessing individual advantage ignores the extent to which the same goods can be used to achieve different levels of individual advantage. Similarly, not all individuals can attain the same outcome (or level of wellbeing) through possession of the same set of goods, most famously in the case of pregnant and/or neo-natal women who require higher levels of nutrition. As such, what people perceive themselves capable of being or doing cannot be accounted for through a focus on goods. Sen proposes instead that we consider questions of justice and redistribution within the space of 'capabilities', namely the functioning (beings and doings) and agency (the freedom to choose and achieve valuable functionings).

However, and although persuasive in many respects, Sen's approach has in turn been criticised for being too vague, most famously by Martha Nussbaum. Nussbaum (2003) who states that any adequate theory of social justice must specify those aspects that should be of concern, and from here, goes on to identify her now well-known list of ten key capabilities.² However, there remains a procedural problem here that undermines this more specified version of a critical liberal approach to social justice. In brief, the effort to list *a priori* the content of a project of social justice, draws on extant moral theory (in this case Aristotelean ethics) rather than any dialogical process involving the people whose capabilities are to be advanced. Given the current emphasis on ensuring that social protection needs to be democratically determined, owned and consonant within local cultural contexts, this has led some to question the legitimacy of this particular liberal theory of justice as: put another way, "the philosophy of social justice cannot be separated from its sociology; in other words, conceptions of justice make sense only when placed in their appropriate social contexts" (Miller 1999: 111).

Procedure

The question of procedure is critical to theories of social justice, with John Rawls, for example, being as concerned with laying out a *method* through which questions of social justice can be addressed as with outlining the *content* of social justice per se. Rawls' veil of ignorance, to be gradually lifted as citizens progressively determine the principles, constitutions and laws that will provide the institutional basis for a just society, is used as the basis upon which a broader contract for social justice is established (Rawls 1971). For Rawls, this provided the best political method for ensuring that the worst-off would receive a basic level of protection, as he presumed that most rational citizens would ensure a basic level of provision should they find themselves disadvantaged in returning from behind the veil to society. However, only those who Rawls refers to as 'fully competent members of society', would be permitted to pass behind the veil to help construct these institutional arrangements and procedures. This bias towards those of able-

² Namely: Life, Bodily health, Bodily integrity, Senses, imagination, thought; Emotions; Practical; reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play; Control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2003).

body and sound mind has been heavily criticised by Martha Nussbaum, who argues, with great relevance for debates over social protection, that this ignores the critical role played by 'care' in relation to people's interdependence. For Nussbaum (2003), real societies contain people who are incapable of exercising the physical and/or mental powers required for independence, and real life is characterised by often lengthy periods of dependence, even within what might be termed a 'normal' life-cycle involving inter alia infancy, illness and old age. She argues that,

"Care for children, the elderly, and the mentally and physically handicapped, is a major part of the work that needs to be done in any society, and in most societies it is a source of great injustice. Any theory of justice needs to think about the problem from the beginning, in the design of the most basic level of institutions, and particularly in its theory of the primary goods" (Nussbaum 2003: 53).

As such, for Rawls to include only autonomous, fully-functioning individuals as agents of justice involves not only an unwarranted exclusion of those requiring care but a misreading of the nature of social life. For Nussbaum (2003: 50), this "all-important issue of care for people who are physically and/or mentally dependent on others: children, the disabled, the elderly", constitutes the main reason "why the capabilities approach is superior to other approaches to social justice within the liberal tradition".

However, and despite the veracity of this critique and its particular relevance to debates here on social protection, the alternative offered by capability theorists as the main procedure through which entitlements are to be agreed on and distributed is also problematic. As for Dworkin, the exercise of reason constitutes the key method through which problems of injustice and the means of overcoming them are to be identified and prioritised here. As noted by Marjoribanks (2010) in a critique of Sen's (2009) *Idea of Justice*,

"Sen provides no indication of how justice may then be achieved; he leaves the reduction of injustice to the exercise of public reason. Justice, it seems, is whatever emerges from the exercise of public reason, although that reasoning will give no final result".

Similarly, John Gray (2009) notes that "Reason is useful in clarifying the values that are at stake and the consequences of settling their conflict in different ways. But at a certain point reason leaves us in the lurch, and we must decide what to do". Taken together, then, there is a bias within the liberal approaches discussed here towards relatively thin forms of proceduralism as the basis for resolving problems of injustice which obscures the highly contested character of the political decision-making process, an issue returned to in Section Four below.

Making the links to policy and practice

Liberal theories of social justice have long-informed the theory and practice of public policy around social protection, both implicitly and explicitly (e.g. Rothstein 2002). The lines of influence can be broadly identified at three levels concerning the target of policies, the type or substance of policies that tend to be advocated,

and also the mode through which such policies are delivered and engage with citizens. Having addressed the first issue above in terms of the 'space' within which justice should be addressed, we focus here on the second two aspects. This section in particular comes with the caveat that we are discussing the question of policy influence in terms of broad tendencies here, rather than proposing that a more tightly definable and direct link exists between what remain broad theories of justice and specific forms of social protection.

In his discussion of the links between different political philosophy and public policy, Wolff (2008 25-6) argues that different theories of social justice can orient social policy responses in different directions with regards the three following approaches,

1. Support for resources that are *internal* to people such as strength and skills (e.g. through health and education);
2. Support for *external* forms of resource such as income or wealth (e.g. through pensions, welfare benefits, cash transfers)
3. Efforts to change social and material *structures*, or the broader rules of game (e.g. legal reform, the reconfiguration of public space)

These distinctions have clear relevance for current philosophical discussions around social protection. For example, Dworkin's approach offers little support for efforts that would go beyond the first two levels, and even in the case of the second level, conservative liberals would want to see clear evidence that people are deserving of such goods. By contrast, both Rawls, with his focus on the 'basic structure' of society, and Sen, who along with Nussbaum argues that for people to have a certain set of capabilities requires both personal resources and an appropriate economic and political context (Wolff 2008: 40), would offer the philosophical grounding for policy approaches across the full range here. For example, whereas a typical Dworkinian approach to disability would be to offer financial compensation, Sen's focus on the broader context suggests that the proper locus for change lies less with the individual than with the wider world that constructs disability in a particular way (Buchardt and Craig 2008: 4).

However, the extent to which either Rawls or Sen can offer robust grounds for engaging with the third level of social policy, which equates to the 'transformative' approach to social protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004), is debatable. For example, using Sen's capability approach as a guide to transformative action faces not only the perennial difficulty of operationalising this approach but also overcoming the problems that the capability approach has with adequately conceptualising and thus prioritising the need for structural level change within society (Gore 1997), a problem already identified above around the charge of methodological individualism. The Rawlsian approach, meanwhile, is hamstrung by the relegation of the principle of difference behind his principle of liberty, which for some rules out a meaningful challenge to existing social relations and related forms of institutional bias to better-off groups. As such, both Rawls and Sen can be more clearly identified with calls for social protection to be seen as part of a broader array of social policy (Adesina this volume, also de Haan 2007, Mkandawire 2005), rather than with a transformative project of social protection per se.

The drawing of more specific lines of influence between broad theories of justice and specific instruments of social protection is a fraught project. Nonetheless it is notable that advocates of particular approaches have drawn on particular forms of social justice thinking to support their claims, and that a degree of alignment between these approaches and some specific instruments can be drawn. This includes work that links Sen's approach with cash transfers (Peppiat et al 2001), health (Bertel 2003) and education (Tikly and Barrett 2009), and Rawls with cash transfers also (Barrientos forthcoming, Tucker 2010). For example, and as noted in Table One, the Rawlsian emphasis on securing a good deal for the worst off and on income as a key primary good has been used by advocates of the Basic Income Grant (Standing 2005). In comparison, the Social Minimum, with its broader conception of what people require to get by and value seems to some (e.g. Taylor 2011) to derive more clearly from a capability-approach.

Perhaps the most obvious link that can be drawn here involves Dworkin's approach, which offers the strongest philosophical grounding for efforts to align the 'choices' made by citizens by attaching conditions to interventions such as cash transfers. Although Sen's (2009) emphasis (contra Rawls) on behaviour as well as institutions might also lead to some alignment here, Sen's thinking offers stronger support for unconditional cash transfers. This is both in the historical sense in which Sen's (1981) entitlement theory helped to show that a lack of food availability was not the primary constraint within famines which helped lead to the introduction of cash- rather than food transfers in such conditions, but also his apparent philosophical opposition to the imposition of conditions. In a study of conditional cash transfers in Mexico, Tucker explores Sen's argument that "that the stigma associated with programs that pivot on the signifiers of "poor" and "needy" has significant individual-level impacts. This includes high rates of non-participation amongst poor people but also 'invasive losses", and also notes that "time-consuming conditionalities and participation requirements may impede the ability of the poor to exercise agency in other (perhaps more political) realms" (2010: 6). Sen is not alone here and there are numerous warnings from within liberal philosophy concerning the problems associated with both targeting and conditionality. For Rothstein (2002), targeting via means-testing effectively places the poor in a separate moral realm from the rest of society, while Wolff (2008: 29) warns that "Attempts to address distributional problems in a clumsy way can increase stigma and division in society and thereby undercut social equality". The basic respect for individuals that underlies the work of both Rawls and Sen thus stands in opposition to Dworkin's division of people into the categories of responsible/irresponsible (Wolff 2008: 24).

Summary

Liberal approaches to social justice have helped shape debates over social protection in both the global north and south in a number of ways, and have arguably made some headway in displacing more conservative readings of how questions of social justice should be approached within international development, particularly through the work and advocacy of Amartya Sen. This is illustrated to some extent in the emphasis that some international development agencies place on 'rights-based' rather than charity-driven approaches to social protection (e.g. DFID, UNICEF, ILO) and the more encompassing agenda of the World Bank's latest

social protection strategy, which goes beyond a thin focus on risk to encompass a more muscular agenda, albeit one that falls short of advocating transformative approaches.

However, the adequacy within which liberal theories of justice can underpin the theory and practice of social protection remains in doubt. Taken collectively, there is a particular failure to identify a thorough and convincing diagnostic basis for understanding how injustice arises. Without this analysis of the problem itself, liberal theories fail to offer a proper guide to action, particularly in terms of linking proposed actions to underlying causes. The procedures within liberal theory for arriving at a programmatic basis for achieving social justice are also problematic, particularly the emphasis on 'reason' as the basis for identifying the best route forward. Rawlsian approaches face a particular struggle to deal with the dialogical aspect of achieving social justice, with its emphasis on the participation of able-bodied people striking a strong note of discord with the more recent emphasis on involving the subjects of public policy in philosophical discussions around the public actions to be targeted at them (Wolff 2008). Finally, none of the liberal approaches would offer robust support for a more transformative project of social protection, in part because of the methodological individualism that underpins much liberal thinking, and which tends to avoid an engagement with the more structural underpinnings of poverty and exclusion. As such, this paper argues that there is a need to move beyond liberal theories of justice here, to encompass in particular "...the more radical approaches to social justice that can be identified with some feminist and leftist tendencies" (Hickey 2011: 434).

4. Radical thinking on social justice: towards a relational approach?

Thinking on social justice from those situated to the left of the liberal tradition has been split between those seeking to elaborate radical theories of social justice and those who reject the language of social justice altogether. This paper focuses on the former camp, although even here the 'radical' perspective on social justice constitutes a very broad camp that stretches across many concerns and ideological approaches, and is riven through with some fairly strong disagreements. However, a thread that can be woven throughout radical theories of justice, most notably in its socialist, post-marxist and, in particular, feminist forms, is a concern with the *power relations*, as opposed to resources or rights, as the foundational concern. From this perspective, the uneven distribution of rights and resources between individuals, and also wider political communities, inheres in the relationships of power that exist between and within them. According to a radical perspective on social justice, and contrary to liberal theories of justice, then,

"Equality, as it is more commonly understood, is not, in the first instance, a distributive ideal, and its aim is not to compensate for misfortune. It is, instead, a moral ideal governing the relations in which people stand to one another." (Scheffler 2003: 21).

It is this core concern that underlies the concerns of radical theorists of justice, whether in terms of social relations around gender, class or race, or at the global level between countries. A key move here is to extend the concerns of social justice theory beyond being concerned solely with redistribution in material terms to a more cultural focus on the politics of recognition (Young 1990, 1997). The

most coherent statement of this lies in the work of Forst (2001), who maps out a 'critical theory of justice' that places relations at its centre, such that:

"...the question of power is *the first question of justice*. It stresses the need for a theory that does not just focus on the justice of the distribution of goods, but on the justice of the 'basic structure' of relations of political and economic power, that is, relations of government, of production, and of distribution" (2001: 167-8).

The following section examines how a relational theory of justice stands up when analysed in terms across the same criteria and dimensions employed to interrogate liberal theories of justice in Section Three.

The analytical basis: diagnosing the causes of injustice?

Radical theorists of social justice generally place a greater emphasis on the analysis of how injustice is produced and reproduced than is apparent in the liberal approaches discussed above. For example, the first three stages of Forst's four-fold theory of justice emphasises a critical role for analysis in establishing the grounds for pursuing a project of social justice. This reflects a similar emphasis across radical thinking on justice, as with Young's (1990) identification of five key forms of injustice/faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. In her later work, Young maps this out more clearly, stating that,

"social groups are constituted through structural social processes which position people according differently along social axes. Important axes of structural social privilege and disadvantage concern the social division of labour, hierarchies of decision-making power, practices of sexuality and body aesthetic, and the arrangement of persons in physical and social space" (2008: 80).

Injustice, then, inheres in the way that hegemonic forms of 'being and doing' render other forms grotesque. This approach differs from the analysis of injustice offered within the liberal tradition. To take once more the case of disability, Young (2008) sees this as a form of 'structural inequality', a paradigmatic case for justice rather than an outlier (as in Rawls, who proposed to deal with this after other matters had been resolved). Radical theorists of justice can also claim to extend the range as well as the depth of how we understand social justice. In particular, radical theorists move beyond a resource-based concern with redistribution to identify recognition as a core concern, thus usefully extending the terrain across which concerns with social justice can stretch. From this intervention, the theory and practice of social protection would therefore need to address problems of cultural discrimination as well as material inequality.

Within which space should justice be pursued?

From a radical perspective, then, the proper space for discussing and tackling injustice lies not with goods or capabilities but in the realm of social relations. For Forst (2001), all social relations to which one finds oneself subject, and which can be changed by political action, are to be justified reciprocally and generally. Once unequal social relations are identified in these terms, "then persons are accorded a fundamental right to justification (of such relations), that is, a qualified veto

right against any (such) norms and practices" (Forst 2001: 1968-9). This approach also directly opposes Dworkin's attempt to distinguish between choice and circumstance as the basis for mapping out a proper space for social justice interventions.

Procedural concerns

More recently, radical thinkers have extended their theories of justice to include politics as well as redistribution and recognition as the key dimensions of justice. In analytical terms, including a stronger political dimension is particularly helpful in,

"Establishing criteria of social belonging, and thus determining who counts as a member, the political dimension of justice specifies the reach of those other dimensions: it tells us who is included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition" (Fraser 2009: 17)

This resonates clearly with the frequently aired concern in debates over social protection concerning not only who should get what but also how and how this should be determined (e.g. Pritchett 2005). The radical approach here means that the emphasis placed on equal participation here, whereby "the most general meaning of justice is parity of participation" (Fraser 2009: 16). Where Rawls places an emphasis on 'competent' members of society being involved in making judgements on justice, for the "radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life" (Fraser 2009: 16). For Young (2008: 98-99), this places the radical camp more in favour of Habermasian forms of deliberative democracy than of political liberalism as a means for resolving questions of justice "a focus on more plural spaces of contestation". This goes beyond Sen's reliance on 'reason' and offers a more politically-attuned procedural basis for establishing principles and practices of justice in particular places.

Making the links to policy and practice

Radical theorists of social justice draw a distinction between 'affirmative' and 'transformative' forms of redistribution, and emphasise the importance of focusing on the latter in order to tackle the underlying causes of injustice. In terms of social protection, Fraser (1995: 85) casts public works programmes, social insurance and other types of transfer as essentially conservative in that they seek to ameliorate rather than abolish class differentiation, a point also made by more recent critics of certain versions of social protection (e.g. Teichmann 2008). For Fraser, such approaches tend to obscure the tensions between more and less powerful groups in society (e.g. between employers and employed) by shifting the focus onto struggles between less powerful groups (e.g. between employed and non-employed). Moreover, because they fail to remove the structural factors that lead to injustice, need to be repeated over time. Transformative approaches, on the other hand,

"...typically combine universalist social-welfare programmes, steeply progressive taxation, macroeconomic policies aimed at creating full employment, a large non-market public sector, significant public and/or

collective ownership, and democratic decision-making over basic socio-economic priorities" (Fraser 1995: 85).

In line with this, the relational approach also tends to argue for a 'universal' and/or 'parametric' approach rather than against targeting resources at particular groups, as this may exacerbate pre-existing injustice and inequalities:

"The result is to mark out the most disadvantaged class as inherently deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more. In time such a class can come to appear privileged, the recipient of special treatment and undeserved largesse" (Fraser 1995: 85).

This sets in play a contradictory movement against universalism which creates new problems of recognition. Ruth Lister (2008) goes further and identifies that what really matters to people is the lack of respect they are afforded, including how they are treated at the interface of state-citizen relations around the receipt of social policy. Ensuring that people are seen as being of equal worth requires respect and voice, and may involve the training of social policy delivery agents.³

This clearly aligns radical theories of justice with current debates concerning the need to move away from more conservative versions of social protection as, for example, 'social risk management', towards a fuller more transformative notion of social protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). Indeed, much of this agenda (e.g. on taxation, macroeconomic policy) goes much beyond what proponents of transformative social protection tend to emphasise. Moreover, recent iterations of the radical perspective on social justice have usefully moved beyond the state alone as both arbiter and deliverer of social justice to include a broader focus on 'agents of justice' (O'Neill 2001). For Young (2008: 98-99), liberal theories of justice tend to over-emphasise the role of the state and public policy and ignore the role of civil society and social movements, as both cause and solution to social injustice. Young's more radical perspective opens more plural spaces of contestation, focusing on deliberative democracy rather than political liberalism and emphasising that a transformative project begins with enabling people to map their own situatedness in the relations of power which structure their circumstances and available choices.⁴ This opens up a role for social movements in both contesting and establishing the terms and parameters of social justice, often in terms of both redistribution and recognition, a move that goes well beyond the conservative/liberal emphasis on the role of community-based groups in delivering social protection, a staple feature of social risk management (SRM) and social action funds (SAFs).

This constitutes a useful reminder that while social protection can be usefully relocated within a social justice approach, the reverse is not the case: public

³ From a relational perspective, this point holds across the broader range of social interactions, such that, "If the way we see each other is a function of our positioning in a social fabric marked by cleavages and social boundaries, development has to do with the ways in which these boundaries are defined, reaffirmed, reproduced, challenged, contested and ignored (De Herdt and Deneulin 2007: 183).

⁴ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me further on this point and for this useful formulation of the issue.

action on a far greater scale than social protection (as currently conceived) is required to achieve social justice, and in certain circumstances an emphasis on social protection can provide a distraction and even an obstacle to the pursuit of social justice as conceived from a relational perspective. Two brief examples can help illustrate the point, the first of which is largely inspired by a largely neoliberal approach to social justice, the second by a more muscular form of social liberalism.

The northern regions of Uganda have been subject to prolonged periods of adverse incorporation within the broader polity and political economy, aspects of which helped create the context for a prolonged insurgency between 1987 and 2006, with disastrous results in terms of this region suffering persistently high levels of poverty and vulnerability. Faced with this problem, the main policy response by government and donors alike has centred on the country's largest social protection initiative, the World Bank-funded Northern Ugandan Social Action Fund which was established in 2002 and will complete its second phase in 2014. However, the scope and size of this programme pales into insignificance given the structural conditions that have historically underpinned poverty in this region (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2010). NUSAF relies heavily on people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps through forming community-based groups to demand resources for development activities that they are then largely responsible for delivering. Delivered largely through parallel structures, NUSAF has tended to further undermine the role of the state and reduce levels of popular accountability, leading to high-levels of corruption at both national and local levels (*ibid.*). Such an approach operates as a mere palliative that avoid addressing the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion and obstruct moves towards fuller programmes of political and economic (re-) integration based on a joined-up economic strategy, decent employment opportunities and building the institutional basis for delivering public goods over the long-term. Nor is this a one-off, given the extent to which others have made similar criticisms of this form of social protection elsewhere (de Haan 2002, Lange 2008).

The second comes from South Africa, a country which has consciously modelled its social welfare approach on that of Europe since at least the Second World War and which is often celebrated as offering the most comprehensive system of social protection in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this approach, grounded in a (social) liberal approach to social justice, has been accused of operating as an essentially ameliorative cover-up for the failure of the country to provide higher levels of equality and wellbeing, particularly meaningful employment. In particular, critics argue that high-levels of public expenditure on social grants (including the social pension and grants for children) is effectively operating as a trade-off between economic and social policy, whereby a capital-intensive approach to growth is retained in place despite leading to high-levels of unemployment, with social transfers used to try and maintain social reproduction within poor households. This state of affairs is grounded in a pact between capitalist firms, the government and labour unions, whereby the preference of business to invest in capital- rather than labour-intensive forms of production converges with the interests of the unions in protecting skilled, formal sector jobs (Natrass and Seekings 2010), and which effectively excludes the majority of working South Africans within the informal economy. In such a context, and seen from a radical perspective, social protection

can become complicit with the hegemonic political and economic forces responsible for creating different forms of injustice and for obstructing more transformative routes towards social justice.

6. Concluding thoughts

The major point of this paper has been to argue the case for relocating the theory and practice of social protection within a broader project of social justice. Social justice offers the most relevant, rigorous and politically-attuned framework within which to situate current discussions of social protection, whether both in terms of substance and process, and there are increasing signs that this engagement, always there implicitly, is now coming more strongly to the fore. However, this is not an easy or unproblematic path: political philosophy of any type cannot be used in any straightforward sense to assess or generate social policy (Wolff 2008), in part because of serious disagreements amongst different strands of thinking but also because achieving social justice necessarily involves a dialogical political process rather than a monological attempt to read-off the correct institutional arrangements and policy mechanisms through which justice can be achieved. However, and unlike other philosophical approaches to the good life, establishing such a political process is integral to what most theories of social justice offer, thus offering a guide to the method (the how) as well as the what and who questions.

The second main argument has been to advance the case for adopting a more radical approach to social justice, and in particular to displace the current emphasis on conservative and liberal theories of justice in international development with a more relational perspective. The relational approach mapped out here, which takes issues of political economy, culture and politics seriously, makes a critical contribution in linking interventions directly with the underlying causes of poverty and inequality, and to identifying the forms of politics and policies best suited to challenging such injustices, particularly in terms of 'transformative' approaches. However, to advocate for a relational approach constitutes a significant challenge to the current order, particularly given the ideological and institutional biases within international development which often appears constitutionally indisposed to adopting more radical perspectives, despite the evidence of injustices persisting and deepening over time, and of the recurrent failure of current institutional arrangements and policy responses to address them.

Finally, the paper calls for a stronger sense of modesty and caution amongst proponents of social protection. Once a social justice perspective is adopted, particularly a radical one, then it becomes clear that social protection may not be the first step towards tackling injustice and may even constitute an obstacle to this process.

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