

## What is justice?

### Fleur, Year 8

Justice is a word that many struggle to define. Over the years there have been different types of justice, and different understandings of what is 'just'. People all want to be treated fairly, but how can that be so if we cannot agree on what is fair? When someone has stepped out of line in society, people want justice to be served. But what is justice? To me, justice must be one of three things: the reinforcement of equality, necessity or equity. In this essay, I am going to show why I think that justice is (or should be) based on equity above all other things.

Firstly, I am going to cover why justice should not be based on equality, despite what most people may believe. Equality is the equal sharing of a substance between several people. This substance could be anything from a birthday cake to a prison sentence. Although this may sound good at first, it is far from it. If everyone received the same salary, then why try your best? If I will make the same amount of money as a cleaner as I will as a lawyer, then what would be the point in going to the effort and expense in becoming a lawyer? Equality may help those who do not have as good a job, but it removes the incentive to work hard and put in effort, since there will be no reward for doing so. In the situation of prisons, if all the inmates had equal sentences, what is to stop you from committing a greater crime? If the jail time for shoplifting is the same as for murdering, people would be encouraged to commit worse crimes, since there is no reason to not go a step further when you are caught. Clearly I am exaggerating the effects of what would happen if justice was based on equality, but my point still stands. If people were all treated the same and all received the same things, it would completely ruin the incentive to do well in life. This may also eventually lead to communism, and that rarely ends well as it has been shown to be detrimental to both society and the economy in the USSR and other communist-run states.

Secondly, I am going to talk about why we should not base justice on necessity. If justice was based on necessity, then more will go to the people in need, and less to the people who do not. This may sound like a good idea, similar to levelling out the playing field, but taken to extremes it would cause several disputes and riots from the more fortunate. The tax system is rightly shaped around necessity, taking more from the rich and less from the poor, a bit like a legal Robin Hood. The more fortunate people are net contributors to this system, since they use the public services less (for instance the NHS and state education) but pay a lot more for them. A specific situation of this system failing is the 'Child Benefit' scheme. This scheme gives eligible parents £10 a week per child they take care for. If you are eligible but have a salary over £50,000, you need to pay the 'high income child benefit tax charge'. For every £100 you earn over £50,000, you get taxed 1% of that money, resulting in 100% of the money being taxed if you earn £60,000. After this, no more of the money can be taxed. Yes, this may seem like a good idea, but they have not thought about the partners of these people. If you and your partner both earn £40,000 a year, you will not be taxed, but if a single parent earns £60,000 a year, they will be taxed. This means that one family may be earning £80,000 a year or more, and receive the untaxed money, while another might only earn £60,000 and receive nothing. This would make it unfair on the single parent. Similar to the previous paragraph, necessity-based justice may also remove the incentive to try hard and do well, since you will end up in the same place either way. If justice was based on necessity, no-one would be able to stand out from the crowd, since they would only be pushed down while they watch worse people be pushed up. This is definitely unfair, since some people just do not deserve to be pushed up as high, if

you do not try hard in school, then it is not someone else's responsibility to help you reach higher; it is your own.

For me, justice is based mostly on equity. Equity is another concept that could be defined in several ways, but for the purpose of this essay I am using the definition from [www.lifepersona.com](http://www.lifepersona.com). This definition reads: 'equity means that the reward given to an individual is equivalent to the work that he invested to obtain it'. This version of equity-based justice would be similar to merit-based justice. The reinforcement of this would help people to, quite literally, get what they deserve. This version of justice would keep the incentive to work hard and strive for success, since you will be rewarded for doing so. This would help the economy for more people would be in 'successful' jobs, generating more economic return, thereby benefitting society as a whole via an effective system of taxation, unlike equality-based or necessity-based justice, which disincentivises effort. Although this may be good for the more fortunate in the world, the less fortunate would suffer. This is why I am proposing justice to be a mix of equity, equality and necessity.

If justice could only be one of the three options, equity would be the best option, even if it isn't *entirely* fair on the poor, but I think that it can be a mixture of the three. I believe that the 'necessity' side of justice should be to put limits on how well or badly someone can do. For example, on salaries. The minimum salary you can receive past the age of 22 in the UK is £8.20 per hour. This is way too low for this salary is barely enough for the average human to live off. There are millions of people in poverty in our country and many are homeless. I believe that everyone should be helped to have a reasonable life (the definition of reasonable life will change depending on the country), and that *that* should be the bare minimum across the globe. I also think that some people's salaries are way too high. Some people (not many) get paid tens of millions (or more) annually. Although they may have worked hard and earned it, I personally feel like this is too high for a single human to earn. The world's richest 26 people own the same as the poorest 50%. The gap between poverty and these people is just too high, and I believe that the role of justice is to narrow that gap, but not close it completely. I believe that everyone should have the same opportunities at the beginning of their life (equality), for example the same education and the same healthcare facilities, but if they misuse those facilities then later on in life they will not be able to go to the top schools or qualify for the best jobs, but at least they had the same starting point and opportunity.

If justice was as described in the previous paragraph, then this is how the world would look. Prison sentences would be based on the crime, and all people who committed that crime would have the same sentence. There would be no death penalty and everyone would receive the correct length of sentence. People would be treated better by society. I believe that the bare minimum is forgiveness, as the Bible is greatly orientated around it, and encourages us to love our neighbours as ourselves. No matter who it is, they deserve to be forgiven, but if you have gone above and beyond in society, then you will be treated even better. There is still a margin for excellence in the way one can be treated, but the minimum is just a lot higher than it is currently.

To summarise, I believe that justice is the fair treatment of all. To me, justice is the reward for your actions, while also the help for those who need it. Everyone will have the same starting point in life and an assured basic standard of living; there will be help for those who fall below this standard, and contributions required for those above it.