



COLLOQUIUM SERIES

“Freedom, Money, and Justice as Fairness”

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The first principle of John Rawls’s conception of ‘justice as fairness’ secures a set of ‘basic liberties’ equally for all citizens within the constitutional structure of society. The ‘worth’ of citizens’ basic liberties, however, may vary depending upon their wealth and income. Against Rawls, G. A. Cohen contends that an absence of money *directly* constrains citizens’ liberty, and not simply the worth of liberty. Cohen’s argument threatens a core feature of justice as fairness, as it is unclear why the parties within the ‘original position’ would endorse the lexical priority of the first principle over the ‘difference principle’ (which concerns the distribution of wealth and income in society) if *both* principles similarly shape the freedom enjoyed by citizens. In response to Cohen’s challenge, I advance five points. First, I explain that Rawls is concerned with the freedom of citizens to exercise their two ‘moral powers,’ their ‘sense of justice’ and their capacity for a ‘conception of the good,’ and not their overall ‘negative liberty.’ Second, with respect to citizens’ sense of justice, Rawls’s insistence that the ‘fair value’ of the political liberties be secured for all citizens inoculates this aspect of justice as fairness against Cohen’s challenge. Third, with respect to citizens’ second moral power, it is necessary to distinguish between its two aspects: (a) citizens’ capacity to form and revise their conceptions of the good, and (b) citizens’ capacity to pursue those conceptions. Fourth, clarifying the ‘basic needs principle’ within justice as fairness, including adding to it a right to adequate discretionary time, ensures that citizens will be roughly equally free to form and revise their conceptions of the good. Fifth, with respect to citizens’ freedom to pursue their conceptions of the good, Rawlsians should concede that the difference principle permits inequalities in *this* freedom, but minimizes them to the greatest feasible extent. I conclude that Cohen’s criticism of Rawls’s distinction between a liberty and its worth is not fatal to justice as fairness.

Friday, November 28th, 2014

Room: 3228 River Building

Time: 3:00 pm

All are welcome!