

Reply to Wonsup Jung¹⁾

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I had originally hoped that Professor Rawls himself would be able to respond to Wonsup Jung's award winning paper on that aspect of his theory having to do with its compatibility or incompatibility with alternative economic systems. But since that was not possible, given the state of Professor Rawls's health, I agreed to accept this responsibility, which is at the same time an honor for me. While it might reasonably have been expected that Professor Rawls, had he been here, would have defended his own view against Professor Jung's mild criticism — although Professor Rawls is well known for his very laudable inclination to admit that his critics often have valid points and to modify his theory accordingly —, the same cannot of course be expected of me, who in fact was the author of one of the earliest published critical review studies of *A Theory of Justice*.²⁾ That secondary literature now numbers in the thousands of essays and in the tens of thousands, perhaps even in the hundreds of thousands, of references.

This is an important point to recall when attempting to place Wonsup Jung's paper in context — above all in historical context. The category

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- 1) William L. McBride 교수의 동의를 얻어 그의 논평을 함께 싣는다. 참고로 이 논평은 20회 세계철학학술 대회를 마친 후 McBride 교수 본인이 수정 및 보완한 것임을 밝혀 둔다.
 - 2) William L. McBride, "Political Theory sub specie aeternitatis: A New Perspective", *Yale Law Review*, 81, 5 (April 1972), pp.980-1003.

under which he submitted this article for our competition was “contemporary American philosophy”, and it is very fitting that its subject is the philosophy of John Rawls, because I am reasonably certain that no other contemporary American philosopher is as frequently cited, not only in our own discipline, but also in numerous cognate disciplines, as Rawls is. This is the case, of course, not only within the boundaries of the United States, but around the world. I have discussed Rawlsian theory with very knowledgeable colleagues, often more knowledgeable on specific points than I, in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Russia, and China, to name only a few countries; and the author of the present paper is a Korean citizen. So Rawls’s work has done much to enhance the reputation of contemporary American philosophy and by virtue of its focus on justice, to promote a popular global identification of the American political consciousness with an orientation toward the achievement of justice.

But there is more than a little that is paradoxical about this conjecture. For, during the period of a generation that has passed since the initial publication of *A Theory of Justice*, while critics from Right and Left argued over whether Rawls’s theory was in fact a celebration of the American capitalist *status quo* or rather an implicit, even if gentle, critique of it — with the argument always revolving, ultimately, about what would constitute the most reasonable interpretation of the famous “difference principle” when brought down from the realm of ideal theory and applied to existing reality —, that existing reality has drifted in the direction of ever great differences between the amounts of goods possessed by the wealthiest members of national populations and the rest of the world “community”. In both philosophical journals and more popular literature, as it seems to me, less is written today about justice than was written 26 years ago, in part because the topic seems so irrelevant to a world in which either “savage capitalism” or merely predatory capitalism, frequently characterized by reversion to practices and attitudes that were already being attacked as inhumane in the early Nineteenth Century, is not only sanctioned by governments but also

held up as an ideal by the dominant global media, themselves increasingly controlled by a very wealthy and powerful few.

Wonsup Jung's paper, for all of its scholarly and philosophical merits, reproduces this and related paradoxes in interesting ways. Its most central thesis — namely, that what he, following a Rawlsian usage, calls “liberal socialism” is incompatible with Rawls's notion of justice as fairness, especially in the light of Rawls's later elaborations of “political liberalism”, even though Rawls himself thinks the contrary — has its roots in lectures given in Sweden 1964 by an already retired British economics professor, J. E. Meade. In three footnotes in *A Theory of Justice*,³⁾ Rawls acknowledged his intellectual indebtedness to the book by Meade in which these lectures were published, *Efficiency, Equality and the Ownership of Property*, particularly for having created the terms and elaborated on the concept “Property-Owning Democracy”. Meade's context, to which Wonsup Jung alludes in a footnote not in the body of his paper, was his fear that the effort to maximize efficiency under the economic conditions of the modern world could result in what he called “the Brave New Capitalists' Paradise”, a society, for which Meade had an obvious loathing, of increasing inequality between the wealth and few and the great mass of the population performing essentially service functions — a remarkable prescient anticipation of the contemporary trends that I have just mentioned. In his first lecture, he listed four alternatives to this possible historical outcome, namely, a Trade Union State and a Welfare State, about which he made only brief comments, and a Property-Owning Democracy and a Socialist State, upon which he elaborated at somewhat great length. I have found Meade's work, of which I confess to having been ignorant (except, of course, for Rawls's footnote references to it) prior to receiving Wonsup Jung's paper, very interesting in its own right, but here I only want to note a few features of it that are relevant to the latter's argument. It is important

3) John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.273, 274, and 277.

above all to insist that Meade himself was more of a syncretist than an either/or thinker, although the latter direction is the one in which his ideas have been taken by Rawls, by others cited in Jung's paper, and above all by Jung himself. Meade's own way of thinking is exemplified in two passages that I would like to cite: (1) "In my own view what we need is a combination of measures for some socialisation of net property ownership and for a more equal distribution of the property that is privately owned".⁴⁾

(2) "The combination of efficiency-in-use with equity-in-distribution already calls in the United Kingdom for measures for the equalisation and the socialisation of property ownership. These measures are needed, for the most part, to supplement rather than to replace the existing Welfare-State policies."⁵⁾ It should further be noted that the socialist alternative upon which Meade elaborates, with a certain amount of sympathy, is a "Socialist State", by which he means something much closer, at least, in terms of its economic arrangements (which are his almost exclusive concern here), to the state socialism of the former Eastern Bloc than to the worker-managed socialist society that Wonsup Jung has in mind as his model for Rawlsian "liberal socialism". So, first of all, some of the crucial concepts and their interrelationships, as we move from Meade to Rawls to Jung, are not precisely the same; but above all, as I have been trying to insist, Meade's historical context — the British welfare state of 1960s, when the Trade Union were strong and feared, the Cold War was ongoing but there was continuing hope for détente, and to have prophesied that what we call Thatcherism, with its unabashed celebration of what Meade dismissively named "the Brave New Capitalists' Paradise", would eventually triumph even within the dominant wing of the Labour Party would have entailed subjecting oneself to withering ridicule — was vastly different from that of the present. Rawls's own historical context when he

4) J.E. Meade, *Liberty, Equality, and Efficiency* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), p.64.

5) *Ibid.*, p.67.

published *A Theory of Justice*, even when we acknowledge that Rawls was American rather than British and a professional philosopher rather than a professional economist, was much closer to Meade's, I am contending, than it is to ours today.

One may legitimately question just how important this difference of historical context is to the political issues. I maintain that it is of crucial importance especially when we are considering just those kinds of historically-based abstract concepts, such as socialism, with which Wonsup Jung is dealing here, but I do not have the time to argue this point in detail. Indeed, I shall make three brief concluding points, the first two having to do with the argument of his paper, the third having to do with Rawlsian justice. First, in building his case against the compatibility of liberal socialism with Rawlsian justice, Mr. Jung says that workers under liberal socialism "cannot have full ownership rights over the means of production" — meaning as he explains in the following sentence, rights to sell, alienate to others, and destroy them —, and he cites A. M. Honoré's chapter on "Ownership" in *Oxford Essays in Jurisprudence*. But this citation, I believe, fails to do justice to Professor Honoré's very subtle, careful analysis of "ownership". Honoré seeks to show, among other things, the ways which forms of ownership have existed in all societies (including Soviet society), and the special complexities involved in split ownership such as what we find in most large modern corporations. The clear implication of his article, it seems to me, is that "the existence of full [emphasis mine] ownership rights over the means of production", the possession of which Mr. Jung takes to be characteristic of capitalists as opposed to socialist worker-managers, is something of fantasy in relation to the real world even if one considers it desirable.

To the extent to which Mr. Jung does consider this desirable — and I come now to my second concluding point —, that is, to the extent to which he would like to see a property-owning democracy in which there is some capitalist ownership of a thoroughgoing, virtually absolute sort, he

bases much of his argument, if I understand him correctly, on the alleged additional desirability of there being more rather than fewer conceptions of the good realized in any given society. He maintains that liberal socialism as a regime would disallow any capitalist ownership of means of production, and this would of course entail the absence of the peculiar conceptions of the good that only the existence of capitalist firms can sustain; whereas, according to him, the idea of property-owning democracy allows for the co-existence of capitalist and socialist forms of ownership and hence of both capitalist-inspired and socialist-inspired conceptions of the good. The underlying assumptions seems to be that “more is better” and that this accords not only with the section of the Good in *A Theory of Justice* but also, and even more obviously, with the later Rawls’s strong emphasis on democratic pluralism. ... First, it is not clear to me why a liberal socialist regime, as distinguished from a command socialist one, would automatically have to prohibit all capitalist enterprises, unless one just chooses to define such a regime in such a way as to make that exclusion a part of one’s definition. Second, there are good reasons, precisely those developed by Meade in his analysis of “the Brave New Capitalists’ Paradise”, to expect that allowing unregulated capitalist ownership, with its inherent imperatives to maximize efficiency by keeping wages minimal, by downsizing whenever possible, and so on, would tend to drive out worker-managed socialist enterprises, committed as they are to other social values besides sheer efficiency, from many if not eventually all sectors of a given national economy. So I am inclined to think of unbridled capitalism as being in principle much more exclusionary of other forms of enterprise than what I, at least, would understand by “liberal socialism” — just the opposite of Mr. Jung’s claim. And moreover, third, I see no reason to assume that more is always and necessarily better in the domain of conceptions of the good — or in most domains, for that matter —, just as long as we are willing to admit, at least in theory, that some particular conceptions of the good may in fact not be good in a broader sense. Nor

do I think that even John Rawls, impressed as he is especially in his later work by the fact of pluralism in modern societies, is committed to an ethical principle that we have a duty to increase and multiply conceptions of the good *gratia sui*.

This brings me to my final point, which has to do with the function of John Rawls's philosophy itself. For I know that his grand scheme, with its commitment to the irreducible diversity of various conceptions of the good, is such as to question deeply, if not simply to deny, the meaningfulness of my locution, "good in a broader sense", and to insist only that any admissible conception of the good must not violate the principles of justice. The possibility of his taking this line rests on maintaining a sharp distinction between the Right and the Good, a distinction which of course has an older ancestry. But it seems to me, as it has seemed for some time, that this distinction is by no means self-evident, and that it imposes restrictions on discourse in the domains of social and political philosophy that are unnecessary and counter-productive. Moreover, if we except his brief and in many respects problematic 1993 article on "The Law of Peoples",⁶⁾ his treatments of justice in both early and later periods take virtually no account of the global dimensions of the topic that are so salient and inescapable in the contemporary world and that render artificial, in the last analysis, even an ideal theory that is elaborated with a view to its being applied to single nation-states, such as (to cite real-world examples) the United States, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Korea. And there are, in my view, a number of other fundamental problems, by now much rehearsed, with the Rawlsian

6) John Rawls, "The Law of Peoples", *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993), pp. 36-68. At the session of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy at which Mr. Jung's paper and my commentary were presented, a member of audience familiar with Professor Rawls, who was serving as Professor Quine's escort, mentioned that Professor Rawls was currently at work on expanded, book-length discussion of the issues in that paper.

scheme, including the ideal theory approach itself. I in no way wish to fault Mr. Jung for exploring some of the implications of the work of such a prominent contemporary American philosopher without entering into considerations such as these, based as they are on a more external critique of the latter's thought; to have done so in a 3000-word paper would have been an utterly impossible task. But I want to suggest, in concluding my remarks, that we are at an historical point at which we must, while never forgetting to thank Professor Rawls from the bottom of our hearts for his enormous contributions, begin to look toward new paradigms in this area of philosophy.