

ON THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract: *Knowledge is one of the most important factors determining the development of global economy and overcoming the present existing inequalities. Humankind needs a fair distribution of the potential of knowledge because its big social problems and difficulties today are due to the existence of deep-going differences in its possession and use. This paper is an attempt to analyze and present certain philosophical arguments and conceptions justifying cooperative decision-making in the searching for fair distribution of the benefits of knowledge in the globalized world. Made individually or collectively, these decisions do not worsen the status of anyone - rather they can lead to the use of benefits of knowledge in the interest of all people. A fair distribution of resources and achievements of a knowledge-based economy is of key importance for the future of humankind. There exist three significant roads to justification of cooperative decision-making in a global aspect. The main problem here is that of how to ensure equal access of all members of the global society to benefits of knowledge. In this paper are considered communitarianism, J. Habermas` theory of communicative action and public choice theories. The right to participate in activities of the knowledge society and to share in its wealth is related to the use of social and economic benefits. A distributive justice, including such right, could be based on communitarian political and moral values and principles. Any violation of such principles means existence of social injustice, with lasting consequences, including loss of access to natural goods, such as food and water.*

Key words: *knowledge and society, global justice, wealth of knowledge society*

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Introduction

The social benefits of knowledge are not in the center of the present-day discussions in social and political philosophy. These discussions are focused mostly on political justice, freedom and human rights. Problems of the benefits of knowledge and their fair distribution are usually omitted in the better part of more influential critical studies of social justice in a global aspect¹. To have an access to the achievements of knowledge and technologies is a very important human right – it is of one and the same order with all positive human rights.

Knowledge is one of the most important factors determining the development of global economy and society. Humankind needs a fair distribution of resources of knowledge because its major social problems and difficulties today are due to existing deep-going differences in their possession and use. This paper is an attempt to present and analyze certain philosophical arguments and conceptions justifying the importance of collective cooperative decision-making in searching for fair distribution of the benefits of knowledge. The cooperative decisions made individually or collectively do not worsen the status of anyone² – they can lead to the use of benefits of knowledge in the interest of all people. The fair distribution of resources and achievements of a knowledge-based economy is of key importance for the future of humankind.

Today, we are living in an imbalanced and insecure world. Global insecurity and global threats, such as terrorism, refugee flows, regional and global conflicts, global economic and ecological crises and social contradictions, arise out of existing inequalities and clash of different social and political interests. It is a very important task of social-philosophical analyses to explain these phenomena and to define main trends in the development of the present-day world. R. Roussev is completely right that today “the concern for the future of humanities has attained global

¹ Thomas Pogge. “Real World Justice”. In *Current Debates in Global Justice*, Brock, G., D. Moellendorf (eds.), Springer, 2005, pp.29-53;

² Frederik Schick, *Making Choices. A Recasting of Decision Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.106-109;

dimensions”¹. It is necessary to find a way of overcoming such threats and critical analyses could be an effective tool to this end.

1. The Global Rivalry in the Field of Knowledge

It is true that abysmal imbalances exist in the spheres of knowledge and technological innovations in our days. Social and economic inequalities dividing our world are prerequisites for the existence of lasting inequalities in the field of knowledge. Knowledge and its technological advantages is the subject of intensive worldwide economic and political rivalry. At present- and during the past two centuries too, the most developed countries are, and have been, dominating in the spheres of high technologies and scientific innovations. Poor countries and poor people are completely deprived of access to the wealth of knowledge, both scientific and technological.

The large and ever-widening gap between rich and poor countries and between West and East has its roots in developments in the 18th century - the era of a great scientific and industrial revolution. The first scientific revolution of the 17-18th centuries was the result of the development of new technology and machines, coupled with aggressive capitalist expansion². It is the era of appearance of the new expansionist type of human and its transformations in the activist philosophy of Modernity – from Descartes to Kant. At the same time it would be just to highlight that the great scientific and technological progress of the rich colonial countries is based on the using of material, human and natural resources from all over the world.

The unique, rapid scientific and technological progress in the world today, within a lifetime or even in a shorter period of time, stems from the appearance of innovations based on high level knowledge. New information and communication technologies are among the most

¹ Rossen I. Roussev, “Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice: A Response to Recent Concerns for Critical Thinking”. In *Telos*, Vol. 148, Fall 2009, p. 103;

² Vihren Bouzov, “Modernata nauka kato kreativen product na evropeiskata kultura [Modern Science as a Creative Result of European Culture “]. In *Mreji i institucii na znaniето v Rannomoderna Evropa [Networks and Institutions of Knowledge in the Early Modern Europe]*. (Ed. Vihren Bouzov), Veliko Turnovo: Abagar Publishing House, 2010, pp.205-231 (in Bulgarian);

powerful tools of progress on a worldwide scale. Their development is dominated by rich countries and big corporations. Now the established tradition to use material and human resources of the poor countries is going in the extreme. One can say that the existing inequalities in the sphere of knowledge and unfair distribution of the wealth of knowledge are obstacles hampering a balanced development of the world and that its secure future is at stake.

The now deepening economic imbalance on our planet is a lasting result of the ongoing neoliberal globalization. This process is masterminded and streamlined by global financial and political elites in the interest of the richest people. It could be said that in this context the skepticism expressed by classical liberal thinkers as J. Rawls¹ to the project of building up a system of international relations based on social justice and cosmopolitan moral principles is completely justified.

Shaping of a knowledge-based society is a great project of the most developed countries, their coalitions and world organizations. It may become a successful alternative to the neoliberal globalization now going on because it visualizes a rich society based on knowledge and up-to-date technologies. The knowledge society can solve most of the global problems facing mankind – poverty, hunger, diseases and ecological threats. For its construction it is very important to perceive of knowledge as a communitarian social value, as solidarity, cooperation and mutual assistance. This means that the access of all humans to wealth of the knowledge society could become a reality some day on the basis of a morally justified consensus. Humankind should aim to secure opportunity for everybody to benefit from the existing scientific and technological progress, at a reasonable price. But in the world of global capitalism knowledge has turned into a commodity and the subject of fierce rivalry. The development of neoliberal society stems from the relations of mutual enmity and heartless rivalry.

Indeed, one can say that humankind is now living through a deep going crisis in the realization of universal values upheld by the knowledge society. As a strategic resource, knowledge is a subject of intensive world rivalry. The worldwide rivalry in science and innovations is far more

¹ Thomas Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism" . In *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*. V.I., (Eds. Robert Godin, Philip Pettit and Thomas Pogge), Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp.316-317;

intensive than that over natural resources, such as fuel, energy and water, and the control over trade routes. Innovations in science and technology have become a strategic resource that brings huge profits in the long run, which however, divides – rather than unites and improves – the standards of peoples and countries in the world. The uneven distribution of the products of knowledge and corporate ownership of them widens the gap between wealth and poverty and boosts up social and economic imbalances. Paradoxically, the scientific progress incessantly puts restraints on life chances and labour market.

2. Three Ways of Justification of Cooperative Decisions

The crisis featured above could be overcome by means of cooperative political decision-making. Its results should improve the situation of each actor without worsening the status of anyone. Cooperative decisions could be initiated, controlled and imposed by world organizations and a global civil society through the development of a new consciousness of humankind. Nowadays there is a real chance some great countries like Russia and China to realize an initiative for building an alternative economic order based on investments in poor countries. A dominating factor in these efforts to overcome the neoliberal worldwide order should be activity in the interest of people, not in the interest of economic elites.

The analysis offered in this paper is a brief overview of specific methodological problems facing up social thinkers and mankind in efforts to find out justification of cooperative decision-making in all cases and especially in the field of knowledge. A political game theory can be used as methodological tool, but its formal schemes need a philosophical interpretation. Games are models of social relationships where persons or groups of people vie with each other in the quest for resource-apportioning¹. Choices could be motivated by personal selfishness or by an idea of action in favor of the interest of a given group of individuals. Games could be a good model for international relations with nation-states, international organizations and individuals as actors.

The principal problem here is how to reach a consensus between conflicting interests of individual and group actors. Two alternative

¹ John Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior. More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.312;

viewpoints could be outlined in the interpretation of the ways and means of solving conflicts between individual and community. They have different philosophical justifications. Cooperative strategies rely on a social welfare function in their attempts to find out values of individual utility functions – i.e. maximization of benefits or utilities in respect of different individuals. Cooperative strategies rely on holism; corporate strategies rely on methodological individualism. The latter perceives of society as a sum total of atomized individuals. According to holism in social studies “the general” is more important than “the individual”; it meets a ruling social interest.

Efforts to correlate these two types of strategies in an uncontroversial way come up against considerable logical and methodological difficulties, formally expressed in the Paradox of Social Choice. It says that it is impossible to get to maximization of a social welfare function on the basis of satisfaction of certain individual utility functions. It could be demonstrated through an analysis of two familiar choice situations – the Prisoner’s dilemma and the Paradox of vote behavior. The latter example justifies the conclusion that preferences of a group of voters do not correspond to the rational requirement of transitivity. On this basis K. Arrow proves the validity of General possibility theorem for social welfare functions¹. According to it, in order to achieve maximization of a social utility function, a given choice must be subjected to five living conditions of moral nature. They bear on relatively simple cases with two options; however they do not overcome the Paradox of social choice.

When used corporate strategies lead to the formation of coalitions and their domination in the allocation of resources. These strategies cannot find a stable social way-out, one living up to a variety of differing interests. They cannot solve social problems and the problem of fair distribution of knowledge wealth. Use of these strategies in international relations and the distribution of wealth will lead to further growth of the power of rich global elites and powerful countries.

Cooperative strategies are based on a common interest of a certain social group, community or society. Their decisions are oriented to the

¹ Kenneth Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*. New York: John Wiley&Sons, 1963, pp.22-60;

realization of this interest as a collective aim or commonly-shared good. Cooperative strategies lead collective actors to seeking for realization of their preferences and to achieving maximization of existing social utility functions in a successful way on the basis of some communitarian values like solidarity, mutual aid and support.¹

One can note that contradictions between the two types of strategies outlined correspond to the existing discussion on liberalism and communitarianism in the contemporary political philosophy. They are not alternatives – the latter is a project of revision of some unfavorable social consequences of the first one. These consequences became ever clearer in analyzing the failures of the liberal project for justification of cosmopolitanism in the process of neoliberal globalization.²

There are three significant roads to justification of cooperative decisions-making in a global aspect. The problem here is that of ensuring equal access of all members of the global society to the benefits of knowledge.

The first of them is the so-called “moral economy” or cosmopolitanism as a new form of this project in the Globalization era. The main idea of the “moral economy” stems from the assumption that there are communities based on institutions and practices developed in common interest. It is an “economy”, based on commonly-shared good, mutual aid and justice; an economy completely opposed to political economy. Yet it can only regulate relationships in small social communities, under specific natural conditions³. Cosmopolitanism is an attempt to recover this idea in the context of contemporary liberal philosophy, upholding the view that each human being can make a choice with regard to an interest of humankind and universal moral principles.

Now, how can one justify a transition from moral economy to cosmopolitan morale? One of the most important methodological problems pertains to the justification of the existence of a new global altruism or a universal code of cosmopolitan moral norms. How could we justify a

¹ Vihren Bouzov, *Rationality, Decisions and Norms in the Globalization Era (Essays in Practical Logic)*. Veliko Turnovo: IVIS Publishing House, 2011, pp.61-62;

² Vihren Bouzov, “Globalization and Cosmopolitanism: Some Challenges”. In *Dialogue and Universalism N 2*, 2015, pp.236-244;

³ Edward Thompson. *Customs in Common. Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*. New Yourk: New Press, 1991;

universal cosmopolitan set of principles accepted in all cultures and active in intercultural communication¹? This is of great importance for present-existing political practices, because according to globalist-philosophers cosmopolitanism “defines forms of political regulation and law-making that create powers, rights and constraints transcending claims of nation-states and having far-reaching consequences in principle. This is the domain between national and global law and regulation. It is embedded in rule systems and institutions that have already transformed state sovereignty in many ways”².

These problems of justification have become more complicated owing to the fact that cosmopolitanism can be used by economic and political elites as an ideology justifying world domination of the richest countries and aggressive wars vaunted as “humanitarian” interventions of the global community (Iraq, former Yugoslavia, Syria). Certain cosmopolitan norms purport in the policy of the EU, UN initiatives against global poverty, and worldwide activities of some great NGO’s (World Social Forum).

The cosmopolitan principles could be justified in the context of liberal philosophy. As a conception of social justice cosmopolitanism “is individualistic by focusing exclusively on how human beings fare or are treated: on each person’s human rights and socioeconomic share”³.

Cooperative decisions could be also justified taking into account the advantage of common interests in the context of communitarianism. In a recent publication by me I set out the view that mankind should take on to create institutions through which cooperative justice could be realized in the distribution of specific goods of the knowledge economy⁴. I mean a cooperation that is not in the field of trade alone “but is production of public goods, too, such as world peace, prevention of damaging climate

¹ Anna M. Ivanova, *Understanding Others: The Coherentist Method in Intercultural Communication*. In *Dialogue and Universalism* N 2, 2015, p.203;

² David Held. *Cosmopolitanism: Taming Globalization*. In *The Global Transformations Reader. An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. (Ed. David Held, Anthony Mcgrew), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, p.514;

³ Thomas Pogge, *Ibidem*, pp.318;

⁴ Vihren Bouzov, *The Knowledge Society in Global Perspective*. In *Limits of Knowledge Society. Antropology and Cultural Studies (2). Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy*. (Eds. Irina Frasin, Codrin Dinu Vasiliu Iasi), Romania: Colectia Societate&Cunuastere, Institutul European, 2012, pp. 91-105;

change, guaranteeing of mutual aid in case of natural disasters”¹. Shared use of scientific and technical achievements belongs to these goods as well.

The right to participate in activities of the knowledge society and to share in its wealth is related to the use of social and economic benefits. A distributive justice, including such right, could be based on communitarian political and moral values and principles. We need debates and “reasoning together” on the advantages of good life, mutual aid and human solidarity² – it is the best way to defend the communitarian values as a basis for a construction of a new project for realization of common good through fair distribution of the benefits of knowledge. We can stress on the fact that this project could have its support from the poor countries, socially responsible citizens and their NGO’s, and responsible nation’s states governments. Any violation of such principles means existence of social injustice, with lasting consequences, including loss of access to natural goods, such as food and water. Hungry people can be fed, homeless ones can receive shelter, but lagging behind in science and technology brings forth multiple degrees of inequality and difference between the richest and the poorest regions in our world.

Knowledge can be considered as a communitarian social value. World organizations, governments of poor and developing countries, alter-globalist NGO’s and the global civil society as a whole could bring a certain pressure to bear in efforts to foster a democratic accessibility to goods produced by high-level science and technology. We can add here the poor countries and their alliances interested in finding out new dynamic incentives for their development.

Global inequalities between peoples in the world today have their repercussions on inequalities between countries – we are witnessing the existence of new intensive conflicts between rich and poor countries. There is a new trend of building up new alliances of nation-states, jointly seeking to react to challenges of the globalization process and trying to counter negative consequences of neoliberal economic experiments. Examples are the development of the EU and new alliances in Latin America built up

¹ Philip van Parijs. “International Distributive Justice”. In *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, V.II. (Eds. Robert Godin, Philip Petit and Thomas Pogge), Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, p.640; pp.638-652.

² Michael Sandel. *Justice:What’s the Right Thing to Do.*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2010, pp135-136;

through efforts made by countries like Brazil and Argentina. Also, mention should be made of the integration of developing countries to counter dictate by rich ones especially in the field of environmental challenges and ecological constraints on economic growth (the Copenhagen Summit 2009 and the Kyoto process after). Another unifying idea of developing countries could be the securing of equitable access to benefits of the knowledge economy-it could be a more serious source of future conflicts than cultural differences. It could hardly be asserted that rich countries will continue to exploit, unpunished, resources, experts and labor of poor countries, without any reaction.

It could be said that the attainment of a consensus ensuring such accessibility to the products of knowledge could be steady enough, if it is based on shared respect for values and is realized by people in a global community, not by rich countries and their elites only.

Other vehicles of justification of cooperative decision making in the field of knowledge economy and shared use of its goods could be the critical communicative theory of Jurgen Habermas and the public choice theories.

Individualist and cooperative strategies of decision making are opposed to each other in the conception of Habermas¹. The first correspond to corporate decisions and have a justification in the context of instrumental rationality. Communicative action is based on moral values and rules defining the framework of a discourse – they are accepted in an intersubjective way in the holding of a free discussion. Habermas rightfully binds the cooperative strategies to the efforts of all participants in public communication to achieve a consensus or a democratic association of citizens based on collectively accepted values. His humanist criticism of neoliberal capitalism could be a good road to social and political justification of the cooperative models of rational decision-making.

According to the public choice theorists it would be more advantageous in some situations of decision-making if an agent chose a social utility function and did not seek an individual maximization.² They

¹ Jurgen Habermas. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984-1987;

² James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock. *The Calculus of Consent. Logical Foundations of the Constitutional Democracy. The Collected Papers of J. M. Buchanan*, V.3. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999, pp.31-40.

argue that such organic entities as “society”, “community” and “people” do not exist. The choice made according to the social utility function is thus subjected to individual models of decision-making. This type of individualism and nominalism could not be successful in searching for justification of a collective decision. Alternatively, a collective or some community could be taken in as a basic unit of an analysis and a cooperative choice could be bound up to common goals and principles of common interest. So, we can define a social utility function as an expression of group interests.

In conclusion, one could say that cooperative decisions could be justified in different ways which could be the basis for reconsidering the present-day global policy of uneven distribution of the benefits of knowledge economy. This process could open up new prospects for the existence of a balanced, sustainable and dynamic development of humankind.

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