

Nozick's View of Kant's Theory

According to Robert Nozick, prohibiting people from coercing others constitutes a legitimate moral constraint that rests on "the underlying Kantian principle that individuals are ends and not merely means; they may not be sacrificed or used for the achieving of other ends without their consent." Thus, Nozick seemed to hold that Kant's theory supported his own views on freedom.^{80, 81, 82}

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Nozick argued that the negative right to freedom from the coercion of others implies that people must be left free to do what they want with their own labor and with whatever products they manufacture by their labor. This claim, in turn, implies that people must be left free to acquire property, to use it in whatever way they wish, and to exchange it with others in free markets (as long as the situation of others is not thereby harmed or "worsened"). Thus, the libertarian view that coercive restrictions on freedom are immoral (except when needed to restrain coercion) is also supposed to justify the free use of property, freedom of contract, a free market system, and the elimination of taxes to pay for social welfare programs. However, there is no basis for any positive rights or for the social programs they might require.

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the Burmese population was mired in poverty. Unocal thereby worsened Burma's highly unequal and unjust distribution of wealth and power. We turn now to discuss an approach to ethics that focuses on the concept of justice. We begin by looking at a controversy in which the central ethical issue is one of justice.

2.4.1: Wages in the Fast Food Industry

In September 2014, thousands of fast food workers around the United States went on one-day strikes and demonstrated to protest the low wages paid by the largest fast food corporations, including McDonald's, Wendys, Burger

King, Taco Bell, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Domino's Pizza. Hundreds of fast food workers were arrested.⁸³ The strikes and protests had begun 21 months earlier in New York, then spread to Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, and Kansas City. Then fast food workers in Los Angeles, Memphis, and Raleigh got involved. By August 2013, workers in 60 cities were participating in the one-day walkouts and marches. By the end of 2013, over 100 cities were involved, and by the middle of 2014, over 150 cities were involved. In many cities the protestors chanted the same refrain: "Hey, hey, what do you say, we demand fair pay." At a workers' rally in New York, organizers fired up the crowd with chants of "This is not about politics, it's about justice" and "Welcome to the capital of inequality."⁸⁴ *Time*

magazine reported that the protests and strikes were “based on the idea that their wages are inherently unfair, perpetuate inequality, and fail to move them up the economic ladder.”⁸⁵

Cashiers and crew workers at McDonald’s and some other large fast food companies make an average of \$8.25 an hour before taxes; for the entire fast food industry, however, the average is \$9.09. That is less than the hourly wages of workers in any other industry. Cafeteria workers, for example, get \$10.31 an hour; retail workers in general merchandise stores get \$11.20; and housekeepers get \$12.68. Moreover, unlike other workers, the average fast food worker is not given 40 hours of work a week, but an average of just 24 hours a week. A fast food worker earning the average wage for the average hours earns less than \$12,000 a year.⁸⁶ The protesting workers argued that the fast food companies should pay a “living wage” (i.e., a wage high enough to live on). Even if an employee was given 40 hours of work a week, McDonald’s pay of \$8.25 an hour would total only \$16,500 a year before taxes, insufficient in most U.S. metropolitan areas to support a single person, let alone a family. Yet 68 percent of fast food workers are adults and a quarter of all fast food workers have children.⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, about 40 percent of fast food workers live in poverty, unable to provide themselves with adequate food, housing, health care, transportation, and other basic goods. To make ends meet while working for the fast food companies, more than half of all fast food workers rely on taxpayer-funded government assistance. A study found that the wages fast food companies paid their workers ended up costing U.S. taxpayers more than \$7 billion a year in public assistance to make up for the companies’ low wages.⁸⁸

On a website called “McResource” (now discontinued) McDonald’s unintentionally acknowledged its wages were not enough to live on.⁸⁹ The website offered employees economic advice and a sample budget. However, normal living expenses were more than a McDonald’s wage could cover, so the budget assumed that a fast food worker would have a second full-time job to make up the difference. Besides advising workers to look for a second job, the website explained how to file for government assistance. Employees were also advised to break food into pieces to make it go further, sing to relieve stress, take at least two vacations a year, and give good tips to their masseuses, pool boys, and nannies. Ironically, the website also noted that fast food, although cheap, was an “unhealthy choice” because it is “high in calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar, and salt and may put people at risk for becoming overweight.”⁹⁰

The protesting workers were demanding that fast food wages be raised to \$15.00 an hour. Some observers argued that those higher wages would mean substantially higher prices for fast food. Yet researchers at Purdue University found that raising wages to \$15 an hour would cause only

a 4.3 percent increase in fast food prices.⁹¹ In Denmark, McDonald’s pays starting workers over the age of 18 more than \$20 an hour, yet the price of a Big Mac was only 35 cents more than in the United States.⁹² In the United States, the wildly popular fast food company In-N-Out Burger, which has over 300 outlets in the Southwest, pays a starting hourly wage of \$11 plus a complete benefits package (McDonald’s gives its cashiers and crew workers virtually no benefits). While McDonald’s charges \$3.99 for its “Big Mac,” In-N-Out charges \$3.40 for its equivalent, the “Double-Double.” In fast food surveys, In-N-Out food is consistently ranked at the top, while McDonald’s is at or near the bottom.

Numerous groups and individuals agreed that McDonald’s wages—and fast food wages in general—were too low. Minnesota’s congressman Keith Ellison stated: “In the richest country in the world, you should not be working full time and still be on food stamps.”⁹³ One online blogger wrote that she was glad workers were “coming together at fast food stores to demand justice.”⁹⁴ Another blogger wrote: “The fast food industry today in the U.S. is a veritable buffet of injustice.”⁹⁵ An NGO stated on its website that it would “continue to stand with fast food and other low-wage workers in their fight for justice.”⁹⁶

Many people criticized the huge gap between fast food workers’ wages and the salaries of fast food executives. A 2014 study found that “fast food workers earn the lowest average wage of all occupations” in the United States, while fast food executives are among “the best paid . . . anywhere in the economy.”⁹⁷ In 2013, the average CEO in the fast food industry made \$23,813,482. This wage was more than 1,200 times the total annual income of a fast food worker with a 40-hour week who made the average hourly wage of \$9.09; it was 1,900 times the income of the worker who worked only the average number of weekly hours and earned the average wage. Between 2000 and 2013, the average income of fast food CEOs grew by 400 percent, while the average income of fast food workers grew by 0.3 percent. Commenting on these inequalities, an editorial stated: “bosses and stockholders living an extravagant lifestyle with the employees hardly or not getting by is simply an injustice.”⁹⁸

2.4.2: Standards of Justice and Fairness

As in the controversy over fast food wages, disputes in business often refer to *justice* or *fairness*. This is the case, for example, when one person accuses another of *unjustly* discriminating against him or her, showing *unjust* favoritism toward someone else, not shouldering a *fair* share of the burdens involved in some cooperative venture, or takes an unfairly large portion of a cooperative venture’s benefits. Resolving disputes like these requires that we