

Justice in Economy and Trade: Ten dimensions

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Fairness in trade means fair conditions of exchange. This is a cornerstone of the economy in general and of trade in particular. In a future-oriented business ethics, the fundamental value of *justice* pertains to the following ten aspects:

1. Performance-related justice *means that every person (indeed every living being, i.e. also of non-human nature) who is involved in the production, trade, sale or disposal of a product must be given their due on the basis of their performance.*

Performance-related justice allows for a fair assessment of and compensation for performance. In trade, this is reflected in a fair exchange in the purchase and sale of products, with the entire production chain from the raw material down to the end-user and the disposal process being taken into account.

2. Needs-related justice *means that a fair exchange of goods must take into consideration human needs, i.e. the subsistence minimum and a dignified life.*

Apart from performance, human need is the second criterion for economic justice. The fact that human beings are more than their performance and do not acquire their salvation through performance is at the core of the Christian view of humankind. Performance-related and needs-related are not opposites but must complement each other, because the dignity of human beings and their non-human environment is respected best when both efficiency and its limits and people's dependence on the performance of others are recognised as a criterion for a humane life.

3. Distributive justice *ensures that goods are distributed fairly, while performance and needs are taken into measured consideration to pursue the aim of social equalisation.*

The shares of countries and continents in world trade are far apart and are growing even farther apart; this distribution is an urgent problem of justice. The ethical acceptability of market mechanisms and government and multilateral liberalisation or regulation policies must be measured against, among other things, whether they facilitate or aggravate fair distribution.

4. Justice as equal treatment (among other things, with respect to gender): *this allows for equality of opportunity.*

Equality is a central characteristic of justice throughout the various ethical conceptions of justice. The equality of all human beings is substantiated differently in the different ethical approaches. For theological ethics, equality in terms of the precept of equal treatment is substantiated in various ways: in the theology of creation, by the proposition that all human beings are a living image of God; in Christology (in terms of Christ), in Jesus Christ's offer of liberation, which is addressed to everyone; and in pneumatology, by the spirit of love through which we respect our neighbours as ourselves. The principle of equal treatment and equality of opportunity is also of particular significance in terms of the *equal treatment of genders*.

5. Participatory justice *means the fair, appropriate participation in decision-making of all those involved in an economic process.*

Justice is not an absolute quality but must be jointly renegotiated and developed according to the above-mentioned criteria for every new context. Justice is a participative process. This participative structuring of the world economy concerns all the levels from the small producer who negotiates a fair price, to democratic participation in the establishment of national trade policies, and to equal rights in government cooperation for the negotiation of international treaties. Fair participation is an essential instrument capable of reducing the number of trade conflicts.

6. Ecological justice *means a sustainable use and fair distribution of resources, as well as a reduction in and a fair distribution of ecological burdens. A fair distribution of resources and burdens extends to three dimensions: between generations living today, between today's and tomorrow's generations, and between human beings and their non-human environment.*

When distribution conflicts arise, justice with regard to ecology stipulates the preferential rule that the elementary needs (basic needs) of today's or future generations or the non-human environment have priority over the non-elementary needs of today's or future generations or the non-human environment. The right to a subsistence minimum (cf. Ch. 3.1) has priority over the right to self-realisation (cf. Ch. 3.3). One of the prerequisites for ecological justice is the cost transparency in relation to goods. Ecological justice also contains an eminently peace-securing dimension since the fight for resources is one of the most frequent causes of conflict (cf. Ch. 6.21). Trade is ethically acceptable when it does justice to the environment and does not appropriate any access to scarce resources by violent means.

7. Allocation-related justice *in terms of business ethics means the fair placement and weighting of production factors, with the other nine aspects of justice taken into due account.*

Allocation – i.e. the allocation of the production factors land/natural resources, labour and capital both in weighting and in geographical allocation – is one of the economy's major tasks. Trade, the worldwide movement of production factors, plays a central role in this. The relation between globality and locality is a problem of this aspect of justice. Trade is fair when allocation is fair. In a market economy, allocation is primarily carried out through pricing. This is why in market-economic conditions, fair prices are crucial for allocation to be fair.

8. Relational justice *views a trading partner not merely as an economic object and a homo oeconomicus who creates maximum benefits, but also as a human being with whom a relationship is built up.*

The globalised economy does not only result in a rapidly increasing mobility of goods, but also of people and of relations between trading partners. "Loyalty" to a producer, or of consumers to a brand or firm, is rapidly decreasing. This aspect of justice raises the question as to how this mobility of relationships, which in many trading sectors is almost total by now, can be replaced by a humane mixture of long-term and changing trade relations without keeping flagging production structures artificially alive. A humane economy always measures economic aims against the yardstick enjoyed by people, and thus also by trading partners and their personnel.

9. Procedural justice *means calculable, constitutional (publicly and privately) regulated, transparent, corruption-free and thus fair procedures in trade relations.*

Justice with regard to procedures is a necessary constituent particularly of justice in terms of equal treatment and impartiality, but also in relation to justice with regard to performance, participation and distribution. In trade relations, *monitoring*, the continuous surveillance of and checks on compliance with trade criteria, is a necessary component of fair procedures.

10. Interlinked justice *places the various aspects of justice in relation to each other as in a network since no aspect alone is tantamount to justice as a whole. This interlinkage also prevents justice from being rendered absolute. It safeguards the relations (relational nature) with and the equilibrium between the other fundamental values.*

Every fundamental value can become a negative value if it is rendered absolute. The basic ethical principle of love unfolds in various fundamental values such as reconciliation, freedom, justice, human dignity, solidarity, etc., which, however, only lead to love if they remain related to each other, relational, interlinked. This is particularly true for the balance between freedom and justice.