
Book Notes: The Work of Global Justice: Human Rights as Practices, by Fuyuki Kurasawa

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Book Note**THE WORK OF GLOBAL JUSTICE: HUMAN RIGHTS AS PRACTICES, by Fuyuki Kurasawa¹**

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IN *THE WORK OF GLOBAL JUSTICE*, sociologist Fuyuki Kurasawa articulates a novel understanding of the relationship between human rights and global justice by transcending liberal and formalist understandings of human rights as either abstract legal entitlements or outcomes of processes in a given juridical order. While recognizing the importance of traditional legal avenues to achieve human rights, Kurasawa looks beyond such mechanisms to construct a comprehensive understanding of human rights as practices. For Kurasawa, human rights exist as contested spaces where individuals and communities struggle to achieve justice. This reconceptualization allows Kurasawa to discuss the work of global justice, in other words, the way in which actors exercise their agency in order to pursue emancipatory projects at the global and local levels.

After establishing his initial theoretical framework, Kurasawa outlines five ways in which global justice is contested through human rights struggles that are manifested in the work and actions of individuals around the world. These modes of practice are: first, intersubjective in that they involve the creation of meaning through the mutual interaction of two or more parties; second, occurring within public spaces at local, national, and global levels; and third, becoming transnationalized, as human rights are increasingly understood as widespread practices that respond to issues and abuses that know no geographical boundaries. The first practice identified by Kurasawa is the process of bearing witness. This involves the open and public acknowledgment of injustices and human rights atrocities, and it is the foundational practice upon which the other four are premised. Without public acknowledgement of human rights violations, one cannot hope

1. (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2007) 239 pages.

to achieve global justice in their wake. Yet bearing witness is, itself, an intersubjective struggle, as the process faces failure in the form of apathy, complacency, denial, and compassion fatigue.

The process of forgiveness is the second aspect of the practice of human rights. Forgiveness requires a substantial amount of labour on the part of the individuals whose rights have been violated. Achieving justice through forgiveness is difficult, however, if the result is impunity for perpetrators. Instead, the author proposes a process of forgiveness that combines retributive justice and restorative justice with a focus on remedying not only the acts themselves—to the extent possible—but also the structural relations of domination that made such abuses possible.

Foresight is the first practice described by Kurasawa that takes the work of global justice from a retrospective reflection of past injustices and instead looks to preventing them in the future. This is achieved primarily through the work of global civil society in disseminating information about potential human rights abuses. Foresight itself is dialogical, public and transnational, and thus engages the global public in the process of building a farsighted cosmopolitanism that looks towards alternatives to the current world order.

Providing aid where foresight fails involves the conceptualization of a transnational ethic of care that spans borders. Using the HIV/AIDS pandemic as an example, the author emphasizes the relationship between material redistribution, which might address North-South power imbalances, and human rights/global justice. For Kurasawa, achieving the latter requires recognition of the importance of the material basis upon which human rights are predicated and the role of the current world order in preventing these material needs from being met.

Solidarity is the fifth and final practice identified by Kurasawa and is of particular import in the post-Cold war era, which is characterized by neoliberalism and globalization. Global solidarity to achieve human rights requires moving beyond categories of social homogeneity to demand a form of global redistributive justice that would remove the existing structural barriers to achieving human rights. Kurasawa concludes by laying out a framework for an emancipatory globalization; one that leaves the reader hopeful that empowered individuals and communities will achieve some level of global justice and see, in the words of the author, global justice not as a “teleological end point ... but a labourious and imperfect working-through without finality.”²

2. *Ibid.* at 200.