

RESPONSIBILITY AND OBLIGATION IN THE FACE OF MODERN DAY SLAVERY: THE DEMANDS ON GLOBAL CITIZENS TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE FOR SLAVES

by

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There are likely more than 45 million slaves in the world today. Economist Kevin Bales defines slaves as people whose freedom and autonomy have been denied, who are paid nothing above subsistence, and who are maintained in these conditions through violence or the threat of violence. I am especially concerned with exploring the nature of the various relationships that everyday citizens share with these modern slaves, and establishing what, if any, obligations such citizens have to act on behalf of modern slaves.

Contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre asserts that humans are storytelling beings caught up in real stories (i.e. narrative quests) that involve both ourselves and numerous others. As such, our lives are inextricably intertwined with the lives of these others. Therefore, we cannot go about our lives with little or no thought toward how our actions and decisions impact the lives of others.

Consequently, living in shared communities requires that we consider and care about justice within those communities. Another contemporary philosopher, John Finnis, distinguishes two specific types of justice: distributive and commutative. Distributive justice deals with distributing resources, opportunities, profits, advantages, and responsibilities to individuals, with the ultimate purpose of benefiting the common good. Commutative justice considers what is required for individual wellbeing in communities where individuals and groups must live and work alongside one another, and establishes standards for such relationships. It also helps to determine what should be done when one person or group of people has been mistreated by another person or group. This can include, but is not limited to, ideas of correction, restitution, or restoration.

The ultimate goal of discussing distributive and commutative justice is to argue that the narrative quests of individual global citizens are intertwined with the stories of countless slaves across the globe. Some slaves may be our immediate neighbors, and some slaves may be distant others. Yet we still find ourselves linked by numerous threads that tie our stories together. Our duties in justice, both distributive and commutative, demand that we work on behalf of those who are enslaved. But what does justice require that we practically do to help such people? In the end, I make several suggestions that will help us work toward achieving greater justice for the world's slaves.