Hi Diamond,

I've been thinking about your comments, particularly the following:

"In other words, justice seems to be this subconscious meeting of the minds where both parties receive the same or equal portions of collateral. The issue with this concept is that not everyone believes that all individuals should receive an equal piece of the available collateral. When this mindset is instilled in people's minds for generations, certain people become marginalized and oppressed."

I'm wondering if the question is not whether individuals/communities/societies believe all people should have an equal piece of the available collateral, but rather if people should have their fair share of the collateral with the freedom to participate in the labor market, as Sen argues.  However, access and participation in a capitalist system (as we well know) does not mean equal portions of the bounty of that labor market to all participants.  Does this therefore mean our labor market is inherently flawed because it creates unequal distribution of goods?  Or is this simply an outcome of a labor market that rewards hard work, effort, and luck?  Probably - but it's a different question than believing all persons should receive equal collateral.  My understanding of equal distribution of collateral -- irregardless of effort and based only on citizenship -- is the root of a socialist perspective.  (And yet even in socialism, there often remains a desire to use personal agency to achieve "more" collateral based on hard work and effort - which would then lead to different portions, and is at the core of why pure socialism (or its State-controlled sister, communism) generally fails.)  Is this a commentary on social justice or human nature?  Said another way, is marginalization a result of an unfair labor system (capitalism in this case) rather than the lack of a subconsious meeting of the minds?

You clearly got me thinking -- thank you!

Hi all! Thank you for your great comments. In order, some thoughts here:

Inge, I was thinking of you when exploring different economic systems, particularly your relationship with Cuba. You ask "how the greater equitable distribution of free quality education in Cuba or Russia compares to the socioeconomic disparities we experience in our culture," particularly in relation to education access. From where I sit, I have observed the distribution of "free quality education" in Cuba/Russia -- and even China, North Korea (to the extent available), Venezuela, Bolivia, and elsewhere -- as a narrative hiding a more complicated truth. In communist regimes - like Cuba - education might be available to all, but -- whether that education is offered at the same quality to all students, and whether opportunities based on that education are fair for all students, and whether the wealthier (read: politically connected) students have access to better educational opportunities -- the reality is that deep discrepancies within communist systems still exist in their economic systems. The difference is how those discrepancies of access are flavored. In the US, as you well note, our more visible differences lead to different employment opportunities and perpetuated socio-economic differences. And yet: would we call a traditional Cuban family more economically secure than a traditionally American family? Probably not?

Abby, thinking about your questions, "Students don't always have equal access to top quality education and educators. How do we pay for fairness and who is responsible for paying for it? And doesn't that make it inherently unfair if someone else is paying for someone else's choices?" seems to be a significant area of discontent among many of us these days. One component underlying these questions is the question of prioritization: individual or common good. Public education addresses the morality of the common good; a mother is focused on her individual child, or a childless couple is assessing the opportunity cost of taxes covering education that they don't use. Is "fair" ensuring our society as a whole is populated by educated young people, or is "fair" associated with a work ethic and the family's choices made to pay or not pay for an individual's choice in school? My ontology explains our nature of being in terms of relationships, which means I default to the common good, so personally I am interested in seeking to provide equal and equitable access (although I am coming to think it's ultimately possible to make things fully equitable), and then focusing on the character of the student, i.e. work ethic, focus, citizenship, etc. Not an easy one. Thank you for bringing up these questions.

Diamond, your question on universal health care and possibly universal education is intriguing. In International Development, we sometimes combine these two sectors under "Human Development" as they are often interrelated (Exhibit A: Covid + School). My familiarity with Germany (Inge would know more) is that education is free, including at the university level, just as health care is considered a right. In Canada, there is no national education system, but attending school is a law (similar to the US), and yet they have a national health care system. Most African countries with which I’m familiar charge “school fees” for uniforms, books, etc – sadly making school inaccessible for some – and likewise clinics charge fees, although government clinics are heavily subsidized by the government. Seems this would be an interesting question to research! Regarding your question of tracking marginalized populations, and if capitalism does a better job, I can only answer based on my own experience, which is not backed up by empirical research; my response is categorically no. It has only been in the past couple of decades that Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) has taken hold as a consistent practice in the development sector, including measuring the impact of education outcomes on marginalized populations. In fact, often the metric, if there had been one, is whether a profit is earned or the dollars obligated were spent. On the other hand, countries with more socialist economies (India, Sweden, for example) have been much better at tracking their results, and authoritarian governments (say China) are rigorous in their tracking of education statistics. Data is not always made available, but tracking has been consistent. What has been your experience in this? Have you observed something different?