

# Injustice in Pandemic Narrations

## Philosophical Reflections

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### Introduction

When can we consider a pandemic to be a mere misfortune and when can we see it as an injustice? Like any other natural disaster, a pandemic can be understood as an unavoidable calamity, with no one – no human, no god or devil – being responsible for its occurrence (cf. Shklar 1990). The fact that human activities can influence natural events – the current climate change may serve as the prime example here – raises the question of how the consequences of this agency affect our understanding of (in)justice. Rendering the experience of a pandemic in narrative form allows us to address these moral problems in various ways. Factional pandemic narratives may, in a similarly way as fictional ones,<sup>1</sup> exclude one or more relevant social groups or present a one-sided perspective, e.g., by focusing only on health policy issues only the suffering of an affected patient. Thus, the “morality” within a narrative depends on the perspective and the persuasive motivation of the narrator (Davis and Lohm 2020, 31).

As a moral philosopher, I typically seek to move beyond the subjective limitations inherent in a particular point of view. However, it is the premise of my approach that such a move does not entail abandoning narrative as such. Analyzing pandemic narratives, especially factual ones, from a meta-perspective allows one to analyze the causal chain of events: what is the source of the harmful infection? Did a virus escape from a laboratory as a biotechnological modification? Has it been deliberately or inadvertently introduced into an indigenous population by settlers and colonialists, as in the case of smallpox in Native Americans and Aboriginal peoples?

Analyzing various narratives through such a broad lens allows for the identification of potentially responsible actors (individuals and institutions) and the consid-

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1 For the difference between factional vs. fictional, cf. Schaeffer (2009). I am here mainly in favor of the pragmatic definition in which a factual narrative advances claims of referential truthfulness, whereas fictional narrative advances no such claims.

eration of existing structural injustices that manifest themselves in the context of a pandemic event, sometimes against our former assumptions.

As this volume illustrates, fictional scenarios can serve as normative thought experiments for best- or worst-case scenarios regarding pandemic times. A novel such as Albert Camus' *The Plague* addresses social harms (a whole city is under quarantine and excluded from socio-political welfare politics), misbehavior (some protagonists try to benefit economically from the crisis), and advocates humanitarian action (the doctor must decide to stay or flee, and finally decides to stay at a great personal cost). This story is a fiction, but it has practical dimensions as people in pandemic situations always face similar dilemmas and must make similar choices.

Specific reflection on the moral implications of actions is needed for health policy considerations. This is because in health policy discourses the factual, the non-factual, and sometimes even the fictional come together. For example, health policies focus on measures for infection reduction which are backed by factual knowledge on transmission risks. But they also draw on non-factual, anticipated assumptions regarding the future ("X will flatten the curve"). Embedded stories and anecdotes about patients, often used as illustration in public health communication, finally can be seen as the fictional element. The epistemic dimension of infection might be framed in fictional narratives in a way that allows to demonstrate the possible consequences of human actions, often in moral categories such as good/bad, and in relation to stories about the probable causes. Such narratives involving an epistemic and a normative dimension can be understood as "mixed judgments." The combination of both premises, namely about how the world is and how the world should be, stresses the fact that both dimensions are object of our social deliberations. Narratives are part of our social discourse, especially when we debate over real pandemics. For example, a policy proposal about whether to declare a vaccination mandate or to put infected people under quarantine gives rise to normative conclusions about which intervention is justified for which reasons (e.g., to reduce the number of cases by interfering with the right to bodily self-determination or even with the right to freedom).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, charges of "injustice" were frequent – especially in the media. For example, issues of social inequality between the global south and north were discussed with regard to the access to vaccines; there were also controversies on how particular treatments discriminated against particular social groups, e.g., the elderly or children (cf. Schweda & Ellrich-Groppe's contribution in this volume). Some claimed that people who did not believe in the pandemic or in its harms were treated in a discriminatory way.<sup>2</sup>

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2 German media were full of headlines using terms such as "injustice" or "unjust." Some examples (my translations): "Survey: Children consider Corona measurements as unjust" (*Telepolis* 3.5.21); "Double injustice. Corona increases social injustices worldwide" (*gruene-bundestag.de*),

What does “injustice” mean in these competing claims? In the following, I will parse several meanings of the term, relative to the scenarios in which it is deployed, and argue for the importance of a nuanced consideration of the concept of injustice in relation to the narrative. Narrative, it will be claimed here, helps to bring together competing claims of and multiple perspectives on injustice in a way that helps us to de- and reconstruct injustice conceptually.

First, the concept “injustice” needs to be subjected to a more detailed and contextualized explanation to unfold its powerful normative meaning. My first aim is thus to contribute to an ethically informed analysis of current discursive practices and to suggest a more differentiated description of what is at stake in various uses of the term. Secondly, I want to show how different philosophical-conceptual considerations of injustice can allow direct and indirect forms of criticism by outlining selected philosophical theories in a sorting scheme. This is meant to show both the existing philosophical discussions can inform narratives and how a philosophically informed analysis can be used to bring together the multiple perspectives always involved in narrative claims of injustice.

## Injustice as Ubiquitous Moral Experience

Justice is a central but multi-layered concept in moral philosophy. Since Greek antiquity, ethical theories have approached it in different ways. In modern ethics as well as in current legal and political philosophy, theories of justice have moved to the center of debates on morality, whereas questions of personal conduct (e.g., what is a Good Life) and values have been relegated to the more subjective domain of individual ethics. As a modern guiding principle of democratic welfare systems, justice is understood as justificatory principle for any legal order and of the distribution of material and immaterial goods (e.g., by John Rawls). Justice, as a normative concept, is relational, as it always requires an intersubjective justification of how others are treated in a system. As a concept, justice provides a positive, idealistic, and normative definition. The common term for designating a deviation from this norm is “injustice” as a negation, understood as normative critique of reality. But what does this negative definition mean in concrete terms?

Interestingly, the language of injustice shows a long pre-theoretical or everyday list of usages – the term is already used by young children long before they have a more developed theory of what justice means. For example, we use the term unjust to address unequal treatment (e.g. when others are favored), but do we use it also

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“Easing restrictions for vaccinated people? This is unfair. Poessel explains” (*BR.de*, April 4, 2021).

when we are favored over others? It is used to describe unfair treatment when something we feel entitled to is withheld from us or when we do not have the same chances to achieve something in a self-declared egalitarian society. However, the term unjust is also used in reference to claims such as “you don’t follow the rules”; “I cannot assert my interests”; “my benefit is less (than desired or that of others)”; or, “I am not respected, my self-esteem is undermined.” This scope already gives an idea of how complex our understanding of (in)justice actually is.

Philosophical approaches that focus on injustice (rather than justice) are rare but have received more attention in recent years. Injustice has been described as one of the “epiphenomena” in moral debates, namely as the absence or counterpart of *justice*, a concept more commonly addressed in ethical theories (Flügel-Martinsen/Martinsen 2016, 53; Shklar 1990). But of course, in many normative definitions of justice, one can also discern basic assumptions about what injustice is. For the purpose of thinking about pandemic injustices, it may be productive to review and compare different definitions to ensure that they are applicable to address the complex situation of a pandemic: one should consider the relationship between the health care system and state politics, the context of professional care where resources among different needy individuals are allocated, as well as the role of scientific knowledge production to justify infection containment measures. It is also important to consider counter-pandemic measures that can impact everyday life and small social interactions between citizens or within families.

## The Many Philosophical Faces of Injustice and Their Relevance for Pandemic Narratives

I have therefore deliberately selected different approaches, which are neither exhaustive nor without alternatives.<sup>3</sup> However, they are very well suited for capturing and exploring different dimensions of the pandemic and the emerging debates on injustice related to it. Some authors have already briefly addressed a short list of different approaches to injustice, e.g., a “plural theory of justice” (Axel Honneth). My attempt here is not to analyze these debates in light of their terminological or philosophical-conceptual differences. I am also not providing a detailed analysis of which theory is better, more convincing, or more or less consistent. My main intention is to give a conceptual overview and to show how each approach is suitable for analyzing various dimensions of pandemic injustice through narrative.

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3 The overview here cannot and will not do justice to all details of each philosophical approach. My main aim here is to bring some philosophical concepts in conversation with other disciplines.

## **Maldistribution: Unequal Allocation of Resources between Few and Many**

In general, theories of injustice struggle over the specific object of justice that we want to have organized in a just, fair way. The object can be of distributive, material nature that requires redistribution (e.g., material goods such as food, water, money), or is it of a procedural, abstract nature (e.g., political rights of participation or rights of socio-cultural recognition). Many contemporary philosophers accept both definitions, but that raises questions of prioritization. A very common understanding of social injustice involves “maldistribution.” As Bufacchi explains (2012, 1), maldistribution describes an unequal allocation of social or natural benefits and/or burdens which are distributed according to criteria on an institutional or inter-individual level that not everyone – especially those who receive less than others – could reasonably accept (Bufacchi 2012, 9). In a pandemic, maldistribution does normally not address the spread of the infectious agent as we are “all in the same boat” in terms of susceptibility, as the factory worker in Laura Bäuml’s contribution to this volume argues. But when it comes to the allocation of resources that can protect or minimize effects of infection, then maldistribution becomes an issue. In a comparison of experts’ observations regarding the ethical challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale, a research team of which I was a member found big differences between high-, middle-, and low-income countries (Vonderschmitt, Wöhlke, Schicktanz 2023). In low- and middle-income countries, the effects of pandemic containment measures as well as access to vaccines or other protective material was distributed unequally (often extremely so) between people of poorer and better incomes. While poor people did not necessarily suffer more from the infection, they did suffer disproportionately from socio-economic effects.

## **Structural Oppression: How some Social Groups Suffer more than Others in Pandemic Times**

Young (1990) has proposed the concept of “oppression” as an adequate way of addressing the various forms of structural injustice in political discourse. The term describes how some social groups “suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and to express their needs, thoughts and feelings” (38), “not because a tyrannical power coerces them but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (39). She differentiates between exploitation, exclusion, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Not all five characteristics may be directly relevant or specific to the pandemic context. However, it seems helpful to briefly describe them. Exploitation, according to Young, enacts a structural relationship between social groups (e.g., class or gender) where power and inequality determine what work is, who does what for whom, and how it is rewarded. This

structural system leads to the fact that a few people accumulate while others lose out. Exploitation is therefore related to what Bufacchi (2012) calls maldistribution (cf. above), but Young emphasizes the relevance of the structural power of the institutions in place. Thus, redistribution of goods alone cannot eliminate exploitation. Exploitative structures in health care work, for example, can be seen in the hierarchies between nurses and doctors. During the pandemic, nurses invested a great deal of emotional and personal resources in caring for patients, and often for their own family members, but received less social recognition and economic benefits, at least in comparison with doctors. Studies suggest that the structural effects of working conditions before and after COVID-19 led to an immense turnover of labor, moral distress, and burnout, especially in this group (Kurtzman et al. 2022). Nevertheless, there is a great deal of reluctance to address the hierarchy between nurses and doctors.

The second concept, marginalization, is defined by Young as the structural and material deprivation of a group of people from meaningful participation in social life. A third form is powerlessness. Young describes it as a lack of authority status (1990, 53) associated with absent or very low occupational status (e.g., professor versus factory worker). She observed that norms of respectability in our society are associated with professional cultures. The emerging role of experts in policymaking and the proximity of some experts to political power during the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as an example of this, while others – non-experts as well as academics from areas considered less important (e.g., humanities and social sciences) – have often suffered a loss in status. Cultural imperialism, the next concept in Young's typology, goes beyond the economic and material parts of our social lives. It refers to the ways in which a dominant group's experience and culture is seen as universal and normative. Culturally dominated groups, on the other hand, are problematically stereotyped through their social practices, becoming "marked" and singled out as behaving in abnormal ways, or they become invisible. In pandemic times this may become relevant when cultural views on the body, illness, or health-related issues are dominated by the perspectives of a powerful group, which interprets the body and illness in a very one-sided way. Cultural views can clash with scientific facts and well-examined studies. Hence, not all cultural views might be justified, valuable, or deserve protection. However, the basis of scientific facts regarding contagious diseases can be very thin, especially in the early stages of emergence or discovery. Therefore, it would be morally sensible to respect the co-existence of pluralistic cultural views on illness as long as they do not lead to other forms of marginalization or stigmatization.

The fifth dimension addresses physical violence, cases in which members of one group are beaten, killed, or raped by members of another group. The Black Lives Matter movement, whose activities overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic, made clear how police brutality is normalized in the U.S. and goes hand in hand with the everyday material deprivation of people of color. Violence has accompanied pandemics in many historically documented cases – anti-Jewish pogroms during plagues in the Middle Ages serve as a prominent example here (Cohn 2007). HIV-positive patients, who are often victims of violence, regularly report physical abuse both within and outside the health care system (Dlamini et al. 2007, Zierler et al. 2000), but the number of such studies is scandalously small.

### Political Unfairness: How Quarantine Can Harm Political Participation

In John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, western philosophy's perhaps most influential study of justice (published first in 1971), there are only few direct hints related to injustice. According to Rawls the unjust man must be distinguished from a bad or an evil person. Rawls describes an unjust person as somebody who strives for excessive power and "dominion for the sake of aims such wealth or security which when appropriately limited are legitimate" (1971, 439). As this definition is very general, one can try to define injustice more precisely by reinterpreting the definitions and conditions of justice as political fairness based on what would be agreed to by rational persons in an "original position"<sup>4</sup> of equality – as provided in Rawls's theory. This approach suggests that injustice exists when there is no egalitarian distribution of primary goods. Such primary goods range from political rights, liberties, and opportunities (political participation through freedom of speech, assembly, and political association etc.), but also material goods such as income and wealth. Hence, injustice exists if the distribution of social material goods does not benefit everyone, especially those who are worst off. Furthermore, a social situation or system would be called unjust if the opportunities to access offices and decision-

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4 The original, ideal position is Rawls' thought experiment is the veil of ignorance (Rawls 1971, 136–138): this is a thought experiment in which persons have no information about their personal place in society or about particular circumstances of their society. The assumption is that such people would rationally choose those principles for allocating rights and resources that offer the same opportunities as well as same social safety structures to all people. Obviously, this ideal position contrasts with existing social inequalities of "knowing" where one stands and how existing structures are. However, its charm lies in its rational abstraction of a moral ideal. Furthermore, in a crisis such as a pandemic, evidence and certitudes regarding our own lives and society become shaky and might remind us of the fragility of social advantages.

making positions are limited to the naturally or socially privileged. Finally, a process is unjust if it is biased or based on selective participation. Rawls's approach is procedural and contractualist. It complements the distributive approach to justice by focusing more on *how* procedures and institutions create justice; distributive theories, by way of contrast, point to *which* resources or goods are distributed in *what* quantities.

Procedural injustice during pandemics can occur in manifold ways. Persons in quarantine are often robbed of their basic political rights: they cannot naturally participate in many political and public events due to limited mobility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, various governments restricted the right to meet in large groups, even outdoors. This resulted in bans on public demonstrations and street protests – which are normally legitimate and important means for expressing views and concerns in modern democratic societies. Restricting mobilization thus limited opportunities to protest publicly against COVID-19 measures or against other political decisions that happened in parallel. The social media channels increasingly used to express public concerns regarding the (in)appropriateness of pandemic measures led to more extreme in- and out-group effects (cf. the contribution of Julia Brose in this volume), questioning the democratic potential of such virtual alternatives. The concept of political unfairness or injustice thus enables an in-depth discussion of how the right to political participation is relevant, especially in times of restricted physical mobility.

## **Struggle for Recognition: HIV Patient Expertise and the Fight against Homophobia and Undertreatment**

Axel Honneth's theory of the struggle for recognition (2003; 2004) is also relevant when discussing participatory injustices in the context of pandemics. His approach provides a sense of injustice as a driving force for social movements in times of social conflicts – and does not start from a hypothetical perspective of an original position, but from a history of real struggles between social classes and other groups. The political struggle for recognition arises through the moral experience of injustice and previously endured humiliation. Injustice is related to the threat to physical or social integrity or dignity of persons as a collective and not exclusively in terms of individual experience. The experience of disregard as a “typical key experience of an entire group” needs collective semantics to bridge the gap between individual experience and to form collective identity (2003, 260–262). In Honneth's terms, the shared experience of misrecognition provides the motor of new social movements. Forms of social resistance, revolutions, and strikes form communities which themselves develop new insights, social bonds, and organizations to support members of marginalized social groups. If the struggle for recognition is successful, it can con-

tribute to the moral development of society as it comes closer to common notions of a good or just society. The focus on social movements and struggle for recognition allows us to shed light on particular forms of social exclusion that often occur in pandemics.

An outstanding historical example for the struggle for recognition is ACTUP, or the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an activist group that emerged during the 1980s HIV pandemic. The documentary film *How to Survive a Plague*, directed by David France (2012), narrates how patient activists and the gay community struggled against dying of HIV and stigmatization at the same time. In the film, the group fought against the lack of health care by collectivizing political agency, it became “experts” on treatment drugs, and finally forced the US health care administration and pharmaceutical companies to develop new, efficient treatments. The film’s narrative focuses on the ACTUP, which was founded in 1987 in New York City as a grassroots movement to help people living with HIV get access to care and treatment. The group organized effective public demonstrations and protests at the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) in 1988, at the National Institute of Health (NIH) in 1990, and at the 6<sup>th</sup> AIDS Conference in San Francisco in 1990, which ended as a joint action of activists and scientists. These protests contributed significantly to a change in public recognition of the situation of living as a homosexual person, with or without HIV (cf. Epstein 1996). A subgroup of ACTUP, the split off organization TAG (Treatment Action Group), developed into a kind of patient-expert community who collaborated with scientists, pharmaceutical companies, and the NIH to accelerate and transform research on HIV treatments. In my opinion, this is an impressive narrative of patient-activist empowerment, but of course does not cover all dimensions of people s affected in the 1980s and afterwards by HIV policies.

## Epistemic Injustice: How some Knowledge is Overheard or Ignored

The experience of social disregard also plays an important role in what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls “epistemic injustice.” Her argument, based on speech act theory, focuses on inter-individual situations between a speaker and a listener, but it also considers power as implicit in such discursive settings. Epistemic injustice and its various dimensions have become a major topic in the philosophy of science (Koskinen and Rolin 2021). The academic world (but also other institutions such as courts, clinics, parliaments, and the media) are settings where knowledge and facts form the basic condition for our self-understanding and orientation for acting. In pandemic situations, facts and knowledge about developments are highly relevant. What kind of infectious agent is transmitted in what way? What is an efficient vaccine? How to treat symptoms? The epistemic dimensions of pandemics are manifold

and impact communication channels and relations between the authorities and the public, regardless if the specific case is syphilis (cf. the contribution by Victoria Morick in this volume) or leprosy (cf. the contribution by Richard Hölzl).

According to Fricker, power relations and stereotypes shape communicative practices and therefore define what counts as factual knowledge. She distinguishes between testimonial and hermeneutic injustice. Testimonial injustice can be also understood as the unfair assessment of credibility: it is the underestimation of a person's capacity to provide adequate or relevant knowledge due to social stereotypes. Such stereotypes are ubiquitous in the health science context, where patients are often seen as too health-illiterate to give evidence of their condition (Schick-tanz 2018). However, also the overestimation of a person's credibility – such as the supposed rationality, neutrality, or objectivity of experts – in such settings can be problematic. Indeed, the under- and overestimation of specific groups is often relational in systems of power. The above-mentioned example of the ACTUP narrative can also be discussed from an epistemic injustice perspective, because in the beginning, the testimony of HIV patients about their symptoms and experiences with the (illegal) combination of different treatment<sup>5</sup> was ignored as “unscientific,” but later contributed to a revised clinical trial scheme which was then successful (cf. Schick-tanz 2015).

A second form of epistemic injustice is hermeneutic. Here Fricker refers to the exclusion of certain social experiences from the pool of accepted facts due to a lack of opportunities for naming. Such hermeneutic injustice can occur in a pandemic if, e.g., rare long-term effects of the disease or some side-effects of countermeasures, such as pharmaceutical treatments or vaccines, are not named properly by affected patients due to the social power of expert discourse. Framing long-COVID as something purely “psychological,” for instance, can discredit patients' experiences as well as limit their ability to observe and register the symptoms and to receive relevant care or social support in a timely manner. In colonial or postcolonial contexts, indigenous knowledge systems for dealing with infectious diseases are often discredited, although they can provide important insights into how to deal with infectious agents. These insights are often well-adapted to socio-economic conditions, even if they use nominally unscientific formulations or explanations. Epistemic injustice, however, affects not only health or science topics, but also the social realm. Consider the possible negative effects of pandemics on poorer citizens, whether directly

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5 The movie *The Dallas Buyers Club* (2013, dir. Jean-Marc Vallée) tells the story of a straight, homophobic worker who after being diagnosed with HIV and suffering from AIDS, does not give up. Instead, he travels to Mexico and benefits from alternative, illegal or yet not clinically tested treatments. He then starts a business to import such drugs from Mexico to the US to offer to HIV patients who experiment on themselves with different treatments, after paying a monthly sum of \$400.

or indirectly through disease management. These include economic deprivation, increased risk of socio-economic harm and unemployment, and the effects of mobility restrictions due to fewer social and economic resources, coupled with increased risk of stress, violence, or social isolation. How do these facts become facts? When structural inequities disfavor social science and related fields during a pandemic, as was particularly evident during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, these epistemic inequities lead directly to social inequities.

## Everyday Injustices

Legal-anthropological work focusing on neglected everyday injustice has been done by anthropologist Laura Nader. Nader (1980) documented the experienced injustice of disappointed consumers who complain about defects in purchased items or about miserable public services that interfere with life-as-usual in the United States. She calls such cases “little injustices” as they are normally too insignificant to be recognized by the law. According to Nader, ignoring these little injustices increases distrust in the legal system; this, in turn, can encourage criminal behavior, as people who feel ignored by the law are more likely break it. Over-bureaucratic or overly slow and inadequate responses contribute to the general sense of injustice. There is evidence that the “jailbreaking” behavior evident during the COVID-19 lockdown was understood by protestors as acts of resistance against unjust measures (cf. the contribution of Böhrer et al. and of Ege/Schmitzberger in this volume).

This is not to say that all acts of lawbreaking can be justified from a moral philosophical point of view. On the contrary, protests against perceived injustice often result in counter-injustices that should also be subjected to review. In her analysis of Telegram conversations among vaccine sceptics, Julia Brose (cf. this volume) explores how those who ignore mask mandates etc. sometimes feel stigmatized by other people, including their own family members. At the same time, some of those who feel stigmatized are capable of doing the same, for instance by calling the vaccinated and those who observe rules “smurfs” and “silly sheep.” Where to draw the line between acceptable and non-acceptable injustices, even when they are small, requires important procedural consideration in civic society. This links Nadler’s observation to Judith Shklar’s (1990) attempt to differentiate between misfortune and injustice. She draws on Cicero to provide a normative look at so-called passive citizens (40). She focuses on citizens who turn away from actual or potential victims and, by doing so, contribute in a small way to the harms done to third persons. These small non-interventions occur in situations that have hardly any influence on life chances (in contrast to cases involving social inequality or political unfairness); they sometimes involve trivial, everyday situations such as rudeness or impertinence (e.g., someone who lifts his or her mask to sneeze in a public space). Pas-

siveness in such cases means not raising one's voice in protest. Of course, there are always good reasons for not getting involved: people are in a rush, do not feel well, prefer to stay out of trouble, or simply respect the liberty of others. According to Shklar, we tend to frame such situations as misfortunes, as minor calamities that cannot be corrected, even when they are actually minor injustices. However, passivity helps injustice flourish, as Shklar argues, when we simply "mind our own business," as the saying goes. Also, misfortunes of these types are actually injustices when they are structurally embedded in the inequalities of the labor market, the shape of public space, or the rituals of politics and commerce. Nadar and Shklar both argue that passivity in the face of injustice – even when we mistake injustice as misfortune – can lead to "hard feelings" that influence fundamental attitudes towards society and the political-legal system. Thus, the little injustices that can and do occur during pandemics require our special attention, especially at a time when pandemics may become normalized and chronic. While glaring injustice may be obvious, we may become insensitive to the everyday injustices against vulnerable people. Here is where the elements of storytelling – narrative perspective, characterization, the different points of view – become increasingly relevant to moral thought and vice versa. Engaging with various pandemic narratives can prevent us from becoming too ignorant of the little and big injustices. Some injustices already exist, and a pandemic just makes them bigger and more visible; however, some injustices are created by the way we deal with a pandemic and how we have not learned from the past.

## Some Concluding Remarks

Moral and political philosophers have long debated over how best to develop a consistent and practicable theory of justice. Combining various approaches may offer the best solution by allowing us to take different levels of interaction and interdependence into account on a case-by-case basis. We need to be able to think about the relation between citizens and the state, between social groups, between particular institutions and social groups, between particular institutions and individuals or social groups, and between citizens. Table 1 is an attempt to schematize the various considerations and perspectives summarized above.

Pandemics force us to rethink the relations of separate actors and spheres because vectors of infection can cross social barriers and distinctions. Whereas analytical ethical thinking may have trouble accounting for the confusion attending times of crisis, a narrative approach offers the possibility of bringing together separate perspectives in intersecting storylines. Comparing narrative and exploring new ways to braid them into multivalent stories may help us develop more comprehensive understandings of the (real-world) injustices involved. The new picture will not answer the futile question of which injustice is more unjust – that is not the primary

goal of this volume. Our more modest goal is to sharpen our perception and description of injustice. A detailed and appropriate description of a problem can be a first step to tackling it.

*Table 1: Approaches to injustice*

| Concept                                                                                        | Setting                                                     | Acts                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Oppressions:<br>exploitation<br>exclusion<br>powerlessness<br>cultural imperialism<br>violence | Social groups in a liberal-capitalist democracy             | Material deprivation in work contexts<br>Limiting participation of social life<br>Missing social status by professional hierarchies<br>Non-dominant culture is marked or made invisible<br>Physical attacks or abuse |
| Political unfairness                                                                           | State institutions vs. citizens (e.g., laws, courts)        | No fair access to basic rights/primary goods because of some person's egoism or their taking advantage of already privileged positions                                                                               |
| Maldistribution                                                                                | State vs. social sub-groups                                 | Unequal distribution of socially relevant goods (material and immaterial) resulting in structural inequalities                                                                                                       |
| Struggle for recognition                                                                       | Social sub-groups/working class in a social conflict/crisis | Missing recognition, no respect of dignity, or harming physical integrity                                                                                                                                            |
| Epistemic Injustice                                                                            | Knowledge production and fact exchange                      | Disregarding/excluding epistemic competency of some members due to social stereotypes and hence excluding persons from making epistemic contributions                                                                |
| Little injustices                                                                              | Individuals vs. bureaucracy                                 | Often underrated misbehavior (ignorance, complicity) in everyday contexts of consumerism                                                                                                                             |
| Passive injustices                                                                             | Between citizens in a liberal, civic state                  | Intentional ignorance or unwillingness to make use of leeway in everyday context of civil society                                                                                                                    |

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