

KANTIAN DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND LOW ABSOLUTE EARNINGS OF WORKERS

ABSTRACT

Many individuals working in South Africa earn extremely low wages. I briefly discuss these low wages, and examine their implications for the shareholders (owners and controllers of businesses) in South Africa. I argue that shareholders, in particular, have a moral duty to increase the absolute level of the wages of their lowest paid workers. In this essay I choose to develop this position in the context of Kantian distributive justice. I seek to join distributive justice and Kantianism together to evaluate the moral status of the lowest paid workers. I propose a just means of allocating the benefits of wages according to the work performed that shows respect for workers' autonomy.

Current South African stakeholder theory includes 'equity' claims arising from compensatory justice issues. However, based on the arguments in this essay, I believe we can see that there is also a definite independent moral duty in distributive justice for shareholders to increase the amounts that they spend on their worst-off employees. This spend is not necessarily only the wage costs for these employees, but is also on self-empowerment tools such as education and community services with which employees can build their life plans.