

BOOK REVIEW

Melvin L. Lerner and Sally C. Lerner (eds.), The Justice Motive in Social Behavior: Adapting to Times of Scarcity and Change.,
New York: Plenum Press, 1981 (pp.XXII + 494)

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The concept of justice plays a fundamental role in human interaction. People are very inclined to use this concept for the legitimation of actions and options. The concept has a long-standing career in philosophy, but only in the last two decades have psychologists studied the justice motive very intensively. Unlike many philosophers and some lawyers, they focus on the question what people think justice is.

As such, justice and perhaps even more its reverse, perceived injustice, turns out to be a very strong motive in social behavior. Because of different meanings of the justice concept between individuals and between individuals and groups, most authors in this volume distinguish between different types of justice, e.g., microjustice versus macrojustice. Notwithstanding these levels of justice perspective, most types of justice are inherent to all societies (e.g., the universality of the retribution response) and the chapters of this volume are therefore highly interesting to social scientists, especially students of fundamental issues in sociology, anthropology of law, jurisprudence and politics.

One of the leading psychologists on the topic is Melvin Lerner, co-editor of the volume under review. Lerner has made some remarkable experimental and theoretical contributions. Among other things he is the godfather of the "Just World Hypothesis": a fundamental human belief that in the end everyone gets what he or she "deserves".

Let us be clear from the beginning that this book, which is based on a meeting prior to the annual conference of the American Psychological Association in Toronto in 1978, presents a

splendid overview of the issues, recent developments, and different perspectives in the general area of the role of the concept of justice in social behavior. Likewise the reader will find plenty of references to justice research and adjacent topics in the reference lists after the chapters and the author and subject index.

The central theme of the book is the relation between justice judgments and the adaptation to social change involving a diminishing access to scarce resources. The present lack of economic growth focusses attention on the importance of a just allocation of resources. The justice concept plays a central role both in explanatory theory and as an instrument to cope with the problems caused by a reduction of living standards. All contributors present a broad view of the impact of individual justice judgments not only in a judicial context, but on all human interaction. Though they share a common emphasis on the importance of judgments of fairness and justice in explaining human behavior, they are often critical of each other's perspectives. Since the authors of many chapters criticize both earlier and later chapters, one should really read the volume twice to grasp the full richness of the contributions.

The book is divided into four main sections: an introduction, "Basic Processes", "Institutional Settings", and a final note. We follow the editors' organisation in giving below some brief impressions of the chapters which are most interesting for scholars in the field of law and society.

In the introductory chapter Melvin Lerner gives a theoretical analysis of the unique role that the idea of justice plays in our lives. Starting from the moment at which a child first learns about the sequences of cause and effect in his environment, Lerner sketches the development of the belief in a just world. A fundamental belief in a just world is in his view necessary to the maintenance of an organised cognitive structure of that environment. This particular hypothesis, however, is not present in the work of many other theorists in this field, e.g., equity theorists like Walster et al. and Sampson (both contributors to this volume), who conceptualize justice as a social and personal device designed to facilitate a maximized outcome in the long run. Lerner distinguishes between three kinds of perceived relations to others (which he calls identity relations, unit relations, and nonunit relations). These correspond to the justice principles need, equality and equity, and are elaborated in the contributions of some of the other authors.

The chapter on "Morality and the Development of Conceptions of Justice" by Rachel Karniol and Dale T. Miller is the most inter-

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esting in the first section. They describe the arousal of the sense of injustice and how the pursuit of justice becomes a moral value. The authors try to specify the conditions of the development of three well-known types of justice: commutative justice (i.e., the avoidance of harm to others), distributive justice (i.e., the allocation of goods), and procedural justice (i.e. the means by which principles of allocation are decided). In the same section Simmons gives a short and clear overview of the different theoretical perspectives from which the processes that underlie the development of conceptions of justice can be seen.

The second section, "Basic Processes", contains two contributions that are of special interest for scholars of penal law. Hogan and Emler argue that retributive justice is the all-embracing principle. In their opinion the concept of distributive justice is inappropriate for understanding how the concept of justice functions at the individual level, because people primarily seek to maintain their status and reputation (the pre-eminent scarce resource according to the authors). Thus, people primarily take remedial rather than distributive actions against transgressors of the rules that govern the struggle for power. Distributive justice is only useful for interpreting the actions of power-holders who have to distribute scarce material resources among subordinates. Hogan and Emler present a clear, simple, but thought-provoking point of view replete with well-chosen ethnographic examples.

In the first part of the third section, on "Institutional Settings", three chapters deal with the nature of close relationships, their exchange processes, and the external barriers to termination. Especially the contributions of Kidder et al. and Holmes are good examples of how useful the concept of justice can be in explaining the development of dyadic relations. In "Justice in the Marketplace", Greenberg stresses the predominance of the factors Need and Efficiency in making allocation decisions under scarcity. This entails a somewhat different perspective from that used by most of the authors, who stress the set of three principles: Equity, Equality, and Need.

Deutsch appears to be the most optimistic author in this book when he states: "... participating in a cohesive, productive, solidary group enhances one's feeling of personal and social well-being; this may more than compensate for the economic losses that one has during a period of economic crunch". Cook and Pearlman, however, stress the unattainability of both economic growth and diminished inequality. In a lengthy discussion they deal with both the trickle-down theory and the bubble-up theory as explanations for the ultimate increase in economic growth and equality. Many questions still remain unanswered at the end.

In an interesting essay, Vidmar examines how well law and its institutions serve justice by studying the various motives that are involved in the resolution of a dispute between individuals. Vidmar emphasizes that psychological motives and goals of the disputants determine the adequacy of the legal forum for dealing with the resolution of the dispute. For example, a formal adjudication forum such as a court is suited to the retribution motive (in the sense of Hogan and Emler), while an individual who merely claims damages from another would be better helped by an alternative third-party dispute-resolution forum like arbitration or mediation. Vidmar pays special attention to the differences among persons as to behavior and attitudes at the various choice points in the development of a dispute. He explains why confrontation may be more psychologically costly than avoidance for some people. A clear apprehension of the justice motive in interpersonal differences and in the dispute process could make an interesting contribution to more sociologically-oriented theory about disputing.

Unlike Vidmar's emphasis on civil law, Peachey and Lerner explicitly deal with central issues in penal law. They see the North American system of criminal justice as a social trap: the initial rewards of rapid increases in the level of legalisation yield more and more negative effects in the long run, which can only be dealt with by creating even more legalisation. But while they indeed point to a serious failure of the American legal system, Peachey and Lerner do not give very convincing alternatives. Worth mentioning is their suggestion that the functioning of the law and the attribution of causation, especially to the intentions people attribute to a person's behavior, are closely related.

It is not surprising that after such a wide range of perspectives Sally Lerner, in her final note, can only make some vague remarks on the potentially positive influence which the idea of justice can have in social relations. Nevertheless, Sally and Melvin Lerner have succeeded in editing a volume with very interesting theoretical analyses, which provides many new insights into fundamental questions about justice.