

Justice as a Basic Human Need

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Justice, whether civil, criminal, socio/cultural, or universal, is a basic human value to which psychologists intent on improving the lot of mankind are committed. The New Zealand Psychological Society underscores the commitment with a principle that explicitly highlights social justice and responsibility to society, and frequently it makes public statements on matters of significant social concern. Psychologists in all sectors of practice strive constantly to apply the principle in their various fields of endeavour. Academic psychologists do the same in relation to their teaching and the design and execution of their research, but none has brought Justice per se into a framework for critical appraisal and study. The aim of the present article is to describe a step taken recently towards that end.

To those whose daily work brings them into contact with the suffering brought about either by adverse circumstances or by malevolence, it might seem obvious to construe justice as a basic human need. Indeed the classical Greek philosophers regarded justice as one of the foremost virtues alongside courage, prudence, and temperance, and the early Christian fathers endorsed such virtues as being universally applicable (http://www.deadly_sins.com/virtues.html - accessed May 6, 2004).

The case has to be advanced, because justice behind laws and their enactments is sometimes difficult to discern. Beyond that, to the man in the street criminal justice seems to assume more importance than civil justice, while social justice – the third and youngest member of the judicial family – has to be seen and not heard. Yet the injustice of economic deprivation has been well documented with regard to a) the destructive effects of economic globalisation on community life (Korten, 1995), b) the onset of law-breaking (Weiss 1998),

and c) poor health and life expectancy (Howden-Chapman & Tobias, 2000; Marmot, 2005). In New Zealand, the zealous free-market policy adopted by successive governments since the mid-1980s has accentuated such adverse effects (cf. Gould, 2009, pp. 12-44).

To its credit, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (WCSDG) (2004, p.8) declared that a ‘fairer and more prosperous world is the key to a more secure world. Terror often exploits poverty, injustice and desperation to gain public legitimacy. The existence of such conditions is an obstacle in the fight against terrorism’. Subsequently the United Nations General Assembly (2005) endorsed the WCSDG theme, and it urged member countries to redress their priorities to avoid further catastrophe. On the 10th August of the same year, Paul Hunt (http://www.essex.ac.uk/human_rights_centre/research/rth/docs/Paul_Hunt_profile.pdf), a human rights legal advisor to the United Nations, addressed the School of Government at Victoria University on the abuse of economic, social and cultural rights,

and he put it among the most important and challenging issues of the day. The very next week, at a National Counter Terrorism Capability Seminar in the same place, political analyst Kumar Ramakrishna (2005) of Nan Yang Technological University (http://www.rsis.edu.sg/about_rsis/staff_profiles/Kumar.html) described the interaction of three main roots of terrorism as being a striving for political ascendancy, the elaboration of an ideology, and a pervasive discontent with the status quo reflecting social injustice

Overall, the indications are that justice is becoming recognised as a major concern of individuals, families, communities, and nations. Its presence gives satisfaction and security, and its absence quite the opposite. It goes beyond matters of achieving contractual rights and securing protection from criminality through the courts, to neutralising the aversive effects of socio-political policies through parliament and United Nations.

However, in recent years the intellectual analysis of justice has been left to academic lawyers, philosophers, and political scientists (cf. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online). They focussed mostly on the distribution of justice rather than on the basic need for justice. A few iconoclasts came close. One was the former social caseworker-cum-Australian diplomat John Burton (1990; 1996, p. 32) who coined the term ‘provention’ to describe the active prevention of conflict through meeting universal human needs, one of which he intimated was justice. Another was the

ethno-psychologist Donald E Brown (1991) who hovered on the brink when including 'differentiating right from wrong' in his list of universal needs.

The Norwegian doyen of peace studies, John Galtung (2000, pp. 3 & 34), recognised such needs, and he considered them 'non-negotiable'. But in his training manuals even he described justice simply as 'the commodity produced by the legal system'. Pragmatist New Zealand Judge Fred McElrea (2002) expressed his dismay in an address to a legal conference in London, and he pleaded that one 'should be able to find, or create a theory about the innate sense of justice'.

Quite independently, I tested the waters in 2003 with a seminal article on justice, and subsequently an edited book with contributors from diverse domains in social science (Taylor, 2003a; 2006). For present purposes, my argument can be confined to

- a) the definition of justice and of human needs
- b) locking justice into a theory of personality in which it might conveniently be placed and from which propositions might be drawn
- c) the methods by which such propositions might be tested, and
- d) implications for the extension of psychology through research and the training and updating of psychologists.

Definition of justice and of human needs

Justice is a nebulous but far from negligible concept. The OED Online offers a variety of 12 definitional categories that range from the 'quality of being just', through the 'observance of Divine law', 'the infliction of punishment', to sundry 'phrases and combinations'. The most pertinent category for present purposes would have justice construed as 'the exercise of authority or power in maintenance of rights; vindication of right by assignment of reward or punishment'. Regrettably, the offering relates more to the system that sustains laws and procedures

than to the basic needs of individuals, communities, and nations. For that reason, I defined justice *de novo* as the reciprocal quality of relationships that obtain between people for their mutual wellbeing¹.

Similarly, the OED Online offered 13 categories of need and a variety of compound definitions, the essence of which, consistent with established psychological theory, would have them described as mainsprings of action. Specifically, I selected category 12b, because it referred to need as 'A feeling of want that provides a basis for behaviour or action; (Psychol.) a motivational state resulting from such a feeling, a drive.'

Locking into a theory of personality

Anyone invoking a new concept has the choice of either elaborating the concept into a theory, or of seeking an existing theory in which it might conveniently be placed. For reasons of parsimony (once known as Occam's razor), the latter is to be preferred, and in the present instance, it was the more desirable, because the declared aim from the outset was to try to integrate justice within the broad domain of existing psychological theory than to strike out independently.

In seeking an appropriate domain within the field of psychology in which to nestle justice, that of motivation seemed the most promising, because it entertained the notion of both attraction and propulsion in accounting for human behaviour. Furthermore, the historical development of psychology shows that human motivation preoccupied pioneers like William James, Sigmund Freud, William McDougall, and Abraham Maslow. Almost in parallel a stream of animal and child experimenters led by Pavlov, Watson, Mowrer, Hull, Spence, Tolman, Skinner, and Bandura, made considerable advances in detailing the systems of reward under which certain needs could be satisfied and the laws of learning be established. Another stream of researchers under the influence of Henry Murray and David McClelland

made substantial progress by developing psychometrically robust rating scales and applying factor-analytic procedures to unravel some of the complexities of the topic, particularly as they applied to motivation and leadership in business and industry (cf. Porter, Bigley, & Steers, 2003, ch.2). However, none of the earlier or the later authorities, nor the recent reviewer of motivational studies Wong (2000), was concerned with justice *per se*.

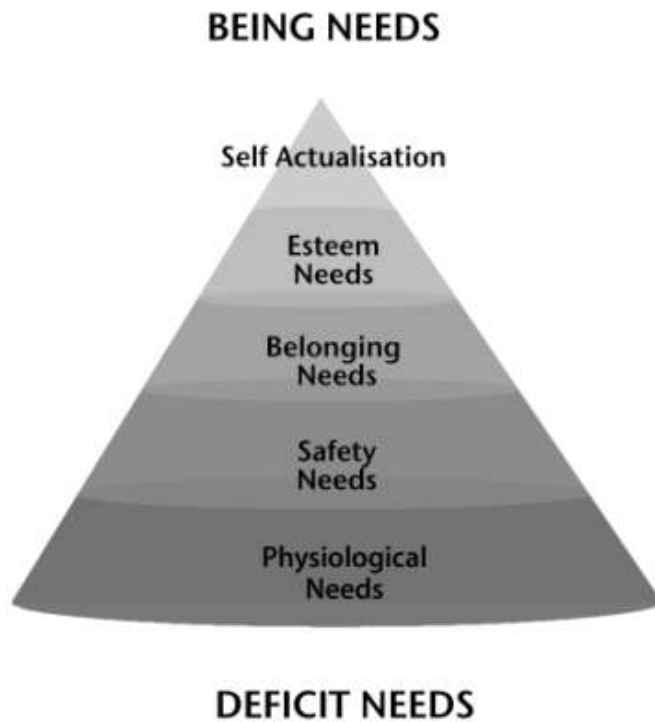
In fact, of all the motivational theorists and researchers mentioned, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was the only one even to raise the topic. He gave the first intimation in a footnote when he described a) security needs for 'a world that does not threaten and that is not dangerous', and b) the final stage of self-actualization 'in which the individual will tend to want to strive for all the conditions which make these satisfactions possible, e.g. freedom, full information, justice, order, etc.' (Maslow, 1943a).

Yet Maslow did not include justice specifically in his hierarchy of needs, and he put the 'self-actualisers' under no obligation either to promote justice or to remedy injustice for mankind at large.

As every first-year student knows, Maslow arranged the significant needs he identified in five clusters, and he considered the satisfaction of the lower three 'Deficit needs' - physiological, safety, and belonging - essential for the subsequent flowering of human personality through the higher 'Being needs' of esteem and self-actualisation (Fig. 1). He deduced the former from his experiential and reflective appraisal of the human condition, and the latter from his 'global and holistic' impressions of a very small group of highly selected students within his immediate orbit who were far from preoccupied with themselves, were spontaneous, 'problem-centered', remote and unruffled, relatively independent of their physical and social environments, highly selective in their friendships, democratic in orientation, and 'strongly ethical' (Maslow, 1954, ch. 12). He said that unlike 'any jungle denizen [their world is not] dominated and organised by the lower needs, especially the creature needs and the safety needs' (ibid, 1954, p. 232).

1. The kind of Old Testament justice that obtains between individuals and the Deity, of which natural disasters are still often construed as a punitive measure for transgressions, was set aside for separate consideration (cf. Taylor, 2003b)

Figure 1. Maslow's Motivational Hierarchy



Later, Maslow (1954, p.374) admitted that his sample of self-actualized subjects was somewhat limited – saying that people with a ‘sense of duty, of loyalty, obligation to society, responsibility, the **social conscience**... The crusader. The fighter for principle, **for justice, for freedom, for equality**’ had yet to be studied. Then, having declared that ‘the behaviour of the healthy person is less determined by anxiety, fear, insecurity, guilt, shame, and more by truth, logic, **justice**, reality, fairness, fitness, beauty, rightness, etc.’, he put the rhetorical question ‘What produces the socially desirable characteristics of kindness, **social conscience**, helpfulness, neighbourliness, identification, tolerance, friendliness, **desire for justice, righteous indignation?**’ (ibid, p. 377) - (my emphases in bold face).

In a later work, Maslow (1968, p.83) nominated justice more specifically as # 4 in his list of 14 higher values essential for ‘Being’, and he alluded to the concept as a component of five other values (i.e. # 2 ‘perfection’, # 3 ‘completion’, # 7 ‘simplicity’, # 9 ‘goodness’, and # 13 ‘truth’). In the same work, he included ‘living by its own laws’ as elements of higher value

14. Then in an introduction to the posthumous volume on Maslow’s work, Richard Lowry included justice in the index of that edition, and wrote that Maslow had proclaimed ‘the deeply moral nature of mankind’ throughout his life (Maslow, 1999, p. vi).

For whatever reasons, not only did the latter-day Maslovians Alderfer (1972), Deci and Ryan (2000), and Zohar and Marshall (2004) not develop the notion of justice, but they omitted mention of it altogether.

Despite Maslow’s hesitation to accord justice its full due², and its neglect by his followers, I think justice merits a place among Maslow’s second level of safety needs that, in his own words, ‘may serve as the almost exclusive organizers of behaviour, recruiting all the capacities of the organism in their service’ (cf. Maslow, 1970, pp. 39-42)³.

Positioned there among the security needs, the need for justice would be

consistent with the need for everyone at all stages of life to be treated fairly, and hence with a better chance of being able to thrive cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually than otherwise. Further, such a placement would:

- give tacit recognition to the neo-Kohlbergian theory that the young inculcate cognitive systems of right and wrong with which ultimately to moderate their own behaviour to some extent

- acknowledge the growth of reciprocal patterns of concern between people, and the part they play in framing and applying laws wisely between parents and children, other family members, neighbours, and wider communities (cf. Rest, Narvarez, Bebau, & Thoma, 1999)

- be consistent with the philosophical, religious, developmental, and social aspects of justice enunciated by Charles Tolman, Chris Marshall, Paul Jose, Ronald Fischer and Linda Skitka that underpin the restorative and therapeutic judicial processes raised by Lynne Eccleston and Tony Ward, Gaye Maxwell and Allison Morris, and David Wexler*

- challenge the systems that condone the abuse, torture, destruction and denigration of minority groups highlighted by Reg Orovwuje, Jeffrey Sluka, and Paul Burns, and endorse Andrew Ladley’s view of the dialectic between the extremes of individuality and community in the recognition and fulfilment of human rights for all.*

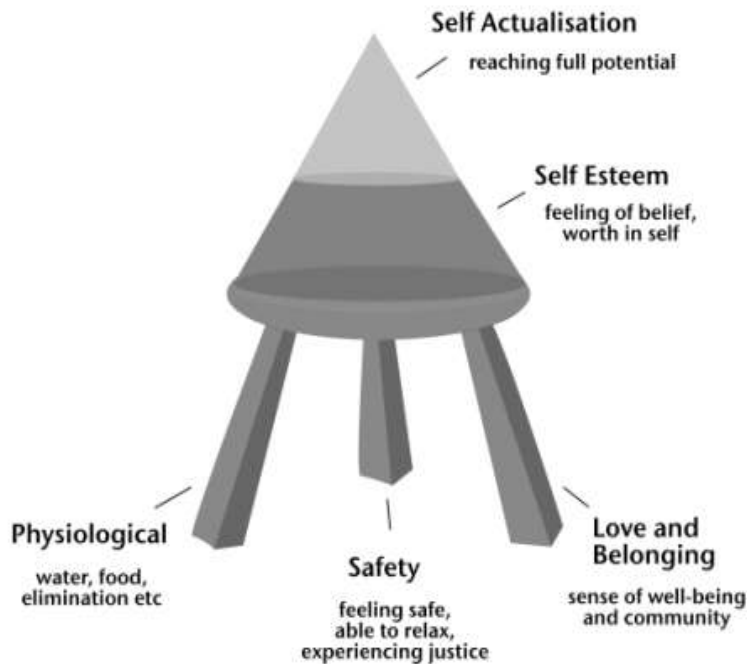
Like the deprivation of any other basic need, the shattering of secure expectations brings the need for justice to the fore, with the victims yearning to restore the status quo – either by asserting themselves, or appealing for help until either justice or its approximation once again might prevail. This time the victims should not expect their appeals fall on deaf ears, because by definition the self-actualised would not be so self-centred as to be lacking in compassion

2. It is difficult to explain Maslow’s hesitation to give justice its full due. He was neither born into a loving family with a silver spoon in his mouth, nor was he protected from anti-Semitism in his neighbourhood as he grew up and in academia where he taught and researched. He was also sympathetic to the plight of American-Indians relegated to reservations in their own country (cf. Hoffman, 1988, ch.1). Because of his sensitivity to the persecution of Jews in Europe, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levison, and Stanford (1950, p. 231) consulted him in the course of their authoritative study of the matter.

3. To quote from the last edition of the book with which Maslow personally was involved.

* (see their respective contributions in Taylor, 2004).

Figure 2. Maslow's schema refigured to include justice as a basic human need, and to emphasize the fragility of self esteem and self actualisation.



and altruism⁴.

Consequently, it seemed appropriate to redraw the familiar triangular figure to include justice with the safety needs, and to emphasize the precarious nature of the basic Deficiency needs in the form of a three-legged stool on which the development of Being needs depend.

Methods by which the proposition might be tested

The question then arises as to how the incorporation of justice firmly within the ranks of basic needs might be validated with some degree of independence.

Here Maslow gives no lead. As a humanist, with an experiential and introspective orientation who was not unacquainted with both experimental and empirical methods⁵, he admitted that his theory lacked formal validation and support, and he made a plea for critics to avoid 'unreal perfectionism'

in testing his claims (Maslow, 1954, p. xix; & p. xxvii). He argued that:

this 'kind of research is in principle so different – involving as it does a kind of lifting oneself by one's axiological bootstraps – that if we were to wait for conventionally reliable data, we should have to wait for ever. It seems that the only manly thing to do is not to fear mistakes, plunge in, to do the best one can, hoping to learn enough from blunders to correct them eventually' (ibid, p.199).

Essentially, he was reliant on 'the slow global development of a global or holistic impression of the sort that we make of our friends and acquaintances' (ibid, p.203).

Maslow repeated his stand later in the preface to the first edition of his *Towards a psychology of being* (1962/1968 reprint, p. viii), viz:

'This book, like my previous one, is full of affirmations which are based on pilot researches, bits of evidence, on personal observation, on theoretical deduction and sheer hunch. These are generally phrased so that they can be proven true or false. That is, they are hypotheses, i.e. presented for testing rather than for final belief. They are also obviously relevant and pertinent, i.e. their possible correctness or incorrectness is important to other branches of psychology... They should therefore generate research.... For these reasons I consider this book to be in the realm of science or pre-science, rather than of exhortation, or of personal philosophy, or literary expression'.

Certainly, many researchers contributed to a 'rich harvest' of some 1,580 citations of his theory until the posthumous publication of the third edition of his 1954 volume (Maslow, Frager, & Fadiman, 1987, p.365). Nonetheless, it is no longer acceptable for social scientists to ignore empiricism and accept untested propositions, especially when trying

- a) to make scientific contribution to the advancement of knowledge
- b) to establish a sound data base from which to embark on comparable studies, and
- c) to recommend changes in social policy to improve and ameliorate the living circumstances for individuals and their communities.

At issue, is the obligation of social policy theorists to test their hypotheses and propositions with rigour (but not to the point of rigor mortis), and to consider the ethical implications of the policies they recommend⁶.

A few sympathetic researchers have used standard psychometric procedures

4. According to biographer Hoffman (1988, pp. 293-302), Maslow 'really did not care much about helping a privileged few [university students] to lead happier lives on the edge of catastrophe'. In 1968, as president of the American Psychological Association, Maslow was a signatory to a petition to all members in support of a National Commission's findings about the causes of the widespread riots of the previous year. The petition said that the troubles 'resulted largely from conditions of discrimination, poverty, and unemployment... (with) roots in racial prejudice, ... (and) strongly urge(d) that direct action be taken to combat these unjust condition' (ibid, p. 308).'

5. Not surprisingly for a student with a firm focus on abnormal psychology, Maslow was repelled by E.B. Titchener's exclusive emphasis on the function of psychosensory systems. But he was inspired by a) J.B. Watson's promise of a science of psychology through behaviourism, b) Harry Harlow's 'controlled objective observation' in animal behaviour, c) Ruth Benedict's anthropological fieldwork, and d) Kurt Goldstein's neuropsychiatry (Hoffman, 1988, pp. 26-31; 49-55; 138-139).

6. Witness the horrendous consequences of the application of eugenics campaigns in the early 20th century that many leading scientists supported (Nuffield Council on Bioethics, 2002, ch. 2), to say nothing of the part that others played in the development of nuclear weaponry (Gellhorn, 1986). Also note that several prominent behavioural scientists in Canada and the United States were involved with the US Counter-Intelligence Agency in determining the precise techniques of torture for producing compliance from captives with particular types of personality (Hodge & Cooper, 2004).

with some success in seeking the essential prerequisites for healthy living that Maslow proposed, while still promoting the narrower scientist-practitioner model that he opposed. Four of such studies happen to have a tangential bearing on the theme of the present paper. First came Harlow and Newcomb's (1990) survey of young adults to identify their social, political, or religious beliefs that might conceivably be thought related to justice. They found that 'Peer Relationships, Intimate Relationships, Family Relationships, Purpose in Life, Perceived Opportunity, Work Satisfaction, and Health Satisfaction' were the primary positive factors in a hierarchy of satisfactions, but 'Meaninglessness' and 'Powerlessness' were not. Soon afterwards, Ronen (1994) found substantial support for Maslow's hierarchy when applying a fresh non-metric multidimensional scaling technique to international sets of motivational data relating to work experience. Then Slone, Kaminer, and Durrheim (2000) used a Political Life Event Scale to measure the reactions of 540 South African adolescents to the racial policy of apartheid, and they confirmed the interaction between innate personality variables and external social stressors. Finally, Tepper (2001) documented the adverse effects of injustice arising from work on the health of employees.

Indicative as they might be in support of the theory, such studies highlight the importance, and the difficulty, of making objective the subjective in psychological research. Clearly, if justice were brought more into mainstream alongside other well-researched topics, its subjective elements would need to be made operational and exposed to empirical scrutiny, and then to have its interdisciplinary potential fully explored.

In the process of validating the concept, psychologists would do well to avoid Scylla and Charybdis. The former by making sure that their strategies, methods, techniques, and data manipulation were appropriate for the

topic in question rather than to express a slavish devotion to convention (cf. Kerry Chamberlain's 2009 address to the British and New Zealand Psychological Societies)⁷. The latter by avoiding the arrogance and abuse of freedom in the design of research that Alan Sokal exposed in 1996 (cf. <http://www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/index.html> - retrieved 1 November 2004)⁸.

The implications

Were justice to be given full recognition as a motivating force, as suggested, challenging topics would open to entice more researchers to develop and apply their skills. For example, in general psychology, cognitive psychologists might be impelled to examine Kohlberg's theory of moral development in relation to children from underprivileged and criminal families. Their colleagues in cross-cultural, developmental, environmental and social psychology might address topics in the long dormant but currently burgeoning fields of child-rearing, community development, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural interaction. Clinical researchers might consider the primacy of injustice in the pathological proclivities of sadists and masochists at different ends of the cruelty spectrum, as well as in the borderline unstable who satisfy their immaturity by simulating scenes of injustice sometimes to the point of making video-tapes of violence. Forensic psychologists might have another scale for monitoring interventions, and applied psychologists and psychometrists might also join forces to develop scales for helping victims of crime that include items relating to civil and social justice (cf. <http://www.state.tn.us/finance/rds/victimhomepage.htm> - accessed May 15, 2005). Here in New Zealand, psychologists might also induce the Ministry Social Development to include justice in a collection of social indicators it applies at regular intervals to assess contemporary social conditions and to monitor the effect of remedial policies (cf. <http://www.ms.govt.nz>).

To continue with suggestions for new research, organisational psychologists might consider the socialised psychopaths in position of responsibility who perpetrate injustice of the non-criminal kind (McCormick & Burch, 2005), and practitioners with a broad interdisciplinary commitment and training might bring legal, philosophical, and theological dimensions into their analysis of human behaviour. Already Ronald Francis (1999/ 2009) has given a helpful lead to the latter with his comprehensive guide to ethics for psychologists.

Before long, such research might go some way towards redressing the complex causes of wars, massacres, and atrocities of the twentieth century. It might also help to resolve the internecine feuds that in recent years have driven millions of people from their homes either as displaced persons within their own countries, and obliged refugees and asylum-seekers in fear of losing their lives to seek sanctuary abroad (cf. <http://users.erols.com/m.white28/war-1900.htm>: UNHCR. 2002: International review of the Red Cross, 2003-No. 851).

There, is a cutting edge for psychology and a challenge for psychologists to earn their keep in the service of mankind. It has implications for broadening the content of training courses, whether under-graduate, post-graduate, or professional updating.

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7. In a forthright paper presented to the London Conference of the British Psychological Society in 1968, US Navy Commander Newell H Berry had good reason to be jaundiced about the relevance, methodology, and outcome of a sample of some 4,000 research reports that his government had sponsored from psychologists. I heard the presentation, and I have a copy of the unpublished paper.

8. To break the fetters of experimental method, that were inappropriate for their discipline, sociologists David Bloor, Barry Barnes and Bruno Latour advocated the use of novelty. The physicist Alan Sokal took them at their word and presented a paper that parodied their intentions, to the embarrassment of many scholars.

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