

Equity and Social Justice
(Hotfield)
Elaine Walster and G. William Walster
University of Wisconsin

Scholars and social reformers have long been interested in trying to define "social justice." In this essay, we present a framework for understanding recent theorizing and research on social justice. First we review equity theory. Aristotle proposed a primitive equity model of social justice; in recent years, social philosophers such as Homans, Adams, and Walster, Berscheid, and Walster have reformulated and extended the model. Next we describe the equality-proportionality controversy and a simple equity resolution. Finally we speculate concerning the impact of power on society's definition of equity and "perfect social justice."

Scholars and reformers have long been interested in defining "social justice." For example, Aristotle proposed a primitive "equity" model of social justice. In recent years, such modern social psychologists as Homans (1961), Adams (1965), and Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1973) have reformulated and elaborated the equity model. In this essay, we will present a framework for understanding recent theorizing and research concerning social justice. We will briefly review Walster et al.'s (1973) equity theory, describe the equality-proportionality controversy, and speculate concerning the impact of power on society's definitions of equity and "perfect social justice."

THE EQUITY FORMULATION

In general terms, two people are in an equitable relationship when the ratio of one person's outcomes to inputs is equal to the other person's outcome/input ratio. *Inputs* are defined as

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Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to E. Walster, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

“what a person perceives as his contributions to the exchange, for which he expects a just return.” The inputs which a person contributes to a relationship can be either assets, which entitle him to reward, or liabilities, which entitle him to punishment. In an employer-employee relationship, inputs such as skill, financial investments, seniority, and so on may be relevant. In social encounters, participants may perceive that quite different assets or liabilities are relevant. For example, in a friendship, such inputs as kindness, wit, or beauty may be considered relevant.

Outcomes are the individual’s “receipts” from a relationship. They may be positive or negative consequences of the individual’s relationship with the other person. The person’s total outcomes are the sum of the rewards he obtains from the relationship minus the costs he incurs.

Walster et al. (1973) supply a precise mathematical definition of “equity.” A relationship is equitable when:¹

$$\frac{\text{Outcomes Person A} - \text{Inputs Person A}}{\left| \text{Inputs Person A} \right|^{k_A}} = \frac{\text{Outcomes Person B} - \text{Inputs Person B}}{\left| \text{Inputs Person B} \right|^{k_B}}$$

By convention, equity theorists term the individual who intentionally takes larger relative outcomes than he deserves an “exploiter”; the individual whose outcomes are reduced is the “victim.”

Psychological Consequences of Inequity

According to equity theorists, after an exploitative encounter, both the exploiter and his victim experience distress. Theorists have labeled the distress reactions in various ways: guilt, empathy, fear of retaliation, dissonance, conditioned anxiety, shame, anger, etc. Most agree, however, that the distress which exploiters and victims feel arises from two sources: retaliation distress and self-concept distress.

1. The exponents k_A and k_B take on the value +1 or -1, depending on the sign of A and B’s inputs and the sign of their gains (Outputs-Inputs): $k_A = \text{sign}(I_A) \times \text{sign}(O_A - I_A)$; k_B similarly. The exponent’s effect is to change the way relative outcomes are computed. If $k = +1$, then we have $(O - I)/I$, but if $k = -1$, then we have $I(O - I)$. Without the exponent k , the formula would yield meaningless results when $I < O$ and $(O - I) > O$ or when $I > O$ and $(O - I) < O$.

Retaliation distress. When children exploit others (or allow themselves to be exploited) they are sometimes punished. Soon the performance of exploitative acts comes to arouse conditioned anxiety. This distress may have cognitive correlates. Harmdoers may attribute their distress to a fear that the victim, the victim’s sympathizers, legal agencies, or even God will retaliate against them. Victims may attribute their distress to a fear that their colleagues will ridicule them or consider them “a pushover” or “fair game” for subsequent exploitation. Discomfort emanating from these sources is labeled *retaliation distress*.

Self-concept distress. Exploitation may produce discomfort for another reason. In our society there is an almost universally accepted (if not followed) moral code that one should be fair and equitable in his dealings with others. (See Fromm, 1956, for an interesting discussion of the pervasiveness of the fairness principle.) When a normal individual violates that code by participating in a profoundly inequitable relationship, he violates both his self-expectations and accepted ethical principles. The distress that arises from such inconsistent or unethical acts has been discussed in great detail by cognitive dissonance theorists (Bramel, Taub, & Blum, 1968) and by guilt theorists (Arnold, 1960; Maher, 1966). Discomfort emanating from this source is labeled *self-concept distress*.

Presumably, individuals are motivated by retaliation distress and self-concept distress to restore equity to their inequitable relationships.

Techniques to Reduce Distress

Restoration of actual equity. One way participants can restore equity is by inducing the exploiter to compensate his victim. Many studies indicate that an exploiter will often exert considerable effort to make restitution (Berscheid & Walster, 1967; Walster & Prestholdt, 1966; Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967). Parallel evidence indicates that a victim’s first response to exploitation is to seek restitution (Leventhal & Bergman, 1969; Schmitt & Marwell, 1972).

Restoration of psychological equity. Participants can reduce their distress in a second way. They can distort reality and convince themselves (and perhaps others) that their ostensibly inequitable relationship is in fact perfectly fair. Individuals use several techniques to rationalize exploitation. A number of studies demonstrate that exploiters may rationalize their exploitation by derogating their victim (Glass, 1964), by denying responsibility for the act

(Sykes & Matza, 1957; Brock & Buss, 1964), or by minimizing the victim's suffering (Brock & Buss, 1962). There is even some sparse experimental evidence that under the right circumstances, victims will justify their own exploitation (Austin & Walster, 1974).

The preceding discussion has focused upon the means by which the participants may restore an unjust relationship to equity. Participants are not the only possible agents of equity restoration, however. The participants' friends, social workers, the courts, etc. may all observe inequity, become distressed by it, and intervene to right existing wrongs. Are there any data on how such impartial observers respond to inequity?

According to equity theorists, impartial observers tend to react to injustice in much the same way that participants do—with one qualification: Observers react less passionately than do participants. The discovery that observers' reactions faintly echo participants' fiery ones should come as little surprise. Human beings are able to empathize with others. It is probably particularly easy to empathize with others when they are caught in inequitable circumstances. An observer who empathizes with an exploiter may well share his embarrassment and rationalizations; the observer who empathizes with a victim may well share the victim's anger and indignation. If, as seems likely, the feelings we empathize with are less intense than the ones we experience, it is understandable that observers react less intensely to inequity than do actual participants.

Evidence that impartial observers react to injustice in much the same way as do participants comes from a wide variety of sources (Schafer, 1960; Lerner, 1970; Chaiken & Darley, 1973). On the basis of the existing evidence, theorists have concluded that even the most aloof of "impartial" observers is motivated to right existing wrongs, and—failing that—to at least convince himself that this is an equitable world, a place where exploiters are somehow entitled to their benefits and the deprived somehow deserve to suffer.

THE EQUALITY-PROPORTIONALITY CONTROVERSY

Aristotle described two major types of social justice: equal justice and distributive (i.e., proportional) justice.

In the case of equal justice, rewards are distributed equally among men.

Sometimes only one input counts—a person's "humanity." In certain situations, people assume that "all men are created

equal" and that whether a man has behaved badly or well, he is entitled to the same treatment. Aristotle notes:

For it makes no difference whether a good man has defrauded a bad man or a bad man a good one, nor whether it is a good or a bad man that has committed adultery; the law . . . treats the parties as equal. (Ross, 1966, p. 1131)

In the case of distributive justice, rewards are distributed in proportion to merit.

Sometimes simple "humanity" is not enough. Persons vary in their inputs and people assume that the greater one's inputs, the better the treatment one deserves. In describing this form of justice, Aristotle observes:

Awards should be "according to merit"; for all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit. . . . The problem of distributive justice is to divide the distributable honor or reward into parts which are to one another as are the merits of the persons who are to participate. If A (first person):B (second person):C (first portion):D (second portion), . . . this, then is what the just is—the proportional; the unjust is what violates the proportion. (Ross, p. 1131)

Unfortunately, Aristotle does not provide any precise guide as to when equality or when proportionality is the appropriate standard of social justice.

Equality vs. Proportionality

Aristotle—and several current theorists (Sampson, 1969; Lerner, 1974b; Leventhal, Popp, & Sawyer, in press)—assume that equality and proportionality are entirely different varieties of justice.

Social critics have alternately praised or damned these alternative forms of social justice. Social inequality has had its passionate defenders—Aristotle, Hobbes, and Rockefeller among them. For example, Isocrates praised the primitive Athenians for recognizing that there are two forms of "equality": "the division of advantages indiscriminately among all citizens *vs.* the division of the same advantages according to each man's deserts" (cited in Rousseau, 1913, p. 232). He commended the Athenians for inviolably adhering to the latter principle of justice. Social equality has had its equally passionate advocates. For example, Rousseau (1913) argued that natural man's state was equality, and the evolution of society ravaged his idyllic state.

Social psychologists, however, contend that people are less consistent than Isocrates or Rousseau might think. Sometimes they adhere to one and sometimes to another of these two "entirely

different" types of social justice; more confusingly, sometimes they even try to combine the two. There is ample evidence in support of these contentions: Sometimes individuals do allocate rewards in accordance with others' task inputs (Lane & Messé, 1971; Lane, Messé, & Phillips, 1971; Leventhal & Lane, 1970; Leventhal & Michaels, 1969, 1971; Leventhal, Michaels, & Sanford 1972; Messé & Lichtman, Note 1). Sometimes they do ignore differences in others' task inputs and divide rewards equally (Kahn, 1972; Lane & Coon, 1972; Morgan & Sawyer, 1967; Pruitt, 1972; Sampson, 1969). Sometimes they do try to combine the two; for example, Chertkoff (1970), Schelling (1960), Gamson (1961), and Komorita and Chertkoff (1973) observe that participants frequently decide to split-the-difference when debating whether to divide goods equally or proportionally.

Since it seems obvious that in different situations, individuals define fairness differently, researchers soon began to concentrate on isolating the demographic, personality, or situational variables which determine whether individuals perceive equality or proportionality to be most fair.

Some theorists argue that age is a crucial determinant of how people define fairness. However, evidence in support of this contention is mixed. Lane and Coon (1972) argued that preschoolers are incapable of comparing their own input/outcome ratio with another child. Children simply cannot perform such a complex task. Masters (1968) agreed. Lerner (1974a) found that kindergarteners do simply divide things equally. Morgan and Sawyer (1967) found that even at 10-12 years of age, boys prefer to share and share alike. They are of course capable of taking merit into account in apportioning rewards (Lerner, 1974a). Accumulating evidence, however, makes it clear that even preschoolers are capable of behaving equitably. Leventhal and Anderson (1970), Lerner (1974a), and Leventhal, Popp, and Sawyer (in press) document that preschool children are capable of assessing merit and giving more reward to the better of two performers.

Other theorists have proposed that sex is a crucial determinant of how a person will allocate rewards. Vinacke (1969) proposed that males and females differ in two important ways in their allocations: (a) men tend to be exploitive while women tend to be accommodative, and (b) coalitions of males tend to apportion resources unequally. (The men whose initial inputs are greater tend to receive the larger share of the resources.) Coalitions of females tend to ignore initial differences and to split group resources equally.

Support for Vinacke's contention that males are more exploitative than females, comes from studies by Lane and Messé (1971), Leventhal and Lane (1970), and Messé and Lichtman (Note 1). Support for Vinacke's contention that females focus on harmonious relations and share prizes, while men focus on quality of performance and divide prizes unequally comes from Bond and Vinacke (1961), Leventhal and Anderson (1970), Leventhal and Lane (1970), Leventhal, Popp, & Sawyer (in press), Uesugi and Vinacke (1963), Vinacke (Note 2), and Vinacke and Stanley (Note 3).

In a recent essay, Leventhal (Note 4) proposes a compelling alternative interpretation of the Vinacke data. Leventhal proposes that men and women do not differ in their motivation to behave equitably. Both want to maintain equitable relations. However, Leventhal observes, individuals must sometimes sacrifice equity in order to pursue more important goals. It is here that men and women differ. For a man, succeeding at a challenging task is an important alternative goal; for a woman, succeeding at affiliative goals is important. According to Leventhal, recognizing these motivational differences enables us to account for the way men and women apportion rewards.

How should a woman allocator respond if she wants to please her partner?

If her work is better, she believes the best way to maintain a friendly relationship is by *not* forcing her partner to accept a small share of reward. She therefore divides the reward evenly. If her work is worse, she believes the best way to maintain a friendly relationship is to show her concern about having done poorly by using her power to reduce her own reward. She therefore takes less than half the reward. (Leventhal, Note 4, pp. 6-7)

Leventhal and Lane (1970) support Leventhal's analysis. When women allocators perform better than their co-worker, they divide rewards equally; when they perform worse, they take less than half of the reward. If Leventhal's reasoning is correct, we should also be able to predict how males will apportion resources when they win or lose. When males perform better than their partners they should insist that others symbolize their success by allocating them a large share of the community resources. When they fail, they should be less eager to have success and failure marked by the reward allocation.

It appears, then, that a plethora of specific personality and situational factors determine whether people adopt equality or proportionality as their standard. Can we specify any general

factors that determine when people will be motivated to define equal or proportional inputs as relevant? A cost-benefit analysis of the process provides some insights. It is much simpler to apportion resources equally than proportionately. In order to divide things equally, all the allocators have to do is look around and decide who should share in the spoils. Each group member then gets his equal share. In order to divide things proportionately, the allocators must decide who should share in the spoils, enumerate all the inputs that may be relevant in the situation, negotiate as to which inputs count and how much, and finally calculate appropriate shares.

Given this analysis, we should be able to specify several general variables that probably affect willingness to apportion resources equally *vs.* proportionately in ambiguous situations:

1. *Time constraints.* When a decision must be made quickly, an equal division becomes more attractive. When participants have unlimited time to bargain, they will be more likely to consider a proportional division.
2. *Communication costs.* When negotiation is extremely costly, an equal division becomes more attractive.
3. *Potential benefits.* When the amount involved is small, an equal division becomes more attractive. It isn't worth it to haggle over a small amount.
4. *Significance for future decisions.* When the allocation is a one-time-only affair, an equal division is more popular. If, however, the decision will set a precedent for future allocations, individuals will be more likely to consider a proportional division. (Observers have noted that in football, bonuses are simply split among team members, while players insist that merit be taken into account in assigning regular yearly salaries.)

Are Equality and Proportionality Really Different Forms?

It is claimed by some that it is profitable to treat equality and proportionality as two entirely different forms of justice.

What is being argued for, therefore, is a consideration of the concept of justice in at least its two major senses. In the one, justice in a relationship exists when resources are allocated on the basis of investments. This the author and others have referred to as *equity* (*sic.* proportionality). In the other, justice exists when resources are allocated independently of investments and according to a norm or principle of *equality*. It is suggested, furthermore, that both senses of justice in human relationships can be and have been demonstrated. To speak of equality as a special case of equity overlooks more than it reveals and is a move toward unwise parsimony. (Sampson, 1969, p. 264)

In spite of the fact that most theorists seem to feel that equality and proportionality are markedly different types of justice, we would argue that Aristotle's—and the more contemporary theorists'—examples fit nicely within equity theory. In the view of equity theorists, Aristotle is simply describing two different collections of situations. In the first, participants assume that the only relevant input is a person's humanity. Since all possess equal humanity, all are entitled to equal outcomes. In the second collection of situations, participants assume that the relevant inputs are ones on which people vary; they assume that inputs such as Marxian need, legal advantage, task performance, bravery, investments, political acumen, etc., etc. are relevant. Thus, they conclude, different people deserve different amounts of reward.

In his review of the many theories of social justice that have been proposed, Brandt (1962) reminds us that not just such things as humanity, task effort, or need can be viewed as inputs. Lerner (1974a) enumerates four systems of justice: the Marxian justice of need, the justice of equity, the justice of parity, and the justice of laws. Deutsch (1975) cogently observes that societies have defined almost everything to be a valuable input at one time or another.

The Brandt (1962), Lerner (1974a), and Deutsch (1975) reviews make it evident that somewhere, sometime, people have assumed that almost any input legitimately entitled its possessor to reward. Regardless of which inputs a society believes are relevant in a given situation, the same theoretical framework—equity theory—predicts when men will feel equitably or inequitably treated and how they will respond to their treatment.

EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Since most of us have been socialized in American values, we naturally assume that the investments which Americans deem relevant are somehow the only legitimate or even possible inputs. It is difficult for us to believe that capital and hard work aren't really inputs in every society—or to believe that someday good guitar playing could be a crucial input in the business world.

In fact, however, society can define anything—bravery or cowardice, humility or arrogance, beauty or ugliness—as a valuable input. In fact, great diversity already exists. In traditional societies, a distinguished lineage entitles one to esteem. In a revolutionary society, the same lineage entitles one to disdain—or assassination.

If that is the case, a practical question naturally occurs: Who gets to decide whether equality or proportionality prevails? If proportionality prevails, who gets to decide whether such inputs as good breeding, skin color, sex, or tap dancing ability prevail? Equity theory's second proposition states: *Groups can maximize collective reward by evolving accepted systems for "equitably" apportioning rewards and costs among members; thus, members will evolve such systems of equity and will attempt to induce members to accept and adhere to these systems.* Equity does not explain how society's members make that decision. But we can speculate. In general, the following scenario seems to make the most intuitive sense.

1. In a society, members have a vested interest in evolving some system for allocating the community's social and material goods.
2. Every member also has a vested interest in persuading others that the inputs he happens to possess are relevant and important ones and that he thus is entitled to maximum reward.
3. The more powerful an individual (or coalition of individuals) is, the more successful it will be in (a) capturing the lion's share of community goods and (b) persuading others to acknowledge the equitableness of the unbalanced allocation.
4. Over time, the powerful persons who control community resources will evolve a social philosophy to buttress their right to monopolize community goods; and, over time, the entire community will come to accept this justification of the status quo.
5. So long as society's distribution of power remains the same, members will accept the existing standard of equity; if marked shifts in the distribution of power occur, however, the emerging groups will be motivated to push for a new, more profitable, definition of equity.

Is there any compelling evidence in support of this scenario? No. Almost no researchers have experimentally investigated the impact of power on social justice. What we can do, however, is review the sparse evidence of relevance to each of the five contentions.

1. *In a society, members have a vested interest in evolving some system for allocating the community's social and material goods.* Theorists in a wide variety of disciplines assume that man is selfish. Psychologists believe that behavior can be shaped by the careful application of reinforcements. Economists assume that individuals will purchase desired products at the lowest available price. Moral philosophers conclude that the ideal society can only be one which insures the greatest good for the greatest number.

The belief that man is selfish does not imply, however, that man is totally unrestrained in his pursuit of material benefits. Thomas Hobbes pointed out that if men were unregulated in

their pursuit of pleasure, the result would be an unprofitable "war of all against all." He argued:

Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind then another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim himselfe any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he. . . . From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End . . . endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another. . . . Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; . . . In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (1964)

John Locke (1821) observed that social associations not only check the "Warre of all," but they allow men to secure positive benefits as well. In any case, all existing societies have found it profitable to evolve some rough guidelines for allocating community resources.

2. *Every member also has a vested interest in persuading others that the inputs he happens to possess are relevant and important ones and that he thus is entitled to maximum reward.* A wide range of theorists have observed that men's assessments of justice are heavily colored by their own self-interest. For example, Aristotle (Ross, 1966) cynically notes:

Awards should be "according to merit"; for all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit, but democrats identify it with that status of freemen, supporters of oligarchy with wealth (or with noble birth), and supporters of aristocracy with excellence. (p. 1131)

There is recent evidence in support of Aristotle's contention. McGinn (Note 5) argues that in almost any situation there is some ambiguity as to what is equitable. For example: Should effort count or only quality of performance? Should one's previous experiences with an individual be taken into account or should

each new encounter be treated separately? McGinn proposes that in ambiguous situations participants will scan the possible alternatives and select those rules which give them the biggest equitable outcome. Some support for McGinn's contention comes from Leventhal and Anderson (1970) and Komorita and Chertkoff (1973). Komorita and Chertkoff propose that when coalition members can legitimately divide resources equally or proportionately, self-interest will shape their perception and advocacy of equity. Specifically, they state:

Assumption 3: A person strong in resources is more likely to expect and advocate the parity norm as a basis for reward division, while a person weak in resources is more likely to expect and advocate the equality norm. (p. 152)

They cite data from Psathas and Stryker (1965) in support of their contention.

3. *The more powerful an individual (or coalition of individuals) is, the more successful it will be in (a) capturing the lion's share of community goods and (b) persuading others to acknowledge the equitableness of the unbalanced allocation.* Tawney (1939) defines power as:

The capacity of an individual, or group of individuals, to modify the conduct of other individuals or groups in the manner which he desires, and to prevent his own conduct being modified in the manner in which he does not. (p. 229)

Basically, Tawney suggests—and we agree—that there are only two ways a person can induce others to do the things he wants: He can promise to reward them if they comply and threaten to punish them if they do not.

People are very inventive. Over time, humans have found a myriad of ways to exercise power—to reward, withhold reward, or punish others in order to get what they want. Politicians offer political patronage; mothers proffer love; courtesans offered sex; teachers offer good grades; and bosses offer bonuses for compliance. Truckers park their rigs; Lysistrata withholds affection; children refuse to budge until they're placated; shrews make sarcastic comments; bullies beat their wives; generals wield atomic warheads to induce others to go along. Sages use knowledge; con men use cunning; orators use persuasive power; lawyers remind others of their commitments. Some people are adept at turning weakness into power: The "helpless" maiden aunt threatens to commit suicide if her relatives don't toe the mark. The wild-eyed, drunken teenager's irrationality scares his partner in a game of "Chicken."

And, if an individual is not strong enough to get the things he wants, he may form a coalition—"a subset of a group [which] agrees to cooperate in the joint use of resources so as to maximize reward" (Komorita & Chertkoff, 1973, p. 149)—with like-minded individuals in order to do better (see Olson, 1968).

Given the plethora of specific power techniques we (and others) have enumerated, it is not surprising that power theorists' first step was to concentrate on developing a power typology (French & Raven, 1959; Michener & Suchner, 1972; Parsons, 1963; Tedeschi, 1972).

If we accept Tawney's general definition of power, our contention that "the more powerful an individual (or coalition of individuals) is, the more successful it will be in capturing the lion's share of community goods" necessarily follows. However, documentation that individuals who possess the specific bases of power enumerated do get a larger share of community goods than their fellows is of interest.

Collins and Guetzkow (1964) provide a review of correlational evidence in support of two propositions: (a) "high power persons will be successful in a larger percentage of the influence attempts which they do make than low power persons"; and (b) "high power persons will be less affected by the efforts of others to influence them." In support of the first contention, they cite evidence from Lippitt, Polansky, Redl, and Rosen (1952) and French and Snyder (1959); in support of the second, they cite Lippitt et al. (1952), Harvey and Consalvi (1960), and Levinger (1959).

The research of Caplow (1956), Gamson (1961), Horai and Tedeschi (1969), Komorita and Chertkoff (1973), Michener and Cohen (1973), Patchen (1970), Simmel (1950), and Thibaut and Kelley (1959) provide documentation that powerful people and powerful coalitions can command a relatively large share of community goods, and that existing power models can make reasonable predictions as to the impact that various degrees and various distributions of power will have on a person's or group's bargaining success.

Granted that the powerful can force others to cede to them a large share of the community's social and material goods, can they persuade their rivals that they *deserve* the lion's share of goods? Unfortunately, there is no evidence in direct support of the contention that power provides the ability to capture the lion's share of community goods *and* the ability to persuade others to acknowledge the equitableness of the unbalanced allocation.

However, there is substantial evidence that power provides the ability to capture the lion's share of community goods, *which in turn* provides the ability to persuade others to acknowledge the equitableness of the unbalanced allocation.

Theorists have observed that people possess an intense need to perceive this as a fair and equitable world, a world where the enormously benefited deserve their fate and the under-benefited deserve theirs. For example, Lerner (Note 6) has observed that even the most impartial of observers possess an intense desire to believe that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. In an impressive body of research, he documents observers' eagerness to convince themselves that exploiters deserve their excessive benefits and victims deserve their unwarranted suffering (Lerner, 1965, Note 7, 1970, 1974a).

Equity researchers have documented that, under the right conditions, *both* exploiters and their victims tend to be capable of convincing themselves that the most unbalanced of exchanges is in fact perfectly fair (Brock & Buss, 1962, 1964; Glass, 1964; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Walster et al., 1973; Austin & Walster, 1974).

4. *Over time, the powerful persons who control community resources will evolve a social philosophy to buttress their right to monopolize community goods; and, over time, the entire community will come to accept this justification of the status quo.* Perhaps among theorists, Karl Marx has most eloquently argued that there is an inevitable connection between power, monopoly of community resources, and the evolution of a justifying philosophy. He notes:

The ideas of the *ruling* class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. . . .

The individuals composing the ruling class . . . rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an "eternal law."

. . . During the time that the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc., were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. . . .

For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as common interest of all the members of society, put in an ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (Marx & Engels, 1947, pp. 39-41)

More recently, Kipnis (1972, Note 8) has been fascinated by the impact of power on men's social relations and social philosophy. Kipnis argues that as soon as men acquire power, they become tempted to use that power to enrich themselves; inevitably they succumb to temptation. Power thus leads to corruption—of several sorts. According to Kipnis, the powerful: (a) monopolize community goods, (b) are tempted to develop an exploitative morality and soon conclude that they are exempt from ordinary morality, (c) develop an exalted and vain view of their own worth, (d) become alienated from their fellow man, and (e) come to despise him. In a series of laboratory experiments, Kipnis (1972) amasses evidence in support of the sequence he proposes.

5. *So long as society's distribution of power remains the same, members will accept the existing standard of equity; if marked shifts in the distribution of power occur, however, the emerging groups will be motivated to push for a new, more profitable, definition of equity.* Researchers have investigated the effects of various distributions of power on the development of contractual norms (i.e., on the definitions of social justice that groups develop)—Michener, Griffith, and Palmer (1971), Michener and Zeller (1972), Murdock (1967), Murdock and Rosen (1970), Thibaut and Faucheux (1965), and Thibaut and Gruder (1969).

Some theorists have even argued that social upheaval, in and of itself, motivates citizens to take a close look at their power position and to wonder whether they can improve their lot. They argue, for example, that during both unusually good times or major depressions, citizens come to realize that traditionally valued inputs are not inevitably linked to appropriate outcomes. During such chaotic times, the naked power basis underlying society's laboriously articulated philosophy of social justice often becomes evident; it becomes painfully evident that people are receiving far more or far less than they deserve. Such an observation may well stimulate men to wonder why things shouldn't be "reformed" still further. Why shouldn't equity be defined in a way that is more beneficial to them?

Theorists in a wide variety of periods have observed the

connection between social change and social reform. For example, Rousseau (1913) argued:

Most peoples, like most men, are docile only in youth; as they grow old they become incorrigible. When once customs have become established and prejudices inveterate, it is dangerous and useless to attempt their reformation . . .

There are indeed times in the history of States when, just as some kinds of illness turn men's heads and make them forget the past, periods of violence and revolutions do to peoples what these crises do to individuals: horror of the past takes the place of forgetfulness, and the State, set on fire by civil wars, is born again, so to speak, from its ashes, and takes on anew, fresh from the jaws of death, the vigour of youth. Such were Sparta at the time of Lycergus, Rome after the Tarquins, and, in modern times, Holland and Switzerland after the expulsion of the tyrants. . . . But such events are rare. (p. 39)

Mason (1971) cites more contemporary examples in which political revolutions have undermined traditional definitions of social justice.

THE IMPACT OF POWER ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

"It is a truism that political philosophy has traditionally concerned itself with the search for some kind of moral justifications for the power and coercion of governments" (Sampson, 1968).

If the scenario we have sketched is accurate, it has two unsettling implications for the social reformer. Social reformers naturally assume that they stand somewhat outside of their own society. They feel they possess a special sensitivity for and special willingness to work toward universal justice. The preceding dismal scenario, however, suggests that reformers, like their fellows, are likely to be trapped by the status quo. Rather than having a special sensitivity for universal social justice, they may simply possess a special sensitivity to the pressures of emerging groups for "fairer" treatment. One generation of reformers' biases often become startlingly evident in the next generation, when the next generation of reformers encounters yet another power balance. The masses of serfs, merchants, second sons, migrant workers, blacks, women, middle Americans, youths, or elderly now assert their claims. The new generation of reformers realizes that the principles of justice that their fathers found so compelling were in fact unduly influenced by the prevailing power balances. They

too try to articulate an objective system of universal justice. They too end up rationalizing the status quo. We would suggest that we inveterate social reformers must acquire some humility, admit that we are inexorably shaped by our society. It is easy for us to feel appalled at the way nobles exploited their serfs, plantation owners exploited their slaves, and male chauvinists exploited women. But these landowners, slaveowners, and male chauvinists were not fundamentally different from us; they were simply responding to different pressures and a different status quo. The prevailing power balances, then, surely affect even the most aloof reformer's conceptions of social justice.

Our scenario also suggests that even if a social reformer did transcend his society and propose an objective theory of social justice, it would have very little chance of being accepted.

Let us consider an example. John Stuart Mill observed that at one time, sex and physical power determined men's outcomes:

People are not aware of how entirely, in former ages, the law of superior strength was the rule of life; how publicly and openly it was avowed, I do not say cynically or shamelessly—for these words imply a feeling that there was something in it to be ashamed of, and no such notion could find a place in the faculties of any person in those ages, except a philosopher or a saint. (1971, p. 22)

In 1869, Mill—a generation ahead of many other social philosophers—argued that such inputs as sex, race, and physical strength should not be determinants of one's social opportunities. Instead, such inputs as intelligence, industry, and interest should determine one's outcomes. Mill's advanced vision was not accepted by his contemporaries. For example, Freud was an enthusiastic admirer of Mill's, yet Sampson (1968) wryly notes, referring to Freud's well-known criticism of Mill's views:

The irony could hardly be greater. Mill is singled out as the man above all others of his epoch who succeeded in surmounting contemporary prejudices; and then rebuked for his supreme achievement in unmasking the most disastrous of prejudices to which Freud succeeded in clinging his life long. (p. 50)

Other commentators assailed Mill's equalitarian views with bitterness equal to Freud's (Anonymous, 1869; Stephan, 1873/1967; Bain, 1882).

In the time honored tradition, both the beneficiaries of the status quo and its victims joined in defending the status quo. Even those women who chafed most at society's restrictions insisted that although a slight adjustment in the way resources were allocated was clearly in order, major revisions were of course unthinkable.

able. Thus, Caroline Norton (quoted in Perkins, 1909), a tireless campaigner for the Infant Custody Bill of 1839, could not bring herself to support general rights for women. She wrote:

The wild and stupid theories advanced by a few women, of "equal rights" and "equal intelligence," are not the opinions of their sex. I, for one (I, with millions more), believe in the natural superiority of man, as I do in the existence of a God. The natural position of woman is inferiority to man. Amen! That is a thing of God's appointing, not of man's devising. I believe it sincerely, as a part of my religion. I never pretended to the wild and ridiculous doctrine of equality. (pp. 149-150)

Mill would not have been surprised at this. In his essay, *On The Subjugation of Women*, he observed:

But was there any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it? There was a time when the division of mankind into two classes, a small one of masters and a numerous one of slaves, appeared, even to the most cultivated minds, to be natural, and the only natural, condition of the human race. . . .

It hardly seemed less so to the class held in subjugation. The emancipated serfs and burgesses, even in their most vigorous struggles, never made any pretension to a share of authority; they only demanded more or less as limitation to the power of tyrannizing over them. So true is it that unnatural generally means only uncouth, and everything which is usual appears natural. The subjugation of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural. (1971, pp. 27-28)

Recent experimental evidence has supported Mill's—and Baldwin's (1955)—contention (Walster et al., 1973; Stephenson & White, 1970).

If the preceding scenario is correct, the message seems clear. Logic is a good ally for the social reformer; power is a better one. There seems to be little chance that the majority will recognize the claims of exploited minorities unless these minorities can amass sufficient power to enforce their demands for equal treatment. Minority members can (and have) used a variety of techniques to make majority members realize that sharing with them is a more profitable strategy than hoarding. They can use praise, passive resistance, sabotage, moral opprobrium, or moral approbation. But unless the minority has some real power to affect the outcomes of the majority, the case seems hopeless. The powerful can probably always generate a philosophy to satisfactorily justify the most unequal of outcomes.

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