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Equity Theory and Social Justice

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RUNNING HEAD: Social Justice; Equity; Social Exchange

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Abstract

In the 11th century, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1998) argued that the will possesses two competing affinities: an affection for what is to a person's own selfish advantage *and* an affection for justice. The first inclination may be stronger, but the second matters, too. Equity theory, too, posits that in personal, social, and societal relationships, two concerns stand out: firstly, how much reward does a person reap from a given social relationship? Secondly, how fair and equitable is that relationship? According to equity theory, people feel most comfortable when their relationships are maximally profitable and they are giving and getting exactly what they deserve from their relationships—no more and certainly no less.

In this paper, we will begin by describing the classic equity paradigm and the supporting research. We will then review the history of Equity research. In the 1960s and 1970, scholars generally concentrated on testing Equity Theory's applicability to romantic, social, and business relationships. More recently, scholars have attempted to speculate about *why* people in almost all societies share a concern with social justice and equity. We close by predicting that in the next stage in Equity and social justice research, scholars will explore (1) *who* is to be included in the "moral community," (2) a commentary on the current political debate as to the ideal balance personal interest and social justice, and (3) how governments, business, and social activists can best foster that ideal.

Key Words: Equity. Spirituality. Social Justice.

I. Equity Theory

A. Equity Theory

Equity theory is a straightforward theory. It consists of four propositions:

PROPOSITION I. Men and women are "hardwired" to try to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

PROPOSITION II. Society, however, has a vested interest in persuading people to behave fairly and equitably. Groups will generally reward members who treat others equitably and punish those who treat others inequitably.

PROPOSITION III. Given societal pressures, people are most comfortable when they perceive that they are profiting from a relationship *and* are getting roughly what they deserve from that relationship. If people feel over-benefited, they may experience pity, guilt, and shame; if under-benefited, they may experience anger, sadness, and resentment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

PROPOSITION IV. People in inequitable relationships will attempt to reduce their distress through a variety of techniques—by restoring psychological equity, actual equity, or abandoning the relationship (Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978, p 6.)

All people are concerned about fostering social justice. Historically, however, societies have had very different visions as to what constitutes "social justice," "profit," "fairness," and "equity" in social and business relationships. Some spiritually oriented people, for example, argue for "a brotherhood of man" and "universal social justice." Others believe that God has decided that his chosen people are entitled to all the earth's bounty. In a telling example, the Assembly in New England in the 1640s passed a series of resolutions on the Indian question:

1. The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Voted.

2. The Lord may give the Earth or any part of it to his chosen people. Voted.

3. We are his chosen people. Voted. (Reported in Mason, 1971, p. 242).

Probably all of us are inclined to define "justice" in a self-serving way.

B. Assessing Equity

Technically, Equity is defined by a complex mathematical formula (Traupmann, Peterson, Utne, & Hatfield, 1981; Walster, 1975). In practice, however, a relationship's fairness and equity can be reliably and validly assessed with the use of a simple measure. Specifically, participants in a social exchange are asked:

> Considering what you put into your _____ relationship, compared to what you get out of it . . . and what your partner puts in compared to what (s)he gets out of it, how does your relationship "stack up?"

Respondents are given the following response options:

+3: I am getting a much better deal than my partner.
+2: I am getting a somewhat better deal.
+1: I am getting a slightly better deal.
0: We are both getting an equally good, or bad, deal.
-1: My partner is getting a slightly better deal.
-2: My partner is getting a somewhat better deal.
-3: My partner is getting a much better deal than I am.

On the basis of their answers, persons can be classified as over-benefited (receiving more than they deserve), equitably treated, or under-benefited (receiving less than they deserve).

Of course, people can (and do) judge things to be fair or unfair on a familial or society-wide level as well (see Austin & Hatfield, 1974). An activist concerned about global warming, for example, might contend that: "America is consuming more of the world's resources than is fair and just." An end-of-days

Christian might counter that God commanded mankind to “go forth and propagate,” that fears of global warming are exaggerated, or might claim that the “technically savvy” Americans are reaping the just rewards of their enterprise (see Kahan, et al., 2010).

II. Classic Equity Theory Research

In the 1960s and 1970s, Equity researchers conducted a plethora of research designed to test Propositions I-IV in a wide variety of romantic, social, and business settings. The voluminous research in support of the theory is summarized in Hatfield, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) and Hatfield, Rapson, and Aumer-Ryan (2008). In attempting to apply Equity theory in management and commercial settings, researchers focused on three major themes: Are there personality differences in people focused on profit versus justice (Miles, et al., 1989)? How important are managers’ and workers’ perceptions of justice in business settings? How much distress does injustice spark in business settings? How concerned are managers/workers with setting inequities right—either by justifying the inequity, restoring actual equity, retribution, or punishment of wrongdoers? (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Smith, Skitka, & Crosby, 2003; Hatfield et al., 1978).

Social scientists provide compelling evidence that men and women feel most comfortable in relationships that are both profitable and equitable. When people are profiting from their work and know they are receiving just what they deserve in status, money, and services, they feel “content” and “happy.” When receiving considerably more than they deserve, they feel “shame,” “guilt” and

"unease" (Peters, van den Bois, & Karremans, 2008). When receiving far less than they deserve, they feel "angry" and "resentful" (See Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978; Sprecher, 1986, for a compendium of this research.)

Surprisingly, whether people are generally more concerned about justice or profit in work settings is still up for debate. (For a meta-analysis of perceptions of justice in business settings, see Skitka, Winquist, & Hutchinson, 2003. They found that in work settings, outcome favorability is generally considered to be less important than outcome fairness!)

Many studies have found that people are willing to suffer significant costs to administer punishments to third parties who behave selfishly on group tasks (Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2003; Price, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2002). In summarizing one study, for example, Wilson (1993) observed:

> . . . our sense of justice . . . involves a desire to punish wrongdoers, even when we are not the victims, and that sense is a "spontaneous" and "natural" sentiment (p. 40).

In recent years, scholars have begun to focus on another question: "Why are people in almost all known societies concerned with social justice?" Let us describe this research in our next section.

III. Recent Research: What is the Source of Humankind's Concern with Justice? A Multi-Disciplinary Approach

All religions consider the Golden rule ("Do unto others . . .") to be the bedrock of faith (Hauser, 2006; Wright, 1994). In the Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—for example, true believers are told that God created the world and decreed that people must be just in their dealings with

others (Webley, 1993). In their scriptures, all three argue that in commercial transactions, true believers must abjure fraud and cheating, abstain from bribery, and avoid discrimination (Quddus, Bailey III, & White, 2009). Of course, people don't always live up to these ideals.

What is the genesis of the conviction that people must behave fairly and equitably in their social and business relationships? In the 1960s and 1970s, social psychologists focused mainly on socialization, social reinforcements, and market considerations (profit and loss) in attempting to explain why people come to care about equity (Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978; Krebs, 2008; Skitka & Crosby, 2003).

Recently, however, scholars have discovered that the desire for justice may well have far more ancient roots than they once supposed: (1) cultural researchers point out that in different societies—although people often possess very different notions as to what is fair and equitable—all share the belief that others should be treated equitably; (2) evolutionary psychologists and primatologists argue that a concern for justice arose early in humankind's evolutionary history because such concerns had survival value. They also contend that this ancient cognitive "wiring" shapes modern-day definitions of what is fair and just, (3) neuroscientists study the cognitive reactions to perceived fairness and equity, and find that a concern with fairness and justice may be hard wired in the brain. It is clear from this more recent research that culture, experience, our evolutionary heritage, and our biological wiring all

impact people's perceptions of fairness and equity and how they choose to deal with perceived social, procedural, and distributive justice or injustice.

A. Equity: A Cultural Perspective

Cultural theorists contend that culture exerts a profound impact on the ways in which people conceptualize the world around them, the meaning they ascribe to common life events, and the manner in which they react to those events (see Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003; Schwartz, 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 2003).

Palestinians and Israelis, for example, differ markedly in their perceptions as to who is the rightful inheritor of the Promised Land. Currently, each possesses the cherished conviction that they (and only they) are the rightful inheritors of the lands of the Ken'ites and the Ken'izites, the Kad'mon-ites and the Hittites, the Per'izzites and the Reph'aims, the Am'or-ites and the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jeb'u-sites . . .

Not surprisingly then, cultural researchers have long been interested in the impact of culture on definitions of fairness and justice and how people react when they perceive they have been treated inequitably. They have asked: "Is equity theory applicable to all people in all cultures and in all historical eras?" (Amir & Sharon, 1987; Aumer-Ryan, Hatfield, & Frey, 2006; Hatfield & Rapson, 1993; Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002).

Many would answer: "No." Triandis and his colleagues (1990), for example, argued that in individualistic cultures (such as the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and the countries of northern and western Europe)

people tend to focus on personal goals. No surprise, then, that in such societies, people are deeply concerned with how rewarding (or punishing) their commercial relationships are and how fairly (unfairly) they are treated. Collectivist cultures (such as China, many African and Latin American nations, Greece, southern Italy, and the Pacific Islands), on the other hand, insist that people must subordinate personal goals to those of the group: the family, the clan, or the tribe. It is tradition, duty, and deference to elders that matters. Rosenblatt and Cunningham (1976) claimed that equity is of less importance in collectivist societies than in individualistic ones.

There is considerable evidence that culture shapes people's concern with profit, harmony, need, merit, fairness, equality, and equity in the allocation of resources (Carson & Banuazizi, 2008; Chhokar, Zhuplev, Fok, & Hartman, 2001; Kruglanski, et al., 2006; Mintu-Wimsatt, 2005; Rochat, et al., 2009). In spite of these differences, in all cultures, people are concerned (at least to some extent) with both the profit and the fairness of their social and business relationships (Westerman, Park, & Lee, 2007).

The most comprehensive work done on cultural differences in perceptions of fairness, equity, and various forms of justice comes from Powell (2005). The Powell group studied people's cognitive maps when thinking about fairness in more than 40 types of social groupings (such as gender, age, class, and occupation) and in more than 20 cultures (such as India, South Africa, Jamaica, and the like.) They asked:

> (1) What do individuals and collectivities think is just and why? (2) How do ideas of justice shape determination of actual situations? (3) What is the magnitude of the

> perceived injustice associated with given departures from perfect justice? (4) What are the behavioral and social consequences of perceived injustice? (Jasso, 2005, p. 15).

As you might expect, the Powell consortium found that in different cultures, people possess very different ideas as to what is fair and equitable in social and business relationships.

B. Equity: The Evolution of a Cultural Universal

In the past 25 years or so, evolutionary psychologists have become interested in the underpinnings of morality (Krebs, 2008), focusing primarily on humankinds' desire for social justice and fairness and equity in social exchange. Cosmides and Tooby (1992), for example, observed:

> It is likely that our ancestors have engaged in social exchange for at least several million years. . . Social exchange behavior is both universal and highly elaborated across all human cultures—including hunter-gatherer cultures . . . as would be expected if it were an ancient and central part of human life. (p. 164)

They argue that notions of fairness and equity came to be writ in the mind's "architecture" because a concern with social justice possessed survival value (Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). Further, a concern with social justice, in all its forms, is alive and well today (in all cultures and all social structures) because fairness in romantic, social, and commercial relations remains a wise and profitable strategy. People are good at identifying people who behave fairly in commercial exchanges versus those who do not. Selfish individuals are often shunned and ostracized—a potentially lethal punishment within a social species. (For a further discussion of these points, see Hatfield, et al., 1978; Jost & Major, 2001; Krebs, 2008.)

Today, paleoanthropological evidence supports the view that notions of social justice and equity are extremely ancient. Ravens, for example, have been observed to attack those who violate social norms. Dogs get jealous if their playmates get treats and they do not. Wolves who don't "play fair" are often ostracized—a penalty that may well to lead to the wolf's death (Bekoff, 2004; Brosnan, 2006).

Primatologists have amassed considerable evidence that primates and other animals do care about fairness. In a study with brown capuchin (*Cebus apella*) monkeys, Brosnan and de Waal (2003) found that female monkeys who were denied the rewards they deserved became furious. They refused to continue to work for reward (refused to exchange tokens for a cucumber) and disdained to eat their "prize"—holding out for the grapes they thought they deserved. If severely provoked (the other monkey did nothing and still got the highly prized grapes instead of the cucumber) capuchins grew so angry that they began to scream, beat their breasts, and hurl food at the experimenter. Interestingly, in a later study, the authors found that chimpanzees *(Pan troglodytes)* were most upset by injustice in casual relationships. In *chimps'* close, intimate relationships, injustice caused barely a ripple (Brosnan, Schiff, & de Waal, 2005). In nature, family members often try to "set things right" in subsequent interactions. We see, then, that different species, in different settings, may respond differently to injustice in a work setting.

Potentially, this fascinating animal research may provide some insights into three questions that have intrigued equity researchers: (1) when, in primates'

long pre-history, did animals begin to feel “guilty” about receiving “too much,” as well as feeling outraged when they are “ripped off?” (Brosnan, et al., 2005; Brosnan, 2006); (2) are animals more (or less) concerned about fairness in despotic, hierarchical societies than in those that are in relatively equalitarian communities? (Brosnan, 2006); (3) are primates and other animals more (or less) concerned about inequities in close kin relationships than in more distant encounters? (Brosnan, et al, 2005.)

C. Equity: A Neuroscience Perspective

Recently neuroscientists have begun to explore people’s sensitivity to moral issues in commercial settings, using a compendium of state-of-the-art fMRI, EEG, and chemical assays (Borg, et al., 2006; Raine & Yang, 2006; Robertson, et al., 2006; Tabibnia, et al., 2008.). Tabibnia and his colleagues (2008), for example, used fMRI techniques to study how people react when faced with a conflict between financial interests and fairness. The authors examined self-reported happiness and neural responses to fair and unfair offers while controlling for monetary payoff. Compared with unfair offers of equal monetary value, fair offers led to higher happiness ratings and activation in several reward regions of the brain. The tendency to accept unfair proposals was associated with increased activity in the right *ventrolateral prefrontal cortex* (a region involved in emotional regulation) and decreased activity in the *anterior insula* (which has been implicated in negative affect). The authors conclude: “This work provides evidence that fairness is hedonically valued and that tolerating unfair treatment for material gain involves a pattern of activation

resembling suppression of negative affect." (p. 339). In brief, people in business settings value both reward and social justice.

D. A Caveat

We have spent so much time dwelling on the multitude of reasons why citizens are predisposed to care about social justice that it is easy to forget that the concern with social justice is a fragile flower, easily trampled under foot by fear, anger, jealousy, greed, and the like.

In the past decade, the world has witnessed a plethora of the horrific: suicide bombers, mass murder, genocide, crimes against humanity, and global terrorism. We have only to speak the names "Serbia and Bosnia," "Northern Ireland," "Cambodia," "Rwanda," "Palestine and Israel," and the "World Trade Center" to despair.

Social psychologists have devoted a great deal of thought to unraveling the mysteries of the "psycho-logic" that allows good people to commit staggering wrongs—to engage in orgies of torture and killing (see Reich, 1990). It is thought that terrorist ideologies are driven in part by a sense of "relative deprivation", whereby violence against readily identifiable culprits is seen as a morally justifiable means of reclaiming one's wrongfully restricted rights and freedoms (Kruglanski et al., 2009).

Theologians parse the promises of the *Bible,* the *Torah,* and the *Qur'an.* Social psychologists speak of cognitive transformations that allow people to interpret the Golden Rule and the Fifth Commandment that "Thou Shalt Not Kill" as meaning "God Is On Our Side" and "Victory At Any Price,"

and “By Any Means.” Psychologists speak of cultural factors, “moral disengagement,” “self-deception,” “depersonalization,” “splitting,” and “externalization.” These processes lead to the development of an “Us versus Them” mentality, of “denials of doubt,” and a refusal to admit even the *possibility* of uncertainty (Newman & Erber, 2002; Rapson, 1978). They also focus on peoples’ emotions as well—facing up to the inner conflicts of people caught up in such “Holy” crusades and attempting to comprehend the nature of their shame, fear, rage, hatred, and despair (Hatfield & Rapson, 2004).

This caveat is merely meant as a reminder that we can’t be too sanguine about the universal desire for justice. The fact that people possess gentle as well as fierce instincts is not the topic of our essay, however, and in this paper we will not discuss the darker aspects of the human personality further. This is simply meant as a reminder of political and social realities.

IV. Future Directions

Spirituality, as defined by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) refers to: “Individuals’ drive to experience transcendence, or deeper meaning to life, through the way in which they live and work” (p. 87).

In the wake of two major Middle Eastern wars, the global financial crisis, and outrage on the part of many over what were generally seen as unscrupulous and predatory financial practices among high level Wall Street brokers and bankers, scholars have begun to look for new ways of introducing

solid and meaningful ethical reforms in political and business settings. The goal is to inspire fairer and more equitable dealings among political and business professionals.

Increasingly, the focus of scholars has shifted away from theoretical matters to a concern with real-world social problems (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). We suspect that in the future, the attention of scholars may well be directed to three fundamental questions: (1) Who is included in the moral community? (Are we obligated to be "fair" to lovers, family, friends, and strangers? How about adversaries and enemies?) (2) In a given society, what is the ideal balance between self-interest and social concern? (3) Even if politicians, scholars, and businessmen can decide on the previous points, is it possible to change the attitudes and actions of citizens?

A. The Scope of Justice

Darwin (1874) theorized that the social instincts originated in "parental and filial affections" (p. 95). There is considerable evidence that people are more concerned with maintaining close, fair, and equitable relationships with intimates than with strangers (Hatfield, Rapson, & Aumer-Ryan, 2008). Recently, theorists such as Opotow (1990) have begun to investigate the "scope of justice." The scope of justice is the psychological boundary for justice and fairness, such that "moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply only to those within this boundary for fairness, called our 'scope of justice' or 'moral community.'" (p. 3). Only those within the golden circle of intimacy and concern must be treated fairly. For the rest, moral values, rules, and

considerations of fairness do not apply. For example, some people may feel at ease with the ideas of genocide, mass internment, or slavery, because these social victims are thought of as barely human (Hafer & Olson, 2003). They do not count.

Not surprisingly, we suspect that the question of who is included in the scope of justice, along with when, where, and why, will be a topic of great interest in the future.

Politicians, businessmen, and humanitarians have also begun to devise ways to persuade people to assist those in need worldwide. Recently, for example, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett initiated "The Pledge," an attempt to persuade Forbes named billionaires to pledge to give away half of their wealth to charities worldwide (Mishel, et al., 2010). More than 40 billionaires signed on to the giving pledge. Other attempts to change the political and corporate culture have been inaugurated as well.

B. Two Views of Social Equality: the American and the European

Once politicians, citizens, businessmen, and humanitarians decide who ought to be included in their "moral community," they face a second question—what is the "appropriate" balance between private concerns and public caring.

The economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1958), writing of the U.S. more than a half-century ago, described a domestic Sunday ritual of his day.

> The family which takes it mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground. They pass on into a countryside that has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art. (The goods which the latter advertise have an absolute priority in our value system. Such aesthetic considerations as a view of the countryside accordingly come second. On such matters we are consistent.) They picnic on exquisitely

> packaged food from a portable icebox by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius? (p. 199-200).

In a commentary, Rapson (1988) observed:

> *The Affluent Society* was ironically titled. The signs of wealth are apparent throughout the tale above: the family drives in a fancy car; their food is extravagantly packaged, they own a portable icebox, an air mattress, and a nylon tent. Few families in few places in the world in 1958 could have possessed such luxuries. But, on their tour they witness a dirty city, billboards, a filthy stream, and an unsafe park. Galbraith distinguishes between private affluence and public poverty, and poses the problem of social balance. An adequate sewage system, a well-staffed police force, and decently maintained cities are severely lacking. The multi-millionaires of Beverly Hills may possess gorgeous swimming pools, displayed on the spacious front lawns of their extravagant mansions, but they still have to breathe the filthy, smoggy air of Los Angeles along with the Chicanos, blacks, and less well-off white folks all around them (p. 101).

Galbraith skewered this social imbalance throughout his long writing career, noting that it only grew more out of whack well into the early 21st century. By the time he died in 2006, America, still the wealthiest nation in the world (but by a decreasing margin), possessed by far, in the developed world, the greatest income and wealth inequity between its richest and its poorest citizens (Kasser et al., 2007; Hertz, 2001; Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2005). One result of its low tax base and its consequent diminished safety net—its definition of social equity—was that America was rapidly losing its place as The Promised Land, the place to which people contemplating emigration most wished to resettle. Instead the European Union, with all its problems of adjusting to its still forming system of political and economic order, was increasingly being seen as a fairer, more just, and better place to live (Huffington, 2010; Newsweek, 2010; Rapson, 2007).

These days, many nations, from Turkey to the Ukraine, strive to join the European Union. Few aspire to join the United States of America. (Pew Global

Attitudes Project, 2005 and 2010; Rapson, 2007). Were Canada, New Zealand, and Australia offered the chance to join either the EU or the USA, it's not likely they would choose the latter with its growing social imbalances. In fact, in 2010, the mainstream Conservative parties controlling the three most powerful members of the EU—France, led by Nicolas Sarkosy, Great Britain, led by David Cameron, and Germany, led by Angela Merkel—took as a matter of course social policies and cultural attitudes not at all accepted by America's Republican Party and not yet fully accepted even by some leaders of the Democratic Party: universal health care, civil unions, abortion rights for women, gun control, separation of church and state, sex education, the reality of climate change, parental leave, and much more (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2010).

The entire political debate in the U.S. is tilted well far to the so-called "right" of every other developed nation in the world. America is unique in, rightly or wrongly, failing to support the notion of equity that higher taxes are worth paying if they result in worthwhile government-provided services such as health care, clean air, fine public schools, public transit, high-speed railroads, broad internet access, family leave, clean water, safe streets, fewer homeless people, a well-supported infrastructure, and even financial aid for the arts. (Immigration remains an *un*settled issue in both the EU and America.)

In the U.S., the Republican Party's winning electoral mantra over the past 50 years of "no new taxes" may be a coded racial message, but it also bespeaks the outsize power of rural, Southern, evangelical Red State Americans in the U.S. Senate, supported often by corporate money to push through its anti-government

ideology. This far-right ideology has become singular in the Western world. For these passionate Americans (and they vote!), government programs funded by higher levels of taxation don't work. Rural white, evangelical, Southern and Mountain West Americans have developed a remarkable and self-serving view of equity: we'll take what government gives *us*, but we don't want to pay for it. And we certainly don't want to pay for *them*. Why not, if they can get away with it? It seems only fair to them (Bunch, 2010; Hofstadter, 2008a and 2008b).

The view of equity in the "rest of the West" is that citizens support higher taxes for the common good and social services. There are fierce debates over the details, but not much about the theory. Europeans by and large accept that Social Contract, and their view of equity and social justice has become more a model for the world than the more dog-eat-dog-I'll-take-care-of-my-own American view. They'll settle for a car smaller than Galbraith's mauve and cerise gas-guzzler if it means they can camp out in safety, cleanliness, and breathe clean air (Newsweek, 2010).

In sum: A desire for private rights and social justice may lead to very different views of the world and very different social choices and rationalizations. But there does seem to be a growing historical tendency towards diminished support for the American model and greater support for the European model of social justice. Might this perhaps mean that to most future citizens of the world, the latter form of social organization will be seen as more "equitable?"

(There are those, of course who contend that the "European dream," which values workplace spirituality and humanity over profit, falls far short

of its goals [see Bolton, 2010, for such a critique]). A number of Conservative commentators have also addressed these issues—obviously taking a very different position to that articulated above. Social commentators who possess a very different vision as to what social policies would be best for America and the world include Beck (2009), Demuth and Kristol (1995), and Limbaugh (1992).

C. Is it Possible to Change Americans' Visions of Social Justice?

Even if thoughtful people were all to agree on the *concept* of social justice, it seems plausible, given the discussion above, that individuals from different backgrounds may come to define the *terms* of social justice differently. If certain divisions of the American populous base their perceptions of social justice upon societal values of self-interest and competition, might emphasizing values of a more egalitarian nature promote similar changes in their conceptions of social fairness?

Some scholars, assuming that people's sense of ethics and morality is derived from their religious backgrounds and beliefs, have argued that universities and business schools should introduce spiritual and religious studies into business ethics courses. This, it is hoped, would activate professionals' religious sensibilities, and lead them to act more charitably and humanely toward one another. In preparation for such a religious intervention into business ethics, Quddus, Bailey III, and White (2009) have already illustrated how the sacred texts of the major religions speak out against unethical practices

such as bribery, fraud, discrimination, and mistreating workers. (See also, An Interfaith Declaration, 1993).

Critics have pointed out, however, that spirituality and religion are only two ways by which individuals can construct meaning and a sense of values in their lives; that other value systems may be just as influential in determining the ideals they cherish and the goals that they pursue (Lopez, et al. 2009).

Some argue, for example, that American corporate capitalism is a cultural system whose core values and goal orientations are by their very nature antithetical to communal and egalitarian concerns (Kasser et al., 2007; Corvino, 2006). Others point out that traditional cultural values have such a powerful impact on attitudes, emotions, and behaviors, that social change is almost impossible. They point out that long-standing group visions provide members with a view of the world that gives meaning to their lives, helps them understand their place in the world, and gives them guidance in negotiating their lives (e.g. Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti & De Grada, 2006).

Many anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists argue that man's primary motive in life is not power or pleasure but the approbation of one's community and the conviction that one's life has meaning (Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Essentially, individuals need to feel that they are meaningful agents in a meaningful, sensible world, and that their actions and beliefs have real value (Becker, 1971; Frankl, 1963). Becker (1971) argued that cultural systems provide individuals with meaningful values and standards of practice that allow

them to pursue a sense of self-value in the world. Americans, for example are raised to embrace values of individualism and capitalism. In China, they are encouraged to embrace values of deference and collectivism. It is these values that shape citizens' ideas of what makes one a worthwhile person and their views of social justice. Changing these is no easy matter. (See also Kruglanski et al., 2006; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczski, 1991 for a further discussion of these issues.)

Other theorists remind us that it is extraordinary difficult to alter a political or business climate (Corvino, 2006). Attempts to change people's visions of who should be included in the moral community and how much one should sacrifice to help one's fellow man, is bound to pose a powerful threat to one's self esteem and social reality, especially if one is asked to sacrifice for "outsiders". No surprise then, that promoting more egalitarian conceptions of social justice within an inherently self-interested and competitive culture – whether by religion or other means – may lead to the kind of conservative backlash typical of any concerted effort to change the status quo. (See Becker, 1971; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Skitka, 2003.) In a famous essay, the economic historian Robert Heilbroner (1991) posed the witty question: "What has posterity Ever Done for Me?" when discussing the problem of persuading people to sacrifice today for a future good.

We agree that change is not easy, but even a little change would be a good thing. Fernand Braudel, a French historian, once observed that he would happily settle for a world with a bit more justice, a bit more equality, a bit more

freedom, less violence, and a good deal less poverty. Those modest achievements would indeed be worthy of celebration. Happily, many have been occurring in the wake of the 18th century Enlightenment. Braudel's modest goals are not beyond reach (Cameron, et al., 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005).

D. Some Additional Research Questions

The fact that few social scientists have explored the impact of spirituality (and religious commitment) on the visions people possess of fairness and equity (Dean & Fornaciari, 2007) means that a fascinating panoply of questions remain to be addressed. A few examples:

- Do spiritual people possess a wider "moral universe" than do their peers?

Social commentators often claim that people committed to spiritual or religious life are more likely to "Do unto others. . ." and to be Good Samaritans than are their secular humanist brethren (Huckabee, 2009; Ratzinger, 2007; Wills, 2009.) Secularists often make a counter claim—that all mankind feel the stirrings of an ethical passion, be they religious or not, and that in fact parochial religions are often divisive (Dawkins, Hawking & Miodinow, 2010; Harris, 2010; Hitchens, 2007.)

Some have asked "How could scholars possibly conduct research on such questions?" In truth, paradigms for such research are already in existence. In an early article, Hatfield and Piliavin (1972), attempted to apply principles of Equity theory to helping behavior. They describe a series of naturalistic studies, in which social scientists had found that innocent

bystanders generally possess a “narrow moral universe.” In an ingenious experiment, for example, Piliavin et al. (1969) staged an emergency during a seven and one-half minute express run on a New York subway. On each run, a male confederate—playing the part of either a Caucasian, Black, or Hispanic invalid with a cane or a man who was drunk—collapsed. He remained supine looking at the ceiling until one of the passengers (or in the absence of such help, another confederate) came to his aid or went for help. As expected, people were far more likely to help people in need who were of their own ethnic background. Given the abundance of such pre-tested paradigms, it would be a simple thing to assess people’s spiritual (and religious commitment) via reliable and valid measures (see, for example, the plethora of scales described in Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Scholars could then assess whether innocent bystanders would be more (or less) likely to help others in need, who varied greatly in age, ethnicity, attractiveness, etc. This would give us some idea as to whether or not spiritual (and religious) people do indeed possess a wider moral universe than do their peers.

- Are there gender, social class, educational, and/or religious group differences in the extent to which people think spiritual concerns ought to be addressed in the workplace? (Furnham, 2010).

Austin and Hatfield (1974) proposed that people will choose, as behavioral guides, those norms and comparisons that are most rewarding, least costly, and which will stand up as feasible justifications for their actions. In a series of experimental studies they examined the factors that influenced whether or not people would limit a concern with fairness to those with whom

they had face-to-face relationships or, rather, with people in general—individuals who hailed from anywhere in the world. Certainly it would be easy to determine whether the demographic and spiritual variables above affected such trade-offs—using the paradigms we have reviewed.

- Do spiritually (and/or religiously) oriented people differ from their peers in their definitions of fairness?

Once again, using the measures of spirituality and religiosity we described earlier, it should be possible to address this question.

- Do they differ in their perceptions as to what inputs and outcomes are relevant in a commercial setting? Might the spiritually oriented, for example, consider the fostering of spirituality and amity and the welfare of others to be more important than maximizing corporate profits?

Today, the corporate world is caught up in a political debate about this very question. Recently, Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren E. Buffett, and 40 of American's wealthiest businessmen, called on billionaires to sign a Giving Pledge, agreeing to give away at least half of their fortunes (about $600 billion) to charity. Naturally, the call to such corporate philanthropy sparked a firestorm of attention and controversy. Do such giving programs unduly affect governmental policies? What is the role of the public and private sectors in philanthropy? (Strom, 2010). Historians could certainly conduct some research into the antecedents and consequences of such charity—contrasting the 19th century and early 20th century philanthropy of the Rockefeller-Carnegie-Ford generation with the Gates and Buffett charities of today. And what about the billionaires who make "public service" contributions? Those like the Rupert Murdochs and the Koch Brothers, who

underwrite politically right-wing causes, versus people like Arianna Huffington and George Soros, who underwrite progressive liberal causes? How do contributors differ from corporate moguls who choose to spend money on themselves in conspicuous consumption? What are their views as to the appropriate balance between the public good and corporate profits? And to what extent is self-perceived spirituality a variable in all this?

- [To further expand on the above point.] Are the spiritually oriented more likely than their peers to prefer equal allocations of rewards (which promote group cohesiveness) to proportional resource allocations? Are they more concerned with the process of reward allocation than the profitability of resource allocation?

- Do spiritually oriented people differ from their peers in the trade-offs they are willing to make between spiritual and material rewards?

- How do individuals' perceptions of fairness and justice change when they enter an organizational structure whose values either support or oppose participants' sense of equity? (Kruglanski, et al., 2006).

By repute, traditional companies such as IBM, the CIT group, General Motors, and the *New York Times* adhere to a top-down style. Silicon Valley companies such as Google and Apple employ a team-based style (de Baar, 2009). How do managers' perceptions and values change as they enter one or another type of company? How do such varying structures effect workers' perceptions and behavior? Is a perfect balance, combining the best of both strategies, possible? How does entry into one of these companies affect managers and employees' values?

- Is it possible to change society's definition of justice? To persuade business to transcend the political, social, and economic imperatives of capitalism and a profit orientation?

Does the welfare capitalism of the European Union promote a more spiritual orientation than does the more laissez-fair capitalism of the United States? Does it affect citizens' perceptions of fairness and equity?

- What are the best ways of bringing about such changes? (Cameron, 2003; Collins, 2010).

Luckily, social scientists have amassed voluminous evidence as to the best way to produce attitude and behavioral change. They suggest that Governmental agencies and PR firms employ very different messages when facing an audience receptive to intellectual versus emotional appeals (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). Of course, a precursor of such change is persuading a government to wish to implement such change—a much harder proposition.

- Under what conditions will spiritually and ethically oriented organizations financially outperform unethical ones? When will such concerns prove costly? (Collins, 2010)

Earlier we suggested that we compare the performance of EU companies (which are required to take a social welfare approach) with American companies—comparing manager, worker, and consumer satisfaction and monetary performance. These days, it might be useful to add the previously admired (and currently-stagnant) Japanese group oriented style of capitalism and the energetic, non-democratic capitalism of China into the mix. Of course, since many corporations are multinational, such research is naturally going to be complex.

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Figure 1: The Relationship Between Perceived Equity and Contentment/Distress