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978-0-521-42525-4 - Justice: Interdisciplinary Perspectives
Edited by Klaus R. Scherer
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Klaus Scherer brings together leading scholars from the social sciences to discuss recent theoretical and empirical studies of justice. They examine the nature of justice from the current perspectives of philosophy, economics, law, sociology and psychology, and explore possible lines of convergence. A critical examination of theories of justice from Plato and Aristotle, through Marx, to Rawls and Habermas heads a collection which addresses the role of justice in economics and the law and which evaluates contemporary sociological and psychological stances in relation to justice, distributive and procedural. All the material is of clear cross-disciplinary interest; and it provides a framework with which administrators and researchers in social institutions can inform their practice.

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This volume arises from exploratory discussions and reviews on justice research initiated by the ESF Standing Committee for the Social Sciences.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521425254

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First published 1992
Reprinted 1994
This digitally printed version 2010

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Justice: interdisciplinary perspectives/edited by Klaus R. Scherer.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 41503 9.
1. Justice. 2. Sociological jurisprudence. 3. Distributive
justice. I. Scherer, Klaus R.
K246.J82 1992 340'.115—dc20 91-20389 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-41503-3 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-42525-4 Paperback

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Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
1. Issues in the study of justice Klaus R. Scherer	1
2. Philosophical theories of justice Bernard Cullen	15
3. The economics of distributive justice, welfare and freedom Erik Schokkaert	65
4. Justice and the law John Bell	114
5. Sociological approaches to distributive and procedural justice Wil Arts and Romke van der Veen	143
6. The social psychology of distributive justice Kjell Törnblom	177
7. Interdisciplinary theory and research on justice John Bell and Erik Schokkaert	237
<i>Bibliography</i>	254
<i>Index</i>	285

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Preface

The study of justice may be one of the prime examples of the negative consequences of the increasing specialization and professionalization of modern academic writing, particularly in the humanities and the social and behavioural sciences. Concern with justice in society dates back to the very beginning of principled reasoning about human social association. Ancient philosophers approached the problem in an integral fashion dealing both with the sense of and the need for justice as a basic aspect of human psychology and with justice as a normative political and legal concept with important implications for the exercise of government. A first fragmentation of the academic study of justice occurred around the thirteenth century when the thriving universities were divided into different faculties, thereby recognizing the growing importance of subjects such as philosophy, medicine, grammar and rhetoric. The study of justice as an ideal for law making and as a legal procedure became separated from philosophical and ethical concerns about justice in society based on reflections concerning the nature of man and of the state. A further fragmentation arose when British political philosophers, in particular Locke, Smith and Bentham, treated distributive justice as a fundamental concept for economic policy. The rift widened with the development of modern economics in the nineteenth century. At the same time, owing in large part to the influence of early French sociologists such as Comte and Durkheim, sociology started to become established as a separate and largely empirical discipline, concentrating on the observation of the effects of justice and injustice on society and social movements. Finally, the emancipation of social psychology from both psychology and sociology as an independent discipline dealing with individual motivation and subjective experience in a social context gave rise to yet another approach, descriptive and experimental, to the study of justice.

While not at all an expert in the area of justice research, I was struck by the discrepancy between the importance of justice as a general social and political problem and the fragmentation of scholarship and research across the various disciplines concerned with it. It seemed that, with a few exceptions such as the work of Rawls, there was little overlap between the relevant work in the different disciplines and, even more worrying, generally little awareness of the scholarship in other areas.

x *Preface*

Since I happened to be serving as a representative of social psychology on the Standing Committee of the Social Sciences of the European Science Foundation at the time, I suggested to the ESF that they envisage an interdisciplinary workshop series to remedy that situation. I proposed the commissioning of a series of state-of-the-art reports on the work in the various disciplines concerned with justice to serve as a basis for the discussion at such workshops. The ESF approved the proposal, a coordinating committee was set up, expert authors were identified with the help of the committee and the ESF member organizations, and the reports were commissioned. The draft manuscripts were discussed during a workshop at the University of Edinburgh and, on a basis of multiple inputs, the authors proceeded to establish the final manuscripts which form the bulk of this book.

Owing to the outstanding efforts of the contributors and the general enthusiasm for an attempt to break through the disciplinary boundaries, this volume has become much more than a collection of isolated state-of-the-art reports. Given the possibilities for repeated discussion of the manuscripts among the authors and because of the commentaries from a number of experts in different areas, a multi-authored interdisciplinary monograph emerged. In an introductory chapter, I attempt to identify some of the major questions on justice as they seem to present themselves in the different disciplines. Furthermore, two of the contributors, John Bell and Erik Schokkaert, have written a concluding chapter in which they tie together some of the different strands of thought and empirical evidence emerging in the different chapters and highlight the importance and the potential of future interdisciplinary research.

Some limitations should be mentioned. In an effort to keep this volume to a manageable size some sacrifices had to be made. First, and most regrettably, several authors had to cut their manuscripts quite drastically, eliminating the discussion of some topics, detail on some issues, and copious notes. However, appropriate references have been provided and the interested reader may consult these works. In addition, from the outset priority has been given to issues of distributive justice, assuming that this issue would be of greatest interest for interdisciplinary work. While there is some discussion of procedural justice, large parts of the copious literature could only be referred to. Retributive justice, i.e. punishment for wrongdoing, had to be virtually excluded from the discussion in this volume. As far as completeness of coverage of the relevant disciplines is concerned we have tried to include most of the major approaches. There is a deplorable absence of ethological and anthropological work dealing with the comparative approach to justice. In addition, within some of the larger disciplines represented in the volume, such as law and economics, not all of the different schools or traditions could be given equal weight or even represented. Finally, given the enormous

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Preface xi

amount of relevant literature of justice in scholarly publications from many countries of the world, some selection had to be made and some preference was given to European publications. Because of the limited linguistic expertise of both authors and editor, there is also some bias, as usual, towards publications in English (and, to a more limited extent, in French and German).

We hope that this volume will prove useful as a text for all those eager to embark on the study of justice by learning about the fundamental contributions in the different disciplines concerned with this topic and as a manual of reference for all those established scholars of justice who feel the need for stronger interdisciplinary efforts in this area. Greater familiarity with the concepts and approaches used in the various fields may help to encourage more constructive discussions and to launch new interdisciplinary research. Finally, we hope that the 'practitioners of justice', dealing daily with problems of distributive and procedural justice in the context of the administration of law, of social politics or of private enterprise, to name but a few domains, will benefit from this volume by encountering some of the major facets of theory and research on justice in philosophy and the social and behavioural sciences.

Klaus R. Scherer

Acknowledgements

The authors and the editor of this volume would like to express their sincere gratitude to the following institutions and persons whose contributions have been invaluable in producing the book:

the European Science Foundation, its Standing Committee on the Social Sciences, and in particular John Smith, without whose unswerving loyalty to the project and remarkable skills in the politics of science this volume would not have been possible;

the members of the coordinating committee who have generously contributed their expert advice at all stages of the project: Wil Arts, Anthony Bradley, Göran Hermeren, Serge-Christophe Kolm and Carlo Rossetti;

the Centre for Criminology and the Social and Philosophical Study of Law, and in particular Neil MacCormick, its director, and Zenon Bankowski for the organization of the Edinburgh workshop on the Nature and Administration of Justice, which, because of its scientific stimulation and atmosphere of relaxed interdisciplinary interchange, greatly contributed to the enthusiasm which carried this volume through many of the difficulties en route;

the following colleagues from many disciplines who have spent many hours reading and commenting on various parts of the manuscript and whose input has been the single most important factor in ensuring the scientific quality of the enterprise (with the authors obviously accepting complete responsibility for any shortcomings and oversights persisting despite such excellent advice): Z. Bankowski, B. Barry, L. Bouckaert, A. Decoster, P. De Grauwe, U. Foa, W. Griffiths, S.-C. Kolm, M. Lerner, G. Mikula, D. Raphael, H. Treiber, W. van Trier, P. van Parijs;

last but not least, Marion Smith, our editor at Cambridge University Press, who has seen this volume through the production process with an unusual sense of commitment and with great efficacy.