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Exploring the "Lost and Found" of Justice Theory and Research

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Abstract Scientific interest in the nature of how people think about justice and fairness began approximately 70 years ago with Stouffer's classic study on the American soldier. Since then there have been numerous theoretical frameworks and thousands of research studies conducted on what people perceive as fair and the consequences of making a fairness judgment. The goal of this article is to dig through the "lost and found" box of justice research in an attempt to re-examine where we have been, issues and ideas we may have forgotten, and to gain insight on directions we may want to go in the future. The key rediscovery of this review is that perspective matters. Specifically, how people interpret fairness depends critically on whether they are viewing a situation in terms of their material, social, or moral needs and goals. The implications of adopting a contingent theory of how people reason about fairness are discussed.

Keywords Justice · Fairness · Morality · Symbolic interaction

Forays into studying the psychology of fairness over the last 70 or so years have yielded dozens of theories and thousands of empirical studies. The goal of this review is to selectively rummage through the last several decades of theory and research to explore where we have been, re-examine issues and ideas we may have forgotten or neglected to sufficiently follow-up or apply forward, and to gain insight on directions we may want to go in the future.

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Although there are many possible starting points, I want to begin my search through the "lost and found" of justice theory and research by revisiting the classic study of fairness inspired by a football game in 1951 between rivals Princeton and Dartmouth. By all accounts, the game was a hard-fought one. The Princeton quarterback had to leave the game in the second quarter because of a broken nose and a concussion. The Dartmouth quarterback's leg was broken in a backfield tackle in the third quarter. Numerous penalties were called on both sides. Hastorf and Cantril (1954) decided to interview students who saw the game, as well as a sample of those who viewed the game on film, and to ask them how they would characterize the game: was it fair?

As can be seen in Fig. 1, Princeton students almost universally reported that the game was "rough and dirty," whereas a substantial proportion of Dartmouth students saw the game as "rough and fair" or "clean and fair." These results are consistent with the major claims and insights of theories symbolic interaction: the game can only be understood as an interpreted reality, something that is filtered through expectations, previous experience, and desired goals or end states. As Hastorf and Cantril (1954) put it: "there is no such 'thing' as a 'game' existing 'out there' in its own right which people merely 'observe.' The game 'exists' for a person and is experienced by him only insofar as certain happenings have significances in terms of his purpose" (p. 133).

These findings, and others that arrive at similar conclusions, beg the following question. Specifically, what perspectives or frames of reference are most likely to shape how people define fair and unfair behavior? A rummage through the last several decades of justice theorizing and research leads to the prediction that at least three different perspectives or frames of reference are intimately tied to people's perceptions to fairness. Although traditionally treated as competing theoretical explanations for what motivates people's concerns about justice, one could alternatively view these frames of reference as contingencies instead. Specifically, how people define or understand fairness is likely to depend on whether they currently see their situation in terms of (a) maximizing their self interests, (b) their needs for status and inclusion, or (c) questions of basic moral right and wrong (see also Skitka, Aramovich, Lytle, & Sargis, in press; Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen,

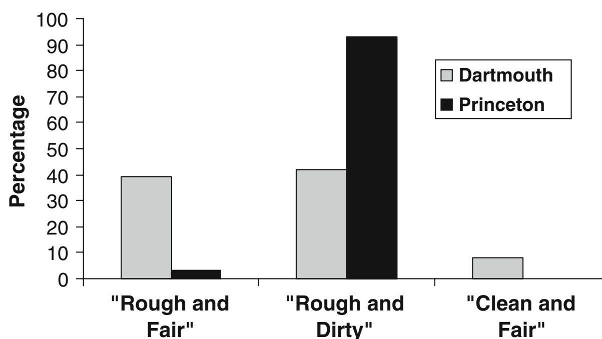

Fig. 1 How Dartmouth and Princeton Students "Saw" the Game (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954)

2008). I briefly review each of these perspectives next, which I respectively refer to as the *homo economicus, socialis,* and *moralis* programs of justice research.

Homo Economicus

From approximately 1949 through the 1980s, social psychological research on justice was dominated by a *homo economicus* guiding metaphor of human nature. According to this school of thought, social life is best understood as representing a series of negotiated exchanges, and people use subjective cost-benefit analyses to guide their interactions with others. The *homo economicus* theoretical perspective hypothesizes that people's goals and concerns are "self-interested" or "selfish". That said, these theories posit that pure self-interest and a Hobbesian war of all against all is avoided by people's acceptance of the need for fairness in material and social exchange to maximize their interests in the long run (e.g., Lane, 1986; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1976). Examples of theories that emerged during this time were various versions of equity theory (e.g., Adams, 1963, 1965; Cook, 1975; Homans, 1961; Walster & Walster, 1975; Walster et al., 1976), social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), and theories relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976, 1982; Folger, 1984, 1986; Gurr, 1970; Stouffer, Suchman, Devinney, Star, & Williams, 1949; see also Walker & Smith, 2002).

Justice research inspired by the *homo economicus* perspective on human nature led to some important discoveries, four of which will be briefly reviewed here: (a) people engage in mental accounting of their social relationships, (b) the importance of social comparisons in determining people's perceptions of justice or injustice, (c) the distinction between outcome fairness and outcome favorability, and (d) the concept of deservingness.

One of the major discoveries of the *homo economicus* program of research was support for the prediction that people carefully attend to and care about how much they contribute to and get from their relationships (see Adams & Freedman, 1976 and Walster et al., 1976 for reviews). People even apply cost-benefit analyses to their most intimate and close relationships, up to and including dating and marriage (e.g., Lerner & Mikula, 1994; Rusbult, 1983; Sprecher & Schwartz, 1994; Steil, 1994). Moreover, research taking the *homo economicus* perspective also led to the important discovery that people's fairness reasoning depends importantly on social comparisons, that is, whom people choose to compare their outcomes and treatment (e.g., Crosby, 1982; Stouffer et al., 1949).

Another particularly critical insight of the *homo economicus* program of research is that outcome favorability and fairness are not the same things (e.g., Wit & Wilke, 1988). A concrete example of the difference between a favorable and fair outcome would be the child who receives a slice of cake that is double in size that is given to her siblings. The child clearly has received a favorable outcome; however, even quite young children—including the beneficiary of largesse—recognize that this allocation is distributively unfair (e.g., Lerner, 1974).

Finally, the *homo economicus* program of research discovered that perceived deservingness is a key factor that determines whether an outcome or treatment is perceived as fair (e.g., Feather, 1999a, b; Lerner, 1974; Walster et al., 1976). One way that people determine whether they deserve outcomes is by comparing the ratio of their costs and benefits associated with a given relationship or effort with someone else's cost-benefit ratio. If Person A received more pay than Person B, Person B would be likely to perceive the situation as fair if Person A also worked harder or produced more widgets than Person B. Comparisons that lead to perceptions of either under- or over-benefit are perceived to be undeserved, and inspire efforts to restore actual or psychological equity (e.g., people often increase or decrease contributions under conditions of over- and under-benefit, respectively) (e.g., Adams, 1963; Homans, 1961; Walster et al., 1976). People also respond negatively to "tall poppies," that is, people who are perceived as undeserving their level of wealth or success, and will consider it fair if something bad befalls them (Feather, 1999a, b).

Although this brief overview just skims the surface, there clearly were a number of important insights into human psychology discovered during the period of very active theorizing and research inspired by *homo economicus* models. A limitation of *homo economicus* models and their focus on primarily economic costs and benefits, however, is that they tend to neglect the possibility that people may care about more than just what they get. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, justice theorists and researchers in social psychology began to realize that procedures, and not only outcomes, play an important role in how people think about fairness. As research attention began to shift away from the role of distributive to procedural concerns in how people think about fairness, theorists also began to develop new explanatory models and guiding metaphors for thinking about why people care about fairness. Specifically, *homo economicus* yielded to *homo socialis* as the primary guiding metaphor used for justice research.

Homo Socialis

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was almost a pendulum shift in justice research away from studying what people get from or put into their social exchanges, to a focus instead on characteristics of the procedures people use to make allocation decisions. Although the first theoretical perspectives on procedural fairness were rooted in the assumptions of *homo economicus* (e.g., Thibaut & Walker's, 1975, process control theory), it was not long before more self-interested explanations were ultimately rejected in favor of the notion that fair procedures serve people's needs to feel that they are respected and valued members of the group (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). The shift from *homo economicus* to *homo socialis* explanations for why people care about fairness was also facilitated by the discovery of the "fair process effect," that is, that people are more willing to accept negative outcomes when they are a consequence of fair decision making procedures (e.g., Folger, 1977; Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Cockran, 1979; Greenberg, 1987, 1993; Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990; Lind, Kurtz,

Musanté, Walker, & Thibaut, 1980; see also Brockner & Weisenfeld, 1996 for an influential review).

Among the many discoveries made by research inspired by a *homo socialis* guiding metaphor was the fact that when people are asked to specifically recall an instance of unfairness or injustice, they are more likely to spontaneously mention concerns about treatment and respect, rather than concerns with outcomes or what they "got" out of a given social exchange (e.g., Lupfer, Weeks, Doan, & Houston, 2000; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990). As mentioned earlier, variations in procedural treatment are often stronger predictions of fairness reactions than is whether the outcomes people receive are positive or negative (e.g., Folger et al., 1979). Moreover, there is ample evidence that variations in procedural treatment has numerous downstream consequences and affects a host of variables, including decision acceptance, organizational commitment, cooperation with the rules, as well as much more (see Tyler & Blader, 2003, for a review).

There is also evidence that indicates that the relative salience of *socialis* needs and concerns affects how people define procedural fairness. For example, people's fairness reasoning is influenced more strongly by variations in interactional treatment when (a) social identity needs are particularly strong (Brockner, Tyler, & Cooper-Schneider, 1992, Study 1; Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind, 1996; Platow & von Knippenberg, 2001; Wenzel, 2000), (b) perceivers are of low rather than high status (Chen, Brockner, & Greenberg, 2003), (c) status concerns are primed (van Prooijen, van den Bos, & Wilke, 2002), and (d) people are high rather than low in interdependent self-construal and interdependent self-construal is primed (Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008).

In summary, some of the major insights from research inspired by *homo socialis* models are that dignity, respect, and inclusion are important factors that influence fairness reasoning that people care as much or more about than their material gain. Clearly, it is just as important, if not more important, to pay attention to how decisions are made, and not only decision outcomes.

Homo Moralis

Both the *homo economicus* and *homo socialis* metaphors for guiding research on justice focus on people's wants and desires, for example, the notion that people fundamentally want to maximize their self-interests, or to be socially valued. The *homo moralis* metaphor for guiding research directs attention away from wants and desires and toward conceptions of "ought" and "should" instead.

A working definition of justice and what it means to people could reasonably start with morality, righteousness, virtues, and ethics rather than with self-interest, belongingness, or other non-moral motivations (Skitka & Bauman, 2008). For example, we can dig pretty deeply into the scholarly study of justice, and rediscover that Plato's conception of individual justice was a distinctively moral one. Specifically, Plato considered actions to be just if they sustained or were consonant with ethics and morality, rather than baser motives, such as appetites (e.g., lust, greed; Jowett, 1999).

In addition to having roots in classical philosophy, the connection between conceptions of justice and morality has been a consistent theme in moral development theory and research. For example, Kohlberg's theory of moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1973) posits that justice is an essential feature of moral reasoning, and that "justice operations" are the processes people use to resolve disputes between conflicting moral claims. From this developmental perspective, people progress toward moral maturity as they become more competent and sophisticated in their approach to justice operations. In short, an alternative guiding metaphor in justice research and closely related areas is *homo moralis,* that is, the notion that people have an intrinsic propensity for caring about and acting on conceptions of morality.

Theorists in moral development have made useful distinctions between the conceptions of preference, convention, and moral imperative (Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 2002) that map to some degree unto the *homo economicus, homo socialis,* and *homo moralis* notions I have reviewed here. Judgments of preference are defined as matters of subjective taste. People may differ in whether they prefer apples to oranges, for example. Matters of preference are seen as autonomous, subjective, and quite specific to perceivers. Conventions, in contrast, are socially or culturally shared notions about the way things are normally done in one's group. Conventions are often formally sanctioned by authorities, rules, and laws. Although everyone within the group boundary is supposed to understand and adhere to matters of convention, people outside of the group boundary need not. Matters of moral imperative, in contrast, generalize and apply regardless of group boundaries. Moreover, a key distinction between normative conventions and moral imperatives is their relative degree of authority independence. People are likely to ignore authorities, rules, and laws if they perceive them to be at odds with personal moral standards. For example, children as young as 3 years of age judge certain acts as wrong, such as hitting and stealing, without reference to what authorities dictate as correct behavior (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1993). Similarly, children disobey legitimate authorities who ask them to do something immoral more than non-legitimated authorities who ask them to do something moral (Laupa, 1994). Finally, adult psychopaths and children who exhibit psychopathic tendencies do not make distinctions between the conventional and moral domains (Blair, 1995, 1997).

Although less mature than the *homo economicus* and *homo socialis* programs of justice research, there is increasing research interest in hypotheses generated from the assumption that people's moral concerns sometimes play an important role in how they reason about justice (e.g., Bauman & Skitka, in press; Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; Folger, 2001; Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka & Mullen, 2002; Skitka et al., 2008). Moreover, considerable research has found support for the notion that when people have a strong moral stake in outcomes (e.g., that abortion should or should not be legal), that their fairness reasoning is shaped more by whether their preferred outcomes are achieved than by whether they are achieved by fair or unfair procedures, a result consistent with the authority independence predictions of theories of moral development (what we have called the "moral mandate effect," see Mullen & Skitka, 2006).

Two core discoveries of the *homo moralis* program of research to date have really been rediscoveries, specifically, (a) that outcome considerations sometimes trump people's concerns about due process, and (b), just as outcome favorability is different from outcome fairness, outcome favorability is different from people's feelings about the morality of outcomes. In short, this program of research has demonstrated that outcomes come in different flavors, and to predict the relative importance of outcome considerations on people's fairness reasoning, one needs to know which flavor one is dealing with.

How Do We Put All This Together? The Contingency Model of Justice

To a considerable degree, the *homo economicus, socialis,* and *moralis* programs of research have been presented as competing explanations for why people care about fairness, and therefore what shapes fairness judgments. However, there are clear and persuasive empirical demonstrations with multiple replications that support the core hypotheses of each of these different theoretical schools of thought. Although there are a number of ways one can attempt to integrate different theories of justice (e.g., Schroeder, Steel, Woodrell, & Bembenek, 2003; Törnblom & Vermunt, 1999, 2007), one way to do so is to propose a contingency model of justice reasoning. The basic premise of the model is a simple one: How people think about fairness is contingent on what frame they are using to understand their current situation (e.g., Skitka, 2003; Skitka et al., in press). A review of the extant literature provides some clues about when people are most likely to take a *homo economicus, socialis,* or *moralis* perspective, and these perspectives in turn should influence how people interpret whether a given situation is fair or unfair, the relative weight they place on outcomes versus procedures, and so forth.

When Do People Take A Homo Economicus Perspective?

Material goals and concerns refer to people's desire to satisfy their basic needs, such as for food, shelter, clothing, and so on, as well as their desire to accumulate possessions, property, and wealth as valuable ends in themselves rather than in the service of needs for social status (e.g., Belk, 1988; James, 1890). People are most likely to take a material or economic perspective when (a) their basic material needs and goals are not being met or are under threat (e.g., Abramson & Inglehart, 1995; Maslow, 1993), (b) material losses or gains are explicitly primed, (c) the relational context is defined primarily in market pricing terms (e.g., when shopping, negotiating the price of car, paying rents, tithing, e.g., Fiske, 1991), and (d) the goal of the social system is to maximize productivity (Deutsch, 1985; Lerner, 1977).

Cultural contexts dominated by capitalistic economies are often criticized for their rampant materialism. Surprisingly, however, there has been little psychological research on the antecedents and consequences of situationally primed or state levels of materialism on people's judgment and decision making. That said, research based on the *homo economicus* guiding metaphor provides some hints about which justice considerations are likely to dominate when people adopt this mindset or frame of reference. For example, equity concerns and distributive rules should

become more salient than other possible distributive criteria when materialistic goals and values are more salient than social or moral ones (e.g., need, Deutsch, 1985; Lerner, 1977). Moreover, there is some evidence that suggests that distributive justice is perceived to be more important than interactional justice in cultural contexts that emphasize materialism more than interdependence (Kim & Leung, 2007). That said, the contingency model prediction is not that procedural justice will become irrelevant when people take a *homo economicus* perspective. Instead, the contingency model predicts that procedural justice concerns will just shift in form. For example, people may become more focused on formal than interactional aspects of procedural fairness when taking a more *economicus* than *socialis* or *moralis* perspective.

When Do People Take a Homo Socialis Perspective?

Existing research also provides some clues about when people are more likely take a *homo socialis* perspective when thinking about fairness. Specifically, people should be more likely to take a *homo socialis* perspective when (a) their material needs are at least minimally satisfied (e.g., Abramson & Inglehart, 1995; Maslow, 1993), (b) their needs to belong, for status, and inclusion, are not being met or are under threat (e.g., De Cremer & Blader, 2006; Maslow, 1993), (c) the potential for significant relational losses or gains are made especially salient, (d) the dominant goal of the social system is to maximize group harmony or solidarity (e.g., Deutsch, 1985), or (e) a strong sense of interdependent identity, or interdependency concerns are primed (e.g., Brockner, De Cremer, Van den Bos, & Chen, 2005; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008).

Some research suggests that when people see a situation through the lens of *homo socialis,* they will be more likely to define distributive justice with need and equality than equity norms (e.g., Deutsch, 1985; Lerner, 1977; Prentice & Crosby, 1987). Other research suggests that people should also become more concerned about interactional aspects of procedural fairness than they are about whether outcomes are favorable or unfavorable (e.g., Platow & von Knippenberg, 2001; Wenzel, 2000). Future research might also explore whether people become more concerned with interactional than formal aspects of procedures when people's dominant motivational perspective in a given situation is oriented around *socialis* concerns.

When Do People Take a Homo Moralis Perspective?

Existing theory and research also provides suggestions about when people will be most likely to be motivated more by *homo moralis* than by either *homo economicus* or *socialis* concerns. Specifically, people should be more likely to use a moral frame of reference for evaluating fairness when (a) their material and social needs are minimally satisfied (Maslow, 1993), (b) they witness an intentional and undeserved harm (Pittman & Darley, 2003), (c) moral emotions are aroused (Haidt, 2003), (d) there is a real or perceived threat to people's conceptions of moral order (e.g., Tetlock, 2002), (e) their sense of personal moral authenticity is questioned or

undermined (e.g., Steele, 1999; Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006), and when (f) people are reminded of their mortality (e.g., Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002).

When people view a situation from a *homo moralis* perspective, they are less likely to view fairness in terms of what the rules or authorities dictate, and are more likely to assess fairness in terms of matches with internalized moral standards of right and wrong (e.g., Smetana, 1995). In a related vein, whether authorities are perceived as legitimate and fair will also be judged more in terms of whether they yield moral outcomes than by whether they follow the rules or are procedurally fair (e.g., Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka & Mullen, 2002). There are also some indications that people will be more likely to retaliate when they experience a personal injustice when they view a situation through a moral lens (Aquino, Reed, Lim, Felps, & Freeman, 2007). For example, although people chronically higher in the relative salience of morality are more likely to behave ethically at work when treated well, they are also more likely to massage expense reports and steal office supplies if they feel they are not being treated fairly (Aquino et al., 2007). Finally, there are some suggestions that retributive justice reactions are also likely to vary as a function of the relative salience of different frames of reference. For example, when taking a more *economicus* perspective, people may be motivated primarily about compensating victims. However, when people take a more *moralis* perspective, they are more likely to be concerned about vigorously punishing perpetrators and exacting retribution (Mahony, 2008; Pittman & Darley, 2003).

Some Implications of a Contingent Approach

The insight that "perspective matters," and proposing that how people define fairness will depend on whether they currently are taking an *economicus, socialis*, or *moralis* perspective, suggests a number of possible new directions for psychological studies of justice. For the most part, researchers have studied individuals' justice reasoning in social isolation. People are "acted upon" and then are individually asked about the fairness of their treatment or outcomes and related variables. However, the notion that people socially construct their perceptions of justice, and how they do so will be shaped by their current motivational priorities and concerns, suggests that people are often likely to interpret the same situation quite differently.

For example, consider the contemporary debate in American politics about whether the government should intervene to provide everyone with access to medical care, rather than continuing to distribute health care using the market (those who can pay for it or who can afford insurance can buy the services they require). One person may view the situation entirely from the perspective of *homo economicus*, and be focused on the fairness of increasing taxes to subsidize others. Someone else may view the situation as one that involves recognizing citizens' status and standing, and communicating to all citizens that they are equally valued. Yet another person may view the situation in terms of morality and fundamental human rights. How each of these people interprets whether a given policy decision about how or whether to provide greater access to health care is fair is likely to be profoundly shaped by the perspective through which they view it. In other words,

the notion that "perspective matters" is a reminder that people often initially disagree about whether fairness has been achieved in a given situation.

The notion that people have different perspectives on fairness also reveals that social psychological studies of fairness have often not been very "social." In other words, researchers typically measure fairness in terms of judgments that people make in social isolation. Real world justice reasoning may be something people socially negotiate by asking each other "what do you think would be fair to do in this situation?" and working together to find procedures and outcomes that are acceptable to everyone involved (Platow, 1999). The notion that people might socially negotiate fairness suggests a host of interesting questions to pursue in future research. For example, what kinds of arguments are persuasive? When placed into competition, are fairness considerations associated with *homo moralis* any more or less persuasive than fairness considerations associated with *homo economicus*?

It will be interesting to explore whether there are stable individual differences in the perspectives people bring to their fairness reasoning. Specifically, some people may have a stable tendency to see all fairness situations through the lens of *homo economicus,* whereas someone else may be more likely to chronically interpret fairness from a *homo socialis* perspective. The contingency model seems likely to be useful in thinking about intergroup conflict and justice as well. Groups also have goals, needs, expectations, etc., that are likely to shape how they define justice (see also Azzi, 1992; Clayton & Opotow, 2003). Knowing that groups can approach conflicts with very different ideas about fair resolution may prove to be a useful insight that can guide future research on conflict resolution.

Why These Three Contingencies?

The selection of three primary contingencies for making predictions about how people define and think about fairness is a relatively arbitrary one. Why not five contingencies or twelve? I initially focused on these three contingencies because they successfully captured and were consistent with the current empirical record of justice research in social psychology. However, in addition to consistency with known facts, another criteria for good theorizing is that any new theory should be consistent with other theories that have a high probability of being true. The three contingencies focused on here are remarkably consistent with other theories and perspectives. For example, the *homo economicus, socialis,* and *moralis* contingencies correspond remarkably well with William James' (1890) theory that the self consists of three overlapping but distinct categories: the material self, social self, and the spiritual self.

James (1890) posited that people's sense of material self consists of the body and its adornment, their home and hearth, acquisitions, and accumulated wealth. People define and sustain their material self by endeavoring to acquire and maintain things like property, goods, and wealth. In contrast, the social self is defined in terms of the groups people belong to, their social role in those groups, and the reflected appraisal or standing that they have vis-à-vis other group members. People have as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion they care. The goals and strivings of the social self are met by the roles that people

have, seek out, and see as important, and through their ability to live up to the demands associated with those roles. James' spiritual identity refers to "the most enduring and intimate part of the self that which we most verily seem to be…it is what we think of our ability to argue and discriminate, of our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will…" (p. 315). People's sense of personal or spiritual identity is shaped to a considerable degree by their need to live up to internalized notions of moral "ought" and "should," and a desire to live up to both public and private conceptions of moral authenticity.[1]

The overlap between James' (1890) categories of the self and the different motivational frameworks and guiding metaphors that have driven justice research are quite clear. There are relatively transparent similarities between the descriptions of *homo economicus, socialis,* and *moralis* and James' conception of material, social, and personal/spiritual aspects of self or identity. Given that one's self-system or schema and its attendant goals and strivings tend to dominate people's "working self-concept" at any given point in time (see Markus & Wurf, 1987, for a review), it is not a large stretch to imagine that how people think about and define fairness may therefore be importantly shaped or dependent on which self-schema currently dominates a perceiver's working self-concept (Skitka, 2003).

Similarly, there is considerable overlap between the three areas that have received the most attention in justice research and neo-Kolhbergian theories of moral development. For example, Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma's (1999) moral schema theory posits that people use three kinds of schemas to make socio-moral judgments, specifically, personal interests, norm maintenance, or post-conventional schema. The personal interest schema develops in early childhood, the norm maintenance schema develops during adolescence, and the post-conventional schema develops in late adolescence and adulthood. Once formed, people can use each of the schemas to guide their judgment and behavior, and theoretically can move fluidly between them as a function of how well features of situations and social relationships map onto, and therefore prime the activation of, one or another core schema.

When people apply the personal interest schema, they tend to focus on either their own self-interests or personal stake in a situation, or justify the behavior of others in terms of their perceptions of others' personal interests. The norm maintenance schema focuses on the need for norms that address more than the personal preferences of those involved in a given situation, and place a heavy focus on (a) the needs of cooperative social systems and the group, (b) a belief that living up to these norms and standards will pay-off in the long-run, and (c) a strong duty orientation, whereby one should obey and respect authorities and authority hierarchies.

Finally, the post-conventional schema primes a sense of moral obligation based on the notions that laws, roles, codes, and contracts are all relatively arbitrary social

[1] It should be noted that James (1890) was explicit that the spiritual self was not to be confused with religiosity. The term "spiritual" was meant to represent a more inner-directed and autonomous sense of self than either the extrinsically focused material self, or the socially constructed and focused social self, and therefore has sometimes been referred to by others as people's sense of "personal" or "moral" self (e.g., Skitka, 2003).

arrangements that facilitate cooperation, but that there are a variety of ways these coordination rules could be constructed to achieve the same ends. Just because rules exist, does not mean that people think these arrangements are right when a situation primes a more post-conventional schema. When activated, a post-conventional schema leads people more toward an orientation that duties and rights follow from the greater moral purpose behind conventions, not from the conventions themselves. In summary, post-conventional thinking focuses people on ideals, conceptions of the ultimate moral good or imperative, something people presume (not always correctly so) that reasonable others will also share and understand, or could easily be persuaded to share or understand (Rest et al., 1999).

In summary, the metaphors that have been used in justice research show a remarkable degree of overlap with the categories of social judgment that guide contemporary theories of moral development, despite both programs developing quite independently of the other. Taken together with theory and research on the self, contemporary theories of moral development provide further support for the notion that it is theoretically useful to focus on contingent predictions rather than competing conceptions of how people think about justice. Rather than remaining wedded to competing single-motive accounts for why people care about fairness and therefore the factors most likely to influence perceptions of whether social encounters are fair or unfair, there are a host of reasons to believe that people's perceptions of fairness depend to some degree on the goals or concerns that are currently most important to them.

What Insights Have Gotten Lost Along the Way?

Rummaging around in the "lost and found" yields some interesting additional insights, especially in terms of truisms in the established literature that somehow were not carried forward when new guiding metaphors captured researchers' attention. Proposing a contingent theory of justice, rather than focusing on competing motivational accounts for why people care about justice, leads one to consider how the lessons of one program of research might yield novel insights in the phenomena focused on by another program of research. For example, although researchers made many new discoveries when the guiding metaphor for understanding why people care about fairness shifted from *homo economicus* to *homo socialis*, some insights derived from the *homo economicus* program of research became seemingly obscured or lost in the transition. Three of these insights will be briefly mentioned here, with examples of how each could extend and inform theory and research guided by other metaphors of why people care about fairness. Specifically, let me briefly review how (a) the distinction between favorability and fairness; (b) the concept of deservingness; and (c) the importance of social comparison processes in justice reasoning could be applied forward.

Favorability vs. Fairness

A distinction that became lost or obscured as research and theory became more focused on the *homo socialis* than the *homo economicus* guiding metaphor was that

between favorability and fairness. As mentioned earlier, one of the most reliable and well-replicated findings of the *homo economicus* program of research is that people perceive undeserved over-benefit to be unfair. These results clearly demonstrate that outcome fairness and outcome favorability are distinctly different constructs: in short, favorability does not equal fairness.

Further evidence of the distinctiveness of outcome fairness and favorability was found in a recent meta-analysis (Skitka, Winquist, & Hutchinson, 2003). Specifically, this analysis revealed that (a) there is weaker evidence of the fair process effect when the criterion is outcome fairness than when it is outcome favorability, (b) outcome fairness has stronger effects than outcome favorability, and equally strong or stronger effects as procedural fairness on a host of variables (e.g., job turnover and organizational commitment), and (c) manipulations of outcome fairness and favorability have stronger effects on perceptions of procedural fairness than the converse. That said, it has been quite common in *homo socialis* program of research to treat outcome favorability and fairness as functionally the same things (e.g., Brockner & Weisenfeld, 1996).

Rediscovering the importance of the distinction between fairness and favorability raises some interesting questions for theory and research inspired by the *homo socialis* program of research. Specifically, given that we know that psychological perceptions of outcome fairness and favorability are clearly distinguishable constructs, it raises the question of whether there are important distinctions between procedural fairness and favorability as well. To my knowledge, no research has addressed whether the perceived fairness of procedures explains unique variance beyond the variance explained by people's general level of procedural satisfaction, or the simple hedonic value of "like" or "dislike" associated with a specific form of structural or interactional treatment.

Deservingness

Deservingness refers to earned or achieved ends (e.g., Feather, 1999a, b; Heath, 1976; Steil, 1994). Deservingness been a core concept in most if not all justice theories inspired by *homo economicus* metaphor (e.g., equity theory, relative deprivation theory, see, Crosby, 1976, 1982; Walster et al., 1976). Although perceived need, responsibility, and other variables can affect perceptions of deservingness (e.g., Skitka & Tetlock, 1992, 1993), formal definitions of deservingness tend to focus primarily on the match between outcomes and perceived merit (e.g., Feather, 1999a). People see favorable outcomes as more fair when they are perceived as deserved and merited than when they are not (e.g., through hard work and effort), a finding that generalizes across perceptions of both one's own outcomes, as well as the outcomes of others (see Adams & Freedman, 1976; Feather, 1999a; Walster et al., 1976 for extensive reviews). Moreover, people will change their behavior, such as work more or less, if they feel that they are being under- or over-benefited (e.g., Adams & Freedman, 1976).

With some important exceptions (e.g., Heuer, Blumenthal, Douglas, & Weinblatt, 1999; Sunshine & Heuer, 2002), the concept of deservingness has been neglected in research inspired by the *homo socialis* metaphor. A number of scholars

have made a persuasive case, however, that although structural aspects of procedures should be consistently applied to be perceived as fair (Leventhal, 1980), interpersonal aspects of procedural fairness such as opportunities for voice and respect are things people feel should be earned and deserved (e.g., Heuer et al., 1999; Sunshine & Heuer, 2002). The notion of deservingness in general, and as it relates to how people think about components of procedural treatment in particular, merits greater in future justice research. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether people differentiate what leads to a perception of deserving favorable treatment versus favorable outcomes in allocation decisions, or whether deservingness is a more holistic judgment that shapes perceptions of a given targets' deserving of both kinds of resources.

Social Comparison Processes

Finally, a third insight of research motivated by taking a *homo economicus* perspective that seems to have gotten overlooked along the way has been the important role of social comparison processes in how people make fairness judgments (Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). Comparisons of the self with other people comprise one of the building blocks of human conduct and experience. One of the first discoveries of fairness research was that fairness is an inherently social judgment, and that choices of social comparison affected people's perceptions of whether they were treated fairly or unfairly (e.g., Crosby, 1982; Stouffer et al., 1949).

Imagine a person alone, who has never experienced other people. Would fairness as a consideration ever occur to him or her? Similarly, imagine yourself alone in a room where you are asked to perform a task for an hour. At the end of the hour, some money is pushed in through a slot in the door as payment: it is yours to keep. In the absence of striking a deal with one's employer before providing the work or knowledge of other worker's outcomes or treatment, how would it be possible to judge whether one's payment or the process that decided it is fair?

Early theories of procedural fairness made consistency of treatment a cornerstone, that is, the notion that people would evaluate formal procedures that were applied consistently across targets as more fair than inconsistent procedures (Leventhal, 1980). A judgment of consistency would seem to require comparisons of one's treatment to the treatment of others. However, as research and theory took a more explicitly *homo socialis* perspective (e.g., the group value and relational authority models of procedural fairness, Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992), consistency as a core issue was left aside.

"Rediscovering" the importance of social comparisons, akin to the "rediscoveries" of the distinctions between outcome fairness and outcome favorability and the importance of deservingness to fairness reasoning, has a number of implications for future research. Specifically, it seems unlikely that people evaluate the fairness of their procedural treatment in a social vacuum. Surely, these judgments are based on comparisons of how well people feel they are treated relative to relevant others'. Moreover, judgments of procedural fairness are likely to move around if people choose different points of social comparison (e.g., Crosby, 1982). To some degree,

social comparisons may be a key factor that distinguishes fair from simply favorable procedural treatment. One can certainly decide whether one likes or dislikes a given procedure without knowing how other people feel about it. To judge whether the procedure has been fairly applied, however, would seem to require that one have some sense of how others have been treated as well.

Conclusion

Digging through the lost and found box of justice theorizing and research reveals a number of insights that justice theorists and researchers "already knew," but had not necessarily carried forward in an integrated way. The most important of these insights is the basic lesson of symbolic interactionism: "Reality" is a social construction. Therefore, there will be considerable variance in how people view the same "game." Thinking through the possible contingencies or motivational frameworks people use to understand the fairness of social situations yields fresh insights and novel hypotheses to explore in future research.

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