

Preface: Justice, Conflict and Wellbeing: An Introduction

The present book includes not one, or even two, but three enormous topics, each of which is broad and deep enough in its own right that it would be impossible to cover adequately in a single volume. Justice. Conflict. Wellbeing. What do these words mean, where do they intersect, and how do social science researchers investigate them? To borrow a phrase from Raymond Carver (1981), what do we talk about when we talk about justice, conflict and wellbeing? *Webster's College Dictionary* defines them (in part) as follows:

- Justice (n.): The quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness.
- Conflict (n., though also v.): A fight, battle, or struggle, esp. a prolonged one; strife.
- Wellbeing (n., also well-being): A good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity; welfare.

A Google search for “justice and conflict” yielded approximately 167,000,000 results, with entries covering blogs, books (e.g., Hampshire 2001; Kals and Maes 2012), research centers, policy statements, and so on. Searches combining the other terms are comparably large and diverse. It therefore seems obvious that when we talk about justice, conflict, and wellbeing, we’re talking about a large amount of work that cuts across several social science disciplines.

These definitions make it clear that the three concepts are closely connected: Conflict often (but not always) impairs wellbeing, whereas justice often (but not always) enhances it; perceived injustice is a common source of conflict, at multiple levels; and calls for justice are a common response to conflict. Thus, the valence and causal connections among the concepts are complex. In addition, each construct has subtypes, such as distributive and procedural justice, individual and group conflict, and physical and psychological wellbeing. Moreover, each construct operates at multiple levels, ranging from individuals, through groups of varying size, to societies and nations. Consider conflict, for example. Two kids can get in a fight on the school playground (see Part VI); two neighborhood organizations might go to an arbitrator to settle a dispute over who has rights to a certain piece of property (see Part V); or nations go to war over disagreements about sovereignty and territory

(see Part IV). For these same instances, we could ask whether the conflict itself is just, how to resolve it fairly, and in what ways, positively or negatively, the experience of conflict or its resolution affects the parties' wellbeing.

Justice, conflict, and wellbeing are large topics that occupy researchers from a variety of disciplines, as well as laypeople and policy makers. For example, the law seeks to further justice, establishes mechanisms to resolve conflict, and has the capacity both to enhance and to diminish the wellbeing of those who use the legal system. Psychology, in its various subdisciplines (e.g., social, clinical, cognitive, educational, developmental), seeks to understand the affective, behavioral, and cognitive underpinnings of justice, conflict, and wellbeing. Other disciplines, such as philosophy, political science, and sociology have long histories of studying these topics as well. Although there are established traditions of research on the topics in multiple disciplines, there is little cross-fertilization across disciplines. This situation is not particularly surprising, as the social sciences have been relatively slow to adopt interdisciplinarity (Christakis 2013). Though not surprising, it is unfortunate: Interdisciplinary scholarship yields better science, in terms of having a higher impact and being more innovative (American Academy of Arts and Sciences 2013; Wuchty, Jones, and Uzzi 2007; Yamamoto 2013). *Interdisciplinary research*, which “integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice” (Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research 2004, p. 2), is harder to perform than *multidisciplinary research*, which simply involves multiple disciplines in juxtaposition. Nonetheless, the latter is often a precursor to the former (Atkinson and Crowe 2006; Chandramohan and Fallows 2009; Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research 2004). A major goal of the present volume is to establish a multidisciplinary social scientific foundation for the study of justice, conflict, and wellbeing, from which future interdisciplinary work can proceed.

To that end, the present volume brings together researchers from social, clinical, and educational psychology; law; and political science. The unifying theme is how injustice and conflict pose threats to wellbeing, at the micro (individual) and macro (groups and societies) levels. Multi- and interdisciplinary research are at the vanguard of science in the twenty-first century, and the present work applies multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives to the important real-world topics of justice, conflict, and wellbeing.

The remainder of this volume consists of six parts that sample from the numerous ways that justice, conflict, and wellbeing intersect. Part I contains two chapters on the theme of distributive justice, which deals with the fairness of outcomes, especially with respect to the distribution of resources. It is often contrasted with procedural justice, which focuses on the fairness of the processes used to determine those outcomes (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler 2005). Questions of distributive justice play a role in a wide swath of human endeavors, ranging from interpersonal interactions (e.g., how to apportion responsibilities and benefits for everyday tasks) to governmental policies (e.g., allocating foreign aid, welfare benefits, tax burdens,

etc.; see, generally, Brams and Taylor 1996). Perceived injustice in “who gets what” is a common source of conflict, whether the conflict takes the form of a heated argument or a war; whereas a just distribution contributes to the recipient’s sense of wellbeing. Chap. 1, by Brian Bornstein, Sarah Gervais, Hannah Dietrich, and Justin Escamilla, introduces different principles of distributive justice (e.g., proportionality, equality, need) and describes original research examining the effect of those principles, as well as interpersonal power, on resource allocation in experimental tasks. Their results indicate a strong norm toward egalitarianism. While not disputing the importance of equality in resource allocation, John Scott shows, in Chap. 2, that equality has a rich history—dating back at least to Aristotle—and has been interpreted differently by various thinkers over the years.

Just as an unjust allocation of some commodity can be a source of conflict, so too can treating people *like* a commodity—that is, treating them as objects, without human qualities. This occurs in many situations, as when we treat members of disadvantaged groups (e.g., racial or ethnic minorities) as less than human, or when individuals’ sexualized body parts overshadow their individual identities. The two chapters in Part II address the topic of objectification, focusing especially on its negative consequences for objectified persons’ wellbeing. Chap. 3, by Richard Wiener, Sarah Gervais, Ena Brnjic, and Gwenith Nuss uses objectification as a framework for understanding the causes and consequences of hostile environments, sometimes prohibited in law but sometimes simply in violation of public norms. The following chapter, by Lee Budesheim, takes a somewhat contrary approach, asking whether objectification is necessarily harmful, and whether it is avoidable. It also offers a critique of recent social psychological research on objectification.

According to the definition with which we began this chapter, wellbeing is “a state characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity.” By definition, then, those who are ill—whether they suffer from a physical or mental illness—are lacking in wellbeing. Moreover, their illness can bring them into conflict with others, both other individuals and social institutions. Conversely, those same institutions, especially the legal system, have the power to implement and enforce procedures that can improve the wellbeing of those who need it most, an approach to law and policy known as *therapeutic jurisprudence* (TJ; Wexler and Winick 1991, 1996). Part III explores this issue by focusing on people with mental illness. Chaps. 5 (by William Spaulding, Elizabeth Cook, and Andrea Avila) and 6 (by Robert Schopp) apply therapeutic jurisprudence to persons with severe mental illness. Spaulding and colleagues show how TJ can contribute to the treatment and rehabilitation of persons with severe and disabling mental illness. The chapter by Schopp discusses how mental health courts and civil commitment can both enhance mentally ill persons’ wellbeing and protect the public by reducing the risk that they will commit further crimes. Schopp’s chapter also addresses the role of psychological experts in predicting whether individuals with mental illness are dangerous. In Chap. 7, David Wexler—one of the originators of the TJ movement—takes a slightly different tack, applying its principles to attorneys themselves, who may be in need of intervention to improve their own wellbeing because of the daily stress that characterizes their work lives. Wexler shows how work with individuals with psychosocial problems

can be challenging, thereby threatening the wellbeing of professionals who work with mentally ill clients, in much the same way (though at a lower level) that living with and caring for mentally ill family members can have adverse health consequences (e.g., Baronet 1999).

The biggest scale on which conflict occurs, of course, is war. Even in a “just” war—laying aside the debate over whether such a thing genuinely exists—war undeniably exerts an enormous, and mostly negative, impact on the wellbeing of both soldiers and ordinary citizens. The two chapters in Part IV address this aspect of war by using the example of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Chap. 8, by Patrice McMahon and Jennifer Miller, explores how the ICTY has affected the lives of individuals of various ethnicities and nationalities in the region affected by the Tribunal. Jelena Subotić, in Chap. 9, focuses on the ICTY itself, and asks whether it is feasible and just to hold a small number of individuals accountable for large-scale, political conflict.

Although the major institutional venue for resolving conflicts and obtaining justice is the legal system, many conflicts are resolved outside the courts, either because the courts are not the optimal mechanism for some types of dispute resolution, or because the dispute does not rise to the level of a legal infraction. The book’s final two parts explore these situations of “private justice.” Part V contains two chapters on alternative dispute resolution (ADR). Although ADR mechanisms are efficient in many respects, they raise some unique justice-related concerns of their own. For example, as Kristen Blankley describes in Chap. 10, the ethical rules (or lack thereof) imposed on arbitrators can both enhance and impede conflict resolution efforts. Moreover, by drawing judges away from traditional careers on the bench, ADR raises concerns about the quality of justice administered by public courts. Chap. 11, by Maureen Weston, examines this issue and some of the other costs associated with ADR.

The book ends with an examination of what many recall as their first experience with conflict, namely, childhood conflict with peers. Other than in the home, with siblings, where do such conflicts take place? In schools, on playgrounds (which can be part of schools or public), on sports fields, and anywhere else children might congregate. Part VI contains two chapters on childhood conflict. Chap. 12, by Catherine Bohn-Gettler and Anthony Pellegrini, raises the important premise that not all conflict is necessarily bad, as we all need to learn effective strategies for dealing with conflict, and schools can help accomplish this goal, especially by allowing time for recess and providing the structure needed for children to learn to negotiate conflicts with other children. Their chapter summarizes a wealth of research on the benefits of school recess and the implications for educational policy. Chap. 13, by Beth Doll and Susan Sarver, extends this argument by looking at the valuable social skills that children can acquire through experiencing and successfully resolving conflict with peers on the playground. Their chapter also examines the ways in which the features of recess and the playground environment can influence children’s interactions with peers.

The impetus for this edited volume came from a conference on the same themes that were held at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in November 2011. Many people’s

efforts are necessary to produce a successful conference (and book). We are especially grateful to the speakers/chapter authors for their active participation and thoughtful contributions; to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln for its financial and administrative support; to Allison Skinner for her assistance in organizing the conference; and to Sharon Panulla and Sylvana Ruggirello at Springer Publishing for their support in turning a successful conference into what we hope will be a successful book that will contribute to future research on justice, conflict, and wellbeing.

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