System Justification as an Obstacle to the Attainment of Social Justice[1]

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It was not long ago that questions of social justice were at the forefront of theoretical and empirical inquiry in social psychology. The father of modern social psychology, Kurt Lewin, promoted the discipline as, among other things, a scientific means of fostering democratic, egalitarian norms and preventing tyranny and oppression from gaining the upper hand in society. Although he seldom (if ever) couched these goals in the explicit language of social justice, it is clear that his "applied" research programs on overcoming certain forms of prejudice, outgroup hostility, and self-hatred among Jews—to mention some of the most salient examples—reflected a commitment to social justice as well as a scathing critique of authoritarianism and the fascist ideology that had seized the hearts and minds of so many of his fellow citizens in 1930s Germany. Lewin self-consciously strove to integrate theoretical and applied goals, which he believed could be "accomplished in psychology, as it has been accomplished in physics, if the theorist does not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems" (Lewin, 1944/1951, p. 169). It is not surprising that one of Lewin's doctoral students, Morton Deutsch, went on to become one of the field's most illustrious contributors to the field of social justice research (see Deutsch, 1973, 1985, 1999).

Another prominent social psychologist of the postwar era, Gordon Allport, observed that, "Practical and humanitarian motives have always played an important part in the development of social psychology" (1954/1962, p. 4). Specifically, he wrote that:

Social psychology began to flourish soon after the First World War. This event,

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followed by the spread of communism, by the great depression of the '30's, by the rise

of Hitler, the genocide of the Jews, race riots, the Second World War and its

consequent anomie, stimulated all branches of social science. A special challenge fell

to social psychology. The question was asked: how is it possible to preserve the

values of freedom and individual rights under conditions of mounting social strain and

regimentation? Can science help provide an answer? (p. 4)

Allport's own work on *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954) as well as a predecessor, *The Authoritarian*

Personality by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950), sought to employ theories

and methods in social psychology to diagnose and ultimately defeat prejudice, intolerance, and other

apparent obstacles to social justice. It has been suggested darkly on more than one occasion that the

individual who exerted the strongest influence over the development of social psychology in the 20th

century was Adolf Hitler (e.g., Cartwright, 1979; Jones, 1985/1998).

Historical Context for the Social Psychological Study of Social Justice

World War II illustrated far too vividly both the devastating effects of social injustice and the

human capacity to overcome it. In its aftermath, issues of social justice were central to social

psychological theory and research. Textbooks routinely covered themes such as morality,

conscience, crime and punishment, prejudice, authoritarianism, propaganda, war and peace, and the

determinants of revolution (e.g., Brown, 1965; Doob, 1952; Klineberg, 1940; Krech & Crutchfield,

1948). However, as was the case with Lewin's writings, such themes were often approached in the

absence of an explicit social justice framework, and terms such as "justice" and "fairness" were not

necessarily used to illuminate them. It was not until decades later that social justice research became

a subfield or area of specialization within social psychology. Before then, considerations of social

justice seemed to permeate the field as a whole, albeit tacitly. None of the first three editions of *The*

Handbook of Social Psychology contained a chapter devoted to studies of social justice *per se* (see Miller,

2001, p. 528), but several chapters covered pertinent subjects such as prejudice and ethnic relations, leadership, social structure, political behavior, collective action, and social movements.

Social psychological research on theories of justice (especially equity theory) began to flourish in the 1960s, but the demarcation of social justice research as a specific subfield came years later. For instance, *Social Justice Research* and the International Society for Justice Research (ISJR) were not established until a decade later. These professional developments have allowed researchers to delve more deeply into questions that are unique to justice-related theories and findings, but they also reflected (and may have even contributed to) some degree of separation (and, therefore, marginalization) of social justice research within the larger discipline of social psychology. By the mid-1960s some social psychologists had already begun to have sober second thoughts about Lewin's vision of humanistic, action-oriented research aimed at human betterment and social justice (Ring, 1967). McGuire (1965), for instance, admonished his more "applied" colleagues for being "too preoccupied with the Berlin wall, the urban blight, the population bomb, and the plight of the Negro in the South" and quipped that students who wished to solve social problems should consider joining "the law or the ministry" (pp. 138-9).

In retrospect, social psychologists' commitment to social justice research in the middle of the 20th century may be attributable, at least in part, to the societal urgency that accompanied the need to defeat fascism in Europe and elsewhere (e.g., see Lewin, 1939/1948a). But, one might ask, do we not face urgent problems related to social justice even today? What, if anything, should be done about yawning economic inequality under capitalism; racial disparities in criminal sentencing, including the imposition of the death penalty; gender disparities in hiring, salary, and promotion at work; the persistence of prejudice; religious, ethnic, and other forms of violent conflict, including war, terrorism, and torture; and the problems posed by global climate change, environmental degradation, and species extinction? One need not be a doomsday prophet to suspect that the

continued survival of the human race depends ultimately on its capacity to see past purely selfish, parochial sources of motivation and to embrace what social psychologists refer to as "the justice motive."

The Justice Motive in Human Behavior

Solomon Asch (1959) insisted that social psychologists study not only the perpetration of injustice but also "the vectors that make it possible for persons to think and care and work for others" (p. 372). More specifically, he wrote that: "It is of considerable consequence for any social psychology to establish the grounds of concern for the welfare of other persons or groups, and how these are related to the concern individuals feel for their own welfare" (p. 368). Such comments presage research programs on "altruism" (Krebs & Miller, 1985), prosocial behavior (Batson, 1998), and the so-called "justice motive," that is, the extent to which people are motivated to promote fair treatment of others and not merely by considerations of self-interest (Lerner, 1977, 1980, 2003; Miller, 1977; Montada, 2002; Tyler, 1994; see also Tyler & Smith, 1998).

The point is not that justice and self-interest are *always* opposed—plainly, they are not. In fact, the sense of justice may originate in humans and other primates in the self-protective desire to insure that they receive what they "deserve" (Brosnan, 2006; Brosnan & DeWaal, 2003). When members of disadvantaged groups band together to push for civil rights or other improvements in their quality of life, they are fighting on behalf of social justice *as well as* personal and collective self-interest (e.g., Piven & Cloward, 1978). Nevertheless, the purest evidence of a "justice motive" in human beings comes from cases in which people are willing to risk or sacrifice their own welfare to insure that *others* are treated fairly (e.g., see Lerner, 2003; Monroe, 2004).

Deservingness and Entitlement

There may be no single theme more commonly enshrined in Western ideology than that of individual deservingness (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Wegner & Liebig, 2000). It figures prominently in

characterizations of the Protestant work ethic (Jones, 1997; Katz & Hass, 1988; Weber, 1958), culturally prevalent conceptions of personal control and causation (Nisbett & Ross, 1980), the belief in a just world (Lerner, 1980), and various system-justifying belief systems, including meritocratic ideology and faith in the American Dream (Jost & Hunyady, 2005; McCoy & Major, 2007). The take-home message from empirical inquiry is that people are far more likely to feel that the existing social, economic, or political system is fair and just to the extent that they see recipients of various distributive outcomes (e.g., wealth and poverty) as personally *deserving* of those outcomes (e.g., Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003). People seem to feel more justified in discriminating against those who are stigmatized on the basis of characteristics that are seen as personally controllable, such as obesity (e.g., Crandall, & Martinez, 1996; Puhl & Brownell, 2003; Quinn & Crocker, 1999).

Social psychologists have devoted considerable research attention to understanding how notions of deservingness (and entitlement) are related to processes of attribution, stereotyping and prejudice, perceptions of discrimination, political ideology, and appraisals of the legitimacy of social systems (e.g., Feather, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Major, 2001; Major, 1994). Studies show that perceptions of personal causation and deservingness lead people to hold more and less favorable attitudes towards high and low status targets, respectively (e.g., Weiner, Perry, & Magnuson, 1988). Endorsement of just world beliefs and system-justifying ideologies that emphasize deservingness are associated with increased prejudice towards African Americans and obese people, among other stigmatized groups (Crandall & Martinez, 1996; Rim, 1988). Attributions of deservingness act not only as causes but also as *releasers* of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), insofar as they seem to justify the expression of pre-existing negative attitudes towards certain social groups (Allport, 1954; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Espousing political conservatism, which often leans heavily on the assumption of personal deservingness (or individual responsibility), also predicts both implicit and explicit devaluation of those who are disadvantaged in society,

including African Americans (e.g., Crandall, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003; Nosek, Banaji, & Jost, 2009; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996).

Much research, including studies of relative deprivation and social comparison processes, has explored the ways in which people's perceptions of entitlement relate to issues of social justice. One useful focus has been on the conditions that lead members of disadvantaged or low status groups (such as women) to develop a "depressed sense of entitlement" that leads them to be satisfied with less than others receive (Blanton, George, & Crocker, 2001; Callahan-Levy & Messé, 1979; Hogue & Yoder, 2003; Jost, 1997; Major, 1994; Pelham & Hetts, 2001). The endorsement of various ideological belief systems—especially those that reinforce notions of meritocracy and deservingness—have been associated with the tendency for members of low status groups to view their own state of disadvantage as relatively legitimate (Crandall, 1994; Jost, 1995; Jost et al., 2004; Olson & Hafer, 2001; Quinn & Crocker, 1999). For example, women who score higher on the belief in a just world are less likely to report career-related discontentment (Hafer & Olson, 1993), and ethnic minorities who espouse the belief that it is possible to climb the status hierarchy are less likely to view negative outcomes as due to discrimination or unfairness (Major et al., 2002). There is also experimental work showing that "depressed entitlement" (and tolerance of injustice more generally) can be produced or exacerbated under specific situational conditions. For instance, priming members of a low status group with meritocratic ideals makes them less likely to regard unfair treatment (by a higher status group member) as caused by sexism or discrimination (McCoy and Major, 2007). Research on system justification theory similarly suggests that people may be motivated (for epistemic, existential, and relational reasons) to view inequalities among individuals and groups as fair, legitimate, and defensible rather than due to discrimination, unfairness, or historical accident (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Kay et al., 2007). As with regard to the belief in

a just world and many other areas of social justice research, system justification tendencies vary as a function of both dispositional and situational variables (Jost et al., 2003, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005; Kay & Zanna, 2009).

The Problem of System Justification

It would be difficult to find a more astute justice theorist or a bigger authority on ethical behavior in the entire history of Western civilization than Aristotle. And yet there are aspects of his belief system that strike contemporary audiences as anomalous and obviously wrong-headed, possibly even immoral. Probably the most obvious example is his spirited defense of the institution of slavery as practiced by so many of his fellow Athenian citizens (see Kraut, 2002; Miller, 1995). It is not the case that no one in ancient Greece had ever raised moral objections about slavery; several philosophers of Aristotle's era had criticized the practice, but Aristotle apparently rejected those criticisms (Kraut, 2002, pp. 277-8). How could such a brilliant ethical mind possibly find itself arguing that such a brutal, exploitative institution as slavery was not only necessary but also just? The answer, it seems, has to do with *system justification*, defined as the conscious or unconscious motivation to defend, bolster, and justify existing social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). Kraut (2002) writes:

> No doubt, Aristotle believed that slavery was justified in part because that was a convenient tenet for him to hold. Had he come to the opposite conclusion, he would have been forced to announce to the Greek world that its political institutions, which he greatly valued (however much he also criticized them), rested on resources that could not be justly acquired or used. The all too human tendency to avoid upheavals of thought and revolutions in social practice certainly played a role here. But . . . in order for Aristotle to have arrived at the sincere conviction that slavery was just, his social world had to present itself to him in a way that supported

that thesis. (p. 279)

Thus, a combination of social, cognitive, and motivational factors apparently led Aristotle to the

conclusion that some individuals are "natural slaves" (by virtue of their "childlike helplessness") and

others are "natural masters" (by virtue of their "rational faculties"). Thus, he argued that both slaves

and masters benefit from the institution of slavery. As a result of these beliefs, Aristotle and his

fellow Athenians were able to feel better about their own society and to rationalize away any guilt,

dissonance, or negative affect that they might have otherwise felt. To make matters worse, because

of Aristotle's philosophical stature, his arguments were resurrected in 16th century Spain to justify

the enslavement of indigenous people in the New World (Kraut, 2002, p. 277).

Motivation to Justify the Societal Status Quo

If Aristotle himself was tempted to excuse the injustices inherent in the social system he

knew and loved, what hope is there for the rest of us to avoid a similar fate, at least with respect to

some subset of social issues? According to system justification theory, all of us are motivated—to

varying degrees, as a function of both dispositional and situational factors (e.g., Jost & Hunyady,

2002, 2005; Kay & Zanna, 2009)—to rationalize away the moral and other failures of our social,

economic, and political institutions and to derogate alternatives to the status quo (Jost, Liviatan, Van

der Toorn, Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, & Nosek, 2010; Kay et al., 2009). Thus, despite the fact that

most Americans espouse egalitarian ideals and acknowledge substantial income inequality in society,

surveys show that a majority of U.S. respondents judge the economic system to be highly fair and

legitimate (Jost, Blount, Pfeffer, & Hunyady, 2003). In the context of a chapter on social justice, it is

worth pointing out that in the U.S. today the combined net worth of the 400 wealthiest citizens

exceeds 1 trillion dollars (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretta, 2005) and that corporate chief executives

earn over 500 times the salary of their average employee (Stiglitz, 2004). It would be difficult to find

any justice principle (i.e., equity, equality, need, etc.) that would permit this degree of economic

inequality, and in fact the inequality has arisen not because it is believed to be fair but because of impersonal "market forces" that most citizens accept (consciously or unconsciously) as legitimate (see also Benabou & Tirole, 2006; Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Stereotyping as system justification. One way in which people engage in system justification is through the use of stereotypes (such as Aristotle's stereotypes of slaves and masters) that ascribe to individuals and groups characteristics that render them especially well-suited to occupy the status or positions that they do in the current social order (e.g., Allport, 1954; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay et al., 2007, in press; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). It is important to point out that members of disadvantaged groups sometimes internalize system-justifying stereotypes and evaluations of themselves, and this almost surely has the consequence of decreasing their likelihood of rebelling against the status quo or participating in collective action aimed to change it (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, & Monteith, 2003; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Lewin, 1941/1948b; Rudman, Feinberg & Fairchild, 2002; Uhlmann, Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002).

System-justifying aspects of conservative ideology. Certain ideologies—such as political conservatism, which developed in part out of Edmund Burke's (1790/1987) critical resistance to the French Revolution and his efforts to "vindicate" the social order—satisfy the "goal" of system justification as well (see Jost, in press). More than two centuries after the French Revolution, political conservatives continue to show stronger implicit as well as explicit preferences for order, stability, conformity, and tradition (over chaos, flexibility, rebelliousness, and progress), in comparison with liberals and others (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). The fact that political conservatives are motivated more strongly than liberals by system justification motivation helps to explain why: (a) they strongly favor advantaged over disadvantaged groups on implicit as well as explicit measures (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004); (b) their Black-White racial attitudes lagged behind

those of liberals by over thirty years in the U.S. (Nosek, Banaji, & Jost, 2009); (c) they are more likely to deny problems associated with global climate change and to resist efforts to change current environmental practices (Feygina, Jost, & Goldsmith, 2010); and (d) they are relatively insulated against the negative hedonic effects of increasing inequality (Napier & Jost, 2008a). Thus, at least some of the attitudinal differences observed between liberals and conservatives can be understood in terms of variability in system justification tendencies.

Costs and Benefits of System Justification

System justification appears to satisfy a constellation of *epistemic* needs to attain certainty and create a stable, predictable worldview (Jost et al., 2003); *existential* needs to manage threat and perceive a safe, reassuring environment (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008); and *relational* needs to achieve shared reality with important others, including friends and family members who are also motivated by system justification concerns (Jost, Ledgerwood, & Hardin, 2008). Perhaps because it addresses these various needs, system justification conveys *palliative* psychological benefits, including increased positive affect and (especially) decreased negative affect (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Kay et al., 2008; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lerner, 1980; Wakslak et al., 2007). At the same time, however, system justification is associated with low self-esteem, depression, ambivalence, and outgroup favoritism among members of disadvantaged groups, who may be "caught" between competing desires to feel good about themselves and to feel good about the social system to which they belong (e.g., Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2003; Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2000; O'Brien & Major, 2005).

It has been suggested that system-justifying attitudes reflect a "moral motivation" to protect society and that "the benefits of justifying the system are not just palliative, they are meaning-providing and can often be important for human flourishing" (Haidt & Graham, 2009, p. 391). Without disputing that system justification contributes to social stability and carries with it a number

of social and psychological advantages for the individual, group, and society, it seems important to point out that it is probably *neither* moral nor immoral in and of itself. System justification can indeed inspire people to celebrate and vindicate truly just institutions and practices. Nevertheless, the very same motivation can lead us—as it may have led Aristotle—to venerate those features of the social system (e.g., customs, traditions, and practices) that deserve to be changed.

What Can Social Psychology Contribute To Social Justice?

The topic of social justice brings into stark relief both the promise and challenges of social psychology in a way that perhaps no other subject can. Among other things, social justice is a theme that requires one to consider and integrate insights arising from individual, group, and system levels of analysis (Doise, 1986; Stangor & Jost, 1997). Students of social justice—like those who dare to confront questions of rationality or truth—must grapple with the uneasy relationship between the subjective and the objective or, what is nearly the same in the present context, descriptive facts about how people actually think, feel, and act with respect to justice considerations and normative standards about how they *ought* to behave if their actions are to be considered just (see also Baron, 1993; Konow, 2003; Miller, 1999; Payne & Cameron, 2010; Tyler & Jost, 2007).

Of course, reasonable (as well as unreasonable) parties can disagree about what justice entails, and many longstanding, seemingly intractable conflicts, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, involve interpersonal or intergroup disputes over what is considered fair and legitimate (e.g., Deutsch, 2006; Jost & Ross, 1999; Kelman, 2001; Mikula & Wenzel, 2000). At the same time, it is not entirely satisfying to conclude simply that justice (like truth or beauty) is in the "eye of the beholder." As Miller (1999) observed, "Popular beliefs about social justice may turn out to be defective in various ways; for instance, they may prove to conceal deep contradictions, or involve serious factual errors" (p. x). If we accept this possibility, then we cannot merely assume that justice consists in what people *think* is just (e.g., Sampson, 1983), even though it may be a very difficult task

to determine what actually *is* just (or unjust) in any given situation.

Another reason why one cannot simply interpret the subjective acceptance of a given state of affairs as conclusive evidence of its objective fairness is that people sometimes tolerate circumstances, such as slavery, apartheid, or caste systems, that seem obviously unjust to outsiders or in retrospect or from the point of view of clearly established standards of just treatment (Crosby, 1982; Deutsch, 1985; Lerner, 1980; Martin, 1986). Some such cases are said to reflect "false consciousness," defined as false beliefs that serve to sustain injustice or oppression (Fox, 1999; Jost, 1995; Lind & Tyler, 1988). They may also suggest the presence of system justification motivation, that is, the desire to exonerate the existing social system and, in so doing, to minimize or overlook its injustices (see Blasi & Jost, 2006; Jost et al., 2004, 2009).

For all of these reasons, the scholar of social justice must at least bear in mind the possibility that there are objective standards of justice, even if specific candidates are bound to be controversial (e.g., Feinberg, 1973; Hare, 1981; Miller, 1999; Rawls, 1971). Much as researchers use scientific means to identify the objective causes of subjective well-being (or happiness) of individuals (e.g., Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999), it should be possible for social scientists to discover which characteristics of social systems are more and less likely to maximize equity, equality, need, liberty, and other putative principles of social justice, and which characteristics lead disproportionately to unjust outcomes such as suffering, exploitation, abuse, prejudice, and oppression. It seems like a daunting task to develop objective (as well as subjective) measures of well-being at the system or societal level, but there may be no way of knowing whether scientific methods can gain traction on age-old problems of social justice unless it is attempted.

For instance, it may be feasible to compare societies in terms of how well they adhere to specific deontological principles; indeed, some human rights organizations collect international data in order to draw precisely such comparisons. The most compelling normative meta-theory of social

justice may well combine elements of utilitarian and deontological approaches and reconcile multiple, potentially conflicting justice principles—such as equity, equality, need, merit, liberty, consistency, accuracy, and ethicality—in some hierarchical structure that weights such principles differentially as a function of contextual variables, local contingencies, and domains of application. As John Stuart Mill (1910) observed, "Not only have different nations and individuals different notions of justice, but, in the mind of one and the same individual, justice is not some one rule, principle, or maxim, but many, which do not always coincide in their dictates" (p. 51).

Empirical research has a crucial role to play in clearing away common misconceptions— including erroneous assumptions, stereotypes, and misunderstandings about the causes of human behavior—and thereby updating and elevating public discourse about matters of social justice and morality (Greene, 2003; Payne & Cameron, 2010). Over time, scientific findings have the capacity to change culturally prevalent representations of free will, responsibility, and so on, and these changes will (eventually) manifest themselves in legal transformations (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Greene & Cohen, 2004; Wegner, 2002). Cognitive scientists have contributed mightily to refining normative theories of *rationality* (e.g., Kahneman et al., 1982; March & Simon, 1958; Thaler, 1991) as well as formerly philosophical (and even metaphysical) treatments of epistemological questions in general (Goldman, 1992; Kornblith, 1999; Quine, 1969; Stich, 1990). In recent years, philosophers have incorporated evidence from social and personality psychology in evaluating Aristotelian and other normative (as well as descriptive) theories of ethics, virtue, and moral character (Doris, 2002; Flanagan, 1991; Harman, 1999; Jost & Jost, 2009). There is no *a priori* reason to assume that social psychological research will be less useful in forging the kinds of normative conceptions of justice and injustice that have traditionally been the bread and butter of moral philosophy and legal scholarship (see also Tyler & Jost, 2007).

Another basis for optimism concerning attempts to "naturalize" the study of social justice

comes from explicit efforts to integrate legal studies with research in the social and behavioral sciences (e.g., Sunstein, 2000), including calls for "psychological jurisprudence" (Darley, Haney, Fulero, & Tyler, 2002; Haney, 1993; Tyler & Jost, 2007) and "behavioral realism" (Blasi & Jost, 2006; Hanson & Yosifon, 2004; Kang, 2005; Krieger & Fiske, 2006). Each of these represents a concerted attempt to bring the law and public policy into better alignment with conclusions drawn from the scientific study of human nature. It has been suggested, for instance, that current legal protections against racial discrimination (e.g., the Davis doctrine) are inadequate because they focus exclusively on conscious intention as an explanation for human behavior and the basis for assigning legal responsibility, whereas contemporary social and cognitive psychology has demonstrated that automatic, implicit (i.e., unintentional) processes are capable of producing discriminatory outcomes (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Kang & Banaji, 2006; Krieger, 1995; but see Mitchell & Tetlock, 2006 for a dissenting view).

All of this returns us to the grand Lewinian ambitions with which we began this chapter. The notion of solving social problems through rational, scientific means rather than ideological (or even coercive) means is particularly attractive (e.g., Allport, 1954; Deutsch, 1985, 2006; Lerner, 1980; McGuire, 1985). Along these lines, Kurt Lewin (1939/1948a) argued that the objectives of science and social justice were in fact highly compatible:

> To believe in reason means to believe in democracy, because it grants to the reasoning partners a status of equality. It is therefore not an accident that not until the rise of democracy at the time of the American and French Revolutions was the goddess of "reason" enthroned in modern society. And again, it is not accident that the first act of modern Fascism in every country has been officially and vigorously to dethrone this goddess and instead to make emotions and obedience the all-ruling principles in education and life from kindergarten to death.

I am persuaded that scientific sociology and social psychology based on an intimate combination of experiments and empirical theory can do as much, or more, for human betterment as the natural sciences have done. However, the development of such a realistic, nonmystical social science and the possibility of its fruitful application presuppose the existence of a society which believes in reason. (p. 83, emphasis added)

Thus, Lewin ardently recommended the use of social science to serve the ends of social justice and, in so doing, to improve society. The evidence reviewed by Jost and Kay (2010) suggests that considerable progress toward this most ambitious goal has been achieved. At the same time, the jury is still out on whether the theories and methods of social psychology can offer unique, indispensable insights that—when combined with those gathered from philosophy, law, history, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, and other disciplines—will enable the human race to attain the highest degree of social justice in practice and to permanently overcome its most stubborn, pernicious obstacles. We suppose, however optimistically, that they can.