

Distributive Justice:  
A Status Value Formulation\*

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Technical Report #28

April, 1968

\*We gratefully acknowledge the support of NSF Grant GS 1170, for the study of status, power, and prestige structures, and ARPA contract DAHC 15-68-C-0215, for the study of distributive justice, that made the work reported in the present paper possible.

March, 1968

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I. Introduction.

The theory of distributive justice is concerned with the way in which socially valued rewards, such as salaries, promotions, or privileges, are allocated to members of social systems. Its basic notions are that actors have what they regard as legitimate expectations about how rewards are to be allocated, that these expectations arise from comparisons with other actors, and if such expectations are violated there is both strain and pressure for change.

Examples.

To fix the problem clearly in mind we take two examples from the study of wage comparisons, although wage comparisons are only one among many instances of what is essentially the same sort of process.

(1) In the billing office of a public utility the status "ledger clerk" is more skilled, responsible, autonomous, and senior than the status "cash poster" but the two are paid the same wage. Actors in both statuses regard this as unjust, and the ledger clerks agitate in their union for a wage differential. The ledger clerks show all the signs of relative deprivation. (See Homans, 1953.)

(2) The ledger clerks regard themselves as underpaid, but this is not always true in every case of distributive injustice, as the following example shows: A number of college students are employed through a university employment office to interview for a survey research organization.

In their initial employment interview, half the students are told by their "employer" that they are qualified for their job, because they are so well-educated, and that they will be paid 30 cents per interview. The remaining students are told that they are not qualified for their job, because they lack experience, but they are hired anyway because of the pressure of time. The "employer" pays the going rate, 30 cents per interview, but complains that this is really the rate for qualified interviewers. Thus the first group is clearly labelled by instructions as appropriately paid while the second is overpaid. Both groups are then given a simple interview task. Overpaid subjects work harder, but earn less; that is, they produce fewer interviews, but of higher quality. (See Adams, 1963.)

In general, the characteristic features of a distributive justice situation appear to be:

- (a) Rewards are allocated to actors on the basis of one or more socially defined and evaluated characteristics.
- (b) That a given level of reward is appropriate to a given state of a characteristic is determined by comparisons between kinds of actors.
- (c) If two actors have similar states of similar characteristics they have a right to expect similar rewards as well.
- (d) If similar actors have dissimilar rewards, or dissimilar actors have similar rewards, normative expectations are violated.
- (e) Violation of expectations about reward produce strain and some sort of pressure to change the situation.

In the literature on the subject the violation of expectations referred to in (e) has been variously called inequity, injustice, disequilibrium, inconsistency, or imbalance.

2. Formulations of the Justice Problem.

The history of the justice problem has been closely connected with that of the status inconsistency problem. The earliest formulation was Weber's "Class, Status, and Party" (see Gerth and Mills, 1946), in which three basic dimensions of a stratification system are conceptually distinguished, but it is supposed that in time positions in the three tend to equilibrate. The Weberian formulation was restated in 1944 by Benoit-Smullyan, whose paper became the point of departure for much of the later interest in the problem. Benoit-Smullyan added to Weber's formulation the notion that if equilibrating tendencies were blocked in some way, there would be pressure for radical change. Why this should be so Benoit-Smullyan did not attempt to explain. The first attempts at an explanation of the phenomenon, by Lenski in 1956, were based on Hughes' status ambiguity formulation (Hughes, 1945). Lenski claimed that inconsistent status creates status ambiguity, status ambiguity creates tension, and this tension is reduced by bringing statuses into line.

In the process of constructing his formulation, Lenski to some degree simplified the process as Benoit-Smullyan had understood it. In Benoit-Smullyan economic processes, power processes, and status processes were all treated as if they were one process obeying the same laws. Lenski made no attempt to deal with power, which he treated as if it obeyed different principles.

In two respects, a marked advance over Lenski's formulation was made by Homans (whose earliest theoretical ideas about the equilibration phenomenon are found in Zalesnik, Christenson, and Roethlisberger, 1958). First, he saw for the first time that the equilibration phenomenon behaved like a relative deprivation process, and therefore made comparisons central to his theory. Second, he saw that status ambiguity and the allocation of rewards were two different processes. For Lenski, though he had simplified the problem by comparison with Benoit-Smullyan, nevertheless treated ambiguity and justice as if they were one unitary process. It is in Homans that for the first time the justice problem per se emerges as a distinct theoretical concern.

In formulating status congruence, or ambiguity, Homans followed closely the Hughes conceptualization. But in formulating distributive justice Homans made use of a new kind of explanation, not previously seen in discussions of the equilibration phenomenon. This new explanation, in terms of social exchange, has become the most important focus of contemporary concern and research on the problem of justice. In general, all exchange formulations of justice concern themselves with compensation for effort expended. Effort has a certain exchange value, in the sense that its amount or quality will elicit reward from others. Reward too has a certain exchange value, in the sense that it elicits effort from others. For an exchange of effort and reward to take place the reward must in some sense be enough, or appropriate to the effort. Whether or not a reward is enough is a relative matter: it is not a function of the absolute magnitude of reward but of the proportionality of reward to effort. To determine whether rewards are proportional to

effort one must make a comparison between the ratio of reward to effort for two or more actors allocated rewards by the same source, or who are in some other way part of the same reward-allocation system. If the effort/reward ratios of the two are equal, their rewards are fair.

The two most important variants of the exchange formulation are Homans' own theory (1961) and Adams (1965). In Homans' theory an exchange is just if profits are proportional to investments. The idea of profit may be defined in the following manner: Let  $p$  be an individual who must choose between two alternatives, A or B. The consequence of choosing A has a certain positive value for  $p$ ; call this its reward. But B also has a certain positive value, and if  $p$  chooses A he foregoes the reward he would otherwise obtain by choosing B. Call this reward foregone the cost of choosing A. The profit associated with choosing A is the reward minus the cost of A. There is, of course, a profit associated with each of the two alternatives. It can be assumed that  $p$  will choose the more profitable alternative. Now define an exchange situation as one in which  $p$ 's choice has consequences not only for himself but for another, say  $o$ . One may then imagine the interaction of  $p$  and  $o$  as a sequence of transactions each of which involves a profit to both  $p$  and  $o$ . Profits may be increased by increasing the value of the activities in a transaction. This could be done by making an investment, say in training or experience, which would raise the quality of  $p$ 's contributions to  $o$ . A reward is just if profit is proportional to investment. This can be determined by comparing  $p$ 's profit/investment ratio to that of another actor in the system, such as  $o$ . The two ratios must be equal.

Adams' theory (1963, 1965) differs in some respects, partly because it was originally a cognitive dissonance formulation. More recently, however (1965), it has clearly emerged as an exchange theory. In Adams, an exchange is equitable if outcomes are proportional to inputs. Inputs are any contributions made by p to an exchange. Energy, amount of effort, quality of effort, training to improve the quality of effort, would all be classed as inputs. Outcomes are any consequences that follow from the contributions made by p to the exchange. Approval, money, gifts, or respect would all be classed as outcomes. In Adams, as in Homans, satisfaction with outcomes is a relative matter: It is not a function of the absolute value of outcomes, but is determined by comparisons with others and behaves like a relative deprivation phenomenon. To determine if one deserves an outcome one compares the input/outcome ratios of two or more persons in the same reward-allocation system. An outcome is equitable if the two ratios are equal, and inequitable if they are not.

### 3. Reasons for Preferring an Alternative to the Exchange Formulation.

The basic purpose of the present paper is to offer an alternative to the exchange formulation of distributive justice. In this section our purpose is to show why we believe a new formulation is required.

A new formulation is required, in our view, for three reasons: First, the exchange formulations do not actually define justice in a precise and unambiguous manner. Second, they do not actually explain some important features of the allocation of rewards. Third, the way in which they treat status, reward, and comparison lead to some questionable empirical consequences.

If we attempt to deal with these three problems, we may try to do so within the terms of the original formulation or we may try to reconceptualize the problem. We propose to argue that the problems in the exchange formulation are such that they cannot be dealt with without looking at status, reward, and comparison in quite different ways. Hence our interest in proposing an alternative formulation.

Difficulties in the Definition of Justice.

In conceptualizing exchange in terms of effort and compensation for effort, exchange formulations are led to define distributive justice as the equality of two effort/reward ratios. An example of how such a definition might look is shown in 3.1 below.

$$3.1 \quad \frac{\$300 \text{ per month}}{4 \text{ years of training}} = \frac{\$900 \text{ per month}}{12 \text{ years of training}} = 75$$

Dividing both sides, each ratio equals 75. Therefore the rewards are just.

But at most such equalities are suggestive. For most of the time they can be constructed only by forcing the analogy to effort. In exchange formulations statuses such as sex, age, ethnicity, or race are among the things classified as effort. Therefore it is possible to define justice by ratios such as 3.2.

$$3.2 \quad \frac{\$300 \text{ per month}}{\text{Female}} = \frac{\$900 \text{ per month}}{\text{Male}} = J$$

But of course one does not actually divide by denominators like male, or white, or Italian, or middle-aged. In general, from ratios like 3.2 no generally meaningful result is obtained, nor does the result when



meaningful precisely define states of justice and injustice. The only possible conclusion is that the definition of justice in exchange formulations is useable only as an imprecise analogy.

Status and Reward.

Exchange formulations leave some important properties of justice unexplained. First, they do not take into account the special significance in distributive justice of small reward-differentials. Not uncommonly injustice occurs in situations such as example 3.3 in which the upshot is likely to be that Asst. Professor p demands another \$500

3.3                   Asst. Professor p has been well thought of at University V for three years, receiving normal merit increases every year. This makes his salary equal to that of o just hired by V, because the market price for new Ph.D.'s has increased each year at the same rate as V's raises.

or so from his chairman. Is it greater purchasing power that p is asking for? Is it the absolute size of the salary that is really important to p? Or is it not more important that there simply be some kind of reward-differential, and of a magnitude that has status significance to p?

The importance of small reward-differentials cannot be understood unless a distinction is firmly established between the consummatory and the status value of reward. The distinction we intend is of course Veblen's (1899). Veblen conceded that one aspect of rewards was the value to an actor of their use in consumption:

"The end of acquisition and accumulation is conventionally held to be the consumption of the goods accumulated. . . . Such consumption may of course be conceived to serve the consumer's

physical wants--his physical comfort--or his so-called higher wants--spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual, or what not . . ." (Veblen, 1899, p. 25)

But, though one might want things in order to use them, consume them, and through consumption satisfy needs, Veblen felt only among the poor did accumulation satisfy a consummatory purpose. Among the more wealthy,

" . . . it is only when taken in a sense far removed from its naive meaning that consumption of goods can be said to afford the incentive from which accumulation invariably proceeds." (Ibid.)

If the consummatory needs of the wealthy do not motivate accumulation, it does not follow that they have no motivation to accumulate. Indeed, they have a quite passionate desire to acquire, because aside from their consummatory value,

" . . . possession of wealth confers honor; it is an invidious distinction." (Ibid, p. 26)

Thus, objects possessed and objects consumed can stand for worth, respect, esteem, social standing: in other words they have status significance. But in exchange formulations no account is taken of the important differences between consummatory and status value.

If the status significance of small reward-differentials is not accounted for in exchange formulations, neither is the significance of age, sex, ethnicity, race, or other status characteristics. All these characteristics, which often form the basis on which rewards are allocated, are treated by analogy with the amount or quality of effort. In Homans, for example, they are all classified as investments. Investments are efforts to acquire a certain capacity to contribute to the accomplishment of some goal. Thus, education and seniority might be thought of as effort expended to acquire high skill. But it is hard to see that age, sex,

race, or ethnicity can be looked at in the same way. Is effort expended to become thirty, male, and white? Is it for that effort that actors are compensated? In example 3.2, is it the difference in the "investments" of males that is rewarded by the difference in wages?

We thus have two kinds of clues to the importance of status value in distributive justice: First, that small differences in reward can be so important in feelings of distributive justice; second, that status-significant characteristics are so prominent among what Homans calls investments. For just as with rewards, we can distinguish the value of investments in exchange from their status value, though this distinction plays no part in exchange formulations.

Justice as a Moral Phenomenon.

Just as exchange formulations do not account for the status significance of social characteristics and rewards in distributive justice, so also they fail to explain how normative expectations about rewards emerge. The moral character of justice is one of its special peculiarities. It is seen in the fact, first, that under-rewarded actors are not simply dissatisfied, they are morally indignant; and second, in the fact that over-rewarded actors do not simply owe something to somebody, they are guilty. We would hazard the guess that even people who are neither over- nor under-rewarded feel about injustice that disinterested outrage that sociologists associate with the violation of normative order. Though it does not touch them personally, people will feel incensed at the shabby treatment of the under-rewarded or the inexcusable favoritism shown the over-rewarded.

More than is the case with most other formulations of the problem, the observations and investigations that support exchange formulations point to the importance that must be given to normative expectations in distributive justice. But the moral character of justice is not explicitly dealt with in exchange theory; exchange theorists nowhere attempt to show just how normative expectations about appropriate levels of reward emerge; and we believe that if they had tried to show how expectations emerge they could not have done so from the assumptions they make. There simply are no assumptions in exchange theory that will accomplish this task.

Comparisons.

Exchange formulations do not account for some aspects of the justice phenomenon that are important to it; but they suffer also from the opposite difficulty that some of the things they attempt to account for aren't so. Most of the problems of the latter sort arise from their conceptualization of comparisons.

There are two basic ways of formulating comparisons. The first is to suppose, as exchange formulations do suppose, that p compares himself with o. Comparisons in which one individual compares himself with another particular individual may be called local. The second is to suppose that p compares himself, not with o in particular, but with a generalized other. Thus, if p is an airline mechanic, instead of comparing himself to another particular person who is a mechanic, he might compare himself to "people who are highly skilled mechanics." Comparisons in which one individual compares himself with a generalized other may be called referential.

Current exchange theories formulate comparisons as local. But strictly local comparison is not sufficient to produce a distributive justice process. What unfolds if comparison is strictly local is a quite different process, best described as anomie. This is seen from examining the functions comparison is supposed to perform in distributive justice situations.

The purpose of comparison is to define the meaning that can be given to a particular reward. In example 3.4 there is no way to say whether

3.4                    P is paid \$3.52 an hour.

\$3.52 is too much, too little, or the right wage for p. The meaning of the wage is undefined. In example 3.4' the problem appears to be solved, providing p feels he is similar to o. P is underpaid. But why should

3.4'                    P is paid \$3.52 an hour while o is paid \$4.33  
                          an hour.

we draw that conclusion? Why not draw the conclusion that p is paid an appropriate wage and o is overpaid? Or even that both are overpaid, but o more than p? There is no basis for the claim that local comparison, of which 3.4' is an example, defines the significance of a reward.

But suppose that, as in example 3.5, p believes highly-skilled

3.5                    P is a skilled mechanic paid \$3.52 an hour.  
                          Skilled mechanics typically make \$4.30 an hour.  
                          Unskilled mechanics typically make \$3.50 an hour.

mechanics make about \$4.30 an hour. Certainly there is no longer any doubt about how he defines the situation. He will believe he is underpaid.

The difference between 3.5 and 3.4' lies in the use made by p of a stable frame of reference in terms of which local, particular comparisons are given their meaning. This frame of reference consists of generalized others, such as "skilled mechanics," and beliefs about the wage typically paid to them.

If comparisons have meaning only in terms of a frame of reference, what local comparison produces must be a process quite different from distributive justice. In distributive justice p knows he has been unjustly rewarded; in local comparison he knows nothing of the sort. In fact, p's problem is that he does not know how to define the situation in which he finds himself. His problem is to establish some standard. In other words, he is anomic. No doubt he is anxious and wants to change the situation. But his problem is not to protest injustice.

Hence we argue that no justice phenomenon arises in the absence of a stable frame of reference. If once this view is accepted, it has far-reaching consequences for the theory of distributive justice, because both justice and injustice have different meanings in local as compared to referential comparison. What is called a "just" state in local comparison sometimes is "unjust" viewed in terms of referential comparison, while some of the "unjust" states of local comparisons are "just" in referential comparisons. Even two states that are "unjust" in both views are seen as quite different kinds of injustice in referential as opposed to local comparison.

For example, when comparison is thought of only as local 3.6 is always just, since similar individuals are paid similar wages. But 3.6 is not always just. If skilled mechanics in general typically make \$4.30

3.6                    P is a skilled mechanic paid \$3.52 an hour.  
                         O is a skilled mechanic paid \$3.52 an hour.

an hour, both p and o are unjustly paid, and instead of their being satisfied with their wage the foundation is established for a protest coalition. On the other hand, 3.7 may appear to involve injustice to both p and o in terms of local comparison. Is this reasonable?

3.7                    P is a skilled mechanic paid \$4.30 an hour.  
                         O is a skilled mechanic paid \$3.52 an hour.

Or is it more reasonable to say that as skilled mechanics typically earn \$4.30, o is underpaid, but p is not. P may regard the system as unjust, and this may undermine its moral standing in his eyes, but it is not p himself who is unjustly rewarded.

Strictly local comparison confuses not only justice and injustice, but also different kinds of injustice. More accurately, in local comparison it is not possible to make distinctions that in referential comparison assume great importance. In 3.6 both p and o share the same injustice; in 3.7 only o is unjustly paid. Collective injustice should have different consequences than individual injustice, if for no other reason than the social support the sharing of injustice provides. Furthermore, in 3.7, while there is injustice in the system, p himself is not unjustly rewarded; his response will be a response to the moral injustice of there being others, unlike himself, who are unjustly treated. This situation, in which there is one individual injustice but it is the other who is rewarded unjustly, contrasts with 3.4' in which also there is one individual injustice, but it is p himself who is the unjustly rewarded individual.

Thus, we argue that the distributive justice process is obscured by formulating comparison as local. First, anomic states come to be confused with unjust states. Second, some states that are just are identified as unjust. Third, some states that are unjust are identified as just. Fourth, collective injustice cannot be distinguished from individual injustice. Fifth, situations in which it is oneself who is unjustly rewarded are not distinguished from those in which it is the other person who is unjustly rewarded. Sixth, it is not even possible to always correctly distinguish situations of over-reward from those of under-reward.

If such distinctions make a difference to how p will respond to injustice, and in our view they will, it is difficult to see how any lawful regularities in the behavior of distributive justice are to emerge if such distinctions are obscured. Thus, to make useful predictions about distributive justice, careful thought will have to be given to the nature and function of referential structures in comparisons.

#### 4. The Theory of Status Value.

We have four tasks: (a) To conceptualize the properties of status and reward in terms of their status-value; section 4 is devoted to this. (b) To conceptualize the frame of reference in terms of which comparisons are given their meaning, and to analyze its properties; section 5 is devoted to this. (3) To use these concepts and properties to show how normative expectations about appropriate levels of reward emerge; section 6 is devoted to this. (4) To give a meaningful and precise definition of the state of distributive justice; section 7 is devoted to this.



The theory of status value is concerned with evaluations of worth, esteem, or honor. "Status significance" in this usage means "honorific significance." Two kinds of elements may have status significance: states of characteristics and states of goal-objects. A characteristic,  $C$ , is any feature or aspect of a person that might be used to describe him, such as energy, height, or skin color. A state of a characteristic,  $C_x$ , might be, in the case of energy, high or low; in the case of height, tall or short; in the case of skin color, light or dark. In the present paper, all characteristics are treated as if they had only two states (hence the subscript  $x$  identifying states can take the values  $a$  or  $b$  only). A goal-object,  $GO$ , is any object, tangible or intangible, that an actor might want, or that might satisfy some need, such as shelter, an income, or a title.<sup>1</sup> A state of a goal-object,  $GO_x$  ( $x = a, b$ ) might be simple or elaborate shelter, a high or low income, a noble title or no title at all. A state of a characteristic or goal-object is distinct from the notion of its status value; for example, a state such as "great physical strength" might be given either positive or negative status value, might be good in some cultures, bad in others.

Every status situation is conceptualized from the point of view of some given actor,  $p$ . Other actors and indeed  $p$  himself, are treated as

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<sup>1</sup>In the more precise context of the theory of status value, we use the term "goal-object" instead of the term "reward" for three reasons: reward often connotes only positive value, where we want to talk both of positive and negative values; reward often connotes various psychological notions about effects on  $p$ , such as reinforcement, that play no part in our formulation; and reward often connotes direct gratification of  $p$ , through consumption of the reward--exactly the wrong connotation for our theory. But suitably stripped of any such connotations, one could use the term "reward" in place of "goal-objects" and understand what we mean quite well.

objects of p's orientation. That is, p is aware of and responds to other actors, but what is important in the theory is only p's awareness of and response to them. For example, the theory does not attempt to predict their behavior, except in the sense that other actors may of course also be treated as the actor p. Objects of orientation may include p as an object to himself (denoted p'), another particular actor, o, or such generalized objects as "airline mechanics," or "business executives." As notation, generalized objects will be distinguished from particular objects, p' and o, by upper case Roman letters, such as Y and Z.

It is sometimes useful to refer to general properties of any instance of an object of orientation, p', o, Y, or Z, in which case we designate objects as  $x_i$ . The corresponding notation for states of C and GO will be  $e_i$ .

The actor p may regard any object,  $x_i$ , as possessing any element  $e_i$ , or p may expect that  $x_i$  possesses  $e_i$ . Our idea of possession is straightforward; but expectation is used here both for normative and cognitive expectation. We want to cover by the term somewhat more than "to anticipate," but we also do not want to exclude this meaning. Thus, we mean that p thinks  $x_i$  ought to possess  $e_i$ , but do not preclude his also predicting that  $x_i$  actually will possess  $e_i$ .

P may regard two distinct states of C or two distinct states of GO as similar or dissimilar. For example, an airline mechanic may compare himself to an automobile mechanic and believe that they have the same state (high) of the same characteristic (mechanical skill). Similarity involves both similarity with respect to characteristic or goal-object, and similarity with respect to the state of the characteristic or

goal-object. The airline mechanic must believe both that the same sort of mechanical skills are common to airline and automobile mechanics and that they have the same degree of skill. Similarity, like status value, or any other aspect of a status situation, is seen from p's point of view; what matters, that is, is whether p regards two states as similar, not whether the sociologist regards them as similar.

We now use the ideas of possession, and expectation of possession, to define two fundamental relations in the theory of status value.<sup>2</sup>

Definition 1. An element  $e_i$  is associated with an element  $e_j$ , if it is the case that: if  $x_i$  possesses  $e_i$ , then  $x_i$  possesses  $e_j$ .

Definition 2. An element  $e_i$  is relevant to an element  $e_j$ , if it is the case that: if  $x_i$  possesses  $e_i$ , then  $x_i$  is expected to possess  $e_j$ .

Certain important implications follow immediately from these two definitions. First note that:

4.1 If  $e_i$  is associated with  $e_j$  and  $e_j$  is associated with  $e_k$ , then  $e_i$  is associated with  $e_k$ .

For " $e_i$  is associated with  $e_j$ " means that if  $x_i$  possesses  $e_i$ , then  $x_i$  possesses  $e_j$ ; and " $e_j$  is associated with  $e_k$ " means that if  $x_i$  possesses  $e_j$ , then  $x_i$  possesses  $e_k$ . From this it follows that if  $x_i$  possesses  $e_i$ ,  $x_i$  possesses  $e_k$ . Hence association is transitive.

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<sup>2</sup>For readers of "The Stability of Organizational Status Systems" (Zelditch, Cohen, Berger, 1966), where an earlier formulation of the theory of status value was described, one of the major changes in the theory developed here is in the way relevance, which we are about to define, was treated in that paper. Relevance was in the prior formulation introduced as a primitive term. Here it is a defined term, and moreover is broken down into two distinct ideas, association and relevance.

Also note that:

4.2                    If  $e_i$  is associated with  $e_j$  and  $e_j$  is relevant to  $e_k$ ,  
then  $e_i$  is relevant to  $e_k$ .

This follows from definitions 1 and 2 taken together.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, note that association and relevance are not symmetrical relations. For example, it is quite possible to say that  $C_x$  is associated with  $GO_x$  without claiming at the same time that  $GO_x$  is associated with  $C_x$ . Suppose that Negroes are in p's eyes typically poor. It does not follow that p regards the poor as typically Negro. Therefore we distinguish the association of  $e_i$  to  $e_j$  from the association of  $e_j$  to  $e_i$ . The same is true of relevance.

We now use the primitive idea of similarity, and our defined concepts of association, and relevance, to study how status value spreads: That is, how states that have no particular significance in and of themselves come to mean something important to p about the place occupied by p' and o in a status situation. We will not be concerned with how states acquire status-value ab initio. Though the problem is of obvious importance, it requires a theory of its own and one not relevant to the problem of distributive justice. But once at least one status-valued element is given in a status situation, S, it is our view that other elements of the same situation come to be defined by their relations

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<sup>3</sup>Note that certain important ideas do not follow from definitions 1 and 2. For example, it does not follow that: if  $e_i$  is relevant to  $e_j$  and  $e_j$  is relevant to  $e_k$ , then  $e_i$  is relevant to  $e_k$ . Therefore, if we believe transitivity of relevance to be true, it must be made an independent assumption of the theory of status value. However, we do not need such an assumption for the problem of the present paper, and so omit further discussion of it.

to the already valued elements of the situation. This occurs under the following conditions:

Assumption 1. (Spread of Status Value) Let  $e_i$  be a non-status-valued element of a status situation  $S$ , and let  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , be status-valued elements of  $S$ . Let  $e_i$  be similar to, associated with, or relevant to,  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ ; or let  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , be similar to, associated with, or relevant to,  $e_i$ .

- (1)  $e_i$  acquires the status value of  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , if  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , have the same status value.
- (2)  $e_i$  acquires no status value if  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , have different status values.

Thus, if executives use different washrooms from blue collar workers in a factory, the key to the executive washroom acquires status significance in the factory. For this to occur it is not actually necessary for there to be two or more status-valued elements in  $S$ , such as  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ ; the process will take place if there is only one. But if there are two or more such elements, assumption 1 claims that status value spreads only if they all have the same status value. If  $e_j, e_k, \dots$ , do not have the same status value, no status value is transferred to  $e_i$  at all. Thus, in an organization with only one washroom, used by everyone regardless of their status, there is no status significance attached to the washroom.

Note that the assumption is mute on the subject of any change in status value that might be expected of  $e_i$  if it is already status-valued when it becomes similar to, associated with, or relevant to,  $e_j$  and  $e_k$ . For example, the claim that  $e_i$  acquires no status value if  $e_j$  and  $e_k$  differ in value does not imply in any way that if  $e_i$  were already valued when it became attached to them it would decay in status value. If a washroom is

used indiscriminately it will acquire no status significance. It does not follow that if it does have status significance and is then used indiscriminately it will lose its significance. While in the long run this may be so, there will first be a protracted process of conflict and tension. The reasoning that leads to this view is developed below after the idea of balance is introduced.

Prominent in many discussions of distributive justice is the idea that, like status value, relevance itself may spread along bonds created by similarity. For example: if  $p$  perceives that  $C'_x$  is similar to  $C_x$  and also that  $C_x$  is relevant to  $GO_x$ , then  $p$  will come to see  $C'_x$  as relevant to  $GO_x$ . This is the sort of process one must suppose when airline mechanics come to believe they should have the same wage as automobile mechanics because airline mechanics have skills similar to those of automobile mechanics. The underlying idea seems to be a natural one. Explicitly stated:

Assumption 2. (Spread of Relevance) If  $e_i$  is similar to  $e_j$  and  $e_j$  is associated with or relevant to  $e_k$ , then  $e_j$  will become relevant to  $e_k$  or to any element similar to  $e_k$ .

Note that what spreads is relevance, not association. Thus, if  $e_i$  is similar to  $e_j$ , then either association or relevance of  $e_j$  to  $e_k$  leads  $p$  to expect any object that possesses  $e_j$  to possess  $e_k$ . Note also that unlike assumption 1, there is nothing that bars relevance from spreading between status elements that have different status value.

If the elements that come to be linked do have different status value, however, they are imbalanced. The idea of balance plays a key role in the theory of status value, because balance defines the conditions

of stability of a status situation. (The formulation used here differs only slightly from that of two previous papers using the same notion. See Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch, 1966; or Zelditch, Berger, and Cohen, 1966.) Balance of a status situation may be defined in three steps:

Definition 3.1.  $[e_i, e_j]$  is a relational unit if there exists an  $e_i$  and  $e_j$  such that

- (1)  $e_i$  is associated with  $e_j$  or  $e_j$  with  $e_i$ , or
- (2)  $e_i$  is relevant to  $e_j$  or  $e_j$  to  $e_i$ , or
- (3)  $e_i$  is similar to  $e_j$ .

Because we have limited ourselves to dichotomous characteristics and goal-objects, the status values of the states of a given C or GO may be treated as if they were either positive or negative evaluations. Thus, for occupational classes, the white collar class may be treated as if it were the positively-evaluated class while the blue collar class may be treated as if it were the negatively-evaluated class. From this perspective,

Definition 3.2. A relational unit  $[e_i, e_j]$  is balanced, if and only if  $e_i$  and  $e_j$  are both status-valued and the sign of their evaluation is the same.

Definition 3.3. A status situation S is balanced, if and only if all its relational units are balanced.

The idea of balance is now identified with the stability of a status situation, and with freedom from strain or tension. Imbalance, on the other hand, is identified with tension and pressures to change; and when pressures do arise, they will be pressures to change the situation from imbalance to balance.

Assumption 3. The status situation S is stable if and only if it is balanced.

By "stable" in this assumption we mean that the status situation will not change as a result of any pressures within the situation itself. Thus, assumption 3 is not a definition of the terms "balance" or "stability;" the two terms are independently defined. "Balance" is a term having to do with the agreement in evaluation of two or more related status states in a status situation; "stability" is a term having to do with pressures towards change in a status situation.

Assumption 4.     If a status situation S is imbalanced, there is tension generated within that status situation.

Assumption 5.     If a status situation S is imbalanced, there will be pressures from within S to change in the direction of balance.

Note that all assumption 3 claims is that if a status situation is balanced there are no pressures for change that arise from the way characteristics and goal-objects are related to each other. The assumption does not, of course, preclude the possibility that there are pressures on the system from some other factor or source. What the assumption implies, rather, is that if in some concrete setting there is tension or pressures for change, but the status situation is balanced, the source of tension and pressure must be from some other factor. Assumption 5, on the other hand, claims that the status situation is a source of pressures for change, if imbalanced, but does not claim that any actual change will be observed. Again the caution taken in this assumption is due to the fact that some factors outside the status process may have an opposite effect, inhibiting actual change.



5. Referential Structures.

In section 3 a distinction was made between local and referential comparisons. What distinguishes local from referential comparison is the presence of a stable frame of reference providing a standard in terms of which local comparisons are given meaning. Of course there are many different kinds of "frames of reference" in sociology and psychology; they are important in many different kinds of problems. But in defining status situations, the particular kind of frame of reference used by p has the following four components:

- (a) generalized individuals,
- (b) who possess given states of given characteristics,
- (c) to which are associated given states of given goal-objects,
- (d) where the characteristics and goal-objects are all status-valued.

A frame of reference having these four components will be called a referential structure.

A generalized individual is an individual such as "an airline mechanic" or "an automobile mechanic," as opposed to a particular, named individual like "Jones" or "Smith." Not being particulars, the states of characteristics attributed to generalized individuals are those they are seen typically to possess. Airline mechanics are typically highly skilled mechanics; apprentice automobile mechanics are typically unskilled. In the same way, goal-objects associated with the generalized individual are those typically allocated to the kind of people who have that much skill. Typically, skilled mechanics are paid \$4.33 an hour. Finally, the states of each characteristic and the states of each goal-object associated with the generalized individual have status-value.

To function as a referential structure, it makes no difference how a frame of reference originally developed, or how some individual, p, happened to acquire it. There are in fact many different ways in which they develop, and many ways in which p acquires them. In Homans' billing office, for example, most of the girls probably acquired from fellow employees the conception that a ledger clerk was more skilled than a cash poster, and that the pay they shared in common was the pay suitable for the cash poster rather than the ledger clerk (Homans, 1953). In other words, the referential structure was acquired through a process of socialization and social influence. In Adams' experiments, it is the experimenter who provides the subjects with the referential structure, communicating it as part of the experimental instructions--even though Adams' own theory does not formulate the way in which such a frame of reference is important (Adams and Rosenbaum, 1962; Adams, 1963; Adams and Jacobsen, 1964). In the airline strike of the summer of 1966, it was either through the mass media that airline mechanics learned that automobile mechanics typically made \$4.33 an hour or else it was their union officials who told them so. It is even possible to think of individuals contriving their own personal frames of reference by inference from repeated local comparisons, so long as what they contrive is a referential structure containing general in place of particular individuals.

Given a referential structure, in our view of comparison p sees his own characteristics and goal-objects as similar to or different from those of generalized individuals in it. It is in terms of such similarities and differences that his own characteristics and goal-objects acquire

their status significance; it is in terms of such similarities and differences that expectations emerge about which goal-objects he has a right to possess. Give p a job as sales clerk and he may see no significance in the fact that, like o who drives a delivery truck for the same firm, he is paid an hourly wage. But let him feel that he is similar to other white collar workers, and other white collar workers in the firm are paid a salary, and furthermore only blue collar workers are paid hourly: p will feel he has a right to expect a salary too and will define the method by which he is paid as degrading. The stage is set for a distributive justice process.

But for a distributive justice process to unfold, more is required than the simple existence of a referential structure. The referential structure must in addition have three fundamental properties: (a) It must be unitary. (b) It must be differentiated. (c) It must be balanced.

A unitary referential structure is one the generalized objects of which are associated with uniform states of C and GO. That is, if Y is an object of orientation in the structure, and C and GO are a characteristic and a goal-object of the structure, Y is associated with just one state of C but not both, and just one state of GO but not both. If Y is equally likely to possess  $C_a$  and  $C_b$  or  $GO_a$  and  $GO_b$  the structure is not unitary. For example, if p believes airline mechanics are skilled and earn \$4.33 an hour while "mechanic's helpers" are unskilled and earn \$3.50 an hour, his referential structure is unitary. If p believes some airline mechanics are skilled but others are unskilled, and some earn \$4.33 an hour but others earn \$3.50 an hour, then p's referential structure is not unitary. The importance of a unitary referential

structure lies in the clear-cut expectation it creates. A structure that is not unitary can give rise only to conflicting expectations. But a distributive justice process is one in which p has well-defined expectations that are either met or violated. Conflicting expectations will not give rise to such a process. Hence only a unitary referential structure can generate a distributive justice process.

A referential structure is differentiated when both the high and low states of a characteristic, and both the high and low states of a goal-object, are contained in it. For p to fully grasp the significance of an imbalanced goal-object in a local comparison, he must know not only that it is not the goal-object associated with his own state of a characteristic, but also that it is the goal-object associated with some other state. For the status significance of states and objects derives wholly from the other states and objects with which they are associated (by assumption 1). Thus, an airline mechanic must be aware not only that \$3.52 is too little for a highly skilled mechanic, but also that it is the wage associated with unskilled mechanics, before \$3.52 is fully interpreted.

A referential structure must be balanced because if it is not balanced it is unstable. If it is unstable, the status values of the referential structure will change; and quite as much as in a strictly local comparison p will be unable to define the local situation. The process that unfolds is without question an important one to understand if we are to fully comprehend the dynamics of status; but it will not be a distributive justice process. Instead it will be a process of disintegration and decay of the status value of rewards, a disappearance of

status distinctions formerly important, and a struggle to preserve the disintegrating status order by those to whom it meant much.

6. Emergency of Expectations about the Allocation of Goal-objects.

In most general terms, the problem of distributive justice concerns itself with the relation between the actual allocation of status-valued elements, such as goal-objects, and the normative expectations about their allocation which have emerged in a given status situation. Therefore, to understand distributive justice we must show how elements of a given status situation acquire their status value and how the normative expectations for their allocation emerge.

What acquires status value are the particular characteristics and goal-objects possessed by  $p'$  and  $o$ ; and it is about these elements that  $p'$ 's expectations emerge. The particular characteristics and goal-objects of  $p'$  and  $o$ , with the expectations held by  $p$  for the relations that ought to obtain between them, form the local system of a given status situation. A status situation, therefore, is made up of a local system and a referential structure. In analyzing how the local system acquires its status significance, and how expectations emerge about who in it should possess what goal-objects, we assume that the following conditions are given:

- (1) The referential structure is unitary, differentiated, and balanced.
- (2) The status value of the elements and the relevance bonds between them are initially undefined in the local system.
- (3) Each state in the local system is similar to one and only one state in the referential structure.

As we make use of these three conditions at several points, the numbers 1, 2, and 3 are useful as cross-references. Any reference later to condition 1, or 2, or 3 therefore refers to the above three conditions.

The justification for condition 1 has already been given. In our view, for a distributive justice process to emerge at all, p must regard the referential structure as something unchallenged and unchallengeable either by himself or by people like himself. The structure, furthermore, must remain unchanged throughout the process.

The second condition is a simplifying condition. It might be possible to consider a more complicated case. Suppose that the elements of the local system were already defined, and p then became aware of similarities to a new referential structure about which he learned for the first time from some mass media source. The status values of the local system, which are determined by referential structures, should shift. And in fact, local systems probably fluctuate in this way a good deal. But for the present the task that presents itself is to account for the behavior of the simpler case in which initially the elements of the local system have not acquired status value at all.

Condition 3 rules out those cases in which one element of a local system is similar to two or more elements of a referential structure. The purpose is to rule out those cases in which no transfer of status value from referential structure to local system would occur. Because referential structures are differentiated (by condition 1), a one-many relation between local system and referential structure would permit the possibility of one element of the local system being similar to two differently-valued elements of a referential structure. Therefore, no

transfer of status value could take place (according to assumption 1). On the other hand, the condition does not rule out the possibility that two or more states of the local system are similar to one state of the referential structure.

Given conditions 1, 2, and 3, states in the local system will acquire the status value of the states to which they are similar in the referential structure. This follows from assumption 1, the spread of value assumption. To see how this follows, let  $p'$  and  $o$  be objects in the local system,  $Y$  and  $Z$  be generalized objects in the referential structure,  $c_x$  and  $go_x$  be states in the local system, and  $C_x$  and  $GO_x$  be states in the referential structure (see figure 1). We know, because it is given in condition 3 that

6.1  $c_x$  is similar to some state  $C_x$ .

Furthermore, we also know, because of conditions 1 and 2, that

6.2  $c_x$  is an element that is not status-valued while  $C_x$  is a status-valued element.

From condition 3 it follows that

6.3  $c_x$  is not similar to, associated with, or relevant to any other state that is different from  $C_x$  in status value.

Therefore,

6.4  $c_x$  acquires the status value of  $C_x$ ,

which follows from 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and assumption 1. In the same way it can be easily shown that, given the similarity of  $go_x$  to  $GO_x$  it follows that

6.5  $go_x$  acquires the status value of  $GO_x$ ,

again using assumption 1.

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insert Figure 1 about here

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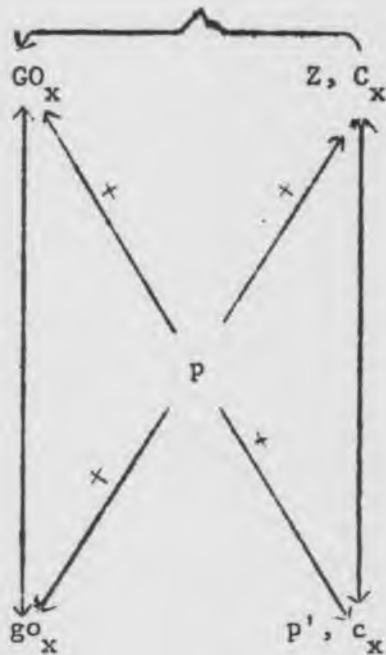


Figure 1. How elements of the local system acquire status value.

Lines  $p-p'$ ,  $c_x$  and  $p-go_x$  are accounted for by deductions 6.4 and 6.5 on p. 30. The following conventions are followed in the diagram:

(1) states are shown by the letters  $c_x$ ,  $go_x$ ,  $C_x$  and  $GO_x$ , where lower case letters are local and upper case letters are part of the referential structure. Only half the status situation is shown, because the process taking place is identical for the remaining half. (2) Objects are shown by the letters  $p'$  and  $Z$ , where lower case letters are local and upper case letters are referential objects. A conjunction of an object and a state shows the state possessed by the object. (3) Relations are shown by different kinds of line segments: A signed-directed line is an evaluation of a state; an unsigned, bidirectional line indicates similarities; a directed brace shows association. Thus, figure 1 shows the positively evaluated portion of a status situation: The general object  $Z$ , possessing the state  $C_x$ , is associated with the goal-object  $GO_x$ , both of which have positive status value. The states  $c_x$  and  $C_x$  are similar, as are the states  $go_x$  and  $GO_x$ . As a consequence of assumption 1,  $p$  will positively evaluate the states  $c_x$  and  $go_x$ .



To account for the way in which normative expectations about the possession of goal-objects emerge in the local system (see figure 2) we make use of assumption 2, the spread of relevance assumption. We know, as given, that

6.6  $c_x$  is similar to some state  $C_x$

and

6.7  $C_x$  is associated with  $GO_x$

and finally that

6.8  $go_x$  is similar to some state  $GO_x$ .

Therefore,

6.9  $c_x$  becomes relevant to that state  $go_x$  which is similar to the  $GO_x$ -state associated with  $C_x$ .

which follows from 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, and assumption 2.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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Perhaps it is useful to remark less formally that what happens is that  $p$ , recognizing the status significance of elements in the local system and seeing their similarity to states in the referential structure, comes to regard it as right that he should be treated like anyone else who has the same status significance. Therefore he regards it as right that he, like anyone else having the same state, should have the goal-object  $go_x$  that "belongs" to the state  $c_x$ .

#### 7. Distributive Justice.

As a result of the processes described in the previous section, we will find in  $p$ 's status situation two important features: (a) The states

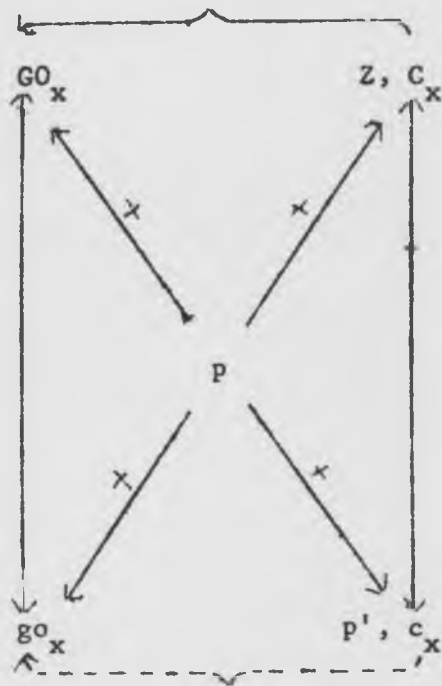


Figure 2. Emergence of normative expectations about the possession of goal-objects in the local system. Line  $p', c_x - go_x$  is accounted for by result 6.9. The identical process takes place in the remaining half of the status situation, which is not shown in the figure. A broken directed brace is used to indicate relevance relations. Thus the figure shows that  $GO_x$  is the goal-object associated in the referential structure with  $Z, C_x$ ;  $p', c_x$  is seen by  $p$  to be similar to  $Z, C_x$  and  $go_x$  is similar to  $GO_x$ . Therefore  $p$  expects that objects in the local system that possess state  $c_x$  ought to possess  $go_x$ .

of  $c$  and  $go$  possessed by  $p'$  and  $o$  have acquired status significance. (b) Relevance relations between states of  $c$  and  $go$  have emerged. We propose now to examine the consequences of actually allocating goal-objects to  $p'$  and  $o$ , given (a) and (b).

Allocation of goal-objects to  $p'$  and  $o$  creates a third important feature of the status situation: the actual possession by  $p'$  and  $o$  of goal-objects, which creates a new set of relations in the situation. All, some, or none of the association relations created by allocating goal-objects to  $p'$  and  $o$  may correspond to  $p'$ 's expectations. For example, figure 3 shows a local system in which  $p'$  and  $o$  have been allocated the goal-objects that  $p$  expected; the association relation coincides with the relevance relation on both the right and left sides of the figure. This is the sort of situation in which  $p'$  and  $o$  may be said to have the goal-objects they "deserve." In other words, the allocation of goal-objects is just in the sense typically given this expression.

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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Figure 4 shows a local system in which  $p'$  and  $o$  have been allocated goal-objects that fail to coincide with  $p'$ 's expectation; the association relation on the right side of the figure fails to coincide with the relevance relation that connects  $o$ ,  $c_a$  with  $go_a$ . One of  $p'$ 's two objects of orientation, therefore, has not been allocated the goal-object that is deserved. In other words, the allocation of goal-objects is unjust in the sense typically given this expression.

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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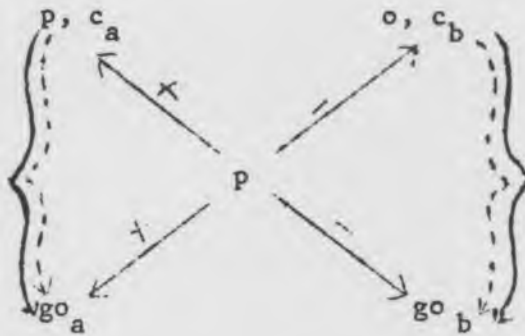


Figure 3. Just allocation of goal-objects to p' and o.

Solid braces show the actual possession of goal-objects by p' and o. Thus, p expects himself to possess the goal-object go<sub>a</sub> and o to possess the goal-object go<sub>b</sub>. Actual possession coincides with p's expectations, so that p' and o possess the goal-objects they "deserve" to possess.

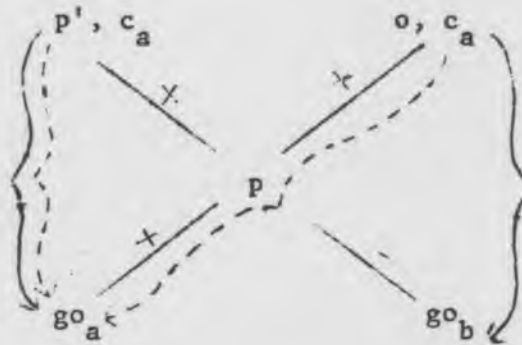


Figure 4. Unjust allocation of goal-objects to  $p'$  and  $o$ .

Both  $p'$  and  $o$  possess the positively-valued state  $c_a$ . Therefore  $p$  expects that both will possess the positively-valued state  $g_o_a$ . Allocation of the goal-objects fails to coincide with these expectations, because  $o$  does not possess  $g_o_a$ , he possesses  $g_o_b$ , which is less than he deserves.

We are now in a position to define a state of distributive justice. Let  $S^*$  be a status situation in which status value and relevance relations have emerged, and goal-objects have been allocated.

Definition 4. (Distributive Justice) A state of distributive justice exists in  $S^*$  if and only if all association relations created by allocating goal-objects coincide with relevance relations in the local system. Otherwise a state of injustice exists in  $S^*$ .

If association and relevance relations coincide, the result is always a balanced status situation in the sense of definition 3. Furthermore, if they do not the result is always an imbalanced status situation.

7.1 If a state of distributive justice exists in  $S^*$ ,  $S^*$  is a balanced status situation. If a state of injustice exists in  $S^*$ ,  $S^*$  is an imbalanced status situation.

The reason for 7.1 is perfectly straightforward. Relevance relations are determined by similarities between local and referential objects. Referential structures are always balanced (by condition 1). Therefore, relevance relations in the local system always connect states that have the same status value, forming balanced relational units in the local system. Any other relations that connect the same states will therefore also form balanced relational units. But associations formed between any other states will always connect states that have different status values, forming imbalanced relational units in the local system. It will always be the actual associations created by the allocation of goal-objects that create imbalance, if imbalance exists, because the relevance relations are always balanced. On the other hand, it is important to note that any failure of an association bond to coincide with expectations will always create an imbalance.

From 7.1 and assumptions 3, 4, and 5 we immediately see that

- 7.2            If a state of distributive justice exists in  $S^*$ , the status situation  $S^*$  is stable. If a state of injustice exists in  $S^*$ ,  $S^*$  is unstable.
- 7.3            If a state of injustice exists in  $S^*$ , there is tension generated within the status situation.
- 7.4            If a state of injustice exists in  $S^*$ , there will be pressures from within  $S^*$  to change it in the direction of balance.

All of which, of course, accords with the results obtained by such investigators as Adams (Adams, 1963; Adams and Rosenbaum, 1962; Adams and Jacobsen, 1964), Homans (1953), Patchen (1958; 1961) and Israel (1960).

Definition 4 has the valuable property that there is always one and only one state of justice for any given local system, and we are always able to say what that state is.

- 7.5            For every  $S^*$  there is one and only one state of distributive justice.

Given conditions 1, 2, and 3 we are always able to say what expectations  $p$  will develop for a given  $S^*$ . This will always identify which way of allocating goal-objects in  $S^*$  is just. For any given pattern of expectations, furthermore, there are only four ways of actually allocating goal-objects. (The logically possible cases are listed in figure 5. The first column shows the four possible patterns of expectations that can arise: note that these are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. The second column shows the four possible ways of allocating goal-objects, given a pattern of expectations in  $S^*$ . The third column records which are just and which unjust. For any given structure of  $S^*$ , that is for any given pattern of expectations, only one of the possible ways of allocating goal-objects is just.

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Insert Figure 5 about here

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Expected Allocation of Goal-Objects		Actual Allocation of Goal-objects		Distributive Justice	Type of Imbalance, if injustice exists	Reward state	
To p'	To o	To p'	To o			of p'	of o
+	+	+	+	yes	balanced	just	just
+	+	+	-	no	other	just	under
+	+	-	-	no	collective	under	under
+	+	-	+	no	self	under	just
+	-	+	-	yes	balanced	just	just
+	-	+	+	no	other	just	over
+	-	-	+	no	collective	under	over
+	-	-	-	no	self	under	just
-	+	-	+	yes	balanced	just	just
-	+	-	-	no	other	just	under
-	+	+	-	no	collective	over	under
-	+	+	+	no	self	over	just
-	-	-	-	yes	balanced	just	just
-	-	-	+	no	other	just	over
-	-	+	+	no	collective	over	over
-	-	+	-	no	self	over	just

Figure 5. Types of Balanced and Imbalanced Status Situations.

The sixteen cases are put in order according to the types of imbalances in column four.



In section 3 we argued that over vs under-reward, collective vs individual imbalance, and self vs other imbalance all made a difference to how people will respond to injustice. If such distinctions do make a difference, it is only by making them that we will be able to discover regularities in the justice phenomenon. In the status value formulation making them is a simple and straightforward matter. The last two columns of figure 5 show the types of imbalance that occur for each pattern of expectations that emerges in S\*.

What figure 5 shows is that, first, by reference to the referential structure, one always clearly distinguishes under from over-reward. Thus, the phenomenon that Homans studies, in which the ledger clerks are under-rewarded, is clearly distinct from the phenomenon that Adams studies, in which unqualified interviewers are over-rewarded (see examples in section 1). And, while Adams does not theoretically conceptualize the condition, clearly the way in which he provides a referential structure as part of his experimental instructions is a necessary condition of the striving behavior that he reports as a result.

Second, one can always clearly distinguish collective from individual injustice. The collectively unjust system may be expected to show coalition behavior that is not open to the individually unjust. That such coalitions will result is shown by experiments such as the following: Three college students are required to perform a task in which more points are yielded by coalitions than by individual performance. One of the three students is a paid participant, the other two are naive subjects. The paid participant has sufficient knowledge of how the task is performed that on the first of five trials in the experiment he always earns more

points than either of the other two students. In one condition this initial point advantage is made to appear just because the paid participant is defined as more able at the task (as shown by an initial test); in the other condition the paid participant is defined as having the same ability as the two naive subjects, so that the initial advantage is unjust. In the unjust condition, the two naive subjects will enter into more coalitions against the paid participant, and refuse more of his own coalition overtures, than in the just condition. In the just condition the naive subjects are more willing to enter into coalitions with the paid participant, and more willing to give him an advantage in points, instead of forming coalitions between themselves against him. (Cf Hoffman, Festinger and Lawrence, 1954.)

Third, when it is only one member of a system who is imbalanced, self is always distinct from other imbalance. This makes it possible to clearly interpret the results of an experiment like the following: Female students compete in a contest requiring aesthetic ability. They compete in pairs for a prize perfume bottle. In each pair they are defined as almost identical in ability, though just one wins the prize-- the one who has a negligibly greater number of points, such as 1 or 2 out of 100. In one condition, the system thus created is one in which both contestants are superior in ability, but one wins and one loses the prize. In the other condition, the system thus created is one in which both contestants are inferior in ability, but again one wins and one loses the prize. In each condition, though the system as a whole is imbalanced, one can clearly identify one subject as balanced and one as imbalanced, and their behavior is of course quite different. (Cf Israel, 1960.)

8. Summary.

Distributive justice is concerned with the way rewards are allocated. In all formulations of this process, the essential idea is that actors who are similar in terms of socially defined and valued characteristics expect to be similar in their rewards. If not, normative expectations are violated. The violation of such expectations produces tension and pressures for change.

The most important current formulations of this process are in terms of social exchange. But these formulations fail to take into account the nature and importance of status value in distributive justice, give ambiguous and confusing accounts of the comparison process by which actors define similarity or dissimilarity, fail to account for the distinctively normative character of the process, and fail to give meaningful and precise definitions of either justice or injustice.

An alternative way of conceptualizing distributive justice is in terms of status value. A theory of status value is concerned with evaluations of worth, honor, or any synonym of these (merit, esteem, prestige, etc.). It describes the way in which definitions of status significance and expectations spread. It also describes the conditions under which status situations are stable or unstable.

In the theory of status value comparisons are formulated in terms of referential structures. A distinction is made between particular social objects, such as the actor himself or other actors with whom he actually interacts, and generalized objects of orientations, of whom an actor holds stereotyped, unitary conceptions. Among other things, referential

structures contain information about rewards, or more exactly, goal-objects, typically associated with generalized objects.

Referential structures determine, first, the status significance of characteristics and goal-objects possessed by particular actors, and second, the expectations actors come to hold about the manner in which goal-objects may legitimately be allocated. In the context of the status significance and normative expectations created by the referential structure, actual allocations of goal-objects either coincide with expectations or do not. Those that coincide with expectations are defined as just; those that do not are unjust. A state of distributive justice is always a balanced status situation, while injustice is always an imbalanced status situation. Balanced status situations are stable, imbalanced status situations produce tensions and pressures for change.

The main results of formulating the process in terms of status value and referential structures are

- (1) The necessary conditions of distributive justice are much clearer, because the significance of a balanced referential structure emerges and is given great prominence. In the absence of this structure the process that develops is equally important but different from distributive justice.

- (2) The definition of the state of distributive justice becomes meaningful and precise. There is always one and only one state of distributive justice for each status situation, and its meaning is always exact.

(3) The meaning of each state of injustice becomes equally precise, and important distinctions are made that are obscured by other formulations, including the differences between: (a) over and under-reward, which cannot be distinguished in the absence of a referential structure; (b) collective vs individual justice-- collective injustice being typically confused with "just" situations; (c) self vs other imbalance. This should improve our chances of finding and stating regularities in the behavior of people in unjust situations.

(4) Processes formerly obscured emerge as important for future investigation. These include: (a) the problem of anomic status situations, for which there is no referential structure; (b) the problem of imbalanced referential structures, for which there is a referential structure, but the structure is itself in the process of changing, either by devaluing goal-objects or breaking down status distinctions.

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