JOURNAL OF SOCIAL ISSUES
VOLUME 31, NUMBER 3, 1975

Who Believes in a Just World?

Zick Rubin

Harvard University

Letitia Anne Peplau

University of California, Los Angeles

Research with the Just World Scale has indicated that many people believe that the world is a place where good people are rewarded and bad people are punished. Believers in a just world have been found to be more likely than nonbelievers to admire fortunate people and to derogate victims, thus permitting the believers to maintain the perception that people in fact get what they deserve. Other studies have shed light on the antecedents, correlates, and social consequences of the belief in a just world. Everyone may have a version of the just world belief in early childhood (Piaget's "immanent justice"), but some people outgrow the belief quickly and some apparently never do. Believers in a just world have been found to be more religious, more authoritarian, and more oriented toward the internal control of reinforcements than nonbelievers. They are also more likely to admire political leaders and existing social institutions, and to have negative attitudes toward underprivileged groups. Suggestions for modifying the belief in a just world are offered, focusing on the socialization techniques employed by parents, teachers, religious institutions, and the mass media.

Both sides of a fundamental religious controversy are set forth in the biblical Book of Job. God tests the faith of Job, a righteous man, by inflicting tremendous suffering upon him, depriving him first of his children, then of his wealth, and finally of his health. Job's friends try to convince him that suffering is necessarily the result of sin, and that therefore he should repent. "Behold," one of them declares, "God will not cast away an innocent man, neither will he uphold evildoers" (Job 8:20). The friends

Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to Z. Rubin, Department of Psychology and Social Relations, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138.

hold fast to the position that the world is a just place, where good people are rewarded and bad people are punished. (With friends like that, a nonbiblical saying goes, you don't need enemies.) Job, on the other hand, resists this popular argument, for he is not aware of any great sin that he has committed. He admits his humility before God, but never his blameworthiness, and complains that "Though I be innocent, He shall prove me perverse" (Job 9:20). In Job's view, the world is not a just place at all, but rather a place where rewards and punishments are often unfair or capricious.

Our personal view of the matter agrees with Job's. In reality, the world seems far from just. An unbiased glance about us will reveal countless instances of innocent people suffering, wicked people reveling, and, more generally, fate playing mischievous and arbitrary tricks with our lives. Our concern is not with the facts of the matter, however, but rather with the common belief that the world is a just place. In this paper we discuss the nature of this belief, viewed as an attitudinal continuum extending between the two poles of total acceptance and total rejection of the notion that the world is a just place. We begin with a discussion of "belief in a just world" as a social psychological construct, and review some recent data that help to validate an attitude scale that assesses this belief. We then consider childhood antecedents of the belief in a just world, focusing on its links with more general processes of socialization and cognitive development. Next we discuss the demographic and personality correlates of the belief in a just world and review evidence concerning its social consequences. Finally, we consider some implications of this research for socialization practices.

The Belief in a Just World

There is a great deal of evidence, both anecdotal and systematic, to the effect that many people view the world as a just place, where a person's merit and his fate are closely aligned. The evidence is especially abundant with respect to the perceived link between wickedness and suffering. When people, like Job's comforters, observe apparent instances of suffering, they are often prone to conclude that either (a) the suffering is not really taking place (or, at least, is greatly exaggerated) and/or (b) the victim is in fact blameworthy. For example, many Germans living under the Nazi regime either denied the fact of mass murders or else concluded that those who were sent to the death camps were

members of an impure race who must have deserved their fates (Hallie, 1971). Surveys conducted in the United States at the time indicated that "far from evoking sympathy, the Nazi persecutions apparently evoked a rise in anti-Semitism" (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969, p. 63). Similarly, a common (even if self-contradictory) theme of official and unofficial American reactions to atrocities inflicted on the Vietnamese was "it never happened and besides they deserved it" (Opton, 1971). The belief in a just world may also help to explain people's negative attitudes toward the physically handicapped and toward the poor. Goffman (1963) suggests that people often view another person's physical disability as evidence for some sort of moral defect—"as just retribution for something he or his parents or his tribe did, and hence a justification of the way we treat him" (p. 6). Ryan (1971) has focused attention on the tendency of middle-class Americans to "blame the victims" of poverty in our society for not working harder to overcome their adversity. In each of these cases, either the suffering is denied or the victim is seen as having brought it on himself or as somehow deserving it. In all cases, the belief in a just world prevails.

Lerner and his associates have documented the tendency to derogate the victim in a series of laboratory experiments (summarized in Lerner, 1970, 1974a). In one study (Lerner & Simmons, 1966), subjects watched a fellow student react with apparent pain to a series of supposed electric shocks. In one condition subjects had an opportunity to compensate the victim by voting to reassign her to a reward condition in which she would receive money rather than shocks. Virtually all subjects availed themselves of this opportunity, and they were told that the victim would be reassigned. In this condition, then, subjects were able to restore "justice" to the situation. In another condition, however, subjects could not reward the victim and were informed that the victim would continue to suffer. Subjects who knew that the victim would be compensated rated her more favorably than those who knew that her suffering was to continue. The ratings provided in the latter condition indicated considerable rejection of the victim, suggesting that she was seen as somehow deserving her fate.

The converse of the tendency to blame the victim also seems to be common: Success is often taken as a sign of virtue. Newspaper features on state lottery winners frequently mention the winner's hard work, good deeds, and admirable qualities, as if these characteristics helped to account for his or her purchase of the lucky ticket. Recent studies have documented people's tendencies

to view physically attractive people as more sensitive, kind, and better-natured than less attractive people (Berscheid & Walster, 1974), suggesting that even the "reward" of beauty is often seen as deserved. An earlier study by Lerner (1965) also demonstrated this perceptual link between reward and virtue. Subjects who learned that a fellow student had been awarded a cash prize as a result of a random drawing were likely to conclude that he had in fact worked especially hard.

Observations such as these led Heider (1958) to view the belief in a just world as a pervasive cognitive tendency, stemming from the more general principle of cognitive balance. In Heider's terms, justice is an *ought* force which we view as inherent in our environment, conceived as a harmonious fit between happiness and goodness and between unhappiness and wickedness. "When they coexist, we feel the situation is as it should be, that justice reigns. On the other hand, the coexistence of happiness and wickedness is discordant" (Heider, 1958, p. 235). Heider proceeded to make the link between the balance principle and the belief in a just world explicit:

> The relationship between goodness and happiness, between wickedness and punishment is so strong, that given one of these conditions, the other is frequently assumed. Misfortune, sickness, accident are often taken as signs of badness and guilt. If *O* [the other] is unfortunate, then he has committed a sin. (p. 235)

But whereas there may be strong forces leading people to perceive justice in the world, it is clear that not all people tend to react in this way. For example, several of the subjects in the Lerner and Simmons (1966) study disapproved of the experiment, writing comments such as "I thought there was no sense in the experiment and it was very cruel." These subjects did not disparage the victim. Such individual differences may manifest themselves in a wide range of situations. Some people, like Job's comforters, may be highly disposed to perceive justice in the world and to blame victims for their misfortunes. Others, like Job himself, may recognize more clearly that the world is often unjust. These people are more likely to attribute misfortunes to their social context or to the arbitrary workings of fate.

There are undoubtedly situational as well as individual variations in people's perceptions of justice. For example, people are probably more likely to see suffering as deserved when it is someone else's suffering, rather than their own. Perhaps Job would have shared his comforters' viewpoint if the victim had been someone other than himself. People may also be especially likely

to see their own rewards as being deserved (Beckman, 1970). Recent variations on the Lerner and Simmons (1966) experimental paradigm have documented related situational variations in perceptions of justice. Aderman, Brehm, and Katz (1974) found that subjects reacted with compassion rather than rejection to a victim of misfortune when the experimental instructions facilitated empathy ("imagine yourself in that situation"). Similarly, Chaikin and Darley (1973) found that subjects were less likely to derogate the victim of an accident when the subjects themselves expected to be placed in a role similar to that of the victim. Perceptions of justice may also be affected by the specific nature of the reward or punishment and the way it is determined (e.g., a jury's decision vs. the results of a random drawing).

The Just World Scale

We propose that in addition to possible situational variations, there are relatively enduring individual differences in the extent to which people perceive others (and perhaps themselves) as deserving their fates in a wide range of situations. We began our exploration of individual differences by developing the following paper-and-pencil "Just World Scale":

1. I've found that a person rarely deserves the reputation he has. (U)
2. Basically, the world is a just place. (J)
3. People who get "lucky breaks" have usually earned their good fortune. (J)
4. Careful drivers are just as likely to get hurt in traffic accidents as careless ones. (U)
5. It is a common occurrence for a guilty person to get off free in American courts. (U)
6. Students almost always deserve the grades they receive in school. (J)
7. Men who keep in shape have little chance of suffering a heart attack. (J)
8. The political candidate who sticks up for his principles rarely gets elected. (U)
9. It is rare for an innocent man to be wrongly sent to jail. (J)
10. In professional sports, many fouls and infractions never get called by the referee. (U)
11. By and large, people deserve what they get. (J)
12. When parents punish their children, it is almost always for good reasons. (J)
13. Good deeds often go unnoticed and unrewarded. (U)
14. Although evil men may hold political power for a while, in the general course of history good wins out. (J)

15. In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top. (J)
16. American parents tend to overlook the things most to be admired in their children. (U)
17. It is often impossible for a person to receive a fair trial in the USA. (U)
18. People who meet with misfortune have often brought it on themselves. (J)
19. Crime doesn't pay. (J)
20. Many people suffer through absolutely no fault of their own. (U)

The respondent is asked to indicate his degree of agreement or disagreement on a 6-point continuum, agreement with items labeled "J" above being scored as "just," "U" as "unjust." Some of the items refer to the belief in a just world in general terms (#2), others to the alignment of reward with virtue (#3) or of punishment with wickedness (#12). Still others (scored negatively) refer to such "unjust" possibilities as guilty people being rewarded (#5) or admirable people being punished (#4). The items are drawn from a variety of domains—health (#7), family (#16), school (#6), politics (#8), and criminal justice (#9).

In a sample of 90 male and 90 female undergraduates at Boston University, the mean individual item score on the scale was 3.08, indicating a slight tendency on average to reject the notion that the world is a just place. Nevertheless, there was a wide distribution of total scores on the scale, ranging from total rejection (scored 1) to qualified acceptance of the just world ideology. Merrifield and Timpe (Note 1) administered a revised version of the scale to 35 male and 27 female students at Oklahoma State University. The mean individual item score was 3.79 for their 26-item revision, pointing to a stronger belief in a just world among the Oklahoma than among the Boston undergraduates. They also found a wide range of individual scores, however. In both samples the scale had high internal consistency (coefficient alpha or KR-20 equal to .80 in the Boston and .81 in the Oklahoma sample). The psychometric data suggest that in spite of the broad spectrum of contents sampled, the scale is tapping an underlying general belief that can meaningfully be viewed as a single attitudinal continuum.

An initial opportunity to assess the predictive utility of the scale was provided by the 1971 national draft lottery, when 19-year-old men were randomly being assigned to good or bad lots in the form of either low- or high-priority lottery numbers. In our study (Rubin & Peplau, 1973), groups of 19-year-olds

who had previously completed the Just World Scale listened to the radio broadcast of the lottery and then rated their fellow group members on a series of dimensions. Most subjects expressed greater sympathy, greater liking, and less resentment toward losers of the lottery (those who had received high-priority numbers) than toward winners. Especially in light of the fact that the subjects themselves were also in the lottery, and in many cases victimized by it, this generally sympathetic pattern did not seem too surprising. We also found, however, that the ratings of those subjects with high scores on the Just World Scale ran counter to this general pattern; these subjects reacted at least as favorably to winners as to losers and they "resented" losers more than winners. To disparage or resent an innocent victim of circumstance seems an unusual reaction. But it is precisely the sort of reaction we would expect from people who tend to perceive victimization in terms of an underlying moral order. This pattern of reactions toward others seemed to hold regardless of the subject's own fate in the lottery.

Several more recent studies have further contributed to the construct validity of the Just World Scale. In two experiments, Zuckerman, Gerbasi, Kravitz, and Wheeler (Note 2) compared the reactions of high and low scorers on the Just World Scale (High JWs and Low JWs) to innocent victims. In the first study, patterned after Lerner and Simmons (1966), a fellow student received apparent electric shocks, ostensibly as part of a learning experiment. High JWs derogated the victim significantly more than did Low JWs; they also thought the experiment was more important and less cruel than did the Low JWs. In the second study, subjects were presented with an account of a rape; High JWs attributed more blame to the rape victim than did the Low JW subjects. The results of both studies conformed to the expected pattern: People who believe most strongly in a just world are most likely to see victims as meriting their misfortune and/or "asking for trouble." Analogous results have been found in experiments conducted by Miller, Smith, Ferree, and Taylor (Note 3) and by Flowers (Note 4).

The available evidence converges on the conclusion that High JWs will derogate victims even when there is no reason to think that the victim was in fact responsible for his or her misfortune. When the victim's suffering is undeniably caused by some other person, however, High JWs may no longer derogate the victim. Instead, they may attempt to restore justice by demanding vengeance against the culprit. A pilot study by Izzett (Note 5) compared

the reactions of High JWs and Low JWs to a criminal defendant. Playing the role of jurors in a negligent homicide case, High JWs formed a less favorable impression of the defendant than did Low JW jurors ($p < .05$) and tended to assign a stiffer sentence ($p < .10$). Similarly, Gerbasi and Zuckerman (Note 6) found that in a population of real jurors, High JWs gave more severe verdicts in a mock trial than did Low JWs. These results suggest that people who believe in a just world may feel special hostility toward the agents of unjust suffering, at least in those cases in which the agent has already been singled out and accused of a crime.

A similar line of reasoning may help to explain a pattern of results recently obtained by Hanback (1974). Student nurses were asked to evaluate a young woman who had been injured in a traffic accident. Half of the subjects were told that the woman was responsible for the accident (she had failed to wear her glasses while driving). The other half were told that the accident was caused by the driver of the other car. When the victim was depicted as responsible for the accident, High JWs evaluated her less favorably than did Low JWs. When the accident was depicted as caused by the other driver, however, High JWs evaluated the victim more favorably than did Low JWs (interaction $p < .01$). It may be speculated that in the nonresponsible-victim condition, the High JW subjects reserved their wrath for the other driver, and showed extra sympathy for the victim by contrast.

The Development of the Belief in a Just World

Given that (a) the belief in a just world seems quite prevalent, at least in Western societies, and (b) people vary widely in the degree to which they hold this belief, how does the belief originate and develop? We will consider three interrelated approaches to this issue: the theme of a just world in Western culture; the psychological functions of the belief in a just world, especially for children; and the links between this belief and current theories of cognitive development.

The Cultural Backdrop

Children growing up in Western societies are often explicitly taught that the world is a just place. Fairy tales and popular myths emphasize the rewards that follow from virtue and the punishments that follow from misbehavior. The industrious and deserving Cinderella is rewarded by marriage to the charming prince; Pinocchio's lies are conspicuously punished by an ever-

lengthening nose; Santa Claus makes an annual list of children who are "naughty or nice" so he can allocate presents only to the deserving. Parents often foster such beliefs as a way of shaping children's behavior. In some cases, these teachings may foster accurate perceptions of causal relationships: Hard work at school may well be rewarded by a good report card. But in other instances the prescriptions may distort reality. Piaget (1965) suggests, for example, that "many children think that a fall or a cut constitutes a punishment because their parents have said to them, 'It serves you right,' or, 'That will be a punishment for you'" (p. 260).

Teaching children respect for authority may provide a special opportunity to encourage the belief in a just world. Both at home and in school, children are taught to admire parents, policemen, and political leaders, and to revere American social institutions. This is often done in a one-sided manner, presenting only the virtues and not the flaws of those in power. George Washington is described in idealized terms as someone who "could not tell a lie," John D. Rockefeller as a saintly figure who gave dimes to needy children. Implicit in such stories is the idea that power and prestige are signs of merit. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that children from families in which idealized and uncritical respect for authority is encouraged (cf. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) will be especially likely to have a strong belief that the world is just.

Belief in a just world may also be fostered by religions such as Judaism and Christianity which teach that although just rewards may not occur immediately, they are ultimately inevitable. In the Old Testament, from the original sin to the delivery of Daniel from the lions' den, the message that the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will triumph is brought home over and over again. Similarly, the Protestant Ethic emphasizes the links between hard work, financial success, and spiritual salvation. In this view, prosperity is seen as an indication of virtue; diligent labor and thrift are both necessary and sufficient conditions for financial and spiritual rewards. We might also hypothesize, therefore, that children who grow up in "religious" households are likely to develop a strong belief in a just world.

Psychological Functions of the Belief in a Just World

Lerner (1974a) has suggested that a social learning view of the development of the belief in a just world, based on the internalization of cultural norms, is inadequate; there is also a need to understand the motivational significance of the belief

for the individual. Considering the psychological functions of justice from a developmental perspective, he suggests that young children typically graduate from the "pleasure principle" (taking what you can get and doing what feels good now) to the "reality principle" (giving up immediate rewards in favor of sustained effort to achieve future goals). In making this transition, the child makes a "personal contract" with himself to delay gratifications in order to achieve greater rewards later. Implicit in this strategy is a belief that investments of effort and self-denial will pay off in the end. Because the child needs to believe that he will get the outcomes he deserves, Lerner argues, he is motivated to believe that others also get what they deserve. After all, the individual may reason, if other people do not get what they deserve, then I may not either—and this possibility is likely to be highly threatening.

Lerner's developmental analysis suggests two personality dimensions that may be related to the belief in a just world. First, Lerner sees the ability to delay gratification as necessary for the shift from a pleasure to a reality orientation, and thus as intimately linked with the notion that the world is a just place. In a recent review, Mischel (1974) also emphasizes that an important determinant of the decision to delay rewards is a trust or belief that one will ultimately receive the delayed rewards one deserves. Some evidence for a link between children's ability to delay gratification and their concern for justice has been reported by Long and Lerner (1974). Second, Lerner implies that belief in a just world is related to a sense of personal efficacy, an ability to manipulate one's environment to bring about just rewards. Thus a strong belief in a just world may be linked to a sense of personal or internal control over one's outcomes.

The Cognitive-Developmental Perspective

A third view of the development of beliefs about justice derives from the cognitive-developmental approach of Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1963). Both have examined systematic developmental changes that occur in children's ideas about morality. When Piaget presented children with a story in which a boy disobeys his mother and later accidentally falls into a stream, he found a strong tendency for young children to view this accident as punishment for the boy's disobedience. Piaget (1965) calls this phenomenon "immanent justice," a belief that "a fault will automatically bring about its own punishment" (p. 256). His data indicated that this belief declines with age, existing in 86% of the six-year-olds he

interviewed and only 34% of the 11- and 12-year-olds. Medinnus (1959) has reviewed several studies that confirm the existence of children's belief in immanent justice and the general age trend that Piaget reported.

Piaget views immanent justice in the broader context of children's cognitive and moral development. Young children see their parents as absolute, omniscient authorities who define what is fair and just. The fact that someone is punished by an adult is thus proof of his wrongdoing. In support of this point, Kohlberg (1963) presented four- to seven-year-old children with stories in which an obedient child was either rewarded or punished by an adult. The youngest children typically accepted the punishment as just while at least some of the seven-year-olds expressed concern about the fairness of the adult's actions.

Through a process of maturation and experience, children slowly abandon belief in the absolute moral correctness of adults and in immanent justice. This development is fostered by personal experiences with injustice, by occasions on which parents are shown to be wrong or unfair, and by an expansion of the child's social world to include egalitarian relationships with peers. But although the belief in immanent justice typically declines with age, Piaget believes that it may persist to some degree in adults.

Piaget's analysis of moral development has been elaborated by Kohlberg into a three-level model of moral judgment. At Level One—"preconventional morality"—an act is judged on the basis of its physical consequences rather than on the basis of intention or standards of fairness. At Level Two—"conventional morality"—acts are judged in terms of their conformity to social order and the wishes of respected authorities. Only at Level Three do people begin to make moral judgments on the basis of universal principles of fairness and human rights. It may be speculated that as children progress through moral levels, the basis for their belief in a just world as well as the extent of this belief changes. For younger children at Level One, the derogation of victims and admiration of fortunate people appears to be based on a magical belief in immanent justice and the implicit assumption that natural events and parental acts are just. At Level Two, the belief in a just world may be based on a "duty-oriented" tendency to uphold authority and social institutions. At Level Three, in contrast, people may be more willing to challenge the actions of legitimate authorities when they conflict with higher standards of justice, and thus be most likely to abandon the belief in a just world.

Overview

These three approaches to understanding the development of belief in a just world are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they emphasize that the belief in a just world serves functions for both society and the individual, and that the basis for a person's belief in a just world may change with age. Adults teach children to believe in a just world in order to encourage good behavior, hard work, and respect for authorities and institutions. For the children themselves, this belief may be an important prerequisite for a shift from a short-run pleasure-seeking orientation to a future-time perspective. The belief may take somewhat different forms, however, as a function of the child's more general level of cognitive and moral development. And while most people probably believe in a just world during at least part of their childhood, they come to question this belief as they grow older. This questioning may be fostered by personal experiences of injustice and by the attainment of a principled view of morality that transcends obedience to conventional standards and authorities.

Individual Correlates of the Belief in a Just World

Very little research of the sort that could shed direct light on the development of the belief in a just world has been conducted.[1] Our consideration of developmental perspectives has suggested several hypotheses about likely correlates among adults, however. We would expect people with strong beliefs in a just world to be authoritarian, to be trusting, to be religious, to adhere to the Protestant Ethic, and (although we are less confident about it) to have a sense of internal or personal control of their reinforcements. We would also expect them to have had relatively little personal experience with injustice. Each of these hypotheses has received at least some support in recent investigations employing the Just World Scale. An important limitation upon the evidence to be presented is that all of it is based on studies of college students.

Authoritarianism

For a sample of 180 Boston undergraduates, Rubin and Peplau (1973) reported a correlation of .56 between Just World scores

[1] Studies of children's orientations toward deservingness and justice (e.g., Kohlberg, 1963; Lerner, 1974b; Long & Lerner, 1974) have not been addressed directly to the belief in a just world; Stein (1973) is one exception.

and a 10-item version of the F-scale focusing on authoritarian submission. Using a larger pool of F-scale items, Lerner (Note 7) found a correlation of .20 between the two scales in his sample of 106 Canadian students. Zuckerman (Note 8) administered a five-item form of the F-scale to students in his Rochester sample six months after they had taken the Just World scale and obtained a correlation of .35.

The link between the belief in a just world and authoritarianism is consistent both with their common cultural content (e.g., the tendency to describe leaders in idealized terms) and with the logic of Piaget's and Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental models. The two constructs converge on the themes that strong and powerful people are good and that weak and powerless people are bad. Moreover, authoritarianism has been shown to be related to intolerance for cognitive inconsistency (Steiner & Johnson, 1963) and to hostility toward handicapped and underprivileged persons and groups (Centers, 1963; Christie, 1954; Noonan, Barry, & Davis, 1970), tendencies which would also be expected to follow from the belief in a just world.

Nevertheless, there is direct evidence for the value of a conceptual distinction between the belief in a just world and authoritarianism. A factor analytic study by Lerner (Note 7) indicated that the Just World Scale and the F-scale, although positively correlated with one another, loaded highly on separate factors. As one might expect, F-scale scores were associated with a general ethnocentrism among the Canadian student respondents, including negative attitudes toward both Americans (a highly advantaged group) and Indians and Metis (disadvantaged groups). Just World scores, in contrast, were associated with positive attitudes toward Americans and negative attitudes toward Indians and Metis. This pattern of relationships is clearly consistent with the implications of the belief in a just world—successful groups (the Americans) are like and respected, while unsuccessful groups (Indian and Metis) are derogated.

Trust

To the extent that one believes that people are assured of getting what they deserve, one might also be expected to be a trusting person, as opposed to a person who is suspicious and cynical. This expectation has been supported in both laboratory and questionnaire research. In two experiments, Zuckerman and Gerbasi (Note 9) found that High JWs were less likely than Low JWs to be suspicious of a deceptive experimental manipulation

and of a publisher's giveaway offer. Fink and Guttenplan (Note 10) found that Just World scores were highly correlated with scores on Rotter's (1967) Interpersonal Trust Scale (r = .55). In their study, Just World scores were significantly correlated with scores on each of three factors of the Rotter scale that had been identified by Kaplan (1973): institutional trust (r = .42), trust in other people's sincerity (r = .34), and trust that one will not be taken advantage of by others (r = .32). All of these results may be viewed as reflecting in large measure the link between the belief in a just world and the uncritical acceptance of authority. There is at least some suggestion, however, that the belief in a just world may also be related to a more generalized trust of other people.

Religiosity

Because the major Western religions endorse the belief in a just world to a significant extent, it was hypothesized that people who are relatively religious will be especially likely to espouse this belief. Indeed, Rubin and Peplau (1973) found that scores on the Just World Scale among college students were correlated with their reported frequency of church or synagogue attendance (r = .42). In the same study, participants were asked to specify their conception of God, with alternatives ranging from "God is a being beyond ourselves who takes an active part in the affairs of man" through "God does not exist." Just World scores were significantly correlated with the belief in an active God (r = .31).

The Protestant Ethic

The belief in a just world has much in common with central tenets of the Protestant Ethic. Mirels and Garrett (1971) developed a Protestant Ethic Scale, with high scores reflecting an emphasis on hard work both as a value in its own right and as a key to success. For 117 male undergraduates, scores on the scale were related positively to authoritarianism and to the expectancy for internal control of reinforcements. In a subsequent experiment Garrett (Note 11) found that high scorers on the Protestant Ethic Scale in fact worked harder on a tedious experimental task than low scorers did. In support of the hypothesis that people who espouse the Protestant Ethic also tend to believe in a just world, MacDonald (1972) found that college students who scored high on the Protestant Ethic Scale were significantly more likely than low scorers to derogate social victims, agreeing for instance that "most people on welfare are lazy." Lerner (Note 7) administered

both the Protestant Ethic Scale and the Just World Scale to his sample of undergraduates, and found that they were significantly correlated ($r = .35$).

Locus of Control

Especially in light of its link with Protestant Ethic notions about the rewards of hard work, it was hypothesized that the belief in a just world would be associated with an internal locus of control—that is, the expectation that one can determine one's own rewards and punishments, rather than being at the mercy of external forces (Rotter, 1966). The available correlational data provide strong support for this hypothesis. Rubin and Peplau (1973) reported a correlation of $-.44$ between Just World scores and scores on Rotter's Locus of Control measure (on which high scores indicate an *external* locus of control). Six other studies have obtained correlations ranging from $-.32$ to $-.58$ (Zuckerman & Gerbasi, Note 12). On the basis of factor analytic studies, Collins (1974) and Zuckerman and Gerbasi (Note 12) have suggested that the belief in a just world may be one of four separate dimensions that underlie an internal locus of control (the other three being belief in a difficult world, a predictable world, and a politically responsive world). The belief that the world is a just place seems to provide part of the scaffolding needed to support an internal locus of control. If the world were not just, people might strive for reinforcements and then fail to get them because of unforeseen external events. Thus the belief in a just world seems necessary if one's sense of personal efficacy is to be maintained.

It also seems likely, however, that some people believe in a just world that is governed by external forces, such as fate, a just Deity, or other authorities. The obtained correlation between Just World Scale scores and the belief in an active God argues in support of this possibility. Some "superstitious" manifestations of the belief in a just world—for example, the notion that a person who finds money in the street must have done a good deed that day—also seem to depend on the workings of external or supernatural forces.

In interviews with dying patients, Kübler-Ross (1969) obtained examples of both "internal" and "external" versions of the belief in a just world. An internal example is the case of a businessman hospitalized with Hodgkin's disease who maintained that he had caused his illness by eating improperly. "His account was totally unrealistic, yet he insisted that he, and only he, caused 'this

weakness'" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 54). The businessman's belief that he personally brought about his own misfortune may be based in part on the hope that he will also be able to effect his own cure. On the external side, Kübler-Ross was impressed with the number of patients who pledged to give parts of their bodies to science if the doctors would use their knowledge of science to extend their life. These promises seem to reflect the patients' belief, or at least their hope, that if they do good deeds they will be rewarded by an external agency, much as a child may be expected to be rewarded for good conduct by a parent or a good fairy. Additional research into these links between the belief in a just world and locus of control would be of considerable interest.

Sex, Age, and Social Class

Because of the limitations of the subject samples employed, there is only rudimentary evidence concerning links between the belief in a just world and three fundamental dimensions of social identity—sex, age, and social class. A general hypothesis that is relevant to all three dimensions is that the belief in a just world will be diminished to the extent that a person has had direct experience with injustice. This notion would lead us to expect that the belief in a just world would be less pronounced among women than among men, among older people than among younger people, and among members of less privileged socioeconomic groups than among members of more privileged groups. The available evidence in each of these respects is mixed.

No clear sex differences in the belief in a just world have emerged. Peplau and Tyler (Note 13) administered the Just World Scale and a variety of other measures to 134 male and 113 female undergraduates at the University of California at Los Angeles. They found no differences between men's and women's Just World scores. Similarly, Rubin and Peplau (1973) found that men's and women's scores in their Boston University study were approximately equal. It may be speculated that although women in America may have encountered more than their share of personal and social obstacles, the prevailing ideological climate has seldom led them to experience such inequalities as unjust. More recently these inequalities have increasingly come to be recognized as injustices, but at least on college campuses this realization may be shared to a large extent by men as well as by women.

In the UCLA study, Just World scores were negatively correlated with age for men ($r = .22$, $p < .01$) but not for women.

It seems reasonable that the belief in a just world should continue to decline through childhood into young adulthood, as people continue to discover injustices in the world. Why the age trend in the UCLA study was found only for men remains unclear, however. Kübler-Ross's (1969) examples suggest that the belief in a just world may tend to grow stronger among older people, especially as they see themselves nearing death. Unfortunately, no data are available on this.

Within the UCLA sample there was no relationship between social class (as measured by father's educational level) and scores on the Just World Scale ($r = .03$). It may be that the hypothesized tendency for people of lower social-class origins to perceive greater injustice in the world is offset by ideological factors working in precisely the opposite direction. Lerner and Elkinton (Note 14) interviewed 93 Kentucky housewives, representing upper middle, lower middle, and laboring groups, about their perceptions of justice. The questions included: "Are there any people that you can think of who are getting a raw deal, or who get less than they deserve?" and "Are there any people in this country that get more than their fair share?" Lerner and Elkinton found that with respect to both forms of inequity, the upper middle class respondents tended to perceive the most injustice and the laboring class respondents the least. Lerner and Elkinton suggested that the tendency of the laboring class respondents not to perceive any injustices may have stemmed from their fundamentalist religious ideology, which teaches that "what may appear inequity on the surface is really the result of sin or it will be corrected in the future—Heaven or Hell." Further research with wider samples of respondents is needed to disentangle the complex web of socioeconomic, regional, religious, and ideological factors that may contribute to the development of the belief in a just world.

Social and Political Consequences of the Belief in a Just World

The belief in a just world affects attitudes toward both the victims and the beneficiaries of contemporary society. We would expect strong believers in a just world to admire and support successful people and those who are in power. Believers in a just world should also be hostile or unsympathetic toward victims of social injustice, especially in cases where their suffering cannot be easily alleviated. More generally, a strong belief in a just world

may encourage acceptance of existing social and political institutions. As a consequence, this belief may discourage social activism of the sort designed to correct real injustices.

Data from Peplau and Tyler's UCLA study (Note 13) provide empirical evidence for the link between the belief in a just world and support for powerful political and social institutions. Scores on the Just World Scale were positively correlated with favorable attitudes toward the Congress, the Supreme Court, the military, big business, and labor unions. The correlation between a summary measure of attitudes toward such institutions and Just World scores was .37 ($p < .001$). A separate scale assessing support for the federal government was also positively correlated with Just World scores ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). More generally, belief in a just world was related to political conservatism. High JW students were significantly more likely to have preferred Nixon to McGovern for president in 1972 and to place themselves at the conservative end of a four-point scale of political orientation.

At the time of the UCLA study (fall, 1973), news of Watergate was constantly in the popular press, but the extent of President Nixon's involvement was unclear and his impeachment seemed unlikely. It was predicted that so long as Nixon's guilt about Watergate was in doubt, believers in a just world would be more likely to defend him against criticism and to maintain that the president merited his high office. The data indicated that although belief in a just world was not related to one's overall evaluation of the quality of Nixon's leadership, it was significantly correlated with more specific attitudes about Watergate: High JWs were less likely to believe Nixon was guilty ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), were more supportive of the way he handled the Watergate matter ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), and were more opposed to his impeachment or resignation ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$). In responding to these and other questions, High JWs appeared to have more positive attitudes toward politicians generally and to be less cynical about U.S. politics. Other studies have also found the belief in a just world to be related to conservative political attitudes and to a lack of suspicion or cynicism about governmental activities (Fink & Guttenplan, Note 10; Zuckerman & Gerbasi, Note 9).

A second major consequence of belief in a just world is the tendency to derogate victims of social injustice. Several studies have documented the link between high scores on the Just World Scale and negative attitudes toward socially disadvantaged groups. Rubin and Peplau's (1973) respondents indicated the extent of their agreement or disagreement with statements about the degree

to which blacks, women, and the poor were responsible for their inferior position in society. For both male and female students, belief in a just world was correlated with derogating blacks ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and women ($r = .31$, $p < .001$), but not with the measure of blaming the poor ($r = .12$, ns). Zuckerman (Note 8) also has found small but nonsignificant correlations between Just World scores and the belief that blacks ($r = .22$) and women ($r = .15$) are responsible for their "inferior state." Along related lines, Smith, Ferree, and Miller (1975) found a negative correlation between belief in a just world and scores on a 20-item scale of pro-feminist attitudes ($r = -.24$, $p < .05$) in a sample of 100 male and female Harvard Summer School students. Similarly, Peplau and Tyler (Note 13) found that Just World scores were positively correlated with a 10-item sex-role traditionalism scale ($r = .35$, $p < .001$) in their UCLA sample.

People who approve of existing political and social institutions and who derogate underprivileged groups should also feel less of a need to engage in activities to change society or to alleviate the plight of social victims. Rubin and Peplau (1973) constructed an index of political and social activism based on respondents' reports of having participated in such activities as demonstrating, picketing, or contributing money to political or social causes during the previous year. For 180 undergraduates, the correlation between Just World scores and this activism index was $r = -.29$ ($p < .001$). There was also an inverse correlation between Just World scores and students' global self-ratings of their degree of involvement in "political or social action groups or activities" ($r = -.20$, $p < .01$).

Although we have consistently found links between the belief in a just world and the derogation of social victims, the magnitude of these relationships is typically small. The belief in a just world is clearly only one of many determinants of attitudes toward socially disadvantaged groups and of political activism. Nevertheless, these studies do suggest that the tendency to perceive others as deserving their fates may contribute to the perpetuation of social injustice.

Derogating a victim or denying his suffering is one mode of maintaining the belief in a just world. As Lerner (1974a) has shown, however, when subjects are given an opportunity to compensate a victim and thus alleviate the suffering, they often choose this alternative. Consquently, there may be situations in which strong believers in a just world will act in a very altruistic manner. Specifically we would hypothesize that High JWs will be disposed to help victims when (a) the help is relatively easy

to provide; (b) helping the victim does not run counter to firmly entrenched social attitudes, such as preexisting prejudice against blacks or women; and (c) the altruistic behavior has the sanction of authority. For example, Zuckerman (1975) found that High JWs were more likely than Low JWs to volunteer to take part in an experiment and to read to a blind student. In both these situations, the request for help had the explicit or implicit sanction of a professor. Further research would be useful to test these hypotheses and specify more clearly the special circumstances under which the belief in a just world facilitates altruism.[2]

Some Implications

As Lerner (1974a) has pointed out, the desire for justice is a double-edged sword. People often exert tremendous effort in order to help right social wrongs and thus help restore justice in the world. At other times, however, people's desire to live in a just world leads not to justice but to justification. Secure in the belief that the world is a just place, we are often prone either to deny the existence of suffering or to conclude that it is in fact deserved. This paper has presented evidence that there are relatively stable individual differences in the belief in a just world and that these differences may underlie the ways in which people react to victimized individuals and groups, both inside and outside of the experimental laboratory.

The implications of this research for socialization and public policy depend on one's social philosophy. To some extent, the belief in a just world—as embodied, for example, in Western religious ideologies—may be a valuable operating principle for the individual in society. It might be argued that were it not for their faith that good deeds will be rewarded and transgressions punished, people would be unwilling to undertake socially beneficial activities, whether these be spending long years in school or obeying traffic laws. There may also be particular situations in which the belief in a just world is especially functional. The dying patient, for example, may derive much-needed comfort from the belief that his life of virtue will ultimately be rewarded

[2]Zuckerman's differences in amount of helping behavior exhibited by High and Low JWs were found mainly at a time when students were getting ready for final exams. He suggests that in a time of need (such as final exam period), people who believe in a just world may engage in good behavior to increase their own deservingness and hence their likelihood of getting a good grade.

in heaven. A strong belief in a just world can also be socially harmful, however, especially as it leads one to blame the victims of fate or of social discrimination for their adversity and thus helps to perpetuate the vicious cycle of victimization.

Our analysis of the origins of the belief in a just world suggests that all children may have a version of the belief (Piaget's "immanent justice") at an early stage of development. Whether children outgrow the belief quickly, slowly, or not at all depends in large measure on processes of socialization. If we wish to attenuate the belief in a just world, therefore, we may wish to consider modifications of prevailing socialization practices—at home, in church and school, through the mass media.

Among the perpetuators of the belief in a just world are the mass media. Virtually all television dramas, from "Batman" to "The Secret Storm," have the same utterly predictable ending: the good guy is rewarded and the bad guy is punished. Producers claim that the viewing public requires them to enforce such perfect justice. According to the producer of "Dark Shadows," "People asked us to kill the heavies off all the time. We did eventually get around to killing them off—but they wanted them killed off right away" (Efron, 1971). When a "good" character is endangered, on the other hand, viewers reportedly threaten to stop watching the show if he is not rescued (Efron, 1971).

Producers of children's television shows also defend the perpetuation of the belief in a just world as a matter of public responsibility. The Television Code of the National Association of Radio and T.V. Broadcasters (1954) includes the following provision, under the heading *Responsibility for Children:*

> The education of children involves giving them a sense of the world at large. Crime, violence, and sex are a part of the world they will be called upon to meet, and a certain amount of proper presentation of such is helpful in orienting the child to his social surroundings. However, violence . . . should not be presented without indications of the resultant retribution and punishment.

There is evidence that children tend to believe that what they see on television reflects reality (Liebert, Neale, & Davidson, 1973). It may be, however, that the message that good guys always win and bad guys always lose in the world of television is not in fact helpful in "orienting the child to his social surroundings." In the real world, such perfect justice does not always prevail. Thus the broadcasters' educational effort may instead perpetuate a perceptual distortion. Perhaps the producers would be fulfilling their responsibility more conscientiously if they occasionally flout-

ed what they perceive as the public will and let Perry Mason lose a case or allowed an embezzler or two to escape to a life of luxury on the Riviera.

We do not mean to single out television as the prime defender of the belief in a just world. We cite the case of television as but one example of the prevailing practices of socialization that help to maintain this belief. It is equally important that attention be paid to the (frequently unintentional) effects of socialization practices in other domains as well. For example, parents who wish their children to outgrow the belief in a just world might be well-advised not to suggest that every minor accident is a punishment for the child's misbehavior. Teachers might try harder to call attention to the faults as well as the virtues of national leaders. Clergymen might make less of stories like that of Lot's wife (who was turned into a pillar of salt for failing to follow God's orders) and more of the story of Job (whose suffering was undeserved). More generally, socialization agents might make a point of keeping in mind the perils, as well as the possible benefits, of fostering the belief in a just world.

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