

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. By Morton Deutsch.¹ New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. 1985. Pp. vii, 313. \$27.50.

EQUALITY IN AMERICA: THE VIEW FROM THE TOP. By Sidney Verba¹ and Gary R. Orren.² Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1985. Pp. x, 334. Cloth, \$25.00; paper, \$12.50.

*Catherine Zuckert*³

In *Equality in America: The View from the Top*, Sidney Verba and Garry Orren report the results of a complex poll of American leaders which shows that even the most radical leaders desire equality of opportunity rather than equality of result. And in *Distributive Justice*, Morton Deutsch argues that the "equity" theory of justice implicit in the search for "equal opportunity" rests on inadequate—if not simply erroneous—assumptions about human behavior. Has contemporary social science then proved that the dominant American conception of justice is largely unfounded—both logically and empirically? That possibility surely deserves serious reflection. The studies summarized in these books were carefully designed and meticulously executed. Unfortunately, the authors' broader conclusions are not so carefully argued or rigorously deduced.

After two chapters summarizing recent studies showing the central place the principle (or definition) of "equality" has played in American history, Verba and Orren report the results of their poll of Democratic, Republican, business, farm, labor, intellectual, black, and feminist leaders. The authors admit they neglected leaders of the newly emergent "moral majority" or "religious right"—their study was designed in the 1970's before such groups had become quite so prominent. But, they urge, this omission does not create serious doubts about their main conclusion. By neglecting to include representatives of the religious right or Southern populists, however, Verba and Orren (like Thomas Edsall in *The New Politics*

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of Equality) present a deceptively monolithic view of more "conservative" American public opinion in which "Republicans" and "businessmen" agree on virtually all questions in stark contrast to the divisions of opinion (and loyalties) among more liberal Democratic, labor, farm, black, and feminist leaders. On the basis of such data, it becomes extremely hard, if not impossible, to understand or explain American elections—either GOP ascendancy in presidential elections or continuing Democratic dominance at the state and local levels. The skewed sample of respondents is, moreover, indicative of a more fundamental problem with the definition of the issues in the study. The authors define both "equality of opportunity" and the question of the legitimate degree of state intervention in merely economic terms. Predictably, Republican and business leaders endorse more economic inequality and less government intervention than farm, labor, black, or feminist leaders. Had Verba and Orren asked their respondents about moral issues, however, the spectrum of opinion might have looked quite different. As William S. Maddox and Stuart A. Lillie⁴ have shown, American public opinion is more accurately (and interestingly) portrayed in terms of crosscutting issues and transitory alliances among "libertarians" (who oppose all forms of government intervention), "conservatives" (who advocate moral legislation but not necessarily economic controls), "liberals" (who favor government intervention in the economy for the sake of more egalitarian redistribution of income and property but oppose most social or moral regulation), and "populists" (who advocate both economic and social controls).

Although American leaders accept the justice of economic inequality, Verba and Orren report that they unanimously endorse political equality. This distinction between political and economic (in)equality is traditionally American, but our authors believe they have discovered an interesting twist. Insisting that Americans ought to be politically equal, leaders of all groups nevertheless thought that their particular group ought to have more power than it does at present. Here Verba and Orren see a paradox, if not a problem: insofar as these leaders want more power, they would deny the political equality of others. To this reader's mind, however, the apparent "paradox" is rather easily resolved. In a pluralistic society which grants all members an equal right to advocate their own position, no one group is able to see its particular conception of the public interest adopted in its entirety. To the extent that leaders of any group believe that they represent what is truly in the public interest, they cannot help but be frustrated by their inevitable

4. W. MADDUX & S. LILLIE, *BEYOND LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE* (1984).

failure to obtain all that they want and to conclude that the cause of justice (or the common good) would be furthered if their group were to obtain the power necessary to enact its vision.

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In contrast to the rather uncontroversial, if incomplete results of the Verba-Orren survey, the practical consequences that Professor Morton Deutsch draws from a lifetime of social-psychological research are extremely provocative. Whether these conclusions are well-founded, however, is another question.

To each according to his demonstrated ability. As Verba and Orren show, Americans tend to conceive of justice in proportional rather than strictly egalitarian terms. This conception is too narrow, Professor Deutsch argues. When such a conception of justice becomes dominant, it tends to transform even the most intimate relations into quasi-economic transactions, and all human relations are not accurately described in terms of economic exchange.

Deutsch's general point is surely correct, but it is not quite clear what follows from it, since love and marriage are not more accurately described in terms of justice than they are in terms of economic exchange. Fortunately, this is not the central point of the argument. Deutsch approvingly cites John Rawls's conclusion that no one "deserves" his particular talents any more than one "deserves" the family background or circumstances that foster the development of character requisite to the development of these talents and hence that no one deserves a reward for the exercise of those abilities. But Deutsch himself does not explicitly discuss the *justice* of unequal (or any) rewards. Despite its title, his book is not devoted to an examination of the question of "distributive justice." On the contrary, apparently assuming that no human being or activity is inherently more valuable and hence deserving of more recognition or reward than any other, Deutsch devotes himself to showing the problematic character of the social-psychological assumptions at the foundation of the claim that human beings need unequal rewards as incentives to produce. The suggestion, although Deutsch by no means states it so baldly, is that if unequal rewards are not necessary as incentives, they are unjustifiable.

The problem with treating unequal rewards as incentives is two-fold, Deutsch argues. In the first place, the extent to which unequal payment or recognition is necessary as an incentive depends a great deal upon the individual's expectations; and, Deutsch observes, individual expectations are greatly affected by the social context. Those who argue that great rewards are necessary to pro-

duce great efforts ignore the role of bargaining and negotiation in the determination of economic rewards. Likewise, he observes, a person who feels unjustly treated may after a time feel less aggrieved; indeed, may come to feel that a deprivation is just or deserved, if all or even most other people seem to concur in the result. "Just desert" is thus a matter of psychological expectation and social manipulation more than economic exchange or objectively determined psychological and social necessity.

In the second place, studies that Deutsch has conducted for more than three decades at Columbia Teachers College show that it is by no means evident that competition results in a higher rate of production than cooperation. Under some circumstances people produce more in a cooperative, egalitarian environment than they do when competing against each other.

Because Deutsch summarizes the results of so many quite disparate studies, his line of argument becomes obscure at times. He also omits much of importance to his topic. For example, in discussing the conditions under which persons denied equal treatment will protest, Professor Deutsch details many of the tactics Saul Alinsky recommended in *Rules for Radicals*. One of Alinsky's basic points was, of course, that underprivileged groups can use officeholders' concern for their reputation against them. But Deutsch never inquires, even speculatively, whether officeholders would act from such a concern if all views of justice and all human activities were equally valued, so that no one was reputed to be wiser, juster, more decent or more responsible than any other. Would anyone seek to write a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel if all books were awarded the same prize upon publication and all manuscripts were guaranteed publication? Clearly honor or recognition serves as an incentive to just as well as to productive action; it perhaps represents a greater incentive to the exercise of truly exceptional talent than economic reward per se. But Deutsch has no direct, much less sustained discussion of the issue in his book.

In the various experiments Deutsch conducted with Columbia students, he discovered that they (like the American public as a whole) tended to prefer a proportional system of distribution (for economic rewards) to a purely egalitarian system (though by a small margin) or (by a larger margin) to a system based strictly on need. But in comparing the productivity of otherwise identical groups of students working at the same rather simple tasks under "winner-take-all," proportional, and egalitarian systems of distribution, he found that there was little if any difference in productivity between groups working under proportional and egalitarian systems

of distribution, and that, over time, very competitive, "winner-take-all" distributive systems provoked feelings of resentment among the losers. Moreover, Deutsch discovered that differences in distributive systems had little impact on productivity. Face-to-face contact, he found, made groups much more cooperative and egalitarian.

Deutsch himself specifies the limits of these experiments. In the first place, he admits, the Columbia students probably agreed to more egalitarian forms of distribution in face-to-face encounters out of politeness rather than principle. The economic rewards in any case were rather slight; so was the time involved in the experiment and hence the stake for any particular individual. The basic aptitudes, abilities, and circumstances of the Columbia students were rather similar and the tasks to be performed relatively simple. There was nothing approaching a situation in which the lives (or livelihoods) of all members of a group depended upon an individual's performing a task he and he alone was able to execute. In such a case, should rewards be equal? Will an individual altruistically continue to perform an arduous task—or one involving risk to him or herself—simply for the benefit of others, with no exceptional recognition or reward? Deutsch doesn't ask such questions nor do his experiments answer them.

The limitations of his experiments do not prevent Deutsch from concluding in a summary description of several rather well-known cooperative economic enterprises that egalitarian relations are fostered by small-scale, "face-to-face" operations, but that such small-scale operations can be preserved only through a kind of federal arrangement. (There is a whole line of democratic theory arguing the same point as the basis for the United States Constitution, among other things, but Deutsch takes no notice of either traditional thinkers like Montesquieu or Tocqueville or more contemporary advocates of "economic democracy" like Robert Dahl.)

Nor do the acknowledged limitations of the research he summarizes prevent Deutsch from specifying (apparently on the basis of these studies) ways of "preventing World War III." On the contrary, in the face of a possible nuclear holocaust, Deutsch urges, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. should move from competitive conflict to cooperation. He does not seem to realize that the strategies he outlines presuppose the desirability of maintaining the status quo—the basis of U.S. policy since World War II but not of Soviet doctrine. Like some of the strategic gamesters he criticizes, Deutsch utterly ignores the ideological and political differences of the "players." He does not seem to be sufficiently aware of the obvious differences be-

tween games played for small stakes by Columbia students and the competition among nations for influence and power.

In sum: in reading these reports of often very elegantly designed social science research on some of the most fundamental political issues, one cannot help but wish that the authors would extend the care they take designing their questionnaires and experiments to the logical interpretation of the results. It is only through such interpretation that the studies become available to and usable by nonexpert readers. Unfortunately, social scientists seem to concern themselves primarily with rigorous methods of collecting data, not so much with methodical argumentation on the basis of that data.

VIGILANTE: THE BACKLASH AGAINST CRIME IN AMERICA. By William Tucker.¹ New York: Stein and Day. 1985. Pp. 371. \$14.95.

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Vigilante excuses subway gunman, Bernhard Goetz, as an inevitable product of a permissive society in which punishment may be delayed or avoided by process. Mr. Tucker sees the subway encounter between Goetz and three black youths as a microcosm of all that is wrong with America. The country has gone to hell in a hand basket, it happened during the 1960's, and "intellectuals," lawyers, and judges did the carrying. The decade of degeneration, driven by intellectual drivel and represented quintessentially by the Warren Court, spawned an unprecedented crime wave that, in turn, provoked "good people" to replace their faith in the criminal justice system with blazing six-guns.

These arguments deserve serious consideration, but this book contributes nothing to the debate. The author's anger with those he views as the handmaidens of the 1960's warps not only his perspective, but his interest in research and analysis. Conclusions and anger are all there is to this book. *Vigilante* is divided into three sections. The first, "What Went Wrong," focuses on what is wrong with the legal system: the exclusionary rule, lawyers, and judges. The middle, "How the System Should Work," deplures most sociology, psychology, and criminology. The last forty-six pages contain

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