

BOOK REVIEW

Justice as a Basic Human Need

Editors: A. J. W. Taylor (Victoria University of Wellington - New Zealand)

This work, published in 2006, draws our attention to justice, fairness, and dignity as a basic human need. In that, it complements the other basic needs of items such as food and water, sex, and a survivable environment. In doing so it draws our attention to a fundamental point that is commonly overlooked.

On the positive side should say that our attention is drawn to the importance of justice, and rightly so. In addressing this issue we are directed to consider such issues as Maslow's *Hierarchy of needs*, of the role of the United Nations, and the seven deadly sins (and virtues). It is a timely reminder that we have need of a *UN Declaration of Human Obligations statement*. The notion that the concern for individuals is a particularly Western notion is rebutted by noting that the UN agreed its *Declaration* in 1948 by a body comprised of a wide variety of nations. The idea of tribal or communal rights is, and rightly should be, secondary. Our attention is drawn in this book to the hierarchy of needs. One should go so much further and note that one does not need to satisfy lower needs before considering those up the hierarchy. It is clear that on occasion the higher need will supersede the lower ones: people will sacrifice their life for an ideal.

On the negative side one might note that one could add a countervailing argument to the right-of-centre religious view. While it is important to note that view, it is of equal importance to record the opposite one, wherein morality is a largely human enterprise that uses a religious basis for its justification. The idea that humans are unique, and that animals are mere ciphers in a human world is worthy of discussion.

In the matter of what might be added, there are some further issues that warrant inclusion. One is the notion of McLean in his 1990 book, *The triune brain in evolution*. Instead of the three brains evolving into one it has left us with three brains, all of which may be at war with each other, thereby promoting conflict. A point taken up by Koestler in his work, *The ghost in the machine*. A discussion in a new edition of the Taylor book, of the origins and remedies for human violence, would be a welcome addition.

A second idea worthy of mention is that of equitability. In that idea the balance of considerations is vital. In situations wherein there is inequity there is the potential for injustice. For example, where the state is arraigned against an individual the imbalance is redressed by the presumption of innocence until guilt is proved. In countries where women wear the face veil, and men do not, it provides the opportunity of women to observe men's faces, but men not allowed to observe women faces. The importance of facial expression is critical to almost social interactions and, in principle, is a fundamental imbalance. One might even argue that equitability is the critical component in morality. Injustice consists of imbalance, and thus justice consists of fostering such balance. On this view equitability is both a descriptive and a moral term.

We have to conclude that *Justice as a basic human need* is a work that draws our attention to a fundamental issue. In this, Taylor and his co-writers, have shown us its importance, and outlined a case for justice: it is one that is thoroughly deserving of our attention. One would hope that they will provide us soon with an updated and revised version.

Review provided by Ronald D Francis, Professor Emeritus
College of Law & Justice, Victorian University