

**Distributive and Procedural
Justice in a Moral Reasoning
Context**

**Craig A. Wendorf
and Sheldon Alexander
Wayne State University**

Abstract

Most research on procedural and distributive justice norms has examined them in group or organizational settings. This study investigated the evaluative importance of these norms within a moral reasoning context. In responding to three moral dilemmas from Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test, participants rated the importance of five specific distributive and ten procedural justice rules, as well as global evaluations of distributive justice, procedural justice, and outcome favorability. Analyses showed that the most preferred rules were dependent upon the situation, though some cross-situational findings emerged. Finally, a factor analysis showed that the 15 justice rules were best represented by four factors: Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness, Distributive Fairness, Consistency, and Participatory/Appeals Procedures. The implications of these findings for justice theory are presented.

Introduction

Social Justice Theory: *Criteria for Determining Fairness:*

- ***Distributive Justice:*** Concerns about the Fairness of Outcomes.
Walster, Walster, & Berscheid (1978): Application of the Equity principle to many arenas of social behavior.
Deutsch (1975): Highlight the importance of Need and Equality as other principles that can define distributive fairness.
- ***Procedural Justice:*** Concerns about the Fairness of the Procedures that determine the Outcomes.
Thibaut & Walker (1975): Highlights the importance of Decision Control and Process Control in determining fairness.
Leventhal (1980): Added six additional criteria: Bias Suppression, Representativeness, Ethicality, Accuracy, Correctability, and Consistency
Tyler & Lind (1992): Argued that Status Recognition, Trust in Benevolence, and Neutrality are important aspects of fair procedures.

Limitations of Justice Research: *A Useful Distinction:*

- ***The Psychological Perspective:*** Research has tended to focus on individual reactions to existing situations of personal relevance or involvement (Tyler & Smith, 1998).
- ***The Philosophical Perspective:*** Individuals have justice criteria that define what they believe ought to happen (Perelman, 1967; Rawls, 1971).
This view defines justice judgments as being ideological in nature (Rasinski, 1987; Tetlock, 1986), and is similar to that of moral judgments (Rest, 1979).

Thus, we sought to examine people's beliefs about which justice norms ought to be most important in examining specific moral dilemmas.

Method

Participants: *Characteristics of the sample:*

- ***Number of Participants:*** 201 total respondents, all from Psychology classes at a large urban university; 11 were eliminated as they were outliers on measures of inconsistent or meaningless responding.
- ***Gender and Age:*** 70.5% female, 29.5% male; Ages 18 to 52 ($M = 22.5$)
- ***Ethnic Background:*** 47.4% Caucasian-American, 29.5% African-American, 6.8% Arab-American, 5.3% Asian-American, 3.2% Hispanic-American, and 7.9% other groups.

The Moral Reasoning Context: *The Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1979):*

- ***The Short Form's 3 Moral Dilemmas:*** The famous Heinz dilemma, the Prisoner dilemma, and the Newspaper Dilemma.
- ***The Participant's Task:*** To identify those issues that are most important in judging and solving a particular moral problem.

Social Justice Rules: *Additional Items Added to the DIT for Each Dilemma (see Appendix for samples):*

- ***Procedural Justice (PJ):*** Included 10 items based on Leventhal (1980), Tyler and Lind (1992), and Thibaut and Walker (1975).
- ***Distributive Justice (DJ):*** Included 5 items based on Deutsch (1975).
- ***Global Evaluations (Global):*** Overall evaluations of the importance of Procedural Justice, Distributive Justice, and Outcome Favorability.
- ***Method of Assessment:*** Parallels that of the DIT:
Respondents rated all items on a 5-point importance scale ranging from "No Importance" to "Great Importance."
For each type of justice (PJ, DJ, Global) within each dilemma, respondents choose the 4 most important of the 12 items and ranked them in terms of importance.

Results: Ranked Preferences

Which justice norm is considered most central to a particular moral dilemma?

Analysis #1: Number of Participants Ranking a Particular Justice Norm as Most Important within Each Dilemma

- ***Procedural Justice Norms:*** The frequencies with which each norm was preferred differed within each dilemma: Heinz, $\chi^2(9) = 134.74$, $p < .001$; Prisoner, $\chi^2(9) = 146.53$, $p < .001$; and Newspaper, $\chi^2(9) = 36.32$, $p < .001$. (SEE TABLE 1 FOR PERCENTAGES)
- ***Distributive Justice Norms:*** Within each dilemma, the proportions among the top-rated rules were significantly different: Heinz, $\chi^2(4) = 204.94$, $p < .001$; Prisoner, $\chi^2(4) = 118.53$, $p < .001$; and Newspaper, $\chi^2(4) = 31.82$, $p < .001$. (SEE TABLE 2 FOR PERCENTAGES)
- ***Global Justice Evaluations:*** These, too, were significantly different in proportions: Heinz, $\chi^2(2) = 42.32$, $p < .001$; Prisoner, $\chi^2(2) = 100.61$, $p < .001$; and Newspaper, $\chi^2(2) = 167.68$, $p < .001$. For all three dilemmas, Procedural Justice was ranked as most important by a majority.

Table 1: Percent of Individuals Ranking Each Distributive Justice Rule as Most Important for Each Dilemma

Justice Rule	Dilemma		
	Heinz	Prisoner	Newspaper
Ability	1.05%	27.37%	27.89%
Equality	12.11%	11.58%	30.53%

Equity	24.74%	47.37%	14.21%
Need	57.89%	3.16%	9.47%
Status	4.21%	10.53%	17.89%

Note. Each column totals to 100%. Percentages are based on N = 190.

Table 2: Percent of Individuals Ranking Each Procedural Justice Rule as Most Important for Each Dilemma

Justice Rule	Dilemma		
	Heinz	Prisoner	Newspaper
Accuracy	10.00%	14.74%	8.42%
Consistency	16.32%	4.21%	11.58%
Decision Control	4.74%	2.11%	4.74%
Correctability	1.05%	5.26%	6.32%
Ethicality	12.11%	15.26%	17.37%
Neutrality	14.74%	31.58%	16.84%
Respect/Standing	5.26%	3.16%	6.84%
Representative	.53%	6.32%	8.42%
Trust	5.26%	2.63%	5.79%
Voice	30.00%	14.74%	13.68%

Note. Each column totals to 100%. All percentages are based on N = 190.

Results: Importance Ratings

Which justice norms are judged as most important in solving a moral dilemma?

Scaling: Contextually-Independent Justice Scores:

- **Global Evaluation Scores for Procedural Justice, Distributive Justice, and Outcome Level:** Created by taking the mean of the appropriate items across dilemmas; 3 scores per person were therefore created.
- **Individual Justice Rule Scores:** Determined by averaging the appropriate items across dilemmas; therefore, a score for each of the 15 justice rules was created for each participant.

Analysis #2: Repeated Measures ANOVAs on Justice Rule Ratings:

- **Procedural Justice Ratings:** The mean procedural justice ratings were significantly different, $F(9, 162) = 46.12, p < .001$. (SEE TABLE 3)
- **Distributive Justice Ratings:** The mean distributive justice ratings were also significantly different, $F(4, 186) = 12.50, p < .001$. (SEE TABLE 3)
- **Global Justice Evaluations:** Finally, the mean global evaluations ratings were significantly different, $F(2, 184) = 133.777, p < .001$. Planned comparisons showed Procedural Justice was most important, followed by Distributive Justice and Outcome Favorability.

Table 3: Justice Rule Importance Ratings

Justice Rule	Mean	SD
Procedural Justice		
<i>Very High Relative Importance</i>		
Accuracy	4.445	.586

High Relative Importance

Ethicality	4.282	.727
Neutrality/Bias Suppression	4.291	.707
Voice/Process Control	4.188	.794

Moderate Relative Importance

Trust	3.998	.876
Consistency	3.913	.834
Standing (Respect)	3.739	.978

Low Relative Importance

Correctability	3.562	1.022
Representativeness	3.428	1.022

Very Low Relative Importance

Decision Control	2.997	1.087
------------------	-------	-------

Distributive Justice

High Relative Importance

Equity	3.511	.763
Equality	3.402	.942
Ability	3.283	.962

Low Relative Importance

Need	3.095	.860
Status	2.935	1.095

Note. Means are on a 5-point importance scale: 1 = "No Importance" and 5 = "Great Importance." Items are clustered according to significant differences.

Results: Justice Dimensions

Can ideological justice concerns be more parsimoniously represented than by 15 norms?

Analysis #3: A Factor Analysis of Ratings:

- Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax rotation showed that 4 Factors summarized the 15 individual justice rules produced in Analysis #2.
- These dimensions involve concerns over:
 1. **Decision-Maker Procedural Fairness (DMPF):** Leventhal's procedural justice rules of Accuracy, Trust, Ethicality, and Neutrality.
 2. **Distributive Fairness (DF):** Distributive justice rules of Ability, Status, and Need.
 3. **Participatory and Appeals Procedures (PAP):** Procedural justice rules of Correctability, Decision Control, Voice, and Standing/Respect.
 4. **Consistency (CON):** Distributive rule of Equality along with procedural rule of Consistency.

Table 4: Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax Rotation of Justice Rules (Pattern Matrix)

Justice Rule	DMPF	DF	PAP	CON	h^2
Accuracy	.715				.517
Trust	.654				.455
Ethicality	.628				.420
Neutrality	.580				.439
Representative					.233

Ability		.801			.686
Status		.750			.577
Need		.628			.511
Correctability			.700		.542
Dec. Control			.546		.464
Voice			.455		.471
Respect			.400		.337
Equality				.639	.509
Consistency				.524	.489
Equity					.207
% of Variance	14.48	13.63	10.33	7.27	45.71

Note. Loadings less than .40 are not shown. The h^2 column represents communalities.

Table 5: Intercorrelations among the Equally-Weighted Unit Factor Scores

Factor	1	2	3	4
1. DMPF	[.819]	.094	.324**	.234**
2. DF		[.806]	.523**	-.136
3. PAP			[.809]	.030
4. CONS				[.588]

Note. Numbers on diagonal in brackets are Cronbach's alpha.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Discussion

Justice Norm Importance: *Cross-Situational Findings:*

- ***The Most Important Norms:*** Procedures should be governed by people:
 1. Who act to uphold ethical standards,
 2. Who act neutrally without bias toward any party or person,
 3. Who operate on the basis of accurate information,
 4. Who allow the individual(s) affected by the decision to participate.
- ***Contributions to the Literature:*** Consistent with Barrett-Howard & Tyler (1986) in supporting Leventhal's (1980) procedural criteria.

Variations in Importance: *Situation-Specific Preferences:*

- ***Procedural Justice:*** While the most important rule varied, Voice, Neutrality, and Ethicality remained very important in each dilemma.
- ***Distributive Justice:*** The most preferred distributive rule was strikingly dependent upon the situation.
- ***Contributions to the Literature:*** Like Alexander & Russ (1985) and Barrett-Howard & Tyler (1986), this study highlights the importance of recognizing situational variations in justice norm preferences.

Relationships among Norms: *Factors of Justice Norms:*

- ***Four Justice-Related Ideological Concerns:*** People believe that:
 1. Decision-makers ought to insure fair proceedings,
 2. People ought to be involved in the decision-making process,
 3. Consistent application of procedures and outcomes is desirable, but
 4. Special considerations should also be made.
- ***Contributions to the Literature:*** These factors differ from a pure distinction between procedural and distributive justice.

People hold justice criteria as if they were objective; they have beliefs about how others ought to behave.

Appendix: Social Justice Items

Consistency (PJ): Whether the judge treats all defendants in the same way.

Bias Suppression/Neutrality (PJ): Whether the judge is unbiased and impartial in making decisions.

Accuracy (PJ): Whether the judge uses the most accurate information he can get when deciding Heinz's case.

Correctability (PJ): Whether Heinz has the opportunity to appeal to the judge to change the decision if he feels he is being treated unfairly.

Representativeness (PJ): Is the judge's behavior suitable to all of the different people or groups who are affected by the decision?

Ethicality (PJ): Does the judge act in an ethical way when he makes his decision about Heinz?

Voice/Process Control (PJ): Whether Heinz is allowed to fully explain to the judge his reasons for stealing the drug.

Standing (PJ): Does the judge show respect for Heinz as a person?

Trust (PJ): Is the judge trustworthy in the way he makes decisions?

Decision Control (PJ): Whether Heinz has a direct influence over the final decision made by the judge?

Equity (DJ): Should the judge's decision match the severity of Heinz's crime?

Equality (DJ): Would the judge make the same decision for anyone else who might steal the drug?

Need (DJ): Should the judge's decision be influenced by the fact that Heinz's wife really needs the drug?

Status (DJ): Should Heinz's position in the community be considered by the judge?

Ability (DJ): Should the judge's decision be influenced by Heinz's ability to contribute to society?

Procedural Justice (Global): Are the rules and procedures used by the judge fair overall?

Distributive Justice (Global): Is the judge's final decision fair to Heinz?

Outcome Level (Global): Is the final decision of the judge favorable to Heinz?