



The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion (Critical Issues in Social Justice)

Melvin Lerner

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The "belief in a just world" is an attempt to capture in a phrase one of the ways, if not the way, that people come to terms with-make sense out of-find meaning in, their experiences. We do not believe that things just happen in our world; there is a pattern to events which conveys not only a sense of orderliness or predictability, but also the compelling experience of appropriateness expressed in the typically implicit judgment, "Yes, that is the way it should be." There are probably many reasons why people discover or develop a view of their environment in which events occur for good, understandable reasons. One explanation is simply that this view of reality is a direct reflection of the way both the human mind and the environment are constructed. Constancies, patterns which actually do exist in the environment-out there-are perceived, represented symbolically, and retained in the mind. This approach certainly has some validity, and would probably suffice, if it were not for that sense of "appropriateness," the pervasive affective component in human experience. People have emotions and feelings, and these are especially apparent in their expectations about their world: their hopes, fears, disappointments, disillusionment, surprise, confidence, trust, dependency, anticipation-and certainly their sense of right, wrong, good, bad, ought, entitled, fair, deserving, just.

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