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THE GLUE OF COMMUNITY: ON THE FUNCTION OF JUSTICE

(Der Kitt der Gemeinschaft. Über die Funktion von Gerechtigkeit)

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"You need not to begin with your thesis — because justice simply does not exist", such were the comments of his friends, when Martin Kaluza told them about his project, as he reports in the introduction to this book. In some regard his work clings to this basic claim: Kaluza does conceive justice not as a given value or characteristic but as a social process that is essential for the constitution of society. In his concept, justice is built on the mutual recognition of individual rights and interest, it therefore enables societies to mobilize individual self-esteem into social cohesion. Thus, fairness relies on conditions that enable members of communities to voice concerns about maltreatment and unjust conditions and force community members to provide causes for their actions especially in the case of conflicts. In order to work properly, this process must be built on equality without regard of social status or material means.

Kaluza conceives justice as a moral concept for human interaction and draws a sharp line to concepts that rely on ethical values like religious belief systems or political foster cohesion within particular communities, only fairness in the moral sense is able to link people regardless of their particular ideologies or interests. Thus, he develops a firm foundation that is able to differentiate his concepts from sayings like "it is unfair that Maradonna is such a gifted soccer player". Also John Rawls' concept deviates from Kaluza's perspective, as it does not start with equal individual rights. Justice becomes vital in the face of social conflict, be it in the aftermath of a Latin American dictatorship, in the distribution of housework responsibilities of families or the hiring of people for a job. Questions of fairness decide if such conflicts are resolved in a way that promotes or corrupts social cohesion, claims Kaluza.

One of the great benefits of this book is that it portrays this bold idea in a clear language and relates it to vital and accessible social conflicts. While cynics point out that trained philosophers bring the spice into mundane work-life as taxi drivers, Kaluza reverses the perspective: his philosophical work clearly benefits from his bread-and-butter job man magazines. This becomes apparent in the last part of his thesis, where he investigates conflict areas through the lens of his justice concept. In his investigation of the social welfare state he uses his justice concept for the justification of state provided welfare. The background is based on attempts of a neo-liberal lobbying in Germany to reduce state responsibility for social assistance. As Kaluza clearly shows, these attempts are largely unfair, as they aim to deprive a significant part of society of basic participation. However, from my perspective the example is unlucky chosen: While state aid helps to relieve the harshest consequences associated with social uncertainties it can hardly be justified as a fair concept that provides equal access to society. Often it, admittedly unintendedly, stigmatizes its recipients.

Kaluza attacks Nozick's radical liberal concept of property rights as the ideological backbone of liberal arguments. He thereby rightly claims that a natural concept of property rights can not coherently be enforced in complex economies — not even with a pioneer history like that of the US. However, an interesting avenue would have been to investigate adaptations of Nozick's externality arguments that are used in the realms of modern social theory. James Coleman for example conceives social institutions and organizations based on individual interest in the face of positive or negative external effects. This provides a firm argument for the role of non-market-institutions in modern societies and it would be an interesting avenue to investigate such inter-subjective concepts of social organization on the ground of a justice-concept, as developed by Kaluza. Thus, it becomes questionable if the state is the exclusive let alone the best provider of social re-distribution, if real social participation is the central issue. The spectrum of social organization is probably much wider, e.g. foundations, education organization or private initiatives.

But this leads to the central benefit of this book: It provides a fresh perspective on the role of justice in the face of social conflicts and is likely to inspire enlightening debates as well as further research. In my own research field in marketing and the study of customer relationships it is vital but largely ignored and would be beneficial without a doubt.