Naive Realism:
Implications for Social Conflict and Misunderstanding

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Naive Realism in Everyday Life: Implications for Social Conflict and Misunderstanding

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One of social psychology's most enduring contributions has been to highlight the importance of subjective interpretation. Long before the intellectual community began to struggle with the implications of hermeneutics and deconstructionism, Asch's (1952) classic text reminded us of the need to pay attention to the individual's subjective understanding of events and cautioned us that apparent differences in judgment about particular social objects might actually reflect differences in the way those objects of judgments are being perceived or construed by different actors. Indeed, in a slightly earlier and less celebrated text, Krech and Crutchfield (1948) challenged the prevailing objectivist traditions of the day with the following, decidedly postmodern contention: "There are no impartial 'facts.' Data do not have a logic of their own that results in the same perceptions and cognitions for all people. Data are perceived and interpreted in terms of the individual perceiver's own needs, own connotations, own personality, own previously formed cognitive patterns" (p. 94).

Both Asch's and Krech and Crutchfield's arguments, in turn, owed an obvious (and clearly acknowledged) debt to an earlier psychological tradition—to Lewin's (1935) field theory, which emphasized the organizing role in perception played by specific current goals, and to Thomas and Znaniecki's (1918) even earlier exhortation to attend to the actor's "definition of the situation."

We shall not pause here to review the classic empirical demonstrations and conceptual analyses that Asch and others offered in hoisting the subjectivist banner (see Griffin & Ross, 1991; Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Nor shall we review the work of other pioneers who helped to launch the cognitive revolution in

the social and personality areas—pioneers like Ichheiser (1949), whose analyses of the cognitive processes and biases underlying stereotyping and prejudice remain fresh today, or Kelly (1955), whose clinical account of interpersonal problems and misunderstandings so clearly anticipated the central concerns of this chapter. Nor, at least for the moment, shall we discuss the seminal work of Piaget, whose discussion of early developmental limitations, and later adult mastery, in social perspective taking provides the most obvious stimulus for our present undertaking (see Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1926, 1928; see also Flavell, 1963, 1985). Instead, we begin our discussion of the subjectivist tradition by distinguishing between two separate assertions: The first assertion is simply that differences in subjective interpretation or construal *matter*, that they have a profound impact in the conduct of everyday social affairs. The second assertion is that social perceivers characteristically make *insufficient allowance* for such impact in the inferences and predictions they make about others.

CONSTRUAL AND SOCIAL INFERENCE

The Impact of Construal

It is appropriate, perhaps, to begin by noting that the fate of attempts to understand, predict, or control behavior in the political arena often hinges not on success in recognizing or invoking differences in ethical values, but rather on success in understanding, predicting, or controlling the way in which the relevant issues are construed. In the 1930s, Roosevelt and his New Deal lieutenants recognized that the proposed new program of intergeneration income transfer, which we now know as the social security system, would face substantial opposition if it were presented as an income equalization scheme with connotations of "welfare" or "socialism." Instead, the plan was portrayed as a combination of personal pension and insurance. The image put forward was one of a steadily accumulating nest egg to be tapped in one's golden years—with immediate benefits to be available if unanticipated misfortune struck—notwithstanding the fact that there really was no such gradually accumulating account, either individual or collective, only the government's promise to keep the social security system solvent enough to meet financial obligations as they arose. There was no explicit acknowledgment that the early beneficiaries would receive many times what they ever contributed, nor that subsequent generations of workers would be obliged to pay much more and to receive a much less generous return on their investment.

Today, of course, debate about the social security system is becoming increasingly heated, and critics are offering images and construals that are far less positive—that is, a "gift" to (often well-off) retirees by tax-burdened (often not-so-well-off) younger workers, or even as a "pyramid scheme" bound to

collapse when not enough new "suckers" can be persuaded to pour fresh money into the system. A more mundane view of the system, of course, might be that the federal government essentially is collecting taxes from current wage earners and providing benefits to retired or disabled workers (and, after the workers' deaths, to their dependents) in fulfillment of the same kind of social contract to be found in virtually every industrialized country in the world. The system will not collapse unless the government itself goes bankrupt, but over the long haul total government expenditures of all sorts, including the required social security payouts, will have to be balanced (or nearly so) by the total government revenues collected from all sources.

Our point, again, is simply that such differences in construals, whether the product of political manipulation or the result of more spontaneous processes, *matter* in determining political behavior. At times, they even can be determinative of policy. More often, they serve to justify policies that are dictated by the standard combination of necessity, ideology, and special interests, but that clash with broadly held personal, political, or ethical values. The political battle to manipulate construals and thereby win support or marshal opposition to particular policies goes on constantly. Thus, depending on the views and interests of those controlling the media, we hear references to "illegal aliens" versus "undocumented workers," to "terrorists" versus "freedom fighters," to "surgical" strikes and "police" actions versus bombings and invasions, or the "right to life" versus the "right to choose." As George Orwell (1949) warned us so chillingly in *1984*, those who have the capacity to control language and media images—those who control the way in which objects of political consideration are subjectively construed—enjoy the power to control political attitudes and behavior. Indeed, the manipulation of labels and language can be used effectively to disengage normal mechanisms of moral evaluation, that is, to promote and justify individual or collective actions that might otherwise be constrained by moral or ethical standards (see Bandura, 1990).

The psychological literature contains many studies showing that proponents and opponents of particular policies, such as capital punishment, liberalized abortion rights, or military intervention in service of U.S. interests construe those policies and the facts and concerns that give rise to them quite differently (e.g., Doob & Roberts, 1984; Lord, Desforges, Fein, Pugh, & Lepper, 1994). Furthermore, several investigators have shown that manipulations in the way problems or decisions are framed (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, 1986), or manipulations making particular schemas and knowledge structures more or less salient can significantly influence the respondents' choices (Gilovich, 1981; Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Read, 1984, 1987; Spellman & Holyoak, 1992). We restrict ourselves here to an account of one such study recently conducted in our laboratory—a study that manipulated the way subjects construed and subsequently played what is perhaps the best known and most widely researched of all strategic "games."

The Wall Street/Community Game. This simple experiment (Ross & Samuels, 1993) essentially pitted the determinative power of a construal manipulation against the predictive power of subjects' reputation for cooperativeness or uncooperativeness. The experiment had two separate phases. In the first phase, dormitory advisors on the Stanford University campus were asked to nominate male undergraduates living in their dorm who they thought especially likely to "cooperate," or especially likely to "defect" (i.e., not cooperate) in playing the so-called Prisoner's Dilemma Game (Rapoport, 1960; see also Dawes, 1991). More specifically, after hearing a detailed account of the specific payoff resulting from each combination of cooperation and/or defection by the two players on each round of the game,[1] the dorm advisors were asked to estimate the probability that their particular nominees would choose to cooperate rather than defect on the first trial of the game. In the second phase of the study, the two types of nominees—that is, those designated "most likely to cooperate" and those designated "most likely to defect"—were recruited and given an opportunity to play the game in question. We were thus able to see whether each nominee in fact opted, on the first round of the game and then on six subsequent rounds, to cooperate or to defect.

The construal manipulation was a very simple one. As the experimenter explained the nature of the game and the payoff matrix it provided, he explicitly labeled it, on two separate occasions, either as the *Wall Street Game* or the *Community Game.* In every other respect, the subjects in the two experimental conditions were treated identically. The investigators' concern, of course, was the impact of this difference in labels (and, presumably, of the differing construals or associations evoked by such labels) on subjects' play—especially their choice of moves on the very first trial, when there was no history of cooperation or defection on previous trials to influence the subjects' expectations and responses. Three questions were to be answered: First, how much difference would the labeling manipulation make for the two kinds of players? Second, how would the influence of the label compare with the influence of the players' nomination status as most likely to cooperate versus most likely to defect? Third, how would these two influences compare to the estimates made by the nominators (who, it should be emphasized, knew whether

[1] The "payoff matrix" characterizing this game guarantees that on any given round each player, regardless of the response chosen by his or her partner, receives a more positive payoff for choosing Response D (defection) than Response C (cooperation). At the same time, however, the players both jointly fare less well when they mutually opt for Response D than when they mutually opt for Response C. Hence the "dilemma," which is called the *Prisoner's Dilemma* because it resembles the quandry faced by a pair of criminal suspects, each of whom must decide whether to cooperate with his partner by remaining silent or to defect (by confessing and implicating his partner) under circumstances in which each suspect, regardless of the other's decision, improves his situation by defecting, but in which joint cooperation or mutual silence yields both suspects a better fate than mutual defection.

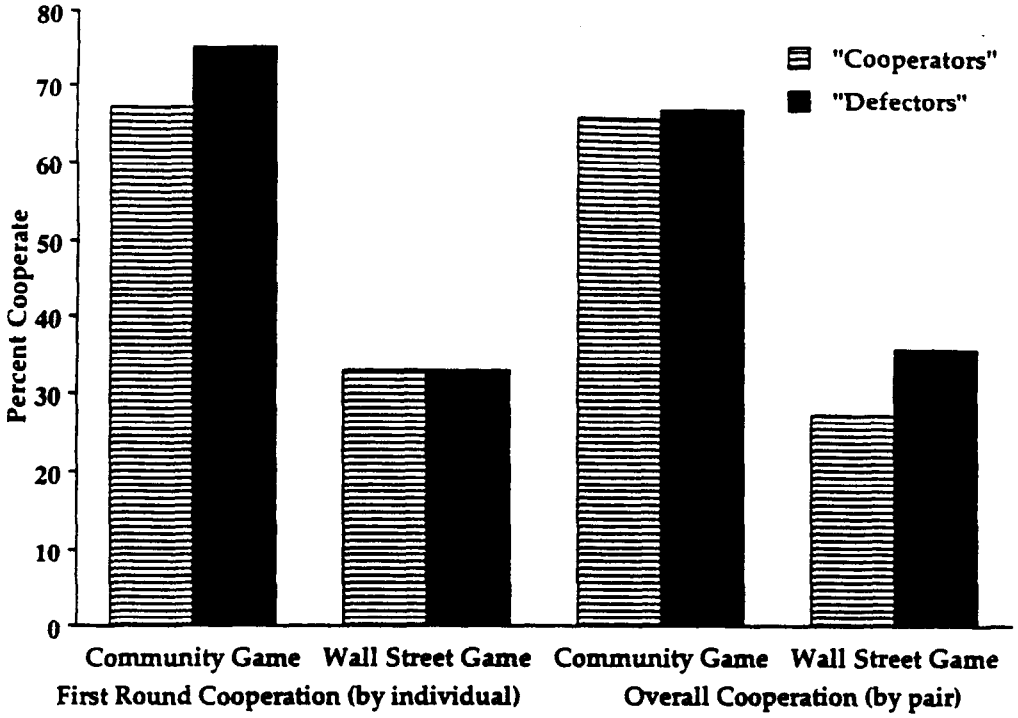

FIG. 6.1. Percentage of cooperation by nominated "cooperators" versus "defectors" in the first round and over all seven rounds in *Community Game* versus *Wall Street Game*.

the game their nominees were to play would bear the *Wall Street* or the *Community* label).

The results of the study were simple and dramatic (see Fig. 6.1). The construal manipulation exerted a large and significant impact on subjects' play. Only about one third of players elected to cooperate on Trial 1 of the *Wall Street Game*, whereas more than two thirds elected to cooperate on Trial 1 of the *Community Game*. These differences, moreover, persisted on subsequent trials. The label attached to the game through the experimenter's two casual references—now buttressed by the tendency for initial mutual cooperation to encourage further cooperation and for initial defection by either player to produce subsequent defection by both players—induced subjects in the *Community Game* to cooperate more than twice as much (and to earn considerably more money than those in the *Wall Street Game*).

Nomination status or reputation, by contrast, exerted virtually no impact on play. Players nominated as most likely to cooperate versus most likely to defect showed similarly low levels of first trial cooperation in the *Wall Street Game*, and similarly high levels of first trial cooperation in the *Community Game*. Moreover, this pattern persisted throughout the subsequent trials of the game, despite the fact that the dyads always consisted of two subjects with the

same most likely to cooperate or most likely to defect status. These findings can be expressed somewhat differently and perhaps more dramatically: A Prisoner's Dilemma game participant would be twice as likely to receive initial and sustained cooperation from a player whose reputation led him to be nominated as most likely to defect but who happened to be playing the *Community Game* as he would from a player who was nominated as most likely to cooperate but who happened to be playing the *Wall Street Game*.

Further research will be required to determine exactly why the particular label attached to the game exerted so large an effect—that is, to what extent the label influenced subjects directly (i.e., determined the way subjects felt they ought to play) and to what extent it influenced them indirectly (i.e., by changing their expectations about how the other player would choose to play, or even by altering their beliefs about how the other player would expect them to play). But the power of the label—that is to say, its impact on the way the game was construed by the players, what they felt it was about, and what kinds of real-world situations and associations came to mind as they made their choices—seems indisputable. The manipulation of construal by the experimenter mattered, and it mattered deeply.

What also seems to be beyond question is the fact that the dorm counselors who made the nominations and furnished the probability estimates drastically underestimated the impact of the game label on the subjects' construal and play (and, incidentally, they also drastically overestimated the predictive value of the impressions they had formed about the subjects' personality traits and reputations after having observed them in other situations). Indeed, even when they were explicitly asked to offer a second set of predictions and likelihood estimates, this time with the other label suggested as a hypothetical alternative, the nominators continued to feel that the nominees' previously revealed personality or character would be a far more powerful predictor than the label attached to the game. In short, the nominators failed to recognize the importance of the participants' construal of the situation or game to which those individuals would be responding. This finding thus serves to reintroduce our second assertion about the significance of subjective representation or construal. That is, we argue that in seeking to understand, predict, and control each other's behavior and in attempting to make inferences about each other on the basis of such behavior, social perceivers characteristically fail to make adequate allowance for the variability and/or impact of subjective construal. It is to this second, more subtle assertion that we now turn our attention.

Insufficient Allowance for Construal Differences

Failure to recognize the importance of intersubjective differences in construal can play havoc in a number of judgment and decision-making contexts. In the

context of interpersonal prediction, for example, failure to make sufficient allowance for the possibility that the situation facing the actor actually will be quite different from the way we presently are construing it (and/or the possibility that the relevant actor's construal of it will be quite different from our own) breeds unrealistically high levels of confidence, and ill-advised gambles (Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic, & Ross, 1990; Griffin, Dunning, & Ross, 1990). Failure to make such allowance similarly breeds undue optimism about the fate of planned social interventions. That is, interventions that are experienced and interpreted very differently by the intended beneficiaries than by the intervention planners and deliverers are likely to produce results that disappoint all concerned.

Consider, for example, the fate of a policy enabling welfare recipients to earn money for socially useful work. The initiative is apt to have been advocated by a social scientist who saw it as a program to boost participants' job skills and personal pride. The relevant initiative, or at least the variant proposed by politicians, is apt to be presented to the public as a "workfare" program to discourage able-bodied adults from "living off" the taxpayers, and to cost-conscious civic bureaucrats as a way of getting snow shoveled from sidewalks or streets freed of litter at low cost. Meanwhile, the initiative is apt to be construed by the welfare recipients, especially in light of the ensuing public discourse, not as a potential benefit to them but as punishment or harassment—as an additional burden to be imposed on the poor by unsympathetic rich folks who are acting out of hostility or prejudice. Given such differences in construal, it is unlikely that the details of the program as it is actually implemented (i.e., the nature of the work, training, and manner of compensation) will remain attuned to the objectives of the social scientist or practitioner who proposed it in the first place, and even less likely that the participants, construing the program as they do, will reap either the anticipated boost in skills or the hoped-for improvement in self-image and social regard.

The same limitation in perspective taking can also promote interpersonal misunderstandings and misattributions. Consider the consequences that occur if John and Mary differ markedly in the assumptions they make about content and surrounding context when they see someone rebuke a ragged individual seeking a handout, or hear a politician endorse "family values," or read about a reported incident of spousal abuse. The two social perceivers will be inclined not only to make different attributions about the relevant actors, but also to reach unwarranted conclusions about each other. That is, on seeing and hearing Mary react, John is apt to make attributions about her that presume she has responded to the same event as he did (attributions that perhaps would have been quite reasonable if she had in fact responded to the same event). Mary, of course, is apt to do the same on hearing John's views. What the two perceivers will fail to recognize, we argue (unless and until they carefully and explicitly probe the divergence in their respective assumptions and construals), is that they have in fact responded to *different* events, or at least to dif

ferent social *constructions* of those events. Moreover, there is a distinct risk that Mary and John will exacerbate the problem when they begin to exchange accusations of bias or unreasonableness, and that they will further compound their difficulties if and when they proceed to make attributions about each other's accusations.

Such failures of empathy in perspective taking—or rather failures to treat surprising and seemingly unwarranted responses as a cue that the relevant social actors or observers are in effect responding to different situations—we argue, are ubiquitous in social and political life. Such failures, we contend, play an important role in promoting the correspondence bias (Gilbert & Jones, 1986) or fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977)—that is, the tendency for observers to attribute actions and outcomes in the social sphere to distinguishing personal dispositions of the actor instead of the situational forces and constraints faced or experienced by that actor. The same failures also play a significant role in the related tendency for observers to offer less situational attributions for particular actions and outcomes than the actors themselves (Jones & Nisbett, 1971).

Our more general contention is that although some aspects of the child's egocentrism disappear through maturation and experience, the process is never completed (see Ross, 1981). The adult, as Piaget well recognized (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Piaget, 1962), continues to show important limitations in perspective taking and other aspects of naive or intuitive psychology, especially in confronting new situations and new domains of response. These limitations, we argue, reflect a kind of worldview or lay epistemology that can appropriately be characterized as "naive realism." In the remainder of this chapter we stipulate the main features or tenets of this naive realism, then proceed to discuss some relevant evidence and explore implications for the analysis of social conflict and misunderstanding.

TENETS OF NAIVE REALISM

The layperson's social understanding, we suggest, rests on three related convictions about the relation between his or her subjective experience and the nature of the phenomena that give rise to that subjective experience. For didactic purposes, we find it best to express these convictions or tenets in first-person terms:

1. *That I see entities and events as they are in objective reality, and that my social attitudes, beliefs, preferences, priorities, and the like follow from a relatively dispassionate, unbiased, and essentially "unmediated" apprehension of the information or evidence at hand.*

2. *That other rational social perceivers generally will share my reactions, behaviors, and opinions—provided that they have had access to the same information that gave rise to my views, and provided that they too have processed that information in a reasonably thoughtful and open-minded fashion.*

3. *That the failure of a given individual or group to share my views arises from one of three possible sources—(a) the individual or group in question may have been exposed to a different sample of information than I was (in which case, provided that the other party is reasonable and open minded, the sharing or pooling of information should lead us to reach agreement); (b) the individual or group in question may be lazy, irrational, or otherwise unable or unwilling to proceed in a normative fashion from objective evidence to reasonable conclusions; or (c) the individual or group in question may be biased (either in interpreting the evidence, or in proceeding from evidence to conclusions) by ideology, self-interest, or some other distorting personal influence.*

The first tenet thus asserts, essentially, that I see things as they are, that is, that my beliefs, preferences, and resulting responses follow from an essentially unmediated perception of relevant stimuli and incorporation of relevant evidence. The second tenet further asserts that other rational, reasonable people (provided that they have been exposed to the same stimuli and information as I have, and provided that they process that information in a reasonably thoughtful, objective fashion) will share both my experiences and responses. Empirical demonstrations relevant to these two tenets of naive realism have been provided through a pair of findings from our laboratory. The first finding involves a now much-researched phenomenon termed the *false consensus effect.* The second finding involves a more recently demonstrated and less thoroughly researched phenomenon, one that arises when one research participant generates or hears an impoverished auditory stimulus knowing its identity, while another research participant hears the same stimulus without knowing its identity.

EVIDENCE FOR THE FIRST TWO TENETS OF NAIVE REALISM

The False Consensus Effect

This effect is reflected in the tendency for people who make a given choice to see that choice as more common and more "normative" (i.e., less revealing of personal attributes or idiosyncrasies) than do people who make the opposite choice. In pursuing this phenomenon, Ross, Greene, and House (1977) queried respondents about their reactions to a variety of hypothetical scenarios, administered questionnaires about personal habits, preferences, attitudes, and beliefs, and exposed laboratory subjects to a number of real experimental

dilemmas; many investigators subsequently have expanded the relevant body of evidence (see Marks & Miller, 1987; Mullen & Hu, 1988). In perhaps the best known of the Ross et al. (1977) demonstrations, subjects in a study purportedly concerned with "various non-typical communication media" were requested by the experimenter to walk around campus wearing a large sandwichboard sign bearing a message (e.g., "Eat at Joe's") and to note the reaction of other students they encountered. The subjects, however, were given the opportunity to decline the invitation to participate in the study (and return for some later study) if they wished. Immediately after agreeing or refusing to participate and wear the sandwichboard, subjects were asked first to estimate the frequency of agreement versus refusal on the part of other participants and then to make some inferences about the personal attributes of two peers who, they were told, had accepted or declined the experimenter's invitation, respectively.

As predicted, consensus estimates and trait inferences were very different for the two types of subjects. Those who agreed to wear the sandwichboard estimated agreement to be more common than refusal, and less revealing of the individual's personal attributes. Those who refused to wear the sandwichboard offered opposite estimates about the relative commonness of the two responses, and made opposite inferences about their informativeness vis à vis personality.

Although this study was not designed to discriminate between different possible sources of the false consensus bias, it is easy to see how differences in construal could play a role. Subjects who imagined the unfolding scenario for sandwichboard wearers in relatively positive or benign terms (walking relatively unnoticed, or chatting with acquaintances about the psychology experiment and being complimented for being a "good sport"), we suggest, would have been relatively inclined to agree to the experimenter's request, to think that most other "normal" subjects would similarly agree, and to assume that refusal would reflect "uncooperativeness," "uptightness," or some other departure from normal or average personality. By contrast, subjects who imagined the unfolding scenario in less positive or benign terms (i.e., walking through throngs of giggling, finger-pointing students, seeing acquaintances shake their heads and avert their gazes as they hurry off without social acknowledgment) would have been inclined to react quite differently, and to make very different predictions and inferences about the reactions of others. These subjects, we argue, would have been likely to refuse the experimenter's request, to expect others responding to the "same" situation to similarly refuse, and to regard agreement as far more reflective of atypical or extreme personal attributes (e.g., "submissiveness" or inclination to "show off" and make a fool of oneself) than refusal.

Although the original Ross, Greene, and House studies provided no direct evidence for this construal interpretation, such evidence was subsequently pro-

vided in an elegant series of studies by Gilovich (1991). Reasoning that if the false consensus effect arose from subjects' insufficient allowance for intersubjective variability in construal, then the effect should be greatest for those response domains that offered the most latitude for interpretation or construal, Gilovich first had an independent panel of judges rate Ross et al.'s various response items in terms of their ambiguity or susceptibility to differences in construal. He then proceeded to demonstrate the predicted positive correlation between the size of the false consensus effect for each item and the latitude for variable construal provided by that item. Gilovich also went on to offer simpler and more direct demonstrations. In one study, for example, two groups of subjects were asked if they preferred the color *aqua* to the color *tan*. Members of one group, however, were given only the color names (which obviously left the subjects to imagine or construe very different hues for each color label) whereas members of the other were given specific color swatches (stimuli that obviously left little if any room for construal differences). As predicted, the subjects responding to color names showed a significant false consensus effect, whereas the subjects responding to color swatches did not. In another study, Gilovich asked his subjects whether they preferred "1960s" or "1980s" music and had them estimate what percentage of their peers would share their preferences. The subjects' estimates once again revealed the predicted false consensus effect. Furthermore, Gilovich showed, the group preferring 1960s music and the group preferring 1980s music had indeed generated different examplars of the two periods—exemplars whose differing merits were recognized readily by subsequent raters. In other words, as predicted, subjects expressing a preference for 1960s music over 1980s music, or vice versa, had construed the respective objects of judgment quite differently, then failed to recognize or make adequate allowance for this construal difference in estimating (and, presumably, in subsequently interpreting) the expressed preferences of their peers.

Such simple demonstration experiments hint at an unfortunate scenario in the domain of political discourse. Issues and events that become the object of social, political, or ethical evaluation are bound to be construed differently by different individuals. Failure by those individuals to recognize the existence of such construal differences, or rather failure to recognize that apparent differences in ethical judgment may arise from and reflect such differences in construal (rather than, perhaps, differences in underlying values or in willingness to be bound by such values) can in turn promote misunderstanding and misattribution. That is, the disputants are apt to make unwarranted inferences about each other's values, beliefs, compassion, wisdom, or sincerity.

Before we return to this troubling scenario, which is a manifestation of the third tenet of naive realism, we wish to offer our readers another very different illustration of the first two tenets. This demonstration, provided in a dissertation study conducted in our laboratory by Elizabeth Newton (1990),

showed in compelling fashion how difficult it can be to separate one's own subjective experience of a stimulus from the objective features of the stimulus that are available to other perceivers.

The "Musical Tapping" Study

Newton's study, which was designed with the naive realism phenomenon very much in mind, dealt with a musical stimulus. Subjects in the study were assigned to one of two roles: "tappers" or "listeners." Each tapper was given a list of 25 well-known songs (a list not made available to the listener) ranging from "America the Beautiful" to "Rock Around the Clock," and asked to choose one whose rhythm they then tapped out to a listener sitting across the table. The tapper was then asked to assess the likelihood that his or her particular listener would successfully identify the title of the song, and also to estimate the proportion of students who would be able to do so if given the same listening opportunity. Listeners simply tried first to identify the tune, and afterward to estimate the proportion of their peers who would succeed or fail in the same task.

Before considering Newton's results, it is important once again to contrast the subjective experiences of the two types of participants in her study (see Griffin & Ross, 1991). To better appreciate this contrast, imagine yourself first as the tapper. As you rhythmically tap the opening bars of the tune you have chosen (let's say "Yankee Doodle" or "Auld Lang Syne"), you inevitably "hear" the tune and even the words to the song. In fact, many of Newton's tappers reported hearing a full orchestration, complete with rich harmonies between strings, winds, brass, and human voice. Now imagine yourself as the listener, unaware of which tune the tapper has undertaken to communicate. For you there are no notes, words, chords, or instruments; only an aperiodic series of taps. Indeed, you can't even tell whether the brief, irregular moments of silence between taps should be construed as sustained notes, as musical "rests" between notes, or as mere task interruptions as the tapper contemplates the "music" to come next.

This difference in perspectives and subjective experiences is easy enough to stipulate. The question, however, is whether the tappers were able to separate their private embellishments from the impoverished stimuli they were actually presenting to their listeners—or rather, whether they were able to make adequate allowance for the relevant differences in perspective and experience when they were called on to estimate their listeners' success at the identification task. Newton's results provided clear evidence for the inadequate allowance thesis spelled out in the first two tenets of naive realism. The tappers' predictions of listener success ranged from 10% to 95%, with an average of 50%. Listeners, by contrast, correctly identified only 3 of the 120 tunes presented by the tapper—a success rate of only 2.5%.

Newton went on in a follow-up study to demonstrate that overestimation of

listener success was not a reflection of simple optimism or bravado on the part of the tappers. Indeed, she showed that it did not even depend on their having personally performed the tapping task. In this follow-up study, a group of observers were supplied with the name of each tune being tapped (thus allowing these preinformed listeners, like the tappers, to supply their own private orchestration as they heard the impoverished stimulus) and to estimate the subsequent success of noninformed listeners at identifying the tunes. Like the tappers, these preinformed listeners estimated, on average, a 50% accuracy rate on the part of noninformed listeners. That is, like the tappers, they either failed to recognize how the subjective experience of the noninformed listeners would differ from their own experiences or failed to make appropriate allowance for this difference in their predictions. As a consequence, preinformed listeners and tappers alike were poised to make erroneous inferences and attributions about the musical talents and/or effort exhibited by those who did not share their "privileged" subjective experience of the relevant stimuli. Newton's results may prompt students of Piaget to recall his famous example (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) of the teacher's characteristic inability to set aside his or her own knowledge and mastery of the material being taught and appreciate the perspective of the student being exposed to the information and ideas for the first time.

Our general thesis, once again, is that such failures in perspective taking, or perhaps failures to make adequate allowance for construal differences, are ubiquitous throughout the social sphere. Such failures, we suggest, are apt to be particularly dramatic in cases in which the stimuli and reactions to be evaluated are words and deeds addressed to complex social propositions—words and deeds that are rich and varied in their connotations or associations. Indeed, Ichheiser, another prominent social psychologist who long ago anticipated the tenor of this argument, explicitly distinguished between physical and social stimuli in stating a strong version of the case to be made throughout this chapter:

> Now, the really strange thing is that what every normal person understands by himself as far as things in physical space are concerned, most people do not understand, and even do not want to understand, as far as phenomena in social space are concerned. And any attempt to explain the relativity of social perspectives, and its full implications, usually meets with strong psychological resistance. (Ichheiser, 1951, p. 311)

CONSTRUAL AND SOCIAL ENMITY: THE THIRD TENET OF NAIVE REALISM

The two tenets of naive realism discussed thus far relate to the tendency to assume, often without even considering any alternative, that other social actors and perceivers share one's perspective and one's subjective experience of the

objects or events to which one responds. This tendency, in turn, disposes people to make erroneous behavior predictions and unwarranted attributions—predictions and attributions that reflect inadequate inferential allowance for the possibility that other social actors and perceivers might be construing and/or experiencing the relevant events differently than themselves, for the possibility that other actors and observers might, in effect, be responding to very different objects of judgment than the ones to which they themselves were responding. The third tenet of naive realism, which can essentially be derived from the two previous ones, concerns the naive realist's interpretation of differences in response and of disagreements about issues. Given the naive realist's conviction that he or she sees things "naturally"—sees them as they "really are"—then other actors' differing views and responses must reflect something other than a natural, unmediated registering of objective reality.

The naive realist's initial interpretation of differences in opinion is apt to be relatively charitable—that the other party has not yet been exposed to the "way things really are;" that the other party has not yet been privy to the "real" facts and considerations. Indeed, the naive realist may even be so charitable as to concede that the other party may be privy to additional facts and considerations that could moderate the naive realist's own views. In either case, this charitable interpretation of disagreement leads the naive realist to be confident that rational open-minded discourse, in which information and cogent arguments are freely exchanged, will lead to agreement (or at least to a marked narrowing of disagreement). This confidence however is apt to be shortlived, especially in the social and political arena. Repeated attempts at dialogue with those on the "other side" of a contentious issue make us aware that they rarely yield to our attempts at enlightenment; nor do they yield to the efforts of articulate, fair-minded spokespersons who share our views, or even to the evidence presented by whichever media sources we regard as balanced and responsible. (Nor, generally, do those on the other side present new facts and arguments sufficient to persuade us to change sides.)

Another far less charitable interpretation of disagreement, of the failure of others to share our views, involves capacity and effort. Those who fail to arrive at our "truth"—that is, at the views that follow naturally from evidence and logic—may simply be too lazy and/or too limited in intelligence and common sense to reach the right conclusions. This interpretation is comforting, and it is one we sometimes can cling to when the dialogue is limited and the stakes seem low.

A third interpretation of disagreement, however, is more common, especially when our adversaries are persistent, unyielding, energetic, and outspoken, and when the issue is one with hedonic consequences for them or for us. In such cases we are apt to reach the conclusion that people on the other side of the issue are *biased*—by ideology, or by self-interest, or by idiosyncratic values, traits, or features of temperament—and that such bias distorts either

their construal of relevant information or their (otherwise unimpaired) capacity to proceed normatively from evidence to conclusions.

This third interpretation is apt to be buttressed by the correlations that one generally observes among others' social and political beliefs, construals, and individual or collective self-interest. Other people in general, and adversaries in particular, the naive realist readily discerns, rarely hold views or advocate propositions whose acceptance would threaten their economic, social, or psychological well-being. In fact, other people generally and adversaries specifically seem to hold views whose general acceptance would advance their individual or collective interests. The naive realist, of course, is apt to be quite correct about the direction (if not, as we shall see, the magnitude) of this correlation between motives and construals or beliefs. What generally seems lacking on the part of the naive realist, however, is the recognition that his or her own interests, ideological beliefs, and construals of facts and evidence are similarly correlated, and that the relevant correlation is equally subject to unflattering interpretation.

It is to this third tenet of naive realism—and more specifically to one's willingness to infer bias on the part of those who fail to share one's own views and perspectives—that we now turn. Again, before discussing specific research evidence and implications, let us make explicit our general contention and its relevance to the concerns of this volume and of the Piagetian perspective that inspired it. We are claiming that adults do come to recognize, in fact even come to assume on the basis of relatively scanty evidence, that certain other individuals or groups fail to share their general perspective and/or their interpretation of particular pieces of information. Indeed, those who participate in or observe outspoken social and political debates could hardly fail to recognize such differences in perspective and construal. However, we are further claiming that even adults persist in feeling that their own perceptions and interpretations are essentially free of distortion, and that other people in general and their adversaries in particular see the world through the distorting lenses of ideology and self-interest.

Again, our presentation of evidence is selective, relying heavily on work done in our laboratory at Stanford. We begin by discussing research documenting the tendency for partisans to see "hostile bias" in the media. We then turn our attention to research on a further tendency that may at first seem a contradiction, but on further examination proves an illustration of our contention about naive realism—that is, the tendency for opposing partisans to overestimate the differences in their respective construals and beliefs.

Biased Perceptions and Perceptions of Bias

Opposing partisans exposed to the same "objective" information are apt to interpret those facts differently. For, as we have noted at several points in this

chapter, facts do not necessarily speak for themselves. As Bruner (1957) stated in a celebrated paper that helped to inspire the cognitive revolution throughout all of psychology, people are wont to go "beyond the information given." In the process of assimilating information, they fill in details of context and content, they infer linkages between events, and they adopt dynamic scripts or schemes to give events coherence and meaning (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). In doing so, opposing partisans facing the same objective facts, evidence, and history of events may both find additional support for their pre-existing views and thus become more instead of less polarized in their sentiments and beliefs.

Evidence suggesting such polarization was provided long ago in a classic study by Hastorf and Cantril (1954) that presented Dartmouth and Princeton football fans with a film of a particularly hard-fought game between their teams. Despite the fact that they were being presented with the very same stimulus, the two sets of partisan viewers seemingly "saw" two very different games. The Princeton fans saw a continuing saga of Dartmouth atrocities and occasional Princeton retaliations, whereas the Dartmouth fans saw a hard-hitting contest in which both sides contributed equally to the violence. Moreover, each side thought that the "truth" (i.e., what *they* saw) ought to be apparent to any objective observers of the same events.

Twenty-five years after the classic Hastorf and Cantril (1954) study, Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) extended this examination of biased assimilation and its consequences to the evaluation of social science data. Lord et al.'s prediction was that opposing partisans would respond to mixed scientific evidence by accepting evidence supporting their position at face value while attacking or explaining away evidence that was challenging or seemingly disconfirmatory to their position. As a result, partisans would rate those studies whose results supported their own positions to be more convincing and well done than those studies yielding opposite results—even when the objective merits of the relevant research designs and empirical evidence had been held constant. Furthermore, it was predicted, partisans who have had the opportunity to contrast the "sound research" supporting their side with the "slipshod pseudo-science" supporting the other side would end up even *more* convinced that their own views were correct. Thus, through the mechanisms of biased assimilation, the two sides would come away from the same set of mixed evidence even more polarized, and farther apart in their views, than they had been before.

To test these predictions, the investigator recruited capital punishment opponents and proponents and had them read a pair of studies that employed differing methodologies (i.e., a design contrasting homicide rates in adjacent "death penalty" and "no death penalty" states and a design contrasting rates before and after changes in the law permitting executions) and yielded mixed, conflicting evidence about the deterrent efficacy of capital punishment. Although the investigators employed a carefully balanced design, matching the

different purported results with the different methodologies, both sides proceeded to accept uncritically the results of the study supporting their position and to identify obvious flaws in the study opposing their position—and thus, as predicted, to become further polarized in their views as they assimilated the relevant findings.

It should be apparent that the same mechanisms that underlie such biased assimilation of evidence, when combined with the features of naive realism described in this chapter, can produce an obvious consequence in terms of interpersonal and intergroup perceptions. To appreciate this consequence, imagine how Lord et al.'s two sets of partisans would have responded to each other's assessments of the evidence and to each other's expressions of increased confidence. Indeed, imagine even how they would respond to a purported neutral third party who evaluated the same two studies and characterized them as "equally flawed," and further insisted that the evidence should encourage both partisan groups, equally, to adopt more moderate, less adamant positions. In such cases, we believe accusations of ideological bias soon would be forthcoming from all quarters. That is, both groups would feel that partisans on the other side, who could look at a body of evidence that objectively favors "our side" but nevertheless insist that it offers support to their side, were either lying or demonstrating the true depths of their unreasonableness. By the same token, both groups of partisans would be apt to feel that a supposedly neutral observer who claims to see equal probative value (or lack of value) in cases of such manifestly unequal merit has thereby shown his or her lack of objectivity.

It was this latter scenario—whereby partisans were led by their own biased perceptions and/or assimilation to perceive bias on the part of third parties—that was put to the test in a study by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985). Capitalizing on long-standing and passionately held differences in opinion that people hold about the Arab–Israeli conflict, Vallone et al. presented pro-Israeli and pro-Arab student partisans (as well as some neutral students) with excerpts from then-current television news coverage of the massacre of civilians in two Palestinian refugee camps located in South Lebanon by so-called "Christian militiamen." Whereas the neutrals (or at least the best informed and most knowledgeable of the neutrals) rated the broadcast summaries as being relatively unbiased on the issue of Israeli responsibility and complicity, the evaluations offered by the two groups of partisans were very different. On measure after measure there was virtually no overlap in the evaluations offered by the two partisan groups (see Fig. 6.2). Pro-Arab and pro-Israeli viewers alike were convinced that the other side had been favored by the media, that their own side had been treated unfairly, and that the relevant biases in reporting had reflected the self-interests and ideologies of those responsible for the program. There was also evidence, reminiscent of Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) findings discussed earlier, that the two partisan groups in a sense "saw" different pro-

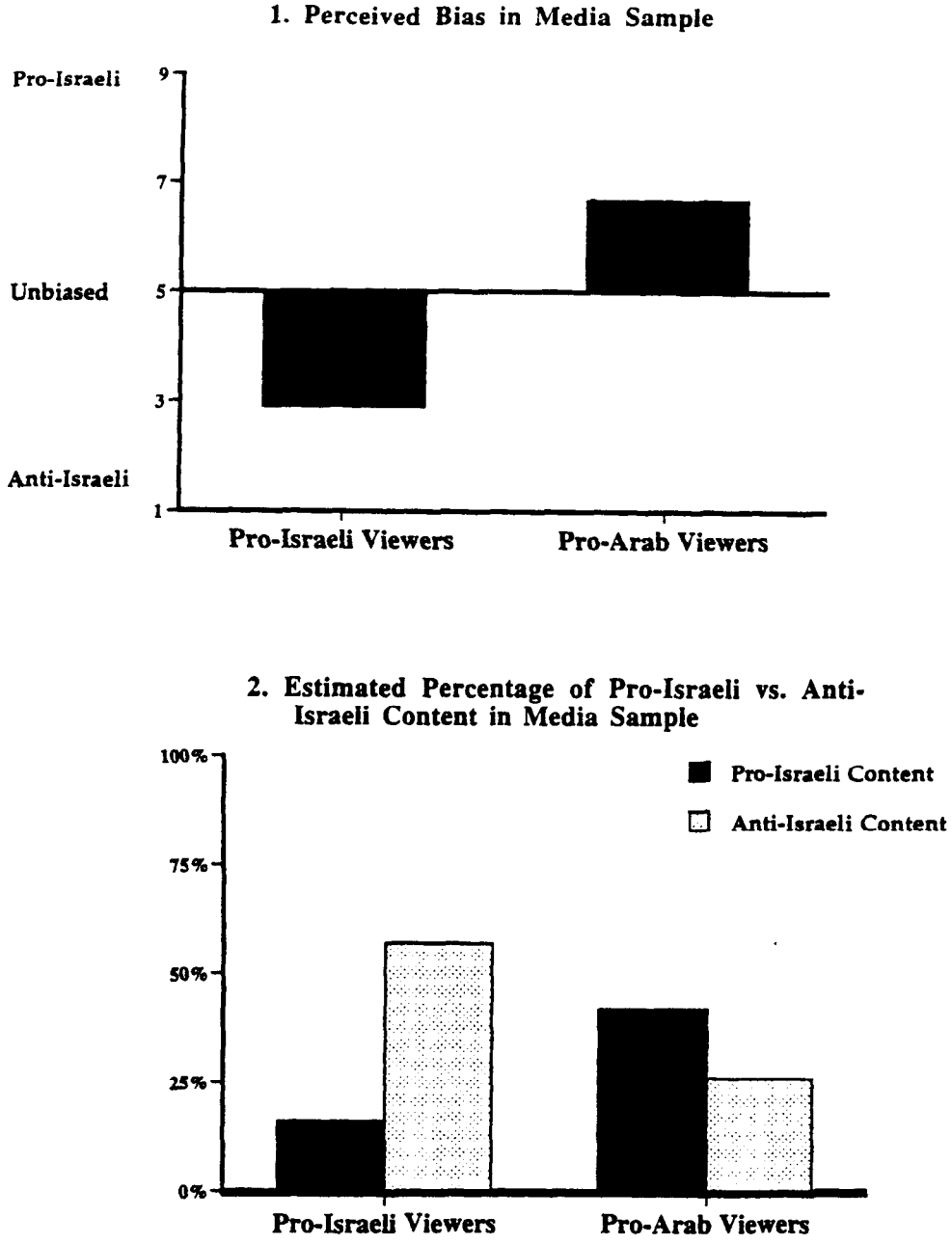

FIG. 6.2. Assessment of "Beirut Massacre" media coverage by pro-Israeli and pro-Arab viewers.

grams. That is, whereas viewers supportive of Israel claimed that a higher percentage of the specific facts and arguments presented had been anti-Israeli than pro-Israeli, viewers hostile to Israel assessed that balance in opposite terms. Both sides, furthermore, believed that neutral viewers of the program would be swayed in a direction hostile to their side and favorable to the other side.

Overestimating Partisan Differences in Construal

Conflict, misunderstandings, and misattribution, as we have noted, can result when individuals or groups fail to recognize that they have construed issues or events differently and have thus essentially responded to different objects of judgment. However, recent research conducted in our laboratory suggests that naive realism, and its attributional consequences, can lead those who participate in or witness ongoing ideological disputes to *over*estimate rather than underestimate relevant differences in construal. To understand the source of this overestimation we must look again at the third tenet of naive realism—at the attributional possibilities available to the naive realist who finds that others do not share his or her position on a contentious social issue. Once again, for didactic clarity, we use the first-person mode.

Suppose it has become clear to us that others do not share our opinions and perspectives, and that the discrepancy in viewpoints is not the product either of easily corrected differences in access to information or of simple inattention or intellectual impairment on the part of those with whom one disagrees. One attributional possibility remains. That possibility involves the distorting influence exerted by ideological bias and/or self-interest—bias and/or self-interest, of course, on the part of those with whom we disagree, rather than ourselves.

In particular, we can maintain that whereas our own "bottom-up" construals of issues and events reflect the richness, complexity, ambiguity, and even contradictions of objective reality, other partisans' "top-down" construals are a different matter. Other people's construals, governed as they are by ideology and self-interest, are bound (we believe) to manifest a kind of simple, predictable consistency. That is, when it comes to other people, evidence and arguments relevant to beliefs will generally be construed in whatever manner best serves their ideology and self-interest. Thus, other people (especially those on the "other side," but to some degree those on "our side" as well) will be more extreme in the ideological consistency of their construals than we are. This set of assumptions, and the resulting overestimation of self–other and us–them differences, is represented schematically in Fig. 6.3.

Evidence for this phenomenon was provided in a pair of studies by Robinson, Keltner, Ward, and Ross (1995) that compared partisan group members' *actual* differences in construal with their *assumptions* about such differences.

One study dealt with prochoice versus prolife views relevant to the ongoing abortion rights debates (e.g., what kind of abortion scenarios and considerations are common vs. uncommon; also, what positive consequences and what negative consequences would be likely to follow from a tightening of abortion restrictions, etc.). The second study dealt with liberal versus conservative construals of specific events in the racially charged Howard Beach incident in which a Black teenager was fatally injured by an automobile while running away from a group of White pursuers (e.g., who had started and who had exacerbated the initial confrontation, what had been the intentions and motives of the various participants in the incidents, etc.).

Both sides, as expected, provided many instances of construal differences; but almost invariably the magnitude of such differences was overestimated rather than underestimated by the partisans. More specifically, the partisans overestimated the degree of ideological consistency that both sides—especially the other side, but to some extent their own side as well—would show in the assumptions and construals they brought to the relevant issues. What is more, individual partisans in both studies felt that their own views were less driven by ideology than those of other partisans. It is worth noting that nonpartisan or neutral respondents in the study showed the same tendency to overestimate the extremity and ideological consistency of the partisan groups' construals as the partisans did themselves. That is, partisans and nonpartisans alike significantly overestimated the construal gap between the two sides, and in a sense,

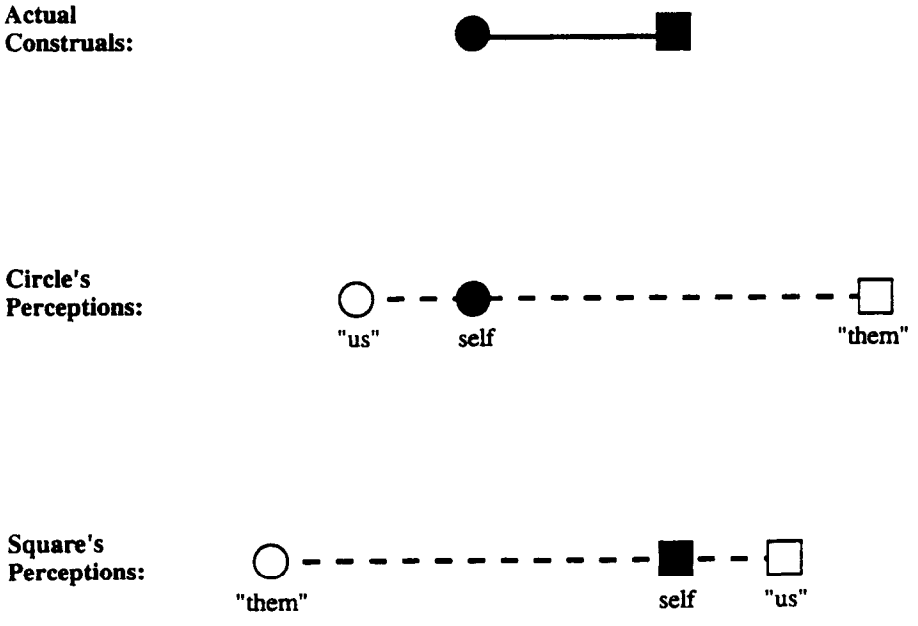

FIG. 6.3. Actual versus perceived differences in partisan group construals.

underestimated the amount of common ground to be found in the assumptions, beliefs, and values shared by the relevant parties.

Informal interviews with students, incidentally, revealed an additional source of these misperceptions and overestimations beyond naive realism, one that is worth mentioning in light of the now numbingly repetitive discussions of political correctness. Students shared with us the fact that they rarely acknowledged to others the degree of ambivalence in their political beliefs—not in talking to their ideological allies (lest their resoluteness come into doubt) and not in talking to their ideological adversaries (lest their concessions be exploited or misunderstood). In fact, most students explained that in the interest of avoiding conflict or being stereotyped, they generally shunned all potentially contentious political discussion. By doing so, it is apparent the students also forfeited the opportunity to learn the true complexity (and the shared ambivalence) in each other's views. The obvious antidote to naive realism and its attributional consequences—that is, the open, sustained, sympathetic sharing of views and perspectives—was rarely employed by the students. Ironically, in attempting to avoid discomfort and giving offense, many students failed to discover that their particular position on the political spectrum (i.e., that of self-labeled "realistic" liberal, or "compassionate" conservative) was one shared by a great number of their peers.

The underestimation of common ground in campus debates was been nicely demonstrated in a follow-up study by Robinson and Keltner (1994) that focused on instructors' views about the proper balance of traditional and nontraditional materials in the basic English literature course. The main finding was that the suggested reading lists of self-labeled "traditionalists" and "revisionists" actually overlapped considerably—despite the traditionalists' beliefs that there would be no overlap at all. The same authors (Keltner & Robinson, 1993) further showed that reducing partisans' misperceptions about each other's construals and beliefs will not only lead those on opposite sides of an issue to view each other more favorably, it will also facilitate their search for integrative agreements. A provocative discussion of the role that erroneous construals can play in social policy disputes has been offered by Doob and Roberts (1984), who found that public perceptions of undue judicial leniency to criminals was based in part on erroneous factual beliefs and construals, and that inclusion of factual details vis à vis particular cases drastically reduced the tendency for respondents to feel that the relevant perpetrators deserved harsher treatment.

BARRIERS TO DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The various features of egocentrism and naive realism described in this chapter not only give rise to social misunderstanding and conflict, they also create barriers to successful negotiation and dispute resolution. Once again, the sam-

ple of research we review is limited mainly to work done in our laboratory. (See Ross & Stillinger, 1991; also Mnookin & Ross, 1995, and Ross & Ward, 1995, for more detailed accounts.)

The Pursuit and Perception of Equity

In attempting to resolve disputes and end conflict, indeed in any bargaining or negotiation, the relevant parties seek to achieve "gains in trade." By exploiting differences in their present needs, preferences, and opportunities, the two parties hope to exchange resources, concessions, and costs in a manner that leaves both of them better off than they were before (or at least better off than they would be in the absence of an agreement). In a sense, it is thus not agreement but disagreement that provides the vehicle for successful negotiation, insofar as it is the differences in the parties' subjective evaluations, expectations, and preferences (along with the differences in their objective circumstances) that make the negotiation process a nonzero sum game. At the same time, however, differences in subjective understanding and construal create barriers to dispute resolution. One particular barrier arises from the fact that the parties to a negotiation seek more than a simple advance over the status quo—they demand and feel entitled to receive fairness or equity (see Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; also Berkowitz & Walster, 1976; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). Attempts to satisfy the equity criterion—that is, to forge an agreement that allocates gains and losses in a manner proportionate to the strength and legitimacy of the negotiating parties' respective claims (see Bazerman, Loewenstein, & White, 1992)—will thus be made more difficult by the features of naive realism discussed throughout this chapter.

Disputants are apt to construe the history of their conflict (i.e., who did what to whom in the past, and with what justification, provocation, and intent) in very different terms. They similarly are apt to have divergent expectations about the present (i.e., whose intentions are hostile and whose are merely self-protective) and about the future (i.e., who will grow stronger with the passage of time and whose assurances can be taken at face value and trusted). As a result, disputants are likely to disagree vehemently about the balance of any proposal that seeks to give both parties what they feel they need and deserve. Moreover, in accord with the tenets of their naive realism, the disputants are apt to misattribute each other's cool response to the proposal in a way that heightens enmity and mistrust. That is, each party is likely to feel that the other is being disingenuous in its public pronouncement of concern and disappointment, that the other is merely engaging in "strategic" behavior designed to secure sympathy from third parties and win further concessions. And each party responds with anger and suspicion when it hears its own response characterized in such uncharitable terms. No laboratory experiment, unfortunately, is required to demonstrate the pattern of costly stalemates, misattri-

butions, and ever-growing enmity predicted by our analysis. The news media, with their continual accounts of ethnic strife and intergroup conflict, provide all the evidence one could wish.

A pair of recent laboratory studies (Diekmann, Samuels, Ross, & Bazerman, 1994) conducted at Northwestern and Stanford, however, offer a more hopeful, or at least more subtle account of the interplay between equity concerns and self-interested construal biases. Both studies confronted subjects with hypothetical resource allocation problems. Furthermore, in both studies the potential recipients of those allocations (i.e., either candidates from two different schools competing for shares of a scholarship fund or managers of two different divisions of a large company seeking shares of a bonus pool) presented equally strong, albeit rather different, records of accomplishment. Both studies contrasted the response of *allocators* (i.e., those recommending specific splits of the resources in question) and *evaluators* (those assessing the fairness of specific splits enacted by others).

The findings from these studies revealed the specific manner in which the participants' individual or group interests, as opposed to fairness and/or equality norms, manifested themselves. That is, allocators tended to opt for equality or a 50/50 split, even in circumstances in which they could have cited differences in accomplishments or other bases for claims if they had wanted to justify an unequal split. Similarly, evaluators who received a 50/50 split tended to rate that division as perfectly fair, even when they too could have pointed to the differences in accomplishments or bases for claims to justify a contention that they, or the representative from their school, deserved the larger share. Self-interested bias was apparent only among subjects who received, or saw a member of their group receive, a much greater than 50% share. Only then did subjects' assessments of fairness and perceptions of entitlement show the distorting influence of self-interest. Only then did they claim that their own accomplishments, or those of a member of their own group, were more significant and more worthy of financial recognition than those of rival claimants. Biases reflecting self-interest, in short, did not overcome all tendencies toward fairness, equality, and equity. But such biases did make advantaged recipients willing and able to justify, after the fact, an inequality of resources that few personally would have recommended, demanded, or imposed.

There is a footnote to be added to this account of the Diekmann et al. study. When asked to predict how others would respond in the same study, subjects made the same error shown by participants in the Robinson et al. (1995) study (described earlier in this chapter) dealing with perceptions of ideological consistency and extremity. That is, subjects were overly cynical and uncharitable in their predictions. They greatly overestimated the degree of partisan bias that other allocators and evaluators would show (and, as a result, they probably would have overestimated the difficulty of negotiating a mutually acceptable allocation of the relevant resource).

Biased Construal and Reactive Devaluation

Disputants who seek equity rather than a mere advance over the status quo—especially those who seek equity in light of their differing construals of past events and present needs and entitlements—thereby erect a formidable barrier for those negotiating on their behalf, and any third party mediators, to overcome. Cognitive and motivational biases alike lead both sides in the dispute to feel that it is they who have acted more honorably in the past, they who have been more sinned against than sinning, and they who are seeking no more than that to which they are entitled. Both sides, moreover, are apt to feel that it is *their* interests that most require protection in any negotiated agreement—for example, by avoiding ambiguities in language that could provide "loopholes" by the other side (at the same time, avoiding rigidities in formulation that could compromise their own side's "legitimate" need to protect itself against presently unforeseeable developments). When the other side makes similar claims, or when third parties offer evenhanded commentary about the legitimacy of the disputants' respective claims, of course, accusations about unreasonable hostility or devious strategic intent are apt to follow.

The same biases apply to the interpretation or construal of proposed terms of agreement and concessions asked of the two sides. Thus the "impartial review board" proposed by the mayor's task force to deal with allegations of racist-inspired police brutality is apt to be construed very differently by members of the outraged minority community ("a bunch of political hacks who will take the word of the police over folks like us") than by the skeptical and beleaguered police force ("a bunch of civilians who don't understand our problems and frustrations and who will try to placate voters"). Acceptance of such a review board, accordingly, would be seen by each side as a major concession to the other side. Moreover, when each side hears the other side's characterization of the content and equitability of the proposal, the result is likely to be heightened enmity and distrust.

Beyond the barriers posed by biased assessment of content and context, there is a further problem resulting from the dynamics of the negotiation process. The evaluation of specific package deals and compromises may *change* as a consequence of the knowledge that they actually have been put on the table, especially if they have been offered or proposed by one's adversary. Evidence for such "reactive devaluation" has been sought in a variety of laboratory and field settings in which subjects evaluated a variety of actual or hypothetical dispute resolution contexts and proposals (e.g., arms control proposals by then Soviet leader Gorbachev, university proposals concerning divestment vis à vis South Africa, and a professor's offer of various forms of recognition and compensation to an aggrieved research assistant).

Three findings suggestive of reactive devaluation have emerged from this research (see Ross, 1995; also, Lepper, Ross, Tsai, & Ward, 1994; and Stillinger,

Epelbaum, Keltner, & Ross, 1990). First, it appears that the terms of a compromise proposal for bilateral concessions are rated less positively when they have been put forward by the other side than when the same terms ostensibly have been put forward by an apparently neutral third party (or, of course, when those terms have been proposed by a representative of one's own side). Second, it appears that those concessions that actually have been offered are rated less positively than alternative concessions that have not been offered or have been "withheld." Finally, it appears that a given compromise is rated less positively after it has actually been put on the table or unilaterally enacted by a party with the power to do so—less positively, that is, than it had been rated beforehand, when it was merely a hypothetical possibility.

A particularly compelling demonstration of the before being proposed versus after being proposed change in evaluation was provided in Stillinger et al.'s (1990) study of student responses to university plans concerning financial divestment from South Africa. Stillinger et al. were able to measure students' evaluation of the plan ultimately adopted by the university—a plan calling for selective or partial divestment, which fell short of the students' demand for full divestment—on two occasions; once before the adoption of the plan was announced (when it was merely one hypothetical possibility among many) and then shortly after the announcement. For comparison purposes, they also measured students' responses to an alternative plan—a seemingly modest proposal to increase university investment in companies that had left South Africa, but to otherwise retain its current investments. The results were dramatic. Students' evaluation of the university's actual concession became more negative after the relevant announcement, and evaluations of the initially unattractive alternative became increasingly positive (see Figure 6.4).

A range of mechanisms and explanations have been proposed to account for this bias in construal and evaluation, including the "rational" tendency to view an adversary's willingness to offer a given resource or concession as informative regarding its scarcity, value, and significance. However, at this point it is also clear that less rational, more motivational processes are involved. Specifically, reactive devaluation seems to occur even when the source of the concession is not a hostile adversary, and the relevant decrease in perceived value or attractiveness reflects a more general tendency for people to devalue that which is at hand, or readily available, relative to that which seems unavailable or is withheld (see Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Wicklund, 1974). Regardless of why reactive devaluation occurs, its potential contribution to the maintenance of negotiation deadlocks and ensuing cycle of heightening enmity and mistrust should be clear. That is, preliminary proposals or even small unilateral concessions are apt to be dismissed by the recipient as "trivial," "token," and "insincere." Each side, moreover, is apt to interpret the other side's negotiation behavior and rhetoric as at best "strategic" and at worst dishonest, as dictated by animus and "out of touch with reality."

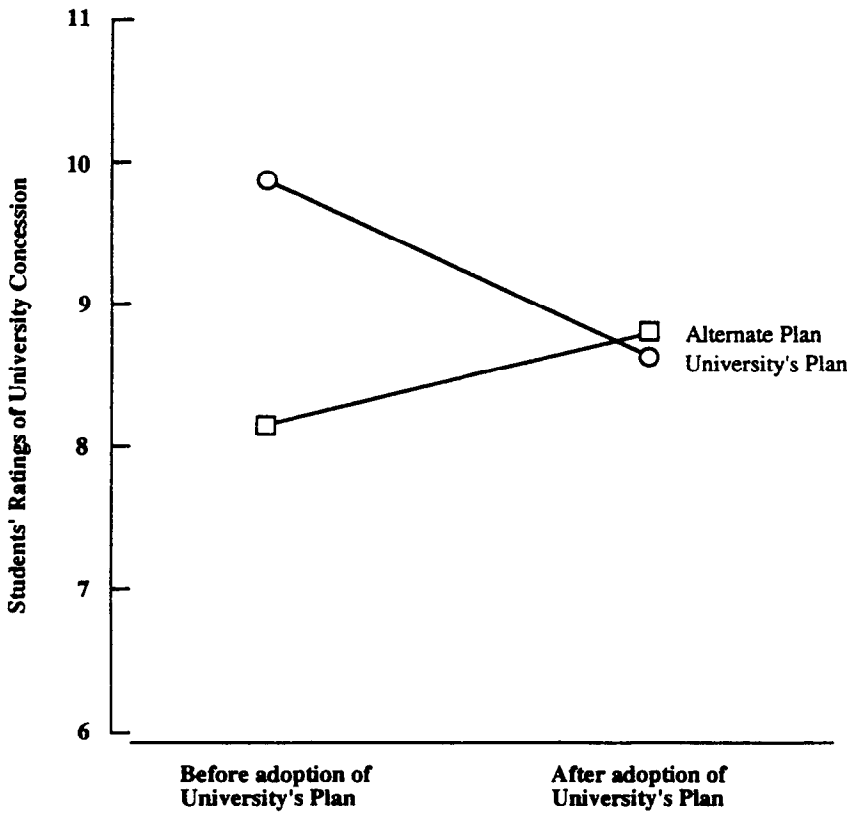

FIG. 6.4. Students' ratings of university's plan and alternative plan before and after university's announcement.

Indeed, one important role played by the mediator in any conflict is to short circuit this process—to obscure the parentage of specific proposals and concessions, and to encourage more positive (and accurate) attributions on the part of the disputants as they struggle to reach terms of agreement that are personally and politically bearable. To this end, skilled mediators may oblige the disputants to clarify their priorities and interests, in particular to have each side indicate concessions it may value more highly than its adversaries and vice versa. The mediator then is free to propose possible exchanges of concessions that are not only based on but also readily attributable by the parties to their own particular expressions of priority.

CONFLICT, CONSTRUAL, AND VALUES

Parties involved in conflict often attribute the existing stalemate to differences in basic values and/or incompatibility of basic interests. We, the authors of this

chapter, have no doubt that some conflicts *do* reflect irreconcilable differences in the parties' values, interests, needs, or objectives. We recognize, further, that some conflicts have little chance of being resolved until one party can impose its will on the other or until objective circumstances change in a way that creates greater commonality of interests. Indeed, we are sympathetic to the view, voiced by many critics of the contemporary dispute resolution movement, that conflict resolution is not always a desirable goal—that sometimes wrongs must be righted, structural changes accomplished, or power redistributed under circumstances in which any genuine resolution demands that the objectives and interests of one party to the dispute be compromised to a degree that it will deem unacceptable and resist as long as it has any means to do so. We also feel, however, as the analysis offered throughout this chapter attests, that many and perhaps even most conflicts are far more tractable than they seem; that disputants are often constrained not by objective circumstances but by cognitive, perceptual, or motivational biases; and that incompatibilities in basic needs, interests, and values are often more apparent than real.

It is to this latter set of observations that we turn our attention in our concluding discussion. We first consider apparent conflicts in basic values, once again focusing on the role of social construal and the limitations of naive realism. We then close on a more optimistic note by pointing out that egocentrism or the assumption of self–other similarity, at least when it is consciously adopted as a charitable working hypothesis about one's adversaries, can forestall erroneous interpersonal influences and promote rather than inhibit the process of reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Apparent versus Real Value Differences

Our most general contention is that perceivers are apt to misattribute behavior, especially behavior that they abhor, to the values (or lack of values) held by the relevant actors. More specifically, we contend that people concerned with particular social issues are bound to find various other individuals or members of other groups or cultures (or even members of their own group or culture at an earlier moment in history) speaking and acting in ways that seemingly reflect indifference to values that the perceivers hold dear, and indeed values they deem to be essential features of any civilized or humane standards of moral conduct. In proceeding from such evidence to any conclusions about the values of the relevant actors, we argue, the perceivers are once again displaying convictions and biases that we have associated in this chapter with naive realism. That is, they are assuming their own construal of the issues or evidence in question to be a veridical, unmediated registering of reality, and they are perceiving the connections between their own values and the specific policies or positions they advocate in light of that "objective reality." They are further reasoning (or tacitly assuming without deeper thought) that other very

different policies or positions accordingly reflect an absence of, or weaker adherence to those values, accompanied by a greater commitment to some other, nonuniversal values or perhaps simply by a closer adherence to the dictates of self-interest.

Thus advocates and opponents of universal health care (or of restrictive abortion laws, or of capital punishment, or of particular affirmative action policies) are apt to assume, often wrongly, that their adversaries simply do not place the same weight that they do on compassion, equality, personal responsibility, or some other widely shared value. What such adversaries fail to recognize is the extent to which their ideological opponents proceed from different construals and factual assumptions, and more importantly, from very different perceptions concerning the linkages between relevant perceptions, political positions, and values. Thus, capital punishment opponents may indeed place a higher value on compassion or equality and a lower value on personal responsibility than proponents, but these opponents may also see the death penalty issue (perhaps because of what they assume to be true about crime and criminals) as much more "about" compassion and equality, and much less about responsibility than do proponents. Hence mutual misattributions are made, as the two sides essentially evaluate objects of judgment that are different in substance and different in their association to various values, and each side sees the other side as unreasonable and lacking in ethical maturity—both in its political position and its way of construing the relevant factual issues and linking those issues to universal values.

As we noted somewhat earlier in this chapter, the conviction that the other side has acted out of pure self-interest or ideological bias with little concern for or appreciation of universal values often gains support from real-world observation. If we examine the political landscape at all closely, we cannot help but notice that other people's views, construals, assumptions, and political positions generally do prove to be suspiciously congruent with their overall ideology and their personal or group interests. Furthermore, those on the other side (and even those on our side) seem disinclined to express the kinds of reservations and sources of ambivalence that we know to be characteristic of our views. What we often fail to note, of course, is the same potentially telling congruence among our own beliefs, assumptions, and interests. And we forget that other individuals—both on our own side and on the other side of the debate—may, like us, hold more ambivalent and complex views than they are comfortable about expressing to anyone but trusted intimates. When the naive realist hears spokespersons for the other side appeal to universal values such as equality, equity, self-determination, reverence for life, or compassion for those weaker than oneself, the appeals are seen as cynical or at best misguided. The real situation—at least when that situation is appraised dispassionately—could lead the ethical actor and possessor of universal values to only one position (or so the naive realist believes); that is, the position that he or she happens to

hold. In a sense the failure is one of attributional "charity." Partisans on the other side, to be sure, do see the world through the prism of their beliefs, expectations, needs, and interests—but the impact is apt to be less powerful, pervasive, and distorting than we assume (in fact, no more powerful, or average than that exerted by the same influences on our own views). Moreover, the congruencies between construals and beliefs that we note in others are a product neither of a particular group or ideology but rather of the way human beings in general, including ourselves, go "beyond the information given" (see Bruner, 1957; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Ross & Lepper, 1980).

Egocentrism, Naive Realism, and Golden Rules

Through maturation and experience, social perceivers come, as we have noted, to recognize that different actors not only have different preferences or tastes but also different perspectives and perceptions—that their own construals or constructions of social actions and entities may not be shared by their peers. Such insights about the diversity of subjective responses can, of course, be very helpful in promoting more accurate social predictions and inferences. Indeed, we argued earlier in this chapter that the wise social perceiver should, at least tentatively, assume surprising or seemingly inappropriate responses on the part of others to be symptoms of exactly such construal differences, rather than prematurely and uncharitably inferring negative personal traits (or, we would now add, inferring deficiency or marked differences in personal values). However, the "naive" conviction that others share our way of responding to the world—especially when such a conviction is adopted mindfully and selectively rather than assumed mindlessly and indiscriminately—similarly can be helpful; for it too can spare us premature and erroneous assumptions about the values adhered to by others.

The so-called Golden Rule, which is an essential feature not only of Christianity but of virtually all of the world's major religions, holds that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us (or, in the less presumptuous version of the rule favored by other sages, *refrain* from doing unto others what we would have them *not* do unto us). The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (cited in Leakey & Lewin, 1992) extended this prescription from presumptions of behavior preference to assumptions about others' subjective responses, offering the following advice: "Given the similitude of the thoughts and passions of one man to the thoughts and passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself and considereth what he doth when he does think, opine, reason, hope, fear, etc., and upon what grounds, he shall thereby read and know what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon the like occasions" (p. 296).

Although there is room to debate the wisdom of relying too heavily on such advice, which both codifies naive realism and provides a recipe for the false

consensus effect, we think such a tentative assumption or presumption can help guard us against errors that may be even more serious in their consequences. We would, however, be inclined to sharpen somewhat the good philosopher's advice. That is, assume tentatively that others share your most important values and preferences—that others, like you, value friendship and family highly, that others, like you, believe that justice must be served (albeit tempered with mercy). Assume further that self-determination, personal responsibility, fair play, compassion for those less fortunate, and other values you regard as essential to moral conduct are shared (although perhaps not ordered identically) by your peers and adversaries alike. And, when others respond in a way that seems unreasonable, unconscionable, or simply bizarre, do not give up such assumptions unless and until you have ruled out the possibility that your peers or adversaries have proceeded from very different construals or interpretations of the relevant objects of evaluation. In short, our advice is to proceed from the naive but charitable assumption that when people respond to important objects of social evaluation in ways that are surprising and/or offensive, it is generally their perceptions, assumptions, associations, and construals, rather than their basic values, that differ from our own and that must be addressed in the process of seeking reconciliation.

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