THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY OF PERSPECTIVE TAKING IN GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

Group members often reason egocentrically, both when allocating responsibility for collective endeavors and when assessing the fairness of group outcomes. These self-centered judgments are reduced when participants consider their other group members individually or actively adopt their perspectives. However, reducing an egocentric focus through perspective taking may also invoke cynical theories about how others will behave, particularly in competitive contexts. Expecting more selfish behavior from other group members may result in more self-interested behavior from the perspective takers themselves. This suggests that one common approach to conflict resolution between and within groups can have unfortunate consequences on actual behavior.

People in the midst of disagreements often fail to "see eye to eye." When such problems with psychological vision arise, it would seem advantageous for each party to actively adopt the other person's perspective in order to

determine the best way of achieving an optimal outcome. An employer in a hiring context, for example, would seem well advised to think about an employee's sense of worth before entering into salary negotiations. So would a prosecuting attorney in a legal dispute seem well-advised to think carefully about the defense attorney's case before entering into a lengthy court trial. Or a spouse to consider his or her partner's perspective before reacting negatively to a perceived insult. The problem for most social interactions, however, is that people rarely think completely about others' perspectives and interests. As a result, much of social judgment is egocentrically biased.

This failure to fully consider another's perspective is an obvious antecedent to conflict, misunderstanding, and strong disagreements about what is morally right or fair. An employer who fails to consider an employee's sense of worth can leave the employee feeling undervalued, under appreciated, and under pressure to find a new job. A prosecuting attorney who fails to consider all the subtleties of a defense team's arguments can risk losing a case, along with considerable time and money. And "communication problems" is among the most commonly cited reasons for marital divorce (Wolcott & Hughes, 1999), much of which may stem from attempting to communicate with another person without attempting to adopt their perspective.

Carefully considering another's differing perspective may be all the more problematic in larger groups with multiple diverging perspectives. Consider, for example, common decisions about how a group should divide collective resources. Because people tend to focus on their own contributions or needs, they also tend to overestimate their own contributions or needs relative to others (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). As anyone who has ever been part of a group knows, disagreements can therefore arise when members of groups seem to claim more than their fair share of resources.

One problem with this egocentrism, at least from an ethics standpoint, is not simply that people fail to see eye to eye, but that people generate cynical explanations for these perspective-taking failures. Employees, for instance, may come to believe that management is filled with greedy or self-interested administrators who only care about their bottom line. These cynical attributions – while occasionally true – are also quite caustic. Once a negative impression about another's moral or ethical character is formed, little can be done to repair it. This may be particularly true when the impression is that such egocentric disagreements arise from deliberate self-interest or egoistic thought.

As it happens, however, such egocentrism is a hallmark of our perceptual lives, and these biases are the product of mental operations that can occur

very rapidly, without conscious awareness or intention (for a review see Epley & Caruso, 2004). This means that such egocentric perceptions of fairness, justice, or resource allocation are often not the product of deliberate or conscious attempts to engage in unethical or self-interested behavior. Because such egocentric reasoning occurs so quickly and automatically, egocentric perceptions do not feel biased or distorted. As a result, others with differing views appear misguided or mistaken. These erroneous cynical attributions made about the moral or ethical intentions of other group members have been described as the "sinister attribution error" (Kramer, 1999) – an error that can obviously increase group conflict and dissatisfaction.

Actively considering the point of view of other group members – by deliberately adopting their perspectives – might therefore seem to be a simple and efficient way to reduce these automatic egocentric biases or sinister attribution errors, thereby increasing group members' abilities to determine fair and ethical behavior for all group members. Although this makes intuitive sense, we will suggest in this paper that the road to group cohesion is actually much more rocky and uneven than intuition might suggest.

Considering the thoughts of another person might be a helpful reminder of their possible beliefs and feelings, but such perspective taking might also inadvertently highlight motives in another person that run counter to one's own. When an employer considers an employee's sense of worth, the strong desire to maintain a tight budget might make an employee's high-salary demand appear irrational and selfish. Or when a spouse considers how his or her partner could have forgotten their 10th wedding anniversary, the salience of the event might make it appear like yet another example of insensitivity rather than a regrettable lapse in memory – making an 11th anniversary somewhat less likely.

Although considerable attention has been devoted to the process by which people adopt another's perspective, as well as their accuracy in doing so (Davis, 1983; Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Keysar, Barr, Balin, & Brauner, 2000), much less has been directed to the potential consequences of attempting to understand the thoughts of others. In this chapter we therefore focus on the organizational consequences of setting aside one's own egocentric perspective by actively thinking about others' thoughts, feelings, and internal motives. Such perspective taking may be achieved in at least two different ways. One way is to imagine how one would feel in the other person's position – what psychologists call "simulation" (Gallese & Goldman, 1998). A second way is to deduce another person's thoughts or feelings by relying on abstract or intuitive theories of

behavior – a process of inference similar to what is called the "theory theory" (Gopnik & Wellman, 1992) or "protocentrism" (Karniol, 2003; see also Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997 for the distinction between imagining how you would feel and imagining how another feels).

Much, although not all, of the research we will address, however, involves the latter process of inference rather than the former process of simulation. We will first review some of the evidence consistent with egocentric biases in groups, especially research focused on the claiming of responsibility in groups. We will then examine perspective taking as a strategy for reducing egocentric biases and group conflict. In doing so, we will point out the good, the bad, and the potentially ugly consequences that can result from perspective taking in different group contexts. Finally, we will offer suggestions for maximizing the effectiveness of perspective taking and consider the ethical implications of attempts to reduce or eliminate the negative consequences of egocentrism. Although egocentric biases can produce conflict and misunderstanding, we will suggest that simply undoing these egocentric biases through perspective taking may, at times, do more harm than good.

EGOCENTRISM IN GROUPS

People are notorious for taking more credit than they objectively deserve for collective endeavors. The classic experimental demonstration shows that married couples overestimate their unique contribution to shared household activities, such as preparing breakfast, shopping, and making important decisions (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). In such studies, when the percentage of work that each individual claims to contribute is summed across all relevant group members, the total systematically exceeds the 100% that is logically possible. Since this initial demonstration, egocentric responsibility allocations have been documented in a wide variety of contexts – including academics (Ross & Sicoly, 1979), athletics (Brawley, 1984; Forsyth & Schlenker, 1977), and fund-raisers (Zander, 1971), just to name a few (see Leary & Forsyth, 1987, for a review).

The consistent tendency to claim credit for positive outcomes appears to be the product, at least in part, of egocentrism. Because people necessarily perceive the world through their own eyes and experience it through their own senses, one's own perspective inherently influences interpretations of objects and events in the environment. In a classic illustration of selective perception, student fans watched part of a particularly rough Princeton–Dartmouth football game and were asked to evaluate the fairness of play (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954). All students watched the same film, but each group believed that the players from the other school were primarily responsible for the aggressive and unfair play. Even when people have a true desire to be fair and unbiased, they are often unable to interpret information in an impartial manner that would allow them to reach an unbiased solution (Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997; Diekmann, Samuels, Ross, & Bazerman, 1997). Participants in one experiment, for instance, who were asked to determine a fair allocation of wages claimed that they deserved almost $5 more than their partner for the same ten hours of work (Messick & Sentis, 1983).

One possible explanation for these egocentric biases is that individuals generally hold (or are motivated to hold) positive views of themselves (Brown, 1986; Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988). People tend to believe they are more rational, healthy, honest, and cooperative than the average person – and feel the same about almost any desirable trait (for a review see Dunning, 1999; Kunda, 1990). Claiming more than the lion's share of credit or resources is certainly consistent with these inflated self-assessments, or may serve a motivated desire to enhance one's view of oneself (Miller & Schlenker 1985; Ross & Sicoly, 1979).

Although motivated reasoning certainly plays a role in egocentric responsibility assessments, it does not offer a comprehensive explanation (Leary & Forsyth, 1987). If only self-serving motives were at play, then people should claim little responsibility for activities that reflect negatively on them. But they do not. Equivalent egocentric claiming has been documented for both positive and negative tasks (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). For example, husbands and wives both thought they caused more arguments, made more messes, and created more irritation in their marriage, on average, than did their spouse. In addition, increasing participants' focus on their own contributions increases the tendency to overestimate one's contributions (Burger & Rodman, 1983; Ross & Sicoly, 1979), and increasing their focus on others' contributions diminishes this tendency (Savitsky, Van Boven, Epley, and Wight, 2005).

Instead, egocentric responsibility allocations also seem to be produced by the increased accessibility of one's own contributions compared to others' contributions (Ross & Sicoly, 1979). It is almost inevitable that people have greater access to their own thoughts and behaviors than the thoughts and behaviors of others. This privileged access makes it easier to notice and recall one's own contributions – both positive and negative – than it is to recall others' contributions (Schwarz et al., 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).

Indeed, when people in one experiment were asked about the factors they considered when assigning responsibility, people overwhelmingly reported

considering information about themselves more than information about others (Brawley, 1984; Thompson & Kelly, 1981). When it comes to giving credit to individuals based on their contributions, people will come to believe they have contributed more (and hence deserve more recognition) than reality dictates. In addition, the ease with which one's own inputs come to mind might cause people to overestimate the relative frequency of those inputs (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), strengthening the conclusion that one's own actions were more considerable and important than they actually were (Greenwald, 1980). Of course, group members who assess responsibility egocentrically are not particularly appreciated by their fellow group members, so disagreements about the actual allocation of work often increase conflict and decrease group cohesion (Forsyth, Berger, & Mitchell, 1981; Forsyth & Mitchell, 1979).

USING PERSPECTIVE TAKING TO REDUCE EGOCENTRISM

The Good

If egocentric biases lead to group conflict and dissatisfaction, a natural solution would involve reducing egocentrism, thereby eliminating the tendency to claim more than one deserves. If the increased accessibility of one's own efforts were in part responsible for exaggerated claims of contribution, a simple strategy for reducing these claims would be to increase the accessibility of others' contributions relative to one's own. After all, the tendency to overestimate one's contributions is heightened when people specifically focus on their own contributions (Burger & Rodman, 1983; Ross & Sicoly, 1979).

Consistent with the effectiveness of this strategy, individuals in a series of experiments who were asked to think about, or allocate responsibility to, each member of a group before allocating responsibility to themselves were less egocentrically biased than those not asked to first consider others' contributions (Savitsky et al., 2005). For example, undergraduate marketing students thought they had contributed less effort to writing, creating ideas, administration, and overall work in a group project if they first considered the other group members' contributions in each of these areas, than if they did not do so. In another experiment, debate team members in a nationwide competition were asked to allocate responsibility for the group's overall efforts. Before doing so, participants in one condition were asked to list the

initials of each of the other group members and to simultaneously think about each of those member's contributions, whereas participants in the other condition were not asked to do so. Consistent with egocentric assessments of responsibility, self-allocated responsibility for overall effort among those who did not think about others' contributions summed to 156% – considerably higher than is logically possible. Self-allocated responsibility of those asked to think about others' contributions, in contrast, summed to only 106% – considerably closer to the 100% figure demanded by reality.

In addition to reducing egocentric assessments of responsibility, perspective taking has also been beneficial in reducing self-centered and self-serving assessments more generally. For example, people instructed to take the perspective of a stereotyped group member showed weaker stereotypic biases toward stereotyped groups and increased positive judgments toward outgroups (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). In another study, people who were able to easily adopt the perspective of a person in the midst of an embarrassing blunder judged that person more charitably than people who were unable to adopt this person's perspective (Epley, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2002). Finally, adopting the perspective of a person in need is a critical antecedent for helping that person (for a review, see Batson, 1994). Experiencing another person's pain by considering their perspective and empathizing appears to create genuine altruism – behavior intended to benefit another person rather than simply to benefit the self. Considering the perspective of other people, particularly those dissimilar to the self, appears to not only debias social thought, but to decrease self-interested behavior as well.

In addition, being especially skillful at considering another's perspective can increase a person's success in some interpersonal interactions. People who are naturally inclined to adopt another's perspective, for instance, are more likely to unconsciously mimic another person's behavior during social interactions, and this mimicry increases liking and a sense of cohesion between interaction partners (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). And negotiators who are naturally inclined to adopt another's perspective are also more likely to gain strategic advantage from understanding the perspective of the other side (and other interested parties; Neale & Bazerman, 1983). In one study, the perspective-taking ability of both parties in a bargaining situation influenced the level of success they achieved when part of their success was driven by their ability to understand the perspective of an arbitrator (Neale & Bazerman, 1983). Negotiators with high perspective-taking ability achieved final contracts with higher dollar values (a better outcome).

All of these results suggest that desirable outcomes can emerge when people adopt another's perspective by putting themselves in the other

person's shoes. Such perspective taking decreases egocentrism, reduces stereotyping and prejudice, increases charitable behavior toward others, and facilitates social interaction. So far, so good for perspective taking as an elixir for social conflict.

The Bad

The research reviewed thus far shows that there are circumstances under which perspective taking can help one understand the other's point of view, decrease bias, and improve social interaction and negotiation outcomes. Perspective taking would therefore seem like a useful strategy for overcoming the obvious problems that can result from egocentric assessments of fairness or responsibility. After all, when people believe they contributed more than they actually did – or more than their collaborators believe they did – they may feel under appreciated or think that the rest of the group is taking advantage of them. In addition, those who appear to take more credit than they deserve for a group accomplishment are less well liked and thought to be less desirable collaborators (Forsyth et al., 1981). Any strategy that allows better calibration of actual efforts should help a group to avoid the tension that results from this form of egocentrism.

However, a growing body of evidence calls into question the notion that perspective taking always leads to more positive outcomes. The research discussed in the previous section requires participants to put themselves in another person's shoes, and imagine themselves in a different perspective. However, much of perspective taking does not involve putting oneself in another's shoes, but rather trying to anticipate what another person is thinking, feeling, or likely to be doing some time in the future. In these contexts, the impact of egocentrism in social interaction depends critically on what people see when they look into the minds of others. When people feel they have contributed more than their peers, for instance, actively considering the (relatively small) contributions of others in the group might actually increase perceptions of inequity and unfairness.

We tested these potentially deleterious effects in one experiment on MBA student study groups and in another experiment on author groups of academic journal publications (Caruso, Epley, & Bazerman, 2005). Between both groups, inducing individuals to think about their collaborators was successful at reducing egocentric judgments of responsibility. That is, those led to think about the contributions of each of their other group members reported doing less work than those who only reported their own efforts. However, the high-credit claimers who engaged in perspective taking

actually reported being *less satisfied* with the group and *less likely* to want to work with the group in future, whereas low-credit claimers showed the opposite pattern. No relationship was found between the amount of claiming and satisfaction or interest in future collaboration for those who did not engage in perspective taking.

It appears that asking those who feel they have carried the bulk of the workload to think about the efforts of their other group members can backfire. Despite reducing judgments of one's own contribution, such a strategy may also draw attention to how little others are thought to have contributed. Such an uneven division of labor in a collaborative endeavor could be seen as a violation of equity and fairness, and the strong desire for proportionality between what one contributes and what one receives (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Whether or not perspective taking increases or decreases satisfaction with the group experience will therefore depend on what people see when they consider the perspectives of other group members. When group members are rewarded equally for a group's outcome, those who come to see that they were carrying others along (high-credit claimers) reported being less satisfied, whereas those who come to see how much they were helped by others (low-credit claimers) reported being more satisfied with the group.

Notice, however, that not all groups are organized like cooperative groups such that each member is rewarded equally for the group outcome, and the effect of perspective taking on satisfaction might therefore depend on the nature of the group in question. Competitive groups, in contrast to cooperative groups, receive rewards as a function of individual performance, and the victor gets the spoils. In these competitive contexts, thinking about others' contributions might have a very different effect on satisfaction among high-credit claimers, such that those who have done a considerable amount of work might be *more* satisfied if led to think about others' contributions. Indeed, a study in which participants were asked to think of competitive versus cooperative group projects in which they had recently worked showed that the inverse relationship between group satisfaction and credit claiming only existed among perspective takers in cooperative groups and not in competitive groups (Caruso et al., 2005). In collaborative groups such as the MBA study groups and journal authors reported earlier, members expect each other to contribute to the extent they can to the group's work; those who are perceived to be loafers in these cooperative groups should therefore be particularly unwanted because of the clear inequity between effort and rewards. In competitive groups, on the other hand, rewards are typically reaped by those who perform the best rather than by the

group as a whole. In such settings, feeling responsible for the majority of the group's accomplishments may translate to greater satisfaction and desire to continue working with this group in the future.

If the impact of perspective taking depends on what people see when attempting to understand another's mind, then the appropriateness of their behavior depends largely on the accuracy with which people make inferences about others' thoughts and feelings. Of course, the human mind is arguably the most complicated machine the world will ever see, and psychologists have documented a number of ways in which people's intuitions about the workings of these complicated minds are systematically miscalibrated. Most important for this discussion, research on naïve realism suggests that people view their perceptions of the world as a simple and unbiased reflection of its objective properties, rather than as subjective interpretations that are influenced by one's beliefs, attitudes, self-interest, or ideologies (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995; Ross and Ward, 1995, 1996).

Notice that this general egocentric bias – naïve realism – has an interesting implication when partisans in the midst of an ideological dispute are asked to think about the thoughts and feelings of their opponents. If people are naïve realists, then those who view the world very differently are likely to be seen as irrational, illogical, or motivationally distorted by self-interest (Pronin, Puccio, & Ross, 2002). Environmentalists, for instance, cannot understand why industrialists fail to see the value of old-growth forests, just as industrialists cannot understand why environmentalists fail to recognize the value of additional jobs from a power plant to be built over the old-growth forests. Given tendencies for naïve realism, it is easy to understand how cynical attributions about the opposing side in partisan disputes could arise. Partisans in the midst of an ideological dispute simply fail to recognize that the judgments and decisions of their opponents are actually based on a different set of beliefs and assumptions about the information under consideration.

These negative attributions about an opponent's thoughts and beliefs are doubly unfortunate because such negative attributions also lead partisans to overestimate the degree of difference between two opposing sides. Democrats, for instance, tend to believe that the average republican is more conservative than the average republican actually is. The same goes for republicans who believe that the average democrat is more left-leaning than the average democrat actually is (Robinson et al., 1995). When considering the perspective of another party, systematic misperceptions about the party's true thoughts and feelings may lead the perspective-taker to conclude that an adversary is more biased than he or she actually is, thereby undermining any beneficial effects of considering the other's point of view.

Research suggests that biased perspective taking does not just happen among partisans in disputes, but may also happen among the closest of friends due to at least one common misperception about the determinants of thought and action. Although psychologists have devoted considerable time to delineating both the cognitive and motivational factors that guide thought and action, the intuitive psychologist in daily life generally assumes that a person's behavior is guided by self-interested motivation. Wants, goals, needs, drives, and motives are firmly entrenched theories for the intuitive psychologist, whereas judgmental heuristics, selective attention, situational priming, and other cognitive determinants of thought and action are not. This means that people often overestimate the extent to which others' thoughts are guided by their self-interest (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1998; Ratner & Miller, 2001), a phenomenon Kruger and Gilovich (1999) termed *naïve cynicism*. Returning to responsibility allocations for collective endeavors, for instance, married couples believed that their spouses would claim more credit for desirable activities that occur in their married lives, and claim less responsibility for undesirable activities, than they actually did. Similarly, debate team members assumed that their teammates would be more willing to accept responsibility for positive outcomes, and more likely to shirk responsibility for negative outcomes, than they actually were.

Adopting another's perspective by actively thinking about their thoughts may therefore have negative consequences. As Kruger and Gilovich (1999) explain, "Because people's assumptions of bias are far more unflattering than their actual biases, the end result will be more social conflict, more distrust, and more pointed fingers than are warranted" (p. 751). Support for this claim comes from a study of couples experiencing major conflicts in their marriages (Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000). The researchers coded discussions between spouses about an issue with which they were particularly dissatisfied. Results indicated that such couples rarely showed evidence of taking the other's perspective. To make matters worse, in the rare times when a member of the couple did consider the other's perspective, it seemed to do more harm than good. The authors explained that "individuals only occasionally considered the partner's perspective and when they did, it was often in a manner that was likely to inflame dissatisfaction and anger" (Sillars et al., 2000, p. 491). Indeed, one study found that husbands who were especially likely to perceive critical and rejecting thoughts when adopting the perspective of a woman were also more likely to be physically abusive toward their wives (Schweinle, Ickes, & Bernstein, 2002).

It therefore appears that some forms of perspective taking may have deleterious consequences, creating negative and cynical attributions about others' thoughts that can harm social relationships and interactions. If the only negative side to perspective taking was that people are not very good at it in certain circumstances, we might well conclude that the good (reduced egocentric judgments) outweighs the bad (cynical attributions of others). Unfortunately, it seems that the behavioral consequences of misguided attributions of others can be quite costly.

The Ugly

Not only do people tend to form cynical attributions when considering the thoughts of others, but they also act on these biased assumptions. The behavioral response to anticipated thoughts in another can turn out to be detrimental when the perspective taker does not like what he sees in the mind of another person. Imagine taking the perspective of an opponent or bitter rival against whom one is competing for some limited resource – an environmentalist adopting the perspective of an industrialist, for instance, or a buyer adopting the perspective of a seller. In such instances, considering the opponent's perspective may not result in empathy or positive thoughts toward the other – feelings that lead to more preferential treatment of the target of perspective taking (Batson et al., 1995). Instead, the more one thinks about the opponent the more cynical and self-interested thoughts come to mind that increase the illegitimacy of the other person's perspective relative to one's own, and the more one may feel the need to actively defend their beliefs in the face of another's (assumed) self-interested actions.

Evidence supporting this suggestion comes from research on commons dilemmas that force people to choose between monetary gain for themselves and gain for their group. In one experiment, participants in a group had the choice between cooperating to obtain a better outcome for the group and competing to obtain a higher gain for the self at the expense of the group. Findings from this study showed that engaging in discussion about the game and strategies for maximizing payoffs can decrease self-interested competition and increase overall group gain (Dawes, McTavish, & Shaklee, 1977). This result alone might suggest that interaction among opponents, in which each side can hear the perspective of the other, leads to better outcomes. Notably, however, those who defected anticipated about four times as much defection from others compared to those who cooperated. This discovery suggests that people use their own behavior as information about the likely actions of other people. When the behavior of another is predicted to be competitive, scrutinizing the perspective of the other person could in turn affect what is perceived to be the appropriate action for the self (in this case, to defect).

Similar evidence exists for a *reciprocity norm* in bargaining interactions (Esser & Komorita, 1975). Quite simply, the behavior of one person often leads to similar behavior in another. Reciprocating the cooperative and competitive behavior of an opponent tends to encourage the other party to behave more cooperatively over time in order to avoid the negative consequences of competitive behavior. Crucial to this interaction, obviously, is whether one perceives that the other person will adhere to or violate the norm. People are likely to be more charitable and cooperative toward a person perceived to cooperative, but are likely to be more cynical and competitive toward a person perceived to be competitive. For instance, participants in one experiment showed a stronger egocentric bias when allocating responsibility to the self relative to "opponents" (i.e., participants claimed more responsibility for themselves than others), but a decreased egocentric bias when allocating to "teammates" (Gill, 1980). This "exception to egocentrism" reiterates the notion that how one perceives the other parties is crucial in determining one's level of egocentric behavior.

It should be noted that the structure of the interaction may also play a role in determining how one will respond to expectations about another's behavior. For example, when negotiators expect that their opponent will be very competitive, they may actually behave less competitively by negotiating less aggressively and agreeing to lower payoffs (Diekmann, Tenbrunsel, & Galinsky, 2003). In those experiments, participants actually interacted with each other to negotiate outcomes for themselves. In contrast, most of the other studies reviewed here involve one-shot social dilemmas (such as a prisoner's dilemma game), where competitive behavior protects one's own self interest regardless of the behavior of the other party. In a true negotiation context, however, each party has the power to walk away and leave the other with nothing. The threat of impasse, combined with the various issues that arise in social interaction when one's behavior is influenced by the behavior of another, may help explain why someone might decide to behave less competitively when expecting to negotiate with a highly competitive opponent (Diekmann et al., 2003).

Together, these results make it clear that assumptions of others' self-interested or cooperative behavior may be as important in shaping a person's own behavior in a social interaction as that person's *actual* self-interest. The very assumption, in fact, that people should be concerned with self-interest (a popular assertion in Western cultures) may serve to

strengthen and perpetuate a *norm of self-interest* (Miller, 1999). Just considering the existence of material self-interest makes the self-interest norm salient – which in turn encourages people to act on self-interest – even if doing so is contrary to one's private preferences. This logic provides an explanation for the findings discussed earlier that the expectation of another's defection correlated with one's own choice to defect in a commons dilemma game (Dawes et al., 1977).

Consistent with this norm of self-interest, Miller (1999) cites evidence (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970) implying that people fear they will be exploited by the selfish behavior of others if they behave charitably, and are therefore motivated to behave selfishly. This explanation suggests one problem for overcoming self-serving reasoning in moral dilemmas. Even people who are not prone to acting on self-interest might be enticed to do so when they believe that others will act selfishly. Cheating on one's taxes, failing to recycle, or driving gas-guzzling cars might all be exacerbated by a belief that "everyone else is doing it." This temptation to act on self-interest should be especially strong when selfish behavior is the self-maximizing response to a situation, such as in most social dilemmas. In such instances, increased focus on both the intentions of another person ("he's likely to cheat") and on the structure of the game ("it's in my best interest to cheat") will most likely work in concert to encourage selfish behavior.

Even when behaving selfishly is not necessarily the rational response, experience with such situations can condition competitive conduct. Miller (1999) concludes that "the experience of experimental games or any similarly structured social relationship thus reinforces people's belief that individuals are 'out for themselves' and leaves them even more convinced that pursuing a competitive orientation is the rational and appropriate thing to do" (p. 1056). Given the tendency to infer cynical motives from other parties in such experimental situations, it is possible that perspective taking could exacerbate negative attributions toward others and actually increase self-interested behavior. Adopting another person's perspective may make everyday reasoners less egocentric, but it may actually increase the extent to which their behavior is self-serving.

Just such a pattern of results was found in a simulated social dilemma in which different fishing associations met to determine how much each association should reduce its current harvesting level in order to preserve the species and retain long-term profits. In the original demonstration (Wade–Benzoni, Tenbrunsel, & Bazerman, 1996), participants showed signs of egocentrism by claiming they deserved more than an objectively fair share of the limited catch. Furthermore, the degree of egocentrism predicted the

magnitude of resulting overfishing, and lower overall outcomes in the simulated society.

In a subsequent study using this paradigm, half the participants were told to take the perspective of the other fishing associations with whom they were negotiating (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2005). This manipulation significantly reduced egocentric perceptions of fairness, such that participants claimed that it was objectively fair for them to take less. But despite this claim, the perspective taking groups actually harvested over 25% more fish than the groups that did not explicitly think about the other associations! This selfish behavior led to the hypothetical destruction of the fish stocks and lower average profits for the firms in the simulation.

A follow-up study clarified why perspective-taking participants would claim it was fair for them to take less, but then actually take more of the fishing stocks. In this study, participants imagined being part of this negotiation and anticipated the amount of fish others in the negotiation would take. Results indicated that perspective-taking participants expected others to take significantly more of the fishing stocks and behave more selfishly than participants in the control condition. These cynical attributions were also positively correlated with participants' own behavior – the more of a fixed resource participants expected others would take, the more of those resources participants took for themselves. Given that people are prone to predict that they have and will behave more ethically and desirably than others (e.g., Epley & Dunning, 2000), perspective taking may unfortunately serve to give people an excuse for egoistic behavior when they anticipate it in their opponents. In the case of the simulated fishing negotiation, the environment – and, ironically, the profitability of the firms involved – was better off when the representatives *did not* consider their competitors' perspectives.

Similar results were found in a laboratory version of a commons dilemma (Epley et al., 2005). Participants in this experiment came to the lab to bake chocolate-chip cookies, ostensibly sharing ingredients with a group of five other bakers. The key element of this experiment was that there was only a small amount of the premium ingredient (Godiva chocolate chips), and thus participants could choose to selfishly take all of the premium ingredient or share it with their other group members. Some participants – those in the competitive condition – were told that they were competing against the other group members for the best final product, and the winner would receive a $100 prize. Of these participants, half were induced to take the perspective of the other members and anticipate how much of the premium chocolate chips they believed was fair for them to take, whereas the other half were not

asked to do so. All participants in this experiment believed they were the first person in the group to select their ingredients, and therefore all faced the same set of ingredients from which to make their selections.

Consistent with the results of the fishing simulation, participants in this condition who took the perspective of the other members claimed it was fair for them to take *less* of the limited resource (premium Godiva chocolate chips), but ended up taking *more* than those who performed no perspective taking. In essence, considering the thoughts of others caused them to selfishly increase their personal gain at the expense of the group when the group members were competing against one another. Once again, the increase in selfish behavior was attributable to higher estimates of how many Godiva chips the other group members were expected to take.

Such observed asymmetries between moral judgment and moral behavior may be particularly problematic for attempts to eliminate bias in moral situations, and join a fairly long list of examples in which attitudes do not map onto behavior. For instance, undergraduates in one study universally expressed anger at the lack of adequate student housing on campus, even when they were not personally affected by the problem. However, those who were personally put out by the situation were much more likely to take direct *action* to encourage the university to fix the problem (Regan & Fazio, 1977). But the results of the fishing and cooking studies are somewhat more surprising because participants did not simply behave in a manner unrelated to their stated attitudes, they acted in a manner perfectly opposed to their stated attitudes. This occurred because adopting another's perspective created cynical attributions about others' behavior that led them to behave selfishly in return – even if it was against their better judgment of what was objectively fair. The self-fulfilling nature of such skeptical reasoning helps explain the lack of connection between judgments of fairness and actual behavior and underscores the difficulty in breaking the cycle of cynicism that leads to self-serving acts. Sometimes, it appears, groups would be much better off if their members simply kept their egocentric blinders on.

IMPLICATIONS

The empirical research reviewed in this chapter suggests that egocentric biases in social judgment can be reduced by actively adopting another's perspective, but that less self-serving behavior does not follow as an obvious result across all contexts. Faced with the heightened accessibility of the contributions and entitlements of other parties, people's overall judgments

should reflect less self-serving attitudes compared to a group that has not considered the situation from another's point of view. However, the same process of perspective taking may give rise to cynical theories about the probable behavior of others. These theories could induce the perspective takers to behave more selfishly in turn.

The research discussed in this chapter highlights the complicated relationship between judgmental biases and psychological or behavioral outcomes. Often, discussions are reduced to a question of whether judgmental biases are strictly beneficial or strictly harmful. However, egocentric biases may be good in some contexts and bad in others, depending on the individuals in the group and on the specific situation in which the group is working. Overly generous allocations of credit to the self can be harmful for happiness and future collaborations among some participants (i.e., high-credit claiming authors), but helpful for others (i.e., low-credit claiming authors). Perspective taking may decrease selfish behavior by increasing the likelihood that a person will help someone in need, or actually increase it by leading people to behave more competitively against other group members (as in the cookie-baking experiment). A unilateral call for reducing egocentric biases in group contexts may not be the foolproof solution for eliminating group conflict that a cursory analysis of perspective taking might suggest.

If the negative features of perspective taking in groups involve the cynical or self-interested theories they activate about others, then a more fruitful approach would be to either (1) alter the cynical theories activated by perspective taking, or (2) to preempt them altogether through institutional interventions. One way to alter the cynical theories activated by perspective taking is to frame group interactions as cooperative, rather than competitive. A positive frame reduces the cynical thoughts about the probable behavior of others. This exact result was observed in a second group of participants in the cookie experiment described earlier (Epley et al., 2005). These participants in the cooperative condition were told that they were working together with their other group members so that the group with the best overall cookies would win the $100 prize. Just like participants who felt they were competing against others alone, cooperative participants who adopted other group members' perspectives showed a decrease in what they judged as fair for them to take; however, unlike the competitive participants, perspective takers who felt they were cooperating actually showed a slight decrease in selfish behavior (compared to the control group). Viewing the task as cooperative mitigated the cynical attributions about other group members, such that cooperative participants did not think other group

members would be as selfish as did competitive participants. As a result, perspective-taking participants in a cooperative condition apparently did not feel the need to behave as selfishly as perspective-taking participants in the competitive condition.

Notice, however, that this difference in framing was accompanied by an actual change in the structure of the game. That is, those in the cooperative condition would probably receive the greatest benefit with an equal distribution of the resources, whereas those in the competitive condition would receive the greatest benefit with an unequal distribution. As such, perspective taking may have highlighted the difference in the actual rules of the game and simply increased participants' rational response, rather than activating different theories about others' behavior, as we have suggested.

To isolate the operation of cynical theories without altering participants' actual self-interest, we created a new social dilemma game that manipulated only the name of the game and kept the payoff structure identical between conditions (Epley et al., 2005). In particular, participants in this study were asked to imagine that they were representing different companies in the fuel cell business, and they met with three others to negotiate potential alliances. When finished, participants were asked to indicate how much of their personal profit they would sacrifice to support the alliance as a whole. All participants knew that they would be paid based on their *individual* profits. The only difference was that some groups were initially told they would be competing with each other in "The Strategic Competition Game," whereas other groups were told they would be working with each other in "The Cooperative Alliance Game" (see Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004). Once again, those who received the competitive framing of the interaction behaved more selfishly – they contributed less of their personal resources for the good of the group – than those who received the cooperative framing of the game. This difference in behavior between conditions helps to rule out the possibility that perspective taking merely increases the rational response to the situation, as the structure of the game (and hence the rational choice of behavior) is the same across conditions. This research therefore suggests that the actual payoff structure of the game need not be different for creating the harmful effects of a competitive mindset, providing yet another reason to frame group tasks as cooperative rather than competitive.

Notice that such framing may be relatively simple because so many groups, like the fuel cell companies described in the experiment, operate with mixed motives on the same tasks – both have intentions to cooperate with other group members as well as intentions to compete with them (Bazerman, Mannix, & Thompson, 1988; Mannix, Thompson, & Bazerman,

1989; Thompson, Mannix, & Bazerman, 1988). Recognizing the mixed-motive nature of most groups makes it relatively easy for perspective-taking interventions to target areas of cooperative interest where other group members help to create overall value for the group.

In addition to simple reframing, an old but effective strategy for promoting cooperative behavior and reducing cynical attributions is the introduction of superordinate goals. In the classic experiment of group dynamics, the interactions of two groups of boys were studied at a summer camp (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Simply dividing boys into different camps ultimately resulted in substantial competition, conflict, and hostility. Perhaps not surprisingly given the current discussion, mere contact between the groups only resulted in increased acts of aggression and continued intergroup conflict. The prevailing friction between groups was only reduced in the final phase of the experiment, when the groups were dependent upon each other to succeed at a task that neither group could accomplish alone (such as attaining drinking water). When faced with a common problem, the groups openly discussed the issue, listened to each other's advice, and determined an efficient solution to the problem.

In the presence of a superordinate goal, perspective taking can create even more benefit by reducing egocentric biases in judgment. In fact, it is possible that the cooperative structure of the cookie experiment mentioned earlier created just such a superordinate goal in the eyes of the participants, which contributed to their relative selflessness in favor of the overall good of their group. Benefits of perspective taking might be particularly pronounced when the group members actually have to work together to determine a joint solution or agree on a group outcome, rather than being left to their own devices to make individual decisions (how many chocolate chips to take) that affect the group. When consensus is needed, it is possible that having to give serious consideration to the thoughts of others might produce outcomes that incorporate unique perspectives and promote more integrative solutions (Gruenfeld & Preston, 2000).

Finally, it is possible that simply learning about the automatic nature of egocentric judgments can alter the cynical attributions that result from perspective taking in competitive contexts. To the extent that a person recognizes that egocentric biases in resource allocation or fairness decisions can be readily produced by the cold calculus of cognition we have outlined, cynical attributions about other group members' sinister intentions may be reduced. Whether understanding the cognitive rather than motivational bases of such ethical judgments is actually sufficient to reduce the cynical attributions that result, however, is currently unknown.

In addition to altering the cynical theories activated by perspective taking in group contexts, it might also be possible to create institutional barriers that either preempt their activation, or reduce their influence. Notice that most of the evidence for the "ugly" side of perspective taking comes from contexts in which parties make independent or anonymous decisions. Many groups, however, can be asked to make decisions (or do so naturally) in face-to-face interactions, and can also publicly commit to binding agreements. In these contexts, the cynical attributions that lead people to anticipate greedy or selfish behavior in others are largely preempted. Others have already committed to a course of action, or have publicly aired their preferences and priorities. In the presence of such institutional controls, perspective taking should reduce egocentric biases in resource claiming or fairness judgments discussed earlier, and increase the likelihood of reaching a face-to-face agreement.

CONCLUSION

Understanding other people's thoughts and feelings is no easy feat, and it is not surprising that people make mistakes when attempting to do so. Chief among these mistakes is the fact that people fail to think about others' thoughts and feelings. Following close behind, however, is the tendency to make overly cynical attributions about others' intentions or motives when one is actually led to think about others' thoughts and feelings. Together, these twin biases suggest that inducing people to adopt the perspective of other group members may not always have uniformly desirable effects. Focusing less on one's own thoughts and feelings can reduce egocentric biases, to be sure, but it can also increase selfish behavior as people react to the presumed selfish or greedy behavior of others that has now been made salient. We have all certainly heard that one should put oneself in the other person's shoes amidst conflict or dispute. More care, however, should be taken when offering such advice. Sometimes it is better to stay firmly planted in one's own shoes.

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