CHAPTER 1

Four Theories in Search of Ethnocentrism

What is the nature of ethnocentrism? How does ethnocentrism arise? And when—under what conditions—does ethnocentrism become important to politics? An adequate theory of ethnocentrism must provide convincing answers to all three questions: nature, origins, and consequences.

With this obligation in mind, our principal business in this chapter is to work through the major theories that claim to speak directly to ethnocentrism. In the pages ahead, we examine ethnocentrism from four distinct theoretical perspectives:

- Ethnocentrism as a consequence of realistic group conflict
- Ethnocentrism as an outgrowth of the authoritarian personality
- Ethnocentrism as an expression of social identity
- Ethnocentrism as an outcome of natural selection

As we will see, no single theory supplies completely satisfying answers to all three questions. Each, however, offers valuable insights, lessons for us to carry forward. Grappling with these alternative points of view here will pave the way to a more adequate theoretical framework for ethnocentrism, which we develop in chapter 2. To arrive at this better understanding of ethnocentrism today, we turn to the past, to traditions of explanation associated with William Graham Sumner, Daniel Levinson, Henri Tajfel, and Edward O. Wilson.

ETHNOCENTRISM DEFINED

But first a few words about ethnocentrism itself. Without a clear conception of our object of study, we could find ourselves in the unfortunate position of the Javanese folktale figure "Stupid Boy," who, as Clifford Geertz tells the tale, "having been counseled by his mother to seek a quiet wife, returned with a corpse." A corpse makes a quiet wife, all right, but surely this was not what mother had in mind.[1] Let's try to do better. When we say that

ethnocentrism plays an important role in American public opinion, just what is it that we are arguing for?

Ethnocentrism is a mental habit. It is a predisposition to divide the human world into in-groups and out-groups. It is a readiness to reduce society to us and them. Or rather, it is a readiness to reduce society to us *versus* them. This division of humankind into in-group and out-group is not innocuous. Members of in-groups (until they prove otherwise) are assumed to be virtuous: friendly, cooperative, trustworthy, safe, and more. Members of out-groups (until they prove otherwise) are assumed to be the opposite: unfriendly, uncooperative, unworthy of trust, dangerous, and more. Symbols and practices become objects of attachment and pride when they belong to the in-group and objects of condescension, disdain, and (in extreme cases) hatred when they belong to out-groups. Ethnocentrism constitutes a readiness to act in favor of in-groups and in opposition to out-groups; it charts a safe path through a social world that may seem uncomfortable, difficult, and, at times, perilous.[2]

People differ—reliably and stably—in the degree to which they see the social world this way. At least since Darwin, it has been axiomatic in the biological sciences to regard living organisms not as constant classes but as variable populations. This point applies to barnacles and to human beings alike. People vary from one another in all sorts of ways: height, color, sociability, intelligence, and more—including ethnocentrism.

People vary from one another *incrementally*. It would be a mistake to conceive of ethnocentrism as a type and to assume that people either are ethnocentric or that they are not. People are more or less ethnocentric. They vary in the degree to which they reduce the social world to in-groups and out-groups, to us and them. Ethnocentrism is a quantity, not a kind.[3]

Ethnocentrism should not be interpreted as irrational, the twisted expression of repressed hostilities and primeval fears. Ethnocentrism is not a sickness. We do not require a therapist's technique to reveal it or psychodynamic processes to explain it. Ethnocentrism is normal. It is, one might say, a "natural" way to look upon the social world.

Finally, ethnocentrism is a *general* predisposition. It is in this respect that ethnocentrism differs from prejudice. In contrast to prejudice, ethnocentrism "has to do not only with numerous groups toward which the individual has hostile opinions and attitudes but, equally important, with groups toward which he is positively disposed." Moreover, while prejudice is hostility directed at a specific group, ethnocentrism refers to a "relatively consistent frame of mind concerning 'aliens' generally." Thus when we turn from race prejudice or anti-Semitism or any other particular social animosity, on the one hand, to ethnocentrism, on the other, we come face to face with "prejudice, broadly conceived" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 102).[4]

ETHNOCENTRISM AS A CONSEQUENCE OF REALISTIC GROUP CONFLICT

Defined this way, how might ethnocentrism—prejudice, broadly conceived—arise? Looking for answers, let's turn first to William Graham Sumner. As we noted in the introduction, Sumner introduced the term *ethnocentrism* into the social science lexicon. But we turn to him here because he also had interesting things to say about ethnocentrism's origins.

In Sumner's view, ethnocentrism included both in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. The two were connected inextricably. Both, Sumner argued, arose out of conflict, inevitable in a Hobbesian world of scarce resources:

> The insiders in a we-group are in a relation of peace, order, law, government, and industry, to each other. Their relation to all outsiders, or others-groups, is one of war and plunder. . . . Sentiments are produced to correspond. Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without—all grow together, common products of the same situation. ([1906] 2002, pp. 12–13)

This is Sumner's principal claim—that in-group solidarity *and* out-group hostility grow out of intergroup competition—and it remains a central feature of contemporary versions of realistic group conflict theory. From this perspective, antagonism between groups is rooted in actual conflict. Groups have incompatible goals, and they compete for scarce resources. Conflict is most intense where competition is keenest, where contending groups have the most at stake. In a way that would no doubt earn Sumner's approval, contemporary realistic group conflict theory treats ethnic and racial groups as "vehicles for the pursuit of interest in modern pluralist societies . . . participants in ongoing competition for control of economic, political, and social structures" (Giles and Evans 1986, pp. 470, 471).[5]

Sumner provided abundant examples of ethnocentrism, first in *Folkways* (1906) and then later in *The Science of Society* (Sumner, Keller, and Davie 1927). Of course, establishing that ethnocentrism is commonplace (Sumner was sure that ethnocentrism was universal) is not the same thing as explaining its origins. Was Sumner right to propose that ethnocentrism arises from group conflict?

Let's start with in-group solidarity. Sumner was emphatic that in-group solidarity arises from conflict between groups over scarce resources. In one form or another, this proposition can be found in the writings of Simmel, Marx, Sorel, and Dahrendorf, among others. But is it, as Dahrendorf has written, really a "general law" (1964, p. 58)? No. In *The Functions of Social Conflict* (1956), Coser argued that conflict with outsiders often leads to

in-group solidarity, but not invariably. Conflict can also lead to demoralization, and in extreme cases, disintegration. Empirical studies suggest that Coser was correct. Conflict generates in-group solidarity only under certain conditions: when in-group solidarity is above some threshold before threat materializes, when threat is seen as a menace to the entire group, and when authoritative leadership seeks to mobilize solidarity (M. Brewer and Campbell 1976; Sherif et al. 1961; Stein 1976).

What of Sumner's second proposition, that conflict is the primary cause of out-group animosity? It turns out that there is empirical support aplenty for this. Consider, as one example, the remarkable field experiments carried out by Muzafer Sherif. In the most famous of these, Sherif recruited two dozen eleven-year-old boys for what was advertised as a summer camp experience. The boys were carefully screened and were mutually unacquainted. Prior to the experiment, they were randomly assigned to one of two groups and then transported separately to Robbers Cave, a state park in Oklahoma. There each group set about various activities designed to build solidarity. The boys went on hikes together, pitched tents, made meals, and built a rope bridge. All of this took place under the gentle direction and watchful eye of experimental assistants posing as camp counselors, who spent their off hours surreptitiously recording detailed observations of the day's proceedings. During this first stage of the experiment, which lasted one week, the two groups of boys occupied different sites within the park and were kept largely unaware of each other's presence.

During stage two, the Rattlers and the Eagles, as the groups now called themselves, were brought into a relationship of conflict through a series of staged contests. Points were awarded for victories on the athletic field, for the best skit, and for the tidiest cabins. The Rattlers and the Eagles were informed that at the end of their stay, the winning group was to be awarded a trophy and each member of the winning group given a splendid prize. The two groups were now taking their meals together, and at the entrance to the common mess hall the results of the day's competition were ostentatiously displayed and added to the ongoing total.

In short order, the Rattlers and the Eagles began to compete fiercely with one another. They exchanged insults, referring to each other as "rotten pukes" and "dirty bastards." They carried out midnight raids to tear up each other's cabins. They celebrated their victories and rationalized their defeats. They wrestled and fought each other, to the point where counselors had to step in to prevent injury. Sherif had predicted that the experimental creation of conflict would generate out-group hostility, but we suspect that he got rather more than he had bargained for.[6]

Realistic group conflict theory is also supported by the most robust empirical finding in the entire American race relations literature: that of a strong

connection between the threat that blacks seem to pose to whites, on the one hand, and the hostility of whites' response, on the other. In *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, V. O. Key showed in masterly detail that politics in the American South through the middle of the twentieth century was most reactionary in the so-called black belt: those regions of the South characterized by rich soil where the plantation economy had flourished and black people lived in concentrated numbers. It was in the black belt where, as Key put it (1949, p. 5), whites possessed "the deepest and most immediate concern with the maintenance of white supremacy." Accordingly, it was within the black belt where support for secession and war was most adamant, where the subsequent drive for black disfranchisement came with greatest force, and where defense of segregation in the 1950s and '60s was most ferocious.[7]

Acknowledging that realistic group conflict theory represents a valuable perspective on social conflict, a major obstacle stands in the way of its application here. Examined closely, realistic group conflict theory has little to say about *generalized* hostility. Why should there be ethnocentrism—prejudice, broadly conceived—in the first place? Hostility directed at a specific group, yes, but hostility in general? Virtually all the empirical support for group conflict theory comes from one group's reaction to the threat posed by one other. In the altogether typical case, realistic group conflict theory takes up pairs of opposing groups: the Rattlers and the Eagles at summer camp, whites and blacks in the American South, and so on. Insofar as ethnocentrism entails hostility directed not at a single out-group but at many out-groups, these applications of realistic group conflict theory, however successful they may be in explaining particular instances of conflict, simply do not speak to ethnocentrism as we conceive it. From the perspective of group conflict theory, generalized prejudice is possible only in the presence of multiple and simultaneous intergroup conflicts. But we are interested in ethnocentrism in precisely this sense. Ethnocentrism is generalized prejudice. If our question is why some people are ethnocentric while others are not, why some but not others are predisposed to take many kinds of difference as warrant for condescension or contempt, then group conflict theory cannot take us very far. More promising, as we are about to see, is the theory of authoritarianism.[8]

ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN OUTGROWTH OF THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, who together produced the monumental study of the authoritarian personality (1950), lived in a more precarious world than did William Graham Sumner. Their study was launched in the early 1940s in the United

States against a backdrop of horrific events: crushing economic depression, cataclysmic war, and the deliberate liquidation of the Jewish population of Europe. Frenkel-Brunswik, one of the principal architects of the study, fled Vienna shortly after Hitler's rise to power. She was Jewish and no doubt knew anti-Semitism well. Little wonder that Adorno and his associates initiated their investigation hoping to illuminate the nature and origins of anti-Semitism and its implications for democratic society. But what began as a study of anti-Semitism ended up as an investigation of the prejudiced personality.

Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford were psychologists by training, and they organized their project around a psychological question: why do some individuals but not others find antidemocratic ideas so appealing? Taking for granted that antidemocratic ideas would be available in any society, they defined their goal to be to identify those who were drawn to antidemocratic ideas, to identify those who were repelled by such ideas, and to explain the difference.[9]

To carry out their project, Adorno's team made use of the new techniques of attitude measurement, in-depth interviewing, and rudimentary statistical analysis—methods that were unavailable to Sumner but were coming to prominence in the social sciences of their day. For theoretical inspiration, they drew primarily on psychodynamic concepts. This meant that Adorno and his colleagues were inclined to see susceptibility to antidemocratic ideas as irrational, an expression of unconscious drives, wishes, and emotional impulses. To understand antidemocratic belief, they urged, look deep into personality; and for evidence, sift through clues offered up by "dreams, fantasies, and misinterpretations of the world" (Adorno et al. 1950, pp. 8–9).

Among various antidemocratic beliefs that they might have examined, the four researchers chose anti-Semitism for their primary exhibit. Levinson took the lead in this portion of the project, and he began by formulating a set of propositions intended to capture the core of contemporary anti-Semitism.[10] He then translated these propositions into plain speech, into statements that ordinary people would recognize and that some might agree with. In final form, the anti-Semitism scale includes such claims as these:

> There are too many Jews in the various federal agencies and bureaus in Washington, and they have too much control over our national policies.
>
> Persecution of the Jews would be largely eliminated if the Jews would make really sincere efforts to rid themselves of their harmful and offensive faults.
>
> The trouble with letting Jews into a nice neighborhood is that they gradually give it a typical Jewish atmosphere.

In composing these statements, Levinson tried to avoid extreme anti-Semitism, to soften and partially disguise animosity toward Jewish people and Jewish faith by adding qualifying phrases and an occasional gesture to democratic ideals. As Roger Brown (1965, p. 483) once put it, "Each question has a kind of fair-minded and reasonable veneer. It is sometimes rather difficult to find the sting."[11]

Levinson and his associates administered their scale of garden-variety anti-Semitism to samples of college students, nurses, psychiatric patients, Kiwanis club members, schoolteachers, veterans, union members, and prison inmates. The propositions that make up the scale raise a variety of conceivable objections to Jews, some of them mutually contradictory: for example, that Jews push their way into places they do not belong, that they (at the same time) keep too much to themselves, and that they (nevertheless) must be segregated. Levinson found that people responded to the questions with impressive consistency, as if the questions were about one thing and one thing only. Some people were consistently sympathetic, while others—the majority—were consistently hostile.[12]

Levinson and his colleagues next wondered whether anti-Semitism might be associated with other varieties of prejudice. In taking up this question, the project moved from a particular animosity—anti-Semitism—to a general predisposition—what they called *ethnocentrism*. Levinson and his colleagues, unlike Sumner, were keenly interested in the possibility that some people were more ethnocentric than others. This is our interest as well. People differ from one another in all sorts of ways: height, color, sociability, intelligence, and more—including, we say with Levinson, ethnocentrism.

To see if such a thing as ethnocentrism might exist, Levinson prepared a set of propositions pertaining to a wide array of possible targets: blacks, Japanese Americans, the mentally ill, Filipinos, criminals, European refugees, "foreign ideas," and more. As in the measurement of anti-Semitism, the propositions were written in everyday language, hostility was softened, and the various complaints were phrased in ways that seemed consistent with common sense and democratic values.[13]

Levinson found considerable consistency here as well. Those Americans who insisted that blacks be kept in their place were likely also to express contempt or condescension for criminals, Japanese Americans, conscientious objectors, immigrants, foreign ideas, and all the rest—including Jews. Responses to the anti-Semitism scale and the ethnocentrism scale, Levinson discovered, were highly correlated. He concluded that "it is the total ethnocentric ideology, rather than prejudice against any single group, which requires explanation" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 122).[14]

If, as Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford say, it is ethnocentrism that requires explanation, how did they explain it? Their first move

was to argue that the striking consistency in belief that is the hallmark of ethnocentrism could be accounted for only by some underlying organizing psychological structure. Ethnocentrism could not reflect actual experience, for actual experience is too messy, too variegated, to produce such an integrated, cohesive ideology as ethnocentrism. Anti-Semitism, racism, opposition to immigration, and all the rest must be expressions of a unified and deep psychological force. Underneath ethnocentric ideology, Adorno and his team hoped to prove, was the authoritarian personality.

They began this part of the project by conducting intensive interviews with people who had scored either very high or very low on the ethnocentrism scale. The interviews were both designed and subsequently analyzed from the perspective of psychodynamic theory, and they seemed to reveal psychological inclinations—none of them flattering—that typified the ethnocentric: rigid adherence to traditional values, moralistic condemnation of those who violate convention, readiness to capitulate to established authorities (parents, bosses, "great leaders"), preoccupation with strength and power, disdain for imagination and generosity, cynicism toward human nature, and a conviction that wild and dangerous things go on in the world.

The next step was to formulate propositions to measure each of these psychological inclinations, to capture in questionnaire form the insights of the clinical interviews. According to Levinson and colleagues, this proved simple and straightforward:

> Once a hypothesis had been formulated concerning the way in which some deep-lying trend in the personality might express itself in some opinion or attitude that was dynamically, though not logically, related to prejudice against out-groups, a preliminary sketch for an item was usually not far to seek: a phrase from the daily newspaper, an utterance by an interviewee, a fragment of ordinary conversation was usually ready at hand. (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 225)

Whether or not things went quite this smoothly, the team did succeed in assembling a reliable measure of authoritarianism—the famous F scale (*F* for fascism).[15] They then proceeded to show that authoritarians—that is, people who scored high on the F scale—were in fact very likely to be both anti-Semitic and ethnocentric. Dislike of Jews, prejudice against blacks, contempt for foreigners, and similar attitudes all seem to arise out of a particular personality type, the authoritarian.

From the perspective of psychodynamic theory, ethnocentrism serves the authoritarian well. Out-groups—Jews, criminals, Japanese Americans—become convenient and safe psychological targets. Through the psychological process of displacement, such groups absorb the hostilities originally pro-

voked by the authoritarian's parents. Through projection, out-groups take on forbidden qualities—unbridled power, liberation from the demands of work, free and easy sex—those things that the authoritarian secretly wants but cannot have. Adorno and his colleagues concluded that "the political, economic, and social convictions of an individual often form a broad and coherent pattern, as if bound together by a 'mentality' or 'spirit,' " which is itself "an expression of deep-lying trends in personality."[16]

When *The Authoritarian Personality* was published, it was greeted with widespread acclaim, and then, in the space of a few years, buried under an avalanche of criticism.[17] Two complaints did most of the damage, and both are highly relevant for what we care about here: the existence of ethnocentrism and its foundations in personality. The first objection concerns sample bias. Because of limitations of funding, Adorno and colleagues were forced to rely on volunteers for their studies, and this they accomplished by working through formal organizations. The almost inevitable result was a sample that was disproportionately middle class and socially active—and therefore, perhaps, more likely to show the coherence of ideas about social groups and politics that was the study's central finding.

A second and more lethal criticism has to do with scale construction. It begins with the seemingly innocent observation that the questions that make up the anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, and F scales are formatted in identical fashion. In each instance, study participants were presented with a proposition—such as "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values that children can learn"—and asked how much they agreed or disagreed with it. This is the Likert method of opinion assessment, and in principle there is little wrong with it (Likert 1932). The lethal mistake came not in the application of the Likert procedure per se but in the writing of the specific propositions. All the propositions were written to run in the same direction. In every case, agreement indicated a propensity toward anti-Semitism or ethnocentrism or authoritarianism; in every case, disagreement indicated the opposing propensity. Writing in defense of the anti-Semitism scale in particular, Levinson argued that "since the scale attempts to measure receptivity to anti-Semitic ideology, it seemed reasonable to use only anti-Semitic statements in the scale" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 59).

Reasonable as it may have seemed at the time, this decision fatally compromises *The Authoritarian Personality*'s results. It means that the impressive figures Adorno and colleagues report on the internal consistency of their scales and, more important, the striking correlations they report on the relationship *between* the scales are inflated, perhaps egregiously so. The correlations within and between scales are partly a product of a tendency for people to agree to reasonable-sounding propositions, irrespective of their

content. This tendency, the acquiescence response set, is well documented now, as it was not at the time Levinson and company were designing their research, and its effects are surprisingly powerful.[18]

So, is there really such a thing as ethnocentrism? If there is, does it reflect antidemocratic tendencies rooted in the authoritarian personality? Though nearly a thousand pages long, strikingly ambitious in purpose and intermittently brilliant in analysis, *The Authoritarian Personality*, in the end, cannot say.

The critics of *The Authoritarian Personality* were right to point out the study's defects, and they were persuasive. But it is important to recognize that the critics thereby established that Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford failed to prove their conclusions, not that their conclusions were necessarily incorrect.[19]

According to *The Authoritarian Personality*, a primary characteristic of ethnocentrism is the generality and consistency of out-group rejection:

> It is as if the ethnocentric individual feels threatened by most of the groups to which he does not have a sense of belonging; if he cannot identify, he must oppose; if a group is not "acceptable," it is "alien."
>
> [The ethnocentric person] is prepared to reject groups with which he has never had contact; his approach to a new and strange person or culture is not one of curiosity, interest and receptivity but rather one of doubt and rejection. The feeling of difference is transformed into a sense of threat and an attitude of hostility. The new group easily becomes an out-group. (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 149)

The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* presented these points as if they were established facts, and that they had established them. We know now that they were mistaken. But, over the last five decades, in a series of studies, with measures corrected against the contaminations of response set, and for samples taken both inside and outside the United States, the generality and consistency of out-group animosity is a common result. So, for example, Americans who regard the Japanese with condescension tend to think the same about Mexicans. Russians who blame Jews for their nation's troubles also blame capitalists, dissidents, and nonethnic Russians. And on it goes. Much as Levinson and colleagues claimed more than fifty years ago, hostility toward any one group appears to be part of a broader system of belief, "a relatively consistent frame of mind concerning 'aliens' generally" (Adorno et al. 1950, p. 102).[20]

And what of their claim that ethnocentrism is an outgrowth of authoritarianism? Perhaps they were right on this point too—though arriving at this conclusion requires a reimagining of authoritarianism itself.[21]

For this we turn to Karen Stenner's book, *The Authoritarian Dynamic* (2005). Building on her work with Stanley Feldman (Feldman and Stenner 1997; Feldman 2003), Stenner offers a new and appealing conceptualization of authoritarianism. She begins by severing the connection between authoritarianism and psychodynamic theory. Stenner invites us to think of authoritarianism as arising out of a basic human dilemma. Living alongside others is an inescapable feature of human society. This leads inevitably to tension between personal autonomy and social cohesion. The problem is how to strike a proper balance between group authority and uniformity, on the one side, and individual autonomy and diversity, on the other. Authoritarians choose the former over the latter: they are inclined to glorify, encourage, and reward uniformity, while disparaging, suppressing, and punishing difference. According to Stenner, the

> overriding objective of the authoritarian is always to enhance oneness and sameness; to minimize the diversity of people, beliefs, and behaviors with which one is confronted; and to institute and defend some collective order that makes all of this possible. (2005, p. 143)

To measure authoritarianism, Stenner relies on a disarmingly straightforward method. She simply asks people to choose values that children should be encouraged to learn at home. Those who select "good manners" and "obedience" as primary virtues for children are authoritarian; those who choose "imagination" and "independence" are not.[22]

Stenner finds that authoritarianism, measured in this way, is a consistent and sometimes powerful predictor of political intolerance. Intolerance, in her analysis, includes such things as keeping "undesirables" out of the neighborhood, prohibiting dissemination of pornography, and requiring prayer in school. Authoritarianism and intolerance are consistently connected not only in the United States, but in many other places besides: in Britain, Spain, Russia, the Czech Republic, and scores of other countries. The details differ from one place to the next—for British authoritarians it is immigrants from South Asia who must be curtailed, while Russian authoritarians worry about controlling the peoples of the Caucasus—but the general pattern is much the same. From such evidence Stenner concludes that "authoritarianism is the primary determinant of general intolerance of difference worldwide" (2005, p. 133).[23]

Ethnocentrism and intolerance are not the same, and Stenner's analysis is confined entirely to the latter. She never takes up the relationship between authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. However, she does find a consistent connection between authoritarianism and many specific instances of intolerance, involving many different groups. It seems reasonable to conclude

that authoritarianism, as Stenner defines it, and ethnocentrism, as we think of it, are related.

And so, although it has taken a good long while, it seems that Adorno and colleagues may have been right all along. They were right, first of all, to presume that people differ from one another in their general outlook toward others. People are more or less ethnocentric: predisposed to react with more or less pride to their in-group and predisposed to react with more or less suspicion, condescension, and contempt to groups not their own. They were right to draw a sharp distinction between ethnocentric ideology, on the one hand, and authoritarian personality, on the other. And with Stenner's evidence in hand, perhaps they were right as well to conclude that ethnocentrism is an outgrowth, at least in part, of the authoritarian personality. These are important lessons to carry forward. At the same time, to reduce ethnocentrism *entirely* to personality would be a mistake. The personality approach misses important parts of the story of the origins of ethnocentrism, as we will see. And a preoccupation with personality is blind to the part that elites play in the mobilization of ethnocentrism.[24]

ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Skipping forward a generation, we come next to Henri Tajfel and social identity theory.[25] Tajfel was a leading figure in what came to be known as the European perspective on social psychology. He founded a Society, edited an influential monograph series, and was a prominent lecturer in Leiden, Paris, and Bologna. His ardent interest in social conflict was a product of his own experience. He was born European and Jewish; his family perished in the Holocaust. Throughout his professional career, Tajfel carried with him "memories of a raging storm" (1981, p. 7).

Tajfel was a sharp critic of American social psychology, which had become, in his judgment, "a social science practiced in a social vacuum" (1981, p. 1). To Tajfel the American turn to laboratory investigation of psychological micro-processes was a terrible mistake. Social psychology, Tajfel insisted, must "include in its theoretical and research preoccupations a direct concern with the relationship between human psychological functioning and the large-scale social processes and events which shape this functioning and are shaped by it" (1981, p. 18).

Given this line of criticism, it is ironic that Tajfel is remembered best for an experimental result from which all of society and culture and history had been deliberately obliterated. This was the so-called minimal group experiment, which questioned whether conflicts of interest were necessary to produce ethnocentrism, as Sherif and other realistic group conflict theorists

insisted. Tajfel was impressed with the results of Sherif's field experiments, but he wondered whether explicit and objective conflicts of interest were actually necessary conditions for the emergence of ethnocentrism. Tajfel's answer, supplied by the minimal group experiment, was a resounding no.

In the first stage of the experiment, participants are assigned to different groups on what must surely have appeared to them to be trivial grounds. For example, in the original experiment, Bristol teenage boys were shown a rapid sequence of slides and asked to estimate the number of dots displayed on each. Based on their answers, or so they were told, they were then were divided into two groups, those who consistently overestimated the number of dots and those who consistently underestimated them. Neither group was more accurate, they were informed, nor was the tendency to over- or underestimate revealing of any deeper truth. It was just a convenient way to divide them up.

This is a defining feature of the minimal group experiment: the triviality of group affiliation. In another version of the experiment, group assignments appeared to be made on the basis of whether participants, all of whom were in the dark about abstract art, preferred the paintings of Klee to those of Kandinsky. In still another, one that could be called the ultimate minimal group experiment, participants were explicitly assigned to one group or the other by a public and ostentatious toss of a coin.[26]

After assignment to one group or the other, each participant is isolated into an individual cubicle, takes part in a problem-solving activity, and then is asked to allocate rewards to other participants (never to themselves). In the original experiment, Bristol schoolboys allocated points that were redeemable for money at the end of the experiment. As part of the allocation task, participants learn that the recipients are members of their own (minimal) group or members of the other (minimal) group; they are otherwise anonymous.

These ostensibly innocuous conditions produce in-group favoritism. In Tajfel's original experiment, more than 70 percent of participants allocated rewards in way that favored their group. And in scores of variations on the basic minimal group experiment design, the results are the same. Group membership—minimal group membership—generates rewards: money, but also affection, trust, and cooperation.

Minimal seems a fitting term to apply to the social system created in these experiments. In-group affiliation is superficial. Group membership is anonymous. Conflict of interest between groups is removed. Self-interest is set aside since participants allocate rewards only to others. Groups are temporary fabrications, so there is no history of hostility and no shadow of the future. And yet, in this artificial social system, in the absence of conflict of interest or the perception of threat, and putting aside differences in culture, social standing, and economic or political power, in-group favoritism

always emerges. It emerges again and again, in experiments conducted among Bristol schoolboys, soldiers in the West German army, Maori children in New Zealand, trade school students in Geneva, undergraduates in New York City, and more.[27]

The ethnocentrism expressed in the minimal group experiment takes a particular and illuminating form. Participants in these experiments are allowed to allocate rewards pretty much as they wish. They can choose to reward their own group, or express generosity to the other group, or ignore the group boundary entirely. What they often do is allocate rewards so as to enhance the difference between their group and the other group. They are not fanatics in this: their choices also reflect everyday conceptions of equity and fairness. Still, the tendency to put distance between their group and the other group—between "us" and "them"—is impressive. They choose this option even when doing so diminishes the rewards enjoyed by their own group.[28]

This result is both replicable and, to us and many others, remarkable. It certainly surprised Tajfel, who created the minimal group condition under the assumption that it would serve as a neutral starting point, a baseline condition. Subsequent experiments would then systematically add in one feature at a time until in-group favoritism finally made an appearance. As things turned out, additional features were unnecessary.

To explain this remarkable and unexpected result, Tajfel and his Bristol colleagues created social identity theory. The theory begins with an assumption about human nature. Tajfel assumes that people—everywhere, regardless of circumstance—are motivated to maintain a positive identity. Social identity theory takes this point as axiomatic: individuals are always striving "to maintain or enhance their self-esteem" (Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 40).[29]

People derive their sense of self, according to social identity theory, in large part from their membership in social groups. In this sense it could be said that not only are individuals in social groups, but also social groups are "in" individuals. Identity is largely a reflection of where and how people locate themselves in their society. In Tajfel's view, "the individual realizes himself in society—that is, he recognizes his identity in socially defined terms, and these definitions become reality as he lives in society."[30]

Identity is a psychological matter. It is determined not by objective membership but by the perception of belonging. The transformation of mere membership into a sense of identity takes place through a process of social categorization. Social categorization parses the social world into a manageable set of basic categories. Through social categorization, individuals define who they are and who others are. Such classifications are

> cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action.

> But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for self-reference: they create and define the individual's place in society. Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. (Tajfel and Turner 1979, p. 40)

One consequence of social categorization is accentuation: people accentuate similarities between themselves and their in-group, and accentuate differences between themselves and their various out-groups. Identity takes on an "us versus them" mentality. Individuals, one might say, are transformed into groups.[31]

The creation of social identity theory was motivated by the puzzle presented by the minimal group experiment result. It cannot be much of an achievement that the theory explains this one result, but it is worth recounting how the theory does so. Here is a lightly paraphrased account, from Hogg and Abrams, two of the theory's principal advocates:

> The minimal group experiments demonstrate that mere social categorization—the discontinuous classification of individuals into two distinct groups—is sufficient to generate ethnocentrism and conflict.
>
> Individuals in these studies are categorizing themselves in terms of the minimal category provided by the experiment. This process of categorization—of self and others—accentuates group differences on the only dimension readily available: the allocation of rewards. The accentuation of difference favors the ingroup because individuals are deriving their social identity in part from the category created in the experiment. The involvement of the self in the categorization process activates the need to maintain or enhance self-esteem, and this can be accomplished by favoring the ingroup—and hence the self—over the outgroup. (1988, p. 51)

In-group favoritism is a well-established result, but it is of course just a tendency, one that, as we noted earlier, is moderated by a sense of fairness. Furthermore, in studies that permit the distinction to be detected, ethnocentrism in the minimal group experiment appears to be more in-group favoritism than out-group hostility.[32] One might say that the in-group/out-group differentiation under examination in the minimal group experiments is a reflection of the merging of self and in-group, rather than the distancing of self from out-groups. This observation provides the point of departure for Marilynn Brewer's theory of social identity, the most interesting and important variation on Tajfel's original thinking.[33]

Taking a page out of Gordon Allport's classic 1954 book on prejudice, Brewer first stipulates that in-groups take psychological primacy over out-groups. Familiarity, loyalty, and preference for one's in-group all precede

awareness of and attitudes toward out-groups. In the minimal group experiment, participants readily reward in-group members, but they are reluctant to punish out-group members. In-group bias is largely due to in-group favoritism, not out-group derogation. According to Brewer, "once the self has become attached to a social group or category, positive affect and evaluations associated with the self-concept are automatically transferred to the group as a whole" (2007, p. 732).[34]

Brewer argues that in-group favoritism has its origins in evolutionary processes; that it is a reflection, in the final analysis, of "the profoundly social nature of human beings as a species" (2007, p. 730). Group living is part of our ancestral history; it is, Brewer says, "the fundamental survival strategy that characterizes the human species." Over the course of evolutionary history, we have evolved to "rely on cooperation rather than strength, and on social learning rather than instinct" (1999, p. 433). Contemporary human nature, Brewer maintains, is characterized by "obligatory interdependence."

From this perspective, in-groups become a site for altruism. Within the group, norms facilitate reciprocal exchange. Expectations of cooperation and security promote mutual trust. Reciprocal attraction motivates compliance. Symbols and rituals emerge that differentiate the in-group from local out-groups, which reduce the risk that in-group benefits will be inadvertently extended to out-group members, and assure that in-group members will recognize their own entitlement to group benefits (M. Brewer 1999, pp. 433–34). In short, in-groups become "bounded communities of mutual cooperation and trust" (2007, p. 732). Brewer concludes that in-group favoritism arises not, as Tajfel would have it, out of a universal striving for self-esteem, but rather out of the fundamental human need for security.[35]

Finally, and this time drawing a distinction with Sumner, Brewer argues that there is no theoretical basis for expecting a close connection between in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. In-group loyalty may be a necessary condition for out-group hostility, but it is not sufficient. Put another way, strong attachment to the in-group is compatible with a wide range of sentiments toward out-groups: admiration, sympathy, indifference, as well as disdain and hatred. This seems to be so. Sometimes strong in-group loyalty is accompanied by strong out-group animosity (Gibson and Gouws 2000; Perreault and Bourhis 1999); sometimes not (M. Brewer and Campbell 1976; De Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Feshbach 1994). In-group solidarity and out-group hostility appear to be bundled together less tightly than Sumner originally believed.[36]

The basic finding of in-group favoritism has stood up well to replications and challenges, and it remains provocative today. Like Solomon Asch's (1951) famous experiments on conformity or Stanley Milgram's (1974) unsettling studies on obedience to authority, Tajfel's minimal group experi-

ment teaches us something about social life that we did not know before. In particular, the minimal group experiment suggests how ready we are to impose social categories and how far-reaching the consequences may be. It implies, contrary to realistic group conflict theory, that ethnocentrism does not require conflict of interest.[37] It also suggests, contrary to Levinson and *The Authoritarian Personality*, that ethnocentrism need not be interpreted as a dark and irrational expression of repressed hostilities and primeval fears. Ethnocentrism is a commonplace consequence of the human striving for self-regard and personal security.

Against these valuable contributions is the standard worry about generalizing from experimental results. What can in-group favoritism created in the laboratory tell us about ethnocentrism in the world?

Quite a lot, according to Donald Horowitz. In his excellent review and analysis of ethnic group conflict, Horowitz (1985) readily acknowledges that the minimal group experimental setup faced by Bristol schoolboys is quite different from the deadly serious and ongoing circumstance confronting rival ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Horowitz commends the minimal group experiment for isolating several vital features of actual group conflict: the "powerful pull of group loyalty, the quest for relative in-group advantage, and the willingness to incur costs to maximize intergroup differentials" (Horowitz 1985, p. 146). He then proceeds to take Tajfel's result as casting doubt on theories of ethnic conflict that assign primacy to competition over material interests.

Maybe so. Tajfel was himself quite modest on this point. His intention was not to deny objective conflicts of interest their place in an explanation of intergroup conflict. As he put it, social identity theory "cannot replace the economic and social analysis, but must be used to supplement it" (Tajfel 1981, p. 223). "It would be no less than ridiculous," Tajfel wrote, "to assert that objective rewards (in terms of money, standards of living, consumption of goods and services, etc.) are not the most important determinants" of contemporary group conflict.

Social identity theory attempts to identify the environmental conditions that give rise to ethnocentrism (or more precisely, to in-group favoritism). In this enterprise, Tajfel, Brewer, and others in this theoretical tradition display little interest in differences among individuals. All of us strive for self-esteem or for security. Placed in the right conditions, all of us are likely to express in-group favoritism.

This is a valuable perspective to bring to ethnocentrism—but it is not ours. Like Daniel Levinson and his colleagues, we are interested first and foremost in differences among individuals. We treat ethnocentrism as a predisposition, a form of individual readiness that guides perception, thought, and action. We argue that people differ from one another—reliably and

durably—in degree of ethnocentrism: that some people are very ethnocentric; many are mildly ethnocentric; and a few are not ethnocentric at all. And we claim (and plan to convincingly show) that such differences in ethnocentrism can take us some distance in explaining the opinions Americans take on pressing issues of contemporary politics.

ETHNOCENTRISM AS AN OUTCOME OF NATURAL SELECTION

A century and a half after Charles Darwin completed *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, the evidence for evolution through natural selection is overwhelming. It is less a theory than a fact, as Ernst Mayr has put it (2001). Biologists have observed evolution in natural populations of plants and animals, and have reproduced evolution experimentally, in the laboratory and in the field. Intricate adaptations of organisms to their environment have been massively documented. The fossil record, while incomplete, follows predicted chronologies exactly. The scope of empirical confirmation is stunning: on the one hand, the generation and inheritance of genetic variation is understood down to the molecular level, and on the other, the geographic distribution of whole species—"biogeography"—is accounted for as well. Evolution through natural selection is the unifying theory of biology. "Nothing in biology makes sense, except in the light of evolution."[38]

This is an inspiring story of scientific achievement—but what does it have to do with our project? Quite a bit, according to the Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson. Surveying biological science from Darwin to the present day, Wilson singles out natural selection as "the essential first hypothesis for any serious consideration of the human condition" (1978, pp. 1–2). Until political science, psychology, economics, and the other social sciences absorb the lessons of evolution and natural selection, they will remain, according to Wilson, theoretically incapacitated, limited to mere description of the surface regularity of human behavior.[39]

Taking his own advice seriously, Wilson has made it his project to build a bridge from natural selection to human society. In *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975), Wilson summarized vast amounts of research on vertebrate social behavior. Drawing on ethology, ecology, and genetics, Wilson attempted to formulate general principles concerning the biological properties of whole societies, including, in the book's final and controversial chapter, human society. His subsequent writing—especially *On Human Nature* (1978), *Genes, Mind, and Culture* (with Charles Lumsden, 1981), and *Consilience* (1998)—has continued this work.[40]

According to Wilson, certain human social traits—for example, bodily adornment or funeral rites—are unique to the human species, occur in all cultures, and are as true to the human type as "wing tessellation is to a fritillary butterfly or a complicated spring melody to a wood thrush" (1978, p. 21). Wilson concludes that the accumulated evidence for a "large hereditary component" to human social behavior is "decisive" (1978, p. 19).

The key question for us is whether Wilson's conclusion holds in the particular case of ethnocentrism. Is ethnocentrism part of "human nature"?[41]

Perhaps it is. Social life surely enjoys huge comparative advantages over solitary life: in the sharing of knowledge, the division of labor, and the economies of mutual defense. This implies that evolutionary pressures would have favored motivational dispositions furthering group life. As a consequence, over the long haul, mutations furthering the capacity for in-group loyalty and out-group hostility might have spread through the population (e.g., D. Campbell 1965, 1975).[42]

However, if ethnocentrism entails both hostility to out-groups and attachment to in-groups, and if the latter rises to the level of altruistic sacrifice, then how could such a disposition evolve? This is the "central theoretical problem of sociobiology" (E. O. Wilson 1975, p. 3). Fallen heroes leave behind no offspring. If self-sacrifice results in fewer descendents, the genes that encourage heroic altruism can be expected to gradually disappear. Yet at the same time, there appear to be indisputable instances of altruism in the world, where one person increases the fitness of another at the expense of her own—as in surrendering needed food or shelter, or deferring in the choice of a mate, or placing one's self in between danger and another. How can these two points be reconciled?

Darwin suggested that altruism might be explained by natural selection acting on *groups*, as it does on individuals. In a famous passage from *The Descent of Man*, published some twenty years after *Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote:

> It must not be forgotten that although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over other men of the same tribe, yet that an increase in the number of well-endowed men and advancement in the standard of morality will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; *and this would be natural selection.* At all times throughout the world tribes have

> supplanted other tribes; and as morality is one important element in their success, the standard of morality and the number of well-endowed men will thus everywhere tend to rise and increase. (Darwin 1871, pp. 159–60, italics added)

Darwin did not develop this idea, however, and for the better part of one hundred years, group selection played virtually no role in the standard theory of evolution.[43]

But in recent years, a modern theory of group selection has arisen. Under this account, altruism can evolve when there exists a multiplicity of groups, which vary in the proportion of altruistic types. Groups with more altruists must be more fit—they must produce more offspring. And the differential fitness of groups (favoring altruists) must be strong enough to counter the differential fitness of individuals within groups (favoring the selfish). Because altruism is maladaptive with respect to individual selection but adaptive with respect to group selection, it can evolve only if the process of group selection is sufficiently strong. According to Sober and Wilson (1998), evidence in support of group selection is now overwhelming.[44]

Suppose we accept the proposition that natural selection operates on groups as well as individuals, and that this is especially true for humans. Does this mean that a new and rosy picture of human benevolence has been thereby established, that a romantic vision of universal generosity fulfilled? No. In the first place, group selection theory does not abandon the idea of competition that forms the core of the theory of natural selection; rather, it provides an additional setting in which competition can occur. Second of all, group selection does not replace individual selection, it supplements it. Group selection leaves ample room for individuals to seek personal advantage. Altruistic motives are mixed with the purely selfish. Ambivalence is the human condition, and ambivalence is more likely to be resolved with opportunistic selfishness than sacrificial altruism (D. Campbell 1975; E. O. Wilson 1975). Third and most important for our purposes, altruism rooted in natural selection is not universal altruism. It is altruism for the benefit of the in-group *and* to the detriment of the out-group. If group selection provides the mechanism by which helping behavior directed at members of one's own group can evolve, "it equally provides a context in which hurting individuals in other groups can be selectively advantageous. Group selection favors within-group niceness *and* between-group nastiness" (Sober and Wilson 1998, p. 9). And within-group niceness and between-group nastiness is, of course, just a colloquial way to say "ethnocentrism."

Group selection suggests that ethnocentrism can be conceived of as an adaptation, a part of "human nature." It rides on the general point that key features of human behavior evolved by natural selection and are today con-

strained throughout the entire species by particular sets of genes. It makes a case for ethnocentrism as a general predisposition.[45]

This is an important conclusion, but it leaves open whether *individual differences* in ethnocentrism have a genetic source. We take for granted—and will shortly show—that contemporary Americans differ from one another in the degree to which they display ethnocentrism. Is it reasonable to suppose that such differences can be traced, at least in part, to underlying differences in "genetic blueprints"?

We think the answer is yes, and we think so primarily because of the empirical results from the new interdisciplinary field of human behavioral genetics—the intersection of genetics and the behavioral sciences.[46] Wilson drew on the early returns from this literature to bolster his case about the inheritability of human behavior. The examples available to Wilson at the time were certainly powerful—research linking genetic mutations to a wide array of neurological disorders, impairments of intelligence, and disease—but they left unclear whether genetic variation might also play a role in social behavior in the normal range. As we will see in a moment, research over the last decade or so makes this case powerfully.

The primary goal of quantitative behavioral genetics is to partition the observed variation in human traits into genetic and environmental sources. Of course, in one respect the genotype and the environment are equally important, in that each is indispensable to human development. Any observed behavior—any phenotype—is the result of a continuous interaction between genes and environment. Still, a deep and important question remains: to what extent do the differences observed among people reflect differences in their genotypes and to what extent do they reflect differences in their environments?[47]

Mathematically, this question can be written:

$$V^P = V^G + V^{CE} + V^{UE} + \varepsilon,$$

where V^P is the variance of the phenotype, V^G is the variance of the genotype, V^{CE} is variance of the common (or shared) environment, V^{UE} is the variance of the unique environment, and ε is error. V^G/V^P is the trait's heritability, the fraction of the observed variance in a certain trait that is caused by differences in heredity (Lush 1940, 1949). Estimates of heritability provide the "backbone" of human behavioral genetics (E. O. Wilson 1998).

The theoretical foundation for behavioral genetics was laid down by the rediscovery of Mendel's laws of single-gene inheritance in the early part of the twentieth century and the extension of these laws to complex factorial traits by Fisher (1918), Haldane (1932), and S. Wright (1921). This trio of brilliant statisticians generalized Mendel's experimental findings to quantitative differences, to differences of degree rather than kind. Inheritance of

traits that form a continuously graded series from one extreme to the other without falling into kinds or types—traits like skin color or height or, as we would say, ethnocentrism—is complicated. It is complicated in the first instance because whatever genetic influence might be operating is almost certainly polygenic: that is, traits are influenced by large ensembles of genes, distributed across different chromosomal sites, each with modest effect, acting together, sometimes in complex ways. It turns out, nevertheless, that the principles of genetic transmission that Mendel discovered—segregation and independent assortment—apply to these more complicated cases.

The most direct and straightforward empirical method for partitioning phenotypic variation into genetic and environmental sources is the experiment. Experimentation is widely used in studies of plant and animal breeding but is obviously out of bounds for human populations. Next best is the statistical analysis of "natural experiments." The classic natural experiment in human behavioral genetics capitalizes on the difference between monozygotic (MZ), or identical, twins (who share an identical genetic inheritance, genetic relatedness of approximately 1.0) and dizygotic (DZ), or fraternal, twins (who develop from two separate eggs, fertilized by two separate sperm, genetic relatedness of approximately 0.5). Insofar as identical twins are more similar than fraternal twins on a particular trait, to that degree the trait can be said to be due to genetic differences. Other designs bring in additional family relationships: for example, parents and biological offspring, parents and adopted offspring, children of one identical twin pair and the children of the other, and so forth. Because genetic resemblance among different kinds of biological relatives is understood and can be expressed in precise numerical terms (Falconer 1961), all these designs offer the opportunity of estimating, under more or less reasonable assumptions, the heritability of virtually any (measurable) human trait.

Research in human behavioral genetics began with a focus on illness and achieved notable successes. In a relatively brief period, scores of debilitating diseases such as cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, color blindness, and schizophrenia were traced, in part, to genetic sources. More recently, research in the field has expanded its focus, taking up the heritability of various personality traits and social attitudes. The best of this work is characterized by meticulous attention to measurement, sophisticated statistical analysis, and data provided by carefully maintained archives.[48]

Consider the evidence on the heritability of social attitudes. The subject itself may seem ridiculous. Attitudes are *learned*. Everybody says so (almost everybody). In his influential essay, Gordon Allport (1935) offered three conjectures about the origins of attitudes. First of all, attitudes might be built up through the gradual accretion of experience; second, they might reflect a single dramatic emotional experience, or trauma; and third, they

might be adopted ready-made from parents, teachers, and friends. That's it: nothing here about inheritance or biology or genetics. Allport took for granted that attitudes are learned, and so, in overwhelming numbers, have those who have written about attitudes since. So widespread is this assumption that the early behavior genetic studies of personality would sometimes include measures of social attitudes as a kind of control, on the (mistaken) idea that attitudes would provide a heritability baseline of zero.[49]

The seminal paper in this line of research was published in 1986 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.*[50] N. G. Martin and his colleagues compared a large Australian sample of MZ and DZ twins on a measure of general conservatism. Their analysis suggested not just a genetic component to conservatism, but a *large* genetic component to conservatism. Under their statistical model, more than half of the observed variation in conservatism is attributed to genetic difference.[51]

This result may seem surprising, but it is no fluke. Other studies, employing different designs, different samples, and somewhat different statistical techniques, arrive at essentially the same conclusion (e.g., Alford, Funk, and Hibbing 2005; Bouchard et al. 1990; Eaves and Eysenck 1974; Eaves et al. 1999; Olson, Vernon, and Jang 2001). Conservatism, it would seem, arises in an important way from genetic endowments.[52]

E. O. Wilson calls heritability estimates of the sort we are discussing here—heritabilities of about 0.5—"midrange" effects. We suppose that heritabilities of about 0.5 are midrange when compared against the near perfect genetic effect for finger length (Lynch and Walsh 1998). But to social scientists working at the individual level, midrange effects look pretty big. They *are* big: the findings suggest that roughly half of the variation we observe in ethnocentrism may be due to variation in the underlying genetic program.

CONCLUSIONS

We began our review of the principal theories of ethnocentrism with the hope of finding good answers to three basic questions: What is the nature of ethnocentrism? How does ethnocentrism arise? When does ethnocentrism become important to politics? If now we have come to the end of the review without altogether complete and convincing answers, we have certainly learned a lot that is valuable. We are indebted to Sumner for noticing ethnocentrism in the first place, for naming it felicitously, for defining it sensibly, and for insisting that the study of ethnocentrism must take into account economic, social, and political conditions. We are indebted to Daniel Levinson and his colleagues for imagining that people in modern democratic societies will vary in how fully they subscribe to ethnocentrism, and to their persistent successors who eventually established that ethnocentrism

defined this way does indeed exist. We are indebted to Henri Tajfel for his remarkable experiments showing how readily we indulge in partitioning the social world into in-groups and out-groups. And we are indebted to E. O. Wilson and scores of scientists working at the intersection of the biological and behavioral sciences for two revelatory ideas: that ethnocentrism is part of human nature and that humans are more or less ethnocentric due to genetic inheritance.

If these pieces are partial, they are important, and we will try in the next chapter to put them together in a theoretically satisfying way. But one piece so far is missing altogether. Not one of the four theories we have examined here speaks to this question: when does ethnocentrism take on political significance? An adequate theory of ethnocentrism must define its nature, account for its origins, *and* specify the conditions under which it is more and less consequential. This is the business of chapter 2.