

# What's Fair?

---

*American Beliefs about Distributive Justice*

JENNIFER L. HOCHSCHILD

Harvard University Press  
*Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England*

---

# 1 Why There Is No Socialism in the United States

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.<sup>1</sup>

Holmes solved his case when he realized that Colonel Ross's watchdog had not barked when the evidence suggested that it should have. Watson's awe at Holmes's reasoning suggests that we are not in the habit of examining closely things that do not occur. There are obvious reasons for this. But, as Holmes points out, when evidence leads us to expect something that then does not happen, an investigation may be warranted.

Such an important nonevent in the history of the United States is the absence of a widespread socialist movement among poor Americans. Werner Sombart asked, "Why is there no socialism in the United States?"<sup>2</sup> I will examine a part of the answer – the fact that the American poor apparently do not support the downward redistribution of wealth. The United States does not now have, and seldom ever has had, a political movement among the poor seeking greater economic equality. The fact that such a political movement could succeed constitutionally makes its absence even more startling. Since most of the population have less than an average amount of wealth – the median level of holdings is below the mean<sup>3</sup> – more people would benefit than would lose from

downward redistribution. And yet never has the poorer majority of the population, not to speak of the poorest minority, voted itself out of its economic disadvantage.

### Economic Inequality in the United States

Holmes would recommend that we begin our investigation by examining the known facts. After all, if existing inequalities are small and lessening, or if even the poor feel that they are "pretty well off," then the silence of the nonwealthy majority is hardly surprising. The dog doesn't bark because it has no reason to be disturbed. Some analysts make that claim. Thirty years ago, Joseph Spengler concluded that "available statistical data indicate that over-all income inequality in the United States has been diminishing since the late 1920's."<sup>4</sup> More recently, Robert Lampman argues that by adding nonmonetary transfer payments to income data, "one can conclude that the goal of eliminating income poverty as stated by President Johnson in 1964 had been virtually achieved before the onset of the 1974-75 recession."<sup>5</sup> Best known, of course, is Alexis de Tocqueville's thesis, stated in the unequivocal first sentence of *Democracy in America*: "No novelty in the United States struck me more vividly during my stay there than the equality of condition."<sup>6</sup> One hundred years later, Louis Hartz adopted Tocqueville's viewpoint to argue that "the historic ethos of American life [is] its bourgeois hungers, its classlessness, the spirit of equality that pervade[s] it."<sup>7</sup>

But the empirical support for these claims is at best ambiguous, and much evidence suggests that they are simply false. In order to evaluate whether the poor "should" demand downward redistribution—that is, whether economic inequality is actually great and persistent—we must look briefly at data on income and wealth distributions. We are looking for evidence on several points: (1) Has economic inequality in the United States increased or decreased during the twentieth century? (2) How great are the absolute differences between the wealthiest and poorest Americans? (3) How accurately does monetary income measure true disposable income and real wealth? Knowing at least generally how material well-being is distributed in the United States will permit us to evaluate whether it would be reasonable to expect the poor to demand redistribution.

First, consider the absolute differences in income among Americans and how those differences have changed over the last five decades. Table 1 shows the percent share of aggregate income (before taxes but after transfer payments) received by quintiles of the United States population

Table 1 Percent share of aggregate pretax income received by each quintile of Americans, 1929-1977.

Year	Lowest fifth	Second fifth	Third fifth	Fourth fifth	Highest fifth <sup>a</sup>
1929 <sup>b</sup>		12.5	13.8	19.3	54.4
1935-36 <sup>b</sup>	4.1	9.2	14.1	20.9	51.7
1947 <sup>c</sup>	3.4	10.5	16.8	23.8	45.5
1957 <sup>c</sup>	3.0	10.3	18.1	25.2	43.4
1967 <sup>c</sup>	3.7	10.5	17.2	24.7	43.9
1977 <sup>d</sup>	4.3	10.3	16.9	24.7	43.8

a. "The mean income of households with greater than \$100,000 [income] was assumed to be \$100,000 exactly." This assumption has the effect of making the share of the wealthiest 20 percent smaller in the table than it actually is, since it measures the income of someone who actually makes \$500,000 as \$100,000. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Household Money Income in 1975 and Selected Social and Economic Characteristics of Households," *Current Population Reports (CPR)*, P-60, no. 104 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), p. 76.

b. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Income Distribution in the United States*, by Herman P. Miller (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), p. 21. Data are aggregated by families and unrelated individuals.

c. Edward C. Budd, "Postwar Changes in the Size Distribution of Income in the U.S.," *American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings* 60 (May 1970): 253. Data are aggregated by families and unrelated individuals.

d. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in 1977 of Households in the United States," *CPR*, P-60, no. 117, p.19. Data are aggregated by household; this change in unit of analysis has the effect of slightly decreasing the measured amount of inequality.

for the past fifty years. The shares received by the two poorest quintiles have changed little; the poorest 20 percent and second-poorest 20 percent continue to receive about 4 percent and 10 percent respectively of the total income. The largest change has been a transfer of money from the richest quintile to the third and fourth quintiles. The middle and upper-middle classes are gaining at the expense of the rich, but the downward redistribution is not trickling down to the poor and near-poor.

David Cameron has analyzed these and other Census Bureau data and concludes that "we see some diminution [of inequality, as measured by the difference between the incomes of the top 20 percent and bottom 40 percent] from the late 1940's to the mid-1950's, then an increase in inequality during the early 1960's, followed by another decrease during 1966-68. But since that period the gap between the top and bottom income recipients has increased."<sup>8</sup> He notes that such persistent inequality is particularly striking in light of six changes that have occurred in the United States since the 1940s, all of which should have had an equalizing

effect. These changes are: an increase in the rate of participation in the labor force, an increase in the educational attainment of the population, a reduction in the differential between white and nonwhite family incomes, an increase in governmental transfer payments, an increase in the share of national income received by labor through wages and all other compensation, and a decline in the share of national income received by capital in the form of corporate profits and interest. These changes should, when combined, considerably reduce income inequality. But they have not done so.

Next, consider whether these data on income distributions accurately describe people's disposable incomes. To make this picture more accurate, we must consider two factors that change incomes—nonmonetary transfers that add to disposable income and taxes that subtract from it. Let us look first at the effect of nonmonetary transfers on the total distribution of income. The Census data cited above include money transfers; thus Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security, unemployment compensation, and pensions have already been considered. But in-kind services and subsidies, which are not included in the Census data, could substantially reduce inequality. They do in the short run, but not in the long run. The best study on this subject compared the distribution of income in 1950, 1961, and 1970 after allocating the burdens of tax payments and the benefits of government expenditures by income class. It shows that "inclusion of all government spending and taxation in household incomes significantly reduces effective income differences among income classes in each year but that dispersion in these post-fisc income distributions has not changed significantly between 1950 and 1970."<sup>9</sup> In other words, government actions have an equalizing effect on incomes in any given year, but this effect does not produce real change in income inequality over time. Explanations for this "interesting puzzle" include the fact that total taxes are becoming less progressive and may now be regressive, and the fact that "most government benefits are distributed independent of income and depend upon characteristics like being a farmer or aged or a veteran, or driving an automobile, or going to a public college."<sup>10</sup> Another study agrees that "redistribution through in-kind transfers consists of shuffling a great mass of money and resources about, mainly in the dense middle of the distribution. The poor gain some in the process, but not enough to have any substantial impact on overall measures of income inequality."<sup>11</sup> In fact, it finds a strong positive relationship between income and in-kind benefits. A gain of 1 percent in income produces, on an average, a gain of 0.22 percent in transfers.<sup>12</sup>

Other analyses also suggest that transfer payments primarily redistribute upward or within one class; for example, Social Security transfers money from young to old middle-class citizens. Low college tuition transfers money from old to young middle-class citizens. Agricultural price supports and western water projects transfer wealth from consumers to agribusiness.<sup>13</sup>

The picture looks somewhat different when we consider the impact of nonmonetary transfers only on poverty. Timothy Smeeding finds that "when adjustments for federal taxes paid, income underreporting, and intrahousehold income-sharing are combined with in-kind transfers evaluated at their cash equivalent, the official Census poverty gap of \$12.0 billion [in 1972] is reduced to \$5.4 billion."<sup>14</sup> In terms of total numbers of people below the poverty line, he finds that in-kind transfers reduce the number of poor from 18,805,000 to 12,854,000.<sup>15</sup> Smeeding also finds, however, that in-kind transfers are inefficient devices for reducing poverty, in the sense that they deliver only thirty-one cents of antipoverty effect per dollar of program cost; that is, over two-thirds of the money spent to reduce poverty in fact is transferred to the nonpoor.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Smeeding also estimates that the target efficiency of in-kind transfers to aid the poor has decreased since 1972, so that as antipoverty programs expand, the proportion of money they allocate to the nonpoor also expands.<sup>17</sup>

Nonmonetary transfers are not the only factors that affect the accuracy of the data on income distributions presented in table 1. Taxes also affect disposable income, so we must briefly consider the distributive effects of taxes. The aggregate incidence of taxation is regressive for the very poor, proportional for most citizens, and progressive only for the very rich. Individual income taxes are progressive and their proportion of total taxation has greatly increased over the past fifty years. They are, however, nowhere nearly as progressive as the tax rates suggest, and their progressivity is declining. Corporate income taxes are probably regressive in the lower half of the income distribution and progressive in the upper half. Sales and property taxes are regressive, but their incidence is declining; payroll taxes are regressive and their incidence is increasing.<sup>18</sup> The very poor, whether welfare recipients or not, pay a much higher rate of taxes as their income increases to \$10,000 than the rest of the population.<sup>19</sup> Overall, even making the most progressive assumptions possible about the incidence of taxation, Joseph Pechman and Benjamin Okner estimate that in 1966 the poorest fifth of the population paid about 19 percent of their income in taxes, the middle 70 percent paid 21 to 24 percent, and the richest tenth paid about 30 percent.<sup>20</sup> Roger Her-

riot and Herman Miller concluded that the tax rate in 1968 varied from 50 percent for those with incomes below \$2,000, to 29–34 percent for those with incomes between \$2,000 and \$50,000, and back to 45 percent for those with more than \$50,000. Their figures differ from Pechman and Okner's because of different methods of measurement, but one conclusion seems clear: taxation appears to follow Director's law by redistributing from the very rich and the very poor to the middle income classes.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, consider whether the data on income distribution, even when corrected for nonmonetary transfers and taxes, accurately represent the distribution of wealth. Briefly, they do not. Data on wealth—that is, all property, possessions, and income—are inferential and incomplete, and therefore much less reliable than data on income. But they consistently suggest much greater differences between the richest and poorest than income data indicate. Table 2 shows the most recent estimates for the distribution of wealth among income tax payers.

There are several things to notice about these data. First, those in the lowest income categories hold an even smaller share of wealth than of income. The poorest 24 percent of taxpayers own less than 8 percent of the

Table 2 Distribution of wealth among American taxpayers, 1970.

Adjusted gross income (AGI)	Percent of people filing income tax returns	Percent of all wealth	Wealth per dollar of income
\$ 0– 2,999	24.31	7.63	\$26.39
3,000– 5,999	20.17	11.49	5.49
6,000– 8,999	18.00	11.85	3.74
9,000– 11,999	14.97	12.30	3.35
12,000– 14,999	9.65	9.97	3.27
15,000– 19,999	7.46	11.24	3.74
20,000– 24,999	2.57	6.78	5.06
25,000– 29,999	1.03	4.23	6.39
30,000– 49,999	1.24	9.29	8.56
50,000– 99,999	0.47	8.02	10.92
100,000–199,999	0.084	3.63	14.00
200,000–499,999	0.017	2.02	17.57
500,000–999,999	0.0024	0.70	18.67
1 million +	0.0009	0.85	18.75
Total	99.9743 <sup>a</sup>	100.00	

Source: Adapted from Stanley Lebergott, *The American Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 242, 245.

a. Figures do not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

nation's total wealth, whereas the wealthiest 5 percent hold over 35 percent of the nation's wealth. Next, note that the ratio of wealth per dollar of income increases as income increases; that is, for incomes between \$12,000 and \$15,000, each dollar of income yields \$3.27 of wealth; for incomes between \$30,000 and \$49,000, each dollar of income yields \$8.6 of wealth; and for incomes over \$1,000,000, each dollar of income adds \$18.75 of wealth. Finally, the very poorest in income, those with less than \$1000 (not shown in the table), have the greatest wealth per dollar of income—\$62.37. They tend to be "entrepreneurs . . . and older persons . . . who retain wealth 'appropriate to' higher permanent levels of income."<sup>22</sup> Both this oddity at the bottom of the income scale and the much greater inequalities of wealth than of income should caution us that income measures do not adequately reflect material well-being.

We know little about changes in the distribution of wealth for the whole population during the twentieth century, but scholars have carefully studied the top wealth-holders. Wealth inequality reached its peak in America before World War I, until "wealth concentration had become as great in the United States as in France or Prussia, though still less pronounced than in the United Kingdom."<sup>23</sup> Wealth became less concentrated during World War I, more during the 1920s, less in the 1930s and 1940s, and "has remained essentially unchanged since 1945."<sup>24</sup> Since scholars and policymakers usually focus only on changes around the poverty level, whereas this book compares a sample of near-poor with a sample of near-rich, a closer look at the very wealthy seems appropriate. Estimates of holdings among the wealthiest Americans are shown in table 3. Although the shares of the wealthiest have declined, the rich still possess a disproportionate share of the nation's holdings, at least from the egalitarian perspective we initially imputed to Holmes's dog.

In a final point about the current distribution of income and wealth, it is significant that some evidence suggests that "cost-of-living movements have moved in a fashion which serves to reinforce the nominal distribution trends,"<sup>25</sup> that is, as the cost of living rises, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

These data demonstrate, I believe, that the dog's silence is not that of an egalitarian contented with the American economic scene. Even after monetary transfer payments, income is distributed unequally, and the poor and near-poor are not gaining on the rich and near-rich. Non-monetary transfers improve the standard of living of the poor, but they help the middle classes and rich just as much. The time series data of table 1 show that, at least so far, welfare has not given the poor enough of a boost to improve their relative position. Taxes are at best a stand-

**Table 3** Share of personal wealth held by the wealthiest one-half percent of Americans, 1922-1972.

Year	Percent
1922	29.8
1933	25.2
1945	20.9
1953	22.7
1962	21.6
1972	20.9

Source: Adapted from Jeffrey Williamson and Peter Lindert, *American Inequality: A Macroeconomic History* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 54. Because they are computed differently, the figures from 1962 and 1972 are not strictly comparable to the figures from 1922 to 1953.

off: the very rich and very poor help the rest of the population to maintain their position. Data on private wealth holdings are, perhaps not coincidentally, extremely sketchy, but they show much more inequality than income figures do. Economic inequality in America may not be excessive—to make that judgment one must use further evaluative criteria—but surely we can conclude that the United States falls far short of Tocqueville's vaunted equality of condition.

### Should We Expect Redistributive Demands?

Even if we agree that the dog's silence is not that of a contented egalitarian, we have not yet justified our surprise at its silence. After all, people may be ascetic, or self-effacing, or masochistic, so that they are happy to be worse off than others. In that case, their silence in the face of inequality would need no explanation. But surely most people are not predominantly masochistic or ascetic. Furthermore, we have specific reasons for expecting them to protest persistent hardship.

I can suggest seven bases for expecting redistributive demands. They range from classical political theory to recent Gallup polls and have been espoused by radicals and reactionaries alike. First, political thinkers since Aristotle have worried that the many poor would revolt against the few rich in a democracy. "Sometimes [the masses] attack the rich individually, [and] sometimes they attack them as a class," but in either case extreme differences in wealth make democracies unstable.<sup>26</sup> Hundreds of years later, John Adams concurred:

Suppose a nation, rich and poor . . . all assembled together . . . If all were to be decided by a vote of the majority, [would not] the

eight or nine millions who have no property . . . think of usurping over the rights of the one or two million who have? . . . Perhaps, at first, prejudice, habit, shame or fear, principle or religion, would restrain the poor . . . and the idle . . . but the time would not be long before . . . pretexts [would] be invented by degrees, to countenance the majority in dividing all the property among them . . . At last a downright equal division of everything would be demanded, and voted.<sup>27</sup>

A century after the United States was founded, during an era of dramatically rising inequality, Lord Macaulay warned Americans that "your government will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority. For with you, the majority is the government, and has the rich, who are always a minority, absolutely at its mercy."<sup>28</sup>

Some political thinkers, in fact, praise democracy precisely because they hope that it will lead to the changes that Aristotle and Adams so feared. In 1831 Stephen Simpson urged: "Let the producers of labor but once fully comprehend their injuries and fully appreciate their strength at the polls, and the present oppressive system will vanish like the mists of the morning before the rising sun. The power to remedy the evil is unquestionable; it resides in the *producers* of wealth, who constitute so overwhelming a majority of the people, when not carried away by the infatuation of faction."<sup>29</sup> One hundred years later, Senator Huey Long hoped to be elected president on the strength of his program to "share the wealth." It would have set a minimum and maximum family estate and yearly income, and would have financed extensive social welfare programs by stiff taxes on the rich. He claimed that biblical law, American history, and the support of millions of voters were behind his plea on the Senate floor: "But, oh, Mr. President, if we could simply let the people enjoy the wealth and the accumulations and the contrivances that we have . . . If we could distribute this surplus wealth, . . . what a different world this would be."<sup>30</sup>

It is not surprising that such diverse political thinkers have argued, despite continual disconfirmation, that a democracy would redistribute wealth.<sup>31</sup> Most of them adopt certain empirical assumptions which, if true, would cause the poor to demand redistribution. These empirical claims constitute the second reason for expecting such demands. Liberal democratic theorists see people as motivated by the pursuit of private, self-interested goals.<sup>32</sup> People are assumed to be rational and self-conscious in that they always prefer more, rather than the same or fewer, material goods, *ceteris paribus*. Thus everyone should favor redistribution from others to themselves, and a properly functioning democracy should

translate these desires into political demands. The poor particularly might favor redistribution both because their absolute need is greater and because the rich have more effective ways to get richer.

Furthermore, even when liberal theory focuses on the need for stability and reasonableness as foundations for freedom and the pursuit of happiness, it can lend itself to arguments for redistribution. A nation with a large, poor, alienated, unemployed, distinct ethnic underclass is hardly a stable nation. Bismarck and Disraeli understood this principle a century ago; more recently, liberals like Gunnar Myrdal, Martin Luther King, and members of the Kerner Commission have agreed.<sup>33</sup> Stability may require judicious redistribution. In addition, social science research<sup>34</sup> and the testimony of the poor<sup>35</sup> lead reasonable people to conclude that poverty and wealth depend less on personal skill and motivation than on structural biases or random events. In that case, we should not blame or praise others for their economic circumstances, and we should mitigate the ills produced by blind luck and severe biases, if only to maintain a stable democratic society. Thus empirical assumptions within liberal theory about individual motivation and social structure could easily lead one to expect demands for redistribution and policies to meet those demands.

3) A third reason for expecting demands for redistribution stems from normative, not empirical, aspects of liberal theory. Democrats, especially Americans, have always valued the ideal of equality, and its range, domain, and definition seem to be expanding over time. The range of people who warrant equal treatment has grown over three centuries from propertied white males to the entire adult population; the domain of goods to be distributed equally has grown from narrowly circumscribed political rights to a wide range of civil and social rights. We now hear powerful arguments for even further expansion to include equal psychological and environmental well-being. Most important, equality is increasingly defined as equal substantive outcomes, whether as ends in themselves or as prerequisites of true liberty and equality of opportunity.

A strong argument for redistribution, then, is perfectly consistent with the traditional American insistence on freedom, individualism, and opportunity for advancement.<sup>36</sup>

4) Fourth, much psychological theory also predicts that the poor would demand redistribution of wealth. Social psychology stresses our profound and continual need for comparison with others and our past,<sup>37</sup> our propensity to feel relatively deprived and envious,<sup>38</sup> our focus on achieved over ascribed characteristics,<sup>39</sup> our need to be validated by participating in socially rewarding—and rewarded—activities,<sup>40</sup> our need for social and economic security,<sup>41</sup> our altruism toward sufferers similar to

ourselves,<sup>42</sup> our propensity to attribute worldly success to personal traits and behaviors,<sup>43</sup> our need to perceive the world as just,<sup>44</sup> and our need to believe that we have received a fair return for our efforts and achievements.<sup>45</sup> All of this suggests that demands for redistribution might come as the political acting out of psychological impulses.

5) Fifth, since World War II other highly industrialized nations have used progressive taxation and social welfare policies to redistribute downward. In 1966, for example, nine European nations spent between 16 percent and 21 percent of their gross national product (GNP) on social welfare policies; eight more Western nations spent over 10 percent, and of 22 industrial nations, only Japan spent less than the United States' 7.9 percent.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, income is less equally distributed in the United States than in most other highly industrialized nations. Table 4 presents data on the distribution of pretax income by quintiles for ten nations belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The poorest 40 percent of the United States citizens have less than the poorest two-fifths of all other nations. Although in absolute terms these differences in shares for the poorest quintiles "may be thought small, in relative terms the bottom decile in Japan receives twice as much of total income as does the bottom decile in Canada, the United States, and France."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Gini coefficient is higher for the United States

Table 4 Percent of aggregate pretax income received by each fifth of the population in ten industrial nations, and Gini coefficient of inequality, 1966-1973.

Country	Year	Lowest fifth	Second fifth	Third fifth	Fourth fifth	Highest fifth	Gini coefficient
France	1970	4.3	9.9	15.8	23.0	47.0	0.416
United States	1972	3.8	10.0	16.8	24.5	44.8	0.404
Germany	1973	5.9	10.1	15.1	22.1	46.8	0.396
Netherlands	1967	5.9	10.9	15.8	21.6	45.8	0.385
Canada	1969	4.3	10.9	17.3	24.2	43.3	0.382
Norway	1970	4.9	11.6	18.0	24.6	40.9	0.354
Sweden	1972	6.0	11.4	17.4	24.3	40.5	0.346
United Kingdom	1973	5.4	12.0	18.1	24.2	40.3	0.344
Japan	1969	7.6	12.6	16.3	21.0	42.5	0.335
Australia	1966-67	6.6	13.5	17.8	23.4	38.9	0.313

Source: Adapted from Malcolm Sawyer, "Income Distribution in OECD Countries," *OECD Economic Outlook: Occasional Studies* (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1976), pp. 14, 16. Data using pretax income are presented here for ease of comparison with table 1; posttax distributions are "broadly similar." See *ibid.*, p. 14, for distribution of posttax income.

than for any other nation except France. This indicates greater inequality across *all* levels of income in the United States than in most comparable nations. Non-Western, nonliberal nations such as the People's Republic of China, Yugoslavia, and Tanzania have moved even further than OECD nations to flatten wage structures. That Americans are not clamoring to follow the lead of Tanzania is understandable, but we do have close historical, cultural, and political ties with Europe. And yet on this issue, both masses and elites in the United States differ sharply from their European counterparts.

⑩ The sixth reason for anticipating demands for redistribution from the American poor is the fact that we are now receding from an era of rising expectations. The 1960s brought economic expansion, government activism, and personal and political optimism to most of the country. In 1964, for example, respondents to a Gallup Poll evaluated their personal lives at 6.0 for the past, 6.9 for the present, and 7.9 for the future on a self-anchoring scale from 1 to 10. They were similarly optimistic about the "situation for our country"; they rated it at 6.1 for the past, 6.5 for the present, and 7.7 for the future. Blacks, workers, city dwellers, the poorly-educated, and the near-poor (those with incomes from \$3,000 to \$5,000) were the most optimistic.<sup>48</sup> By the mid-1970s, however, things had changed. In January 1975, over half of those with annual family incomes below \$10,000 saw their financial position as only "fair" or "poor"; more than half of the population expected their family's financial situation to worsen or to stay the same.<sup>49</sup> In 1978, the average figure given by respondents with incomes below \$5,000 for the "smallest amount of money a family of four needs to get along" was \$10,348. Fifty-four percent of that 1978 sample, including over 60 percent of those with incomes below \$7,000, expected prices to rise more than their incomes during the succeeding twelve months.<sup>50</sup> From 1974 onward, at least half of the population consistently cited financial problems as their greatest worry. Paralleling this decline in optimism have been marked declines in the nation's economic growth rate and productivity, and rises in both unemployment and inflation. In the 1980s, the economic problems of the poor and middle classes are likely to worsen. Finally, during the past two decades of rising, then falling, optimism and prosperity, government at all levels became steadily more involved in social welfare issues. In 1954, domestic expenditures at all levels of government accounted for 13.6 percent of the nation's GNP; in 1964, they accounted for 17.7 percent; and by 1974, they had risen to 25.0 percent.<sup>51</sup> Thus we see a pattern of rising expectations, followed by a failure to realize them, accompanied by a steadily more visible governmental presence in economic affairs. Relative

deprivation theory suggests that the poor might respond to this pattern with discontent and demands for redress.<sup>52</sup>

People often point to equality of opportunity as the great safety valve of American politics; they argue that Americans do not seek equality because they hope to become unequal. This claim leads to the seventh and final reason why we might expect the poor to make demands for redistribution—the hollowness of the equal opportunity claim and the severe consequences of its limitations. I have already cited evidence showing that upward mobility does not depend solely, or even largely, on individual merit. But even if it did, as Stanley Lebergott points out, "The probability that anyone will rise from the lower 99 percent to the top 1 percent of the wealth distribution is less than 0.0002."<sup>53</sup> Intergenerational mobility across all socioeconomic levels is consistently upward, but also consistently modest. David Featherman and Robert Hauser show that in 1962 nonblack adult men held occupations that averaged about 11 points higher in status than their fathers' occupations did, on a 100-point scale devised by Otis Dudley Duncan. In 1972, the rate of upward intergenerational mobility had risen only one point, despite all the social and economic changes of the previous decade.<sup>54</sup>

Shifting from consideration of the chances for mobility of unspecified individuals to the actual achievements of particular groups, we find that groups traditionally discriminated against have made little headway compared with more privileged groups in the past three decades. Specifically, women have lost ground in comparison with men, and blacks have gained only a little ground from the 1950s to the 1970s. Consider tables 5 and 6. Furthermore, not only did youth unemployment rise from 9 percent in 1968 to 13 percent in 1978, but unemployment among minority youth rose even more—from 19 percent in 1968 to 35 percent in 1978.<sup>55</sup> Given the widespread and urgent endorsement of better life chances for blacks and women in the past two decades, we should not be surprised if they were now to protest our nation's failure to translate the rhetoric of equal opportunity into reality.<sup>56</sup>

Albert Hirschman describes how the safety valve of a belief in equal opportunity might give way, letting loose a full head of steam in opposition to it. An expanding economy, as ours generally was from World War II to the early 1970s, improves the position of many people without an equal and opposite downward effect on others. Those left behind—women, blacks, Hispanics, many of the poor and working class—expect, in the absence of other information, their own position similarly to improve in the near future. Hirschman calls this optimism a "tunnel effect," as when drivers of cars in a traffic jam in a tunnel are initially pleased

Table 5 Median income of women as a percent of median income of men, for full-time, year-round adult workers, 1955-1978.

Year	Percent
1955	64
1960	61
1965	60
1970	59
1974	57
1978	59

Sources: 1955-74: Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *The Earnings Gap between Women and Men* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), p. 6. 1978: David E. Rosenbaum, "Working Women Still Seek Man-Sized Wages," *New York Times*, July 27, 1980, sec. 4, p. E3.

Table 6 Median income of black families as a percent of median income of white families, 1952-1977.

Year	Percent
1952	57
1957	54
1962	53
1967	59
1972	59
1977	57

Source: Edwin Dorn, *Rules and Racial Equality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 34-35. The absolute difference between black and white incomes is also rising, even when measured in constant dollars. The constant dollar difference (in 1967 dollars) in 1952 was \$2234; in 1977, it was \$3976. The current dollar difference in 1952 was \$1776; in 1977, it was \$7177. "Black" income from 1952 to 1962 is actually "Negro and Other Races" in these census data.

that cars in the adjacent lane are beginning to move. The tunnel effect "operates because advances of others supply information about a more benign external environment; receipt of this information produces gratification; and this gratification overcomes, or at least suspends, *envy* . . . As long as the tunnel effect lasts, everybody feels better off, both those who have become richer and those who have not."<sup>57</sup> At some point, however, those left behind come to believe that their heightened expectations will not be met; not only are their hopes now dashed, but they are also left in a relatively worse position than when the upward mobility began. "Nonrealization of the expectation [that my turn to move will soon come] will at some point result in my 'becoming furious,'

that is, in my turning into an enemy of the established order."<sup>58</sup> This reversal of sentiment does not require any particular event to set it off, so that the tunnel effect is "treacherous" to elites, since they may receive no "advance notice about its decay and exhaustion . . . On the contrary, they are lulled into complacency by the easy early stage when everybody seems to be enjoying the very process that will later be vehemently denounced and damned as one consisting essentially in 'the rich becoming richer.' "<sup>59</sup> It does not seem farfetched to see the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s as an era of expansion and optimism, and to see the 1970s as an era of slowing down and of increasing pessimism. That leaves the 1980s poised for an explosion of anger and demands for change among those left behind earlier.

### Attitudes toward Redistribution

We now have seven reasons, ranging from the authority of great thinkers, to plausible extrapolations from liberal theory, to comparisons with similar nations and our own recent past, to expect the poor to demand redistribution to mitigate their persistent and substantial inequality. And yet the dog doesn't bark — or does it? Before we proceed on the assumption that this piece of conventional wisdom is true, we must examine it more closely. It is time to step back from speculation and theory, and follow our mentor Holmes in closely considering the known facts about support for redistribution.

Redistribution of holdings has seldom been a major political issue in the United States. Trade unions have sought better wages, working conditions, and benefits — but seldom reductions in wage differentials or ties between corporate profits and wages.<sup>60</sup> Socialists have demanded public ownership of industries, the creation of opportunities for oppressed groups, and changes in American foreign policy — but seldom a fundamental reordering of status and wage relations.<sup>61</sup> Henry George, Eugene Debs, and Huey Long did have large national followings, but in retrospect, at least, it is clear that they never seriously threatened the American political order. George's Single-Tax Clubs did not daunt the robber barons or Horatio Alger; Debs's Socialist Party received, at its height, 6 percent of the national vote; Huey Long was elected to the Senate but found little sympathy there; Norman Thomas's Socialist Party won only 2 percent of the national vote in 1932 — in the depths of the Depression.<sup>62</sup> The United States has no viable socialist party at present; at most, one wing of the Democratic Party is mildly social democratic.<sup>63</sup> Anarchists, not egalitarians, have dominated American radicalism;

American radicals are more likely to oppose government infringement on individual autonomy than to seek government aid in the creation of substantive equality.<sup>64</sup> Even egalitarian communal movements have insisted on voluntary membership and freedom from outside intervention.<sup>65</sup>

Redistribution has been so far from the national consciousness that even voracious pollsters and doctoral students have, for the most part, ignored it. As a result, we know little about how most citizens actually feel about distributive changes. In the past forty years, only eight questions on national surveys have investigated some aspect of redistribution of income. Only three of the eight mention wealth. The findings from these questions are contained in table 7.

These results show several things. First, support for redistribution is strongest among the poor, unemployed, and blue-collar workers—a fact that is hardly surprising. At most, however, only 55 percent of the poor strongly support a program for their benefit. Other survey data confirm this finding: more poor than rich support progressive taxation and anti-poverty measures, but seldom do a majority of the poor do so.<sup>66</sup> Second, the more radical ideas of equalization (question E), limits on incomes (questions D and H), or confiscating wealth (question C) produce dramatically decreased support at all income levels. Third, when Schlozman and Verba compare answers to questions B and G, they find “greater average agreement in 1976 than in 1939, agreement that varies little across social groups . . . It is as if the entire nation has adopted the more liberal position held in the 1930’s by the more disadvantaged groups in American society.” That finding is not at all borne out by questions E or F, however. Furthermore, in comparing questions D and H, Schlozman and Verba find “the pattern . . . quite different. There was . . . more receptivity to this radical change in 1939 than today.”<sup>67</sup>

These data give us no clear general picture of support for redistribution—never mind consistent and intelligible details. Are variations in support a result of the way questions were worded or of substantive differences in ideology or circumstance? Has there been any real change in the past forty years? Why do those who would benefit from redistribution, but not from welfare, support the latter more than the former? How do supporters and opponents within one class differ? What specific policies do supporters and opponents of redistribution prefer? Why do some of the wealthy support downward redistribution? Most important, why do so many people with incomes below the mean oppose policies that would benefit them substantially?

These poll data, scanty as they are, serve as the appropriate point from

which to start considering support for redistribution. Analyzing question F, Hansen demonstrates that income, occupation, education, subjective status, degree of optimism, attitudes toward the beneficiaries of redistribution, and most attitudes toward government all have at most a “surprisingly weak” relationship to attitudes toward redistribution. She does find age to have an effect.<sup>68</sup> Analyzing question E, Feagan finds that an increase in education leads to a decline in support for redistribution, but that age, region, and religion have little effect.<sup>69</sup> Analyzing questions G and H, Schlozman and Verba find that occupational level significantly affects support for redistribution and for limits on incomes, but that employment status does not. They find a relationship between education and economic conservatism among older respondents, but not among younger ones.<sup>70</sup> All three sets of scholars find that blacks support redistribution more than whites do.

We can conclude at this point that race, income, and occupation certainly affect attitudes toward redistribution, but that the effects are weaker than the theoretical discussion above would lead us to expect. That result leaves us just about where we started—why do the poor not support redistribution more strongly? The surveys confirm our political and historical knowledge that most people with incomes below the mean do not believe in policies that appear, at first blush, to be in their self-interest. The survey analyses also give some evidence on variables that do not work very well to explain this nonbelief. But that is not very satisfying, and the polls do not even begin to answer our other questions. Opinion polls tantalize, but do not satisfy, our detective instincts.

### My Research

If poll data do not even concur on how often the dog barks, never mind on when and why, perhaps we should turn for answers to other explanations and data. Scholars have explained the absence of a movement for redistribution, or more generally of an American socialist movement, in various ways. Some explanations are historical. America lacked a feudal aristocracy against which to react; virtually all Americans came from, or quickly became members of, the property-holding middle class; our two-party political system solidified before a working-class party could develop; the frontier served as an outlet for the discontented and landless; the Socialist Party and leftist radicals were unable to work together in their historic moment of opportunity in the late nineteenth century; and slavery caused an irreconcilable split within the proletariat.<sup>71</sup>

**Table 7** Percent of the United States population supporting redistribution of income and wealth, and their income and occupation levels, 1937-1976.

Response to poll question	Income level <sup>a</sup>				Occupational level <sup>b</sup>				Total
	Lowest	Second	Third	Highest	Unem- ployed	Blue- collar	Lower	Upper	
							white- collar	white- collar	
A. 1937. Do you think that the federal government should follow a policy of taking money from those who have much and giving money to those who have little? (N not reported)									
Yes	43 <sup>c</sup>	—	—	18	44 <sup>d</sup>	—	—	22 <sup>d</sup>	30
B. March 1939. Do you think that our government should or should not redistribute wealth by heavy taxes on the rich? (N = 2102)									
Should	46	34	28	17	54	44	32	24	35
C. March 1939. Do you think that our government should or should not confiscate all wealth over and above what people actually need to live on decently, and use it for the public good? (N = 2102)									
Should	24	14	7	5	28	24	12	6	15
D. Dec. 1939. Do you think there should be a law limiting the amount of money any individual is allowed to earn in a year? (N = 2048)									
Yes	32	24	18	10	42	32	22	13	24
E. 1969. Every family in this country should receive the same income, about \$10,000 a year or so. (N = 1002)									
Agree	14	17	16	7	—	—	—	—	13
F. 1974. Some people think the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor. Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing this income difference between the rich and the poor. Where would you place yourself on this scale? (N = 1428)									
Government should do something (scale position of 1 on 7 point scale)	55	44	45	27	—	47	31	29	37
G. 1976. The government should tax the rich heavily in order to redistribute wealth. (N = 1370)									
Agree	—	—	—	—	47	51	42	39	47

**Table 7, continued**

Response to poll question	Income level <sup>a</sup>				Occupational level <sup>b</sup>				Total
	Lowest	Second	Third	Highest	Unem- ployed	Blue- collar	Lower white- collar	Upper white- collar	
						Upper white- collar			
H. 1976. The government should limit the amount of money any individual is allowed to earn in a year. (N = 1370)									
Agree	—	—	—	—	9	6	7	7	9

Sources: A: "The Fortune Quarterly Survey: X," *Fortune Magazine*, October 1937, pp. 154, 159; B and C: "The Fortune Survey: XXII," *Fortune Magazine*, June 1939, p. 68, and Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Unemployment, Class Consciousness, and Radical Politics," *Journal of Politics* 39 (May 1977): 302; D: "The Fortune Survey: XXVIII," *Fortune Magazine*, March 1940, p. 98, and Verba and Schlozman, "Unemployment," p. 302. For a detailed analysis of the methodology and substance of the 1939 *Fortune* surveys, see Verba and Schlozman, "Unemployment"; E: Joseph Feagin, "Poverty: We Still Believe That God Helps Those Who Help Themselves," *Psychology Today*, November 1972, p. 108; F: Susan Hansen, "Public Opinion and the Politics of Redistribution," unpublished paper, Urbana, University of Illinois, 1977, table 2; G and H: Kay Lehman Schlozman and Sidney Verba, *Injury to Insult* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 202, 220, 221.

a. For questions A, B, C, and D, *Fortune Magazine* divided its sample into categories of Poor, Lower Middle-Class, Upper Middle-Class, and Prosperous, "as determined by a classification of homes by value or rental" (*Fortune*, July 1935, p. 65). It also had an economic category entitled "Negro," which has been eliminated from this analysis. Thus the percentages and totals reported here are only for white respondents.

For question E, the income categories in the original report of the data were: under \$4000; \$4000 to \$5999; \$6000 to \$9999; and over \$10,000. Those categories are reported here under the columns of Lowest, Second, Third, and Highest, respectively.

For question F, the income categories in the original report of the data were: under \$4000; \$4000 to \$7000; \$7000 to \$10,000; \$10,000 to \$15,000; and over \$15,000. The first three categories are reported here under the columns of Lowest, Second, and Third, respectively. The final two categories were combined in a weighted average under the column of Highest.

b. For questions A, B, C, and D, *Fortune Magazine* divided its sample into categories of Unemployed, Wage Worker, Lower White-Collar, and Upper White-Collar. See Verba and Schlozman, "Unemployment," 1977, for a discussion of these divisions. These categories are reported here under the columns of Unemployed, Blue-collar, Lower white-collar, and Upper white-collar, respectively.

For question F, the reported occupational categories are Unskilled, Semiskilled and Skilled, White-collar, Managerial, and Professional. The first two categories were combined in a weighted average in the column Blue-collar. The category of White-collar is reported here as Lower white-collar, and the categories Managerial and Professional were combined in a weighted average under the column of Upper white-collar.

For questions G and H, the reported categories were Unemployed, Blue-collar, Lower white-collar, and Upper white-collar. They are reported verbatim.

c. All cell entries are the percent agreeing with the question from that category.

d. These figures are interpreted from a verbal description of the data in the original report.

Other explanations are economic. If capitalist systems have "historically always been characterized by great inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth,"<sup>72</sup> then, in choosing capitalism, Americans may in some sense have deliberately chosen aggregate gain over distributive or collective goals. Furthermore, the coincidence of the nation's founding, the industrial revolution, and sudden access to vast natural resources has permitted great economic expansion and widespread individual gain since the nation's founding. Most people could become better-off than their parents were; a few could become much better-off.<sup>73</sup> Finally, the polity's dependence upon capitalism gives the market a remarkably free rein to "mold volitions."<sup>74</sup>

Still other explanations are political. The founding fathers, after all, deliberately designed a constitutional structure that would foster factionalism based on region of the country, occupation, and opinion—anything to avoid the dreaded mischief of broad class conflict.<sup>75</sup> More pointedly, some argue that political and legal equality through representative democracy is "the principal ideological lynchpin of Western capitalism" because its "very existence deprives the working class of the idea of socialism as *a different type of state*." Because "the bourgeois state 'represents' the totality of the population, *abstracted* from its distribution into social classes, as individual and equal citizens, . . . the economic divisions within the 'citizenry' are masked by" their apparent political equality. The distinction between economic hierarchy and political equality "is then constantly presented . . . to the masses as the ultimate incarnation of liberty." There is, finally, classic pluralism; American politics substitutes group antagonisms and payoffs for class-based ones.<sup>76</sup>

Some explanations are structural. Ira Katznelson describes the dominant feature of American society as the unchallenged serial nature of class relations. We see the community, workplace, and state as separate arenas; each uses a different vocabulary, has different institutional expressions, and legitimates different patterns of demand and reward. In other Western nations, socialist parties have developed a world view that overcomes this separation; but Americans see class relations, if at all, as only one among many components of public life. Even if they do not like their class position, they can escape it when they leave the narrow arena of the workplace.<sup>77</sup> In addition, in bureaucratic and industrial settings, where most people spend most of their time, authority is faceless, organization is hierarchic, and minute divisions foster conflict among peers—all of which mitigate against working-class unity. Collective action costs individuals more than they gain from it, and the structural means to overcome that barrier seldom exist.<sup>78</sup> The educational system

tracks students, elevating the intelligent and capable leaders out of the working class into the bourgeoisie.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, some explanations are ideological and psychological. Workers generally accept, even if they have some doubts about, the American ethos of rugged individualism and the American dream of upward mobility. They fear equality; they have little or no class consciousness; they believe the world is just and people get what they deserve; the poor limit their aspirations and dreams to reduce dissonance between desires and possibilities.<sup>80</sup>

Surely we have an embarrassment of riches here.<sup>81</sup> Why embark on yet another study of the same subject? I have two replies. First, as noted above, very few of these works address the specific question of redistribution of income and wealth; socialism is usually defined in terms of nationalization of industries, workers' control, or class conflict. Even among socialists (who perhaps take their cue from Karl Marx himself), questions of distribution are at best subsidiary and at worst ignored. Second, these studies do not tell us enough about individual beliefs. As we saw in table 7, surveys that compare rich with poor barely begin to answer our questions about beliefs concerning distribution. Qualitative studies that could have answered these questions do not compare rich and poor; therefore they cannot draw conclusions about the relations between economic status and beliefs concerning distribution.

I propose to fill these two gaps in our knowledge of American political values by focusing on issues of redistribution and by comparing rich and poor respondents in a way that can fully explore their beliefs about distribution—through intensive, qualitative interviews with a small set of people.

The methodological value of comparing rich to poor in explaining why the poor do not protest their lot is clear.<sup>82</sup> The value of a small sample of unstructured, intensive interviews is perhaps less so and therefore requires some discussion. Topics as complex and slippery as beliefs about income, property, justice, equality, and the role of the government in the economy and vice versa require a research method that permits textured, idiosyncratic responses. The researcher must permit—even induce—people to speak for themselves and must be wary of channeling their thoughts through his or her own preconceptions about what questions to ask, how answers should be shaped, and what coding categories best subdivide the responses. The channeling comes later. As Robert Redfield points out, the student of an unfamiliar culture must take two positions, in the proper sequence, in order to generate and then communicate his or her findings. First, "the investigator has to see the meaning, understand

the valuation, and feel the feeling connected with object or act in the mind of the native." Only after understanding the respondent's point of view may the investigator "change his viewpoint and look at that object or act — together with the meaning and value it has for the native — as an object of scientific interest now to be described from the outside and related . . . to other things according to the demands of a more detached and abstract understanding."<sup>83</sup> The interviews need to be open enough to allow for unanticipated value judgments and unorthodox world views, but structured enough to permit comparisons among respondents and obedience to the discipline of a "more detached and abstract understanding."

To achieve this balance between openness and discipline, I have conducted intensive open-ended interviews with twenty-eight working adults chosen at random in (New Haven) Connecticut. To choose the subjects, I used block census data to identify the lowest-income and highest-income among predominantly white neighborhoods in the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) of New Haven.<sup>84</sup> I then used a street directory and voting lists to identify the adult residents of the two neighborhoods. Subjects were selected from that list by assigning each a number and then randomly selecting numbers. I sent each potential subject a letter explaining my purpose and followed this up with telephone calls and visits to their homes. I offered the poor respondents thirty dollars for participating. Out of thirty-six wealthy subjects contacted, twelve participated, for a response rate of 33 percent. Out of forty-three poor respondents contacted, sixteen participated, for a response rate of 37 percent.

Thus I spoke with eight men and eight women with incomes ranging from \$2,000 to \$12,000 and with six men and six women with incomes above \$35,000.<sup>85</sup> Most of the poor did not own their own home, had less than a high school education, and worked as unskilled or skilled laborers. They all lived in a city neighborhood that is in transition from middle-class ownership to rental by ethnic white families, the elderly, and increasingly, blacks and Puerto Ricans. It is a run-down neighborhood, rapidly losing young adults and hope. All of the wealthy owned their own home and two to twenty acres of land, had at least a high school education (and in some cases postgraduate degrees), and worked as executives or professionals. A few women in this group were not employed outside the home. They lived in an exclusive, virtually all-white suburb, which has grown over several decades from a rural village to the most desirable bedroom community for New Haven. It is zoned to permit only single-family dwellings on at least two acres of land. Many

of the wealthy also owned their own businesses and employed up to thirty people.

Each interview consisted of three sessions of about two hours each; all were taped and transcribed verbatim. The topics of conversation ranged from the distribution of money and authority within the family, school, and workplace; to views on fair incomes, the class structure, the electoral system, and government policies; to the meaning of justice, equality, and democracy. The idea of equalizing incomes and holdings was extensively discussed several times. My questions sought perceptions, explanations, and evaluations of existing conditions, as well as changes the respondent would make if he or she were "assistant God," as one woman put it. There were detailed probes, forced choice questions, and opportunity for rambling anecdotes.<sup>86</sup>

This research method permitted respondents to reveal their convictions and uncertainties, their reasoning processes and emotional reactions, their foci for passion and indifference, their expertise and ignorance. From the interviews, I was able to evaluate the content, complexity, and strength of individual beliefs about justice, as well as the circumstances in which they occurred and their effects on respondents' political and economic views. The thread uniting all of these facets was an attempt to understand how people feel about being poorer than over half or wealthier than nine-tenths of the nation's population.

But knowing how twenty-eight people feel is not of great value to most readers. I must therefore clarify what is of value to them in this book — what they can and cannot expect to learn from intensive interviewing of a few people. Obviously, one cannot safely generalize from a sample of this kind to a national population; it would be worthless, for example, for me to point out what percentage of my sample sought more or fewer government services for the poor. Since I make no attempt to establish proportions of people who support a particular policy or hold a particular belief, it matters little whether this group is a representative sample of all United States citizens. Thus a concern that a disproportionate number of the wealthy (or poor) respondents are Jewish, or Italian, or over fifty years old, or whatever, would be misplaced. These demographic considerations become important only when one seeks to infer from a sample, as survey researchers can do, how many and what kinds of respondents seek more or less downward redistribution.

Since I cannot generalize from this sample to a population, what can I claim from intensive interviewing? One can make four claims, ranging from cautious to bold. The first and most cautious is Karl Lamb's, that "the reader [should] . . . accept the material [acquired through intensive

interviews] for its intrinsic interest and make judgments about its wider applicability on the basis of its resonance with his own experience." Intensive interviewing thus "suggests" or "implies" truths about American politics, but it never "proves" them.<sup>87</sup>

This claim is so cautious as to be indisputable, but it is hardly a convincing reason to devote hours to the pages ahead. A slightly more powerful claim, as described by Harry Eckstein, "holds that case studies may be conducted precisely for the purpose of discovering questions and puzzles for theory, and discovering candidate-rules that might solve theoretical puzzles."<sup>88</sup> Intensive interviews are a device for generating insights, anomalies, and paradoxes, which later may be formalized into hypotheses to be tested by quantitative social science methods.

This claim, as Eckstein says, "identif[ies] perfectly legitimate uses of case study and methods of carrying them out. [It is] . . . implicit in a host of meritorious political studies . . . [and] is the standard defense of case study by theory-oriented social scientists."<sup>89</sup> But it both exaggerates and underestimates the merits of small samples and intensive probes. It exaggerates because case studies are simply one limited tool for generating theory; the best theorists might be just as successful – or more so – with a different tool, and the poor theorists are not helped much by it. Thus this claim permits us only to say that "there is no special reason for either making or not making such studies."<sup>90</sup>

But this argument also underestimates the value of intensive interviews, which leads to the third claim. They can fill in gaps left by opinion research through providing data that surveys are unable to produce. In opinion polling, the researcher infers the links between variables; in intensive interviewing, the researcher induces the respondent to create the links between variables as he or she sees them. For example, polls show that most of the population usually does not support programs leading to the downward redistribution of wealth. Surveyors explain this finding through the correlation between wealth and support; the researcher interprets the relationship and infers that the rich do not support certain programs because these programs would hurt their economic position. Intensive interviewers explain this finding by discussing with respondents what they expect and how they would feel about the effect of redistributive programs on their lives. The researcher interprets respondents' statements to draw conclusions about what redistribution means to people in various economic positions. The conclusions from both types of research may be equally valid, even identical, but they emerge from different types of data, which are collected in different ways to yield different types of explanations for the same phenomenon.<sup>91</sup>

The fourth and boldest claim for intensive interviewing modifies the conclusion just reached by arguing that intensive interviews can generate findings that survey research does not. This sentence implies two differences between the third and fourth claims. The former holds that the same conclusion may be reached by different paths; the latter holds that different conclusions may be reached by different paths and that the conclusions of intensive interviewing may more accurately capture reality. The third claim also argues that the methods of the two types of research necessarily determine the kinds of explanation they generate – differences between explanations do not stem from poor polling or interview techniques, but from the nature of the two enterprises. The fourth claim, in contrast, argues that polls could perhaps generate the results that interviews provide, but that pollsters may too often be limited by either a failure of imagination or the exigencies of statistical techniques.

An example will illuminate this claim. Imagine two independent dimensions: support for equality in the home and support for equality in the workplace. Both dimensions vary along a scale ranging from low to high support for equality. Survey research would correlate values along both scales; the relationship would be a high positive correlation if most people fell along the diagonal in the boxes marked X in figure 1 (that is, if most people felt the same about equality in the home and in the workplace).<sup>92</sup> Those people who do not appear on the diagonal (that is, those in the boxes marked 0) would reduce the correlation; they would be defined as part of the unexplained variance. But intensive interviews might discover that many respondents support equality at home and oppose it in the workplace, or even that some support equality at home because they oppose it at work. They view the relationship between home and work differently from those along the diagonal, and differently from the surveyor. Thus what is error for the survey researcher becomes a finding for the intensive interviewer. Intensive interviews may find results where surveys find only noise.

One can, I believe, subscribe to all four claims for intensive interviews without contradiction; that at least is my position. Responses from these twenty-eight people may resonate with events or feelings in the lives of the readers; particular responses or sets of responses may engender hypotheses in the minds of social scientists; responses may flesh out the skeletal findings of the pollster; responses may even justify rejection of some interpretations of survey results. It is not necessary to decide a priori which of these or other claims for small samples is the most defensible.<sup>93</sup> The proof is in the reading.

		Support for equality in the home		
		Low	Moderate	High
Support for equality in the workplace	Low	X	O	O
	Moderate	O	X	O
	High	O	O	X

Figure 1 Hypothetical findings about attitudes toward equality in the home and in the workplace.

But drawing conclusions from the interviews, responding to "the demands of a more detached and abstract understanding," is the second step according to Redfield. Let us begin with his first step – taking the "inside view of things." Chapter two reveals some of the blooming, buzzing confusion of the conversations, which I shall briefly examine before seeking to make social science sense of them. Of this our mentor Holmes might approve, since he always preferred to view the scene of the crime before retiring to his study with pipe, files, violin, and Dr. Watson.

## 2 Support for and Opposition to More Equality

In this chapter I introduce eight respondents approximately as they presented themselves during the interviews. My purpose here is not to analyze their views, but to convey the flavor of our conversations, with their intense and quiet moments, predictable and anomalous opinions, revealing and obscuring comments. I hope thereby to draw the reader into the context from which the later social science analyses emerge.

### Opponents of Redistribution

Consider Maria Pulaski, who cleans other people's homes. (First and last names that begin with the letters A through L are used for the wealthy; letters M through Z are used for the poor.)<sup>1</sup> Her husband, a skilled laborer, was demoted during the 1974 recession. She feels lucky that he was not laid off, but she badly misses his former salary. After taxes and an unknown amount that her husband allots to himself, Maria has about \$7,000 a year (in 1976 dollars) from both incomes to fully support herself and her husband, and to partially support one son, his wife, and his six children. She is acutely conscious of her poverty. She can think of nothing "that made me real happy. I'd be happy if I can just get along, pay my bills, and live normally, without have to worrying [sic] about everything, about all my bills and utilities. It's very difficult." She also

cannot even imagine a future "worse than what I'm in now. The way things are now, this is the worst for me."

Maria feels that wealthy employers underpay and occasionally cheat her, and "that bothers me a lot. They're making their money, and then when you ask them for a raise, they almost die—'The cost of living!' Well, the cost of living for me too! It doesn't seem fair." She is also angry about taxes. The government, she says, should not "take so much taxes out. Take it from the other people that have it, the richer people. They get away without paying the taxes. And *we* have to pay the taxes." Not only are tax rates too high and biased toward the rich, she feels, but also the wealthy are better at manipulating tax laws: "My husband's afraid to deduct things. [He says] 'No, I'm not getting in trouble.' And yet these wealthy people, they take out everything. They give to charity, but then they'll say, 'Well, we'll deduct it from my taxes.' They exaggerate, too."

Yet Maria is not calling for a program to dispossess the rich. Her employers earn \$60,000 a year, but "they worked for it, why not? You work for it, it's fair. If I got a good education and I'm doing a different job [than you] and a harder job, I deserve more. But if you deserve it, you deserve it. I don't believe in this equal, all equal." Even those who did not work for it, who "got it through their parents," deserve to keep their wealth. "Sure. If I had money, and I gave it to my children, that's good. Good luck to 'em."

For the first eight hours of interviews, Maria also showed no sign of wanting major changes in the government. After the tape recorder was turned off, however, she suddenly volunteered an observation about the need for such a change: "I only hope things get better, instead of what they are now. Change the government—no, I shouldn't say that, huh?" Changing the government "just might" improve matters, "because the way things are now, I don't know, they're fluky." She had no specific recommendations: "I don't even know what you'd have to do to change it. Get all these men out that (pause) then put the new ones in? I wonder if it would make a difference. Maybe it wouldn't." But the potential for political activism seems to be there:

MP: Can't be just one person doing it [changing the government] or two persons. You all gotta get together and go around, talking with the people, and try to let them understand things.

JH: Would you get involved in something like that?

MP: Sure I would. If I thought it was going to help. Why not?

Although she does not expect the rich to go along with these changes, she thinks that if "the middle-class people get together and discuss the things

what have to be discussed, maybe *they'll* all go for it." Still she is pessimistic: "But what can you do? Actually, you don't see anything like that happening though. Nope."

Does Maria seek major political and economic change? Apparently not. But does she enthusiastically endorse present distributions of wealth and authority? Hardly. There are discrepancies between what she acquiesces in and what she dimly envisions. Because she can neither fully endorse the status quo as she sees it nor fully imagine a desirable alternative, Maria is ambivalent and often retreats into confusion, bitterness, and pessimism.

Maria's pessimism is only one form of nonsupport for major political or economic change. Some of the poor vehemently oppose it. At age twenty-seven, Sally White is unemployed after holding six clerical jobs in nine years, mainly in small companies that have failed. Despite this dismal record and her average annual income of about \$6,000, Sally believes wholeheartedly in free enterprise. Her many jobs have given her "good experience," she loves "wheeling and dealing," and she has no doubts about her own ability to succeed: "People *can* make money if they put their minds to it and get off their little rear ends. People get lazy, but I have no doubt that I will make out well. Because I'm very ambitious, so if there's something I want, I'll do it." She and her friends are "always onto the newest idea—'Let's see how to make money here!'"

Like Maria, Sally rejects the idea of equalizing incomes across occupations. She also rejects the concept of equal pay within occupations: "Not all secretaries are the same. This person may work at a better speed and be more profitable for you, so he *should* get paid more. When I was in control, it was always the person that could do the best for *me* that would get the raise." But Sally exempts some people from this canon of pay for productivity. Some company presidents "just step in, Daddy owns the business, and here comes Junior and [he] gets a \$50,000 a year job and he does nothing." But even though Junior has a boondoggle, "Somebody worked to get there in his family, and if they want to give it to him, really, it's their business." Other company presidents who have "worked [their] way up" may eventually take it easy, but they still deserve high salaries. "I know if I got my business going and I decided to be lazy and have someone else [run it], I would still expect my full share of the profits. *I'm* the one that got the whole thing going." Thus while Sally believes that workers' pay should depend upon fine gradations of productivity, she believes that pay for company presidents requires only family connections or previous effort. Why does someone who will probably remain a worker, and who almost certainly will not become a company president, hold this view?

Sally gives two reasons for "hating" the idea of flattening pay scales. First, "It would take all of the fun out of life. There would be no point in pushing yourself to achieve if you can't get any gain from it." Second, she believes that self-interest ultimately benefits everyone: "By pushing *yourself* up, you're also bringing people with you. Say you own a business, and you're making it more prosperous. Well, then, the people working for you, you're also making [them] more prosperous. But you have to do it for *you* first. And if everybody's doing everything at once, it pulls together, it raises everything. But everybody is out there doing it for themselves."

Unlike many free enterprise enthusiasts, Sally does not want the government to withdraw from the economic realm. In fact, quite the reverse. The American economy is healthy, and all Americans have a chance to advance precisely because of government aid: "You have your SBA [Small Business Administration] to help people out. There's all kinds of help—education programs, and training and job programs and—there's everything! There's *no* reason why people can't get out and work nowadays." All she wants now is enough restraint on government action to ensure that there will always be wealthy citizens. As she puts it, "What would be the sense of pushing if I couldn't get rich by doing it?"

Sally White is not ambivalent about present distributions or pessimistic about the future, as Maria Pulaski is. In fact, whereas Maria impels us to think about acquiescence and suppressed opposition, Sally leads us to consider a very different research question: How can some of the poor be optimistic and entrepreneurial in light of their personal economic failure?

But we are not yet ready to draw lessons from Maria or Sally. To place their views in perspective and to see the relationship between economic position and political opinions, we need to compare them to a group of rich respondents. Only with such a comparison can we discuss the relationship between poverty and attitudes toward redistribution. Furthermore, the wealthy are also an important research subject in their own right, since they exercise a disproportionate share of social, economic, and political power, and since they are so seldom studied.

Common sense, historical evidence, liberal theory, and survey data all lead us to expect the rich to oppose the downward redistribution of wealth; generally my interview data concur. But as Redfield counsels, we need to see the wealthy through their own eyes before we analyze them through the lens of social science.

Consider Isaac Cohen, age forty-eight. Through "hard work and luck," he has risen from a childhood of poverty and anti-Semitism to ownership of a business that supports his gracious suburban life and the post-

graduate education of two children. (He would not reveal his income; I estimate it to have been at least \$70,000 annually, in 1976 dollars.) He is a "workaholic," driven by a need for security and enough money never again to have material worries for himself and his dependents. His immediate family "is the beginning and end of my obligation," but he takes that obligation very seriously: "I wouldn't hurt anyone deliberately, but you fight like hell to defend, and you use *anything* at your means to defend yourself. *Anything*."

Isaac wants society to care for "our sick, our infirm, our less fortunate, those who can't take care of themselves." But "if you're healthy there's no reason why you can't work and earn." He has no sympathy for the "drones" inevitable in any society: "I'm willing to accept this, but I refuse to pay them a living wage. You have to suffer. You have to have an *incentive* to get out of the dirt." To the "shiftless and lazy," he says only "Well goddammit, Suffer! I don't want to pay you to continue living this way." Isaac sees welfare as ultimately harmful to the poor because it teaches them to accept a dole rather than to develop a work ethic. Society thereby loses potential talent, money is wasted, and the poor are infantilized.

Indeed, Isaac argues, not only should we leave the shiftless and lazy to shift for themselves, but also we should not overpay manual workers: "Some of us simply aren't fortunate enough to have the capacity to reason and understand and plan. They shouldn't be paid what I am paid. I would resent it. Frankly, their income should be commensurate—a living wage, nothing more than that. Why should they have the opportunity to buy a new car or live in a house with more rooms than are absolutely necessary?" Finally, Isaac flatly rejects the idea of equal incomes: "There has to be a difference. I have to have something that you *do not* have. The sameness can kill me."

So far, this viewpoint seems straightforward enough. Nothing here would be hidden from a good survey. But Isaac suddenly announces, "Frankly, I can't justify my own income. On the grand scheme of things, judging what I need to live comfortably on, I earn entirely too much money." In fact, he continues, "I don't believe anyone should have anything in excess. It's wasteful." He accepts the policy implications of this view by endorsing confiscatory inheritance taxes and stricter personal and corporate tax laws. "Family fortunes should not be perpetuated in any form. Society gave me what I had, and my incentive built up the security and good life that I have. That good life does not belong to my children by right. I owe society something. I have to give it back. This is contradictory, I know, but I mean it." Isaac is not about to relinquish his

holdings unilaterally: "My business doesn't have to be as profitable as it is, okay, but that's society. We measure success with dollars. The name of the game is dollars." But his belief is as sincere as it is surprising, and part of my analytic task is to understand the distributive implications of such an apparent anomaly.

Finally, Isaac's judgments sharply distinguish between family members and everyone else. He believes that all people, especially blacks and the poor, are greedy and unscrupulous, but he is very proud of his family's "honor box." Instead of giving his children an allowance, he supplies a box with up to twenty dollars in change. He keeps the box filled, but does not monitor it. "And my kids have always been encouraged to use it when they need it for something. Not to abuse it, but it is there, and I will never question the level of that box. And it has never been abused." Again, a sharp and nonobvious distinction, which raises the question of "double standards" in beliefs about distribution.

Isaac leads us to ask about some kinds of discrepancies within a belief system; another rich respondent suggests others. Barbara Azlinsky, age fifty, is a legal paraprofessional married to Ian, a career civil servant; they have an elegant suburban home, three cars, three children in college, and a joint annual income of about \$37,000. Barbara shares Isaac's work ethic, condemnation of the lazy poor, vague hostility toward the undeserving rich, and flat opposition to equalizing incomes. She gives two reasons for her opposition. First, material equality would "homogenize the country," which would lead to "no personality, no character. You're limiting them [people] right away. How can they do what they want?" Her second reason is revealed in this exchange:

BA: It would be nice to have everyone equal, but let's face it, you give someone \$10 and you give another one \$10,000, each one will do what they want with it. So I don't think there's any equality. I don't think you can attain it. That [trying to equalize incomes] is impractical, I think, knowing human nature.

JH: What if you give everybody \$10,000? Some will . . .

BA: Drink it.

JH: And some will . . . ?

BA: Save it. Okay, so where are you? You're right back to where you started.

This seems clear enough—until she adds: "Except they have the freedom and happiness to do what they wanted to do. That's what I was thinking when you said about, ah, utopia." Midsentence, her opposition to equality turns into a wistful perception of it as ideal, but impossible to

achieve. Which is her "true" view? The question is unanswerable as posed: the important point is ambivalence.

A similar shift in Barbara's views occurs when we discuss the poor. She opposes a minimum wage because for "everyone who can think, self-preservation would be there [as a motivation], and you would do something to work, to get money. If it's given to them [the poor], I don't think they value it as much as if they worked for it. When I think about our income, and how we skimmed and saved and did without, I would like to see some other people do it." She is particularly incensed at welfare exploiters, such as a woman "who was having children because the state was supporting her on welfare," and "tremendous[ly]" fat women who buy "tremendous baskets full of food with food stamps." Welfare recipients who shop for groceries "with taxis waiting for them—that irritates me. When I didn't have a car [and had three children less than four years old], I wouldn't dream of getting a cab to help me with shopping." Again, this view seems clear—until she suddenly adds, "Looking on and watching this, it's nice [to criticize], but being in their place, I imagine this is a necessity, the food shopping and the taxi, because they *don't* have a car."

Barbara has the same mixed feelings about the rich. Generally, "if you work for it, you deserve it. Someone that's developed land or *done* things is entitled to profit. That's private enterprise." But she also feels that many of the wealthy—her neighbors, most doctors, Muhammed Ali—do not deserve their holdings. Her comments about lawyers' salaries best capture her ambivalence; her confused language reflects the contradictions in her thoughts:

BA: They deserve their money, but sometimes they take advantage of you.

JH: What makes them deserve the high salary?

BA: Well, they have their education. Some of them don't deserve the money that they have, but they're entitled to it, because they have studied. They have worked hard for it. There are *some* lawyers, they think they're next to God, but they're *not*. I mean, I dislike someone that (pause). You can have a fine attorney who is very good, a good prosecutor deserves what he's getting. But if he thinks he's the best—and he probably isn't—he doesn't deserve so (trails off).

The ambivalence within each of Barbara's attitudes may reflect the changes her beliefs have undergone in the past thirty years. She feels "more materialistic now in my old age" and less of a "humanitarian" than she was in her youth. She is angry that coworkers have been promoted

over her, that her husband was recently demoted, and that her children need financial help she cannot give. Furthermore, she always believed that "by the time I reached this age and stage in life, I would have some security, and I don't. We don't have anything really." She is "upset" by the discovery that her childhood rule—"You work hard, you get your reward"—simply "is not so." She concludes, "I've gotten bitter, because I was brought up 'Do good, do good,' all that. But I don't think that should be the rule, one's way of living. Can't be sweet all the time." Thus in bare outline Barbara agrees with Isaac's rejection of economic equalization, but the nuances of her values and her feelings about them differ greatly from his.

### Some Developing Themes

In one sense, all four of these vignettes merely illustrate the fact with which I began: neither rich nor poor seek redistribution of wealth. To stop there is to miss the point, however. Values relating to distribution are much more complicated than the simple statement "People do not support income equalization" suggests. The reasoning, judgments, and emotions behind this statement are complex, confusing to both speaker and hearer, and at least as important for the social scientist as the bald opinion. These vignettes suggest at least four themes for further investigation.

- ① First, some respondents are ambivalent; they simultaneously hold contradictory opinions about one subject. Maria Pulaski resents her wealthy employers, but respects their right to be wealthy. Barbara Azlinsky feels contemptuous toward and angry about welfare cheats, but she also sympathizes with their plight. These ambivalent beliefs often are associated with confused or unhappy emotions. Maria is bitter, hesitant, and pessimistic; Barbara is bitter, angry, and often incoherent. What kinds of ambivalence recur among respondents, and what political effects does ambivalence have?
- ② Second, some respondents hold not contradictory opinions about one subject, but startlingly different opinions about different subjects. I characterize these views as disjunctions, rather than as ambivalence. Different domains of life are especially likely to call forth different views. Isaac Cohen is permissive about money at home, rigid about it at work and in society in general. Sally White supports with equal enthusiasm rugged economic individualism, social hedonism, and a political welfare state. These disjunctions are less likely to be associated with confused or unhappy emotions. Isaac and Sally are both cheerful, optimistic, and un-

concerned about their apparent inconsistencies. What kinds of disjunctions recur among respondents, and what political effects do disjunctions have?

- ③ Third, the quality of nonsupport for equalizing incomes varies among respondents. Isaac Cohen and Sally White both vehemently "hate" the idea. Barbara Azlinsky rejects it, but makes wistful comments about how nice it might be. Maria Pulaski rejects it, but makes defiant comments about the need for egalitarian tax reforms and political change. The strength of opposition does not depend on economic position. The two strongest opponents are a wealthy industrialist and an unemployed secretary; the two weakest opponents are a wealthy professional and a struggling cleaning woman. What kinds of opposition to redistribution of wealth recur among respondents, and what political effects do these variations have?
- ④ Fourth, respondents vary in their interpretations of their environment and of its effects upon their beliefs. In the face of a long series of failures, both her employers' and her own, Sally White insists that free enterprise works and that any day now she will attain success. In the face of a lifetime of upward mobility and current success, Barbara Azlinsky claims that the free enterprise system does not work as it should and that economically she is a failure. What is the relationship between external circumstances and beliefs about distribution, and what political effects does this relationship have?

Before I turn to these themes and questions, however, and respond to "the demands of a more detached and abstract understanding," I must finish obeying Redfield's injunction to "see the meaning . . . and feel the feeling . . . in the mind of the native."<sup>2</sup>

### Supporters of Redistribution and Abstainers from Opinion

Opposition, whether vehement or muted, is not the only possible or actual response to the idea of redistributing wealth. Some poor and some rich *do* support equalizing holdings; others in both groups refuse even to consider the question of fairness in the distribution of holdings.

Consider Rod Thompson, who is nineteen years old, works in his father's small grocery store, has one year of college education and no future plans. His parents give him room, board, and spending money; he would like to earn "\$20-30,000 someday," but is content right now.

Rod draws on his experience at the YMCA to evaluate the worth of various professions. "FBI agents, and lawyers, and doctors and things like that" who "probably make \$100,000 a year" have "some amazing

long lunch breaks at the YMCA." Asked if they nevertheless deserve their pay, he concludes, "No. Well, if the opportunity arises that they need 'em, they *are* qualified. But I guess they don't need them very often, if they are playing basketball every afternoon at least for five hours." Similarly, "Athletes are way overpaid. \$325,000 a year, what are you going to do with that? I suppose you'd go nuts for awhile, but there's not enough time to spend that kind of money. So why should they get it?" There "definitely" should be a limit on incomes. "There's no reason why people can't live comfortably on, Jeez, \$40,000." He later raised his preferred maximum to \$100,000, then lowered it: "You don't have your yacht for everyday, forty Mercedes. But you could live with your three meals a day and do whatever you want on \$20,000. I like that." His figures are hazy, but his conviction is strong and consistent. Asked about a minimum income, he comes to the same conclusion from the other direction: "Between \$10,000 and 20,000, I'd say. Better yet, you could have everybody make the same thing."

What reasoning underlies Rod's unconventional values? At times, he seeks the greatest good for the greatest number and assumes the diminishing marginal utility of wealth. He corrects me when I ask why people "deserve" equal incomes, saying "Some of them don't *deserve* it, but . . ." He accepts a revision asking why people "ought" to have equal incomes and answers: "There's so many people that need it that don't have it. There's so many people that have it that don't need it. So you might as well bring it in towards the middle, so that you could set a standard. So that you can make people relatively happy." At other times, he focuses on the consequences of equality for community sentiment. With similar incomes, "People would be more together, helping each other out," and they would develop interests "that you don't have to make money out of. You just do them for the enjoyment of them."

Rod foresees problems in implementing redistribution. First, it will never happen because "there's too much power. The people that would [make it] possible to make that law are the people with the high salaries. They would never do that. (pause) You could get up a petition. (pause) Those things never work." Second, he feels that those with important, difficult, or productive jobs may really deserve more than the lazy or unskilled. But his greatest concern is with incentives. People, including himself, whose earnings were limited might not work hard because "everybody's incentive now is their economic stature." Even the best possible society would have people "that don't want to do nothin' or aren't happy in what they're doing." He struggles for a solution to this problem: "I used to think about how Adolf Hitler—morbid, I know,

but—burned Jews and turned them into soap. You can't do that, but he sorta had the right idea. But he just got a little outa hand. Maybe you put all the renegades in their own little world and let them try to function." Rod here is, in effect, proposing concentration camps for those who will not work for the social good. Soon he retreats, embarrassed, from this position and asks me to ignore it. Upon reflection, in fact, he decides that people *would* develop nonmonetary work incentives in an egalitarian society. After all, when he had a part-time job with no work:

RT: I thought it'd be great, sitting around for six, seven, eight hours. But after awhile it was horrible. Mostly slept. I was embarrassed to take their money, as a matter of fact. I would have given anything to have some work.

JH: Do you think other people would end up like that?

RT: Yeah, I guess they'd really miss working.

Rod Thompson strongly, if confusedly, seeks equality. He gets diverted by alternatives and objections, but he always comes back to his basic conviction that people should not have more or less money than they need to live comfortably.

In contrast to Rod, Phillip Santaguidda refuses even to consider alternatives to the way things are. In 1976, he was sixty-eight and a door-to-door salesman. His wife Marion works part-time, and together they earn \$11,000 annually. They have few immediate financial worries, but they have high fixed costs, and their only plans for retirement are to keep working as long as possible.

Phillip neither favors nor opposes economic inequality. Its existence is not, in his eyes, subject to reform or moral evaluation. For example, unskilled laborers are underpaid because they "can replace them so easily. 'Cause there's more unskilled workers than there are skilled workers, and that's what makes it so cheap, the price." His explanation of wealth has similar Marxist overtones: "An honest man never makes it, have to be a thief. That's how you get the big money, by manipulating, gypping somebody. Above the law or within the law. The small businessman has maybe three [employees]. And if you can manipulate three people, get a good pay out of three people—what if you can manipulate *fifty* people, get *fifty* pay slips to work with. The rich can manipulate more. Money is power."

And yet he does not believe that society should confiscate these ill-gotten holdings. After all, "It's their money to do as they please. If a guy got rich [by having] people working for him just robbing banks of all that money—that's *his*. *He* took all these chances. Nobody gets to tell

him what to do with it." Besides, the poor are no more virtuous, only less successful: "The fella working in the shop, he's trying to gyp his boss out of a day's work, and he's dishonest." In fact, unrelenting competition is ubiquitous: "There's always going to be conflict, jealousy. Every country wants more from a smaller country. The smaller country wants more from the *tiny* country. Everybody's out to beat everybody, and it's just human nature to try to get away with everything you can." No more than wealthy thieves should nations be condemned: "Countries are doing it—it's a good thing. People are fighting each other—it's a good thing. The more he fights, the more rewards he gets."

Phillip explains that his refusal to make judgments is deliberate psychological self-protection. Manipulation "doesn't make me mad. After you get to think about it, you say, 'Well, I could be up there too. It's all open for me too, if I was able to get there.' Then I back up. Then I run off, I don't get mad." He knows that, in fact, he never had much chance to "get there." He compares his own deeply poor, immigrant background to the opportunities he would have had as a member of "the Woolworth family." A Woolworth child "would see how this worked at home. We'd have our little talks and find out [how] to manipulate this money, make three out of nothing." Nevertheless, "I don't let things like that bother me. Otherwise I would be in the nuthouse."

Phillip adds further that equality would be impossible to achieve and undesirable anyway. If incomes were equalized, we would "turn out to be a bunch of cannibals. We'd be stealing from each other, killing each other, trying to take away from the ones that *are* satisfied. It can't be." Even though it "doesn't sound right," he concludes: "That's the way it's gotta be. Because it'd be a hell of a world to live in if we didn't have some rich and some poor. You gotta have all classes. Who'd do your housework then? Who'd go picking up the garbage? You gotta have people with money that you have to look up to and do work for. Most of the people don't like rich people, [but] that's what's gotta be."

Despite this grim outlook, Phillip is contented and gentle. He loves, respects, and shares everything with his wife; he spoils his grandchildren shamelessly. Moreover, he is deeply distressed about poverty. "Nobody deserves to be poor": they are poor only because "they're not in a position to take [advantage of] the breaks in life. Sometimes [it's] circumstances, and sometimes people don't even know they're poor. They think that's their *life*. But today, in America, there shouldn't be *any* poor people. Nobody."

How does Phillip live with both his "cannibalistic" view of human nature and his personal compassion? What are the implications of his in-

sistence that what is, must be? The answers to these questions are crucial for our understanding of Americans' beliefs about distributive justice.

Finally, in this series of appetizers, consider the wealthy who support greater economic equality, thereby opposing their own apparent self-interest.

Craig Cabot, age thirty-seven, is the patrician of the group. He descends from a long line of wealthy professionals, attended elite schools from first grade through law school, married a woman with equal status and even greater wealth, and recently moved to New England to become a judge. He is also the philosopher of the group. He discourses on natural versus manmade law, the social contract, legal justice versus economic policy, and individual rights versus the public good. He hesitates only when pinned down on specific circumstances or practical details.

For Craig, the worst possible society is one that would "prevent an individual from freedom of choice and opportunity." Conversely, the good society is one that would "give an individual a chance to make it, whatever that 'it' is for him. Whatever turns him on, that's the whole basis for human happiness. I'm no psychiatrist, I don't know the first thing about it. But to the extent that that's frustrated or inhibited, the person is going to be unhappy."

These two measures of good and bad inform the rest of Craig's discussion of desirable distributions. On the one hand, the government should not "hand everybody everything and say 'Hey, here's your cupcake—be happy! What else do you want? I've just given you a cupcake.' Good Lord!" On the other hand, it should provide "a level beneath which people should not be allowed to drop." Setting that level at "mere survival" is insufficient: "Decency, humanity would say that you have to do more than that. 'Minimal' to me would be enough support so that people could live with reasonable dignity. Dignity—really that says it. People are entitled to live with self-respect and the respect of other people. They're entitled to be free from the anxiety of a pauper state, a dependent state."

Craig does not fear that such a guaranteed income without mandatory work requirements would destroy work incentives. After all, most people would rather work than be paid off. Their sense of dignity—if it is allowed to be healthy and mature, if society doesn't crush that urge—it'll be enough for people to want to work." Certainly "a percentage" will "cheat the system," just as "a percentage goes to crime." But, he points out, just as we hire police to control bank robbers, rather than closing down banks, we could hire police to control malingerers, rather than rejecting an otherwise desirable system. In a perfect society, no welfare cheats—or bank robbers—would exist, and we could eliminate police

and courts. But the perfect society will never arrive, and meanwhile we should beware of a double standard that insists that a welfare system, but not a banking system, must be invulnerable to attack before it is allowed to operate.

Craig does, however, endorse a guaranteed jobs program in order to bolster the morale of the unemployed. "A person who had been working has a natural urge to have something to do, to have self-respect and respect from others. Losing a job has got to be crushing to that kind of an individual." But work should not be required. Welfare mothers, for example, should be encouraged to stay home and care for their children. After all, society will not "benefit from the reduction in the pittance we're talking about [that is, a guaranteed income] to make her work and sacrifice the emotional stability of her children and of the family unit."

Craig rejects the imposition of a ceiling on incomes as strongly as he supports an income floor. He gives three reasons. First, "Why should the government inhibit an individual from going as far as his energy will take him? If he is working within the system, and he happens to be very lucky, energetic, or both, good luck to him." Second, although great inequality of incomes is "evil," the alternative is "more evil." Eliminating great inequality would create a "horrible bureaucratic structure, the inherent evil of a managed population, a constituency which is governed by a mechanical formula." Finally, upon reflection, he concludes that unequal incomes are not so awful after all:

cc: My gut reaction is that it would not be good for government to go to the extent of bulldozing, filling in the holes and levelling off the mounds, and giving us total uniformity. I don't think there's anything inherently positive about total uniformity. In the arts, in politics, in anything else, total uniformity seems not to be a virtue.

JH: If we had more uniformity of incomes, would we end up with more uniformity . . .

cc: Of everything? I think so, not uniformly but to a substantial extent. Particularly if that were protracted over generations.

Thus Craig Cabot does not seek as much equality as Rod Thompson does, but he does seek substantial improvement in the position of the poor. He knows that such improvement can come only from higher taxes on the rich, including himself. Why does Craig support a program that could only cause absolute as well as relative damage to his economic position? Where do his views come from? What sustains them? Would he act on them if he could? How does he reconcile them with his present life? What do they imply for political change?

To complicate the picture a bit more before answering these questions, let us consider Bruce Abbott, who seeks the reverse of Craig's good society—a low income ceiling and no income floor. Aged forty-six in 1976, he first worked as a psychologist in several small colleges, but decided in 1964 that "I wanted to get involved in the movement toward black equality." He took a 25 percent reduction in pay, when he had four young children, to become a guidance counselor at a black inner-city school.

Bruce believes simply that "nobody's worth more than \$50,000." That amount is "more than enough for anybody to live decently, morally." Under that ceiling, the pay structure in the ideal society would "be very concerned about skill, contribution, risk, and effort." Nurses should earn more than performers. Boring jobs should have high pay and short hours; perhaps "the more interesting, exciting the job is, the less you ought to be paid." Even though executives have "important" skills—"I don't want to jump on their chests and all"—still "I just don't think they're worth a hell of a lot more than I am."

Bruce believes, however, that some people "deserve to be poor." They are those who "chose to be poor, in the sense that they don't value working, [those] for whom it [poverty] is not a badge of failure or a bad way to live. Ivy League professors' sons and daughters who already got it made and say 'The hell with it. I'm not going to work, I'm going to go and enjoy life in the sunny beautiful day.' If the kid wants to do that, fine, but you do not have the freedom to go off and live by yourself *and* be supported by society." Even ghetto children, whose destructive socialization he fully understands, fall ultimately under the same rule. Bruce would "walk more than one or two miles or three miles with that person who's not going to contribute," but finally, someone who does nothing of value merits nothing from society. He rejects Craig's argument that simple human existence warrants at least minimal support. After all, "People exploit one another." At some point, "You can't be a goddamn fool, just say 'Yeah, I'll hand out everything to you.' There's a certain 'taking advantage of the white liberal do-gooder' attitude and you [don't] do them any good" by playing into it. In the final analysis, one must "draw the line between compassion and what is beyond compassion."

Bruce's concern about exploitation stems from his conviction that the good of all must finally outweigh the good of the individual. Even though "individual fulfillment is vitally important," we must not forget that "there's also a social dimension in one's existence. Therefore, as a member of society, you are expected to contribute in a social way, do something of value to other people in order to benefit from the labor of

others." Social contribution can be broadly defined: "Talking to people is of value if it's a supportive, loving, sharing kind of thing." But what one contributes to society must equal what one draws from it, and one person's welfare must be balanced against that of others: "We've got more and more to realize that what we expend to keep elderly people and sociopaths alive is so much out of proportion with what other people have that there's no sense of justice that I can find there at all. Therefore we ought to make decisions on very tough issues."

Bruce knows that he is walking a tightrope. On the one hand, personal benefits must not outweigh the social, and even the natural, good: "I don't value human life ultimately anymore as I did when I was younger. Because to put ultimate value on human life means that we're not going to have any more whales or fish, pollution's going to be so bad. I don't think that man has the right to rape the universe for his own sake." On the other hand, individual fulfillment is a basic value: "The most important thing is the right not to be poor and the right to develop oneself, pursue happiness as Jefferson meant, to make something out of one's mind. There's no greater slavery than to be deeply deprived in terms of health, food, and all that kind of thing." Bruce recognizes, even demands, that we must confront these contradictions. He has no answers beyond a hope that conflicting values can be balanced. Although "we've got to swing back in the direction" of doing "the public thing" rather than "doing your own thing," he insists that "we can do that and *still* let me keep my dignity and identity as a thinking person." At a minimum, that balance requires more economic equality, since extremes of poverty and wealth are inimical to both the social and the individual good. But a guaranteed income would help only a few individuals, hurt more, and damage the social fabric. So the ideal income range is something like \$0 to \$50,000.

### More Developing Themes

The second set of vignettes confirms the need to expand beyond a narrow question of support for redistribution to consider other distributive issues, several income classes, and various theories of distributive justice. Three of these respondents support redistribution, and yet the differences among them are almost as great as the differences between supporters and the four opponents described earlier. The fourth, who claims to have no opinion, differs from both groups. Specifically, these descriptions point to four more themes for investigation.

① First, some respondents do seek greater economic and political equality. Rod Thompson, Craig Cabot, and Bruce Abbott all consistently and

strongly seek more equality, and all know that their views are approaching the boundaries of American mainstream thinking. Their support for more equality raises a host of questions. Why do some of the rich support a program that would absolutely and relatively harm their position? How do respondents feel about marching to a different drummer? What do they do about it? What would it take to get them involved in political action? In short, why do some respondents support greater equality, and what political effects does egalitarianism have?

② Second, the nature of support for equalizing incomes varies among respondents as much as opposition varies. Rod Thompson wants incomes to range from \$10,000 to \$50,000; Craig Cabot wants a range of about \$10,000 to infinity; Bruce Abbott wants a \$0 to \$50,000 range. Craig seeks a policy of guaranteed incomes supplemented by guaranteed jobs in order to help the unhappily unemployed. Bruce says that guaranteed incomes would simply legitimate exploitation; a jobs program will both benefit its recipients and, more importantly, benefit society. Rod has no idea of what policies should be used to equalize holdings. What kinds of support for redistribution recur among respondents, and what political effects do these variations in policy preferences have?

③ Third, some respondents are indifferent to the whole question of distributive justice. Phillip Santaguida demonstrates one form of indifference: a deliberate refusal to become involved in questions of right and wrong concerning matters which he sees as inevitable. A few other respondents are indifferent because they simply do not care, or because their value system does not accord distributive justice a very important place. What forms of withdrawal from distributive issues recur among respondents, and what political effects does indifference have?

④ Fourth and finally, people differ from others and even within themselves in their emotional responses to their own beliefs about distribution. Questions of justice for Rod Thompson are a source of wry, flippant humor; justice for Craig Cabot and Bruce Abbott is a source of moral questioning and personal guilt. As we saw earlier, Sally White is cheerfully and confidently opposed to equality; Barbara Azlinsky is defensively and ambivalently opposed to equality. Respondents vary internally as well: Phillip Santaguida is indifferent to excessive wealth but dismayed by poverty; the loving, humanistic, gentle Bruce Abbott would steel himself to unplug kidney dialysis machines; the casual, mocking Rod Thompson toys with the idea of putting bad people into concentration camps. What emotional patterns recur among respondents, and what political effects do feelings about distributive values have?

### Plan of Action

I am, finally, ready to begin to answer these questions. Up to this point, I have obeyed Redfield's first injunction—to get inside the respondents, understand their view of the world, and convey it to the reader. So we have Maria's bitter resignation, Phillip's amused cynicism, Barbara's frustrated confusion, Bruce's totalitarian humanism. Each person opposes, ignores, or supports the redistribution of wealth for different reasons and in combination with different emotions, perceptions, and evaluations. These perspectives, captured in 200 pages of transcript and eight hours of conversation apiece, are what the raw interview data provide.

But this is only the beginning. The point of this book is not to examine a series of individual psyches. I am not, finally, studying Rod's aimlessness, or Isaac's intransigence, or Sally's optimism. The point is to use these individual portraits to generate arguments that apply to other people and settings. I must move to Redfield's second injunction and respond to "the demands of a more detached and abstract understanding." Individuals are subordinated to typologies, idiosyncrasy to pattern, in order to see how people think and feel about distributive justice.

My basic premise is that attitudes about the redistribution of wealth derive from an individual's general norms of distributive justice used in specific circumstances. People's views vary in their clarity, sophistication, robustness, and complexity. Respondents apply different norms to different circumstances, hold underlying principles of equality or acceptance of differences, and sometimes reject normative analysis completely. But each person seeks what is "fair." More formally, everyone makes sense of his or her environment partly by applying beliefs about distributive justice to specific circumstances. Thus attitudes toward redistribution are best understood in a broader context of norms of distributive justice.

The rest of the book explores this general proposition and the themes that follow from it. Chapter three sets up the framework for analyzing the data. It describes the underlying principles of equality and differentiation, the norms of distributive justice that derive from them, and the domains of life to which they apply. Chapter four shows that people generally use a principle of equality, and thus egalitarian norms, in the socializing domain—the arena of home, family, school, and neighborhood. Chapter five shows that people generally use a principle of differentiation, and thus differentiating norms, in the economic domain—the arena of the workplace, marketplace, and social structure.

Chapter six shows that people generally return to a principle of equality, and thus to egalitarian norms, in the political domain—the arena of tax and social policies, political rights and authority, and visions of utopia. Chapter seven shows that some people do not follow the dominant three-part pattern of beliefs. They follow alternative patterns, consistently using either a principle of equality or a principle of differentiation. Throughout chapters four through seven, I show that people's emotional responses to their own beliefs vary and that they are often ambivalent about their beliefs. Chapter eight examines recurring types of ambivalence and discusses how they affect the dominant pattern of distributive beliefs. Chapter nine concludes with a discussion of the political orientations that result from combining distributive beliefs, emotions, and ambivalence. It shows how the question of redistribution of wealth involves intense conflict for most respondents and speculates about the implications for political action and policy change of the entire set of findings.

### 3 Norms of Distributive Justice and Three Domains of Life

#### The Analytic Framework

Chapter two makes clear that we cannot classify individuals as either supporters or opponents of the redistribution of wealth, since people have apparently contradictory views about equality. Similarly, we cannot group economic classes according to support of or opposition to redistribution. Some poor and some rich generally oppose more equality; some poor and some rich generally favor it.

If neither individual ideology nor class position is a good criterion for assigning egalitarian or differentiating views, we need a more subtle classification. But first, we must clarify the relationship among equality, differentiation, and justice. Ordinary language in liberal societies often equates justice and equality – justice means ensuring equal opportunity, giving equal pay for equal work, guaranteeing equal protection under the law, or avoiding favoritism and scapegoating among one’s children or students. But this usage blurs concepts that should be kept separate. Hence I reserve the term *equality* for a particular principle of distributive justice – that which starts from a prima facie assumption that all people may legitimately make the same claims on social resources. Thus equality is a subset of, not a synonym for, justice.

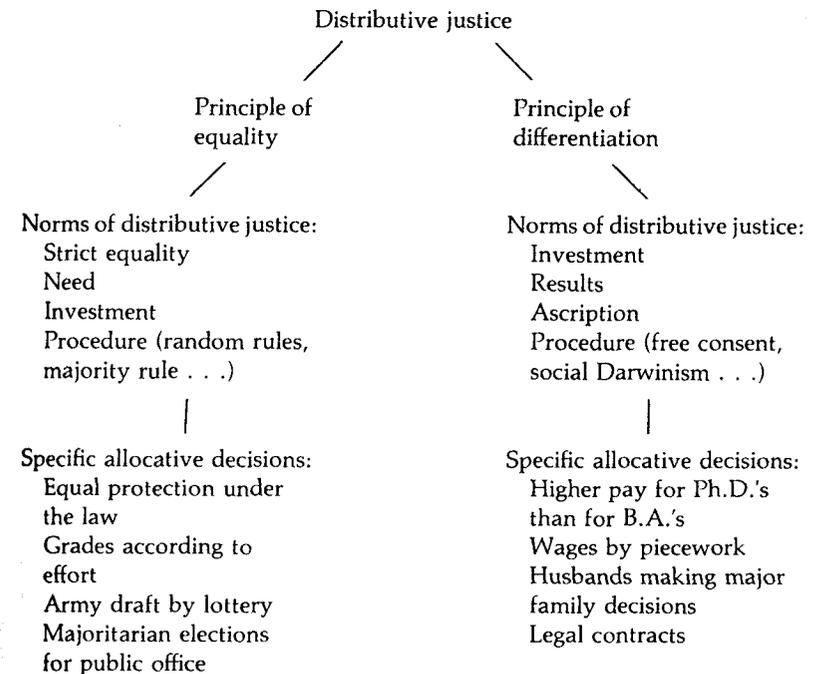
*Differentiation* is also a subset of justice and has the same logical status as equality in my analytic framework. Briefly, justice as differentiation

starts from a prima facie assumption that people may legitimately make varying claims on social resources. Differentiation, like equality, is a basic principle – a value judgment that its holder may not be aware of and that is not susceptible to rational explanation or contradiction.

The analytic framework has a further subdivision. Within each principle, of equality or differentiation, are particular *norms of distributive justice*. These are more precise than first principles and are “prescriptions regarding . . . and prohibitions against certain patterns of behavior and belief . . . when such statements are generally accepted in a society and when each individual has the sense that they are generally accepted by others.”<sup>1</sup> Norms have both a social and an individual component: the norm itself is a widely held social value, but the use of a particular norm in a specific allocative decision is an individual choice. The relationships among these concepts are displayed in figure 2.

Finally, we recall from chapter two the concept of domains of life – the categories of activity and thought that make up a person’s daily existence. The three relevant here are the socializing, economic, and

Figure 2 Distributive justice, distributive principles, norms of distributive justice, and specific allocative decisions.



political domains. This last set of terms brings me to my explanation of support for equality and differentiation. People use different norms in different domains, so that the explanatory variable of support for or opposition to equality is neither individual ideology nor class position, but rather the specific decision in question. More particularly, people generally use norms that derive from a principle of equality in the socializing and political domains, and generally use norms that derive from a principle of differentiation in the economic domain. This hypothesis is pictured in figure 3.

Thus individuals begin from an assumption that they are equal to all others in their home life, school, community, political rights, and policy interests; however, they begin from an assumption that they are either better or worse than—at any rate, not necessarily equal to—all others in their economic and social worth. Justice, then, requires differentiation in economic matters but equality in personal and political matters; justice is not a matter of finding the right rule for all occasions.

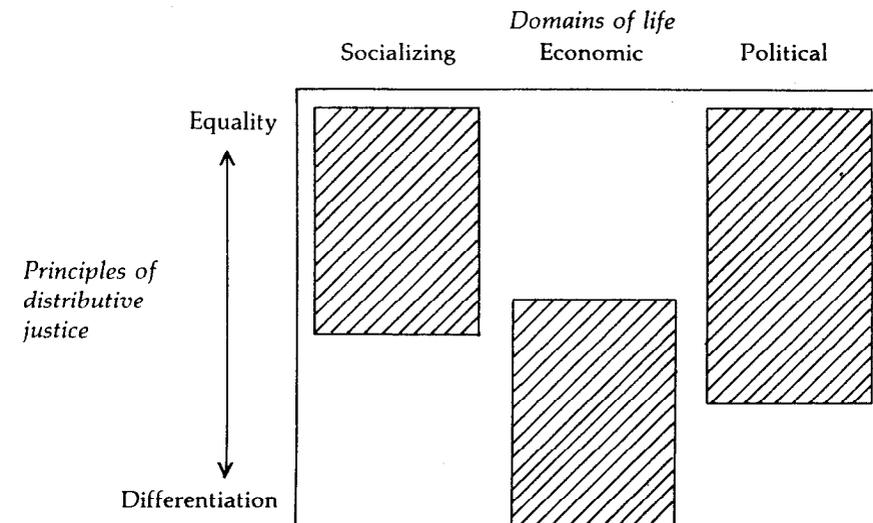
This three-part pattern is blurred in two ways. First, a few people do not follow it: they are consistently differentiating or egalitarian. Second, even those who do follow it feel ambivalent about some or many aspects of their normative judgments. This ambivalence is systematic, explainable, and just as important a finding as the dominant pattern itself.

Using an egalitarian norm does *not* automatically imply that one seeks to redistribute downward, and, correspondingly, using a differentiating norm does *not* automatically imply that one seeks to redistribute upward. The distributive consequences of using a particular norm vary with the circumstances of its use.

Finally, this analytic framework shows why respondents are so often uncomfortable in discussing the downward redistribution of wealth. When they view redistribution as an economic question, they argue from a principle of differentiation and oppose it. When they view it as a political question, they argue from a principle of equality and sometimes favor it. The political redistribution of economic goods, by definition, straddles two domains and forces people to confront the disjunctions in their beliefs about distributive justice. Most often, particularly in a polity that has never seriously considered downward redistribution, the best way to deal with this ideological disturbance is to repress it or to deny its existence. Thus most people refuse to consider the possibility of, or “oppose,” redistribution even though it would materially benefit them.

This chapter explores these concepts, focusing on the norms of justice for two reasons. First, when respondents say, for example, that they give the same allowance to all their children, or that an allowance depends on

Figure 3 The dominant three-part pattern of beliefs about distributive justice.



the child's needs that week, or that they give the older ones more than the younger ones, we will be able to recall the philosophical and political implications of such apparently mundane comments. Knowing the underlying premises and likely pitfalls of a casually used norm enriches our understanding of the respondent's arguments about fairness.

Second, people's beliefs reflect the distinct world view or “social construction of reality” of their society. Each society has its own perspective, which structures the world for its members so that they do not continually have to question or create a basic understanding of their environment: “I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated objects before my appearance on the scene.”<sup>2</sup> Marxists add that a dominant class—be it priesthood, bourgeoisie or proletariat—controls the political, economic, and ideological institutions of a society. This class “uses its privileged access . . . to propagate values which reinforce its structural position . . . [by] defin[ing] the parameters of legitimate discussion and debate over alternative beliefs, values, and world views . . . [Its] parameters . . . define what is legitimate, reasonable, sane, practical, good, true, and beautiful.”<sup>3</sup>

The norms described here are the parameters of legitimate discussion of distributive justice in American society. They have in common assumptions about individualism, the nature of causation, the approximate amount and kind of goods available for distribution, and the relationship of citizens to each other and to government. Within this common framework, however, they differ in significant ways. Thus these norms give both the range and the limits of possibilities for distributive justice as seen by virtually all Americans—certainly by my philosophically untrained sample.<sup>4</sup>

In short, these norms are the intellectual tools with which contemporary Americans make distributive judgments. Obviously, laborers and business executives do not read Plato or John Rawls; nor did Rawls consult with laborers and executives in formulating his maximin principle. Nevertheless, the philosophers discussed here articulate the moral and political choices available to my respondents.

### Principles of Equality and Differentiation

Sometimes people's distributive judgments derive from a *principle of equality* among persons, that is, they assume that every person may legitimately make equal claims on social resources, despite differences in race, sex, ancestry, prior holdings, talents, achievements, conduct, rules of the game, or luck.<sup>5</sup> The purest form of this principle is the norm of giving equal social resources to all. A more complex form argues that movements away from strict equality of outcomes must be justified in a way that reinforces the fundamental equality of persons. All claims may not be equally met, and all persons may not end up with equal shares of social resources, but each person has a prima facie right to make equal claims. Three conditions determine how the principle of equality is applied: the boundaries of the community of equals, the type of resources to be distributed, and the translation of the general principle into particular claims that may call for distributions that diverge from strict equality.

At other times, people begin with a *principle of differentiation* among persons, that is, they assume that differences in race, sex, ancestry, and so on create legitimately different claims on social resources. The purest form of this principle is the norm that ascriptive traits determine a person's worth and that the distribution of social resources should vary accordingly. A more complex form argues that "justice is an equality of proportion between persons and 'things' assigned to them . . . [Justice is] an adjustment in which differences of persons (in whatever respect) is

made a basis of corresponding differences of treatment."<sup>6</sup> The principle of differentiation permits equal allocations to persons with the same claim, but it assumes that persons are inevitably different in ways that usually call for unequal allocations. The same three conditions of boundaries, goods, and particular claims determine how the principle of differentiation is applied.

The crux of the difference between the two principles is that the principle of equality assumes that people begin with equal value and can make equal claims on society. Differences in treatment must be justified. The principle of differentiation assumes that people begin with different value and therefore can make different claims. Identical treatment must be justified.

Aristotle's dictum "Treat equals equally" is useless until we specify *who* is equal to whom, *what* goods are subject to the dictum, and what equal treatment means in a particular case. These three forms of specificity are the three conditions for applying the general principles.<sup>7</sup> The first defines who is to be equal to whom, the boundaries of the relevant community. The community may be as small as the children of a family or as large as the human race. But once it is defined, the principle is restricted to its members. Thus South Africa can claim to follow the principle of strict equality—blacks are treated equally among themselves, and whites are treated equally among themselves. As the example suggests, this condition may permit the principle of equality to yield dramatically unequal results, but this paradox is a problem of boundaries, not of definition.

The second condition concerns what goods are subject to allocative choice. Social resources must be substantial, comparable, and divisible to be within the purview of distributive justice. Thus romantic love, whose objects are not comparable (or chosen justly), and national defense, which is not divisible, are not considered in this analysis.

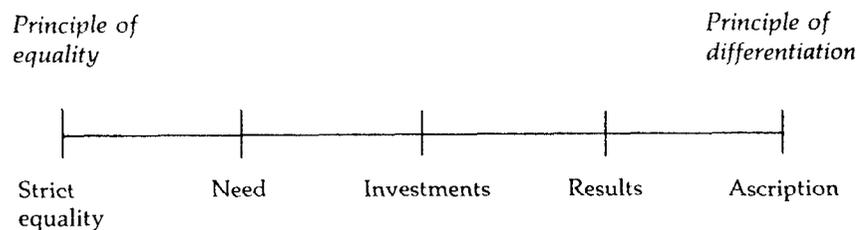
The third condition specifies what equal treatment means or identifies the particular claim to be used in a particular distributive process. One might begin, for example, from an assumption of prima facie equality of all students, but decide that equality does not in this case require that everyone use the same textbook. The general principles of equality and differentiation need to be translated into a specific rule for the division of resources.

The translation of general principles into particular allocations takes place through norms of distributive justice. Six distinct and conflicting claims will be considered here. In figure 4, they are arrayed along a continuum from equality to differentiation.<sup>8</sup>

Briefly, the norms of distributive justice are:

- (1) Strict Equality: All community members deserve equal amounts of the good being divided. Alternatively, members should sacrifice equally when necessary.
- (2) Need: All needs of community members deserve equal satisfaction. Alternatively, members should sacrifice equal amounts of satisfaction when necessary.
- (3) Investments: Community members deserve rewards in proportion to what they put into the community. This norm forms the midpoint of the continuum. It is egalitarian if the investment is equally available to all and always renewable (for example, effort, virtue). It is differentiating if the investment is not equally available to all and need not be renewed once obtained (for example, education, training).
- (4) Results: Community members deserve rewards in proportion to their productivity or social contribution, usually, but not necessarily, measured by market value. This is the first clearly differentiating norm.
- (5) Ascription: Community members deserve rewards according to relevant ascriptive traits, such as age, sex, race, class, or religion.
- (6) Procedures: Community members deserve rewards according to the results of specified processes, such as free consent, random rules, the market, or social Darwinism. This norm does not seek patterned results; therefore, without further information, it cannot be placed on the continuum. The choice of a procedure, however, often depends on the basic principle being followed. Majority rule and random rules assume initial equality of persons; social Darwinism and a free market assume differences.

Figure 4 Norms of distributive justice.



The location of the Procedures norm along the continuum depends on the procedure used.

### Norms of Distributive Justice

Norms are prescriptions or prohibitions that a society uses to create fair relations among its members. Each norm could, in theory, be embraced to the exclusion of all others; each prescribes different actions and would lead to different outcomes from the others. Norms are also prescriptions or prohibitions that individuals can use to promote or measure justice within their society. Individuals, like societies, can embrace one norm to the exclusion of all others or can try to juggle conflicting prescriptions and their equally conflicting outcomes. Individuals may pursue norms that differ from or even conflict with their society's norms.

Each norm has four elements. First is a philosophy, the kind of distribution it prescribes, and the reasons for this prescription. It deals in values, ethics, and moral judgments. Second is a psychology, the kind of society the norm endorses, and the elements of human nature that it seeks to foster. This facet deals in emotions, motivations, and personal interactions.<sup>9</sup> Third are characteristic problems—perversions or distortions to which the norm is especially susceptible, silly consequences that it cannot easily avoid, facts that it ignores or values that it violates. Fourth, even as it raises new problems, each norm resolves some of the problems raised by other norms. Let us consider now the six norms, from egalitarian to differentiating.

*Strict Equality of Outcomes: Objective Equality* The norm of strict equality assumes that "the human worth of all persons is equal, however unequal may be their merit" or any other trait.<sup>10</sup> Some take it on faith that "all men are equal—now and forever, in intrinsic value, inherent worth, essential nature."<sup>11</sup> Others justify this assumption by specifying the equally worthy human attributes: "Each man is to himself equal to the great world of his own experience. In what matters most to men this world has the same import to all; it teaches each the lesson of his own infinite worth. And so men, who are equal to the same thing, are equal to each other. One being of infinite worth cannot be greater or less than another of infinite worth."<sup>12</sup> Others more soberly cite natural rights, descent from God, or rational wills as evidence of our equal worth.

Each justification of strict equality implies different community boundaries and different social resources to be distributed. If inalienable rights prove our equal worth, the community is usually bounded by the state. Relevant resources are those things necessary to ensure these rights, whether they be life, liberty, and property (Locke), life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Thomas Jefferson), or equality, liberty, security,

and property (Declaration of the Rights of Man). For one writer, at least, this assertion is all that is necessary: "In the United States . . . *all men are equal in their rights, . . . it is impossible to make them otherwise . . .* This point once settled, every thing is settled."<sup>13</sup> Of course, specifying the social resources necessary for equal rights is often politically controversial. For example, which is needed to pursue happiness — an equal right to property or a right to equal property?<sup>14</sup> Is downward redistribution of income and wealth necessary for liberty or anathema to it?<sup>15</sup>

If our status as children of God proves our equal worth, the community boundaries expand to include all Christians or even all potential Christians: "There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus."<sup>16</sup> Early Christians believed that all material goods should be distributed equally. As the Church became an institution, the scope of relevant resources narrowed; with the Reformation, it again broadened, but only to encompass intangible goods. Reformers sought the right to read scripture, communicate directly with God, and seek their own salvation. Secularized, these resources became education, participation in government, and personal autonomy. Thus whereas proponents of equal rights seek political and legal goals, proponents of religious equality seek broader social and psychological goals.

Those who claim that our equal worth lies in our equal ability to reason, choose, and act morally pursue still broader community boundaries and the division of still more resources. For Kantians, the community of equals includes all people and all resources crucial to self-development; everyone must be treated as an end, never as a means. Thus "a society practicing equal respect [for 'basic human needs and capacities'] would be one in which there were no barriers to . . . autonomous persons . . . who are equally free from political control, social pressure, and economic deprivation and insecurity . . . [The community] focuses on equalizing the rewards and privileges attached to different positions, not on widening the competition for them."<sup>17</sup>

Even Kantians, however, do not insist that "all social inequalities are unnecessary and unjustifiable and ought to be eliminated."<sup>18</sup> Babeuf does: "Let there be no other difference between people than that of age or sex. Since all have the same needs and the same faculties, let them henceforth have the same education and the same diet. They are content with the same sun and the same air for all; why should not the same portion and the same quality of nourishment suffice for each of them?"<sup>19</sup> Once relevant social resources are expanded so that everything except age or sex is to be distributed equally, however, community boundaries must

shrink drastically. Egalitarian utopians envision small communities set off from the world; egalitarian societies have been small, self-contained, isolated, voluntary, and usually short-lived. At Brook Farm, for example, "The community members all stand in social equality," and all work was paid the same in order "to give outward expression to the great truth, that all labor is sacred, when done for a common interest."<sup>20</sup> Its members realized that Brook Farm would remain very small, however, since "minds incapable of refinement will not be attracted into this association. It is an Ideal Community, and only to the ideally inclined will it be attractive . . ."<sup>21</sup> Thus utopian communities often expect an inverse relationship between the extent of strict equality and the size and stability of membership — and history usually confirms their expectations.

Psychologically, a norm of strict equality seeks to enhance "cooperative relations in which the fostering or maintenance of enjoyable social relations is a primary emphasis."<sup>22</sup> Strict egalitarians argue that purely expressive social relations require mutual respect, which in turn requires equal status and holdings. They reason that "when the parties involved in any transaction are unequal in status, the relationship is likely to be one-sided, and the interests of one party to suffer."<sup>23</sup> In fact, both parties may suffer if unequal status leads to self-devaluation, self-aggrandizement, or conflict over the distribution of status and holdings. Thus winners as well as losers are hurt by material inequality. Richard Tawney says it best: "Practical equality is necessary . . . because a community requires unity as well as diversity, and because, important as it is to discriminate between different powers, it is even more important to provide for common needs . . . Social well-being . . . depends upon cohesion and solidarity. It implies the existence, not merely of opportunities to ascend, but of a high level of general culture, and a strong sense of common interests, and the diffusion throughout society of a conviction that civilization is not the business of an elite alone, but a common enterprise which is the concern of all."<sup>24</sup>

Strictly equal distributions may also serve as a strategy for decreasing envy and defusing rivalry. If all community members have enough standing so that they should not or cannot be squelched, if they all intransigently demand fair treatment, and if the desired resources are fixed and divisible, then a strictly equal division is the best way to satisfy everyone. In fact, in such a situation they are not likely to feel satisfied, but strict equality at least ensures that none will have cause to be more dissatisfied than another.

If strict equality prevents some disasters, it invites others. The first problem is that, as the progression from equal political rights to equal

material resources to identity in all things but age and sex suggests, the norm of equality is vulnerable to an extreme and ridiculous interpretation. If Rudolf Serkin receives a piano, must Bjorn Borg also? If equality is not identity, how are we to compare social resources to ensure equal values? Market worth, elite decisions, or an arbitrary standard are obviously unsatisfactory measures. Relying on their own judgment encourages recipients to devalue goods dishonestly in an attempt to receive more of them.

Comparing social resources is one problem; dividing them is another. Even if people recognize that some desirable goods cannot be divided, "There is a risk that, in the pursuit of equality, good things which there is difficulty in distributing evenly may not be admitted to be good."<sup>25</sup>

A more profound danger is that the norm of equality may violate its own intention of treating individuals as inherently valuable. Equality does not reward—and may not even recognize—individual excellence or idiosyncrasy. But scarce abilities or unconventional traits make people unique and of value to the community. As Bertrand Russell put it: "It has always been difficult for communities to recognize what is necessary for individuals who are going to make the kind of exceptional contribution that I have in mind, namely, elements of wildness, of separateness from the herd, of domination by rare impulses . . . Unjust societies of the past gave to a minority opportunities which, if we are not careful, the new society that we seek to build may give to no one . . . If there had not been economic injustice in Egypt and Babylon, the art of writing would never have been invented."<sup>26</sup> Can we endorse, then, a norm that authorizes society to ignore all individual characteristics in the name of respecting the individual?

Some people fear that equality may not only ignore excellence, but also that it may dampen or even penalize it. The norm hardly requires this outcome, but a society that seeks solidarity and fears envy could foster conformity and mediocrity. Who can forget Tocqueville's nightmarish vision of the consequences of democratic equality:

I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls . . . Over this kind of men stands an immense, protective power which is alone responsible for securing their enjoyment and watching over their fate . . . It does not break men's will, but softens, bends, and guides it; it seldom enjoins, but often inhibits, action; it does not destroy anything, but prevents much from being born; it is not at all tyrannical, but it hinders, restrains, enervates, stifles, and stultifies so much that in the end

each nation is no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd . . . Equality has prepared men for all this, predisposing them to endure it and often even regard it as beneficial.<sup>27</sup>

In short, "Equality, by itself, is not enough to make a good society."<sup>28</sup>

*Responding to Need: Subjective Equality* The problems raised by a norm of strict equality are partly answered by a norm of need, which would allocate resources so as to satisfy equally all needs. Because people do not have exactly the same number or kind of needs, the equal satisfaction of needs will lead to unequal distributions of goods among persons. The degree of final inequality and the direction of redistribution from the status quo depend on the community boundaries, the type of needs that call for response, the priorities among needs, and the social resources used to respond to them. Thus a norm of need begins from a principle of equality, but does not necessarily lead to downward redistribution.

The norms of need and equality have the same philosophical premise, namely, that "the human worth of all persons is equal, however unequal may be their merit."<sup>29</sup> Thus one person's well-being has the same value as everyone else's. But it is well-being, not resources, that are to be equal, and some people need more resources than others to be equally satisfied. Thus "the equal concern for the good lives of its members . . . requires society to treat them differently."<sup>30</sup> According to this reasoning, different distributions according to need lead to "the most perfect form of equal distribution."<sup>31</sup>

To illustrate this apparent paradox, Gregory Vlastos argues that justice requires New Yorker X, who is seriously threatened by Murder Inc., to be guarded so well that his chances for survival are the same as those of all other New Yorkers. The community undertakes this extra expense "precisely because X's security rights are equal to those of other people in New York . . . Hence in these special circumstances, where his security level would drop to zero without extra support, he should be given this to bring his security level nearer the normal."<sup>32</sup> In one passage, Tawney agrees: "Equality of provision is not identity of provision. It is to be achieved, not by treating different needs in the same way, but by devoting equal care to ensuring that they are met in the different ways most appropriate to them . . . The more anxiously, indeed, a society endeavors to secure equality of consideration for all its members, the greater will be the differentiation of treatment which, when once their common human needs have been met, it accords to the special needs of different groups and individuals among them."<sup>33</sup> This seems clear, until

one focuses on the "special needs." If strict equality founders when one must decide what will be distributed equally, then equality of needs stumbles when one must decide which needs will be satisfied first. Even in conditions of scarcity, "As long as it is a question not of actual starvation but of insufficiency, the rule has everywhere been that all should go short alike."<sup>34</sup> When starvation set in, "the effort was made to preserve the children, and after them the aged and infirm."<sup>35</sup> The most basic needs are to be met first for everyone, and the needs of the neediest take precedence even then. One can dispute Hobhouse's apparently empirical claim, but the prescription itself is clear.<sup>36</sup>

At this level of need, the community is usually very broadly defined: people seldom ignore urgent feelings of hunger or cold even of complete strangers. Yet scarcity may have the opposite effect: a community may decide that charity begins at home and draw its boundaries closer.

It is after urgent needs are met that the allocation of further resources raises difficulties. We can agree that, abstractly, everyone needs "the conditions of full physical, mental, and spiritual development,"<sup>37</sup> but specifying those conditions raises questions of different desires, abilities, and requirements. What if some people need more food than others to be satisfied; or more problematically, what if some need more elaborate food to feel equally gratified? Proponents of a need norm recognize, even insist, that equal well-being requires unequal shares, but they seldom face its highly inequalitarian, even elitist, implications.

A second problem of the norm of needs is the fact that equalizing well-being requires interpersonal comparisons of utility—a notorious can of worms. Even if people are honest about the intensity of their needs, even if all needs beyond physical urgency are equally deserving, and even if false consciousness does not exist, how can preferences and satisfactions that are felt internally be compared externally? And of course, these assumptions are heroic.<sup>38</sup> Intersubjective measures of need are controversial, vague, and idiosyncratic. Very small communities may have enough resources and self-restraint to avoid this problem, but larger groups probably do not. Who chooses deserving needs, and how? The possibilities for highly elitist control and dramatic redistribution upward are obvious.<sup>39</sup>

A third problem is the danger of interpreting the need norm so as also to subvert the norm's underlying principle of equality. Expanding the total supply of social resources is presumably in everyone's interest. Growth-oriented societies will probably develop job specializations and the corresponding belief that "every one of whom a given function is required may claim . . . the conditions necessary to its performance . . .

Thus different functions imply different special needs."<sup>40</sup> We cannot, however, objectively measure how difficult or important any job is and how many resources it requires. In these circumstances, those in control may define their own jobs as particularly needy and crucial and thereby justify a stratified society with highly unequal rewards.<sup>41</sup>

Psychologically, proponents of a need norm seek "cooperative relations in which the fostering of personal development and personal welfare is the primary goal."<sup>42</sup> Up to a point of excessive personal risk, community members are obliged to help others with exceptional needs or strong desires. The norm assumes neither equal needs and strengths among community members nor proportionality between a person's needs and his or her value to the community. It also does not assume that aid will be reciprocated. It *does* assume that if people need certain resources fully to develop their potential, they should receive them regardless of their merit or the size of others' allocations.<sup>43</sup> "A baby in the family is equal with others, not because of some antecedent and structural quality which is the same as that of others, but in so far as his needs for care and development are attended to . . . [Response to need] is equitable because it is measured only by need and capacity to utilize, not by extraneous factors which deprive one in order that another may take and have."<sup>44</sup> If babies and other community members do not receive the resources they need, they will become worse-off, and they will contribute less to the community in the future. Thus a community that cares about each person's well-being would be doubly hurt by ignoring needs. According to this reasoning, some people may, for the most part, give, and others receive, but the welfare of all is promoted equally.<sup>45</sup>

The norm of needs, unlike the norm of strict equality, bases mutual esteem not on equal status, but on ties of reciprocal nurturance and growth. The goals are not solidarity and respect, but responsibility, gratitude, and intimacy. Total dependence may be forbidden; Louis Blanc, Karl Marx, and Edward Bellamy all insist that everyone contribute according to ability in order to receive according to need. But worth is not determined by ability or dependent upon equal status; all community members are, by definition, equally worthy of giving and receiving aid.

If the norm of need is divorced from the assumption of equal human worth or of contribution according to ability, it suffers from a psychological perversion. Morton Deutsch's "direct and explicit responsibility for . . . the welfare of others in the group"<sup>46</sup> can turn into self-righteous charity, which "prescribe[s] that one person forego resources previously enjoyed, for little or no return, in order that another may

benefit.<sup>47</sup> Introducing the element of unrequited giving shifts the tone from justice between interdependent intimates to benevolence and obligation between patron and client. This form of social responsibility may be virtuous, mature, altruistic, and system-stabilizing—but it is not particularly just.<sup>48</sup> Thus the mutual benefits between mentor and protégé(e) become one-sided paternalism from patron to client if the basic premise of equal worth and the corresponding right to equal well-being are forgotten.

*Investments: Proportional Justice No. 1* The problems of excessive demand and paternalism raised by a norm of need are resolved by a norm of investments, which allocates resources in proportion to members' investments in the community. Once relevant investments are defined—whether as time, effort, virtue, education, training, or money—those who invest equal shares deserve equal rewards, regardless of the results of their actions, their needs, or any other traits.<sup>49</sup> Like the norm of needs, the norm of investments may not generate an equal division of resources. Whether its use leads to upward or downward redistribution will depend on the definition of relevant investments.

The norm of investments lies at the midpoint on the continuum between the principles of pure equality and pure differentiation. Those who start with an assumption of *prima facie* equality define relevant investments as those traits that everyone possesses. Wealth, talent, and family connections are not such traits. But reason and autonomy are; all people (except philosophers' bugaboos, infants and idiots) can be held responsible for their volitions and actions. According to this view, the community should not penalize members for needing extra time or failing to accomplish a goal, since achievement depends on uncontrollable variations in skill or holdings. But all people can equally control their *effort* to accomplish something; therefore judging members' efforts does not violate their fundamental equality.

Those who start from an assumption of *prima facie* differences among people define relevant investments as things that people possess unequally, which are acquired through prior actions or holdings, and which, once acquired, retain their value forever. Education and vocational training have these characteristics. They are not inherent attributes that everyone can always call upon; their acquisition depends on skill, intelligence, connections, geography, and ancestry. Furthermore, the value of a diploma or license lasts a lifetime. Thus all people cannot equally make certain investments in the community; rewarding those investments implies acceptance of the principle of differentiation.

The resources to be distributed and the community's boundaries affect what investments are valued and thus whether the norm will tilt toward equality or toward differentiation. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul defines the community as the children of God, that is, all those who accept God's guidance as best they can. To be rewarded with salvation one need not successfully obey a rigid set of laws. Rather, one must have faith and strive to understand and obey God's will: "If we do not slacken our efforts, we shall in due time reap our harvest. Therefore, as opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially members of the household of the faith."<sup>50</sup> In the succeeding 1500 years, the Catholic Church increasingly rewarded material contributions and tangible, non-renewable achievements until Martin Luther reintroduced the distinction between faith and good works. He claimed that all people, however poor and lowly, were equally able to achieve salvation by using faith to combat sin and carnal desires, not by producing good works or demonstrating virtue.<sup>51</sup> Thus the history of the Christian use of the investment norm demonstrates its location as a midpoint. It is highly egalitarian in the hands of Paul and Martin Luther, but highly differentiating in the hands of the pre-Reformation bishopric.

Edward Bellamy is the strongest American proponent of the egalitarian version of this norm. In his utopia, everyone has an equal income because the society requires "precisely the same measure of service from all, . . . that each shall make the same effort; that is, we demand of him the best service it is in his power to give."<sup>52</sup> Questioned about the role of varying talents, resources, and achievements, Bellamy's protagonist answers: "The amount of the resulting product has nothing whatever to do with the question, which is one of desert. Desert is a moral question, and the amount of the product a material quantity. It would be an extraordinary sort of logic which should try to determine a moral question by a material standard . . . A man's endowments, however godlike, merely fix the measure of his duty . . . A man who can produce twice as much as another with the same effort, instead of being rewarded for doing so, ought to be punished if he does not do so."<sup>53</sup> Bellamy would, however, distribute only material goods according to an investment norm; his utopia has an elaborate system of differentiated praise, honor, status, and power in order to induce everyone to work equally hard. He does not deny that incentives to work are essential; he does deny that they should be monetary.

Egalitarian investments may include, besides faith and effort, other forms of work, virtue, or training equally accessible to all. John Locke, for example, follows an investment norm when he argues that in a well-

ordered society, differences in wealth result mainly from differences in virtue and enterprise. A honest merchant both should and would have more customers than a shyster, a diligent worker more land than a laggard.<sup>54</sup>

Investments valued from a differentiating perspective include educational credentials, training; and possibly money. Economists, for example, calculate how much each year of college education is worth in future income; those who use these analyses to prescribe more education use a differentiating investments norm. Similarly, those who argue against taxing interest on savings accounts or stocks, because such taxes penalize sober investors more than frivolous consumers, use a differentiating investment norm. Finally, those who argue that only students who complete law school, pass a bar exam, and become duly licensed lawyers may legitimately file divorce papers for others use a differentiating investment norm.

Money and its equivalents lie right on the boundary between the norms of investment and results. On the one hand, one invests money in order to obtain rewards in exactly the same way as one invests effort, virtue, or time in the classroom. On the other hand, one cannot be held responsible for, and therefore be praised for, deciding to invest money, as one can be praised for deciding to invest effort or time. This ability to straddle a boundary may suggest why money holds such a powerful place in our values. Rewarding its use satisfies the moral demands of two norms as almost nothing else in society does.

Psychologically, the norm of investments seeks to foster individual autonomy, maturity, and responsibility. People unite with others for the sake of neither fellowship nor nurturance, but to help themselves. Giving and receiving help may be sincere and enthusiastic, but it is also instrumental. In a society governed by a norm of investments, all people would be able to earn respect and rewards, but they must *earn* them, not be given them. People control, and are therefore responsible for, their own actions, and society's main responsibility is to give them the opportunity and motivation to act.

The psychology of a norm of investments also has a less stern side, because it insists only that people must pursue a goal, not that they must reach it. According to this norm, "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."<sup>55</sup> Thus one competes against oneself or against external barriers, not against others or a predetermined standard; achievement is relative, not absolute. After quoting the passage above, President Emil Danenberg of Oberlin College told the

1980 graduates, "Having worked to teach you that neither wealth nor social background nor sex nor racial origins determine a person's worth, now we add to the list: grade point average. Society honors its great achievers, even as we do today, but Oberlin's greatest concern is not in how great you become, but in how narrow you can make the gap between the person you are and the person you can be."<sup>56</sup> By this criterion, the student at the bottom of the class or the worker at the bottom of the corporate ladder may be the most successful and the most worthy of social reward if he or she has traveled further than all other students or workers.

The dual psychology of a norm of investments — one is responsible for one's actions, but one is not responsible for their results — reflects the position of this norm at the midpoint of the equality-differentiation continuum. It can be forgiving or harsh, evidence of a soft heart or a stiff backbone, depending on the definition of relevant investments. But no matter what its tone, a society using a norm of investments depends less on a conscious sense of community than societies using the first two norms do. Equality without community becomes mindless uniformity; response to need without community becomes paternalism and dependency. Rewarding investments without community perhaps loses some appeal, but it does not eliminate its essential quality of justice. This norm assumes that individuals can — must — stand alone, and that the community's job is only to provide paths for these separate individuals to travel along. Of course, providing equal opportunity can be an enormous task if, for example, one argues that only equal holdings ensure an equal chance to obtain education and training or to express virtue and faith. But even in this case, the community's role is adventitious, not essential.

Like the others, the norm of investments is subject to perversions. First, one may perceive this norm to be not prescription but accomplished fact, so that people's holdings are seen as accurate measures of virtue. In 1901 the greatest spokesman for this "gospel of wealth," Bishop William Lawrence, proclaimed that "to seek for and earn wealth is a sign of a natural, vigorous, and strong character . . . Only by working along the lines of right thinking and right living can the secrets and wealth of Nature be revealed . . . Godliness is in league with riches."<sup>57</sup> The psychological counterpart to the gospel of wealth is the "just world syndrome," the belief that people always get what they deserve. In this view, victims of bad luck or structural biases must somehow have been evil or stupid, just as the wealthy must somehow be moral or smart. Believers in a just world even blame themselves for their own adversity, apparently finding

impotence in the face of aimless chance more distressing than guilt or shame in the face of intelligible causation. Such a belief turns a personalistic, volitional norm into an elitist or fatalistic one.<sup>58</sup>

Hobhouse points out a second problem with an investment norm: we sympathize with unproductive hard workers more than with skilled lazy workers, but what about skilled *and* hardworking laborers—do they not deserve extra reward? Do we really want to reward stupidity as much as intelligence, failure as much as success? Should the buyer of a product have to pay for the greater labor time of an inefficient worker?<sup>59</sup>

Finally, the norm poses a more profound, if less teasing, problem. It assumes that effort and virtue are volitional, that "desert pertains to the moral will alone."<sup>60</sup> But are people responsible for their moral will any more than for their intelligence or talents? People can control and develop their moral will—but perhaps the same is true for intelligence and skill. Perhaps one is born with a given aptitude for effort or virtue, just as one is born with talents or wealth. In that case, a norm of investments merges with a norm of results.

*Results: Proportional Justice No. 2* The norm of results answers the problems of a norm of investments by mandating distribution in proportion to achievements, defined as productivity or social contribution. This is the first clearly differentiating norm, since it assumes that people have different capabilities and worth and that their social rewards should differ accordingly.

Liberal philosophy often confounds investment and results norms by assuming that intentions correspond to achievements. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again"; effort and success are links in one chain, with one distributive consequence. The linkage is not automatic, however, and the elements need to be kept separate. The investment norm cares only about intentions; in the norm of results, the "value of any action always lies in its consequences."<sup>61</sup> Thus the norm of results endorses "the type of differentiation that comes from unequal intellectual and moral strengths, unequal applications of resolve and aspiration, and unequal benefactions of luck."<sup>62</sup> In short, the investment norm rewards effort, whereas the norm of results commends effort, but rewards only success.<sup>63</sup>

Liberals justify the norm of results by claiming that the supreme political value of individual freedom "needs to have roots in social differentiation," which follows directly from individual accomplishments and their rewards.<sup>64</sup> Just as we may not deserve two good eyes but are entitled to use them,<sup>65</sup> so we may not strictly deserve our talents and

resources but must be free to reap the benefits of their use: "The purpose of societal arrangements is to allow the individual the freedom to fulfill his own purposes—by his labor to gain property, by exchange to satisfy his wants, by upward mobility to achieve a place commensurate with his talents . . . Individuals will differ—in their natural endowments, in their energy, drive, and motivation, in their conception of what is desirable—and society should establish procedures . . . to fulfill these diverse desires and competences."<sup>66</sup>

Some proponents urge freedom so that we may benefit from individual traits: "Differences in the readiness to take advantage of economic opportunities are of great significance in explaining economic differences in open societies . . . It is obviously just to penalize those who have contributed less."<sup>67</sup> Others urge freedom so that we may benefit from unequal inheritances and even luck: the ability "to initiate, to create and to do" depends on characteristics "we are . . . born with . . . Plainly chance, contingency, luck play a great role in liberty understood in this sense. Equality is nonexistent here."<sup>68</sup>

Whether they emphasize merit or chance, those who claim that a norm of results best fosters freedom insist on the sanctity of private property. The community may even be defined as that area within which property rights are protected. Property is both a reward for and a means to further productivity. It has the same conceptual status as ability, ambition, and luck—none is worth anything if not put to use, and all are tools, the free use of which defines political freedom. Equality, or even a principle of *prima facie* equality, threatens property rights that are essential to liberty; therefore it must be kept within strict conceptual and political limits.<sup>69</sup>

A second justification for a norm of results is more instrumental: a community that relies upon it increases the total supply of social resources, thereby benefiting all. The "Captain of Industry" was a "man of workmanlike force and creative insight into the community's needs, who stood out on a footing of self-help, took large chances for large ideals, and came in for his gains as a due reward for work well done in the service of the common good, in designing and working out a more effective organization of industrial forces and in creating and testing out new and better processes of production."<sup>70</sup> To achieve this common good, exceptionally productive people need exceptional resources with which to produce and exceptional rewards to remain motivated. If the state always acted to foster the "best human purposes," such individual exceptions would be superfluous. But states are "rather stupid and commonplace"; therefore "it is positively a good thing for the community that a con-

siderable fraction [of wealth] should remain at the disposal of the most capable men, among whom . . . a proportion . . . will find good social use for it . . . Thus it is in the larger interest of the common good itself that private interests should maintain themselves."<sup>71</sup> Private vices become public virtues, and the highly individualistic, self-interested norm of results can be pressed into the service of the public interest and the community good.<sup>72</sup>

Despite his rejection of desert as grounds for a claim of justice, John Rawls's theory of justice seems at least a close cousin to this line of argument.<sup>73</sup> His "maximin" principle permits social and material inequalities that provide the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society, as long as these inequalities are "attached to positions and offices open to all," and as long as the community provides each member with "the most extensive total basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."<sup>74</sup> The latter two conditions obviously fit into a liberal norm of results, but it is the maximin principle that is both most distinctive and most interesting here.

Rawls explains that "all social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage."<sup>75</sup> The underlying principle here may be egalitarian, even socialist,<sup>76</sup> but its effects are likely to be differentiating. "Differences in wealth and power are justified in two ways (a) as incentives to attract candidates into certain jobs and then to encourage them to do well and (b) as facilities for providing required services to the rest of the society."<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, the subsidiary concept of chain connection also justifies differences according to a norm of results. "At least in the longer run," enhancing the position of the best-off, and presumably most productive, will expand the total amount of goods, some of which will trickle down to the poor.<sup>78</sup> "The poor can only be made richer if the rich are also made richer, and the rich can only be made poorer by impoverishing the poor further as well."<sup>79</sup> The maximin principle does not require that a chain connection hold, but Rawls assumes that it generally does. Even without assuming a chain connection, the maximin principle clearly endorses differentiation according to certain results of one's actions—which is at least a modified version of a norm of results.

A third justification of a norm of results relies on a simple claim of payment: a person should get back "that proportion of the national wealth that he has himself created."<sup>80</sup> In its most rigorous form, this is "a principle of commutative justice requiring repayment of debts, return of

borrowed items, or compensation for wrongly inflicted damages . . . So the return of contribution is not merely a matter of merit deserving reward. It is a matter of a maker demanding that which he has created and is thus properly his."<sup>81</sup>

These three justifications of a norm of results all assume that a free, competitive market best measures the value of goods and therefore of their owners. To some, the market process is itself just: "It is the basic premise of a liberal-capitalist society that a fair distribution of income is determined by the productive input—productive as determined by the market—of individuals into the economy."<sup>82</sup> To others, laws of supply and demand are only "operative facts," not "ethical principles."<sup>83</sup> Still others argue that the market distorts the worth of results by using a price mechanism rather than measuring social contribution. Garbage collectors and police, for example, are invaluable to cities and may deserve more reward than athletes or lawyers. Or workers who build automobiles may contribute more than their foremen or designers of cosmetic alterations. By changing the measure of value, a norm of results may be made downwardly redistributive.

Psychologically, the norm of results is best suited to "cooperative relations in which economic productivity is a primary goal."<sup>84</sup> Proponents of this norm assume that people are independent, self-interested, and motivated mainly by rewards. Community members compare themselves to others to determine if their shares are equitable, that is, if they have the same ratio of rewards to contributions as do other community members. To each according to his or her productivity.<sup>85</sup> Thus in contrast to a norm of investments, people measure their worth through comparisons with others or possibly with an external standard of accomplishment. Success is measured absolutely or in relation to others, not to oneself.

The norm of results relies less on a conscious sense of community than does the norm of investments and indeed less than all of the other norms except the procedural one. In fact, its users often extol the value of the individual freethinker, standing apart from or even against his or her community. Its users also tend to be insistent methodological individualists, although there is no necessary link between a norm of results and an epistemology of methodological individualism.<sup>86</sup>

Strictly speaking, economic rationality requires only that people receive as many resources as they can use for the benefit of all; however people learn quickly to apply economic values to the rest of a culture, so that they come to believe that efficient producers deserve rewards, not only resources. Furthermore, efficient producers may use their status to

obtain control of their community and to appropriate even greater rewards to themselves. Self-interest overwhelms altruism and fraternity,<sup>87</sup> and efficiency becomes synonymous with justice, in the eyes of both winners and losers.<sup>88</sup>

At this point, other market-oriented values come to dominate many features of individual psychology. People grow accustomed to impersonal dealings with interchangeable others, and they value others for their usefulness and exchange value.<sup>89</sup> Mutual self-interest, not fellowship or nurturance, induces interdependence: "Egoism can motivate one party to satisfy the expectations of the other, since by doing so he induces the latter to reciprocate and to satisfy his own [expectations] . . . We owe others certain things because of what they have previously done for us."<sup>90</sup> Division of labor and interchangeability among workers permit people to be economically interdependent while remaining emotionally independent.

At an extreme, defining justice as equity, demanding that everyone give and get in the same proportion as everyone else, becomes pathological. Unchecked, economic values lead to an unmitigated meritocracy in which the rich are seen as successes and good, and the poor as failures and bad. The devastating effects for both rich and poor are obvious. People refrain from activities with no market value; they blame themselves excessively for poverty and praise themselves excessively for wealth; they become one-dimensional and estranged: "A person becomes alienated from his possessions and creations when he learns to regard them as utilities which have value because other people desire them; he becomes alienated from other people when they are perceived as competing with him for scarce goods; and he becomes alienated from himself when he sees his own value as a utility based on the desires of others."<sup>91</sup>

One problem is having too much opportunity to rise or fall; another is having too little. Whether deliberately or not, the rich and powerful may bias the allocation system to continue to reward themselves even after they are no longer productive. More subtly, the need (described earlier) to believe in a just world creates an assumption that the rich have done valuable things and the poor have done worthless things. People with this view assume erroneously that luck is distributed equally, that opportunity is broad and equal, that wealth and poverty have no cumulative effects, and that activities have objective worth. At a further stage of reification, the distinctions among effort, achievement, and reward are lost. People combine norms of investment and results and assume not only that achievements are always rewarded, but also that efforts always lead to achievement. There is no psychological room here for honoring a

virtuous debtor or condemning an unscrupulous millionaire. Goodness, productivity, and holdings correlate exactly. This pathology culminates finally in a belief that, by definition, whatever the rich do is moral and valuable and whatever the poor do is immoral and valueless. Otherwise, their positions would be reversed. In my terms, a norm of ascription masquerades as a norm of results: "To begin with, a criterion such as sex or age [or class] may serve as one of several indicators of a person's fitness. Gradually more and more stress is placed on this indicator and finally it becomes the only criterion and is considered decisive even when considerations of fitness pull in the opposite direction . . . [A] further development may take place so that references to fitness become superfluous and are replaced by the belief that it is in itself right to attach importance to status."<sup>92</sup> The flexible libertarian norm that gives everyone a chance to better himself or herself becomes rigid and elitist through distortion of its own best principles.

A final distortion leaves the norm itself intact, but applies it to the wrong elements in the community. The United States changed during the nineteenth century from an agrarian, small-scale, and relatively egalitarian society to a nation of corporate capitalism, huge institutions, and vast differences in wealth. During this period,

through a highly successful case of ideological transfer, the Lockean defense of private property, which in the agrarian order made good sense morally and politically, was shifted over intact to corporate enterprise . . . The corporation took on the legitimacy of the farmer's home, tools, and land, and what he produced out of his land, labor, ingenuity, anguish, planning, forbearance, sacrifice, risk, and hope. The upshot was that the quite exceptional degree of autonomy the farmer members of the demos had enjoyed under the old order, an autonomy vis-à-vis both government and one another, was now granted to the corporation.<sup>93</sup>

This "extraordinary ideological sleight-of-hand" had two deleterious consequences. "First, the new order generated much greater differences than the old in political resources, skills, and incentives within the demos itself." Second, "the internal government of the corporation was . . . hierarchical and often despotic . . . An increasing proportion of the demos would live out . . . their daily existence, not within a democratic system but instead within a hierarchical structure of subordination."<sup>94</sup> Thus the extension to inappropriate bodies of the liberal tenets of private property, a mandate for profit-making, and opportunity to advance has stifled individuals' chances to use the same tenets justly to acquire their share of goods.

*Ascription* One solution to the problems of conflating and reifying effort, achievement, and reward in a norm of results is simply to eliminate any reliance on volition or accomplishment; that is, just distributions may depend solely on ascriptive traits, which are fixed at birth, permanent, socially important, easily ascertained, and ranked in value. Examples of these attributes are race, sex, class, and age.<sup>95</sup>

The fullest version of this norm is the medieval metaphor of a great chain of being, in which all living things have an appointed place in a hierarchy of value. Just as animals are a higher form of life than plants, the heavens rise over the earth, and the soul surpasses the body, so is the pope superior to the emperor, clergy to laity, and nobility to peasantry. Reason, divine law, and natural analogies reveal the proper social order. A correct hierarchy, in which each class receives benefits and obligations from the class above and gives them to the class below, yields a just and harmonious society.<sup>96</sup>

Secularized, the great chain of being becomes Edmund Burke's "Old Whig" world, in which each segment of the community has clearly defined authority, privileges, and duties.<sup>97</sup> Leaders of the community have a particularly difficult and crucial task, for which only a few qualify and for which the resources and rewards must be especially great. A society can be governed well only if it is "in that state of habitual social discipline in which the wiser, the more expert, and the more opulent conduct, and by conducting enlighten and protect, the weaker, the less knowing, and the less provided with the goods of fortune."<sup>98</sup> Leaders can acquire this wisdom, expertise, and opulence only under special circumstances:

To be bred in a place of estimation; to see nothing low and sordid from one's infancy, . . . to stand upon such elevated ground as to be enabled to take a large view of the wide-spread and infinitely diversified combinations of men and affairs in a large society, . . . to be led to a guarded and regulated conduct, from a sense that you are considered as an instructor of your fellow-citizens in their highest concerns . . . ; to be employed as an administrator of law and justice, and to be thereby amongst the first benefactors to mankind . . . : these are the circumstances of men that form . . . a *natural* aristocracy, without which there is no nation.<sup>99</sup>

The natural aristocracy need not be a hereditary aristocracy, but "the circumstances that form a natural aristocracy" occur only when property and rank are secure and devoid of vulgarity—that is, inherited. Furthermore, a law of primogeniture is essential because the "defensive power" of property "is weakened as it is diffused," that is, redistributed downward.<sup>100</sup> Thus with a few exceptions, the "natural aristocracy" is hereditary.

If aristocrats need to learn to use their wealth wisely, common people must be "taught to seek and to recognize the happiness that is to be found by virtue in all conditions." In the happiness of a "protected, satisfied, laborious and obedient people" lies "the true moral equality of mankind, and not in that monstrous fiction [of material equality] which, by inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walk of laborious life, serves only to aggravate and embitter that real inequality which it can never remove."<sup>101</sup> If each class "perform[s] its allotted function," it will be "secured such a livelihood, and no more than such a livelihood, as was proportioned to its status."<sup>102</sup> But a lower-class attack on "rank, and office and title and all the solemn plausibilities of the world"<sup>103</sup> would "confound . . . the best men with the worst; and weaken . . . and dissolve . . . , instead of strengthening and compacting, the . . . visible and regular authority of the state."<sup>104</sup>

An ascriptive norm persists, at least in diluted form. Contemporary advocates argue that some must command and others obey; no social order can long function without authoritative and stable leadership, which probably arises from a hereditary elite. In a few exceptional cases, people may climb to the top or fall from the heights, but usually people become what they are born to be. Constant striving by common people toward unattainable goals simply frustrates them needlessly; but freed from the anxieties of both useless ambition and possible destitution, they could pursue their given vocations to the best of their abilities. The just society is achieved when obligations balance rewards, when people are gratified by their appointed role, and when they exercise the freedom that comes from stability, security, and discipline.<sup>105</sup>

Even in supposedly classless America, "The tendency toward hereditary stratification is so deeply rooted . . . that if one could miraculously eliminate every trace of it today it would begin to creep back tomorrow." Both of the "newer principles," equality and meritocracy, are hard to live with regularly. At times, everyone "is delighted to accept some good thing . . . simply because he stood in a family relationship to the donor, or occupied a certain position in the community, or was a member of the same club as the donor."<sup>106</sup> Local elites, political and corporate nepotism, and particularly "aristocracies of professions" testify to the persistence of hierarchy. By even the second generation of an academic, military, or banking family, a private world of presuppositions, exclusiveness, endogamy, and superiority flourishes.<sup>107</sup>

Moving away from class categories, we find recurring arguments that inherent differences between the sexes call for differences in treatment. In voicing his fears of a nuclear holocaust, Erik Erikson offered the hope that "if women would only gain the determination to represent as . . .

lawyers what they have always stood for privately . . . they might well . . . add an ethically restraining . . . power to politics."<sup>108</sup> The details of his psychoanalytic argument that "girls emphasize . . . inner and . . . boys outer space"<sup>109</sup> are less important here than his assumption that sex should and does crucially influence a person's value structure, obligations, and privileges. Robert Jay Lifton argues that woman's triple role as nurturer, temptress, and knower is partly created by male fantasy and cultural institutions, but basically "emanates" from the "focus . . . [of] woman's psychological life, . . . close identification with organic life and its perpetuation."<sup>110</sup> Others argue that women's special traits make them best suited for nurturing and preserving the family, while men are best suited to jobs outside the home which require aggression, physical strength, or analytic thought.<sup>111</sup>

The idea of community plays two roles in an ascriptive norm. Sometimes ascriptive traits define the community to which some other norm is applied. In South Africa, the black and white communities have internal political equality, but vast differences in political rights and power separate the two. Similarly, parents may treat all children equally, but reserve for themselves, the adults, the right to decide on that treatment. At other times, other criteria, such as the course of a river or the outcome of a battle, determine community boundaries, and the norm of ascription then applies to its members. Burke, after all, made ascriptive claims only for Britain and Britons. The resources to be distributed do not affect the nature of the norm, but dramatically affect its importance to a society. A caste system in India and Jim Crow laws in the United States are philosophically similar, but empirically very different.

The norm of ascription has two complementary psychological components — noblesse oblige and deference. Those who top the social hierarchy "regard themselves as so much set apart as to belong to a totally different class of human beings — a class naturally designed to impose its will on all inferior classes."<sup>112</sup> But at least before democratic revolutions, they "derived, from the very extent of the respect they inspired, a motive for not abusing their power. The nobles, placed so high above the people, could take the calm and benevolent interest in their welfare which a shepherd takes in his flock. Without regarding the poor as equals, they took thought for their fate as a trust confided to them by Providence."<sup>113</sup> The elite is not simply a power elite; it must accept the responsibility for seeing past personal or sectional interests to rule for the good of all.

In medieval times, claims Tocqueville, those who ranked lower in the social hierarchy "accepted benefits from their [leaders] . . . and did not question their rights. They loved them when they were just and merciful

and felt neither repugnance nor degradation in submitting to their severities, which seemed inevitable ills sent by God."<sup>114</sup> In the modern era, ascriptive claims are more tied to merit. The "better sort" of the lower classes defer to men of "rank and wealth" in the belief "that those who were superior to them in these indisputable respects were superior also in the more intangible qualities of sense and knowledge."<sup>115</sup> This claim demonstrates the transformation of a norm of results into an ascriptive norm; the social hierarchy is the outcome of a slow, inexorable sorting process, at the end of which merit and rank co-vary. What is a problem for a norm of results becomes a virtue for a norm of ascription.

Deferential workers need not be self-abnegating, since they see themselves as part of "an organic entity in which each individual has a proper part to play, however humble. Inequality is seen as inevitable as well as just, some men being inherently fitted for positions of power and privilege. To acknowledge the superiority of such people is not to demean or belittle oneself, since all must benefit from their stewardship of society."<sup>116</sup> If "all who properly fulfill their stations in life contribute worthily to the common good," then deferential workers are "the moral, if not the social, equals of the elite."<sup>117</sup>

Collectivities play two important roles in the psychology of ascriptive social relations. First, classes are active social units. Laborers are linked to other laborers by more than employment: they share a culture, norms, and behaviors. Classes are stable, partly isolated, semiautonomous. Friendships and marriage occur within one or between closely related groups.<sup>118</sup> A society without the peculiarities and distinctions of classes "would be as useless as a rankless army and as dull as a wine list that gave neither the name of the vineyards nor the date of the vintages."<sup>119</sup>

Second, class conflict — as distinguished from class differences — is unnecessary and pernicious. It is the job of the elite to rule in everyone's interests; class conflict indicates its failure. If conflict continues, the masses may legitimately abandon the old elite and give their allegiance to a new, more effective one.<sup>120</sup>

Like the other norms, the ascriptive norm can succumb to perversions and exaggerations. A caste system is an obvious distortion; closer to home, so is a view that blacks deserve freedom, but not equality with whites. Abraham Lincoln held such a view:

I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the black and white races . . . Physical difference between the two . . . will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I . . . am in favor of the race to

which I belong, having the superior position . . . He [the Negro] is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, *he is my equal and the equal of . . . every living man.*<sup>121</sup>

The claim that women differ significantly from men in ways that should affect each sex's vocation, privileges, and responsibilities is not a distortion of an ascriptive norm. It *is* an ascriptive norm. But the argument that women deserve less pay for the same jobs or less important and lucrative jobs does pervert the norm.<sup>122</sup> The perversion lies in the fact that this claim gives most of the privileges to one sex and most of the burdens to the other. An assertion that one ascriptive group is categorically superior to another destroys the distinctive quality of ascriptive justice—that rewards and obligations must be balanced. When sexual differences become sexual inequalities, ascription loses its moral force and becomes merely dominance and exploitation.

To the charges of racism and sexism implicit in the paragraphs above, some answer that affirmative action policies are themselves a misplaced use of ascriptive criteria. These policies are designed to end and partially compensate for past discrimination by setting targets for employing minorities and women in proportion to their representation in the relevant population subgroup. Opponents call this a retreat from achievement to ascriptive criteria: "The principle of professional qualification or individual achievement is subordinated to the new ascriptive principle of corporate identity. . . . *The liberal and radical attack on discrimination was based on its denial of a justly earned place to a person on the basis of an unjust group attribute . . .* But now it is being demanded that one must have a place primarily because one possesses a particular group attribute."<sup>123</sup> Proponents of affirmative action see this view as naive or hypocritical; successful white men do not realize that affirmative action policies merely expose and correct for an underlying preference for white males that has always bolstered a supposed norm of achievement.<sup>124</sup>

The most serious danger inherent in an ascriptive norm is that a rigid hierarchical society may persist long after the elite has abandoned its responsibilities and the common people their pride in place. At that point, differences in rank persist only because the elite can retain power and wealth and, more subtly, define the legitimating values to benefit itself.<sup>125</sup> Thus professions require licensing of members in order to restrict access; promotions depend partly on intangible "character traits," appearance, or family connections; job categories flooded by women are downgraded. A ruling class with privileges but no merit or duties, and a

subordinate class with duties and talents but no privileges, is a frightening but plausible inversion of the norm's intent.

*Procedures* One possible solution to the rigidities of a hierarchical ascriptive norm is to maintain the use of ascription (thereby avoiding the problems of norms of need, investments, and results), but to abandon the hierarchical distinctions. All people, by virtue of their birth, deserve the same share of social goods as all other people—a norm of strict equality. Thus the circle is complete. Yet one might choose instead to abandon all norms that prescribe distributive outcomes. In that case, one might seek only to guarantee that the distributive *process* is fair, letting the distributive *outcomes* fall where they may. The use of procedures is thus a sixth possible norm. The first five norms start from a desired result and devise processes to approach it; the sixth norm starts with a valued process and sees the final result merely as derivative.

A procedural norm is qualitatively different from the others and does not fit along the continuum illustrated in figure 4. But since one's choice of a procedure may depend on one's choice of a principle of equality or differentiation, particular variants of the norm can themselves be located on the continuum.

The first procedure to be considered uses a principle of equality to produce differentiated results. Users of this procedure argue that although people have fundamentally equal worth, in some circumstances it is impossible to treat them equally. Rather than try to do so and inevitably fail, we can respond to their basic equality more fairly by subjecting them all to a procedure that randomly chooses winners and losers.

For example, proponents of selection by lottery argue that cumulative inequalities always pervert meritocratic intentions, so that the apparently open norms of investments and results merely delude and damage both winners and losers. With a lottery, social resources are still distributed unequally, but all community members have the same probability of receiving them, and no one is able wrongly to attribute success or failure to his or her own character. Everyone has an equal chance fairly to achieve unequal results.<sup>126</sup> Alternatively, some see a lottery as a substitute for an impossible egalitarian norm, not for a flawed meritocratic one. When a valued social resource is indivisible, an equal distribution, though desirable, may be unattainable. A lottery gives everyone an equal chance to receive the reward and thus justifies the unequal distribution it ultimately produces.

Other procedural rules, although not strictly random, are also intended to yield fair outcomes by ignoring individual characteristics and

rejecting all final patterns. Examples are chronological waiting lists, queues, and unassigned places at the dinner table or in the classroom.<sup>127</sup>

A second procedure mixes principles of equality and differentiation and generally yields differentiated outcomes. This is the procedure of free consent, for which Robert (Nozick) is the strongest contemporary advocate.<sup>128</sup> In his formulation, justice follows from adhering to the twin principles of private property and entitlement. As long as holdings are legitimately acquired initially, legitimately used, and legitimately transferred, any configuration that results from that history is just. People are entitled to keep what they can fairly get – no matter how much or how little that is.<sup>129</sup>

Nozick gives two reasons for making free consent necessary and sufficient to legitimate property acquisition and transfer.<sup>130</sup> First, free consent is the essential foundation of liberty and rights, which in turn are the essential foundations for a system of social justice. Second, exchanges that are not fraudulent or coerced benefit everyone involved; otherwise they would not enter into them. Thus interfering with a freely chosen exchange on behalf of some patterned result or group both intolerably violates human rights and inhibits the achievement of the greatest possible happiness for all.

Others agree that justice is synonymous with free consent, although they may reject Nozick's Lockean premises or libertarian conclusions. For Thomas Hobbes, "When a covenant is made, then to break it is *unjust*: and the definition of *Injustice* is no other than *the not performance of covenant*. And whatsoever is not unjust is *just*."<sup>131</sup> For Jeremy Bentham, "When the question of slavery is not considered, there is little to say respecting the conditions of *master* and its correlative conditions, constituted by the different kinds of servants. All these conditions are the effects of contracts; these contracts the parties interested may arrange to suit themselves."<sup>132</sup> For some modern philosophers too, "Free consent can render any situation just . . . Where inequalities of reward . . . are undeserved, only actual consent to their existence . . . render[s] those inequalities, and the society in which they exist, completely just."<sup>133</sup> Thus differences in reward between master and servant, owner and worker, the deserving and the undeserving are all just as long as each party agrees that they are just.

A community relying on freely contracted exchanges includes all those people with enough ability and resources to bargain, even if their only resource is their labor power. As Bentham suggests, slaves are simply defined out of the community, since they cannot freely consent to anything; for analogous reasons, imbeciles and children are also not full members.

Besides slavery and imbecility, however, there may be more subtle impediments to free consent, such as brainwashing, ignorance, stupidity, threat, economic duress, and certain moods.<sup>134</sup> And the norm has other dangers. What about the ill or handicapped, who do not have even labor power to exchange? And can an exchange between an impoverished worker and a millionaire employer be truly fair? May one sell oneself into slavery? What if one does not know, or does not agree to, the consequences of one's agreements? What of the unintended effects of an agreement on fellow citizens or on unborn generations? Finally, there is the "Rawlsian fallacy: . . . that if something is an individual good it is *ipso facto* a collective good."<sup>135</sup> After all, "Exchanges between freely consenting individuals can result in an economic structure that for various reasons members of the society acting as a collectivity might wish to alter."<sup>136</sup>

The procedure of free consent is egalitarian in its assumption that all people are equally able to make choices and equally responsible for living by the choices they make. But it is differentiating in its assumption that those who are better negotiators, or who happen to have more goods to exchange, deserve to reap the full benefits of their favored position. Its effects will almost certainly be differentiating, since its use is likely to magnify existing differences in holdings, abilities, and luck.

A third set of procedures relies solely on a principle of differentiation. It draws an analogy between human society and Darwin's law of natural selection, which is "hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working, *whenever and wherever opportunity offers*, at the improvement of each organic being."<sup>137</sup> This law is inevitable, just, and ultimately benevolent: "From the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, . . . that, . . . from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved."<sup>138</sup>

Herbert Spencer most eloquently transforms Darwinian evolution into human social justice. Society is an organism with life and purpose; perfection of the species dominates any personal claim. Conflict between individuals and within societies will force them to adapt until people become perfectly attuned to one another and strife disappears. Only then can moral law be an absolute claim; until then, moral law changes as conditions for survival change. Our only right at present is to use our capacities, pursue happiness, and overcome others.<sup>139</sup>

Unrestrained conflict not only will lead to perfection, but also defines justice at the present time. Spencer assumes that some people are simply smarter, stronger, more energetic than others. An ideal world would reward merit, but ours is not yet an ideal world. Therefore it is just for people to retain whatever they can get, by whatever means they choose. Any other distributive rule merely enables the weak to drag down the strong and slows the evolutionary process: "Is it not cruel to increase the sufferings of the better that the sufferings of the worse may be decreased?"<sup>140</sup>

William Graham Sumner softens Spencer's harshness by combining the law of nature with a norm of results. The two norms differ, since the latter creates a process in order to reward skills and ambitions, whereas the former justifies a process that rewards victory; that is, rewarding productivity is the intent of one norm and a possible but unintended consequence of the other. But grafting them together yields a hybrid that equates victory with productivity, dominance with social contribution, strength with virtue:

Competition . . . is a law of nature. Nature is entirely neutral; she submits to him who most energetically and resolutely assails her. She grants her rewards to the fittest, therefore, without regard to other considerations of any kind. If, then, there be liberty, men get from her just in proportion to their works . . . Such is the system of nature . . . If we try to amend it, there is only one way in which we can do it . . . We can take the rewards from those who have done better and give them to those who have done worse . . . We cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members.<sup>141</sup>

Communities further soften the harsh law of nature by regulating market competition, so that the best and strongest win the most, but the worst and weakest are not destroyed. As long as everyone follows certain rules and abstains from certain behaviors, results of the market process may be unfortunate, but not unjust or immoral. One can be called hardhearted, but not unfair, in driving a hard bargain with a failing competitor or in raising prices in a ghetto store. Similarly, producing an expensive commodity that loses popularity may be cause for pity or lamentation, but not for cries of foul play.

Unlike the first two processes, the law of nature does not exclude from the community those who cannot or choose not to participate. Handicapped or reluctant members are part of the process and are simply eli-

minated early—either physically, according to Spencer, or economically, in the market.

The dangers of the law of nature, even modified into a market, are obvious. Inequalities cumulate. Rampant self-interest reigns. There is no room for dignity in weakness, humility in strength, or collective action for the common good. At most, this process is murderous anarchy; it is at least coldhearted and ruthless. The strong get stronger, and the weak or self-abnegating simply lose.

Underlying the psychology of a procedural norm is an assumption that community members are competitive and interdependent; they "share a bond but one which is antagonistic or has a clear conflict of interest."<sup>142</sup> Interdependence combined with conflict over goals or social resources that everyone values creates a "comparative or contesting set [that] implies winning-losing, better-worse outcomes, inferior-superior status."<sup>143</sup> The degree of competition and the importance of victory vary, however, thereby determining which distributive process is used.

The simplest resolution of competitive interdependence is Pareto's principle, which mandates all changes that help at least one person and hurt none, disregarding the legitimacy of envy and assuming that the starting point is fair. Thus Nozick endorses exchanges that free individuals agree will benefit them both, and others are puzzled by "resistance to the idea that 'profit' is available to both seller and buyer in the same transaction."<sup>144</sup>

Yet there are problems even with the Pareto principle. First, assuming that all starting points are fair begs a crucial issue of distributive justice. Why should we assume that any particular distribution is not the result of prior unfair actions and thus in itself unfair? Second, does an exchange that benefits only the advantaged trader have exactly the same moral status as an exchange that benefits only the disadvantaged trader? Third, dismissing envy simply evades the problem of interpersonal comparisons of utility and ignores most of what we know about psychology. Finally, Pareto's principle is usually irrelevant: in most exchanges involving scarce resources, some gain and others lose.

Before considering direct competition, however, we should consider indirect competition, or relative deprivation. It occurs "when people striving for the same goal, and achieving it *independently*, nevertheless rank and measure their standing relative to each other by using the goal as a common standard."<sup>145</sup> Thus one person's success does not preclude another's; runners race against time, not each other, and they cannot shorten their own time by lengthening that of others. People are, however, apt to measure success relatively, not absolutely: runners *feel*

that they are competing with each other, not the clock. Similarly, participants in random procedures such as a lottery, waiting list, or coin toss do not "beat" or "lose to" each other, although they perceive that they do. As the goods being distributed broaden from material goods to "goals, values, ways of thinking, being,"<sup>146</sup> the feeling of relative deprivation runs an increasing risk of becoming personally and socially destructive.

Moving up the scale of degrees of competition, we come to direct competition, in which perceptions coincide with facts. A loss is absolute as well as relative, since one succeeds by taking from others as well as by advancing oneself. Here competitors have no independent measure of success, no chance for joint or partial success. The extent of one person's victory is the measure of the other's defeat.<sup>147</sup> Increasing one's market share in an expanding market is indirect competition; in a stable market, expansion is direct competition. Similarly, theories of class conflict assume direct competition; trickle-down theories or theories of consensual, permeable social strata assume indirect competition. In direct, as in indirect, competition, personal conflict and community instability rise as the value of the goods or goals at stake increases.

Even direct competition has limits, however. Rules of the game assure everyone some share of the total, a voice in later contentions, and a chance to change any outcome. In a majoritarian democracy, for example, the minority accepts the decisions of the majority because it sees the process as just, it never loses an intolerable amount, and it has another chance to compete. If these conditions break down, so does majoritarian democracy.

Removing these limits leads to total conflict, in which victory is complete and final. The loser receives neither a share of goods nor a chance to compete again. "Although one's prior efforts, investment, and costs may elicit some form of condolence or compassion they are not allowed to alter the decision as to who deserves what."<sup>148</sup> Spencer's law of nature rules.

Total conflict occurs when the good at stake is coveted, finite, and indivisible—"the promotion, the fair maiden, the prize."<sup>149</sup> If conflict is extensive enough to reject all rules of social order, it is obviously very destructive to a community. At an extreme, only annihilating the opposition permits stability; life for the losers becomes "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."<sup>150</sup>

### Domains of Life

The six norms just described are, of course, much tidier on the page than they are in any human mind. Very few people, whether philosophers or

assembly line workers, use only one or make clear choices among several. Instead, people try to combine norms that conflict analytically; they shift ground as they sense difficulties ahead; they resolve dilemmas by fiat; and they jump from one norm to another without knowing that they are doing so. Nevertheless, from this blurring one can sort out distinct patterns of normative use that determine respondents' distributive choices. Understanding these patterns, however, requires a fuller description of the domains of life than I have provided so far.

Three domains are important in this book. The *socializing domain* addresses "everyday life," such as family, school, and friends. It is distinguished by four characteristics. First, the resources to be distributed may be material goods, services, emotions, or authority, but seldom money. Second, community boundaries are clearly defined, and community members are easily identified. Third, people expect to have significant control over actions within this domain. That control may be direct, as in a family, or it may be diffuse and only potential, as in a school or neighborhood association, but the issues here appear intelligible and manageable, even to ordinary people like themselves. Fourth, private, self-interested concerns are legitimate—in fact, for many people they are the *only* legitimate concerns in this domain. Few parents, for example, will support busing of their children for the sake of the national goal of desegregation if they think their children will thereby be harmed; in fact, they would view such support as evidence of being a bad parent.

The *economic domain* addresses issues of earning a living and of finding and knowing one's place in the larger society. Thus it deals with income and authority within one's own and others' workplaces, the social structure and where one fits into it, and the processes by which occupational and class positions are determined. It too has four characteristics. First, the goods to be distributed are pecuniary or obvious money substitutes. Second, community boundaries are broad and vague: communities are interdependent and even indistinguishable. There is no easy way to determine who is or is not a member of the community. Third, most aspects of the economy and society appear to be uncontrollable by anyone. People see them either as parts of the natural world, not subject to human direction, or as Leviathans that should, but cannot, be harnessed. Fourth, private, self-interested concerns are legitimate and may even be the only claims with automatic legitimacy.

The *political domain* addresses issues of citizenship, of the effects of the federal government on one's own life, and of hopes and fears for the future of the United States. It too has four characteristics. First, the goods to be distributed are both pecuniary and nonpecuniary, since they include rights, influence, legal decisions, and authority over values. Sec-

ond, the community boundaries are broad and vague – communities are interdependent and members often indistinguishable. Third, citizens or their leaders are able to control the outcome of most political questions, although a small, but important, aspect of the political domain is uncontrollable. This aspect is the realm of the future, the ideal society, which exists only in the imagination. Fourth, concerns must be public and not apparently self-interested in order to be legitimate.

These domains and their identifying characteristics are not categories with precise and measurable parameters. Rather, they are heuristic devices, general frameworks within which issues with common traits cluster. A particular issue may not have all four characteristics typical of its domain, but most do, and no single characteristic has more exceptions than any other. In short, these domains are organizing devices for groups of issues, not conceptually distinct units of analysis.

### Conclusion

This book contends that we can best understand people's distributive judgments by looking not at their general ideologies or class position, but at the distributive norms they apply to particular domains of life. Respondents usually start from a principle of equality, and use mainly egalitarian norms, when they address the socializing and political domains; they usually start from a principle of differentiation, and use mainly differentiating norms, when they address the economic domain.

The modifiers in the previous sentence, "usually" and "mainly," identify caveats in the basic contention. First, a few respondents do not follow this dominant three-part pattern of beliefs. Second, most respondents feel ambivalent about some or all of it. Finally, except for the endpoints of strict equality and ascription, each norm can be used to redistribute upward or downward. A response to need, for example, begins from an assumption of equality, but if we use it to expend all of our resources on kidney dialysis or education for gifted children, then cancer victims or the retarded will be double losers. Similarly, a norm of results is basically differentiating, but if we decide that nurses produce more of value than baseball players, we could use it to redistribute downward.

Setting aside these caveats, however, the dominant three-part pattern goes a long way toward answering Sombart's question of "Why no socialism in the United States?" Americans see socialism, or, more precisely, redistribution of wealth, as an economic matter and thus subject to differentiating norms, or as a mixed economic and political mat-

ter, and thus as a muddle between conflicting norms. If there is no political payoff for resolving this muddle, and if its resolution would require a great deal of time, energy, or mental strain, the most rational thing to do is to ignore it – and thus to "oppose" socialism by not supporting it.<sup>151</sup> Finally, this three-part pattern may help to explain why Americans so often seem to hold inconsistent or "unconstrained" political beliefs, since the pattern I propose does not fit along a single political dimension of liberalism-conservatism. The rest of the book examines this contention.

## 8 Ambivalence

### The Dominant Pattern and Ambivalence about It

I have thus far examined the range of distributive norms available to American citizens, shown that most respondents follow a pattern of equality-differentiation-equality in the three domains of life, and shown that a few are consistently egalitarian or differentiating.

But all of this is really only half of my argument. Interspersed throughout respondents' prescriptions for equality in the home or results in the workplace were hesitancy, contradictions, ambiguity. It is these shadings that made the analysis of the interviews so long and complex. It is easy to describe simple statements of position, even if it is not at all easy to analyze or explain them; survey researchers do an excellent job at this task. But given the opportunity, people do not make simple statements; they shade, modulate, deny, retract, or just grind to a halt in frustration. These manifestations of uncertainty are just as meaningful and interesting as the clear, definitive statements of a belief system. Hence my stressing their tentativeness as I delineated the dominant three-part pattern.

Yet it is not enough to say that people are seldom as certain of their opinions as their bald summary statements imply. We all know that and none more than survey researchers who must work around this fact. But here I can do what their data preclude, namely, treat ambivalence as a

finding with the same status as the dominant substantive pattern and subject it to the same analysis. I wish to analyze it by seeking patterns of uncertainty, regularities among contradictions, explanations for frustration. Most important, I will show how recurrent types of ambivalence help to answer the original question of how rich and poor evaluate vast inequalities of wealth in a society that claims to be politically and socially egalitarian.

I use ambivalence as a generic term to indicate a wide range of views that modify the dominant three-part pattern of beliefs. Before examining its many forms, let us make clear what it is not.

Using different norms of justice in different domains is not ambivalence. Following the dominant three-part pattern does not make one an inconsistent egalitarian or a softhearted social Darwinist. To make that claim would be to fall into Philip Converse's trap, namely, to assert that people who do not always fall on the same end of a single continuum, regardless of the issue, are unconstrained or inconsistent. For some people, this very ability to keep domains of their life separate and to use different norms in each is psychologically and philosophically satisfying. Anne Kaufman, for example, both insists that people be held accountable for their actions and recognizes that people are not always responsible for their situations. She gives great weight to the former demand in her discussion of the market and therefore wants economic differences to reflect personal achievements. But she gives great weight to the latter recognition in her family life and policy recommendations, and therefore wants parents to aid their children and the government to remedy structural or random causes of poverty. By keeping the domains separate, she can balance norms that might paralyze her if they were forced into a direct confrontation.

Even conflicts between two norms within one domain need not lead to ambivalence, if the person is able to handle the conflict. For example, Pamela McLean's discussion of appropriate treatment of people with dependents demonstrates not ambivalence, but an awareness that one must choose between equally valid norms. Employers should not pay people with large families more than less needy employees, but they should lobby for tax exemptions for dependents in order to equalize the economic burdens of large and small families. These claims only "sound contradictory"; they are not really, because "actual salary for doing the same job is a little different than paying for the privilege of living in the U.S. And sometimes the people with less responsibility do have to carry the load a little more for those who are burdened with so many. [For] the privilege of earning the money and having the less responsibility in-

volved, they [single taxpayers] pay a little bit more." Pamela's distinction between employers' moral obligations with regard to salary paid into a family and taxes paid out of it may seem silly to a strong proponent of a norm of need or results. But that is irrelevant; by finding and using a meaningful distinction, Pamela avoids either a confrontation or a stand-off between equally valid norms.

Most respondents, however, lack this happy ability to maintain and draw strength from distinctions among beliefs and domains. Most make the distinctions, but react to them with uncertainty and distress, not contentment and "health."<sup>1</sup>

### Manifestations of Ambivalence

Manifestations of ambivalence vary. One is helplessness. Pamela McLean and Anne Kaufman are both uncharacteristically stymied and silenced by their inability to think of a solution to the problem of poverty. Ruth Sennett is similarly unable to devise a resolution to a normative problem. She lives on an annual pension of \$3000, is grateful to her former employer for having paid her the minimum wage, and says she deserved no more. But redistribution would be "wonderful" because then she could pay her bills and "everyone would be equal." But she gets stuck when asked how we might reconcile her belief that people should be paid according to productivity and her desire that people be equal: "I don't know, what are they doing? I don't know what you mean. I can't answer you that. You go in certain sections, the houses are nice, you go in another section, they're worse. So you pick the better part. Maybe the whole world should be like the better part. That's impossible. When they throw down buildings, what do they do with all that stuff? Burn it? It's got to be someplace."

Sometimes ambivalence is manifested as anger. We have seen Vincent Sartori's frustration at not being able to figure out whom to blame for his poverty or where to turn for help. His only solution is getting into bar brawls, throwing knives at foremen, and making plans to rob a bank. Isaac Cohen is also angry, despite his wealth. He resents how easily wealth came to his WASP neighbors, without the extraordinary efforts that he and other poor immigrant Jews had to make. He resents government "pampering" of the rich through tax breaks, and he does not believe that any of the wealthy, including himself, really deserve to keep their money. But he also envies his neighbors, feels traces of ascriptive awe at "old money," and is "insecure by comparison." He deals with these contradictory impulses by isolating himself from and sometimes condemn-

ing his neighbors. "We do not seek their friendship. I am not interested in clubs. I cannot play the game." The very wealthy are "self-serving," "uncaring," "greedy sharks," who "swallow up little fishies" like himself and "destroy their [own] children." He describes the baleful influence, both physical and social, of the Rockefellers on their environment: "They destroy areas and then pick them up for a song. Taking over Saint Croix—one fertile valley on the island, and they own it. Is there any wonder there's a problem on Saint Croix? You can go on and on. All of the tax advantages that our drunken Rockefeller in Arkansas has—the rest of the country learned from what he was able to do [and are] now taking advantage of the loopholes that *his* people discovered. And *he's* nothing but a drunk." The Rockefellers, he concludes, are "bright, highly motivated, and ruthless." In his case, this mixture of envy, admiration, condemnation, and longing to belong finds expression in anger and bitterness.

A third manifestation of ambivalence is inconsistency. The clearest example is Rod Thompson's discussion of confiscatory inheritance taxes, described in chapter seven. Another example comes from Amy Campbell. She is "a little bit of a Marxist," sees the welfare system as "dehumanizing" and insufficient, and believes that a guaranteed income "would do away with a lot of problems we have in society." It might even "give a person a motivation to go back to work." But neither the employer, local community, nor federal government has any responsibility for helping workers with long-term needs or short-term emergencies. After all, the concept of need "brings in a variable that muddies the issue. You choose to have two cars and say, 'Oh, I need a little bit more money for gas or insurance.' What do you call need? It's in the eyes of the person who needs. No, you can't do that [supplement wages according to need]." As for emergencies, "Okay, if I'm a responsible person, I have insurance, don't I? It costs a whole lot of money every year, but that protects me." Society should help the needy, but need is undefinable, emergencies are a person's own responsibility, and no one is obliged to help anyone else. Her general claim and specific application of it are inconsistent.

A fourth and final manifestation of ambivalence is confusion, the dissolving into incoherence when attempting to express one's thoughts. Barbara Azlinsky provides the clearest example in her unedited answer to the question, "What role did luck play in your career?" "You know, being happy. As I said years ago when I first started working, and I think everybody was healthy and all that. Oh, I wouldn't say 'breaks'—I don't go by luck. Just feel that a lot of times, I mean, in business you gamble,

and you do things, but we aren't business people, we aren't gamblers. But that's where you believe in Lady Luck and all that. But we just feel that if you've worked, then you should get. Well, that's, I think, why I'm a little upset." Barbara does not believe that luck should determine success, and she wants to believe in a norm of results. But she can attribute her own lack of success only to bad luck — which she does not believe in. So she is driven into a flurry of confused, incomplete, vague phrases.

The same thing happens to Ruth Sennett. For example, asked if any people are overpaid, she responds, "I don't know, dear. This is when I was young, my hair long. My husband died young. He had a heart condition. Well, you know, when you work in a shop, and if you get paid more than I do, then you have to fight for more. And then if you make the boss nervous, then she'll fire you. Like my sister was slow, and she [the boss] didn't give her a chance." These comments come after a long discussion of the difficulties of poverty, the greater desert of the rich, and the desirability of equality. Ruth cannot sort out these thoughts; therefore she retreats to non sequiturs.

But all of these examples are simply expressions of ambivalence, not explanations for it. The real task is twofold: to understand why normally intelligible, calm people sometimes become paralyzed, angry, inconsistent, or incoherent; and to examine the implications of these occasions for people's beliefs about distributive justice and the redistribution of wealth.

### Normative versus Pragmatic Judgments

Analysis of the interviews reveals five types of ambivalence, which I shall examine in turn. First, ambivalence may occur when respondents attempt to evaluate some issues normatively and some pragmatically. After making this distinction, they may then question their placing specific items on one or the other side, or they may regret that certain subjects apparently cannot be evaluated normatively. This creates ambivalence: they feel torn between what ought to be and what apparently must be.

Simply choosing to view a question pragmatically or normatively may affect the substance of one's distributive decision but does not necessarily induce ambivalence. For Pamela McLean, the level of pay for dangerous work is a matter of market forces, not justice: "A propane driver shouldn't receive any more than a steel hauler. I mean, it's a truckload of something going somewhere. There is more risk, but nobody says you have to do that job if you don't want to — take an easier one.

Maybe the only way they could get people to do it is to offer them more money, but I don't think that should be a reward thing — that's a business problem." For Phillip Santaguida, the level of pay for dangerous work is a question of justice, not simply market forces: "Dangerous jobs should get more 'cause you're jeopardizing your life every time you take a dangerous job." Neither answer is hesitant or self-contradictory; neither person indicates ambivalence.

Ambivalence occurs when people vacillate and then try to resolve or ignore their indecision. Michael McFarland, for example, is paralyzed when trying to make normative choices because he perceives insuperable pragmatic obstacles. *We should* have truly equal opportunity: "If everybody started off on the same basis, come in [to the world] and they don't have no money, then nobody could have any complaints" about subsequent differences in income, since one's income would depend on "what you make of it." Michael's version of the good society is a classic statement of the American dream, but, as Garry Wills says, "The metaphor [of starting line fairness] is a mess."<sup>2</sup> Michael, although less articulately than Wills, makes the same point in his next breath: "Well, you need money to get through school, though. It would be very *tough*" to enforce equality of opportunity if some get an education and others cannot. He knows that equal opportunity does not, and may never, exist; therefore we cannot assume that people's holdings now, or ever will, accurately measure their worth. He cannot decide where to turn from there. Sometimes he tries to assume that "on the majority, most people end up where they deserve"; therefore current distributions are fair. At other points, he decides that real equality of opportunity is impossible; therefore we should "standardize" incomes, so that "everybody would be making about the same, and nobody would feel better off than the other person." Most of the time, he is simply stymied; the question of fair incomes is "a tough one." For Michael, normative choices must rest on pragmatic bases; when the bases are not there, he does not know what to do about his normative preferences.

Others deal with their ambivalence about what is and ought to be by refusing to think about desired ideals, perhaps even refusing to have any. Phillip Santaguida often does this. The world is full of "cannibals," whose nature would never permit equality; therefore the goal of "everybody have[ing] the same thing" is "just a foolish dream." Rather than working toward that dream, he "just hope[s] for the future." Amy Campbell even more explicitly seeks to avoid ambivalence by refusing to take seriously her own impractical dreams. At various points, she supports guaranteed incomes and jobs, steeply progressive taxation, and other social pro-

grams. But although Marxism is "a lovely theory," she will not discuss the question of equalizing incomes because "I don't think it works. They [China and Sweden] have the haves and the have-nots too. Maybe not as radically as we do, but they have them." Asked if we should work toward equality as an ideal, even if we know we will never reach it, she again answers, "I don't think it's possible. I remember reading Marx, and a lot of his ideas were just great. [But] Marxism doesn't work anywhere. Point me a finger where it works. It doesn't." Asked once more if equality is a desirable, even if unreachable, ideal, she insists once more, "I don't think it's possible. Don't you see what I'm saying? You're trying to get me out of reality, go floating on a magic carpet with you." She will discuss only "what is ideal in reality," in order to avoid tension between apparently immutable facts and evanescent values.

One could make the opposite choice. One could try to end ambivalence by beginning with a normative ideal and seeking to change the circumstances that block its attainment. This, of course, would be the strategy of a *laissez-faire* anarchist or redistributionist, and my sample contains no full-fledged examples of either. It does, however, have examples of people who seek to change the fact side of the fact-value discrepancy. Craig Cabot served several years on a governor's commission to reform laws concerning foster care. He expanded the commission's mandate, and left only after its purpose had been accomplished and it had degenerated into political squabbling. When faced with the problem of work incentives in an egalitarian society, both Rod Thompson and Bruce Abbott would try to change the structure of incentives rather than abandoning equality. Wendy Tonnina worries that "the people with all the money are in control. Money talks a lot in the government." As a result, "The small people, the working people have freedom [only] to a certain point. We can think what we want, but it's just—can we do anything about it?" But instead of giving up in despair, as Ernest Berkowitz does, she encourages her friends and fellow workers to "be tomorrow, more open-minded, to want better and more. They're not willing to sit back" any longer.

Of course, not only egalitarians want to change reality in order to approach an ideal more closely. Judith Baum wants to ban books illustrating two "extremely dangerous trends": the "terrible, terrible problem in this country of violence" and "this whole area of hopelessness." Children will not develop patriotism and the drive to succeed if they are constantly surrounded by evidence of social decay; therefore they should be denied books that lack "upbeat hope." Judith resists the word *censor-*

*ship*, but works actively to persuade librarians to take certain books off their shelves.

Thus far we have examined three strategies for dealing with tension between perceived pragmatic limits and an ideal vision. Some people simply live with tension without even trying to resolve it; others abandon the apparently hopeless ideal; still others seek changes in the constraining reality. Rod Thompson and Ernest Berkowitz follow yet another path in trying to deal with an apparent fact-value discrepancy; they insist on keeping the real and ideal worlds separate. If the two worlds are not juxtaposed, then one need not feel torn between their conflicting pulls. Rod's gyrations about an inheritance tax occur because the interview questions force him to consider real world limitations and ideal values simultaneously. He believes both that we cannot confiscate holdings and that people should not inherit fortunes. He sees no way of moving from the former necessary starting point to the latter desired outcome; therefore he twists uncomfortably between the two opposing forces until the interviewer permits him to change the subject.

Ernest Berkowitz also keeps normative ideals separate from everyday practice as much as he can. He is able to do so in the economic domain: he empathizes with workers' problems and wishes they did not exist, but he sees no reason to do good deeds that amount to poor business practice. He is, however, unable to do so in his family: when his son married a Gentile, Ernest became painfully aware that the ideal of religious tolerance was very different from the concrete fact of intermarriage.

Isaac Cohen shows the same split, although with less discomfort at the juxtaposition of ideal and real, in his discussion of fair incomes. Ideally, "once my kids are through with school, they're on their own." Children should not inherit their parents' wealth; the incomes of the wealthy cannot be "justified." People should be rewarded for "making a genuine contribution to society; my salary is totally unjustified by that standard, and I feel guilty about it." But he will not relinquish his holdings, disinherit his children, or stop searching for tax loopholes because "that's society. The name of the game is dollars. And I cannot . . ." Isaac claims that this discrepancy between values and pragmatism does not bother him, but he immediately begins a tirade against lawyers, who are "incapable bluffers" and thus *really* overpaid, and against "drones" and welfare cheats. Rod's confusion finds echoes in Isaac's bluster.

Both rich and poor feel this form of ambivalence, and both use the same four methods to combat it. But the combination of accepting apparently necessary differences and holding egalitarian values has pro-

foundly different psychological effects on respondents' distributive views, depending on their wealth or poverty. For the wealthy, the gap between facts and values usually justifies personal inaction even in the face of an unfair status quo. They can see themselves as empathetic with the poor, even "socialistic," without feeling responsible to seek greater equality. This is not hypocrisy; they may sincerely wish things were otherwise, but because the market, or human nature, or political corruption are immutable forces, one would simply be whistling into the wind to endorse major changes. Maintaining tension between real world judgments of fact and utopian values permits them both to retain their privileged status and to condemn privilege.

But the gap between the existence of differences and the desire for more equality causes despair and frustration for the poor. They have a partial vision of how the world ought to be and how people ought to treat one another, but to act according to that vision would require that one be either a saint or a fool. They have no intention of being either, and they do not consider making the extraordinary effort that would be necessary to move the world from what it is to what it ought to be. Therefore their egalitarian values are limited to wistful visions of the ideal future or misplaced nostalgia for a golden past.

When the fact-value gap is reversed, so that respondents perceive great equality that belies their differentiating values, the psychology differs. The rich become strong and vocal opponents of the status quo, although they perceive their opposition to be futile. Only one poor respondent shows this pattern, and she is a rather defiant, confused opponent of the status quo. The first type of ambivalence, therefore, generally induces political inactivity, whether by providing an excuse for it or by setting up apparently insuperable barriers to change.

### Normative versus Normative Judgments

A second type of ambivalence consists of unresolved conflicts among distributive norms within the same domain. Once a respondent chooses to consider an issue from a normative rather than a pragmatic stance, he or she must decide what norm is most appropriate. That decision is, of course, the subject of this book, and need not be recapitulated here. Furthermore, not all normative conflicts within one domain induce ambivalence. But some do, and we can identify circumstances in which ambivalence among norms, rather than careful balancing between them, is likely to occur.

Adjacent norms – those located beside each other in figure 4 – are least

problematic, either for political philosophers or for my respondents. After all, Tawney did not sharply distinguish strict equality from need in his program for distributive justice in England.<sup>3</sup> Market liberalism is based on Locke's assumption that investments of work and virtue translate directly into results of productivity and social contribution. Racism and sexism seek justification in the claim that people with one ascriptive characteristic are more productive in certain ways than people without that characteristic.

Similarly, respondents slip back and forth between adjacent norms at some cost to philosophical rigor, but at little cost to psychological comfort. Maria Pulaski most often relies on a norm of need, but she makes equal divisions of the last piece of pie and household chores without worrying about this "inconsistency." Since Bernard Bloomfield assumes that boys can be expected to achieve more than girls, he demands accomplishments from his sons that he does not expect from his daughters – with no apparent unease about mixing norms of results and ascription. Isaac Cohen insists that hard work, even without great intelligence, yields achievement deserving rich rewards – and he cites himself as an example of the success possible through sheer effort. He is not bothered by this conflation of norms of investment and results or by the same mix in his equation of poverty with laziness.

But conflicts within one domain among more, and more dissimilar, norms can create great philosophical and psychological ambivalence – and can induce political paralysis. The standard debate in American politics between equal opportunity and equal results is, at base, a dispute between norms of strict equality and results. The conflict between a guaranteed annual income and a job requirement for welfare recipients reduces to a conflict between norms of need and productivity. Affirmative action dilemmas pit ascription, strict equality, procedures, and productivity against one another in complicated ways. Controversies over competency tests for high school graduation involve norms of investments, results, and ascription. As these examples suggest, many of our most intractable and politically volatile issues are fundamentally conflicts between two or more dissimilar distributive norms.

For my respondents also, simultaneously holding norms far from one another along the continuum of distributive principles creates ambivalence. Even Anne Kaufman, who is exceptionally adept at balancing competing values, is torn between her wish to gratify the needs of her rebellious son and her belief in maintaining high standards of performance even for him. Similarly, Pamela McLean juggles competing norms better than any other poor respondent, but she cannot even begin to reconcile

free speech rights to publicize abortions with her parental responsibility to keep her young children innocent of knowledge about them.

Less adept respondents are even more distressed. Barbara Azlinsky is torn between humanitarianism and materialism; Ernest Berkowitz vacillates between equality and ascription. At one point, Michael McFarland endorses communism because the state would ensure everyone a job and the necessities of life. In that situation, "Anybody would be getting an equal shake. You'll still be working, but you wouldn't have no worries." And yet he regrets that unionization makes it "tough" for an employer to fire a lazy worker: "You just can't let 'em go unless you catch 'em really doing wrong. You're really tied down with them. Before they had the unions, if the guy didn't toe the line, he was let go. *Then* a person had to work." Now a union member can "slack off and push the work on the willing worker" with impunity. Michael cannot choose here among a norm of strict equality for necessities and jobs, a norm of results for the employer's sake, and a norm of investments for the workers' sake. As a result, he feels anxious, angry, and guilty—all at the same time.

Finally, David Fine vacillates between his love of competition and his belief that the meek should not be trampled upon. He learned "the importance of helping other people" through his mother's enthusiastic observance of Sabbath charity, and he "devotes around 25 percent of my time to do-good things." And yet, "The most important thing I learned from my father was to be competitive. I don't like to lose." He describes in loving detail his takeover of his father-in-law's business, mainly through being a good "bullshit artist." These conflicting norms of need and competition appear in his contradictory political recommendations. On the one hand, justice is "the fairness to consider an individual, understanding the individual in [the context of his] society, understanding the society. It's *fair* in this country to give some black kid who doesn't have any parents more understanding than somebody who knows [what] he's doing and is looking to steal blatantly." On the other hand, we must not interfere too much with market forces. Asked about exploitation of ghetto shoppers, he responds, "A man is entitled to sell groceries for whatever he wants to sell it at, and people are entitled to buy." David is not very disturbed by discrepancies between his policy recommendations based on need and those based on competition, because he does not take this whole exercise in normative evaluation very seriously. But he clearly expresses conflicts among norms within the same domain and just as clearly has no suggestions for resolving them.

Respondents generally have fewer strategies for alleviating conflict among norms than for alleviating conflict between a normative and a

pragmatic approach to distributive questions. Most often, they leave the conflict among norms unresolved, and the degree of the resulting disturbance depends on their personality and the salience of that issue to them. Thus David Fine is not distressed even by tensions in his family—at least he does not let the interviewer see any distress—whereas Michael McFarland is deeply pained by the myriad conflicts he sees at his workplace and in the country in general.

Regardless of variations in distress caused by a conflict among norms, it always has the same political effect. People who feel torn between two views are unlikely to act forcefully to promote either; therefore by default, they end up "supporting" the status quo.<sup>4</sup> The only exception would be a leap to certainty on one side or the other, as Rod Thompson shows in briefly endorsing concentration camps for churlish workers.

Rich respondents are especially likely to be deeply affected by this form of ambivalence, as Barbara Azlinsky, Ernest Berkowitz, and Bruce Abbott demonstrate. This finding may, of course, be simply an artifact of a small sample, but the outlines of a pattern are clear. The poor are generally so preoccupied with external material constraints that they can seldom afford the luxury of normative conflict. Vincent Sartori has too little income to buy any presents for his children; why should he waste his time debating need versus achievement as a criterion for spending nonexistent money? Maria Pulaski knows only that she seems to pay a much greater share of her income in taxes than her wealthy employers do; why should she engage in debates over proportional versus progressive tax structures?

Only when one has enough money to have discretion in how to spend it is one confronted with difficult choices. Pamela McLean has an elaborate system for reconciling needs, effort, and chores accomplished in giving allowances to her children. When her husband works, the system is in effect; when he is laid off, there are no allowances and the system therefore is in abeyance. Ernest Berkowitz has the money to meet his payroll and the power to enforce his salary decisions; thus he can be subject to the contradictory pulls of ascription, need, and productivity in deciding how to allocate those resources. And as Craig Cabot points out, the poor are threatened by blacks who want jobs; only the rich can afford to debate the merits of affirmative action policies versus unregulated market processes.

This line of argument suggests systematic variation in the incidence of types of ambivalence. Material constraints induce the poor to focus on conflicts between the real and ideal worlds; lack of material constraints give the rich the opportunity to feel conflict among norms.

### The Encroachment of Economic Values

The third form of ambivalence has a different nature from the first two, which involved conflicts between competing views of the world; the third involves the extension of one view of the world into inappropriate domains. People often permit market values, which are based on a principle of differentiation, to encroach on other domains. They neither intend this encroachment nor believe in it, but they still come to evaluate personal or political relationships according to criteria of productivity, efficiency, and competition.

Chapter three discussed how this phenomenon occurs. A society trying to maximize production should give resources to the most efficient producers, thereby increasing the total supply of goods and benefiting everyone. But the process is perverted: first, when efficient producers come to believe that they deserve large shares of goods as a reward for their services; and second, when the goal of increased productivity comes to dominate other, incompatible goals. "Inherent in economic rationality is a tendency for economic values to spread throughout a culture with the consequence that people come to be regarded primarily in terms of their economic utility."<sup>5</sup> Gratifying the needs of "useless" persons becomes an extravagance to be justified by charity or love—not an inherent right of all community members. Rewarding people for trying but failing becomes altruism to be justified as psychological encouragement—not a legitimate payment for fulfilling one's responsibility to do one's best. Finally, rewarding people equally, or equally within ascriptive categories, becomes hopeless idealism, anachronism, or irrationality. In short, norms of results and market procedures overwhelm all other norms, even in the socializing and political domains.

One could argue, as do Salvador Tivoli, Rod Thompson, and Bruce Abbott, that productivity should not be the dominant goal even in the economic domain. Or one could argue, as do Sally White and Bernard Bloomfield, that productivity should be the dominant goal in all domains of life. But these claims are substantive beliefs, not a form of ambivalence, and thus not our concern here. Ambivalence occurs when people are uneasy about blurring distinctions, when they believe that the domains ought to be kept separate, but nevertheless find themselves using market criteria in all areas of their life.

Let us see how some respondents express this type of ambivalence. Maria Pulaski almost always uses a norm of need to respond to her family, but at one point she insists that children "definitely" should do chores to receive allowances. Her teenage granddaughter is "very lazy"; when

her mother gives her chores to do before going out, "She'll do it for a week. Then a week later, she's out—she's not doing anything. And I always interfere, tell her she shouldn't do that, keep her in the house. Let her do her work, *then* let her go out. They should have a chore to do." But her uncharacteristic sternness disturbs her, and she immediately amends it by insisting that older children should not have more work than young ones, that "it won't hurt" for boys to have the same chores as girls, and that all children should receive the same allowance for their chores. Thus even when Maria uses a norm of results in the family, she hedges it about with egalitarian rules, and her insistence that "sometimes it's necessary" is very defensive.

Pamela McLean uses a different strategy to incorporate the alien norm of results into her family values. Toys and goods are distributed equally, but when family finances permit, allowances are allocated by chores. Toys bought with those allowances are the only strictly private property in the family. Pamela explains her "earn as you go" program in exhaustive detail: "Sam mows the lawn and earns money. Carol, I paid her three dollars a week, but she earned it. She had to clear the table after supper, do all the dishes, load the dishwasher, and then she had to be available to help the rest of the time. But Sam decided he needed the extra money, so he'd do the job. Well, it went down to two dollars a week because all he does is the table and the dishes, and it takes a lot more pushing to get him at it than she. Keith carries back the garbage cans. He gets a quarter for that." As she continues describing her other daughter's chores, variations on these rules, and special projects to earn vacation money, she constantly emphasizes their exceptional nature. Pamela avoids Maria's defensiveness about a norm of results in the family by separating it sharply from her normal egalitarianism. She deals with her ambivalence not by modifying a norm of results according to an equality norm and vice versa, but by applying the alien norm only to carefully circumscribed situations.

The rich, as well as the poor, are ambivalent about their own use of economic norms in the socializing domain. Judith Baum had her three children as close together as possible in order to avoid "the sibling rivalry which I thought must surely be a dreadful thing." She vehemently opposes competition among children; she treated hers identically, and she taught them completely to share toys and friends. And yet she unconsciously conveys a deep commitment to norms of competition and results. She planned for her children's success literally before they were born: she tried to induce labor so that her oldest child would be born before January 1 and could therefore start school a year earlier than

otherwise. She constantly compares their talents and praises them for skills and achievements. At first, her children responded to her unconscious message more than to her conscious one and became deeply competitive: "My younger two are not that friendly. He blames her for a lot of the things that developed with him in his teens. She picks on him. She tends to come on like a nag, with her older sister too." Later, they rejected their mother's drive for success, a rejection that Judith understands no better than their rejection of her equality norm. She explains the fact that "they were dropping in and out of college like yoyos" with only the weak excuse that "it was *the* thing in the sixties, anyway." All she could do at the time was "cling to the experts in child development" and take heart from the knowledge that "during the worst of it, she [her older daughter] still managed to buy the *New York Times* every Sunday." Judith cannot explain their rejection first of equality and then of achievement, because she is unaware that her own ambivalence calls forth confusion, rebellion, and further ambivalence from her children.

Tension also arises when respondents use economic norms of results and competition in the basically egalitarian political domain. Vincent Sartori cannot decide whether or not the government should guarantee incomes, because he cannot decide how much weight to give to the value of productivity. He believes that the rich are mostly undeserving and the poor are not usually to blame for their condition. He also strongly, if vaguely, envisions an egalitarian utopia. And yet he is angry at "welfare cheats" who refuse to work, and he advocates a strict means test and frequent checks by social workers on welfare recipients. Caught between his desire for equality and his knowledge of existing injustice, on the one hand, and his fear that a guaranteed income will benefit even shirkers, on the other, he remains ambivalent about policies to aid the poor.

Barbara Azlinsky's confusion over social welfare policies stems partly from the same set of contradictions. It would be "nice" to ensure everyone basic necessities, health care, and even a minimum income, but "sometimes I wonder if it's fair. When I think about how *we* skimmed and saved and did without, I would like to see some other people do it." She vacillates again and again, depending on whether she is thinking of people as needy citizens or as unproductive workers. She comes to a firm resting point, as do most respondents, only on the question of guaranteed jobs. As she puts it, "Basically nobody wants a handout. Busy hands are nice, busy fingers."

This type of ambivalence helps to explain why so many people are enthusiastic about a jobs program. It is the only major policy that allows a norm of results to combine with all other norms instead of competing

with them. Is the respondent torn between productivity and equality? Give everyone a job at a high level of income. Productivity and need? The neediest get the first or most lucrative jobs. Productivity and effort? Pay people according to the number of hours they work. Productivity and ascription? Grade jobs according to age, sex, marital or parental status. And so on. A guaranteed jobs program can simultaneously satisfy a norm of results and some, if not all, of the other valued norms.

Isaac Cohen permits market values to penetrate even further than Barbara does into the political domain, and he is even less able to devise a way of resolving the conflicts that result. He makes two contradictory arguments. First, "Our best minds are not governing us." If we made "a profession out of legislating, we would all be served. Take someone who doesn't have the educational background for understanding the social or business or international problems—this is courting disaster." Without "breed[ing] a ruling class," we should insist that candidates have at least a "minimum preparation." Here Isaac clearly calls for replacing political equality with political skill and hierarchy. But he will not carry his argument to its logical conclusion and claim that these professional legislators should always vote as their expertise dictates rather than as their constituents want. He begins to make such a claim: professional legislators could "get information in a given area and logically reason, 'What is good, not only for my constituency, but for everybody?'" Pork barrels and vote trading are "absolutely terrible. Make me sick to my stomach." But his basic belief in political equality does not permit him fully to endorse a Burkean trustee. He is incensed that the local congressman "couldn't care *less* what goes on in this constituency. He doesn't even live in the area anymore. His home here is an empty shell. He has no intention of coming back."

Isaac tries to resolve this contradiction between legislative efficiency and democracy by introducing a second argument using a norm of results. Here he distinguishes between rational, productive voters and ignorant, counterproductive ones. Whether a legislator should vote according to his district's wishes "depends on the constituency that he would represent." Unfortunately, "The average man on the street cannot reason as clearly as I. People don't read the newspapers—[they read] the local news or the sports news; they're just not interested in anything else." Such ignorant citizens should not be able to influence legislators; in fact, they should not even be allowed to vote. "They outvote me. *My* destiny rests on *their* vote? Something is wrong." He does not quite know where to go from there, however. He first advocates a poll tax, then a literacy test, then admits bafflement.

Isaac is caught by his own analogy. Workers must produce goods to deserve economic rewards; why should not citizens have to "produce" knowledge to deserve a vote and legislators have to "produce" skills to deserve an office? But he does not fully accept the analogy. He clearly expects me to oppose it, and at other points he himself argues for political equality. In short, he is ambivalent because he is unable to set clear limits on his own use of a norm of results, as well as on its consequences.

Finally, Jean Gilmore, who is a "Democrat, but a little on the socialist side," supports nationalization of utilities and health care, and praises the earned income tax credit as the first step toward a guaranteed income. She endorses an income floor because "I don't believe in people grubbing for food and a good place to live. I'm all for welfare if it's needed." Not only does she believe in it, she continues, but also "I do as much as I can to help. I feel I'm a very charitable person." She shifts here from justice to self-righteousness—from a claim that need deserves response to a claim that the poor are appropriate objects for charity. This shift occurs during a conversation in which Jean worries that some of the needy could work and therefore do not really deserve aid. At that point, she amends her endorsement of a guaranteed income; she would support it only "if you could separate the good from the bad. So they wouldn't have people claim it who could work." Those who can work deserve no help; at most, charity should prevent their starvation. She is "socialistic" only about the *deserving* needy. Thus combining a norm of need with considerations of productivity has the effect of constraining the former value until it loses its quality of justice. Jean is uneasy about this transformation, but she does not understand what has happened and therefore can neither combat nor accept it.

Thus ambivalence occurs when market norms are used in domains where they do not fully belong. Respondents do not really intend that such slippage occur, and they often become confused or defensive when alien norms distort their egalitarian personal and political views. Only when they discuss a program of guaranteed jobs are they unambiguously enthusiastic, since only then can a norm of results reinforce, not contradict, other norms.

#### Egalitarian Experiences versus Differentiating Beliefs

A fourth form of ambivalence addresses the relationship between beliefs derived from immediate, daily experiences and general, abstract beliefs. Social scientists have shown over and over that most Americans accept without much question certain liberal tenets: we are a free, in-

dividualistic nation with political and social equality; a market system is the best—perhaps the only—way to organize a modern economy; private property is sacrosanct; many of the rich deserve their wealth and the poor their poverty; big government is a dangerous threat to freedom; equality of opportunity is the best form of economic equality. Obviously, some people reject some of these tenets some of the time, but my analysis, as well as that of other researchers, demonstrates how strongly and how unconsciously most people accept most of them. People sometimes find, however, that events in their own lives do not fit comfortably into this world view. They know wealthy or poor people whose position is undeserved; they find that the liberty to vote for two equally undesirable candidates does not make them feel free; they are more constrained by employers' decisions than by federal laws or regulations; they find that equal opportunity means little to a teenage son who cannot find a job. In Antonio Gramsci's terms, the worker's "theoretical consciousness may be . . . opposed to his actions. We can almost say that he has two . . . consciousnesses . . . , one implicit in his actions which unites him with all his colleagues in the practical transformation of reality, and one superficially explicit or verbal which he has inherited from the past and which he accepts without criticism."<sup>6</sup> In my terms, people are ambivalent because they are torn between general differentiating beliefs that they have been taught and specific egalitarian beliefs that they derive from experience. As a result, they feel hesitant, confused, and anxious, and may appear to be inconsistent and nonideological.<sup>7</sup>

Many respondents demonstrate this type of ambivalence.<sup>8</sup> It explains the opposition to redistribution of Pamela McLean, Phillip Santaguida, and Ernest Berkowitz. Pamela, for example, does not rely on monetary incentives to make her work; she does not rely on others' poverty to feel gratified; and she would not sink into sloth and corruption if she acquired financial security. She does not know anyone, in fact, who displays these unpleasant traits. But she is convinced that "most people" are materialistic, competitive, and lethargic, so that redistribution is not feasible. Her general beliefs reinforce a differentiated status quo; her specific experiences refute it. She can neither escape her dominant world view nor wholly accept it; therefore she is left ambivalent about redistribution.

The rich, too, feel torn between general differentiating norms and particular egalitarian experiences. Ernest Berkowitz is not "a striver," and he would be happy to see a social democratic state. But he is convinced that most Americans would not permit it to survive, because everyone else appears to have an unlimited appetite for power and wealth.

Unlike those just described, Amy Campbell is extraordinarily aware of her own ambivalence. She is "a dumb romantic. Gee whiz, I never learn. I shouldn't, I know better in so many ways." As a teenager, she believed that World War II was the war to end all wars because "I saw young fellows who I went to high school [with] being killed, and I *had* to think that there was a *reason*. I had to justify losses of that kind in terms of some ideal." Even after many disillusionments, she still "go[es] back to being that kind of romantic. I do it for my own kind of coping measure. I have to feel that way." She knows that she deludes herself: "When I show myself the evidence [about "the American dream"], I know better. The only thing that makes you not too much of a moron is you're able to laugh at yourself occasionally and say, 'Now come on, you know better.'" Nevertheless, even if it does not exist, the American dream — "this goal, this thing that people set themselves on" — would be violated by income equality and government control of the economy. And despite her "annoyance" at her own naiveté and her knowledge of unfair inequalities, Amy clings to her belief in a world of fair differences: "In a gut feeling, I do have it, it's true. It's something that probably I got growing up, and you don't throw those things off easily. It keeps you from going crazy sometimes or from getting too angry about things." A clearer statement of this type of ambivalence would be hard to find.

#### Differentiating Experiences versus Egalitarian Beliefs

The interviews just discussed demonstrate the existence of one kind of "contradiction between one's intellectual affirmation and one's mode of conduct."<sup>9</sup> The opposite contradiction also exists; that is, some people have highly egalitarian general beliefs, but their daily experiences reinforce differentiating norms. Gramsci and his followers do not consider this form of ambivalence, but both survey and my interview evidence demonstrate its existence.<sup>10</sup>

All respondents who support an egalitarian utopia illustrate this form of ambivalence. They accept, even endorse, differentiation in their own workplace, but they think wistfully of economic equality in the distant future or past. Consider, in addition, Michael McFarland. On the one hand, he supports differentiation in his daily activities. His \$10,000 income is "a fair wage"; his foreman's "brain power" merits extra pay; and shiftless workers are overpaid. He worries about spoiled children, law and order, and "lazy" welfare recipients — all concerns of a differentiator. A "radical" is someone "who, every time you would come up with a suggestion, he would be automatically against you." He defines communism

just as negatively: "Russia. It just means you don't have all the freedoms. That you're run by the state."

On the other hand, as he continues his description of communism, Michael supports it more and more as a general ideal:

MM: The state would supply all the money for you. Everybody would be working for the state, there wouldn't really be no rich people in it.

JH: Would that be a good idea or not?

MM: It would be good. I don't know if you would make much money, but they [the state] take care of all your housing and your food and all the necessities. That would be good, if everybody is on kind of an equal level.

The more he thinks about it, the more enthusiastic he becomes. After all, "That's one of the problems [causing] people [to] get high blood pressure and things, it's worrying about where the next dollar's gonna come from. Worrying about paying bills, if I gotta go to the hospital." And yet when Michael returns to the more familiar ground of his job and taxes, he reverts to complaints about lazy workers and welfare rip-offs. He continues to vacillate between these two sets of beliefs and remains anxious, scared, and confused.

Or consider Wendy Tonnina, first on the subject of welfare. She "doesn't think there should have to be any poor people," but her specific recommendations for welfare reform are highly differentiating. She would support higher welfare payments "only if the poor wanted to be [helped]. I'm not going to sacrifice some of my pay that I went to work for, for someone who could care less." She resents welfare cheats and thinks recipients should "definitely be investigated better." Second, on work relations, Wendy excoriates big business for "just taking over the little people. It has them in the palm of their hands because the little people need the jobs. They're very selfish, and they're just out for all they can get. They can pay little people whatever they want because if they quit, they're goin' to get another little person to take their place. They just kinda run the world, you know." And yet she opposes affirmative action policies, not because they are unfair to whites, but because they give workers an excuse to "just sit back and feel oppressed. If someone's really lazy, it's easier to say, 'They won't hire me, I'm black' or 'Italian.' But if they really tried, they could get out of it." After all, no one "ever holds you down with their fist on your throat saying 'Stay there.' It's up to the individual to bring himself up." On both welfare reform and work relations, Wendy's general position is as egalitarian as her specific policy

preferences are differentiating. As a result, she continually changes her mind about which distributive changes she endorses.

What are the political implications of these two final, mirror-image forms of ambivalence? Their main effect is to leave people in a state of political paralysis because they cannot think their way through their mixed beliefs to a definite perspective from which to act. Gramsci continues the passage on "two consciousnesses" quoted above by pointing out that the "superficial consciousness inherited from the past" has profound consequences: "It binds [its holder] to a certain social group, influences his moral behavior and the direction of his will . . . It can reach the point where the contradiction of his conscience will not permit any action, any decision, any choice, and produces a state of moral and political passivity."<sup>11</sup> Both types of ambivalence can have this effect. In the former, as Gramsci points out, people are too blinded by the differentiating world view they have been taught to jettison it when their own experiences teach them otherwise. In the latter, their vague egalitarian vision makes them uncomfortable in accepting the differentiating routines and assumptions of daily life. In both cases, as in the previous three types of ambivalence, they find it easier to live with, and to try to ignore, even distressing normative tensions than to undertake the enormous effort needed to resolve them.

### Two Theses

From one perspective, my two main theses contradict each other. The first claims that the confusion of views presented in chapter two can be sorted into a discernible three-part pattern of equality-differentiation-equality. Respondents are not inconsistent and are not nonparticipants in the history of ideas; instead, they have coherent, intelligible, flexible, complex—if ultimately contradictory—beliefs grounded in solid philosophical traditions. The second thesis claims that respondents are profoundly ambivalent, caught up in a series of ambiguous, contradictory, blurred judgments. People are confused, and their confusion manifests itself in helplessness, anger, inconsistency, and incoherence.

Presented in such bald terms, the two theses seem to describe different interviews or different researchers' views of the same interviews. But the contradiction is more apparent than real; the real conclusion is that most people exhibit both the three-part pattern of beliefs and ambivalence about those beliefs. Some people, such as Pamela McLean and Anne Kaufman, hold beliefs that are predominantly clear and sharp—but even they express some ambivalence. Others, such as Vincent Sartori and Bar-

bara Azlinsky, hold beliefs that are predominantly ambivalent and blurred—but even they express the dominant pattern much of the time.

The strength of in-depth interviewing is that it shows how both main theses can, and do, coexist. It shows that Schumpeter is correct in pointing out "the weakness of the rational processes he [the typical citizen] applies to politics and the absence of effective logical control over the results he arrives at."<sup>12</sup> It also shows that V. O. Key is correct in his "perverse and unorthodox argument . . . that voters are not fools, . . . [that] the American electorate [is] . . . moved by concern about central and relevant questions of public policy."<sup>13</sup> Both views are correct, but only partly so, because they ignore the other view. Analyses of American political beliefs must systematically examine both the pattern of citizens' principles of justice and the breaks in that pattern. This analysis has attempted that dual examination. My only remaining task is to analyze more fully the political implications of the combined patterns of belief and ambivalence.