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From the Fundamental Attribution Error to the Truly Fundamental Attribution Error and Beyond: My Research Journey

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Abstract
This essay traces continuities and changes in focus of research and theory in my career. I describe early work on insensitivity to role-conferred advantages in self-presentation (and the personal experiences that prompted that work) and the subsequent identification and naming of the "fundamental attribution error." I next describe my work on the role that construal processes play in determining responses to various decision-making and attributional contexts. That work, in turn, culminated in identification and exploration of what I now deem the *truly* "fundamental attribution error": the illusion of superior personal objectivity and its various consequences for interpersonal and intergroup interactions. I conclude with the lessons I have drawn from my applied work on conflict resolution.

Keywords
biography, autobiography, history

In the fall of 1969, I was a new assistant professor in the Stanford psychology department with colleagues whose accomplishments already constituted important chapters in psychology's history, yet most of them were still in the prime of their careers: Al Hastorf, Merrill Carlsmith, and Phil Zimbardo in social psychology; Al Bandura and Walter Mischel in personality psychology; Eleanor Maccoby and Robert Sears in developmental psychology; Gordon Bower, Roger Shepard, Jack Hilgard, and Karl Pribram in cognitive and physiological psychology—even now, almost half a century later, that list has lost little of its luster. My misgivings were to grow a few weeks later when I returned to Columbia to defend my dissertation (a less gentle event in that era than is the case in most contemporary departments). My examiners were quite jovial as they displayed their wit and erudition both to me and to their coinquisitors in posing questions about my doctoral studies. The studies investigated the effects of cue salience (e.g., bright white light vs. dim red light) and cognitive salience (what participants were instructed to think about) on the consumption of food (cashew nuts) by overweight and nonoverweight undergraduates. I was well prepared and doing fine until one of my examiners, an eminent perception researcher, asked me about the wavelength "in angstroms" of the red light I had used.

Things went downhill from that point, as the questions grew more pointed. Flying back to Palo Alto, I ruminated about my lack of readiness for the role I was about to resume. However, my doubts were about to be assuaged. Soon after my own dissertation defense, I served on the orals examination of a Stanford PhD student who had just submitted a draft of his dissertation. Seated around the table, I found myself asking questions designed in part to test the candidate but also in part to show my senior colleagues that I knew a thing or two about our field. As I witnessed some discomfort on the part of the candidate, but otherwise enjoyed the camaraderie and the wit and wisdom of the other examiners, the lesson seemed clear. Roles can be a source of advantage or disadvantage in terms of self-presentation and even self-perception.

The narrower lesson is that one is at an advantage when asking questions to which one knows the answer

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rather than answering someone else's question. The broader one was that when making judgments about each other, people tend to be insufficiently sensitive to the impact of situational factors and too ready to make unwarranted attributions about traits, abilities, and other dispositions. I had previously done some work at Columbia on mislabeling and misattribution of emotions with fellow graduate student Judy Rodin and visiting professor Phil Zimbardo (Ross, Rodin, & Zimbardo, 1969). However, a few more years passed before I turned from research on potential causes of obesity to concerns about the types of attributional processes and biases that would occupy me for decades to come. Seven years after my dissertation defense, I finally tried to "bottle" the questioner-advantage phenomenon in a simple demonstration experiment.

The Quiz-Bowl Study

In this study (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977), Stanford undergraduates—mostly first-year students fresh from high school who, with good reason, had a high opinion of their academic abilities—participated in same-sex pairs in a simple quiz session. With a coin flip, we assigned one of them to the role of "questioner" and told the student to prepare 10 "tough but fair" general-knowledge questions of the sort used in the popular TV program, College Bowl, and then to pose those questions to the other participant, the "contestant." The only proviso was that the questioner had to be confident that he or she knew the answer. Contestants did their best to answer each question aloud. The questioner then said "correct" or provided the answer when, as was the case more often than not, the contestant was unable to do so. In a follow-up study, two female confederates reenacted the performance of previous female contestants for a pair of observers, with no facial expressions or additional verbal cues that might offer information beyond that provided by the relevant questions and answers.

Our findings confirmed the failure of contestants and observers alike to make adequate allowance for the relevant role-conferred advantages and disadvantages in knowledge displays. In the great majority of cases, both contestants and observers thought the questioners were much more knowledgeable than themselves. The contestants furthermore rated themselves as less knowledgeable than the average Stanford undergraduate (and the questioner somewhat above average), whereas observers (who, like the contestants, could typically answer fewer than half of the questions posed) rated both themselves and the contestant as average and the questioner as far above average.

My initial thought about the study concerned its relevance to other role-conferred advantages and disadvantages in self-presentation, ranging from employers and prospective employees to the counsel that young women of yesteryear received (i.e., do not chatter when on a date, and urge your male partners to talk about themselves). My reading on self-presentation and the demands and constraints of social roles, especially in the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1956, 1961, 1963), prompted further consideration of attributional issues. Ultimately, however, I came to recognize a still broader lesson, one involving a more general tendency of people to underestimate the impact of situational pressures and constraints on each other's actions and outcomes. That lesson, moreover, pertains to assessments not only about individuals but also groups who either benefit from, or are disadvantaged by, their shared circumstances.

Lay Dispositionism and Actor-Observers Differences in Attributions

The decade from the early 1960s to the early 1970s produced many of the classic experiments that were staples of introductory psychology classes and texts in the years that followed. The most famous were the obedience experiments conducted at Yale by Stanley Milgram (Milgram, 1963, 1974; Miller, 1988; also Ross, 1988). In typical laboratory studies, the willingness of participants to follow an experimenter's instructions is unremarkable. But the willingness of so many of Milgram's participants (68% in the best-known version of the study) to obey instructions to deliver increasingly powerful shocks to a hapless victim, whose only sin was failure in a learning task, was surprising and alarming to all who heard about the result.

Other situationist classics included the bystander-intervention study conducted at Princeton by John Darley and Dan Batson and the foot-in-the-door study conducted in a residential area near the Stanford campus by John Freedman and Scott Fraser. One might have predicted that students in a hurry would less frequently assist someone in distress than would students with time on their hands. The finding that the great majority of Princeton Seminary students would offer that assistance if unhurried, but that only a small minority would do so when running late for an appointment—even when that appointment was to tape record a sermon on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Darley & Batson, 1973)—was truly shocking. Equally surprising was the foot-in-the-door finding reported by Freedman and Fraser (1966). More than three quarters of the homemakers in a middle-class enclave near the Stanford

campus agreed to have a huge, crudely lettered sign promoting auto safety erected on their front lawns because they had previously complied with a request (in fact a request from someone else) to place a 3-inch sticker with a related message on their window.

In each case, the behavior induced by the situational contexts contrived by the experimenter would lead most laypeople (and many psychologists) to offer explanations involving personality traits or other dispositions. Laypeople expect sadistic or weak people to obey evil orders and strong or principled people to disobey. They expect altruistic people to render assistance and selfish people to walk on by. They also assume that the messages on billboards on their neighbors' lawns reflect those neighbors' beliefs and convictions. They are unlikely to consider the possibility that artful manipulations of seemingly small contextual features have produced the behavior in question, and even when they are aware of those manipulations, they underestimate their impact.

Rather coincidentally, I happened to coin the term "fundamental attribution error" (Ross, 1977, p. 187) to describe this penchant for dispositionist explanations, noting its relevance both to the quiz-bowl study and to so many of our field's classic studies. My use of this term came in a summary of my research for the committee evaluating me for tenure. My intent was simply to distinguish this error or bias in the *fundamental* attribution *task*—that of deciding how much a given action or outcome reflected something about the actor as opposed to the various situational factors influencing the actor—from the various shortcomings in inference and judgment I had explored in my own research and was about to describe. One of the outside evaluators of my work, Leonard Berkowitz, invited me to publish a slightly revised version of that research summary, with its now embarrassing focus on my own work rather than that of other contemporary investigators, in the *Advances in Social Psychology* series he edited.

I did not imagine that the dispositionist bias that I had identified was fundamental in the sense of its not being reducible to more basic processes or being inevitable. In fact, I noted various perceptual, cognitive, motivational, and linguistic sources of such dispositionism. I also noted that lay people overestimate, rather than underestimate, the impact of some situational factors. Nevertheless, the term took hold, and many colleagues have explored the limits and cross-cultural variability of failures to appreciate the relevance and power of situational influences, the real-world consequences of such failures, and interventions that prompt attributions that would better serve both actors and observers.

In recent years, as journalists have begun to write more about the insights our field has to offer about pitfalls in human reasoning and ways to avoid those pitfalls, I have noticed a shift in the use of the term *fundamental attribution error*. Often, writers and commenters misuse it to refer to the asymmetry in the attributions made by actors versus observers that was noted and documented earlier in the seminal contribution to the attribution literature by Jones and Nisbett (1971). Actors, they suggested, attend to the specific features of the stimuli or situations to which they are responding and/or have responded in the past. Observers, by contrast, are likely to be unaware of, to overlook, or to underestimate the relevance of those features, and instead focus their attention on the actor. Accordingly, they are likely to infer underlying traits, abilities, or other dispositions. Jones and Nisbett and later researchers also explored perceptual, cognitive, and motivational sources of that asymmetry.

The blurring of the distinction between my account of the fundamental attribution error and the Jones and Nisbett opus is ironic. My first musings about lay dispositionism came when Dick Nisbett sent me an early draft of their article. In my admiration for their contribution, I suggested to Nisbett that unwarranted inferences about traits and abilities were common not only for observers but also for actors—who (like me in my early Stanford travails, and in other cases in which people face difficult challenges) had inferred a lack of readiness to tackle the role of faculty member. What Jones and Nisbett (1971) had identified was an actor-observer difference in susceptibility to the more fundamental error I had identified and named.

Explorations in Lay Psychology and Two Books With Richard Nisbett

One situational influence on the course of my career, and indeed my life, that I have never underestimated is the one exercised by Dick Nisbett. Ever since we briefly labored together at Columbia under the mentorship of Stanley Schachter, he has been my closest friend, greatest supporter, and most important collaborator. Although we have never coauthored an empirical article, his encouragement and prodding to work harder and pursue more ambitious goals than I might dispositionally have been inclined to do have been cornerstones in my career. More specifically, the combination of his deep thinking and insight about diverse areas of psychology, and my particular penchant for considering real-world manifestations of phenomena and possible applications, were the key to two books.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Nisbett and I frequently talked about our separate investigations of various pitfalls in human reasoning and judgment. His work with Eugene Borgida (Borgida & Nisbett, 1977; Nisbett & Borgida, 1975; Nisbett, Borgida, Crandall, & Reed, 1976) on prediction biases and with Timothy Wilson on

awareness of the causes of one's own behavior (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson & Nisbett, 1978) in particular continue to be highly influential and heavily cited. In my case, the work that received the most attention was an article on the false-consensus effect (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977) and a series of articles with Mark Lepper and our students (Lepper, Ross, & Lau, 1986; Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Ross & Lepper, 1980; Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975) on the confirmation bias and belief perseverance. At two junctures a decade apart, Nisbett and I coauthored books that brought together those interests.

Although the belief-perseverance work falls outside the arc of the career narrative I am focusing on in this article, I want to digress to say something about the origins of my interest in that topic, which preceded my entry into academia and was in fact the phenomenon that whetted my appetite for social psychology. Growing up in a working class family in Toronto, I had experienced my father doggedly defending his communist beliefs, including a defense of Stalin and subsequent Soviet leaders, even in the face of the mounting evidence of the suffering they had imposed on so many innocent victims. I had heard similar defenses from my father's comrades, many of whom had visited the Soviet Union, seen evidence of its shortcomings firsthand, and heard first-hand accounts by refugees who had fled Soviet Bloc countries and witnessed the horrors experienced by their compatriots. In short, I had continual opportunities to ponder rationalization and dissonance reduction on the part of my father and others ("the U.S. does even worse things," "the U.S. media lie about the Soviet Union," and, especially, the proposition that "the end justifies the means") who had labored so long and so fruitlessly and had endured so much social disapproval for their beliefs. On learning as an undergraduate about Festinger's seminal work (Festinger, 1957; Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956), I was determined to explore belief perseverance in the laboratory.

The first book I coauthored with Nisbett was published in 1980, bearing the pretentious title *Human Inference* (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). It discussed not only the growing body of research on causal attributions but also many of the other tasks of lay or intuitive psychology, including generalization from samples, covariation detection, prediction, and the challenge of revising theories and beliefs in the face of new information. When research evidence existed, we reviewed it; when it did not, we tried to offer educated guesses and suggest avenues for investigation. Most notably, we introduced colleagues to the research and theorizing of Kahneman and Tversky, whose work on judgmental heuristics (and later biases in decision making) would come to be hugely influential and universally lauded.

The second book, published in 1991 and titled *The Person and the Situation*, offered our perspective on what we deemed to be the most important and robust lessons and the empirical and theoretical foundations of our field (for a later discussion of those lessons, see Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010, which also reflects the content of the graduate school course Lepper and I had taught together over the four preceding decades). One lesson involved the potent and often underappreciated impact of situation pressures and constraints that determined the ease or difficulty of translating attitudes, beliefs, and intentions into actions. These notably included perceived social norms but also other, seemingly unimportant situational factors that facilitate or block particular responses or "channel" behavior in a particular direction (Lewin, 1952; Ross & Nisbett, 1991, pp. 46–58). We also discussed at length the challenge presented by Walter Mischel to traditional conceptions of personality and assumptions about cross-situational consistency in behavior (Mischel, 1968, 1973, 1984; Mischel & Peake, 1982). We further suggested two other lessons, one emphasizing the importance of subjective interpretation or construal, the other highlighting the importance of tension systems (i.e., systems relevant both to group dynamics and to the dynamic relationship between psychologically related "cognitions," including the pressure to resolve inconsistencies between one's beliefs and one's actions).

We emphasized construal and the truism that to understand, predict, and influence behavior, one needs to attend to the actor's subjective interpretation of the event and the context in which it occurred; this was an important cautionary note to the lesson of situationism. Recognizing the moderating influence of construal, we suggested, could explain how small variations in the way a situation was presented or labeled could influence how that situation was interpreted and, as a result, could have big effects on behavior—a theme that would characterize so much work on labeling and priming in the decades that followed.

An experiment that my collaborators and I conducted in that genre (Liberman, Samuels, & Ross, 2004) demonstrated that the label attached to a decision-making context could have greater predictive utility than the supposed dispositions of the actor. The context we used in our study was a version of the classic Prisoner's Dilemma. Two participants choose whether to cooperate or to defect, each knowing (a) that their own payoff for defecting will be greater than their payoff for cooperating, regardless of the choice made by their counterpart, and (b) that joint defection will result in lower payoffs for each than would joint cooperation. The only thing we manipulated was the label we attached to the game—in half the cases, it was the "Community Game";

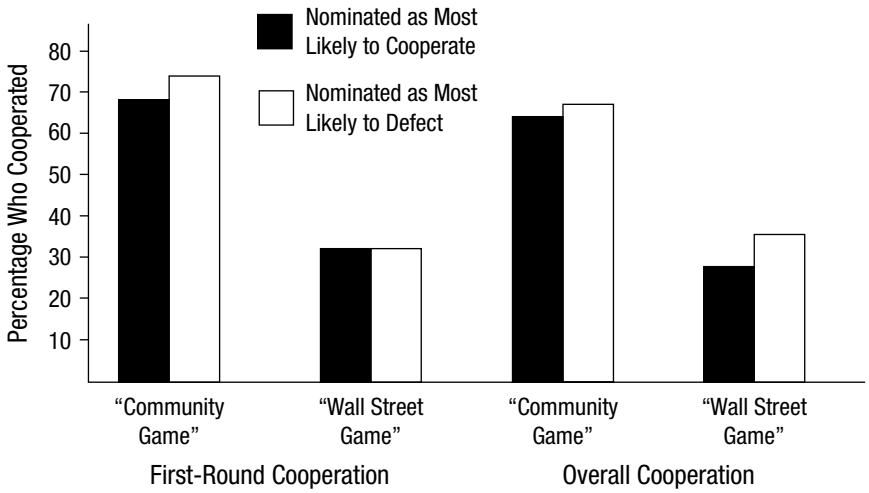

Fig. 1. Effect of name of the game on responses of likely defectors and likely cooperators. The percentages of players who cooperated in the first round and overall are presented for the "Community Game" and the "Wall Street Game," separately for those nominated as most likely to cooperate and those nominated as most likely to defect.

in the other half, it was the "Wall Street Game." The other noteworthy feature of our experiment was that dyads consisted of two students, half nominated by their resident assistants as most likely, among all the students in their dormitory, to cooperate, and half nominated as those most likely to defect.

The results of our study were clear (see Fig. 1). Although the nominators had seen both the payoff matrix and the relevant labels attached to the game, the students' nomination status proved to have no predictive power. By contrast, the name of the game determined whether roughly two thirds or only one third of the players chose to defect on the first trial of the seven-trial game, and the label had a similar effect on cooperation rates over all seven rounds of the game.

In our study, we manipulated the name of the game and thus gained some ability to predict how our participants would play. In the absence of such a labeling manipulation, the participants would have decided for themselves what game they were playing—what norms should apply, how their partners would be likely to play, and what attributions they would make about their partners' and their own choices. Jones and Nisbett (1971) had suggested one possibility: situational explanations about their own choices and dispositional attributions about the choices of partners who made the opposite choices. My later experiences in doing dialogue work in divided societies, in which adversaries offer opposing views about the nature and history of their ongoing conflict, and accordingly very different views about the requisites for a just solution of that conflict, suggested a further attributional consequence—one bound to exacerbate conflict and mistrust.

Naive Realism and the Objectivity Illusion: The Truly *Fundamental* Attribution Error

> In all matters of opinion our adversaries are insane. —Mark Twain (1899)

> Few things have done more harm than the belief [that one is] in *sole* possession of the truth, especially about how to live, what to be & do—& that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad; & need restraining or suppressing. It is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right; have a magical eye which sees the truth; & that others cannot be right if they disagree. —Isaiah Berlin (2002)

In the 1990s, my interests turned from attribution theory and biases in lay psychology to psychological barriers to fruitful dialogue and negotiated agreements (Mnookin & Ross, 1995; Ross & Stillinger, 1991; Ross & Ward, 1995). Both my empirical work and my hands-on experiences in working with community leaders and ordinary citizens in Israel-Palestine, the Caucasus, and Northern Ireland, as a member of the Stanford Center on International Conflict and Negotiation (SCICN), led me to focus increasingly on the corrosive effect of intergroup enmity and distrust. It also led me to reflect on my earlier work on attribution and construal and its relevance to creation of such enmity and mistrust. The result has been a series of articles on "naive realism," and what I now consider the *truly fundamental* attribution error—the illusion of personal objectivity.

The starting point for my consideration was less a hypothesis or a research finding than it was my experience that a particular conviction typically accompanies conflict, misunderstanding, and mistrust and is the source of countless everyday events involving disagreement and attempts at accommodation. That conviction and its corollaries, expressed in first-person terms, represent an epistemic stance that people adopt, usually without much reflection, about the relationship between their perceptions and reality.

The convictions of the naive realist and the illusion of personal objectivity:

1. My own perceptions are realistic and "objective"—and therefore (reasonable) others will (and should) share them. This illusion of objectivity applies not only to my perceptions of objects and events, but also to beliefs, preferences, priorities, and feelings prompted by those perceptions.
2. I will be able to persuade those who disagree with me, if they are reasonable and open-minded, once I explain what the real facts are and what they really mean.
3. Those who disagree with me, and especially those who challenge the most important beliefs of my group, are unreasonable and/or irrational. They have succumbed to particular sources of bias and error in reasoning.

Manifestations of the objectivity illusion

My first attempts to describe naive realism and the illusion of personal objectivity that it leads to appeared in a couple of coauthored articles in the mid-1990s (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995; Ross & Ward, 1995). Later articles with Emily Pronin and our students fleshed out this conceptual analysis in more detail (Pronin, Kruger, Savitsky, & Ross, 2001; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). Pronin further coined the provocative term "bias blind spot" to capture the phenomenon we would focus on. However, it was clear, in retrospect, that my research collaborators and I had been evoking the key ideas embodied in our account of the objectivity illusion and its roots in naive realism in several earlier articles.

The false-consensus effect. The most obvious case was the account we offered of the false-consensus phenomenon (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). Prompted by the provocative Jones and Nisbett (1971) article on the divergent attributions of actors and observers, I had suggested to Nisbett that the phenomenon they were describing could be due in part to the fact that people who make different decisions or express different preferences may do so because they construe those situations differently. If they are not aware of those differences in construal, or fail to take adequate account of them, they will see their own choices as the more reasonable ones and the ones most reasonable people would make under the same circumstance. Greene, House, and I initially set out to test whether the difference in attributions between actors and observers remained even after controlling for differences in perceived likelihood of the relevant responses. The answer was *yes*, although the magnitude of that difference was greatly reduced. Fortunately, we soon realized that bias in estimates of the degree to which others share our perceptions of responses was of considerable interest in its own right, beyond its relevance to actor/observer attributions, and we shifted the emphasis in our false-consensus report (now heavily cited) accordingly.

The psychologist who cleverly provided direct evidence for this "construal" interpretation of the false consensus effect was Tom Gilovich, my coauthor more than two decades later of *The Wisest One in the Room* (Gilovich & Ross, 2015). The first chapter of that book discussed the general tendency for people to believe that their perceptions and evaluations are uniquely objective and free of the biases that lead others to see things differently. What Gilovich (1990) demonstrated in his earlier article was the role played by situational ambiguity in the false-consensus phenomenon. When relatively little ambiguity and hence little latitude for differences in construal existed (e.g., "do you think it will rain on Friday?"), the false-consensus effect was very little in evidence if at all. When considerable ambiguity existed (e.g., in such items as, "Do you think the weather will be nice next summer?" or "Do you prefer the music of the 1970s or the music of the 1980s?"), the relevant difference in consensus estimates became large. (For a review of the false-consensus literature in the decade following Ross, Greene, & House, 1977, see Marks and Miller, 1987.)

Overconfidence in prediction of future actions and outcomes. Kahneman and Tversky's classic articles on the use of heuristics, base-rate neglect, and the resulting biases in prediction and estimation (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Kahneman & Tversky, 1972, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, 1974) led many researchers to explore the overconfidence effect. My students and I swelled those ranks. Our first article (Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic, & Ross, 1990) explored predictions regarding others; the second (Vallone, Griffin, Lin, & Ross, 1990) explored predictions about oneself. Both showed that when people make highly confident predictions, their accuracy levels are lower than their subjective certainty. Both articles

noted an important limitation of the work by other investigators: a failure to designate the specific domains in which we should expect to find such overconfidence. However, we failed to note the fact that people obviously make an enormous number of predictions with total or near-total confidence and similar levels of accuracy. The sun indeed will come up tomorrow, virtually all of my students do show up for their final exams, and my very high level of confidence that the letter carrier will deliver the mail today is appropriate. However, it is worth noting that in many domains of human activity, overconfident prediction occurs with regularity and with serious, even dire, consequences.

Our third article (Dunning, Griffin, & Ross, 1990) suggested a link between overconfident prediction and insensitivity to issues of construal. Our demonstration of this failure was somewhat indirect but simple. We asked students to predict how much time or money they would spend in certain situations (e.g., the percentage of the time they would speak in a forthcoming meeting, or the cost of their next trip to a San Francisco restaurant). We further asked them to place confidence intervals around their predictions. In some cases, they were asked to do so after indicating what assumptions they had made about the situation in question (e.g., how talkative the other students in the meeting would be, and what type of restaurant they imagined) and being told to assume that those assumptions were exactly correct. In other cases, there was no mention of such assumptions. The mean confidence levels proved to be the same in both conditions. The students in the latter condition apparently made no allowance for the possibility that the situations to which they would be responding might differ from what they assumed they would be. Only when instructed both to generate alternative construals of the situations in question and to take into account the fact that they did not know which construal was correct did participants appropriately broaden their confidence limits.

The hostile-media phenomenon. In an article that seems particularly timely today, graduate student Robert Vallone (now known mainly for his "hot-hand" article with Tom Gilovich and Amos Tversky) and Mark Lepper, my partner in work on belief perseverance and other topics, were my coinvestigators in a study of perceptions of media bias (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). The most obvious relevance of the article is the continual complaint of both liberals and conservatives about unfair media reporting. However, the actual inspiration for the article was the Lord et al. (1979) study of belief perseverance and an obvious question that it posed: If opposing groups of partisans could both find support for their beliefs in the same set of mixed data (on the deterrent efficacy of capital punishment), then what might we expect to happen when both groups hear the evidence aptly characterized by a third party as mixed and inconclusive? Expressed somewhat differently, if one group sees matters as largely black and the other as largely white, how will the two groups respond to a third party who claims that matters are some shade of gray, or perhaps a mix or black and white?

Our conjecture was that both groups would claim unfair treatment—that is, that the third party had gone out of its way to find flaws in their own groups' words and deeds but presented those of the other groups without fully acknowledging their much more serious faults. This conjecture, and the metaphor of black or white versus various shades of gray, anticipated my later experiences participating in second-track endeavors and efforts to promote intergroup dialogue in Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, and other societies struggling with continuing conflict. The opposing partisans each cite different roots of the conflict, offer differing versions of historical events, and cite intransigence on the part of the other as the reason for lack of progress in resolving the issues that divide them. When media, or would-be mediators, attempt to offer even-handed assessments or to propose exchanges of concessions, neither side applauds the effort. (For that reason, skilled and seasoned mediators generally make it a point *not* to attempt such assessments. Instead, they focus on helping each side to understand the minimum requirements that other side needs to have met in any agreement that could gain their acceptance and continuing compliance with its terms.)

In Vallone et al. (1985), we showed students who supported or opposed Israel in the intractable Israeli–Palestinian conflict five nights of actual major-network coverage of a tragic event, the killing in the fall of 1982 of hundreds of Palestinian and Lebanese Shiite refugees in two refugee camps near Beirut Lebanon. There was no disagreement about the fact that the perpetrators were right-wing Christian militiamen. The controversial issue was the degree of responsibility that Israeli officials had for the crime. The results of the study could not have been clearer. Indeed, we found little if any overlap in ratings of the coverage. Pro-Israeli viewers rated the content of the coverage and the motives of those presenting as relatively anti-Israeli, whereas the anti-Israeli viewers thought that it was relatively pro-Israeli. Moreover, the more the viewers knew about the broader conflict, the more biased they rated the coverage. In reporting these findings, we noted that they were not the result of our having cleverly contrived stimulus materials to support our predictions, Indeed, if the producers of the coverage had any motive, it presumably was to be lauded for their fairness and objectivity.

When I looked back on the study years later, the link between those results and the objectivity illusion were

obvious. If one thinks one's own views are objective, then reports by third parties, as well as solutions to conflicts proposed by third parties, will be seen as biased in favor of those with the opposite views and interests. One will see media presentations or mediator decisions as "fair and balanced" only when they uncritically support only the position that one advocates. Such is the response of contemporary liberals and conservatives who restrict their viewing to the television network that echoes the views they personally find congenial and fume about the news coverage on "that other network." The point is not that all coverage is equally guilty of bias and misinformation. (Most of my friends and colleagues would insist that one particular network has lost all claim to objectivity.) Rather, it is that complaints about fairness from both the political left and the political right are to be expected and that any coverage that fully satisfies either side is unlikely to be truly unbiased.

Attributions of bias. The most obvious real-world implication of the objectivity illusion pertains to political disagreement and the attributions that people make about the views of people who agree with them and people who disagree with them. In my reading, I had come across the following observation offered by Gustav Ichheiser (1949) long before the dawning of attribution theory research:

> We tend to resolve our perplexity arising out of the experience that other people see the world differently than we see it ourselves by declaring that those others, in consequence of some basic intellectual and moral defect[,] are unable to see things "as they really are" and to react to them in a "normal way". We thus imply of course that things are in fact as we see them, and that *our ways* are the *normal ways* [emphasis added]. (p. 39)

However, it was the wise words of a much earlier and better known sage that essentially dictated the research design that my colleagues and I used in designing a demonstration of the objectivity illusion (see Gilovich & Ross, 2015): "Most men, indeed as well as most sections in religion, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that [to the extent that] others differ from them, it is so far error"—Benjamin Franklin (2000).

In our study (Pronin, Gilovich, & Ross, 2004), students first completed a questionnaire asking their views on various political issues (abortion, capital punishment, etc.), political figures, and media outlets. We then collected and randomly redistributed those questionnaires.

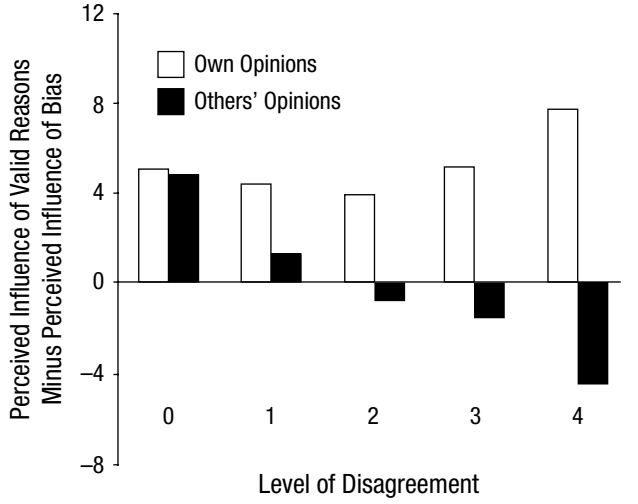

Fig. 2. Perceived level of disagreement in views and attributions about normative versus nonnormative influences on those views. Filled bars depict assessments of the normative influences minus biases on partners' views. Open bars depict corresponding assessments of these two influences on one's own views. Reprinted from Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross (2004).

Each student next indicated, on the basis of the peer's responses to the questionnaire, how similar the peer's views were to his or her own views. They also rated the extent to which various rational considerations (e.g., attention to facts and concern with long-terms consequences) and the extent to which various sources of bias (e.g., wishful thinking, unreliable information sources, and peer-group pressures) had influenced their own views compared with those of the other student. The pattern of attributions the students reported could not have been clearer (see Fig. 2).

When students perceived the political views of their peers to be virtually identical to their own views, they attributed both their own views and those of their partners to the normative considerations (i.e., valid reasons) we listed much more than to the sources of bias and error we listed. In cases of disagreement, the greater the amount of perceived disagreement, the less their peers' views were attributed to normative consideration and, as Franklin had claimed, the more those views were attributed to sources of bias and error. Ratings of influence on one's own views were largely uncorrelated with perceived extent of disagreement, although in cases of the most extreme disagreements in ratings, assessments regarding one's own views became a bit more positive.

My collaborators and I have explored related asymmetries in assessments of influences on one's own versus others' views. In one study (Ehrlinger, Gilovich, & Ross, 2005), Cornell students were told that the university was undertaking a review of its affirmative-action policies

and that student input was being sought. The students then rated the extent to which they believed ethnicity might be a source of bias in such input. As predicted, both minority and White students thought that only the other groups' ethnic status would compromise the ability to see the issue clearly. In fact, the minority students claimed that their particular ethnic or racial status would be a source of enlightenment. The same asymmetry was apparent when varsity and intramural athletes at Cornell were asked about ongoing controversy about access to athletic facilities. Both groups claimed that self-serving bias had dictated the other group's views on the issue more than their own group's views.

In another set of studies (Ross, Kahn, & Liberman, 2018), we examined the attributions that Israeli students made about compatriots whose views on the conflict with Palestinians lay to the right or left of their own and also about those whose feelings toward Palestinians were harsher or less harsh than their own. As predicted, increasing self-other differences in both cases were associated with increasingly negative attributions about the bases for their compatriots' views and about their political sophistication and, in the case of rightist views about leftists, even their patriotism. In our most recent research project (Schwalbe, Cohen, & Ross, 2018), we have examined attributions that Trump and Clinton supporters made about each other during the 2016 Presidential elections. Liberal academicians will not be surprised to learn that Clinton supporters attributed the views of Trump supporters mainly to misinformation, malevolent peer-group influences, and other sources of bias and attributed the views of their fellow Clinton supporters mainly to rational considerations. However, those same academicians may find it sobering to discover that Trump voters thought it was the Clinton voters who had succumbed to such biases and their fellow Trump supporters whose votes reflected sound reasoning.

When I describe such finding to friends and colleagues, they inevitably, and appropriately, raise the issue of moral relativism. They ask whether I believe that the views of fascists, racists, misogynists (or climate-change deniers or, for that matter, believers that intergalactic visitors walk among us) are no less reasonable and objective than the views of those of their critics. The answer, of course, is no. But I do believe that some intellectual humility is a good thing and that consideration of biasing influences on one's own political views (and willingness to critically examine arguments and evidence one finds congenial) is essential if one is to participate responsibly in political debate.

The underweighting and underutilization of peer input. People who believe their own impressions are more "realistic" than those of peers who have different impressions are bound to give the input of those peers too little weight when given an opportunity to update and revise their own impressions. My colleagues and I tested this prediction and explored its consequences in a series of studies in which we asked participants to estimate a variety of unknown values. In the studies we conducted in Israel (Liberman, Minson, Bryan, & Ross, 2011), students made estimates of political opinions (e.g., the percentage of classmates willing to see Israel give up the Golan Heights) or demographic facts (e.g., the Druze population of Israel). The studies we conducted in the United States included students estimating demographic and economic facts, but they also included ballroom dancers estimating the scores they would receive from judges (Minson, Liberman, & Ross, 2011) and lawyers and law students estimating the awards to plaintiffs in tort cases (Jacobson, Dobbs-Marsh, Liberman, & Minson, 2011).

In each study, participants were assigned a partner, but they first made their own individual estimates. Then, after each partner learned of the other's estimates, they made a second set of estimates, giving the input of their partners as much or as little weight as they wished. In a third round, the two partners were required to offer a joint estimate on which both agreed. In each round of estimates, we offered clear financial incentives for accuracy. As predicted, participants consistently gave their own initial estimates much more weight than those of their partners. In fact, more than a third of the time they gave their partner's estimates no weight at all. As a result, participants on average consistently did less well than they could have done if they had simply averaged their own estimate and that of their partner (something they did only about 10% of the time). Furthermore, when the partners were required to agree on a single estimate in the third round of the procedure, their average error consistently decreased. Our studies focused on numerical estimates so that we could assess accuracy in simple quantitative terms. However, the general implication applies to qualitative judgment and advice as well. Two heads, at least on average, are better than one.

Naive realism and religious projection. A final illustration of naive realism I pursued involved the domain of religious beliefs, the domain that Franklin took special note of when describing the tendency for people to believe that they had a special insight about truth. The study that my students and I conducted (Ross, Lelkes, & Russell, 2012) dealt with the tendency for both liberal and conservative Christians to project their own beliefs and priorities onto the central figure of their faith, Jesus Christ. Our research participants were asked to specify, in

a Mechanical Turk survey, both their own views and priorities and their beliefs about Christ's views and priorities with regard to a range of contemporary issues that divide liberals and conservatives.

Our most dramatic findings involved the projection of their own views onto the views they attributed to Jesus. As predicted, conservatives and liberals differed dramatically in the way they characterized Jesus's views "in general" on a 100-point scale (1 = *extreme liberal*, 100 = *extreme conservative*); the difference in characterizations of Jesus's views was almost as great (mean difference = 45.8 points) as the difference in self-characterizations on the same scale (mean difference = 56.3 points). The correlation reflecting such projection of their own views on Jesus was also extremely high (r = .70). The means with respect to the four specific issues that divide contemporary liberals and conservatives offer an even clearer picture of such projection (see Fig. 3).

Christian conservatives acknowledged that their views deviated somewhat from those they attributed to Jesus and the Gospels with respect to fellowship issues—reducing economic inequality through taxation and more generous treatment of illegal immigrants. Liberal Christians reported similar deviation with respect to the morality issues of abortion and gay marriage (issues that would only come to be matters of religious discourse almost two millennia later). However, those discrepancies were much less striking than the tendency of both groups to think that although their views about the central concerns of Christianity closely matched the views of Jesus Christ, the views of the other group diverged from those of Christ and were therefore in error.

As an atheist and a Jew, it is with some trepidation that I comment on a less obvious aspect of the disagreement between the two Christian factions illustrated in Figure 3. I refer to the fact that liberals claimed that Jesus would be even *more liberal* than they were when it came to the two fellowship issues, and conservatives claimed Jesus would even *more conservative* than they were when it came to the two morality issues. The former is perhaps to be expected. Charity toward the less fortunate is a central tenet of the teaching of Jesus—one that most Christians would admit that they honor less than called for in those teachings. The latter is more problematic. Although the biblical injunctions on these morality issues are prominent in the Old Testament portion of the Christian bible, they are not obviously tied to the specific teachings of Jesus chronicled in the New Testament. In fact we find there the famous injunctions "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone" (John 8:7) and "Judge not lest ye be judged" (Matthew 7:1).

Further reflections on reality versus illusion and some everyday examples

> Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

We included the above quotation, commonly attributed to Albert Einstein, in Ross and Ward (1995). It is not clear what experience of reality Einstein was referring to (it probably had something to do with perceptions of time and space). However, for me it brought back memories of my undergraduate philosophy classes at the University of Toronto and the writings of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and the other British empiricists. The discussion of primary versus secondary properties—the recognition that subjective experiences of color, sound, heat, and texture reflected the nature of the human senses and were not a "given" by the nature of the objects being perceived—was heady stuff for an aspiring psychology major. The suggestion that the experience of primary qualities—shape, solidity, and weight—might also depend on the nature of the human perceiver was even more provocative, although few of us knew exactly what that meant or why it mattered for the way people dealt with objects and with each other.

These sophomoric musings (I was in fact a sophomore at the time) came back to mind two decades after the Ross and Ward (1995) article, when I came across a striking account of the physics involved when one sits in a chair offered in *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson (2003). The experience of feeling something solid beneath you, Bryson explained, is an illusion. In reality, you are levitating a hundred millionth of a centimeter above the chair, and the negatively charged fields of your electrons and those of the chair are repelling each other and preventing actual contact. In fact, he added, because your atoms are made up almost entirely by empty space, but for those fields, your body would pass through the chair (and presumably the floor as well).

It does us no harm that the illusion that the redness of apples, the scent of magnolias, the sound of children laughing, and even the solidity of chairs arises directly from the objects and events we are perceiving because the illusion is shared by virtually all of us (except for those with particular sensory impairments). In fact, it is what makes it possible for us to communicate efficiently about such experiences. It allows us to agree that certain breeds of dogs are "color-blind," that our town really needs to do something about noisy low-flying planes passing over residential neighborhoods, to say nothing of the stench of the toxic dump site on the other side of the tracks. It also prevents us from recognizing that canines would be amazed, if they

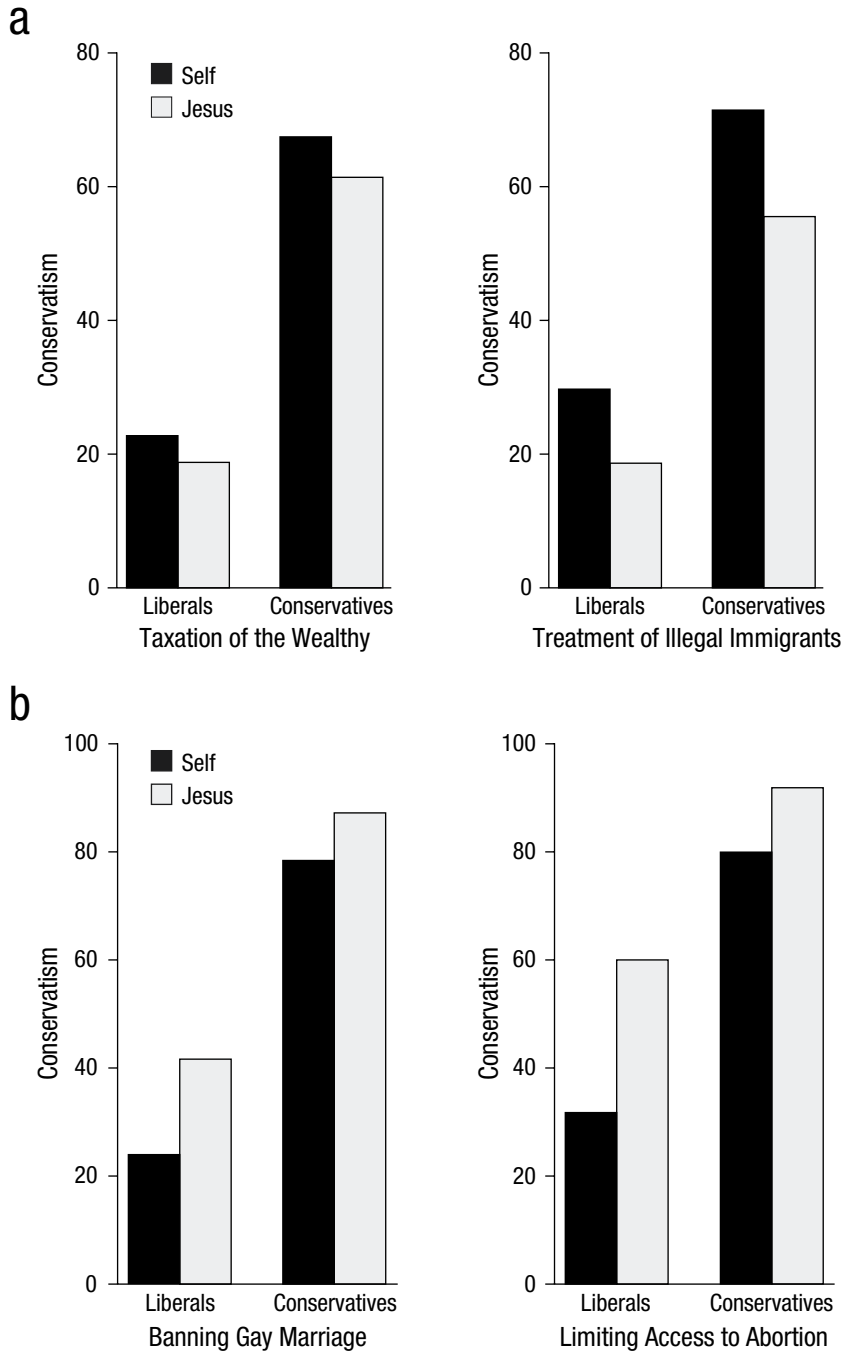

Fig. 3. Comparison of liberals' and conservatives' characterizations of their own views versus Jesus' views with regard to (a) fellowship issues and (b) morality issues. Reprinted from Ross, L., Lelkes, Y., & Russell, A. (2012). How Christians reconcile their personal political views and the teachings of their faith: Projection as a means of dissonance reduction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA, 109*, 3616–3622.

pondered such things, by our "odor-blindness" and that bats would be bemused by our inability to perform simple tasks of echolocation. Nor do we consider ourselves "handicapped" because of such limitations.

The objectivity illusion commands our attention and plays an important role in our lives, mainly when we deal with those who perceive the world differently. The small hunter-gatherer bands that gained a foothold on our planet had relatively few such experiences. For the most part, all had seen the same flora and fauna, faced the same challenges in finding food and making tools, heard the same stories of bygone days, and knew who

in their group had earned the epithet "kind," " short-tempered," "odorous," or "wise." More importantly, they agreed on who merited the privileges and recognition of in-group status and who were outsiders to be feared, dominated, or, if necessary, exterminated. The consensus assumed by those ancestors was less likely to be "false" than in today's ethnically heterogeneous societies made up of people who often are strangers to each other and products of different life experiences, teachings, ideologies, and economic means.

I turn to the implications of the objectivity illusion for intergroup misunderstanding and conflict and my own work in this area, a bit later in my career narrative. First, however, I want to make note of some everyday experiences that, on a bit of reflection, are instances of that illusion of personal objectivity. Earlier in my career, when clever small experiments to demonstrate specific phenomena involving human frailties were more in vogue (and I was more inclined to leave my armchair), I probably would have tried to capture these phenomena in the laboratory. Instead, I shall list some of these experiences (see Gilovich & Ross, 2015) and trust that the reader will offer a smile of recognition.

> Have you ever noticed when you're driving that anyone who's driving slower than you is an idiot, and anyone driving faster than you is a *maniac*?—George Carlin (1984)

The above quotation, which Ward and I used to introduce our 1996 chapter, should produce just such a smile as you recognize that you have applied exactly those epithets to the *idiot* "blocking" the fast lane on the freeway by driving right at the speed limit and the *maniac* "recklessly zooming" past you and everyone else driving at an appropriate speed. Epithets aside, most motorists will necessarily think they are driving at the speed that road and weather conditions and good sense dictate (otherwise, they would be driving either faster or slower); it follows that others driving faster or slower are driving *too* fast or *too* slow.

The terms too fast and too slow apply to many other cases in which people have different notions about what constitutes appropriate speed. My daughter is moving too fast in her new relationship; my parents are too slow in changing their diet given what we now know about the dangers of excessive salt, sugar, fat, or carbohydrates; my institution is moving too fast or too slow in attempting to achieve greater diversity in its leadership. In each case, the statement presumes that one's views about the "right" speed reflect a realistic, appropriate, and indeed objective, weighting of considerations.

Once a recognition of the objectivity illusion takes hold, countless other homey vignettes come to mind. Husbands and wives disagree about thermostat and TV volume settings, about what is comfortable and what is too hot or too cold or too loud or too soft. Each grumbles that something is distorting the perceptions of the other. Neighbors disagree about how much and in what ways a proposed senior center or a low-cost housing project would improve or worsen the livability of their community. A mother is chagrined that so few of her daughters' generation can manage the "simple" task of sewing a button. A daughter feels frustrated by her mother's difficulty in following the "simple" instructions about how to change settings on her iPhone. Similar intergenerational disagreements take place about what is great music and what is sentimental drivel or mere cacophony, or what dress is inappropriate for the workplace or the social occasion one is to attend. In each instance, one or both of the individuals may exercise a large measure of tolerance, but each believes that he or she is the one being tolerant and the other is the one being tolerated.

Barriers to Conflict Resolution and Successful Negotiation: The Relevance of Naive Realism

The brilliant American writer Flannery O' Connor, who died at a tragically young age in 1964, had a gift for provocative titles. The one that sticks in my mind is *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, perhaps because I have often found convergence of ideas in the course of my career. In 1988, with the financial support of the Hewlett Foundation, an interdisciplinary group consisting of the economist Kenneth Arrow, the professor of management science Robert Wilson, the legal scholar Robert Mnookin, and two psychologists (Amos Tversky and I) founded the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation (SCCN). My own initial contribution in terms of scholarship was to address the following question: When trades of concessions and changes in policy would advance the interests and status of two parties compared with the current status quo, and these benefits are obvious to third parties (and often to the relevant parties themselves). Why is it so difficult for parties to make mutually beneficial agreements? My roots in the traditions of Kurt Lewin showed in the title of the articles I wrote, first with Connie Stillinger and later with Robert Mnookin and with Andrew Ward (Mnookin & Ross, 1995; Ross & Stillinger, 1991; Ross & Ward, 1995). Those titles all referred to "barriers" to conflict resolution, and they all focused on the classic Lewinian question: What stands in the way of desirable change? The same question was implicit in the title of our Center's edited volume, *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (Arrow, Mnookin, Ross, Tversky, & Wilson, 1995).

My personal focus was on *psychological* barriers—impediments that did not arise from strategic miscalculation, political constraints, negotiators with a vested interest in avoiding settlements, lack of channels for communication, or other structural factors. The barriers I noted reflected shortcomings and biases in judgment and decision making of the sort that Nisbett and I had discussed in our 1991 volume. These barriers included rationalization and cognitive dissonance, loss aversion, and insistence on justice rather than mere advancement of interests (an insistence that is inevitably unachievable because the parties have such different views of what such justice would entail given their different views of history and entitlements). The barrier my students and I pursued in empirical work involved something less familiar—a phenomenon that we termed reactive devaluation (Ross, 1995; Ross & Stillinger, 1991). It referred to the tendency for parties involved in negotiation to devalue a proposal calling for mutual concessions once it ceases to be a mere possibility and is actually put on the table. Such devaluation, we demonstrated, occurs especially, but not exclusively, when the proposal is put forward by an adversary in an ongoing conflict.

Reactive devaluation as a psychological barrier

In demonstrating this devaluation phenomenon, my students and I made use of actual debates then taking place both in the Middle East and South Africa regarding negotiations to end longstanding conflicts, debates that were also taking place on the Stanford campus. We conducted the first study in the spring of 1985 (not submitted for separate publication at the time, but described in detail in Ross, 1995; see also Ross & Ward, 1995) as the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa was reaching its climax. The University, in the face of widespread demands from students and faculty to divest itself of its shares in companies doing business in that country, ultimately adopted a compromise plan for partial divestment, an outcome that fell short of those demands. Before that adoption, we measured students' sentiments about a partial divestment plan similar to the one the University ultimately adopted and one not calling for any immediate divestment but calling for complete divestment if the main apartheid provisions were not dismantled within a specified period of time. Some students were told that the University was about to adopt the partial divestment plan, and others were told that it was about to adopt the alternative (delay/total divestment plan). As predicted, the students rated whichever plan they believed the University was on the verge of implementing less favorably than the alternative plan.

We also measured student sentiments about the specific divestment plan the University decided on and an alternative plan not calling for any divestment but calling for increased investment in companies that had withdrawn from the apartheid nation. We measured once just before the University's announcement and then again about a week later. The students' evaluations again demonstrated the reactive devaluation phenomenon. Before the University's announcement, they showed a clear preference for the plan it was about to adopt over the rather odd alternative calling only for preferential investment. But 7 days later, their ratings for the University plan had decreased significantly, and their ratings for the odd alternative actually increased a bit. In fact, the students ended up slightly (but not significantly) preferring that alternative.

The second reactive devaluation study pertained to an ongoing negotiation between official Israeli and Palestinian representatives. It examined the responses of Israeli University students who were asked to assess a pair of proposals offered 4 days apart in May 1993 by the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in the 10th stage of an ongoing multistage negotiation. We presented a summary of those proposals, which dealt mainly with procedural details and agendas, but we manipulated their putative authorship. In one respect our results (Maoz, Ward, Katz, & Ross, 2002) were unremarkable; Jewish students who read both proposals rated them more favorably when they were attributed to their own side in the negotiation. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that the relevant assessments were influenced more by the authorship of the proposals than by their content. Jewish students rated the Israel team's actual proposal less positively when they believed that the Palestinian team had offered it than they rated the actual Palestinian proposal when they believed that fellow Israelis had offered it.

One other aspect of these assessments is worth noting in retrospect. As expected, Arab students similarly saw the actual Palestinian proposal as more favorable to Israel when they were told it had been authored by the Israelis than when they were told it had been authored by the Palestinian team. But regardless of its putative source, Arab students rated their own side's proposal as more much more favorable to Israel than the Israeli students rated it. Given that difference in assessments, and given the reactive devaluation bound to occur when the two sides offered proposals demanding more difficult concessions, it is not surprising that the parties ultimately failed to reach a comprehensive "two-state" agreement.

Reactive devaluation, like dissonance reduction, loss aversion, insistence on justice in the face of divergent views of what justice demands, and other psychological barriers, is not a direct product of the objectivity illusion. However, that illusion contributes heavily to the process whereby disagreement gives rise to enmity and distrust. In particular, each of the parties attributes the other's intransigence to a motivated distortion of history, unrealistic assessment of the legitimacy of competing claims, and stubborn refusal to look objectively at the situation.

Relational barriers, naive realism, and the pursuit of a shared future

In more recent years, with the loss of previous colleagues and the addition of new ones (Byron Bland, Allen Weiner, and David Holloway), our Center began to focus more specifically on relational barriers involving enmity and distrust about longer term objectives. Much of our applied work involved participation in second-track efforts and cooperation with groups promoting constructive dialogue not only in Israel-Palestine, but also in Northern Ireland and other troubled areas of the world. We added the word "International" to the name of our Center, and accordingly SCCN became SCICN. My colleagues and I have written about those efforts and about the insights we feel we have gained over the years from direct contact both with partisans in those conflicts and with would-be peacemakers (Bland, Powell, & Ross, 2005; Bland & Ross, 2015, 2018; Bland, Salem, & Ross, 2005). Two themes we have sounded relate directly to the research journey I have recounted thus far.

The first theme involves the critical importance of misattribution and mistrust. Negotiation practitioners rightly suggest the need for parties to trade concessions whereby they cede what they value less than their negotiation counterparts do in order to receive what they value more. Indeed, within that account of integrative bargaining (see Homans, 1961, but much more famously, Fisher & Ury, 1981; also Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991), differences in values, priorities, and present circumstances, rather than creating obstacles to mutually beneficial agreements, provide the vehicles to achieve such agreements. The optimistic assumption of practitioners applying that formula is that where there is a history of enmity, conflict, and even violence, the reaching of such agreements, and enjoying the fruits they bear, will pave the way for the healing of relationships and the building of trust.

In our experience, that formula proves extremely difficult to implement successfully. When enmity and distrust exist, reactive devaluation becomes inevitable and zero-sum thinking dominates. "If the other side proposes it, it must be good for them, and therefore bad for us." "If there is something the other side says it wants and needs, it would be foolish to give it to them because it would disadvantage us and advantage them going forward (or else they wouldn't be making that proposal)." A particular source of the difficulty of reaching agreements through mutual compromise in the context of ongoing conflict is the phenomenon that Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984) refer to in their classic account of prospect theory as *loss aversion*. Prospective losses, as those investigators demonstrated in their ingenious experiments, generally loom larger than prospective gains of objectively equal magnitude.

In the context of conflict, the narrative is apt to be that "we are being asked to make painful sacrifices and accept things we should not have to accept, whereas they would be giving up nothing to which they were ever entitled in the first place; yet they are balking and asking for even more!" The objectivity illusion heightens the impact of loss aversion. It also heightens the barriers imposed by divergent views of the history of the conflict and by the tendency of the parties to rationalize their past decisions and actions. Both sets of antagonists believe their own views to be objective and reflective of the real situation, whereas they see the claims and aspirations of the other side either as disingenuous or as the product of motivated bias, indoctrination, and misinformation.

My SCICN colleagues and I see the building of more trusting and respectful relations as the vehicle to prompt successful integrative bargaining rather than vice versa. In a sense, the challenge is *getting* to the point where the formula in *Getting to Yes* and other negotiation prescriptions can have some chance of success. Four questions lay out that challenge (Bland & Ross, 2018):

1. The question of a shared future. *Are the parties able and willing to articulate a future for the other side that it would find bearable?* No substantial progress toward stable politics is possible unless both parties feel that it could live a reasonably tolerable existence if the other side's basic aspirations were to be achieved. The vision of a *shared future* is not necessarily a *shared vision* of the future. Disagreement about the specific policies, institutions, and political arrangements are bound to persist. However, each side must recognize the need to articulate the other side's place in the future its own side seeks. Furthermore, both sides must communicate their vision to the other side. In doing so, they must recognize that if the future does not offer a degree of dignity and a lifestyle that is, at least, no worse off than the present, no arguments or appeals to principle are likely to bear fruit.

2. The question of trustworthiness. Can the two sides trust each other to honor commitments and to take (all of) the intermediate steps necessary toward that shared future? In the context of long-standing conflict, each side feels that the other bears responsibility for the onset of the conflict, has broken past promises, and has otherwise proven unable or unwilling to make the types of difficult compromises necessary for progress toward a settlement. Given these sentiments, both sides face a critical question: Why should we now trust you? What has changed to make things different? In other words, both parties need to be convinced that there is now some new basis for trust, some reason to believe that the other side is now willing to honor, even if not embrace unreservedly, the terms it previously rejected. Hearing the other side propose a future in which one is offered a bearable place—and above all seeing the other side act in a way that suggests it accepts that vision of a shared future—can be that change.

3. The question of loss acceptance. *Are the parties truly willing to accept the losses that a settlement will inevitably impose on them?* A mutual sense of loss pervades the aftermath of virtually every negotiated peace agreement. This is because a peace achieved by negotiated agreement, as opposed to one achieved by outright victory, demands an abandonment not only of the hopes and dreams that fueled the conflict but also of rationalizations that have long been used to justify the continuing price of it. ("Right makes might!" "God is surely on our side!" "We can't betray the trust of those who sacrificed so much to carry on the struggle in the past!"). One important goal of dialogue is to help both sides recognize the extent to which the concessions that the other side will have to make for the sake of peace are truly painful—that those concessions, no less than their own, are real and hard to bear.

4. The question of just entitlements. *Are the parties open to an agreement that does not fully meet what they perceive to be the requirements of justice? Also, are they willing to work together to at least rectify the most serious injustices that would remain in the aftermath of agreement?* Every negotiated peace agreement imposes not simply losses, but *unjust* losses, on at least some members of each party. The goal of reaching a settlement deemed to be just by all constituencies is impossible to achieve. The question therefore is whether both parties, and especially potential spoilers within those parties, can be convinced that the benefits of the peace at hand are likely to outweigh the injustices it imposes on them. Justice may be beyond the reach of mere mortals, but agreement to rectify the most egregious injustices may be obtainable.

When community members first face these questions, false starts and frustration are inevitable. The challenge they face is heightened by the biases that have been the focus of my own research over the past few decades. Partisans cling to their prior beliefs, selectively remember and interpret relevant facts, rationalize their side's misdeeds and miscalculations, and see their own community's claims and actions as dictated by situational demands and constraints but the other community's claims and actions as a product of deficiencies in character, wisdom, and rationality. Most importantly, they feel that their community's views and positions reflect reality and that those of the other side reflect a failure to perceive and acknowledge that reality.

Citizens of good will are generally open, even eager, to engage in dialogue with the other side, but they do so with the goals of enlightening the other side about what is true and what justice demands, and they do so with little thought that they themselves might be in need of enlightening. As is inevitably the case, when the other side persists in its views, what follows is disappointment, frustration, and, too often, disparagement. The same divergence in attributions is apparent in efforts at intracommunity dialogue. Hardliners, moderates, and would be peacemakers share the conviction that they are the ones being realistic and mindful of the realities of the conflict and that those in their community who think or feel differently are engaging in wishful thinking, falling prey to misinformation and propaganda, or otherwise succumbing to sources of error.

Although the four-question framework was developed out of our experiences in helping to promote constructive dialogue in conflicts outside the United States, we feel that the shared-future question in particular looms over the growing political divides in the United States, as it copes with the economic consequences and challenges of globalization, demographic changes, and long-unresolved racial inequities. I will leave it to the many scholars now tackling those issues in trying to characterize "Trump voters" versus "coastal elites" and to disentangle the complex mix of economic and cultural issues that are fueling that divide. I will, however, make note of research findings from a pair of experiments my colleagues and I conducted two decades ago (Diekmann, Samuels, Ross, & Bazerman, 1997).

One experiment was conducted at Northwestern University. Business School students there assumed the role of managers of different divisions of a profitable company considering the allocation of a "bonus pool" in light of the performances of their divisions. The other experiment was conducted at Stanford University and San Jose State University. For the participants in this experiment, the hypothetical task involved the allocation of scholarship

monies to the two schools in light of the differences in academic rigor, tuition costs, and socioeconomic status of those attending them. In both experiments, some students were asked to assume the role of allocators and suggest a fair division of the bonus pool and were later asked to rate the fairness of divisions in which they would receive either an equal share, a larger share, or smaller share of the funds. Other students were assigned the role of recipients and were told what share they had been allocated (an equal share, a smaller share, or a larger share) and were then asked to rate the fairness of what they had received as well as the other two alternatives.

Our most provocative finding was that allocators consistently suggested 50/50 splits of the funds, even in light of the different bases for potential claims; in addition, they regarded that division as fairest (as did recipients of equal shares), and they regarded both types of unequal divisions as equally unfair. Only the recipients who had been allocated the larger share of the funds disagreed with those assessments. They alone had reservations about the fairness of equal shares, and they alone felt that the share they had been allocated was fairer than a similarly disproportionate allocation that favored the other claimant.

While our study had all the limitations of any role-play study requiring participants to make hypothetical decisions about hypothetical sums of money, its implication seemed obvious. People are willing to defend and rationalize allocations favoring their group that they would not propose anew. With that finding in mind, and the phenomena of loss aversion in mind as well, my conclusion is a somber one. In good times, people will tolerate a "rising tide that lifts all boats"—even one that raises all boats equally. However, in bad times, when losses rather than gains are to be allocated, even-handedness is apt to give way to defense by the advantaged of a markedly unequal status quo and a fight to make sure that their own group maintains their advantage. Under such circumstances, the difficulty of getting a diverse society to articulate, embrace, and work toward a shared future that all will deem tolerable seems daunting.

Final Musings: Overcoming the Fundamental Attribution Error, Naive Realism, and Other Barriers to Agreement

Human shortcomings and biases in the assessment of information, in judgment, in decision-making, and in perceptions of fairness and justice have been the central focus of my academic career. In my account here, I have tried to acknowledge the many fine students and colleagues whose efforts have assisted me in that work. At various points in my career, particularly gifted collaborators have lured me into research undertakings with a more positive focus. Sonja Lyubomirsky for a time directed my attention to the human pursuit of happiness (and the ways in which unhappy people make themselves miserable). Earlier in my career, I coauthored an article with Phoebe Ellsworth on the interpersonal dynamics of eye contact and gaze-avoidance. Phoebe and I also worked together on various projects relating to capital punishment. Both of these colleagues enriched my life as well as my career with their friendship. At various times, I also coauthored articles dealing with topics in psychology and law with Richard Banks, Jennifer Eberhardt, and, earlier, with Donna Shestowki. However, there is no denying that the focus of my attention has been on negative rather than the positive aspects of the human enterprise.

When I give talks, especially to lay audiences, a recurrent question is, what can people do to avoid the pitfalls I have described and explored? In some cases, the best I can offer is some variant of what Danny Kahneman (2011) calls "thinking slow" or avoiding snap judgments, engaging in some deliberation, examining the bases for your judgment, considering alternatives, and getting second opinions from people with different perspectives and areas of expertise. More than once in confronting a truculent partisan I have been tempted to quote Oliver Cromwell's (1650, para. 6) exhortation: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken" (and on rare occasions I have even forced myself to consider the possibility that I am the one being close-minded).

It is a cliché that when confronting disagreement, one should try on the other side's lenses or walk in their shoes. Unhelpful eyewear and footwear metaphors aside, the advice to consider the perspective of those with an opposite point of view has obvious merit. In principle, it is difficult to disagree with such a prescription, although in practice the exercise too often becomes an exploration of the sources of the erroneous views of the other. Liberal intellectuals write about how Trump voters have been led astray by right-wing media and by politicians who promise a return to happier time and have succumbed to wishful thinking, peer group influences, long-standing prejudices, and other sources of bias. However, the same trenchant liberal thinkers are slow to consider cognitive and motivational biases, limited access to dissenting views, and other factors that may be influencing their own assessments of what is true, or what is fair, and who gets to decide.

A personal example: I sympathize with athletes who kneel during the National Anthem. Moreover, I accept their right to define the meaning of that gesture not as an insult to our country or to the veterans who have

fought under its colors but as a protest against racial injustice and unfair police practices. However, when it comes to gestures and protests by those whose politics I decry, on issues ranging from access to late-term abortion to the renaming of buildings and removal of monuments that honor Confederate generals, I do not similarly grant the protesters the right to define the meaning of their actions and to stipulate the motivations behind those actions. Can I really defend the notion that the meaning of all political issues and actions should be defined by the groups with whom I personally identify, regardless of whether those individuals are the ones protesting existing policies, those defending the status quo, or those calling for further changes?

The objectivity illusion poses a unique dilemma. One cannot escape the conviction that one's views capture reality better than some other set of views. Indeed, any departure from that conviction would be tantamount to the adoption of the conviction that one's *new* views capture reality. Consider the perceptual illusion whereby a straight stick in water seems bent (because of refraction of light). Regardless of one's efforts, one cannot see the stick as straight as long as it remains submerged. Only removing the stick from water allows one to fully recognize the illusion and use the stick accordingly. Unfortunately, when it comes to the distortions in perception that fuel most conflicts, we have not yet discovered a strategy akin to removing the stick from water.

Nothing can prevent adversaries from seeing their conflict and the possible agreements to end it through the lenses of their own narratives and motivations. However, there are some strategies one can use to counteract the most negative consequences of the objectivity illusion. In working with dialogue participants on opposite sides of the conflict between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, my colleagues and I have employed a particular exercise as a prelude to any exchange of proposals for future agreement. This exercise obliges those on the two sides to try to present the other side's position—and to keep trying until those on the other side agree that they are getting it right. This procedure initially proves difficult for all concerned and inevitably produces false starts. Yet when the two sides finally are satisfied with the efforts of their counterpart, they feel greater empathy for each other, avoid the caricaturing of each other's views, and are on the road to a more thoughtful and less defensive exploration of future possibilities.

It is rare to see a public figure avoid both the fundamental attribution error and the illusion that his or her own perspective is the most reasonable one. I will close this personal saga not with the results of an experiment or strategic recommendation, but with a truly remarkable passage in a truly remarkable speech. Tom Gilovich and I quoted this passage in *The Wisest One in the Room*, where we offered a more extensive discussion both of naive realism and, later, of barriers to conflict resolution. Frederick Douglass delivered the speech 10 years after the end of the Civil War, at the dedication of the Freedom Memorial Monument honoring Abraham Lincoln. Douglass offered the following assessment of the martyred president: "Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent" (Douglass, 1876, para. 14). This assessment was understandable in light of Douglass's long-standing impatience with the pace of the president's steps toward the abolition of slavery. However, he went on to add a further, less idiosyncratic assessment:

> Measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined. . . . Taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln. (Douglass, 1876, paras. 14 and 17)

What Douglass did that spring day is something worth contemplating and emulating. He recognized the constraints governing Lincoln's actions. More remarkably, he acknowledged that his own views and those of his fellow abolitionists reflected a particular vantage point, history, and set of experiences; he also acknowledged that a future, more objective perspective would render a more objective and more charitable assessment. Less famous, and perhaps more provocative, is the answer Douglass gave to fellow abolitionist in defending his willingness to meet with slaveholders, "I would unite with anybody to do right; and with nobody to do wrong" (Douglass, 1855, p. 33).

Action Editor

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