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Individuals, Ethics, and Empathy of Mind

Chancellor Nancy Cantor
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The Socratic question, "How should one live?" is a central motivating one for ethics.[1] Today, I would like to consider three animating questions that fall within this concern:

- What are the challenges for an ethical person as a member of a community?
- What form do these challenges specifically take in our 21st-century society/world?
- What is the best way to tackle these challenges within university communities?

Individuals and Sociality

What does it mean to live a *good* life? Good in two senses: ethically good and personally rewarding. From a social psychological perspective a key ingredient in both ethics and personal well-being is healthy engagement with others, in social groups, communities, organizations and the like.

As David Myers, writing about "Close Relationships and Quality of Life," noted: "We humans feel motivated to eat, to drink, to have sex, and to achieve. But being what Aristotle called "the social animal," we also have a need to belong, to feel connected with others in enduring close relationships."[2]

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[1] B.A.O. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana; and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985) quoted in Amartya Sen, *On Ethics & Economics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994) 2.
[2] David Myers, "Close relationships and quality of life," *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, & Norbert Schwarz (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 374-389.

And most compelling in some ways are the group attachments that we form. Anthropologists have long documented the universality of bonding with groups,[3] evolutionary accounts of our hunter-gatherer ancestors suggest the survival value of group living,[4] and social psychologists have spent the last forty or so years showing how easy it is to create a "we" and "they" distinction (and all the in-group favoritism that goes with it), even when the group members are previously unacquainted and arbitrarily assigned to groups.[5]

People show fierce loyalty to their groups and strong preferences for in-group as compared to any and all out-group members, leading David Myers to also exclaim: "like sexual motivation, which fuels both love and sexual exploitation, the need to belong feeds both deep attachments and menacing threats. Out of our need to define a "we" come loving families, faithful friendships, fraternal organizations, and team spirit, but also teen gangs, isolationist cults, ethnic hostilities and fanatic nationalism."[6]

But before we consider the downside of groups, it is worth pausing a moment to consider the sustained joy that individuals get from taking part in tasks that are valued by their groups and communities and in making commitments to others, as Catherine Sanderson and I outlined in a piece that is available here today.[7]

Some of the most robust and yet surprising evidence in my field comes from the boost in well-being and quality of life that individuals derive simply from taking part—from what the Nobel prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen called "functionings and capabilities," which he contrasted with the short-lived rewards of more tangible possessions.[8]

The hedonic value of pursuing goals, making commitments to others and participating in groups can be contrasted in fact with the short boost to

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[3] W. Sumner, *Folkways* (New York: Ginn, 1906).
[4] L. R. Caporeal and M. B. Brewer, "Reviving evolutionary psychology: Biology meets society," *Journal of Social Issues* 47.2 (1991) : 187-195.
[5] M. Sherif *In common predicament: Social psychology of intergroup conflict and cooperation.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,1966).
[6] Myers, *op. cit.,* 375.
[7] N. Cantor and C. Sanderson, "Life task participation and well-being: The importance of taking part in daily life," in Kahneman et. al., *op. cit.,* 230-243.
[8] Amartya Sen, "Equality of what?" *Tanner lectures on human values,*ed. S. McMurrin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 195-220.

quality of life that people get, for example, from winning a lottery, leading Phil Brickman and Don Campbell to refer to the "hedonic treadmill" that makes the acquisition of tangible resources an endless source of escalating desires.[9]

In this framework, therefore, it is misleading to pit self-interest and altruism, and psychologists and sociologists have repeatedly shown that people not only feel good about giving to and caring for others, but their "acts of compassion" as Robert Wuthnow calls them,[10] are good for self-esteem and even for personal health and well-being.

Mark Snyder and his colleagues have followed hundreds of volunteers over the years and they find a variety of what might be called "self-interested" motives that predict sustained participation in volunteer organizations and groups.[11]

And Phil Brickman and Dan Coates, in a discussion of commitment and mental health, make a similar point that: "research on recipient reactions to aid has consistently shown that those who help, rather than those who receive help, benefit most in terms of greater self-esteem and perceived self-competence … supportive relationships may best enhance coping by giving us something to work for and sacrifice for, something to be obligated and committed to and derive meaning from."[12]

The value of volunteerism and care-giving for the "giver" goes beyond the actual tangible effects on others to the personal benefits derived from participation, and this is especially true when people directly take part in groups and group projects and begin to form a self-identity as a group member. Although increasingly people do their "volunteerism" on the Internet or by writing a check, the demonstrated value of direct group participation, for selfish as well as altruistic reasons, should not be forgotten,

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[9] P. Brickman and D. Campbell, "Hedonic relativism and planning the good society." *Adaptation level theory: A symposium*, ed., M. H. Appley, (New York: Academic Press, 1971) 287-304.
[10] Robert Wuthnow, *Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves (*Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).
[11] A. M. Omoto and M. Snyder, "Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIDS volunteers," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68 (1995) : 671-86.
[12] P. Brickman and D. Coates, "Commitment and mental health," *Commitment, conflict, and caring*, ed. Philip Brickman (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987) 238.

especially as it also impacts on the quality of our social fabric and civic life.[13]

Exploring Other Groups: "We" and "They"

Thus far I have emphasized the facility that human beings have—cultivated over evolution as well as in our own social environments—for taking part in social groups and the concomitant benefits for self and others of group bonds, loyalty and belonging.

Yet there is also a problem to consider. The problem is that we are very good at bonding with what one might call "groups of convenience"—groups populated with people like ourselves, groups based on shared values and traditions and geography—but we are much less facile at reaching out to groups that are not familiar. Moreover, once ensconced in our own groups, we are prone to insularity—spending time mainly with our group, for example—less anxious to explore.

My colleagues and I have studied the many social groups on college campuses, and although we do find these campus groups—from teams to performance groups to newspapers and issue-oriented groups—to be great sources of what Putnam calls "social capital" (trusted networks of confidants), they can also constrain students from developing diverse friendships and pushing beyond their already well-honed skills and talents.[14] Certainly one of the great assets of college life should be the veritable candy store of new opportunities, and spending too much time in familiar groups can interfere with taking full advantage.

In addition to our tendency, all of us, to gravitate toward familiar and comfortable groups, whether in our social lives or in our volunteerism, whether as students or as citizens, there is a negative side to group life that we must confront if we are to consider what it means to lead a "good" life in every sense of that term.

This is when the "we"-"they" distinction becomes a problem. With every satisfying in-group experience, comes out-group exclusion of some sort that social psychologists have also documented across a wide range of cultures,

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[13] R. D. Putnam, "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (1995) : 65-78. See also K. A. Politt, "For whom the ball rolls," *The Nation* 262.9 (1996).

[14] N. Cantor, M. Kemmelmeier, J. Basten and D. Prentice, "Life task pursuit in social groups: Balancing self-exploration and social integration," *Self and Identity* 1 (2002) : 177-184.

ages, and types of groups.[15] Frequently, such exclusion is merely a reflection of favoring one's in-group, as when we give members of our own group more benefit of the doubt, or we care more about their welfare. Other times, it may take a more disagreeable turn, as when we distrust or derogate groups simply because they are different. And discrimination often grows out of our very real ignorance of other groups and our tendency to see them as monolithic and homogeneous, even as we perceive the great variety within our own groups.

Unfortunately, this tendency to lump together all members of an out-group can lead us to treat them unfairly in ways we may not intend. This is especially true when we see and react to others only through the lens of their "otherness." The individual thus becomes less individual and more a representation of a group.

Add to the mix any perceived threat or danger, and even the most experienced and well-meaning professional can be deceived by group stereotypes. This failing is at the heart of objections to racial and other group profiling.

An extreme example of such a mistake made in a context of heightened overall anxiety and threats associated with groups, was the shooting last month of an innocent Brazilian man by British police who chased him into the crowded subway system that earlier had been the target of terrorist attacks. Their split-second decision to kill, rather than arrest, him was certainly based on fear of giving him even an extra second to detonate a bomb. There was every reason to worry, and none of us should easily second-guess their actions. Their decision was rational, given the contingencies, but it was tragic on many levels, including the alarm it caused people of color—that this could happen to any of them, anytime.

As Amartya Sen has observed: "We all do make mistakes, we often experiment, we get confused, and so forth. The world certainly has its share of Hamlets, Macbeths, Lears and Othellos. The coolly rational types may fill our textbooks, but the world is richer."[16]

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[15] See M. Brewer and R. Brown, "Intergroup relations," *Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. II,* ed., D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, and G. Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998) 554-594.
[16] Sen, *On Ethics & Economics, op.cit*.,11.

And the world of group dynamics is richer yet, full of the potential for mistakes, misperceptions and worse.

Inter-Group Conflict

The potential for tragedy only gets worse when members of groups perceive, whether true or not, that their resources, security, status and the like are threatened by the (mere) existence of the out-group. Such fears are usually fueled by history, and each side has a story to tell of victimization and honorable intentions.

In Northern Ireland, two hostile groups descended from the same white ancestors have practiced profiling for many years, most recently through a technique called "telling," by which one white person can distinguish the politics and culture—all subject to demeaning stereotypes—of another white person by tokens as small as the way they pronounce the letter "H." A few years ago, a very revealing joke made the rounds in Belfast:

> A tourist was walking down a street late at night when a man wearing a black hood stepped out of the shadows and put a gun to his head.
>
> "Are you Catholic or Protestant?" the gunman asked. When he could catch his breath, the tourist stammered, "Neither. I'm Jewish."
>
> The gunman didn't miss a beat. "Are you a Catholic Jew or a Protestant Jew?"

Although the struggle in Northern Ireland has been usually described in religious terms, as the joke indicates and the anthropologist William Kelleher has written, the terms "Catholic" and "Protestant" designate political, not religious communities. And although the rhetoric of religion certainly enters into the politics of division, "Protestant" translates into Ulster unionist—a person who identifies as British—and "Catholic" into an Irish nationalist.

The struggle itself is national, economic, social and historical[17] with roots in the English conquest of Dublin in the 12th century. The latest "Troubles" began in 1969, and more than 3,000 nationalists, unionists and British troops have been killed there since then.

In such a climate, the giant murals showing IRA fighters as martyrs and heroes have inspired some nationalists but terrified most unionists. In such a climate, mass marches to celebrate the victory of "King Billy" over the Irish in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 are seen as patriotic and uplifting by unionist but triumphalist and menacing by the nationalists.

Over time, numerous peace groups have invited adults and children from both sides to come to the United States to talk. Once they were on neutral ground, they often found things to like about each other. So why couldn't they get together back home?

The answer was that the physical, emotional, legal, social and economic separation between them had not changed. Each side saw their shared history and common experiences in a completely different way.

In a rare instance when dialogue was possible on Irish soil, the sister of an innocent nationalist shot to death by the British army arranged private meetings just to talk with some women who were her Protestant neighbors. It took a great deal of courage for any of them to attend.

The sister was a well-known member of Sinn Fein, the political arm of the IRA, and one narrative among unionists in their rural area was the IRA was killing Protestant farmers to grab their land. The narrative among nationalists was that the IRA was shooting British soldiers and policemen who also happened to be Protestant farmers.

Even in this climate of fear, the women did reach out to each other and—over time—ended up pouring their hearts out to each other. One of the unionist women, as it turned out, also had a brother who had been killed by

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[17] William F. Kelleher Jr., *The Troubles in Ballybogoin; Memory and Identity in Northern Ireland* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2003) ix.

the army, and since the army was on "her side" felt she could not complain.[18]

What can we learn from the example of Northern Ireland, where the conflict took so many lives in a very small place before it entered an overtly political phase that is inching its way to a solution?

Empathy and Conflict

We can learn about the failure of all sides to show any empathy of mind—willingness to get in the head of the other, a failure that almost always accompanies inter-group hostilities and conflict.

Each side is blinded from moving forward together by its own "story or narrative," often told to children and carried forth for generations. These are stories that they simply know to be true and can't see why the other group doesn't "get."

We have all had this experience, though not necessarily in as dramatic a context of conflict. The group narratives become believable justifications for further conflict because they render the intentions of the group as having arisen out of positive group identity—protecting the group, for example—and therefore standing as honorable for all to see.

But each side fails to observe that even their "honorable" or "innocent" intentions can have negative impacts on others. And, just as important, they rarely take responsibility for the *possibility* that others may have an experience or (interpretation of history) different from the one they use as the touchstone of truth.

Unfortunately, however, there is no one more righteous (on any and all sides) than a person with *good intentions* encouraged by like-minded others.

It is precisely the ubiquity of this experience that makes it so important. Even the best intentions may cause someone else's worst nightmares, and we simply don't pay enough attention to how our well-intentioned actions are received.

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[18] Anecdote from my colleague, Jo Thomas, who covered Britain and Northern Ireland for *The New York Times* from 1984 to 1986 and has since written about it in *The Atlantic*, *The Columbia Journalism Review*, and other publications.

At the same time, we also often fail miserably to acknowledge the "good intentions" of others when there are hurtful impacts on us. We expect the world to forgive our well-intentioned "mistakes," but we are rather unforgiving of others, especially those we fear or do not know.

In other words, we are blinded by our own stories and unable to empathize with the stories of others.

Still, it is storytelling that can help us work through intractable conflicts. The dialogue group To Reflect and Trust, which started in 1992 with descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Jewish descendants of Holocaust survivors, pioneered a storytelling method that was later applied to a yearlong Jewish-Palestinian student workshop held at Ben Gurion University in 2000-01, with results the facilitators described as a "transformative process that has the potential for leading to the building of relationships between the groups." [19]

Working through the past for these Jewish and Palestinian students meant acknowledging and listening to stories from the other side and developing an ability to connect them with their own narratives. It also involved collecting narratives of the past from parents and grandparents. The stories helped the group build a collective memory of their painful mutual history, creating a common space through which each participant's narrative could be accepted.

The group facilitators, Dan Bar-On and Fatma Kassem, one speaking Hebrew to the Jewish students and the other speaking Arabic to the Palestinian students, recorded the ups and downs of the yearlong dialogue, which took place with a war outside, including numerous violent encounters that made it difficult for the two sides to hear each other's narratives.[20] Still, their dialogue notes suggest that the students were listening: "One Jewish male participant wrote, 'This was my first opportunity to learn something about what their families went through during the 1948 war. Until today, I only heard about our heroic war.' A Palestinian female student wrote, 'When Noa (Jewish participant) spoke about her father's feelings of not being at home in Israel, I could identify with that feeling. For the first time,

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[19] Dan Bar-On and Fatma Kassem, "Storytelling as a Way to Work Through Intractable Conflicts: The German-Jewish Experience and Its Relevance to the Palestinian-Israeli Context," *Journal of Social Issues* 60.2 (2004) 304.
[20] *Ibid*., 299

I felt that Jews are not only enemies, but have similar feelings to those I have."[21]

By grounding the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict in shared personal historical narratives of rootlessness and oppression, students on each side moved away from seeing themselves as victims and victimizers, closer to the understanding that the world is complex, and that some of the descendants of the victimizers were suffering from the atrocities their parents had committed. Their undifferentiated perceptions of the "other" were breaking down. They opened the door to the possibility of reconciliation to take place through symbolic acts of taking responsibility and forgiveness.[22]

At the heart of that possibility for reconciliation, I would argue, is the delicate balancing of group affirmation from telling one's own narrative, and the recognition of both difference and similarities across narratives that comes with inter-group exchange. It is a delicate balance indeed.

Psychologically, what makes our group identities so self-fulfilling—that is, the reinforcing nature of our shared values, opinions, history and experiences—is often what makes us unappreciative of other groups and resistant to considering things from their perspectives. Without even realizing, we become defensive, closing off or undermining constructive inter-group relations.

Crossing 21st Century Boundaries

As we think about the ethical life in our new century, our new millennium, and how we might create empathy—changing ourselves and our various communities—it's worth recalling the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

In spite of the American view that we live in an individualistic culture, we actually make our selves through our relations with others.[23] As people, we depend on each other, and, as a society, we will share a common fate, even in a society which is becoming less and less white, and where the fault lines between the rich and the poor are becoming wider and wider.

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[21] *Ibid*., 300.
[22] *Ibid*., 304.
[23] David Myers, *op.sit.*

Patterns of residential segregation by race and by social class continue to damage children and stunt the opportunities of all, especially the poor and children of color. In our cities, we are confronted with what the Harvard Civil Rights Project has called "apartheid public schools."[24] Recent news reports show that just 18 percent of all high school students in New York City graduate with a Regents diploma, considered a requirement for admission to a four-year college, [25] a preferred route to upward social mobility in our knowledge economy. Many white suburban students have also lost a great deal by the time they walk through our doors: They have rarely had chances to study, hang out with, or really get to know others not just like them.

The destructive influence of ethnic and religious inter-cultural conflict around the globe exacerbates the difficulty at home of peacefully integrating Islamic and other non-Western traditions. We also see mounting inter-cultural tensions with Christians and Jews. Even though intellectual diversity is more necessary than ever as the foundation for democracy, the public's willingness to work through difference in civil dialogue seems to be weakening.

There are precious few contexts in our world in which the attention is explicitly given to bridging some of these most divisive and harsh fault lines of inter-group relations. And even when this is the organizational mandate, as in the United Nations for example, the reality is much different from the ideals on which it was built.

As Ramesh Thakur, an assistant secretary general of the UN noted in an opinion piece on the occasion of the UN's 60th anniversary: "Despite bureaucratic rigidity, institutional timidity and intergovernmental trench warfare, the United Nations is the one body that houses the divided fragments of humanity. It is an idea, a symbol of an imagined and constructed community of strangers. It exists to bring about a world where fear is changed to hope, want gives way to dignity, and apprehensions are turned into aspirations."[26]

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[24] Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, Gary Orfield, "A Multiracial Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?" The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu, 28.
[25] Bob Herbert, "Education's Collateral Damage," *The New York Times* (July 21, 2005) A29.
[26] Ramesh Thakur,"The UN at 60: The place where humanity's divisions meet," *International Herald Tribune* (June 25-26, 2005) 6.

I believe that universities are similarly constructed communities of strangers, and that we can be a force for good in cultivating empathy amongst our future citizens and leaders, and in bridging across those divided fragments of humanity. This will take hard work, but it is part of our job, and although some of my examples have focused on large, dramatic and seemingly intractable conflicts, most of us encounter situations that demand empathy for others every single day.

Facing Conflict; Promoting Empathy in the Arts

In seeking to create opportunities to build "difficult dialogues"[27] across the fault lines of our world, universities can and should take a lesson from the cultural expressions that come into our daily lives through the arts—not only through novels, poetry and telling stories, but also through movies, photography, theater, dance and all kinds of music.

The arts can draw us in, across history and in the most unlikely ways, as Jodi Wilgoren of *The New York Times* reported last spring in an article describing a production of "King Lear" at the Racine Correctional Institution in Wisconsin.[28] The 17 actor-inmates, who were doing time for kidnapping, homicide, drug dealing and other crimes, called themselves the Muddy Flower Theater Troup, asserting that beauty that can grow in unlikely places.

One of the inmates, who played Lear's counselor Kent, expressed it this way: "There are no walls now. I'm in medieval England." Although the prisoners could not use swords and performed in a large room—not really a stage—they found their experience to be transforming. Some found themselves crying in front of others for the first time in their lives. In the prison yard they started calling each other Cornwall and Oswald and Goneril.

As in this example, the arts can serve as the medium, not just the reflection, of inter-group dialogue. They offer an escape from the silencing that tends to come in "normal" society, making it is possible to face highly charged and even taboo subjects. And everyone has some "standing" in the "conversation" that ensues.

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[27] Ford Foundation call for proposals: "Difficult Dialogues Initiative: Promoting Pluralism and Academic Freedom on Campus," July 2005.
[28] Jodi Wilgoren, "In One Prison, Murder, Betrayal, and High Prose," *The New York Times*, (April 29, 2005) A16.

Somehow, we can confront even the most searing of inter-group and inter-cultural experiences with relatively little group defensiveness and more honesty in the context of the literary, visual, and performing arts. We accord more (human) standing to our "enemies" and can feel far more empathy than is usually the case. Through the artistic lens, we can see that almost everyone is vulnerable in some way. We can also see the complexities in the lives of others.

Khalid Hosseini's recent novel *The Kite Runner* is an outstanding example of the power of the story-teller to astonish us by putting his readers—and his own characters—in the shoes of others, even those they thought they knew well. The novel tells the story of Amir, the son of a wealthy Pashtun businessman in modern Afghanistan, and Hassan, the son of his family's Hazara servant. Both boys have lost their mothers at birth, and they play together almost like brothers, although Amir goes to school and Hassan does not. Amir takes the social distance between them for granted - until he opens one of his mother's old books and is "stunned to find an entire chapter of Hazara history."[29]

"In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had 'quelled them with unspeakable violence.' The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said that part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a. The book said a lot of things I didn't know, things my teachers hadn't mentioned. It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras *mice-eating, flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys*. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan."[30]

The following week, when Amir shows the chapter to his teacher, "he skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. 'That's the one thing Shi'a people do well," he said, picking up his papers, "passing themselves as martyrs. He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi'a, like it was some kind of disease."[31] Although Amir remembers

[29] Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004) 9.
[30] *Ibid*, 9.
[31] *Ibid*, 9-10.

this moment later in life, his new knowledge of history produced little change at the time in his treatment of his friend Hassan.

The Kite Runner shows, in ways far more intimate than most journalistic accounts, how the ethos of a dominant culture can combine with ordinary emotions such as jealousy, fear or love to paralyze some people from intervening to stop acts of unspeakable cruelty, even when these people know or even care deeply about the victims.

Moreover, it shows the multiple layers of inter-group hostilities in contemporary Afghanistan—with both the (oppressed) Hazara and the (dominant) Pashtun sharing a fierce enmity for the marauding Taliban.

What *Kite Runner* therefore manages to do in the most pressing of ways is to complicate any monolithic post 9/11 view of all Afghanis as members of an (out)-group of potential terrorists. The novel allows us to enter the minds of people battling each other in a world unknown to many of us, except in the most simplified and stereotyped of ways.

Hosseini also give us an empathetic view of the lives of Afghan refugees in our own country, post 9/11, as they struggle not only with the destruction of their homeland and life as they knew it, but with our (homogenizing) out-group enmity toward them.

It is hard to imagine a clearer, more penetrating portrayal of the complexity of inter-group hostility and the difficulties that all peoples have in appreciating difference, finding common ground, and acknowledging enmities that divide and destroy peace for everyone. The novel is full of conflict living side by side with empathy, and the experience of reading it forces one to consider how to stretch empathy to reach across the blinding barriers of inter-group defenses.

Diversity and Divided Campuses

As universities themselves become more diverse, the divisions in our society are reflected more and more on campus. Indeed, when groups of students from the same ethnic or racial or cultural background sit together at the cafeteria, many people wonder about the value of diversity—arguing that students will self-segregate into familiar groups, anyway. Some have even

argued that the social divisions always just below the surface in our campus communities will be exacerbated if we focus on diversity.

But really, no one should be surprised to find these tensions, nor should we blame students if they want to hang out with others just like them. After all, students come to campus with very little experience of inter-group interaction. In this country, their neighborhoods and their schools tend to be clustered by religion, culture, class, race and ethnicity, and it is only worse in other countries.[32]

As Claude Steele and his colleagues have elegantly demonstrated, students from all kinds of backgrounds—majority and minority alike—feel some degree of vulnerability around others not just like them. The mere presence of a cue that one might be stereotyped leads to anxiety and stress, and we all feel those cues when crossing into other groups. And, as I have mentioned earlier, these inter-group vulnerabilities are often beyond our explicit control—we feel them and act on them without much self-awareness.[33]

In one experiment described by Steele, a white student is told he is going to discuss racial profiling with two other students. He is asked to arrange the three chairs in the room while the experimenter goes to get the other students. If he thinks the other students are also white, he puts the chairs close together. If he is asked to arrange the chairs for a discussion of racial profiling with black students, he will usually move his chair away from the other two. And paradoxically, the more the student perceives himself as concerned with inequality, the further away he will move his chair. His fear: being perceived as a racist.

What is poignant here is that these students want to "do it right," but stereotype threat, as Steele labels it, takes over. At the same time, they have no idea they are under this kind of pressure.

"If you ask them, they have no idea, no sense of having been under this pressure," Steele says, "no subjective awareness." But physiological tests,

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[32] Derek V. Price and Jill K. Wohlford, "Equity in Educational Attainment; Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Inequality in the 50 States, *Higher Education and the Color Line*, ed., Gary Orfield, Patricia Marin, and Catherine L. Horn (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2005) 65.

[33] Expert Report of Claude M. Steele, *Gratz* and *Grutter*, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

as well as the outcomes, show they have been responding to "cues in the environment" that put them under enormous stress.[34]

These are the stresses of inter-group life that our students (and the rest of us) face everyday on diverse campuses and so we should have some considerable patience for the self-segregation into familiar groups that we see so often.

Nonetheless, our mandate—and it is more important than ever on our campuses today—is to educate our students as ethical people who can show empathy to others and engage in the rich inter-group life of our multicultural world.

If we can do this, then, as Patricia Gurin frequently notes, diversity becomes an educational resource embedded throughout the institution, like books in a library or faculty of quality, benefiting not only students' intellectual growth, but also better preparing them for citizenship.[35]

Students and faculty alike can gather with those of similar background or shared interests—that table at the cafeteria of Muslim students has its benefits in comfort and affirmation. But they also have the opportunity to talk, as a group or individually, with others who are different. Not all the time, but at least occasionally.

How shall we accomplish this healthy mixing?

Inter-Group Dialogue Curriculum

We have to recognize the intertwining of empathy and conflict, and find ways to tolerate both. The answer is not to pretend that we live in a group-less, conflict-free society, but rather to find a way for everyone to affirm their own "narratives" and express their resentments, while acknowledging that others also have stories to tell and vulnerabilities to reveal. Regardless of how hard this is to accomplish, even in the relatively protected world of universities, I do not see a path toward empathy that does not air conflict.

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[34] Claude M. Steele, lecture at the Future of Minority Studies Conference, Cornell University, July 30, 2005.

[35] Patricia Gurin, *Educational Benefits of Intergroup Dialogue*, unpublished grant proposal, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, August 2004.

Pat Gurin and her colleagues at Michigan, who have pioneered an inter-group dialogue curriculum that departs from prior approaches by explicitly using conflict as a path toward trust between groups,[36] are preparing for a ten-institution evaluation of its effectiveness—a project that Syracuse is proud to join this fall.

The approach takes difference and conflict as givens, and:

- adopts an explicitly inter-group focus by bringing together members of groups that rarely interact in meaningful ways or may even be at odds;
- acknowledges that these groups often occupy different positions in society, thereby uncovering patterns of inequality or cultural dominance that often go unnoticed; and
- balances representation of each group in the dialogue, so as to provide security and comfort for each as inter-group conflicts and differences are aired.

With this structure as the basic model, trained facilitators, who also benefit from the experience, can guide a *dialogue*—not a *debate*—in which participants are encouraged to share their narratives, and explore similarities, differences and conflicts within and between groups.

The goal of this form of dialogic thinking and interaction is to "normalize" conflict as part of life in a diverse society that can be managed with openness and care. We gain appreciation for others when we feel appreciated by others, even if this process starts with airing differences and disagreements that might otherwise drive groups apart.

It is critical here not to look for winners and losers, but to have a conversation that is revelatory for all. Accordingly, the groups are balanced in number not as an end in itself, intended to give each group an equal shot at dominating, as sometimes seems to be the motivation when people question whether all "sides" are adequately represented in universities.[37]

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[36] M.C. Thompson, T. G. Brett, and C. Behling, C. "Educating for social justice: The program on intergroup relations, conflict, and community at the University of Michigan," *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace* ed., D. Schoem and S. Hurtado (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2001) 99-114.

[37] David Horowitz, "In Defense of Intellectual Diversity," *The Chronicle Review, The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (Feb. 13, 2004).

Instead, the idea is to have enough participants in each group so that everyone feels comfortable, able to lower their defenses and explore differences honestly. Eventually, in the dialogues, some of the monolithic thinking about the groups breaks down and the ground is laid for building common cause.

Religious and Cultural Pluralism at Syracuse

Let me end with my own university and its efforts to build difficult dialogues around religious pluralism, on campus and with our community in Central New York. We are, in many respects, well-positioned to address issues of pluralism.

Syracuse University welcomed Jews when others didn't and gladly embraced the opportunities of the GI Bill. During World War II, SU became one of only a handful of colleges and universities that accepted Japanese-American students; Chancellor William Pearson Tolley agreed to take 65 students who were then released from internment camps; church groups paid their expenses. Our proximity to the capital of the historic Haudenosaunee Confederacy had a profound impact on Professor Huston Smith, who arrived at Syracuse University after a long career in which he was considered one of the world's experts on comparative religion. In a recent documentary about native struggles for religious freedom, Smith says that his 10 years at Syracuse "in the shade of the Onondaga" transformed his views of indigenous religions.

On our campus, we are trying to keep the tradition of "difficult dialogues" on religious and cultural pluralism going in a number of ways that incorporate Pat Gurin's suggestions. Our Religion and Society Program, directed by Professor Gustav Niebuhr, a former *New York Times* religion writer, was created with this in mind. It draws from the fields of religion, journalism and politics to address, in the form of dialogues, vital questions that shape our views of the world, that we hope will enable participants, for example, to view the world through the unfamiliar lens of a religious minority.

As Professor Niebuhr frequently points out, what better way to honor the victims of bigotry and hatred in our world than by meeting head on the ignorance of diverse religious traditions that is rampant in American society

today. And who better to start with than our first year students as they make a transition from home and high school, where pluralism is frequently met at arms length to the possibility—though not always the reality—of intense inter-cultural interaction in small Freshman Forums on religious pluralism and in our new Interfaith Learning Community.

At the same time, we are developing a new Humanities Center to encourage interdisciplinary work and discussion in the public humanities, and to focus in part on the critical role of the media in broadly communicating the realities of religious pluralism to the public. Facing our Humanities Center outward, and speaking to the pressing issues of our society, will also allow us to benefit from and contribute to the vigorous community dialogues in our region.

The city of Syracuse is home to the InterReligious Council of Central New York, which encourages community-wide dialogues on racism in circles small enough to let new relationships grow, where people are encouraged to express and examine long-held beliefs, where no one can "win" by defending one point of view.

"We are so afraid of inflaming the wound that we fail to deal with what remains America's central social problem," says one invitation to join in the dialogue. "We will never achieve racial healing if we do not confront each other, take risks, make ourselves vulnerable, put pride aside, say all the things we are not supposed to say in mixed company—in short, put on the table all of our fears, trepidations, wishes and hopes."[38]

Syracuse is also home to Women Transcending Boundaries, a group of women who came together after the 9/11 tragedies to share their narratives across many traditions—Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and atheist—and to educate the wider community, through dialogues, events and service projects. WTB has been expanding every year since 2001, and now also supports literacy work in Pakistan and refugees from Afghanistan, among other inter-group projects.[39]

Syracuse University is strengthening our ties with both of these groups, and we are looking for meaningful connections. As you may know, we are also

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[38] "Community Wide Dialogue," pamphlet published by InterReligious Council of Central New York, quoting Harlan S. Dalton, author of *Racial Healing*.
[39] For further information on Women Transcending Boundaries, see http://www.wtb.org.

talking with the Chautauqua Institution in the hope of participating in aspects of the Institution's "Abrahamic Initiative."

Confronting the bitter fruits of hatred is an inescapable part of Syracuse University's history and identity. On December 21, 1988, 35 students returning home from a semester abroad were killed in the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. In the difficult days and years since then, years that have seen new anxieties and fears ignited by the September 11th attacks in 2001, we have come a long way toward healing.

Last fall, drama professor Joan Hart Willard directed SU drama students in the play "Women of Lockerbie" at Syracuse Stage. The play, written by Deborah Brevoort, is based on the true story of how the people of Lockerbie Scotland recovered the personal belongings of the victims of the bombing and returned them to their families. This summer, she is taking the cast and crew to Scotland to perform at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the world's largest arts festival. And she is inviting people from Lockerbie to attend, as a way of saying thank you.

Muddy flowers. They can grow anywhere, especially on college campuses, if we give them safe spaces and nurture their growth.