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Mitigating Biased Political Cognition Through Friendship

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MITIGATING BIASED POLITICAL COGNITION THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PHILOSOPHY

by

David Donley

September 2019

The Dissertation of David Donley is
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David Donley

A growing body of empirical data on human cognition indicates that, despite self-assessments of our reasoning as open-minded, disinterested, and motivated by accuracy, various psychological phenomena associated with our social identity and political ideology significantly bias our cognition when forming political beliefs and engaging in public discourse; such phenomena include motivated reasoning and the introspective illusion. Since these phenomena can undermine equitable, cooperative public discourse in a flourishing democracy, this dissertation focuses on developing practical means of diminishing our susceptibility to engage in such psychological phenomena. To this end, I argue that close friendships can serve as an important social context for cultivating intellectual virtues that support equitable, cooperative deliberation indicative of a flourishing democracy.

Dedication and Acknowledgment

Many people in my life have played essential roles in the path to my completion of this dissertation. I will begin by acknowledging those that inspired my love of philosophy. The seed of this love was planted in high school by my English teacher, Jemima Acantilado (Ms. Kim). Before I knew about the discipline of philosophy, she strongly suggested that I take a philosophy course in college. Her suggestion came after reading an essay that I had written on Richard Wright's *The Outsider*. When selecting courses for the fall semester of my freshman year, everyone that I knew who had been to college urged against taking a philosophy course. They said that it would be too challenging, that it was impossible to get an "A." But Ms. Kim's suggestion won out in the end.

This was for the best, as it afforded me the great fortune of meeting Dr. Doug Deaver at Santiago Canyon College. It is he, more than anyone else, that helped me to see that philosophy is my calling in life. His conscientiousness, his patience, his compassion, his curiosity, and his devotion to teaching have impacted my life tremendously. I cannot thank him enough for the countless hours we spent in conversation during my undergraduate experience. His mentorship provided me not only a model for what it means to be a good philosophy teacher, but to be a good person. It was also at Santiago Canyon College that I met Marcelo Pimentel. His enthusiasm for discussion, his passion for philosophy, and his dedication to students are what convinced me to major in philosophy. Doug and Marcelo are true lovers of

wisdom. They do not just teach philosophy; they embody it in their lives. I am forever grateful that my first experiences of philosophy were with them.

Upon transferring to Cal State Fullerton, my love of philosophy was nurtured by Matthew Calarco, Amy Coplan, and Heather Battaly. Heather is the most genuinely enthusiastic teacher I have ever met. As a philosophy major, it is common to question the wisdom of having chosen this major. Her enthusiasm always confirmed that it was the right choice. Heather as well inspired my interest in virtue ethics and epistemology. She influenced most the subfields I chose to study in graduate school. I was lucky enough to have her guidance on my doctoral work when she served as the outside faculty member on my qualifying exam committee.

Matt is the most brilliant philosopher I have ever met. No one was more pivotal in expanding my intellectual horizons and helping me to overcome the intellectual limits of my prior education than him. In conversations with him and listening to his lectures, I always sensed my mind was expanding. The metaphorical light bulb of inspiration in my head went off so many times that it had to be changed at least a couple of times. Moreover, I cannot thank him enough for igniting my passion for Nietzsche's works. Finally, whenever I doubted that I belonged in philosophy, Matt and Amy always affirmed my place within the discipline.

My experiences with Amy were vital both to my intellectual and personal development. As an undergraduate, Amy had the keen ability to deduce my existential state without me saying much, and she always seemed to know what I

needed to hear to persist in the challenge I was facing. Amy as well showed me that my love of film could be combined with my love of philosophy.

While the great teachers at SCC and CSUF were pivotal in inspiring a love of philosophy that led me to pursue a Ph.D., the emotional support and intellectual stimulation from the friends that I have made along this path have been indispensable. It is a great honor to have Nicholas Williams and Jesse Alonso as my best friends. They are the only two people that truly understand me. Their love, humor, compassion, and loyalty has sustained me during the darkest of hours. And no celebration is complete without their presence. They are the older brothers that I never had growing up. I am as well fortunate to call these finest of people my close friends: Paula Beckman, Kareem Khaled, Steven Estrada, Dannaca Daniel, Patrick Hayer, Sara Baldwin, Hieu Bui, and Tuan Le. It is their friendships that have made this journey rewarding and meaningful. Their friendships, in part, have inspired my interest in studying friendship.

The other close friendships that were pivotal in inspiring my interest in friendship is my group of friends from high school. I am grateful for the closeness that still exists today. I especially want to thank Wesley Koga, Matthew Sarvas, Tyler Munzing, Robert Morris, and Ha Vu. This could not have been possible without their emotional, and, at times, financial support. They are my brothers for life.

Speaking of family, my family's support, financial and emotional, have been invaluable to my completing this dissertation. Though my dad has never studied philosophy, he is at heart a philosopher. He is skeptical, critical, and concerned with

right and wrong. He also has a perfectionism that lends itself well to academic work. It is these qualities that I have inherited from him for which I credit my success.

My mother is the only person that has never once asked me, "What are you going to do with a degree in philosophy?" She always believed that education is intrinsically valuable, and that one can never go wrong pursuing an education. Most importantly, she always believed in me, and that has made all the difference, especially in the moments that I did not believe in myself. She is simply the best.

Finally, I want to thank the wonderful folks that I have met at UC Santa Cruz. My friendships with Nikos Knightly, Linda Kealey, Cynthia Tibbetts, Brett Dinovo, and Alea Grundler sustained me during the challenges of grad school. I cannot thank enough my dissertation committee: Dan, Jon, and JD. They have been nothing but supportive and encouraging. It has been a privilege to work with them. I hope to make them proud as I move on to the next phase of my academic career.

Introduction

In a pluralistic democracy beset by contentious moral issues, deep political

disagreement among a diverse citizenry is inevitable. When confronted with deep

disagreement, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the decision-making

process presents a significant challenge. In facing this challenge, we can easily find

ourselves focused on the structure of democratic decision-making practices and the

epistemic and ethical ramifications of the processes and procedures used to secure fair

representation. For example, one prominent issue concerns ensuring the inclusion of

minority groups historically excluded from the decision-making process, such as

women and people of color. Rightfully, this concern dominates scholarship in social

epistemology and the epistemology of democracy. For example, I take this to be a

concern looming large in Jose Medina's *Epistemology of Resistance* and Miranda

Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice*, which are essential texts in social epistemology. While

there are differing theories on how to best achieve the inclusion of diverse

stakeholders in practice, the common goal is a flourishing democracy where all

reasonable views are included.[1]

Though consideration of inclusion in decision-making practices is necessary

to any discussion of a flourishing democracy, this point of focus has been well

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[1] Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3:1-2 (2006). Here Anderson considers three approaches to ensuring inclusion of diverse views, ultimately settling on what she calls an experimentalist approach, which was first proposed by John Dewey. The issues and concerns raised later are ones I take to be relevant to any of the three approaches examined by Anderson.

explored by philosophers like Miranda Fricker, Jose Medina, Elizabeth Anderson, Jason Stanley, and many others. The following dissertation is one that looks to expand upon such work by considering a related, yet different, point of focus. I take it to be that ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the democratic process requires considerations extending beyond structural elements of practice.

Let us presuppose for a moment that we finally settle the matter of ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives in our pluralistic society in our decision-making procedures. Let us also presuppose that we figure out how to minimize and counteract overt, explicit expressions of bias aimed at marginalizing a group of people. To be clear, I am not asking us to engage in a purely theoretical hypothetical here. The hypothetical I am proposing raises genuine practical considerations that I take to be just as worthy of examination as inclusion in procedures and mitigating explicit bias. As such, let us imagine that we can construct, agree upon, and enact the institutional mechanisms needed for ensuring the inclusion of a diverse array of perspectives in the democratic decision-making process.

To flesh this out, let us use the example of global climate change. Let us imagine that the decision-makers deciding policy concerning global climate change have adopted procedures that ensure the inclusion of the perspectives of all the stakeholders involved in this issue. The perspectives range from environmental groups to fossil fuel energy companies to government agencies to workers in both the renewable fuels and fossil fuels industry to the children whose world will be most shaped by global climate change and vulnerable populations at risk of environmental

injustice and so on. Let us say these decision-makers give serious and genuine consideration to the testimonials of all these stakeholders, the scientific literature on global climate change, the social science literature of its social, political, and economic impact, and carefully examine any other relevant evidence. The aim of this description is not to exhaust the list of perspectives and sources of evidence considered. Instead, it is to make it clear that our hypothetical decision-makers are making a good faith effort to be diligent, sensitive, and conscientious with respect to ensuring their decision accounts for the interests of all the people affected. For the sake of the point to be made with this example, let us call these folks democratically responsible decision-makers.

Even following ideal epistemic procedures, we could still doubt that the decision arrived at concerning global climate change by these democratically responsible decision-makers fairly represents the diverse stakeholders mentioned. This doubt can be unrelated to the decision-making procedures themselves or telltale signs of bias against some of the stakeholders. Instead, this doubt concerns the unseen psychological mechanisms that may have manifested in the reasoning processes employed by our democratically responsible decision-makers. We might doubt that careful, objective consideration of a wide array of evidence itself sufficiently ensures the reasoning employed by our democratically responsible decision-makers impartially represents the interests of the diverse stakeholders. We can ask, "Is it possible that even though they examined many perspectives and sources of evidence, and we do not see overt signs of bias, that their examination may be biased?" Biased

in the sense that in their reasoning, they either intentionally or unintentionally give less weight and credibility to specific perspectives and sources of evidence. Biased in the sense that their conclusions favor beliefs they already hold that affirm their membership in social groups central to their identity and well-being.

Moreover, what if the decision-maker or outside observers cannot easily detect these biases? Further, as a result of the difficulty in detecting these biases' manifestation, the decision maker's reasoning appears fair to them but is motivated by self-interest, as opposed to being motivated by the common interest. Admittedly, we would conclude that whatever decision adopted concerning global climate change by these democratically responsible decision-makers is unlikely to have guaranteed the common good of all its stakeholders.

I see this concern about bias as a problem for any of the positions we can hold concerning the achievement of fair representation or any theory of democracy we might adopt. Similarly, I see this concern as a problem that likely besets the reasoning employed for any contentious moral issue where there exists deep disagreement about decisions to be made and policies to be adopted, not just global climate change. For many of us, our political beliefs often express our membership in social groups central to our identity and the emotional support network central to our well-being. The self-interested need to maintain our status within such groups can, without our awareness, impact our reasoning about contentious political issues. More specifically, this self-interested need can inhibit accuracy and the common good from being our

primary motivations when engaging in public discourse on contentious political issues. This is the central problem that will be examined in this dissertation.

When examining cognitive science and psychology literature on political cognition from the past 50 years, there exists significant evidence that casts doubt on our ability to have accuracy and the common good be our primary motivations when reasoning about morally significant, contentious political issues. Despite our best efforts to be impartial and accurate, these studies make it evident that it is plausible that without our awareness, we can be engaged in biased cognition when thinking about political issues. The manifestations of biased cognition that I have in mind here, and explore in the first chapter, include motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and the introspection illusion. Upon examination of these phenomena, I argue that we should be disconcerted by our susceptibility to engage in biased cognition regarding morally significant political issues, such as global climate change. We should be disconcerted because its effects are corrosive to efforts to resolve these pressing issues in ways that are inclusive of the members of our pluralistic society. Ultimately, the manifestation of these phenomena aid in undermining a flourishing democracy.

After examining accounts of biased cognition from psychology and cognitive science, in the second chapter, we turn to considering recent accounts from philosophers examining the effects of biased cognition on public discourse, in particular, the account offered by Jason Stanley in *How Propaganda Works* and Joshua Greene in *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them*. While the work of psychologists and cognitive scientists often focuses on

offering descriptions of the phenomena, the philosophical accounts considered in the second chapter offer possible remedies for mitigating the effects of biased cognition on our public discourse. I will analyze the standards of impartiality for contributions to public discourse offered by Stanley and Greene's recommendation that utilitarian thinking guide our contributions to public discourse.

In my analysis of Stanley and Greene's proposals, I will contend that their proposals overlook a crucial feature of biased cognition. In the first chapter, our examination of political cognition will highlight how an individual's social relationships contribute to their engagement in biased cognition. An individual is susceptible to expressing political beliefs that convey their membership in and loyalty to social groups that are essential to their identity and well-being. Moreover, given the self-interested need to have the emotional support of those within our social groups, individuals are unlikely to revise their beliefs in accordance with an accurate evaluation of information and the common good representative of the interests of all stakeholders, especially when doing so goes against the accepted political beliefs of their social groups. In this dissertation, this feature of biased cognition will be regarded as the social context of biased cognition. My analysis of Stanley and Greene's proposals will show that their proposals do not adequately address this critical feature of an individual's susceptibility to engage in biased cognition.

To build upon current philosophical accounts in a manner that adequately addresses the social context of a susceptibility to engage in biased cognition, in the third chapter, I will contend that forming close friendships with those politically

different from ourselves can aid in mitigating a susceptibility to engage in biased cognition concerning contentious political issues. To support this contention, I will draw upon the philosophical accounts of close friendship articulated by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Alexander Nehemas in *On Friendship*. In these accounts, we will find that the features indicative of close friendship lend themselves to cultivating a social context that alleviates a susceptibility to engage in biased cognition. More specifically, the reciprocated trust, intimacy, and goodwill toward one another that we find in close friendship provides a social context where friends can become more aware of their engagement in biased cognition and support one another to reduce their susceptibility to do so.

In the first three chapters, a dominant theme that will emerge in my analysis is practical considerations of the ideas examined. The examination of psychological and cognitive science accounts of political cognition is intended to provide an understanding of how people in practice reason about political issues. Additionally, the primary motivation behind my criticism of Stanley and Greene's proposals is a consideration of their success in practice. As such, in the fourth and final chapter, I explore real-life friendships that suggest it may be possible in practice for close friends to aid in reducing a susceptibility to engage in biased cognition. Though, given the authors of the accounts considered in the fourth chapter did not conduct their investigation of the friendships with my proposal in mind, there will not be sufficient evidence in the accounts to conclude that my proposal would be successful in practice. Nonetheless, those examples will suggest that there exist suitable

examples for studying my proposal's effectiveness in practice. Thus, future research concerning my proposal is apt to be fruitful.

In concluding the introduction, I want to note my motivation for writing on this topic. As an undergraduate, I often believed that most deep disagreements about political issues could be resolved through education. I had naively believed that if people were taught to critically think about political issues, in a manner that resembled the critical thinking I was being taught in my humanities courses, then people could more quickly arrive at a mutual agreement on how to resolve pressing issues of great moral significance besetting our democracy. In studying the topic of this dissertation, I have come to realize that resolving the pressing issues besetting our democracy is not merely a matter of education. People's political beliefs are closely connected to their emotional support network and sense of identity, and these are a significant source of meaning in their lives. They are not about to abandon these for the sake of accuracy and the common good. They need for the very social relationships that have facilitated their engagement in biased cognition to become the social relationships that facilitate the improvement of their political cognition.

I have always pursued philosophy with the belief that it can make the lives around me and my life better. It is my firm conviction that a love of wisdom ultimately benefits one's life. It is through my love of wisdom that I sought to offer an analysis of a topic that could benefit our society. I hope that close friendship can aid in healing the political divides in this country and that such healing leads to a better future for us all.

Chapter 1 – The Psychology of Biased Political Cognition

Introduction

Since the 1970s, a growing body of empirical research on human cognition has well documented how subjective interest and bias can unconsciously impact our reasoning when forming political beliefs and participating in public discourse. Despite our best efforts and intentions to deliberately form political beliefs and participate in public discourse according to ideals of open-mindedness to diverse perspectives, equal consideration of available evidence, and fairness to those who disagree with us, we are susceptible to engaging in various psychological phenomena that without our awareness hinder us from achieving these desired ideals of a flourishing democracy.[2] Since these ideals are integral to a flourishing democracy, this research should be disconcerting not only to scholars working in ethics and social and political philosophy, but for all people committed to a flourishing pluralistic, democratic society.

This chapter's central goal is to understand how our engagement in biased cognition epistemically corrodes public discourse in a flourishing democracy. To achieve said goal, I will begin with explaining some of the psychological phenomena

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[2] The idea that a flourishing democracy requires open-mindedness to diverse perspectives, equal consideration of available evidence, and fairness to those that disagree with us is a notion that will be assumed in this dissertation. Other philosophers have argued in depth for this idea, notably John Dewey in *The Public and Its Problems* and "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us." More recently, Elizabeth Anderson has followed up on Dewey's arguments in "The Epistemology of Democracy." A summary of their arguments and their relevance to this dissertation can be found in the Appendix.

in cognitive processes that corrodes public discourse in a flourishing democracy; specifically, I will focus on several manifestations of motivated reasoning and the introspection illusion.[3] Then, I will define what I intend to mean by my term *biased political cognition*. Through examining these phenomena, it will become clear how such phenomena of biased political cognition are troublesome for a flourishing democracy that aims at a fair representation of its pluralistic society in its public discourse.

Overall, the discussion of biased political cognition and its relevance to equitable, cooperative public discourse is grounded in an ethos of practical consideration of the political contexts in which we form beliefs, publicly deliberate with one another, and ultimately live our lives. In this vein, I will use a contentious political issue of great moral significance to our society as an example for understanding the psychological literature. To guide us through this chapter, let us consider two present-day Americans discussing global climate change. Casey self-identifies as politically conservative and a member of the Republican Party. Landry self-identifies as politically liberal and a member of the Democratic Party. As we move through our discussion, a helpful way to remember their political affiliation is to think of them as Casey the conservative and Landry the liberal. Whereas Casey

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[3] Empirical studies on human cognition discuss a variety of heuristics and biases that are present in our reasoning about many types of beliefs beyond just political beliefs. As such, I specifically focus on motivated reasoning and the introspection illusion because they have a direct bearing on political beliefs (which should become clear by the end of the chapter) and in certain cases, actual studies focus on these phenomena with regard to political beliefs.

vehemently denies the existence of global climate change, Landry adamantly believes in the existence of global climate change. With these identities and beliefs in mind, let us imagine that Casey and Landry are engaged in deliberation concerning the existence of global climate change and what action, if any, should be taken in response by our society. This above description is intended to serve as the general description of the example being considered. More specific details of the nature of their beliefs and deliberation will be fine-tuned with respect to elucidating the psychological phenomena. As such, expect the specific details to shift through the course of the chapter.

Psychological Phenomena Hindering A Flourishing Democracy

In this section, we will consider different manifestations of motivated reasoning and the introspection illusion that can hinder the achievement of fair representation of diverse perspectives in our political belief formation and public discourse. Motivated reasoning, the introspection illusion, and other related psychological phenomena (such as system justification theory and identity-protective cognition) that will be discussed in this chapter are all ways in which our ability to be open-minded to diverse perspectives, fair to those who disagree with us, and equally consider available evidence can become stymied, and thus render us unsuccessful in attaining these ideals of a flourishing democracy. These ideals of a flourishing democracy are integral to fostering a reasonable, equitable public discourse in a pluralistic society. These standards aim to achieve cooperative deliberation—

cooperative in the sense that such deliberation can aid us in arriving at decisions about collective actions and policies to be enacted by social and governmental institutions. We should be troubled by our engagement in biased political cognition that can inhibit the fair and cooperative deliberation that is essential to a flourishing democracy.

System 1 and System 2 Cognition

Throughout his academic career, Nobel Laureate and social psychologist Daniel Kahneman has argued for a distinction between two types of cognitive processes used in making decisions and forming judgments: System 1 and System 2. These neutral terms formalize a distinction between intuition and reasoning as forms of thinking. System 1 is characterized by operations that are fast, automatic, effortless, and often emotionally charged. Further, they are directed by habit, and as a result, they are difficult to control or change. In contrast, the operations of System 2 are slower, serial, effortful, and deliberately controlled. These tend to be more flexible and can be rule-governed.[4]

The distinction between System 1 and System 2 cognition is fundamental to understanding the psychological phenomena discussed in this chapter. As described in the introduction, despite our best efforts and intentions to explicitly reason following the ideals of a flourishing democracy, there are certain undermining

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[4] Daniel Kahneman, "Maps of Bounded Rationality: Psychology for Behavioral Economics," *The American Economic Review* 93, no. 5 (Dec 2003): 1451.

psychological phenomena that without our awareness impact our reasoning. This description can now be further refined with notions of System 1 and System 2. At the level of System 2, we can be readily aware of our deliberate intentions. Using our guiding example, let us say Casey and Landry deliberately intend to fairly evaluate evidence of global climate change's existence. Then, they form a political belief based on their evaluations. As a result, both Casey and Landry regard their political beliefs as based on the fair evaluation of evidence. All of this cognition occurs at the level of System 2.

In the literature on human cognition, the mechanisms responsible for the psychological phenomena that I call biased political cognition often, but not always, occur at the level of System 1. Since the mechanisms responsible for these phenomena occur intuitively, automatically, and effortlessly, it can be rather challenging to be aware of instances of their occurrence. While at the level of System 2 Casey and Landry can believe themselves to have fairly evaluated evidence for global climate change's existence, at the level of System 1 there may be instances where they engaged in motivated reasoning and fell prey to the introspection illusion. If this were the case, they would not necessarily be able to possess an awareness of this having happened. As a result, they should consider the possibility that they have not achieved their intended ideal of fair evaluation when forming their political belief about global climate change. To better understand why we should consider this possibility, let us move on to specific explanations of these psychological phenomena.

Motivated Reasoning

In her widely cited work on motivated reasoning, social psychologist Ziva Kunda distinguishes between being motivated by accuracy and being motivated to arrive at particular, directional goals.[5] Kunda argues that both kinds of goals impact our reasoning by influencing our choice of beliefs and strategies we apply to a given problem. Nonetheless, "accuracy goals lead to the use of those beliefs and strategies that are considered most appropriate, whereas directional goals lead to the use of those that are considered most likely to yield the desired conclusion."[6] In other words, cognitive processes differ when reasoning aims at accuracy compared to when reasoning aims at directional goals.

In sharpening this distinction between accuracy and directional goals, Kunda clarifies how reasoning differs in the respective situations. Kunda explains that when we are motivated to be accurate, we spend more cognitive effort on issue-related reasoning, more carefully attend to relevant information, and process it more deeply, often using more complex rules.[7] When motivated by accuracy, there is a deep focus on issues at hand and attention to relevant information. In contrast, when motivated by directional goals, there is only a focus on issues and information that support the desired conclusion.

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[5] Ziva Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990): 480.
[6] Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning,"481.
[7] Kunda, 481.

To deepen our understanding of this distinction, let us imagine that it is the early 1970s, and Casey and Landry are discussing whether or not lead should be banned from gasoline. Landry believes that lead should be banned from gasoline. Landry bases this belief on close consideration of many relevant factors. Landry reflects on the increased cost of gasoline that would result from needing to develop an alternative gasoline formula, and that this increase in cost further exacerbates the already increased cost that resulted from the OPEC oil embargo. Landry understands that there will be a financial pinch to be experienced by all, one that could lead to even more difficult financial choices amidst the current stagflation. Such financial hardship will affect those of lower socioeconomic status the most. These considerations are made along with an examination of the evidence of public health risks that result from lead's toxicity. Empirical studies from the late 1940s and early 1950s proved that lead has polluted the air, studies in the 1960s showed there exist abnormally high levels of lead in humans, and studies in the early 1970s are showing that higher levels of lead in children are correlated with decreased school performance. It is through careful consideration of all this evidence and possible ramifications of banning lead in gasoline that Landry arrives at the belief that it would be in the common interest to enact policy that reduces and eventually bans lead in gasoline. Landry can be described as motivated by accuracy in reaching this belief.

In contrast, Casey believes that lead in gasoline should not be banned. Similar to Landry, Casey is quite worried about increased fuel costs amidst stagflation and an oil embargo. Already feeling financially strained, Casey does not want to have to pay

more for gasoline. Even though Casey is aware of empirical studies about the toxicity

of lead being published by scientists working at universities, Casey finds more

compelling the accounts of scientists and doctors working for the lead industry that

has reassured the public that lead in gasoline does not pose a public health risk. When

Casey is provided evidence that such scientists are most likely biased because the

lead industry funds their research and that scientists whose work shows the dangers of

lead are harassed and threatened by the lead industry, Casey still does not give much

consideration to the toxicity of lead in gasoline, as this evidence does not support

their desired conclusion. Casey is motivated by directional goals that influence their

assessment of the credibility of evidence and the weight in their reasoning given to

evidence challenging their viewpoint.[8] In this case, the directional goals are related to

financial self-interest.

Even though directional reasoning involves a focus on the desired conclusion,

we cannot justify any conclusion we desire. Kunda stipulates, "people motivated to

arrive at a particular conclusion attempt to be rational and to construct a justification

of their desired conclusion that would persuade a dispassionate observer. They draw

the desired conclusion only if they can muster up the evidence necessary to support

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[8] Research on the public's understanding of science has revealed that the biases in
directional goals can affect a person's understanding of science and in certain cases
inhibit an understanding of scientific research. As one group of science literacy
researchers put it, "the assessment of the credibility and weight of evidence may be
biased in such a way that the evidence fits the recipient's preexisting attitudes or
moral convictions, or contrary evidence may be ignored or confuted." See Gale
Sinatra, Dorothe Kienhues, and Barbara Hofer, "Addressing Challenges to Public
Understanding of Science: Epistemic Cognition, Motivated Reasoning, and
Conceptual Change," *Educational Psychologist* 49, no. 2 (2014): 123-138.

it."[9] Casey does not blatantly argue against banning lead because it does not coincide

with their financial self-interest. Instead, Casey supports this conclusion by citing

scientists who claim lead does not pose public health risks. I note this aspect of

Kunda's account because I think it is easy to mistake the distinction between

accuracy driven reasoning and directional reasoning as meaning that when we engage

in directional reasoning, we are not attempting to be rational. We may think that if

accuracy is not the goal, then directional reasoning could entail any arbitrary goal

without regard for evidence or logical inferences. In other words, we could construe

directional reasoning as irrational. However, according to Kunda, when engaged in

directional reasoning, we are attempting to be rational.[10]

A crucial point of comparison is that accuracy goals often utilize cognitive

processes focused on hypothesis testing, whereas directional goals often utilize

cognitive processes focused on justification construction. I find this feature of

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[9] Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," 482-483.

[10] In discussing political beliefs and political deliberation, this point is particularly
salient. It is common to observe two people disagreeing about a political issue and to
witness one or both participants claim that the other is irrational for holding a certain
belief about a contentious political issue. We can easily imagine Landry accusing
Casey of being irrational for denying the existence of global climate change and
Casey accusing Landry for being irrational for believing global climate change is real.
We could then easily imagine that if Casey and Laundry were to learn about the
psychological phenomenon of motivated reasoning that they might use this as an
explanation of why the other is irrational for holding their respective belief. This is
the situation I want to prevent before further explaining motivated reasoning. My
intention in understanding the psychological phenomena discussed here is not
contribute further to the polarization that characterizes our political culture. My
intention is to understand these psychological phenomena to better cultivate more
open dialogue between those that disagree with each other. I want Casey and Landry
to have a productive, respectful dialogue about global climate change.

directional reasoning—providing a seemingly rational justification for belief—to be

problematic concerning political beliefs. To better understand why I take this feature

to be problematic, directional reasoning needs to be considered with respect to two

contexts: the individual person and the broader social community. To this end, let us

turn to the work of Dan Kahan, as his work focuses on directional reasoning about

political beliefs. It should be noted that there is a terminological difference between

Kunda and Kahan. For Kunda, motivated reasoning refers to both accuracy driven

reasoning and directional reasoning. Whereas for Kahan, the phenomenon that Kunda

refers to as directional reasoning, he calls motivated reasoning; as such, I will now

refer to directional reasoning as motivated reasoning.

Motivated Reasoning and Political Beliefs

Kahan considers instances of motivated reasoning that can be characterized as

benefiting the self-interest of an individual, but also ethically problematic for

collective interests. To this end, he examines ideological conflicts over facts for

which there is empirical evidence. In addressing disagreements between liberals and

conservatives over the existence and cause of global climate change, waste from

nuclear power plants, vaccinating young girls against HPV, and handgun violence,

Kahan states, "Political polarization on empirical issues like these occur despite the

lack of any logical connection between the contending beliefs and the opposing

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values of those that espouse them. It also persists despite apparent scientific

consensus on the answers to many of these disputed questions."[11]

To elaborate on Kahan's point, let us consider it regarding Casey and

Landry's disagreement over the existence and cause of global climate change. Kahan

is claiming that questions of "Is global climate change happening?" and "Does global

climate change have anthropogenic causes?" are questions for which there are not

only empirical answers but scientific consensus on these answers as well. Given these

are questions with empirical answers, it is not clear how Casey and Landry could

regard such questions as politically debatable. Further, as scientific questions with

empirical answers, it is not clear how answers to such questions are directly related to

being ideologically liberal and conservative. There is no direct logical connection

between the science of global climate change and political ideology. If Casey and

Landry were motivated by accuracy, their beliefs about global climate change would

not be connected to their political identities nor be a matter in need of political

deliberation.[12]

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[11] Dan M. Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection,"
Judgment and Decision Making 8, no. 4 (2013): 407.

[12] There is a subtle point worth noting here, though it is speculative on my part. I
believe Kahan is correct in arguing that the question of global climate change's
existence and causes are empirical matters with answers that do not directly connect
to a particular ideology. Nonetheless, an important related question is directly
connected to one's political ideology: how should our society respond to the fact of
global climate change's existence and anthropogenic causes? This is a question that in
part can be answered empirically. For example, scientists have calculated estimates of
specific amounts of carbon emission reduction that need to take place. At the same
time, the answer to this question is also normative. There are concerns about quality
of life for this and future generations, concerns about the value of nonhuman animals
and the natural environment, concerns about equitable ways of sustainably organizing

In explaining ideological motivations that can underlie political beliefs, Kahan argues that the goal of protecting our identity and standing within a social group that shares fundamental values can lead to motivated cognition relating to policy-relevant facts.[13] Despite the presence of empirical evidence for a belief, we might be disinclined to accept such a belief if it goes against the ideology that is commonly associated with our membership within a particular group. Conversely, even if empirical evidence supports our belief, we may not hold the belief based on the empirical evidence. We could accept the belief because it conforms to the ideology of our particular social group. In other words, we could be motivated by our political ideology, as opposed to accuracy.

Let us return to Casey and Landry. Let us say that as a conservative, Casey's family is conservative as well. Even Casey's personal friends and close relationships at work are predominantly with those who identify as conservative. Casey recognizes that the intimate connection with these people is based in large part on shared political ideology. Further, Casey has witnessed occasions when some conservatives

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the economy, etc. These are concerns for which there is ideologically motivated disagreement. More importantly, these are the more challenging concerns with complex answers that cannot be easily addressed by liberals or conservatives. Some research on scientific literacy views global climate change as a socio-scientific issue, meaning the public's engagement with climate science does not occur in a purely scientific context. Instead, the public's engagement with climate science is embedded in a complex social and political context where it is subject to economic, social, political, and ethical considerations. Collective decisions on socio-scientific issues are not simply inferred from a range of factual premises from scientific research, but are also reflective of a person's ideological beliefs. See Gale Sinatra, Dorothe Kienhues, and Barbara Hofer, "Addressing Challenges to Public Understanding of Science" in *Educational Psychologist* 49, no. 2 (2014): 124.

[13] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 408.

have gone against the standard conservative position on global climate change by agreeing with the empirical evidence and asserting the existence of global climate change. From these occasions, Casey has seen how those who challenged conservative ideology jeopardized their intimate relationships by creating emotional distance between themselves and other conservatives. Casey has seen the detrimental impact that comes with the loss of an emotional support network that is integral to their life and sense of self. These experiences and considerations could be at play in motivating Casey to deny the existence of global climate change. Even if Casey is unaware of these considerations, Casey would most likely feel the deep-seated need to maintain the relationships that have taken years (and maybe even decades) to cultivate. Thus, even when Casey attempts to be rational in their denial of global climate change, it could be the case that, without Casey realizing it, this denial is motivated by self-interest.

Let us say an analogous situation is true of Landry as well. Landry's network of intimate relationships is predominantly liberal. Parallel to Casey, Landry has witnessed a few liberals challenge the truth of global climate change by questioning if climate scientists should be trusted and if the "liberal media" have exaggerated the consensus and abundance of empirical data. Landry has seen how many liberals have met these people's reservations about the "liberal position" regarding global climate change with condescension and even some hostility. In some sense, Landry comes to accept that affirming the existence of global climate change is conducive to maintaining their network of close relationships. Unbeknown to them, Landry's belief

in global climate change may not be motivated by accuracy, but rather by ideological commitments. It is in Landry's self-interest to adhere to the liberal position regarding global climate change.

Kahan's analysis supports this characterization of both a liberal and a conservative being equally susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning. Based on the results of his experiment, he contends, "when assessing evidence of the other group's propensity to consider evidence in an open-minded and reflective way, liberals and conservatives were *uniformly* prone to ideologically motivated reasoning."[14] Thus, it is unlikely that holding a particular political orientation does not make us more or less susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning.

As seen with Casey and Landry, specific instances of reasoning directed by ideology can be beneficial to our self-interest. Kahan argues that ideologically motivated cognition is not necessarily "a reasoning deficiency, but is a reasoning adaptation suited to promoting the interest that individuals have in conveying their membership in and loyalty to affinity groups central to their well-being."[15] In a similar vein, John Jost and Orsolya Hunyady make a parallel claim when discussing ideology and what they call a system-justifying motive, "whereby people seek to maintain or enhance the legitimacy and stability of existing forms of social arrangements."[16] Jost and Hunyady argue, "system-justifying ideologies serve a

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[14] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 417.
[15] Kahan, 417-418.
[16] John T. Jost and Orsolya Hunyady, "The Psychology of System Justification and the Palliative Function of Ideology," *European Review of Social Psychology* (2002): 113.

palliative function in that they reduce anxiety, guilt, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty for people who are in positions that are either advantaged or disadvantaged."[17]

Though certain instances of engaging in motivated reasoning about politics can benefit our self-interest, it is problematic when zooming outward to the heterogeneous social landscape of a pluralistic society. Kahan observes, "if ideologically diverse individuals all follow this strategy simultaneously, they will be *collectively worse off*, since under these conditions, democratic institutions are less likely to converge, or to converge as rapidly as they otherwise would, on policies that reflect the best available evidence on how to protect everyone from harm."[18] In other words, the prescription that we should be motivated by ideology, as opposed to accuracy or the common good, concerning politics is not conducive to a flourishing democracy that requires a certain degree of cooperation for action to take place when addressing contentious political issues with significant ethical ramifications.

Similarly, when a system-justifying motive directs reasoning, people tend to rationalize current social, political, and economic inequalities "as fair and legitimate, perhaps even natural and inevitable."[19] This rationalization of inequalities and the unjust social institutions supporting such inequalities undermines a flourishing democracy that values social justice, freedom, and equal opportunity for all people as

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[17] Jost and Hunyady, "The Psychology of System Justification and the Palliative Function of Ideology," 114.
[18] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 420.
[19] Jost and Hunyady, 119.

an ethical imperative. As Jost and Hunyady explain, "people's remarkable ability to accommodate formerly unwelcome outcomes helps to explain why social and political systems are successful at retaining cooperation and consent and why social change is so difficult to accomplish."[20]

Let us consider Casey and Landry's deliberation about global climate change with respect to these points. If Casey's denial of global climate change and Landry's acceptance of global climate change are beliefs motivated by an ideology that serves their self-interest, then how are they to arrive at a position where they both could consent to the government taking action or not taking action concerning global climate change? While these instances of motivated reasoning do stabilize Casey and Landry's social relations, which are central to their well-being, this comes at the expense of their being able to engage in cooperative deliberation—cooperative in the sense of making headway on decisions about how we ought to collectively respond to empirical evidence of global climate change. The inability of those of opposing ideologies to cooperatively engage in political deliberation, to effectively participate in a dialogue that is needed for the government to take action concerning pressing political issues with significant ethical ramifications detracts from the health of our democracy. As such, the possibility we could be engaging in motivated reasoning when forming political beliefs should be disconcerting to us all.

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[20] Jost and Hunyady, "The Psychology of System Justification and the Palliative Function of Ideology," 123.

With this possibility in mind, we could object to the above analysis by claiming that I may be engaged in motivated reasoning in my discussion of motivated reasoning. My political ideology could be motivating the evidence I have considered and the inferences I have made. It could even be directing how I explain examples with Casey and Landry. Given the empirical research on motivated reasoning, this is a real possibility. Further, since my engagement in motivated reasoning could be occurring at the level of System 1 cognition, it would be quite difficult for me to be aware of there being an instance of motivated reasoning in this analysis. Even if someone were to bring to my awareness an instance where I have engaged in motivated reasoning, it is not clear that such a discussion would necessarily lead to my recognition that I have engaged in motivated reasoning. There is a likely possibility that upon introspection of my thinking I would conclude that I have not engaged in motivated reasoning and that the person challenging me is most likely engaged in motivated reasoning when they bring up their concern—the likelihood of this sort of response will make more sense once we discuss the introspection illusion.

While I cannot wholly relieve this worry, this is not a worry that concerns me nor do I believe it should concern us too much. Let us consider what is at stake when looking at motivated reasoning about political beliefs about global climate change. If ideological commitments motivate our reasoning about global climate change, and if such motivations are serving to undermine a cooperative, equitable public discourse needed for collective action, then our engagement in motivated reasoning contributes to our failure to respond appropriately. In the case of global climate change, if climate

change scientists are correct, then our failure to respond appropriately could contribute to the mass extinction of most forms of life on the planet. This is not meant to shock and awe, but to give an example of how there is a lot at stake ethically in discussing motivated reasoning concerning political issues like global climate change, structural racism, patriarchy, etc. In contrast, the stakes seem quite low in comparison to the worry about me being engaged in motivated reasoning in this analysis. There does not seem to be significant ethical ramifications if we conclude that I am engaged in motivated reasoning or am not engaged in it.

Nonetheless, I do have a concern about a possible significance to be attached to the conclusion that I am engaged in motivated reasoning in this present analysis. I do fear that some people may see such a conclusion as warranting dismissal of this analysis. These people might doubt the accuracy of this analysis if there is an instance of motivated reasoning within it. It is not clear to me how the possibility of my being engaged in motivated reasoning should automatically dismiss what I have to say about it. I think the same applies to Casey and Landry. The possibility that the other is engaged in motivated reasoning should not be cause for dismissing each other's beliefs. Cooperative deliberation cannot occur if this strategy is employed. Again, we should keep in mind the ethical ramifications of the political issues being deliberated. Given what is ethically at stake in many political issues, complete dismissal should be regarded as an uncooperative response.

Confirmation Bias

In light of our discussion thus far, a reasonable response is to claim that we would be less susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning if we regularly exposed ourselves to arguments and evidence that challenge our ideological commitments and push us to see the validity of political beliefs differing from our own beliefs. The more often Casey is exposed to liberal arguments and the evidence that supports them, and the more often Landry is exposed to conservative arguments and the evidence that supports them, the less likely that Casey and Landry would be susceptible to being motivated by their political ideology when deliberating with each other. While this may strike us as a reasonable suggestion, research on a particular manifestation of motivated reasoning known as confirmation bias shows us this strategy is inadequate. To be clear, since this concept can be defined in different ways, here confirmation bias refers to "the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand."[21]

To better understand the inadequacy of this suggestion, let us flesh out what is entailed by this strategy. This response assumes that exposure to multiple perspectives will lead us to reduce confidence in our own beliefs and be open-minded to the beliefs of others. Further, as this exposure continues, the hope is that we can fairly deliberate about politics and participate in cooperative public discourse indicative of a flourishing democracy. The more Casey and Landry become sensitive and familiar with each other's political views, the more likely they will respect each

[21] Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* (1998): 175.

other's positions and fairly account for each other's position when deciding how our society should react to evidence of global climate change. This suggested response to evidence of our engagement in motivated reasoning is reflected in pedagogies that emphasize reasonable, respectful debate between two or more perspectives or when a teacher or a friend plays devil's advocate to our position.

While a well-intentioned suggestion, and possibly a necessary component to nurturing open-mindedness, it is not a sufficient strategy. When presented with evidence or arguments that differ from our own political beliefs and ideological commitments, it is not necessarily the case that we will reduce confidence in our own beliefs and come to recognize the validity of different perspectives. Instead, we are more likely to discount the perspectives of others and become more confident in our own beliefs. In other words, we are more likely to engage in confirmation bias.

The likelihood of us engaging in confirmation bias when presented with evidence that differs from our beliefs was confirmed in a seminal experiment conducted by Charles Lord, Lee Ross and Mark Lepper in 1979 that investigated participants' attitudes toward the legality of capital punishment.[22] Participants in the experiment included capital punishment supporters and capital punishment opponents. They were presented with mixed evidence: evidence showing the effectiveness of capital punishment in deterring crime and evidence showing the ineffectiveness of capital punishment in deterring crime. It was found that participants

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[22] Charles Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper, "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no. 11 (1979): 2098-2109.

did not impartially process evidence relevant to a political belief. Lord et al. contend, "Instead, judgments about the validity, reliability, relevance, and sometimes even the meaning of proffered evidence are biased by the apparent consistency of that evidence with the perceiver's theories and expectations."[23] In this way, we tend to interpret subsequent evidence in a manner that maintains our initial beliefs, as the initial belief directs the reasoning about the new evidence.

In elucidating specifically how this biased assimilation process of new evidence occurs, Lord et al. explain, there is a "propensity to remember the strengths of confirming evidence, to judge confirming evidence as relevant and reliable, but disconfirming evidence as irrelevant and unreliable, and to accept that confirming evidence at face value while scrutinizing disconfirming evidence hypercritically."[24] Given the biased assimilation process of new evidence, Lord et al. also find that the result of exposing opposing groups of people in a political dispute to an identical body of evidence supporting differing positions is that instead of a narrowing of disagreement, there is an increase in polarization of beliefs. These findings suggest, merely exposing us to perspectives, arguments, and evidence that differ from our own initial political beliefs makes us less open-minded and less likely to find common ground with our political opponents, and thus only intensifies political divisiveness and conflict.

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[23] Lord, Ross, and Lepper, "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization," 2099.
[24] Lord et al., 2099.

Merely exposing Casey to arguments and evidence supporting the existence of global climate change and Landry to arguments and evidence that deny the existence of global climate change would not lead to a more fair and cooperative deliberation between the two of them. Instead, it is more likely that Casey will become more convinced that Landry is wrong for affirming global climate change's existence. Similarly, it is more likely that Landry will believe that Casey is wrong for denying global climate change's existence. This result will not be conducive to getting Casey and Landry to respect each other's views and work toward an agreed-upon position regarding what action, if any, should be taken by our society concerning global climate change.

The Introspection Illusion

Considering the pernicious effects of motivated reasoning on forming political beliefs, we might be tempted to think that an effective intervention to lessen our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning would be to educate ourselves about motivated reasoning, and in turn, evaluate our reasoning about politics in light of empirical studies. We might think, "Casey and Landry need to learn about motivated reasoning!" Upon learning about motivated reasoning, they could introspect about their reasoning process to detect instances in which they are engaged in motivated reasoning. This knowledge could aid in making them less susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning in future deliberations. Unfortunately, according to Emily Pronin, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee Ross, it turns out that education about bias and

introspection is an insufficient means for us to learn to detect better and lessen our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning.[25] Their argument relies on what they call the introspection illusion.

Pronin et al. discuss an asymmetry in how we think about our cognition and the cognition of other people, and this asymmetry relates to what they call the introspection illusion. In describing this asymmetry, Pronin et al. contend, "we tend to treat our own introspections as something of a gold standard in assessing why we have responded in a particular manner and whether our judgments have been tainted by bias." We see our beliefs as being influenced by objective concerns and our reasoning as free from bias. "By contrast, we treat the introspections of other actors as merely another source of plausible hypotheses—to be accepted or rejected as a function of their plausibility in light of what we know about the particular actor and about human behavior in general."[26] We tend to see beliefs that differ from our own as the result of bias and self-serving concerns on the part of the other person, and this judgment comes from our knowledge about how humans can be biased in their reasoning.

This asymmetry renders introspection an inadequate means of discovering instances of engagement in motivated reasoning in our belief formation processes. In clarifying this point, Pronin et al. attest that most people "do not claim to be immune

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[25] Emily Pronin, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee Ross, "Objectivity in the Eye of the Beholder: Divergent Perceptions of Bias in Self Versus Others," *Psychology Review* 111, no. 3 (2004): 781-799.
[26] Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross, "Objectivity in the Eye of the Beholder," 784.

to wishful thinking, overconfidence, defensiveness, and a host of other inferential and judgmental failings; we just don't recognize that we are succumbing to them in any particular assessment we are currently making…"[27] Thus, we can possess knowledge of motivated reasoning, know that we are capable of engaging in motivated reasoning, and yet not detect its presence in the processes of our belief formation. As Pronin et al. state, "Although people can accurately report on the *contents* of their thoughts and deliberations, the psychological *processes* and the true determinants of their behavior are often inaccessible to introspection."[28] This phenomenon is referred to as the introspection illusion because the faith that we tend to have in introspection to render our cognitive processes transparent to ourselves is misplaced.

If Casey and Landry educated themselves on the phenomena of motivated reasoning and used introspection to discover when they are engaged in motivated reasoning, it would most likely lead them to become more confident in their ability to engage in unbiased deliberation and that confidence would be misplaced. At the same time, they are more likely to become less confident in the ability of the other to similarly engage in unbiased deliberation and such confidence would be misplaced. Moreover, it is quite possible that they could become more confident that the other is engaged in motivated reasoning when disagreeing with them about global climate change. In the end, we should not be too surprised if becoming educated about

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[27] Pronin, Gilovich, and Ross, "Objectivity in the Eye of the Beholder," 783-784.
[28] Pronin et al., 784.

motivated reasoning only increased the degree of polarization between Casey and

Landry and decreased the likelihood of productive dialogue between the two of them.

Defining Biased Political Cognition

Thus far, we have explored manifestations of what I am calling biased

political cognition, but I have yet to define what I mean by *biased* for the purposes of

this dissertation. Well, keep your chickens in the barnyard because I will offer a

sketch of what I intend to mean for an instance of political cognition to be biased. I

will largely be drawing from Dan Kahan's account of ideologically motivated

cognition in my sketch of biased political cognition, as it allows me to characterize

bias in a way that shows it to be problematic for a flourishing democracy in a

pluralistic society. Kahan "identifies ideologically motivated cognition as a form of

information processing that promotes individuals' interests in forming and

maintaining beliefs that signify their loyalty to important affinity groups."[29] Affinity

groups include political affiliations with shared ideological commitments and social

identity groups with shared cultural commitments. For example, let us consider

Landry, who identifies as politically liberal and sees themselves as belonging to the

"liberal" political community. When Landry processes information about political

issues, whether it be scientific evidence or the perspectives of those whom they

disagree with (such as Casey), in ways that form and maintain the beliefs held by

liberals that signify their loyalty to liberals, they are engaged in ideologically

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[29] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 407.

motivated cognition. Landry is biased in that they form identity-congruent assessments of information pertinent to political issues and perspectives on political issues different from their own. This bias is a form of information-processing suited to promoting the interest that Landry has in conveying their membership in and loyalty to affinity groups central to their well-being (in this case liberals).[30] Let us consider this way of understanding bias with respect to Landry and global climate change. Say that Landry comes across a new climate change study whose findings largely support the current scientific consensus, but casts some doubt on the severity of the changes in climate to be expected in the coming years. When Landry processes the information in the study, let us say that they do so in a manner that maintains beliefs held by liberals about global climate change: Landry concludes they have further evidence that global climate change exists and drastic action must be taken to avert or at least reduce the severity of the coming climate collapse. While evidence in this study can be summoned to support this conclusion, Landry seems to overlook, or at least not give much weight in their reasoning to, the information in the study that casts doubt on the severity of the coming crisis. Landry may be inclined to process the information in the study in this biased manner because maintaining the belief that the coming crisis is severe and drastic action must be taken shows their membership in and loyalty to the "liberal" community. To express doubt of this liberal position could be perceived as a lack of loyalty to the liberal ideology by both Landry and other liberals.

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[30] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 418.

To assert that an instance of political cognition is biased is to assume that there are norms that ought to govern political cognition, that there is a normative standard of reasoning that should be followed when reasoning about politics. Our political cognition is biased when it deviates from such norms or otherwise fails to achieve the normative standard. With respect to processing information about political issues that is factual or otherwise evidential, the expected norms of reasoning are norms conducive to truth, such as objectivity and accuracy. For example, political cognition concerning global climate change means deliberating about the facts of global climate change that we have from climate change scientists. When examining those facts, our political cognition should adhere to norms conducive to truth. When Landry processes the information in the climate change study in a manner that confirms the liberal position on global climate change and does not account for the information that casts doubt on the liberal position, Landry fails to be accurate in their political cognition and in this instance is engaged in biased political cognition.

Moreover, political cognition often entails thinking that relies not just on the facts about a political issue, but moral judgments about collective and individual action to be taken in addressing the political issue. Political cognition about global climate change entails deliberation about what ought to be done by each of us and as a society. We have to make judgments that involve a consideration of the value of human and non-human life and the value of future lives. For example, we would need to consider whether or not to focus on saving species in danger of extinction. Also, we would need to ask ourselves, "Should we prioritize protecting humans over

nonhuman animals from the ravages of global climate change being hypothesized by scientists? If so, which human populations should be given the highest priority?" Here our reasoning should be guided by norms of reasoning conducive to achieving the public interest or common good. There are multiple ways we might give an account of the norms of reasoning conducive to the public interest or common good, and we will consider two accounts, one from philosopher Jason Stanley and another from psychologist Joshua Greene, in the next chapter. Though for now, reasoning conducive to the common good should be seen as the normative standard that biased political cognition fails to meet. When individuals process information in a manner that promotes their interests in forming and maintaining beliefs that signify their loyalty to their important affinity groups, their political cognition privileges their self-interest over the public interest and it privileges their affinity groups' political beliefs at the expense of the political beliefs held by individuals belonging to social groups different from their affinity groups. A flourishing democracy's capacity to be inclusive of all its members in achieving the common good is undermined by political cognition that favors self-interest over the public interest and when individuals favor their political and cultural affinity groups over consideration of the many social groups comprising its pluralistic society. With this in mind, unbiased political cogntion is political cognition that as much as humanly possible adheres to norms of reasoning conducive to truth and the common good with respect to political issues.

The Takeaway from Psychological Evidence

Having reviewed the psychological literature on various manifestations of biased political cognition, we might pose questions of the following sort: are all of us equally susceptible to engaging in biased political cognition? Are those of us who are well-meaning, intelligent people who are aware of this phenomenon as vulnerable as others? How often do we engage in biased political cognition when it comes to political beliefs? These are difficult questions for which neither simple yes or no nor quantitative answers can be provided. To even attempt to answer such questions with a high degree of accuracy, the entire adult population would have to be administered tests for all the manifestations of biased political cognition for all of their political beliefs.

Given the impractical nature of such a monumental undertaking, we may feel compelled to settle for extrapolating the results of these and other studies to the entire adult population of our society. While a seemingly practical response, it is not clear how we could extrapolate such results. To put it simply, empirical studies have concluded that in the experiments conducted a certain percentage of participants engaged in the psychological phenomena being examined and a certain percentage did not engage in the phenomena. I say a certain percentage because the exact number varies from study to study and the psychological phenomenon being studied. When extrapolating results, it is not clear how we could know if a particular person should be placed in the group that engages in the phenomenon or the group that does not engage in the phenomenon. If the results of confirmation bias studies are being extrapolated to Casey and Landry, how could it be determined if Casey or Landry fall

into the group that engaged in confirmation bias or the one that did not? Without testing everyone, it is not clear how there could be an accurate means of extrapolating the results.

Now, let us consider what might happen if Casey and Landry claim that because they are well-meaning, intelligent people they are highly unlikely to be vulnerable to engaging in biased political cognition. It is not clear what they intend by such a claim. When examining the results of psychological studies, we do not come across any studies suggesting that participants who regard themselves as well-meaning and intelligent are less likely to engage in the phenomenon being studied. A study with this result would be of much interest, as such a result could aid in developing a way to ameliorate our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. The most likely reason for why there are no studies that neither confirm nor deny that such characteristics have a bearing on our susceptibility is because researchers have not conducted tests with this variable in mind. Until such empirical data becomes available, we cannot conclude if our self-assessment of ourselves as intelligent and well-meaning is relevant or irrelevant to gauging our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

Though, even if such data existed, we should be skeptical of the findings. A self-assessment of us as well-meaning and intelligent is one that we would most likely conduct via introspection. Given the results from Pronin et al. about the introspection illusion, the reliability of this sort of self-assessment is questionable. As Pronin et al. explain, while we can accurately report the *contents* of our reasoning,

our cognitive *processes* are inaccessible to introspection. As such, we should question how we could know that us being well-meaning and intelligent impacts our cognitive processes in a way that reduces our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Another way to understand this point is in relation to the distinction between System 1 and System 2 cognition. An assessment of us as well-meaning and intelligent relies on System 2 cognition, whereas the mechanisms responsible for biased political cognition can occur at the level of System 1. Given the significant differences in these types of cognition, System 2 cognition would not be of much help at informing us about our System 1 cognition.

Considering the difficulties in completely ruling out the possibility that we do not engage in biased political cognition, it would be reasonable for us to seriously consider the possibility that we are susceptible to engaging in biased political cognition. Furthermore, it would be reasonable to explore the possibility that in certain instances we do engage and have in the past engaged in biased political cognition when forming our political beliefs and engaging in public discourse with others. Most importantly, given the necessity of cooperative, equitable deliberation to a flourishing democracy's capacity to effectively respond to ethically pressing political issues and biased political cognition's capacity to undermine such deliberation, the possibility we might be engaging in biased political cognition demands our serious attention.

Given the above discussion of biased political cognition, we may ask, where does this leave us concerning ameliorating our susceptibility?[31] I think two conclusions are definite at this point: (1) a simple, straightforward means of reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition does not exist—it is not a matter of merely educating ourselves about diverse perspectives or the psychological phenomena in question—and (2) an adequate practical response to biased political cognition necessitates a broader focus beyond merely revising individual beliefs (one at a time) that have been formed through an engagement in biased political cognition. The mechanisms responsible for the psychological phenomena discussed in this analysis operate in cognitive processes that underlie belief formation, and thus an adequate practical response needs to account for this feature of biased political cognition. Having particular beliefs as the focal point of our practical response is too shallow and narrow of a focus.

Two focal points are needed: us ourselves—our desires, motivations, and dispositions that impact the cognitive processes used in belief formation—and our social relationships that nurture our desires, motivations, and dispositions. Falling prey to motivated reasoning and the introspection illusion manifest as deeply ingrained habits of thought in the person that displays instances of them. As such, in

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[31] It should be noted that in this chapter I have not scrutinized the psychological experiments, nor the inferences made by psychologists. While this is something that should be done at some point, I will not be doing it in this dissertation and will leave it to a later work. For the sake of the arguments I will be making in later chapters, I am simply assuming that the inferences are correct. As a result, I do realize that I am asking the reader to put a lot of faith into what the psychologists claim that their studies show, but I am hoping the reader will bear with me.

some sense, a transformation in the person and how they are disposed to form political beliefs and participate in public discourse is needed.

To facilitate this self-transformation, the social relationships supporting the habituation of biased political cognition also need to be transformed as well.[32] The impetus for this suggestion comes from Kahan's argument that the goal of protecting our identity and standing within a social group that shares fundamental values can lead to biased political cognition. If we are less likely to be motivated by accuracy (concerning ideological conflicts over facts for which there is empirical evidence) or the public interest (concerning issues affecting various stakeholders) because doing so could damage our vital social connections, then we should consider the nature of our vital social connections. We should ask, "Could my important social connections become ones that incentivize and reward my being motivated by accuracy and the common good concerning politics?" In the coming chapter on friendship, my aim will be to show how philosophical accounts of friendship from Aristotle and Alexander Nehamas show us that is possible for us to foster relationships characterized by reciprocated love, intimacy, and trust that nurture open-mindedness to diverse perspectives, equal consideration of available evidence, and fairness to those that disagree with us.

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[32] Although integral to more fully responding to the problematic features of biased political cognition, consideration of social structural transformation is beyond the scope of this chapter and should be considered a future avenue of analysis and research.

Before moving on to discussing friendship, let us consider responses from philosophers that grapple with the psychological phenomena I have been calling biased political cognition, as thus far we have only considered the work of psychologists and cognitive scientists. Examination of philosophical responses will not only deepen our understanding of how biased political cognition undermines a flourishing democracy, but it will also bring to light the limitations of these responses, thereby strengthening my case that friendship is a plausible, practical response to ameliorating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition and promoting a flourishing democracy.

Chapter 2 – Recent Philosophical Accounts of Biased Political Cognition

Introduction

From psychology and cognitive science research discussed in the previous chapter, we see that social identity and political ideology significantly bias our political cognition and thereby corrode an equitable, cooperative public discourse that is required for a flourishing democracy. A democracy cannot flourish when its participants struggle to engage in an equitable deliberation over pressing, contentious matters of public interest in a manner that genuinely recognizes the intelligibility and legitimacy of diverse perspectives held within their pluralistic society. This point will be more sharply illuminated in this chapter as we examine recent philosophical accounts of biased political cognition from philosopher Jason Stanley (*How Propaganda Works*) and philosopher/psychologist Joshua Greene (*Moral Tribes*).[33] While Stanley's account scrutinizes the role biased political cognition plays in

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[33] Stanley and Greene are not the only philosophers whose work responds to the psychological phenomena that I have been calling biased political cognition. Philosophers working in the fields of virtue epistemology and epistemic injustice examine the role that psychological phenomena, such as motivated reasoning and implicit bias, play in intellectual vices, such as intellectual close-mindedness, dogmatism, and arrogance, and the epistemic exclusion and oppression of minorities. Two notable and influential accounts are those from Miranda Fricker in *Epistemic Injustice* and Jose Medina in *The Epistemology of Resistance*. A future avenue for extending the analysis in this dissertation would be to explore the connections with the work being done in virtue epistemology and epistemic injustice. I am presently focused on the Stanley and Greene's accounts, as their work most directly relates to how I have framed my discussion of motivated reasoning in two critical ways: (1) similar psychological literature is used in constructing their philosophical accounts and (2) both their and my understanding of the problems arising for politics from these psychological phenomena do not rely on notions of intellectual vice or epistemic injustice.

perpetuating the exclusion of minority perspectives in our public discourse, Greene's account underscores the role of biased political cognition in obstructing cooperative deliberation among politically diverse groups concerning contentious political issues.

In these accounts, we find proposals aimed at diminishing the pernicious effects of biased political cognition on public discourse. I will argue that though these proposals provide us with goals we should aspire to achieve in public discourse, they provide limited practical guidance for achieving them. The main practical limitation that I will highlight concerns adequately addressing needed changes to the social contexts and conditions that support the perpetuation and habituation of engagement in biased political cognition. These proposals tend to place their primary focus on particular reasoning patterns that are characteristic of engagement in biased political cognition.[34] However, as we learned in the last chapter, engagement in biased political cognition does not occur in a social vacuum: protecting our social status and ensuring our inclusion in social groups central to our well-being is integral to our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Given this understanding of biased political cognition, I contend that proposals aimed at reducing our susceptibility would be more effective in practice if they addressed how to counteract

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[34] For example, as we will see later in this chapter with Greene's proposal, there is a focus on individuals overcoming their automatic tendency to engage in intuitive thinking when participating in political discourse and a recommendation that people engage in active deliberation, in particular, utilitarian thinking about politics. While an intriguing proposal, it provides insufficient attention to how our social relationships encourage intuitive thinking and how the nature of our social relationships should change to encourage the kind of utilitarian thinking he recommends.

the social pressures and conditions that make it conducive to our self-interest to engage in biased political cognition. By highlighting this oversight in recent philosophical accounts, I aim to motivate the consideration of friendship as a beneficial practical aid for mitigating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, as this will be the central topic in the forthcoming chapters.

Biased Political Cognition and Social Injustice

In *How Propaganda Works*, philosopher Jason Stanley investigates the prominent role of self-interest in political thought and how this undermines an equitable public discourse.[35] He examines the connection between being engaged in

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[35] By equitable public discourse, I mean discourse that is fair to all cooperating members of society, regardless of their social identity (race, gender, class, etc.). An equal respect for the perspective of everyone subject to the issue under debate guides equitable public discourse. Equitable public discourse entails the inclusion of and responsiveness to the diverse political perspectives found in a pluralistic society. I follow philosopher Elizabeth Anderson on why inclusion and responsiveness is necessary for a democracy's public discourse: "Most of the problems democracies are asked to solve are complex, and have asymmetrically distributed effects on individuals according to their geographic location, social class, occupation, education, gender, age, race, and so forth. Since individuals are most familiar with the effects of problems and policies on themselves and those close to them, information about these effects is also asymmetrically distributed. Surely an important part of the case for the epistemic merits of democracy rests on its ability to pool this asymmetrically distributed information about the effects of problems and policies so as to devise solutions that are responsive to everyone's concerns. We therefore need a model of democracy in which its epistemic success is a product of its ability to take advantage of the epistemic diversity of individuals." See Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3:1-2 (2006), 11. In the final section of this chapter, I will expand upon what equitable discourse would like using our running example of Casey and Landry.

motivated reasoning when deliberating about political issues and the perpetuation of social injustices, such as racism. Stanley focuses on instances where language associated with democracy and autonomy are used in a manner that conceals a thoroughly undemocratic reality of political and economic inequality. A running example Stanley employs in his discussion concerns characterizations of welfare and blacks in America. There are Americans that describe the United States as a democracy with equality of opportunity and as a meritocracy, where intelligence, skill, and hard work primarily determine an individual's economic success. It is not uncommon for Americans who describe America in this manner to then explain the existence of welfare recipients as people who choose not to work hard and take advantage of opportunities. These people's lack of success is the result of laziness, and their inferior status within the social hierarchy is a result of their actions, and thus, their social position is just.[36]

Over the past several decades, through public and private political discussions and the media, this view of welfare recipients has been repeatedly associated with blacks to the point that now in our public discourse it is not uncommon for the term "welfare" to connote a lazy black person for many Americans. For example, the stereotype of the Cadillac driving welfare queen is still active in our political imagination. We have internalized such stereotypes in our political thinking to the point that even when confronted with factual counterevidence that many welfare

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[36] Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 156-158.

recipients are white, and many welfare recipients are victims of economic

circumstances beyond their control, this association of "welfare" with blacks and

laziness nonetheless persists in our society. As such, democratic ideals attached to a

false racial stereotype help to perpetuate and normalize the political and economic

marginalization of blacks.[37]

One thing that stands out for Stanley in this example is how this political

belief about welfare and blacks often resists revision in light of evidence proving that

it is false. To frame this concern with respect to the motivated reasoning literature

previously discussed, we can say that people holding this belief may be motivated by

accuracy, but another competing motivation wins out when they are processing

information related to this belief. As it is often privileged folks that hold such a belief

about welfare, the motivation guiding political cognition here is likely the

justification and legitimization of their privilege. As Stanley contends, "Because our

ideologies are guided by a desire to retain a sense of normalcy, especially when

normalcy is pleasant, they characteristically lead to beliefs that are connected to one's

positive self-image."[38] Believing welfare recipients are "lazy blacks" (as opposed to

believing they are the victims of economic inequality) can justify the economic

advantages enjoyed by privileged folks as legitimate (as opposed to believing their

advantages are a result of economic inequality). The probable engagement in

motivated reasoning in this instance is ethically problematic because such political

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[37] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 158-163.
[38] Stanley, 184.

beliefs help to maintain racial inequalities, and thus undermine an accurate public

discourse that fairly represents blacks.[39] It would be rather challenging (if not

impossible) to deliberate about welfare in our society in a racially inclusive manner if

many of us implicitly reason in a racist manner about welfare.[40]

Stanley's central explanation for political beliefs that resist rational revision is

that such beliefs are often connected to our social identity. Stanley illuminates the

problematic nature of ideology and social identity in a manner that parallels our

preceding discussion of motivated reasoning:

> One main source of the unrevisability of certain beliefs is that they are
> connected to *social practices*. The beliefs are ones that I need to have to
> remain in those practices. Following Dan Kahan, I will argue that one central
> source of ideological beliefs is our social identities. We value our social
> identities. Social identities are constituted by the practices and habits in which
> we engage; those we engage with are our community. We must at least act as
> if certain propositions are true in order to engage in those practices. To
> abandon those beliefs is to abandon certain practices and habits that constitute
> our social identity. To abandon these beliefs is therefore to abandon one's
> community, to leave everyone with whom you identify behind.[41]

Think back to when we discussed why Casey and Landry would be hesitant to hold a

belief about global climate change that challenges the prevailing belief in their

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[39] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 178-181.

[40] It might not be evident why Stanley's emphasis is primarily about language. In examining propaganda as problematic for a democracy, a central topic is how language employed in propaganda undermines productive deliberation in our democracy. In this case, the racist social meaning that has come to be associated with the term "welfare" undermines productive deliberation about our welfare system and racial inequality. Such racist social meanings in effect become obstacles to the realization of democratic ideals of inclusion and equality. For more, see Chapter 4, "Language as a Mechanism of Control" in *How Propaganda Works.*

[41] Stanley, 185-186.

respective social spheres.[42] Stanley's explanation captures well the difficultly Casey and Landry would face if their beliefs about global climate change were to be revised in light of the evidence. For Casey to successfully engage with their community, they must act as if global climate change is not real, and for Landry to successfully engage with their community, they must act as if global climate change is real. It could be detrimental to their self-interest to revise such beliefs about global climate change, as it could lead them to become disengaged from their community that is central to their social identity.

For Stanley, political beliefs that resist revision are not in themselves necessarily beyond rational consideration. We may perhaps retrospectively catch ourselves having reasoned or acted based on such beliefs. Nonetheless, merely recognizing them after the fact is insufficient to change how those beliefs shape our intuitive reasoning and guide our judgments in public discourse in real-time. In real-time, such ethically harmful ideological beliefs can be habituated implicit assumptions, a result of acculturation in a society with structural injustice, and as a function of our identity are integral to how we understand ourselves and relate to others in the world.[43] In other words, such reasoning tendencies are often beyond our awareness in real-time,[44] and we do not easily detect our engagement in them. Any

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[42] See Chapter 1, pgs. 13-14.
[43] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 197.
[44] With the term *real-time* concerning our cognition, I mean its standard definition: the actual time during which one's political cognition takes place. At the actual moment that we are forming a judgment when engaged in political discourse, it is challenging to be aware of the psychological mechanisms influencing our reasoning,

practical response aimed at reducing our susceptibility must keep in mind this feature

of an engagement in biased political cognition.

While we all have political beliefs that are connected to our social identity and

the community we are rooted in, this connection alone does not make those political

beliefs inherently problematic for ensuring a public discourse that is fair and

responsive to all participants. Instead, such beliefs become problematic if they

prevent us from perceiving significant parts of social reality (such as the oppression

of marginalized groups).[45] Our inability to perceive social reality leads to a further

problem. Stanley contends that adherence to self-serving political beliefs "becomes

democratically problematic when it affects political judgment about policies that

might address the injustices" perpetuated by self-serving political beliefs.[46]

Stanley arouses concern over these issues by discussing them in terms of

legitimizing myths and identity-protective cognition, both of which can be regarded

as manifestations of motivated reasoning. Legitimizing myths are social expectations

that serve as the "…means by which an ascendant group assigns to themselves

positive social value while representing others as justifiably possessing lower

standing. Without legitimizing myths, hierarchy is merely stratification. With

legitimizing myths, hierarchy becomes grounded in superiority and inferiority and

formal distinctions become laden with norms."[47] These social expectations, which are

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as some of them operate automatically without our awareness, such as motivated
reasoning.
[45] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works,* 182, 202.
[46] Stanley, 182.
[47] Stanley, 195.

familiarly known to us as stereotypes, frame our understanding of the world and our experiences in it. They render the world to be a seemingly well-ordered, knowable, dependable, and comfortable place. As such, attacks on our legitimizing myths— counterevidence that reveals the gaps between our democratic ideals and our undemocratic reality—feel like an attack on the foundations of the world and our life. Nonetheless, by avoiding the pain and discomfort of disillusionment that would come from revising our political beliefs that aid in perpetuating social injustice, we contribute to preserving a desirable situation for privileged groups of people.[48] In other words, for those in privileged groups, maintaining their social identity comes at the expense of disregarding the social justice concerns faced by underprivileged groups.

The need to protect ourselves from perceived attack is also involved in another manifestation of motivated reasoning known as identity-protective cognition. Here Stanley cites Kahan: "Identity-protective cognition is motivated reasoning with the goal of 'affirming one's membership in an important reference group.'"[49] While Stanley disagrees with Kahan's assertion that *all* cases of motivated political reasoning can be explained by identity-protective cognition, Stanley nonetheless believes that it is clear that deep attachment to our social identity has a profound influence on the ideologies that inform our political beliefs and dispositions. This fact in itself is not problematic; instead, what is problematic is holding ideological beliefs

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[48] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 199.
[49] Stanley, 230.

that unjustifiably normalize the exclusion and oppression of those with ideologies that differ from our own.

Let us illustrate these points by considering them with respect to Casey and Landry. Let us imagine that Casey is a petroleum geologist employed by an oil company and living in a city whose economy is primarily supported by the extraction of oil. Additionally, a clear majority of the folks in Casey's community deny the existence of global climate change and strongly disagree with global climate change believers that advocate for policies that will lead to a drastic reduction of oil production. When engaged in public discourse, Casey's reasoning is not explicitly partial to their social identity. Instead, they articulate reasons that are not explicitly related to their social identity by citing evidence that disputes the existence of global climate change.[50]

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[50] The framing of this hypothetical is not entirely speculative on my part. According to science literacy researchers Gale Sinatra, Dorothe Kienhues, and Barbara Hofer, "A sizable body of literature has shown that having a stake in the outcome, self-interest, personal relevance, ego-involvement, or what is more broadly called "vested interest," motivates information processing. The pattern over many studies that explore variations of these constructs indicates that the presence of 'meaningful personal consequences' related to the issue significantly increases the predictive relationship between attitudes and behaviors. Not surprisingly, when individuals perceive a direct personal consequence of supporting or not supporting a policy, they tend to behave in a manner consistent with those consequences. To consider how this influences perceptions of science, individuals whose livelihood depends on oil production would be considered to have a vested interest in climate policy that influences the industry and are expected to be less likely to support a policy they perceive as unfavorable to their livelihood." See "Addressing Challenges to Public Understanding of Science: Epistemic Cognition, Motivated Reasoning, and Conceptual Change," *Educational Psychologist* 49, no. 2 (2014): 123-138.

Nonetheless, given that Casey's way of life and community's survival depends on oil production, it is plausible that Casey, even though they might not be aware of doing so, deliberates about global climate change in a manner where the motivation to protecting these aspects of their identity wins out over the motivation to be accurate. At the same time, we can see how Casey coming to believe in the existence of global climate change would bring about pain and discomfort for it challenges integral aspects of their identity. Moreover, publicly voicing such a belief could threaten their status within their community: how would Casey reconcile believing in the existence of global climate change with their career choice? How would Casey retain their emotional support network if they come to believe that oil production should be severely curtailed? These would be gut-wrenching questions to answer, and it is plausible that avoiding such painful questions unknowingly guides Casey's reasoning concerning their beliefs about global climate change.

At the same time, let us imagine that Landry's family lives in a coastal town and has lived there for several generations, and this town's residents are projected to be dislocated by rising sea levels in the future. Most people in Landry's community believe that global climate change is real and is the reason their community will eventually be displaced. As such, most of the town's residents actively favor enacting policies that reduce fossil fuel production in the hopes of minimizing global climate change's effects on their community and other communities expected to be displaced by rising sea levels in the future. When engaged in public discourse with Casey, Landry does not provide reasons that are explicitly motivated by protecting their

identity when arguing for the existence of global climate change. Rather, Landry provides reasons that make use of evidence from studies conducted by climatologists.

Nonetheless, given that global climate change threatens Landry's family and community's survival, it is plausible that Landry, even though they might not be aware of doing so, deliberates about global climate change in a manner where the motivation to protect these aspects related to their identity wins out over the motivation to be accurate. Like Casey, Landry revising their belief about global climate change could similarly challenge their identity and status within their community: if Landry were to come to believe that global climate change is not real, then how is Landry to maintain their emotional support network, especially when all of Landry's meaningful connections believe global climate change will devastate their community? This similarly would be a gut-wrenching question to answer, and it is plausible that avoiding such a painful question unknowingly guides Casey's reasoning concerning their beliefs about global climate change.

Despite Casey and Landry's intentions to deliberate with one another about global climate change in a manner that is fair to each other's perspective, it is plausible that each face, without their awareness, the pressure to reason in ways that are not fair to each other's perspective. Also, when they do so, such bias preserves their identity and status within the communities they are rooted in. While this self-interested reasoning is understandable, it is nonetheless problematic: If each is primarily motivated by protecting their own social identities, how are Casey and Landry to arrive at a decision that fairly represents each other's perspective and is

inclusive of both their self-interests? Moreover, if what is happening in this example for Casey and Landry can be extrapolated to some of the deep disagreements that persist when deliberating about many of the pressing political issues that face our society, how can our democracy flourish? Hopefully, it is now evident that we cannot expect a democracy to flourish under such conditions, and that we should aim to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.[51]

In this account of ideologically motivated reasoning, the importance of social conditions and pressures that maintain our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning comes into clear focus: our vital social relationships can unknowingly encourage our susceptibility to being motivated by ideological commitments that maintain our membership in and loyalty to our social groups, and discourage, albeit not intentionally, our being primarily motivated by accuracy and the common good. If indispensable to our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition is our self-interested need to maintain our vital social relationships (our emotional support network), then this aspect of biased political cognition should push us to think more deeply about the nature of our significant social relationships. In particular, we should wonder what kinds of social relationships would be needed to encourage us to be more motivated by accuracy and the common good and help to discourage us from being motivated by ideological commitments and partisan interests. The relevance of

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[51] This point is made mainly for the benefit of a skeptical reader that might not regard biased political cognition to be as pernicious to a flourishing democracy as I believe it to be. I hope that most readers could agree on this point and are looking forward to the forthcoming discussion on how to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

this suggestion will become clear later when I highlight an oversight in Stanley's proposal for reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition and propose close friendship as the social context needed to encourage our being motivated by fairness, accuracy, and the common good.

Recent Proposals for Mitigating Our Engagement in Biased Political Cognition

Beyond explaining various manifestations of biased political cognition that hinder a flourishing democracy, there are proposals for how a democratic society should respond to evidence of its participants' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. We will consider proposals offered by Jason Stanley and Joshua Greene. Having characterized instances of us engaging in biased political cognition as undermining an equitable, cooperative public discourse, in response, both Stanley and Green articulate theoretical ideals for fostering a public discourse indicative of a flourishing democracy. These theoretical ideals provide clear goals and appropriate standards to aim for as we seek to mitigate our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. These ideals provide a benchmark for assessing our success and failure to reduce our susceptibility and promote an equitable, cooperative public discourse.

While Stanley and Greene articulate ideals to strive for in practice, neither of them articulates the practical means or strategies for achieving their ideals in practice. In other words, if Stanley and Greene were medical doctors, then we could say that they have provided us with a sensible diagnosis of our illness and have provided us a

standard of health, but they have not explained what we would need to do to achieve that healthy state. Concerning the ideals they articulate, we could still ask, "How do we successfully practice such ideals in real-time while participating in public deliberation?" Moreover, we could ask, "What social conditions or relationships are conducive to our attainment of such ideals in practice?" This question is significant, as it has been noted that our current social relationships are ones that can support our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. As such, Stanley and Greene are useful to our discussion since they help us to understand what ideals we need to aim for in seeking to reduce our susceptibility, but the practical means for achieving these ideals and the social conditions that facilitate their achievement remain open questions in need of attention. Before turning to these pertinent questions in the final two chapters, let us acquire a sense of the ideals we should strive for in political deliberation in public discourse and a more precise sense of the limitations to their formulations.

Standards of Impartiality

In *How Propaganda Works*, Jason Stanley regards motivated reasoning about politics (in particular, its close connection to our identity), as a failure to be impartial in our reasoning about politics. As such, he proposes standards of impartiality for deliberation in political forums.[52] For Stanley, political forums include not only formal political discussions within the government, universities, or the media, but

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[52] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 82.

everyday conversations about politics between participants in a democracy.[53] These

standards of impartiality are theoretical rationality, practical rationality, and

reasonableness.[54] As we discuss each standard, we will raise concerns about

achieving each standard in practice.

For expressions of political beliefs to meet the standard of theoretical

rationality, they must be "legitimately justified claims (ones 'backed up by evidence')

that contribute to the rational resolution of the debate."[55] As an example, Stanley

considers deliberation over whether or not to invade Iraq was the right decision. A

belief contributing to such a discussion would meet the requirement of theoretical

rationality if it were "justified and provided evidence for or against the wisdom of

invading Iraq."[56] Additionally, theoretical rationality is not merely met by providing

rational contributions to a debate, but such beliefs must also be rational contributions

that appeal to our rational faculties. Instances where a rational contribution appeals to

nonrational faculties (such as our passions) tend to end rational debate on a topic.

Here, Stanley has in mind polemic rhetoric, which often uses rational claims to

purposefully evoke strong emotional responses and thus effectively end rational

deliberation between the present deliberating parties.

Concerning the reduction of our susceptibility to engage in motivated

reasoning, this standard is of little aid in practice, as engagement in motivated

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[53] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 88.
[54] Stanley, 94.
[55] Stanley, 94.
[56] Stanley, 95.

reasoning does not always violate Stanley's conception of theoretical rationality. When engaged in motivated reasoning, we often do provide claims backed up by evidence that contribute to the rational resolution of the debate, and we do so in a manner that appeals to the rational faculties of those with whom we are engaged in public discourse. To understand this point, it is helpful to recall Kunda's account of motivated reasoning from the previous chapter[57]: "people motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion attempt to be rational and construct a justification of their desired conclusion that would persuade a dispassionate observer. They draw the desired conclusion only if they can muster up the evidence necessary to support it."[58] Engagement in motivated reasoning entails rational justification by us mustering up necessary evidence and appeals to rational faculties by us aiming to persuade a dispassionate observer. Thus, exhorting us to express political beliefs that meet the standard of theoretical rationality does not necessarily reduce our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning.

Stanley's account could overcome this objection if he means something more nuanced than is immediately evident by the term "legitimately" when he writes "legitimately justified claims." We could grant that even though when engaged in motivated reasoning our claims are backed up by evidence and appeal to rational faculties, our claims are not legitimately justified if directional goals related to our social identity and ideological commitments have significantly guided the reasoning

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[57] See pages 14-18 for the details of Kunda's account of motivated reasoning.
[58] Kunda, "The Case for Motivated Reasoning," 482-483.

for them, notably if such directional goals inhibited our ability to be impartial. If this is the case, then legitimacy here would involve more than mere rational justification and appeal to rational faculties. I think it could be fair to assume that this might be the case given Stanley's explanation of the next standard of impartiality, practical rationality.

Stanley asserts that impartiality requires that political deliberation should be "guided by reasons that bear on whether or not a particular policy is *for the common good*, or *in the public interest*."[59] In other words, the common good and the public interest should be primary directional goals guiding political cognition in public discourse. Satisfying this norm requires practical rationality, a form of means-end reasoning where, given a goal, we consider the most rational way to achieve said goal, in light of our beliefs.[60] As stated, such reasoning does not rule out expressions of self-interest in public discourse. To ensure impartiality in such a process, given it would be near impossible to completely remove our self-interest from our reasoning process, Stanley proposes that expressions of self-interest only be regarded as "relevant insofar as they bear on reasons that are compelling to all. The impartialist conception of public reason forces the elimination of any claim that has its source in

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[59] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 97.

[60] Though Stanley does not explicitly mention the following point in his account, it can be assumed from the context of where this idea is explained that means-end reasoning also requires reasoning *about* ends, in particular, ends that are in the common interest. Relatedly, Stanley never specifies what is meant by *rational* in this point, though in preceding passages rational contributions to public discourse are discussed as being claims that are backed up by evidence. Thus, practical rationality entails the consideration of proposals that are supported by evidence.

self-interest that does not contribute to impartial reasons."[61] This exclusion is significant because claims that are self-interested, but do not contribute to impartial reasons, are often the type of claims used by particular groups in illegitimate attempts to gain political power. As an example, Stanley asks us to imagine a senator seeking to receive a campaign contribution from an oil company and thus gives a speech endorsing a piece of legislation that will benefit that oil company. For those of us not benefiting from the campaign donation, the reasons provided by the senator in their speech are ones coming from their self-interest in a way that fails to meet the impartialist norm of public reason; they are reasons that could not be compelling to us because we are not the ones to benefit from the campaign contribution.[62]

For Stanley, the ability to provide reasons compelling to all involves supplying reasons that would be intelligible from the position of anyone in society. The reasoning must be inclusive of the many different ideologies (religious, cultural, and political) that one finds in a pluralistic society as our own. To this end, Stanley invokes Rawls' conception of *reasonableness*. For Rawls, we are reasonable when, among other participants in public discourse, we are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. These are terms we regard as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore as justifiable to all of us. At the same time, all of us are ready to discuss the fair terms that others propose.[63] This standard reflects a

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[61] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 98.
[62] Stanley, 98-99.
[63] Stanley, 104.

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commitment to cooperation, negotiation, and empathizing with those whose beliefs and worldviews are different from our own.

Regarding reducing our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning, practical rationality and reasonableness are practically useful standards. They focus on a central feature of motivated reasoning that corrodes equitable, cooperative public discourse: our tendency to be motivated by directional goals related to our social identity and ideological commitments in a manner that significantly inhibits our ability to be impartial. These standards are practically useful in that they do not expect us to sanitize ourselves of political cognition related to the interest we have in conveying our membership in and loyalty to affinity groups central to our well-being. As social creatures that derive significant meaning from our social connections, it would be impractical to expect us to rid ourselves of all political cognition influenced by our social identity. Thus, it is more feasible to encourage us to examine the influence of our social identity on our political cognition and to frame our contributions to public discourse stemming from our social nature in a manner that provides reasons that would be intelligible to all participants and that has a bearing on the common good.

Let us apply these points to our scenario with Casey and Landry. Practical rationality and reasonableness do not require their participation in public discourse about global climate change to be sanitized of expressions of their self-interested motivation to convey membership in and loyalty to their community. Casey is not expected to deliberate with Landry in a way where their reasoning is uninfluenced by

their self-interested motivation to protect the economic viability of their community supported by oil production. Similarly, Landry is not expected to deliberate with Casey in a way where their reasoning is uninfluenced by their self-interested motivation to protect their community from the predicted devastation of global climate change. Instead, both Casey and Landry should actively seek to uncover when this motivation of their political cognition has a bearing on their contributions to deliberations on global climate change. More importantly, they are to be sure to frame their contributions in a manner that has a bearing on the public interest and promoting the common good.

For example, if Landry was to express their political belief about global climate change's existence as not just being based on scientific evidence, but arising out of concern for the many communities across the United States that will be displaced by rising sea levels and extreme weather events, then such a reason could be seen by Casey as intelligible and having a bearing on the common good. When framed in this manner, it is not just Landry's community that has a stake in this issue, but many other communities as well.

Similarly, Casey's concerns about their community being economically devastated by a severe reduction of fossil fuel emissions could be framed as a public interest concern for the viability and stability of all the folks whose livelihood and communities are supported by the fossil fuel industry. Casey could further insist that any policy decision regarding global climate change needs to account for those economically displaced by a drastic reduction in fossil fuel consumption. Likewise,

Landry can insist that any policy decision needs to fairly account for those whose communities will be displaced by the changing climate. In this manner, both Casey and Landry account for the possible engagement in motivated reasoning and do so in a way that is more conducive to equitable, cooperative public discourse.[64]

Nonetheless, there remains an important question: even if Casey and Landry successfully frame their political beliefs about global climate change as having reasons that bear on the common good and the public interest, how do Casey and Landry deliberate with one another in a manner that is fair to one another? How do they come to understand each other's perspective as intelligible and legitimate? In other words, how does Casey decide on policy on global climate change in a manner that is fair to Landry's perspective? Similarly, how does Landry decide on policy on global climate change in a manner that is fair to Casey's perspective?

Relatedly, what sort of social context for political deliberation is needed to facilitate Casey and Landry deeply understanding one another's perspective to such a degree that they can genuinely be inclusive of one another's perspective in their reasoning about policy decisions regarding global climate change? Answers to these questions cannot be found in Stanley's conception of impartiality, and in all fairness, exceed the scope of Stanley's examination. Nonetheless, it is a relevant practical consideration for reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. It

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[64] I should note that this example is meant to illustrate how Stanley's points relate to achieving a more equitable, cooperative public discourse and should not be mistaken as a full account of how to achieve an equitable, cooperative public discourse; more on this topic will be discussed later in the chapter.

is these sorts of questions that underlie my argument in the next chapter that the intimacy of close friendship should be regarded as an important social context for cultivating impartiality in our reasoning about perspectives that differ from our own.

If we share similar commitments with Stanley, we should find ourselves receptive to his analysis of biased political cognition and the goal of impartiality he sets forth. We as well should share a similar sense of urgency to achieve his proposed ideals. To achieve such ideals, we should find it essential to give serious attention to how to move from theory to practice, to strategizing how to enact these ideals in our contributions to public discourse. While Stanley himself does not give sustained attention to this concern, it is worth elaborating on a couple of useful suggestions that Stanley offers us, as they can help with providing some starting points for further consideration.

The first suggestion relates to systematic openness. Stanley contends,

In the face of the complexities we have discussed, perhaps a reasonable way to adhere to ideal deliberative norms, for example, the norm of objectivity, may be to adopt *systematic openness to the possibility that one has been unknowingly swayed by bias*. If so, the mark of a democratic society is one in which participants in debates regularly check themselves for bias, and subject their own beliefs and unthinking use of language to the same critical scrutiny as they do the beliefs and utterances of others.[65]

This requirement of systematic openness should strike us as necessary, especially when considered regarding the introspection illusion. When we fall prey to the introspective illusion, we are partial to our thinking in a way that makes us overconfident about our ability to be free from bias and less confident that others

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[65] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 176.

could be similarly impartial. Stanley's suggestion presses us to be equally vigilant and mindful of our and others' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

Nevertheless, this proposal needs further elaboration concerning how to achieve it in practice. Specifically, given that the psychological phenomena involved in biased political cognition can occur without awareness when participating in public discourse, we can ask, "How do we adopt systematic openness on an intuitive level? How can systematic openness become more of an automatic tendency in our reasoning process when participating in public political deliberation?" Unfortunately, Stanley offers this excellent suggestion at the end of the chapter, and thus, there was not enough room to expound on this sort of practical consideration. Nonetheless, systematic openness is a crucial element of a strategy that aims at reducing our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning. This point serves as part of my motivation for arguing for the necessity of close friendship as a social context for aiding us in habituating impartiality, such that it can become an automatic tendency in our political cognition when participating in public discourse.

Of further interest, there is a point in the above quote that relates to a concern raised in the previous chapter. As mentioned before, one response to the psychological literature is for a well-meaning, intelligent person to sincerely claim they are less susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning and thus do not feel compelled to seek to reduce their susceptibility. Though, for Stanley, it does seem that such a person should still be concerned. As he says above, in a democratic society, each of us must be just as critical in examining our own beliefs for bias as we

are of the beliefs of others. In some sense, a flourishing democracy requires we

equally hold ourselves to the same expectations that we hold others.

Let us turn to a second suggestion Stanley offers about the efficacy of a

psychological strategy targeting individual beliefs of a person on a sort of case-by-

case basis. Stanley argues that because particular ideological beliefs are linked to

social identities and ideologies that are shared by groups of people, it would be

ineffective to focus on changing the individual beliefs of a person. Such a scope is too

narrow, and thus a broader scope of what needs to be changed is required. As Stanley

argues,

> I am skeptical about the search for a psychological strategy individuals can use to "protect themselves" from problematic ideological belief on a case-by-case basis. The distinctive feature of ideological belief often arises from being embedded in a practice together with people like you, your friends, and family. What is needed to eliminate problematic ideological belief is to change the practice of a large group of people simultaneously over time, to alter a social identity people share. It would be hard to see how this would work by assigning to individuals individual psychological curatives to employ.[66]

In light of how our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition in

public discourse is strongly connected to our social identities that are shaped by

systemic features of our culture, it would not make sense for our strategy to reduce

our susceptibility to be merely psychologically focused on individual beliefs. In some

sense, transformation at the level of individuals themselves and their social

relationships is needed. This as well motivates my proposal of close friendship in the

coming chapters, as thinking about friendship pushes us not to be narrowly focused

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[66] Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 186.

on a particular action or belief, but more broadly on our habits of mind and our social relationships influencing our habits of mind. In other words, a consideration of close friendship as an ameliorative social context aims at examining and transforming the social dimensions that facilitate our engagement in biased political cognition.

System 1, System 2, and Utilitarianism

Similar to Stanley, in *Moral Tribes*, Joshua Greene explains the pernicious effects of biased political cognition on public discourse and offers ideals that aim to mitigate such effects. Greene's account of our political cognition centers on the distinction between System 1 and System 2 cognition that we encountered in the previous chapter. In his explanation of this distinction, he uses a camera metaphor: System 1 is called automatic settings, and System 2 is called manual mode. As Greene explains,

> The moral brain's automatic settings are the moral emotions… the gut level instincts that enable cooperation within personal relationships and small groups. Manual mode, in contrast, is a general capacity for practical reasoning that can be used to solve moral problems, as well as other practical problems…moral thinking is shaped by both emotion and reason and how this dual process [works] reflects the general structure of the human mind.[67]

Along with the distinction between System 1 and 2, a central element of Greene's analysis is his assertion that there are two types of contexts in which public political deliberation occurs: (1) between individuals belonging to the same cultural, political, social, and/or religious group and (2) between different cultural, political,

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[67] Joshua Greene, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 15.

social, religious groups. The inability to achieve cooperation and resolution in the first context he terms the *tragedy of the commons*, and the inability to achieve cooperation and resolution in the second context he calls the *tragedy of commonsense morality*.[68] Greene believes the automatic settings (System 1 moral cognition) is an evolutionary adaptation that allows for cooperation between individuals to ensure the survival of the group; automatic settings allow for us to resolve the tragedy of the commons. Further, as an evolutionary adaptation, we find ourselves predisposed to using System 1 cognitive processes in forming political beliefs.[69]

While intuitive moral thinking can achieve cooperation within a group, such thinking undermines cooperation between groups; intuitive moral thinking contributes to the tragedy of commonsense morality. The main reason for this is that groups exhibit incompatible intuitive moralities that lead to incommensurable political judgments and thus significantly inhibit the chances of achieving cooperation and resolution.[70] Considering these points concerning Casey and Landry, we can better understand why consensus regarding political beliefs about global climate change exists within Casey and Landry's respective communities, but deep disagreement arises in deliberation between Casey and Landry. The conservative ideology that pervades Casey's community can be regarded as the intuitive political thought among its members and serves as a strong basis of cooperation for deliberation about global climate change. Similarly, liberal ideology in Landry's community can be regarded as

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[68] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 26.
[69] Greene, 28-65.
[70] Greene, 99.

the intuitive political thought among its members and serves as a strong basis of cooperation for deliberation about global climate change. When Casey and Landry deliberate about global climate change, we see the clash between two incompatible intuitive belief systems and incommensurable political judgments, as Landry decidedly affirms the existence of global climate change and Casey vehemently denies its existence.

Since we cannot rely on our automatic settings when forming political judgments as we deliberate with members of different groups than our own, Greene believes we need to switch into manual mode.[71] Once in manual mode, our political reasoning needs to be guided by what he calls a *metamorality*: "…a moral system that can resolve disagreements among groups with different moral ideals…"[72] For such a moral system to effectively provide the framework for deliberation and cooperation between groups, the moral system must be based on core values that all groups could agree upon.

Greene believes that utilitarianism contains elements of the metamorality we need. He argues that utilitarianism contains two core values whose moral significance could be agreed upon by anyone when thinking in manual mode: impartiality and the capacity for positive and negative experiences. Greene concludes,

> What we've established, first, is that *if all else is equal*, we prefer more happiness to less happiness, not only for ourselves but for others. Secondly, we've established that, when it comes to others, we care not only about the amount of happiness within individuals but also the number of individuals affected. And finally, we've established that we care about the sum happiness

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[71] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 190-208.
[72] Greene, 26.

across individuals, taking into account both the amount of happiness for each person and the number of people affected. *If all else is equal*, we prefer to increase the total amount of happiness across people.[73]

Akin to Stanley, a sense of impartiality that takes the interests of others to be of equal concern to our interests is central to ensuring cooperative, equitable deliberation. Another similarity to Stanley's proposal is the uncertainty of how to achieve such a goal in practice. We should be skeptical of the feasibility of everyone agreeing to a utilitarian framework for deliberating contentious political issues. For example, we could easily imagine that defining happiness (even minimally defined as "positive experience") could prove just as divisive as the political issues that we would be seeking to achieve cooperation on through using a utilitarian framework.[74]

Nonetheless, given our discussion thus far, we can agree with Greene that impartiality and regard for the quality of everyone's life should be guiding ideals for public discourse in a flourishing democracy. However, I have a more foundational concern about Greene's proposal that goes back to the psychological assumptions underlying the distinction between automatic settings (intuition) and manual mode (deliberate reasoning). If we are predisposed to making political judgments based on intuition and habituated dispositions and beliefs, how do we switch from automatic

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[73] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 192.

[74] For example, we could imagine religious folks having a conception of happiness that secular folks would find disagreeable. If a group of conservative Christians believed happiness in a utilitarian framework entailed maximizing to the greatest extent social interactions that accorded with biblical decrees, then we could easily imagine that secular humanists would not only find such a conception of happiness disagreeable, but offensive. It would not be hard to imagine such a debate proving to be as intractable as the abortion debate proves to be between these two groups.

settings to manual mode in real-time? When deliberating with one another about global climate change, how do Casey and Landry switch to manual mode, given they are disposed to forming judgments influenced by their political ideologies and loyalty to their communities? Remember, our goal is to find ways of diminishing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition that could be feasibly practiced by us while engaged in public deliberation about contentious political issues.

In response, Greene asserts, "we can also use our manual mode to override those automatic settings, provided we are aware of the opportunity to do so and motivated to take it."[75] This assertion raises points that need further elaboration in light of psychological realities that already have been established. In real-time, how do we get ourselves to be aware of the need to override our intuitive cognitive machinery that is susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning, especially since the use of such machinery tends to occur automatically without our awareness? Further, in light of deeply held convictions tied to our social identity, how do we get ourselves to be motived to override our automatic settings connected to our social identity and go into manual mode to start deliberating within a utilitarian framework? In other words, how do we counteract influences tied to our motivation to protect our social identity to more reliably reason in terms of accuracy and the common good? My assumption here is that deeply held convictions central to our sense of identity are something not typically nor easily overcome or overridden in real-time.

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[75] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 141.

As Stanley and Kahan have mentioned, it is not reasonable to expect us to abandon our identity or group affiliation. Nor is it reasonable to suddenly expect us, having been habituated to conducting ourselves in public discourse based on intuitive judgments, to easily recognize the need to switch to manual mode and be motivated to do so. These concerns need to be addressed before we can determine if utilitarianism would indeed be a fruitful means for achieving cooperation on resolving pressing, contentious political issues facing our society.

However, Greene's analysis of System 1 cognition does attune us to an important practical consideration. If our habituated beliefs and intuitive judgments can undermine cooperation with groups of people that are different from us, then it seems we should strongly consider changes in our cognitive dispositions that enhance our ability to engage in cooperative deliberation with members of social groups different from ourselves. Concerning the transformation of our cognitive dispositions, we should aim to reduce our reliance on automatic settings, System 1 cognition, and become more disposed to switching to manual mode when participating in public discourse. Relatedly, we should consider the social context of public discourse, in particular, the kinds of social contexts that could enhance deliberation between members of different social groups that disagree about politics. Ideally, it should be a social context that disincentivizes a reliance on automatic settings and encourages us to exhibit impartiality in our reasoning when deliberating with individuals whose political judgments disagree with our own. In forthcoming chapters, I will argue that impartiality in our political cognition can be more effectively developed in the

context of close friendships with people of different social identities and political commitments than our own.

A further concern about Greene's proposed solution is that, in some sense, it seems that Greene believes that when our manual mode overrides the automatic settings that somehow the automatic settings no longer affect the political judgments that are made in manual mode.[76] It is as if we can wholly, or at least to a significant degree, override our intuitions, emotions, and habituated patterns of thought to engage in utilitarian reasoning purely directed by impartiality. Given the psychological literature, it seems such a demand for compartmentalization of our psychology is an unreasonable demand. While we exhibit two types of cognitive processes, it is not clear that such processes necessarily occur independently of each other. It seems that there is an interaction between the two systems. For example, beliefs and judgments arrived through deliberate reasoning can, over time, become habituated to the point of being intuitive assumptions.

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[76] For example, let us consider a climate change denier whose reasoning about global climate change is influenced by a bias against scientific information. It is not clear that merely switching from automatic settings to manual mode would mean that a climate change denier's bias against scientific information is diminished to the degree that it no longer influences their thinking about global climate change. This point can be elucidated by way of contrast. When operating in automatic settings, let us say their bias against scientific information manifests as a hasty rejection of scientific information about global climate change. Though, when switching to manual mode, a bias against scientific information could still manifest, but instead of a hasty rejection, they could give careful attention to the limitations and weaknesses of the evidence presented in climate change studies, meanwhile giving significantly less sustained attention to the merits and strengths of the evidence presented.

To elucidate this point further, let us consider Greene's assertion that three factors shape our automatic settings: genetics, cultural learning, and personal experience.[77] Given this claim, our failure to be impartial towards others with differing intuitions in their political thinking is not necessarily beyond our control. It would be beyond our control if we believed this psychological reality was purely based on genetics. Setting that consideration aside, let us start with the more plausible assumption that there is at least some genetic basis to our tendency to engage in biased political cognition that impacts our intuitive judgments, but that cultural learning and personal experience have amplified such genetic predispositions. In large part, we have acquired intuitive habits of thought that ultimately undermine a flourishing democratic public discourse characterized by inclusiveness and impartiality. If we entertain this plausible assumption, then it seems there is much we can do to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Through transformation at the level of society (cultural learning) and the level of the individual and their relationships (personal experience), our intuitive judgments can be shaped in ways that are more impartial, attentive to our own self-interested motivation to protect our identity, and empathetic to the interests of others. It is attending to ourselves and our social relationships that primarily motivates the consideration of the transformative potential of close friendship on our political cognition in the following chapters.

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[77] Greene, *Moral Tribes*, 143.

Equitable Public Discourse Between Casey and Landry

Much of this chapter has been dedicated to a discussion of the ideals to be strived for in public discourse, in particular, impartiality as the proper aim of political cognition. As such, we might be wondering how Casey and Landry would proceed if they both achieved impartiality. We could ask, "How would their disagreement about climate change proceed? Would there ultimately be an agreement?" Considering such questions pushes us to think more deeply about what makes for equitable public discourse.

In considering how their disagreement about climate change would proceed, Casey and Landry would be mutually supportive in holding one another accountable for adhering to the standards of impartiality in their contributions to public discourse. This entails not only being mindful of the standards, but openness to receiving feedback from each other concerning whether or not they have adhered to the standards. This as well means they have to be willing to offer constructive feedback. Constructive in the sense that each does not merely point out how the other failed to achieve the standard in question but exhibits charity to their point of view by helping them to revise their contribution such that it could achieve the standard in question. In the form of constructive feedback, Casey and Landry would have the opportunity to address any false beliefs expressed—beliefs failing to adhere to norms of reasoning conducive to truth.

For Casey and Landry to engage in equitable public discourse, they would need to be fair to one another in their deliberation of global climate change.

Fairness to one another entails being inclusive of each other's perspective in their reasoning behind a mutually agreed-upon policy decision. This means that Casey and Landry's reasoning must be responsive to how global climate change and the proposed policy under consideration affects their lives. Their reasoning is inclusive when it regards each other's concerns and interests as voiced by them as equal in determining a mutually agreed-upon policy decision. It is through reasoning inclusively that their political cognition is more closely guided by the public interest, as opposed to their self-interested motivation to maintain their membership in and loyalty to their community and political party affiliation.

Underlying this sense of inclusion is a recognition by Casey and Landry that equitable public discourse is responsive to the diverse political perspectives found in a pluralistic society. They realize that most of the problems that our democracy must solve are complex and have asymmetrically distributed effects on individuals according to their geographic location, social class, occupation, education, gender, age, race, and so forth. Since individuals are most familiar with the effects of problems and policies on themselves and those close to them, information about these effects is also asymmetrically distributed. A flourishing democracy possesses the ability to pool this asymmetrically distributed information about the effects of problems and policies so as to devise solutions that are responsive to everyone's concerns.[78] Casey and Landry expressing their

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[78] Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3:1-2 (2006), 11.

concerns and interests to one another facilitates them pooling information about the effects of global climate change and proposed policies for addressing it.

Through equitable public discourse, there are many paths by which their deliberation could arrive at a point of agreement. To provide a sense of the possibilities, I will outline three ways here. One way could be that Landry maintains their position, while Casey abandons their position by converting to Landry's position or vice versa. One means of arriving at this outcome would be that through the course of their deliberation, one of them experiences a significant revelation that leads them to conclude their initial position was misguided and is no longer tenable. For example, Casey could conclude that their political cognition was not being guided by norms conducive to the truth when they were processing the information from climate change studies and concluded that global climate change does not exist. However, now that Landry has helped them to have their political cognition be motivated by accuracy, they now believe that Landry is correct in believing that global climate change is real and drastic action must be taken to avert the predicted devastating consequences to the environment.

A second way that an agreement could be achieved would be that, upon deliberation of each other's position on global climate change, each revises their judgment about what collective action ought to take place. The extent of this revision is enough to reduce the severity of disagreement, such that they arrive at a mutually acceptable, although possibly not preferred solution. Part of what makes for a mutually acceptable solution (in the absence of the solution being a preferred one by

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either Casey and Landry) is that there is a commitment by both to revise the solution if it proves ineffective or unforeseen consequences arise. For example, they may agree on adopting a policy that sets standards to tax carbon dioxide emissions and fossil fuel production and to use the money generated from the taxes to fund investment in renewable, sustainable energy sources. While a mutually acceptable policy decision, Landry would have preferred legislation that phased out fossil fuels altogether, and Casey would have preferred to have no taxes on fossil fuel production. If this policy fails to protect the interests of either of their community, they agree to revise the policy as needed.

A third possibility for reaching an agreement is that neither one of them revises their position, but one of them no longer believes it is worthwhile to oppose the other publicly, and thus they agree not to oppose the preferred solution of the other. We could imagine that Casey believes it is more worthwhile to seek out other ways to support the economic viability of their community than publicly opposing Landry's efforts to mitigate the devastating effects of global climate change. Nonetheless, Casey privately denies the existence of global climate change. One motivation Casey may have for supporting Landry's position is Landry agrees to support policies that would help create other avenues of economic viability for Casey's community when a reduction of fossil fuel consumption and a switch to more renewable energy sources displaces them. In this case, agreeing with Landry allows for Casey's self-interest to be accommodated within the solution seeking to be representative of both of their interests and concerns. Arriving at any of these types of

agreement requires both Casey and Landry to transcend their self-interested

motivation to express political beliefs that maintain their membership in and loyalty

to their communities and to be motivated to secure a common good that accounts for

the concerns and interests of both of their communities.

Conclusion

Through delving into the accounts of biased political cognition offered by

Stanley and Greene, we have examined its corrosive effects on a public discourse that

aims at equity and cooperation. Stanley's account of biased political cognition shows

us how our engagement in biased political cognition can contribute to the

perpetuation of social injustice. Legitimizing myths and identity-protective cognition

can lead our reasoning to be partial to ourselves in ways that render us unresponsive

to the oppression and marginalization of others, notably underprivileged folks that are

often victims of exploitation and discrimination. Just as well, engagement in biased

political cognition can impede the revision of our beliefs in the face of evidence

challenging the accuracy of our beliefs; this is all the more disturbing when it occurs

concerning beliefs that maintain marginalization and discrimination. Moreover, the

engagement in biased political cognition can undermine efforts between diverse

groups to achieve cooperation in working towards the common good concerning

pressing, contentious matters of public interest.

To reduce these pernicious effects on our public discourse, we need to

accomplish a measure of impartiality that aims at ensuring that our collective, public

decision-making fairly represents the differing interests of all social groups in our society.[79] Impartiality entails us countering biases towards our personal preferences or the ideological commitments of our social group that we do not often recognize, especially when such biases render us less impartial in our consideration of preferences and commitments of those who disagree with and differ from us. Moreover, Stanley urges us to relate our interests and preferences in a manner that is intelligible and responsive to the diverse social groups in our society. Meanwhile, through the utilitarian principle, Greene exhorts us to engage in public discourse that equally considers the well-being of all involved in deliberation.

While impartiality is a needed, helpful guiding ethos for our participation in public discourse, the social context of public political deliberation needs to be one that encourages us to embody that ethos. It would be rather challenging for the reasoning in our contributions to public discourse to be better guided by the public interest and the common good if our vital social relationships are ones that incentivize reasoning that always expresses the political beliefs of those who share a similar identity and ideological commitments with us. It should be evident that we should look to cultivate the kind of social relationships that are conducive to a flourishing democracy, that aid us in impartially reasoning towards the common good. In the next chapters, I shall contend that close friendships are the kind of needed social relationships that can aid us in reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased

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[79] For more on the nature of collective, public decision-making see the appendix entitled "Considerations for Democratic Public Discourse."

political cognition and help move our public discourse closer to one conducive to a

flourishing democracy.

Chapter 3 – Friendship and Public Political Deliberation

Introduction

Our discussion started with an account of biased political cognition, specifically psychological mechanisms that can inhibit our ability to achieve an accurate consideration of available evidence and fairness to those that disagree with us. Next, we examined recent philosophical accounts of biased political cognition that underscored its corrosive effect on public discourse and urged impartiality in our reasoning. Given that contentious political issues with significant ethical ramifications beset our society, we have motivated the need to seek out practical means of reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. While fostering impartiality provides us with a goal to achieve in practice, there remain essential considerations in need of exploration: our engagement in motivated reasoning and falling prey to the introspection illusion often occurs without our explicit awareness, and social relationships tend to support our susceptibility. As such, to help counteract these features of biased political cognition, we need to look beyond ourselves for assistance. Ideally, the nature of this assistance needs to embody a way of relating to people that builds upon the development of impartiality and creates an interpersonal context that enhances our cognitive ability to participate in a public discourse indicative of a flourishing democracy. In other words, surprising as it may sound, we need to cultivate terrific friendships to help us in this endeavor.

More specifically, we need to cultivate friendships characterized by a depth of intimacy and vulnerability whereby our friends possess knowledge of our reasoning

tendencies, there exists a reciprocated trust that each other's best interests motivate each of us, and a nonjudgmental openness that permeates discussion of each other's susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. To better understand how friendships characterized by these features can aid in reducing our susceptivity to engage in biased political cognition, we will look to philosophical models of friendship characterized by such features: Aristotle's notion of complete friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Alexander Nehamas' model of close friendship from *On Friendship*.

Aristotle's Complete Friendship

For Aristotle, friendship is necessary for a flourishing existence and leading a virtuous life. Early in his discussion of friendship, Aristotle distinguishes between three types of friendship: pleasure, utility, and complete friendship. He characterizes pleasure and utility friendships as similar to each other, as both are self-regarding types of friendship. Aristotle explains,

> Those who love one another for utility love the other not in himself, but only in so far as they will obtain some good for themselves from him. The same goes for those who love for pleasure; they do not like a witty person because of his character, but because they find him pleasing to themselves. So those who love for utility are fond of the other because of what is good for themselves, and those who love for pleasure because of what is pleasant for themselves, not in so far as the person they love is who he is, but in so far as he is useful or pleasant.[80]

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[80] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

In these types of friendship, our consideration of the utility or pleasure derived from our friend concerns ourselves. With the primary concern being ourselves, our friend does not interest us beyond the narrow scope of utility and pleasure. Specifically, the character, beliefs, and dispositions of our friend are not of much concern to us. Imagine that Casey and Landry are college study buddies who help each other to do well on midterms and final exams, but outside of studying together do not interact nor give much thought to each other.

In contrast to the self-regarding nature of utility and pleasure friendships, Aristotle considers what he calls a complete friendship. Aristotle contends,

> Complete friendship is that of good people, those who are alike in their virtue: they each alike wish good things to each other in so far as they are good, and they are good in themselves. Those who wish good things to a friend for his own sake are friends most of all, since they are disposed in this way towards each other because of what they are, not for any incidental reason.[81]

A complete friendship is an other-regarding relationship. Our primary concern is the well-being of our friend; we desire to see them flourish. Our friend is not merely a means for pleasure or utility but is someone that we love and care for because of who they are as a person, specifically their character. In other words, unself-interested goodwill is the basis of complete friendship. An expert on ancient philosophy, John Cooper describes this aspect of Aristotelian friendship, "Each wishes for him whatever is good, for his own sake, and it is mutually known to them that this well-wishing of this kind is reciprocated. They enjoy one another's company and are

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[81] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 147.

benefited by it."[82] Friends of this sort engage in shared activities and live their lives alongside each other. As such, the intimacy of these relationships allows for friends to become quite knowledgeable of each other and to trust each other's judgment of one another. Aristotle believed that the knowledge we gain from a deep intimacy with complete friends makes these friends better able to judge our character more accurately than ourselves. Here Aristotle is explicit that friends are necessary for gaining a more accurate estimate of our character because humans by their nature are fallible and vulnerable.[83]

With Aristotle's characterization of complete friendship, we could argue that complete friends can help us to detect instances of us engaging in biased political cognition more effectively. Since many of us cannot easily notice our cognitive processes involved in belief formation, and since the intimacy of friendship allows for a complete friend to know how we act and think, a complete friend would be in a better position (than ourselves) to notice when we engage in motivated reasoning or fall prey to the introspective illusion. A complete friend's assessment should be taken seriously because a complete friend is someone we trust and who has our best interest in mind when making such evaluations of our thinking.

Further, since such a friend has spent enough time with us to know our patterns and habits of thought, this friend could not only better detect when we

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[82] John M. Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenber Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 308-309.
[83] Cooper, "Aristotle on Friendship," 330-331.

engage in motivated reasoning, but also could also help bring to our awareness what particular goals influence the formation of our political beliefs. Moreover, such a friend could help us with strategizing about how to develop more impartial and open-minded habits of mind and encourage and support us in this endeavor. In agreement with this point, in his essay "On Friendship," Francis Bacon asserts that the continual self-awareness and self-examination of people who share their lives as close friends provides the context for seeing ourselves in vivid and unexpected ways. This is why he deems the communication exhibited in friendship, more than any other, "maketh daylight in the understanding, out of darkness and confusion of thoughts."[84] Our friends can help illuminate aspects of our thinking that are not immediately aware to us. This kind of intervention by complete friends would be more effective at reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition than us seeking to cultivate impartiality on our own.

Looking back at Kahan's understanding of motivated reasoning, he does not explicitly indicate that social relationships in the form of complete friendship are needed to ameliorate our engagement in motivated reasoning when participating in political deliberation. However, he alludes to the need for such a social connection in his comments about how to reduce occurrences of engaging in motivated reasoning:

> What is needed instead are interventions that remove *expressive incentives* individuals face to form perceptions of risk and related facts on grounds unconnected to the truth of such beliefs. Extending the analysis of previous

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[84] Neera Kapur Badhwar, "Introduction: The Nature and Significance of Friendship" in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 8.

papers, this one has suggested that ideologically motivated reasoning is *expressively rational* at the individual level, because it conveys individuals' membership in and loyalty to groups on whom they depend for various forms of support, emotional, material, and otherwise.[85]

In other words, it seems that love, trust, and genuine well-wishing for one another may not always constitute social relationships in ideologically similar groups, but rather a conformity of beliefs serves as a basis for emotional connectedness. Implicitly, these relationships, in part, are grounded in fear and coercion. We might find ourselves unable to form beliefs that differ from the group we identify with because we fear the loss of those social connections and our emotional support network. As such, to fulfill our need for human connection, we might find ourselves coerced into holding beliefs accepted by our respective ideological group.

But what if a complete friendship was the basis for social relationships in ideologically similar groups? In such relationships, we would not have to fear the loss of emotional support or social connection because we hold beliefs that differ from others who belong to the same group. We would feel more confident in letting empirical evidence (where possible) and the common good guide our political beliefs because we would trust that mutual love, respect, and genuine concern for each other's well-being underlie our social connections. Further, because in complete friendships our friends as well are working toward being more impartial, they as well would be motivated by accuracy and the common good.

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[85] Kahan, "Ideology, Motivated Reasoning, and Cognitive Reflection," 419.

There are two slightly different, but related, suggestions being offered concerning friendship. The first suggestion is that some of our social relationships with those whom we share similar social identities and ideological commitments ought to take on the form of complete friendships.[86] Complete friendships foster a social context that supports fairness to different perspectives and the motivation for accuracy and the common good. The second suggestion is that once such friendships have formed, we ought to regard our complete friends as possessing a vantage point that allows us to know more about our reasoning than we can know (given the unreliability of introspection). These suggestions are the upshot of complete friendship for reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

The Need for Diversity In Our Friendships. One objection to seriously examine concerns the prescription that we form complete friendships with those who are similar to us in terms of social identities and ideological commitments. If we form complete friendships with those who are socially and ideologically similar to us, then as a result of these similarities, it is highly likely that biased political cognition manifests in similar ways for our friends as us. Moreover, if our friends as well are not consciously aware of their engagement in biased political cognition, then how would they necessarily be in a better position to catch incidents where we engage in motivated reasoning? Put another way, how could our friends be better at detecting

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[86] I write "some" of our social relationships, as opposed to "all," because for those of us with large social circles it would be unreasonable to expect us to develop complete friendships with all of the people in our social circle that share similar social identities and ideological commitments.

incidents of us engaging in motivated reasoning if they are most likely similarly engaged in motivated reasoning? Even worse, what if because they are similarly engaged in motivated reasoning, they only confirm and thereby encourage our cognitive bias?[87] Ostensibly, this objection undermines the potential for complete friendships to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

While this objection points to a substantial limitation for the account of complete friendship offered thus far, it does not necessarily undermine the upshot of complete friendship. We should concede that only having complete friends with those who are socially and ideologically similar to us inhibits the amelioration of our susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning, but this alone does not undermine the potential of complete friendships. Instead, this limitation should lead us to believe that we should strive for social and ideological diversity in our friendships. When opportunities arise, we should cultivate complete friendships with people of different social identities and ideological commitments. I say when opportunities arise because I think it is rare for us to recognize the potential for a close friendship when we first meet someone and thus intentionally pursue a complete friendship with them. Rather, over time, as we get to know someone better, we grow into such a friendship with them. As such, it is not a matter of us purposefully interacting with others with the explicit intention to diversify our friendships.[88]

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[87] Badhwar, "Introduction: The Nature and Significance of Friendship," 9.

[88] Philosopher of friendship Laurence Thomas argues that friendship is not consciously pursued, but instead, friendship is something we find we have grown into gradually. Thomas contends, "There is a very clear sense in which we grow into friendships; indeed, we can even be surprised that our interaction with someone has

Nonetheless, we should be more open to the opportunities that exist in our social lives to form complete friendships. As cities, schools, college campuses, and workplaces become increasingly diversified places, we find ourselves more and more in social contexts where we encounter people of diverse social identities and ideological commitments. Further, since we spend much of our day in these social contexts, there exist opportunities to form close friendships. We should become more disposed to being open to these opportunities to cultivate friendships with those that differ from ourselves.

By cultivating diversity in our friendships, we can gain friends whose reasoning is influenced by motivations different than our own. As such, it is more likely that we will have different intuitions about politics and implicitly reason toward beliefs in different ways. The difference in intuitions and implicit judgments could situate each of us in a vantage point to better comprehend our engagement in motivated reasoning. In cases where we do not share similar intuitions, we most likely are going to find ourselves in a state of disagreement, and because we are close and trusting friends that care about each other's well-being, we can endeavor to impartially understand the nature of each other's reasoning that contributes to our disagreement. In developing an understanding of each other's reasoning, we have an opportunity to develop an awareness of the motivations influencing our political

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given rise to such companion friendship. It might never have occurred to us that so deep a friendship would have developed. Thus, on the other hand, there is a sense in which friendships happen to us." See Laurence Thomas, "Friendship and Other Loves" in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 49.

beliefs and hopefully gain a more profound sense of how those motivations influence our cognitive processes. Put another way, the friction of disagreement could aid in sharpening and refining our awareness of how biased political cognition manifests in our reasoning.

To elucidate this point further, let us turn to Elizabeth Telfer's article that led to a resurgence of philosophical interest in friendship in the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that friendship has a transformative potential to change how we think about the world and ourselves. Through our interactions with friends of diverse viewpoints, we can learn to look at our beliefs from a different point of view, to understand and feel in new ways, and thus realize the immense potentiality for different ways of experiencing the world. As Telfer contends,

> …friendship can enlarge our knowledge throughout the whole gamut of human experience, by enabling us in some measure to adopt the viewpoint of another person through our sympathetic identification with him. Through friendship, we can know what it is like to think or feel or do certain things which we do not feel, think or do ourselves.[89]

The enlargement of our knowledge of the world in this manner could help increase our awareness of the motivations present in our political cognition. This can be especially the case when our friends notice motivations in our thinking that may not be apparent to us. For Nancy Sherman, empathy is an aspect of complete friendship necessary for contributing to each other's flourishing. Sherman contends, "…we want to understand 'from the friend's point of view' what she is going through and how

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[89] Elizabeth Telfer, "Friendship," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 71 (1970), 240.

things look to her. Imagining how she must feel ultimately aims at coming to see things from her point of view. Thus, it is not that I bypass my imagination, but that it ultimately transports me to her feelings."[90] Understanding our friend's point of view would include understanding our friend's point of view about our political cognition. If part of our friend's point of view on us includes their awareness of specific motivations influencing our political cognition, then through empathizing with our friend, we could come to greater awareness of the specific motivations as well.

Though, given the discussion about confirmation bias in the first chapter, we could dispute this suggestion by insisting that we would most likely only integrate the knowledge gained from our friend to confirm beliefs we already hold to be true, in a similar manner to most subjects that participated in Lord et al.'s experiment. However, there is one relevant difference between this suggestion about friendship and Lord et al.'s study on confirmation bias: knowledge gained by merely reading about beliefs that differ from our own is considerably different from knowledge gained through relating to and loving a person whose beliefs differ from our own. In comparing the difference between reading about people whose lives are different from our own and being their friend, Telfer employs the distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance.[91] This distinction seems relevant here. Knowledge gained from a friendship can have a profound impact on us that differs in comparison to knowledge gained from reading. This is because "friends

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[90] Nancy Sherman, "Aristotle on the Shared Life" in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 100.
[91] Elizabeth Telfer, "Friendship," 240.

are not just objects of contemplation or analysis, but other selves who interact with us, responding to us and requiring that we respond to them in appropriate ways."[92] It is these rich dimensions of interpersonal interaction that enable the knowledge gained from friendship to affect us in more profound ways than knowledge merely experienced only as an object of analysis. It is this profound impact that hopefully can aid in diminishing our susceptibility to engage in confirmation bias.

I intend for this description to serve as a broad sketch of how we can envision diversity in our friendships aiding us in reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. As such, it is not meant to be exhaustive nor provide a complete picture. Here, I think it is essential to be mindful of Aristotle's advice to be as precise as the subject matter allows.[93] In specific situations, how two friends explore disagreement between each other can play out in a multitude of ways that are relative to each person's habits of mind, their state of mind when this exploration occurs, history of personal experiences, the particular political issue in question, etc. Given these contextual variables, it is not clear how precise we can be in outlining exactly how it will look when two friends help each other in reducing each other's

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[92] Badhwar, "Introduction: The Nature and Significance of Friendship," 10.

[93] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 5. To provide some indication of how this advice is relevant, here is the context in which Aristotle offers the advice. When discussing how what we regard as noble, just, and good "admits of a good deal of diversity and variation," he recommends "we should be content, since we are discussing things like these in such a way, to demonstrate the truth sketchily and in outline, and because we are making generalizations on the basis of generalizations, to draw conclusions along the same lines. Indeed, the details of our claims, then, should be looked at in the same way, since it is the mark of an educated person to look in each area for only the degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits."

susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Instead, at this point, it may be more fruitful to look to deepen our understanding through careful experimentation; we should seek to gain practical wisdom on this matter through experiences with our friends. Although, such experimentation with our friends does bring up a significant concern: do we risk losing our close friends by discussing contentious issues of politics in conjunction with our engagement in biased political cognition?

The Jeopardizing Friendships Objection. While diversity in our friendships can provide us with friends that can better help us to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, we can still question whether or not friendships are a well-suited social context for reducing our susceptibility. We might ask ourselves, "Don't we risk losing or alienating ourselves from a friend by pointing out and insisting on discussing how their reasoning is biased, especially about political beliefs connected to their identity? Is it not more likely that our friend will become resistant and frustrated when discussing something as sensitive and emotionally charged as political beliefs and convictions?" The answer to these sorts of questions in part depends on the type of friendship we have with our friend. If the friendship is a self-regarding friendship where our friend values us primarily in terms of the pleasure or utility we provide them, then it seems likely that we risk losing a friend when engaging them in a discussion about biased political cognition. It can be painful to learn about our shortcomings and errors, and thus, our friend may judge that there is little pleasure or utility to be derived from our friendship. As such, we should not

view self-regarding friendships as a suitable social context for reducing susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

On the other hand, if it is a complete friendship, then this worry should not weigh as heavily on us. I would contend that if a friendship dissolves or experiences a significant rupture as a result of an earnest attempt to discuss instances when our friend engages in motivated reasoning, then it is quite likely that a complete friendship did not exist in the first place. Consider that in a complete friendship the primary concern is the other person and their well-being, and this concern is mutually shared and known by both friends. Thus, we should not perceive discussion of shortcomings or errors as threatening, but rather as a continued expression of our mutually shared love and well-wishing for one another. In other words, the level of trust exhibited in a complete friendship is one that should not worry us about incurring the loss of friendship when bringing up ways our friend is biased in their reasoning about politics.[94]

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[94] Though, we might think that most people's friendships are ones that would dissolve, or at least experience a significant rupture, as a result of one of the friends feeling frustrated, if not angered and hurt, by a discussion of their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. If we think this is the case, then my argument here might mean that complete friendships are exceedingly rare, and, as a result, the remedy on offer remote. Speculation on this matter is difficult, as the kinds of friendships people possess vary widely. Some people lack any close friendships that could be described as complete friendships, and who struggle to form close friendships; I would say my proposal does not apply to them at all. On the other hand, there are people, like me, who have several close friendships that could be described as complete friendships where biased political cognition could be safely discussed. People like me could describe their close friendships in this manner because of past experiences of discussion of emotionally challenging topics, where such discussion did not threaten the friendship, but deepened intimacy between the friends. Nonetheless, in complete friendships, it is plausible that two friends would have to

More specifically, honest mutual self-disclosure should be a feature of friendship with the depth of intimacy and trust indicative of complete friendship. In discussing what he terms "companion friendship," philosopher Laurence Thomas (who has written extensively on the topic of friendship) believes complete honesty between close friends is central to a friendship's ability to "contribute to each other's flourishing, where the emphasis here is upon the improvement of character and personality." Further, it is through honest self-disclosure that friends show that they value each other's perspective on their life.[95] Adding to Thomas's point, philosopher Neera Badhwar believes that honest self-disclosure is such a necessary condition that its absence means a genuine friendship does not exist at all. She asserts a friendship that "would not survive the light of truth is not a friendship at all. For if the basis and object of friendship is the friend as she is, it must be in the nature of friendship that friends see and love one another as they are, and not as creations of their own fantasies."[96] With all this in mind, our friends and we should not perceive discussions of biased political cognition as threatening to our friendship, but rather as a further expression of the honest self-disclosure that is indicative of the intimacy of our friendship. Such discussions should be regarded as deepening the intimacy of the

work through threatening, deeply disturbing, damaging near-ruptures or even temporary ruptures from which they must recover. In a genuine complete friendship, the two friends persist in working through such situations and can move past them, as opposed to the friendship dissolving.

[95] Laurence Thomas, "Friendship and Other Loves" in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Neera Kapur Badhwar (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 57.
[96] Badhwar, "Introduction: The Nature and Significance of Friendship," 7.

friendship and doing so can contribute further to each other's development of impartiality in their political cognition.

Nonetheless, in these situations, we should be cautious and tactful. We should be careful to not frame our discussion as a personal attack or a form of intimidation and embarrassment. It may even be prudent to begin and end discussions of biased political cognition with friends by reassuring them that we intend to support them in becoming a more impartial participant in public discourse.

Another way to approach this worry about rupturing friendships and losing friends is to consider what philosopher Dianne Rothleder calls the work of friendship.[97] If a friendship is to persist over time and continually enhance the lives of both friends, then both friends must actively work to maintain the health of the friendship. Part of this work of friendship entails interpreting and evaluating each other. Sometimes explicitly, and other times implicitly, we are interpreting the meaning of verbal expressions and physical actions of our friends. From these interpretations, we form evaluations of our friends. When we start to talk to our friends about their engagement in biased political cognition, this process of interpretation and evaluation is going to be taking place. For example, our friend could be questioning in their mind, "What do you mean I am biased in my reasoning? Why are you bringing this up in the first place? What is it you want me to do about this? Do you not like me as a friend? Are you saying I'm a bad person?" Our friend is

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[97] Dianne Rothleder, *The Work of Friendship: Rorty, His Critics, and the Project of Solidarity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 117.

going to be evaluating us, determining whether or not we can be trusted and have good intentions.

For us to have a more fruitful discussion with our friend about biased political cognition, we need to communicate and be mindful of each other's emotional states, desires, and abilities.[98] We need to pay attention to if our friend becomes angry, frustrated, or is unable to fully process the concerns we are raising about their biased thinking. We need to determine when it might be best to back off and wait for a better time when our friend is in a more receptive emotional state to listen to our concerns. Further, we should consider the depth and extent to which we should discuss their engagement in biased political cognition in one discussion. We are not going to get our friends to reduce their susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning after one conversation. Since ingrained habits of thinking are not going to be transformed suddenly, we need to think about having several, if not many, conversations to ignite the process of self-transformation towards becoming more impartial and motivated by accuracy and the common good. It is these sorts of suggestions that should factor into our approach for effectively and compassionately facilitating our friend's recognition of their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition and encouraging them to take action to reduce this susceptibility.

The Takeaway from Aristotle's Account. In considering how to reduce our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding friendships is pivotal. The mutual love, trust, and

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[98] Rothleder, *The Work of Friendship*, 124.

concern for each other's wellbeing found in other-regarding friendships foster a depth of intimacy needed for us to empathize with our friends of different perspectives and thereby enhance an impartial understanding of others' political beliefs. It creates an emotionally secure space whereby we can nonjudgmentally explore our engagement in biased political cognition and reduce our susceptibility. Nonetheless, two concerns arise with Aristotle's account that should prevent us from completely adopting his account of friendship and thus prompt us to extend our analysis by exploring an alternative model that builds off the aspects just noted. One concern is that Aristotle's account of friendship is tied up with his ontological notion of humans as purpose-driven creatures; such ontological considerations are beyond the scope of our current discussion, and thus there is no need to be committed to them.

Another consideration for refusing to adopt Aristotle's full account concerns the character state of both friends: a genuine complete friendship requires that both friends be virtuous people. As virtuous people, they should reason similarly to one another when determining the right action in a particular situation and agree on what counts as the virtuous action for that situation. This requirement seems to commit us to believe that both friends need to be like-minded. Concerning political issues, as they involve determining the right action for the common good, this requirement would mean that both friends need to be like-minded in their reasoning about how to address matters of public interest. However, this requirement seems too rigid and sets the bar to an unreachable high. It does seem unlikely, especially if in light of our prescription that we have friends with diverse political viewpoints, that our friend and

we would be like-minded enough to achieve consensus about how to address matters of public interest. Although, maybe the bar need not be set so high regarding like-mindedness.[99]

In discussing the like-mindedness concerning virtue that is necessary for friendship, Nancy Sherman makes a distinction between means and ends and discusses consensus as developing throughout a friendship, as opposed to being initially present. In Sherman's view of Aristotle's account, the consensus present in an intimate friendship is less about similarly enacting specific virtues in specific ways, but rather more about what sort of life is to be lived together and how to go about doing so. Sherman agrees that we could interpret consensus about what sort of life should be lived to mean consensus about beliefs to be held and actions to be taken in practical matters, but she also believes that consensus here could take a looser form.

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[99] Though, for the sake of ameliorating their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, two friends should possess a shared understanding of the psychological phenomena occurring in biased political cognition. This does mean that in order to ameliorate susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition within the context of close friendship, the friends should know about and understand how manifestations of motivated reasoning and the introspection illusion work. Depending on how confident we are that we do not engage in biased political cognition, it could be challenging for us to believe that we are susceptible to engaging in biased political cognition and learn about the associated psychological phenomena to improve our political cognition. It does take a degree of humility and vulnerability to be open to accepting that we can be fallible in our reasoning about firmly held beliefs connected to our social identity. The hope is that the emotional support of complete friends will aid in facilitating the process of acceptance and willingness to learn about the psychological phenomena to improve our and our friend's political cognition.

Sherman holds, "Equally consensus may express only a looser agreement about general ends…Their shared commitment is to an end rather than a specific way of achieving it."[100] She gives an example of how two friends may hold that temperance is a crucial conviction in the lives of two friends, but each friend enacts this virtue differently in their respective lives. For one, it may mean a healthier diet, and for the other, it may mean refusing to participate in gossip. The same could be true of our friend and we regarding political cognition. We may achieve consensus concerning impartiality as desirable ends for our political cognition, but following such an ideal could necessitate us thinking in different ways given the ideological commitments that already guide our thinking. Thus, like-mindedness is less about our friend and we reasoning in a manner that yields similar political beliefs, and more about us being like-minded about the values that ought to influence our reasoning process.

Furthermore, the consensus exhibited in a friendship does not have to be something initially present when the friendship forms, but can develop over time. Sherman puts forth, "There may nevertheless be a particularly characteristic sort of consensus in friendship. In true friendship, we might say, friends realize shared ends which develop through the friendship and which come to be constitutive of it. Specific common interests are thus a product rather than a precondition of the relationship."[101] Through our continued discussions about politics, our disagreements

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[100] Sherman, "Aristotle on the Shared Life," 97-98.
[101] Sherman, 98.

about policies to be enacted, and our exploration of our engagement in biased political cognition—all of which occur as we share our lives—over time we would come to agree on the importance of impartiality. Further, given enough time, as we come to empathize more with each other's point of view and expand each other's horizons of perspectives and understandings of the world, we may develop a shared sense of how to best reason in accordance with accuracy and the common good. The likelihood of such a possibility is probably rare, but it nonetheless is a possibility to be mindful of as we cultivate close friendships.

Nevertheless, Sherman's explanation should remind us that ultimately we should not necessarily conceive of friends as alike in virtue in terms of them reasoning about political issues in precisely the same manner, where their political cognition mirrors one another. She asserts, "Now individuals that come together as character friends might be similar yet different in the above sense that while they share virtue as an overall end, they often express it in ways that are distinct yet complementary. They are not mere lookalikes of one another."[102] In the end, what is essential is that our friends share a similar goal of impartiality for political cognition, and even if we do not converge on how to achieve impartiality in every situation correctly, we nonetheless are striving for impartiality.

At this point, we might be inspired to pursue complete friendships more than we have been on account of how it can aid in improving our political cognition. Though, we might be hesitant to do so because of the following concern: if we start

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[102] Sherman, "Aristotle on the Shared Life," 105.

pursuing complete friendships more than we have been for the sake of improving our political cognition, would that not make those friendships a form of utility-based friendships and, thus, not complete? Indeed, if we are intentionally motivated to pursue complete friendships for the sake of improving our political cognition, then those friendships are likely to be a form of utility-based friendships. One reason this would be the case is that a complete friendship is not an instrumental good, whereas utility-based friendship, such as pleasure and advantage friendships, are instrumental goods. Utility-based friendships are good for the pleasure and advantage they bring about for the friend and are intentionally pursued with this ulterior motive. In contrast, complete friendship is not sought out with an ulterior motive.

Though, even this characterization is misleading for it would not be accurate to characterize complete friendship as something which is intentionally sought out. Typically, we do not go out into the social sphere intentionally looking for people with whom we could form close friendships resembling a complete friendship. It is challenging, if not impossible, to know beforehand or in an initial encounter with someone if it is highly probable that a complete friendship will form over time. After an initial encounter, we might sense the possibility that a complete friendship might form over time, and we may continue to spend time with the person hoping that such a friendship will form. Nonetheless, we often recognize that a close friendship is something that takes time to develop and is the result of both friends nurturing the friendship's development. It is not something that is a result of a deliberate choice on the part of one friend. Instead, through an accumulation of experiences that have

deepened intimacy and trust and led to a shared life together, an individual finds that their friendship has developed into a complete friendship. As such, this cannot be achieved through sheer will alone on the part of one friend.

Thus, it is unlikely that our intentionally being motivated to pursue complete friendships for the sake of improving political cognition would yield a genuine complete friendship. Such a friendship with this intention would be a form of utility-based friendship, where the utility is the improvement of one's political cognition. However, one thing to keep in mind is that utility-based friendships often lack the depth of intimacy and trust and shared life needed to bring about the improvement of one's political cognition. As such, we should not regard utility-based friendships as suitable for improving our political cognition.

However, by contending that we cannot pursue complete friendships to improve our political cognition, I seem to be implying that we could only improve our political cognition with friends we happen to be or become complete friends with in the future. This implication raises two problems: 1) these people are perhaps unlikely to hold substantially different views from us on contentious political issues (like global climate change), and this may limit my account considerably; 2) the implication that my proposal applies only to those we are or happen to become friends with would seem to be in tension with my assertion that there exist opportunities to diversify our friendships in terms of social identities and ideological commitments. Admittedly, these problems are damning for my account. While I

cannot adequately address them here, it is relevant to call attention to them and consider how they might be investigated in the future.

One response is to retreat on the requirement of complete friendships. My main hesitation in retreating on this requirement is that I worry that friendships pursued solely for the improvement of one's political cognition is that such intentionality may be counterproductive. In the next chapter, we will consider real-life examples of friendship. In one of the examples, we will encounter two friends that intentionally pursued their friendship intending to diversify their friendships; they wanted to befriend someone with whom they would disagree on most contentious political issues. After years of friendship and discussion, neither friend reports any improvement in their political cognition. While there is insufficient evidence to conclusively determine why this is the case, I do wonder to what degree their having pursued their friendship to diversify their friendships, and thus confined their friendship to politics, has hindered the development of their friendship. Hindered in the sense that it could have developed into a productive context for improving their political cognition. I wonder if their friendship had developed beyond political discussion, then maybe they could have come to know more about each other's lives in ways that extended beyond their political beliefs, and knowing each other in such ways could have cultivated the needed context for them to aid each other in the improvement of their political cognition. For example, if they had found common ground and learned to empathize with each other concerning non-political aspects of their lives, they may have developed the kind of trust and intimacy needed to help

each other improve their political cognition. This thought is inspired by the consideration of another example we will encounter in the next chapter.

In this other example, we will find friends that discussed politics only after having formed close friendships centering on non-political commonalities. In this example, one of the friends will report that being friends with someone politically different from themselves has improved their political cognition. As such, I cannot help but wonder if complete friendship must first develop around non-political aspects of the friends' lives to have the potential to aid the friends in improving their political cognition. It is the consideration of these examples that makes me hesitate in backing off on the requirement of complete friendship pursued without the intention to improve one's political cognition.

Nonetheless, I am unsure how to avoid the implication that such a requirement severely limits my account. I would think the consideration of more examples of friendship would be needed to address this concern adequately. Keep in mind, I am basing my hesitation off of two examples. I would revise my position if we were to find examples of friendships where complete friendship developed between two people intentionally seeking to diversify their friendships and their political cognition improved because of the friendship. I would then believe that complete friendship can be something intentionally pursued and result in the improvement of the friends' political cognition.

Nehamas: Friendship's Love and The Good of Friendship

Even if we adopt a looser standard for like-mindedness and consensus, there remains at least one significant lingering concern: how are we to regard intimate friendships in which the ends we share for our lives are *not* intentionally virtuous? Is there any value for our political cognition in friendships with people that do not cultivate impartiality as we do? This concern is significant because even though there exist opportunities to diversify our friendships in terms of social identities and ideological commitments, such opportunities do not always lead to friendships with people that are seeking to cultivate impartiality. Actively working to become more impartial and motivated by accuracy and the common good are not ideals that everyone strives for in the places where they have opportunities to make close friends.[103] In such cases, it is worth exploring what value intimate friendships without this shared basis possess for our political cognition—meaning friendship where only we aim to improve our political cognition, but not our friend. Using Alexander Nehamas' recent work on friendship, I will contend that close friendship can still have a positive impact on our political cognition, despite our friend not sharing the amelioration of susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition as a personal goal. The positive impact on us comes from the friendship, in particular with those socially different from our ourselves, providing experiences that enrich our understanding of the interests and concerns of those socially different from ourselves.

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[103] To be clear, this does not mean that most people do not value such ideals, but rather it seems plausible that they might not regard their friendships as the context for cultivating such ideals. It is easy to imagine that folks might avoid politics in their friendships, or that the common interests shared in a friendship are non-political.

Through this understanding, we can better reason in accordance with the common good when participating in public discourse.

In *On Friendship*, Alexander Nehamas articulates a contemporary notion of friendship that is reflective of intimate friendships found in present-day Western culture. He believes that our understanding of close friendships retains aspects of Aristotle's notion of complete friendship noted above: an enduring love of one another, a deep concern for each other's well-being, and reciprocity of such sentiments. Where Nehamas thinks our contemporary notion of close friendships departs from Aristotle is concerning our friends possessing virtuous character traits. While we may tend to agree with Aristotle that we love our friends for features of their character that we admire, we do not think that these features "must be only virtues of morality or even the broader range Aristotle had in mind."[104] Nehamas believes that often the character traits that attract us to our friends are not ones that would necessarily be independently acknowledged as virtuous by others, but are regarded by us as admirable traits. Nehamas brings up an example of how we may regard a friend's sense of humor as a character trait crucial to our friendship, but neither Aristotle nor others may regard this as a virtuous quality—it is not a morally relevant quality and others may disagree with our assessment because they prefer a different sense of humor.[105] One reason for why we may not be drawn to our friends for their moral virtues is that much of modern friendship occurs in everyday, ordinary

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[104] Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016), 28.
[105] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 27-28.

situations, as opposed to critical emergencies or dramatic occurrences that call upon our moral qualities. As such, we find ourselves drawn to qualities that our friends exhibit in commonplace circumstances, such as humor.[106]

Nehamas' assessment of friendship seems applicable to political cognition: in many cases, it might be that the character traits that attract us to a friend are ones that do not seem to have direct significance for improving our political cognition. Nor do we often find ourselves spending most of our time together with our friends deliberating about political issues; much of the time spent with our friends is in nonpolitical, or at least overtly nonpolitical, situations. In such cases, we might wonder whether or not these friendships can still aid us as we strive to better adhere to an impartial ethos for our political cognition. To explore this point further, let us consider how Nehamas believes that friendship is a nonmoral good that enhances the quality of our lives.

For Nehamas, understanding why we love our close friends is central to understanding the good of friendship, as the good of friendship is the result of the reciprocated love. In explaining why we love our close friends, the most straightforward answer to offer is one we have already mentioned: character traits we find admirable. This answer is only a start. Upon further reflection, we will most likely find that listing all the qualities we find admirable does not fully capture nor provide an exhaustive explanation of why we love a close friend. In some sense, the love we have for a close friend exceeds a list of specific qualities. With this in mind,

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[106] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 86-87.

we then might want to say that our love for our friend has to do with who they are in themselves, but such talk seems to suppose an essential nature to our friends, which could commit us to ontological assumptions we might not necessarily hold.

Though even if our close friends did have a definable essential nature, this still would not capture why it is we love our friends. To understand why this is the case, imagine if one of your close friends passed away, and afterward, you met someone else that possessed the same essential nature as the friend you lost. Would you automatically love that person the same way you loved your friend? Could this person replace the lost friend? I take it to be the case that most of us are inclined to think that our close friends are not replaceable in that sort of way, and thus an explanation of the love we have for a close friend is not exhausted by an appeal to an essential nature. The role that a particular close friend plays in our life is one that can only be played by them.[107]

Given that appeals to a list of character traits or an essential nature under-explains why we love a particular close friend, we might be wondering by what other means could we more clearly and fully account for why we love a specific close friend. To illuminate our understanding, Nehamas believes we should look to Montaigne's classic essay on friendship. Responding to Montaigne's analysis of his friendship with his closest, most cherished friend, Nehamas asserts, "Montaigne brilliantly redirects our attention from this or that distinguishable aspect of both his

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[107] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 109-11.

friend and himself to the irreducible experience of the two of them together."[108] Let us unpack this assertion. The reason we cannot fully capture why it is we love a friend when listing their characteristics is because we need to expand the scope of consideration to include not just our friend, but ourselves as well, and to consider both of us within the context of our friendship itself. We love our close friend, not for the person they are in themselves, but for the person they are when they are with us, and for the person we are when we are with our close friend. Our love of our close friend and their love of us is highly specific to the particular ways in which we relate to one another and the character traits that are present as the result of us being together. This also explains why a person who possesses similar character traits as our friend cannot automatically replace our friend. Friendship is not merely two people possessing certain traits, but rather it is the relational context and experiences that emerge from the two unique sets of personal character traits and personal histories interacting with one another over time. As Nehamas sums up, "every friendship is a unique combination of two souls, impossible to duplicate."[109]

While focusing on both friends within the relational context of the friendship itself more fully explains our love of our close friends, consideration of time even more fully explains our love of them. When we feel and say that we love our friend, it is not just an expression of how we feel at the present moment as a culmination of past experiences, but it is also prospective: our love of our friend reflects our hopes

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[108] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 119.
[109] Nehamas, 121.

for the future. When we love our friend, we hope that as we continue to get to know one another better and form new experiences together, we will enrich each other's lives for the better. We know that as a result of us being a part of each other's lives in a profoundly intimate way that we will come to acquire new desires and interests, and perhaps even adopt new values. Since neither of us can know the future with any certainty, we cannot know the specific ways in which we will impact one another's life.

Nevertheless, we hope that the love that constitutes our friendship promises a better future for both of us. Nehamas believes, "That commitment to the future—the hope for a better life that remains unknown for now—is exactly what every one of our efforts to explain the grounds of our friendships always and necessarily leaves out. This is why every explanation is so disappointingly thin. They all contain an implicit 'And so on,' an open end or ellipsis that reveals the friendship is still alive."[110]

Now that we have a more precise, fuller understanding of our love for our close friends, we are ready to see how a close friendship can still have a positive impact on our political cognition, despite not being grounded in ameliorating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. As a result of this deep, enduring love that intimately binds our lives together, our close friend and we create an emotionally secure space where our differences can provide a lasting impact on our sense of ourselves and how we inhabit the world. Through our differences, "we

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[110] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 135.

develop characteristics and capacities that emerge only because of our interaction: a new friend means a new way of approaching both oneself and others—a new way of approaching life itself."[111] As a result, "our interactions with our friends often lead us into novel and unanticipated directions."[112] For this reason, our understanding of ourselves and the world around us is provisional, contestable, and incomplete.

The ways in which differences between friends lead each friend to revise and change their understanding of each other and the world seem applicable to differences in ideological commitments and political cognition. Political differences between friends could lead to novel and unanticipated changes in our political cognition. Thus, the upshot of this discussion of Nehamas' account is that even friendships where our friends are not actively seeking to improve their political cognition are ones that can benefit our goal of improving our political cognition. Through political deliberation with close friends, our political beliefs could be revised to account for evidence more accurately and more fairly represent the interests of other social and ideological groups. Improvements in our political cognition could continue to occur throughout our life as our friendships with those politically different from us deepen and as new friendships are added.

It is this transformative potential of friendship that gives the everyday, ordinary situations in which friendships occur and develop their significance. As Nehamas quite eloquently states,

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[111] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 205.
[112] Nehamas, 206.

During our seemingly idle conversations and pointless activities, within the safety zone that mutual trust creates, we confront desires, ideas, hopes— aspects of what we are—that we hide from others and sometimes even from ourselves. And we try out ways of being—still perhaps inarticulate, perhaps embarrassing if revealed to a larger group, sometimes of dubious benefit— some of which we pursue and some of which we discard. Friendship has its own mortars and pestles, its own alembics and retorts: it comes closer to transmuting the self than any alchemist ever came to transmuting metals.[113]

For Nehamas, friends have this privileged role in our lives not necessarily because they embody moral virtues, but rather this role and influence results from the love that we have for them.[114] Nehamas' moving remarks seem applicable to political cognition as well. The safety zone of mutual trust for self-experimentation is one that can extend to political deliberation. Friendship can be the place where we confront the desires, hopes, fears, and assumptions that bias our political cognition towards beliefs that protect our social identity. Just as well, friendship can be the place where we try out new ways of thinking politically, knowing that we have the emotional support of our close friend.

Nehamas further supports the notion that close friendship provides a trusting, supportive space for experimenting with political beliefs and transforming our political cognition with an additional claim. He believes that it is with our close friends that we can freely "reveal aspects of ourselves of which we may be suspicious, unsure, or even ignorant and which, once revealed can be cultivated, or eradicated, as the case may be."[115] This claim as well can directly apply to political

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[113] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 211.
[114] Nehamas, 212.
[115] Nehamas, 223.

cognition. The motivations influencing our political cognition are ones that we may be suspicious, unsure, and ignorant of, and once revealed, we may decide that they are ones that should be cultivated or eradicated. All in all, despite not explicitly seeking to ameliorate our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, a close friend can play a vital role in developing impartiality by providing us an understanding of ourselves that takes the form of "an interpretation of who we are to them that we can use—not uncritically—to guide our self-formation."[116]

While there is much potential for friendships that do not share ameliorating susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition as an end, there is at least one concern to be mindful of as such friendships form. When we form friendships with people that are not actively seeking to become more impartial, we run a higher risk of developing friendships with people that inhibit the improvement of our political cognition than we do when developing Aristotelian complete friendships. As such, when ameliorating our susceptibility is not a shared end for the friendship, we should be more mindful of the possibility that such a friend might inadvertently encourage biased political cognition. A general case I have in mind is a friend whose ideological commitments differ from our own and who at the same time tends to be less humble about the certainty and correctness of their beliefs. Political deliberation with such an individual could without our explicit awareness prompt a defensive response from us, leading us to exhibit a much lower degree of impartiality than what we are striving to achieve for our political cognition. Political deliberation in such circumstances can

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[116] Nehamas, *On Friendship*, 223.

quickly devolve into displays of frustration and anger. In the end, such experiences inhibit rather than cultivate a public discourse indicative of a flourishing democracy. At the same time, it is possible to have friends who do not actively cultivate their intellectual character but are for other reasons able to confidently hold their beliefs and engage in respectful, reasonable dialogue. Interactions with friends of this temperament can contribute positively to ameliorating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. As such, we should be mindful of both possibilities, and more actively pursue the latter one.

Conclusion

In considering Aristotelian complete friendship and Nehamas' ideas of love and the good of friendship, we find that close, intimate friendships offer much potential to ameliorating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Following the suggestion of Kahan, it provides a social context that explicitly seeks to "remove *expressive incentives* individuals face to form perceptions of risk and related facts on grounds unconnected to the truth of such beliefs." Instead, when both friends are actively seeking to cultivate impartiality, friendship fosters a social context that values these ideals. In doing so, friendship can promote political cognition and public deliberation indicative of a flourishing democracy. In a political culture that is becoming ever more sharply divided and where political deliberation between those of differing ideologies becomes increasingly strained, and at times hostile, friendships can serve as an atmosphere where people express political differences within a

context of love, trust, and mutual concern for each other's well-being. Within this context, our ability to fairly understand political viewpoints that differ from our own deepens and the range of our understanding of the various viewpoints comprising our pluralistic society is expanded. These goods of friendship can aid in bringing the motivations of our political cognition more in line with accuracy, impartiality, and the common good.

A major theme of this dissertation has been for its inquiry to be guided by practical considerations. This major theme appears in the previous chapters through my use of the hypothetical example of Casey and Landry deliberating global climate change. It as well appears in my critique of both Jason Stanley and Joshua Greene's proposals for how we might mitigate our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. In contrast, in this chapter, we have examined friendship theoretically—in the sense that we have given insufficient attention to practical considerations as we examined the accounts of Aristotle and Nehamas. As such, we might be thinking, "David, this is an intriguing proposal, but does it work in practice? Is there any evidence to suggest that friendships characterized by the features of Aristotle's notion of a complete friendship and Nehamas' account of close friendship aid in reducing friends' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition?" To address these critical concerns, in the next chapter, we will turn our attention to the practice of friendship. Though, instead of continuing with our hypothetical example of Casey and Landry, we will examine real-life friendships, where the friendship played a role

in changing how the friends think about politics. We will aim to see if there exists

evidence to support the proposal detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Friendship in Practice

Introduction

In the last chapter, I proposed that close friendship could aid in mitigating our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. At this point, we might wonder what evidence, if any, exists to support my proposal. We could ask, "Are there close friendships (that we could point to) where the friends have helped each other to ameliorate their susceptibility to engage in motivated reasoning when participating in political discourse?" As mentioned in the first chapter, a significant concern of this dissertation is to ground its arguments in practical considerations of the ideas and arguments asserted. Thus far, we have only considered the hypothetical example of Casey and Landry deliberating global climate change. As such, consideration of real-life examples would make my proposal more compelling if they could provide evidence of its plausibility. It also would allow for exploring the practical considerations of my proposal more directly.

My central aim in this chapter is to outline some of the challenging issues that beset a search for existing empirical evidence of my proposal. I will sketch these problematic issues by discussing examples that raise several intriguing and significant questions. At first glance, these examples might seem to lend support to my proposal, but ultimately, they are only the beginnings of evidence for my proposal. As such, we should not regard these examples as conclusive evidence. Relatedly, we should note that it may be impossible to find conclusive evidence for my proposal. As will become evident by the end of the chapter, due to the complexity of the issues raised

in our discussion, the prior question of how to study friendships as a means of mitigating our susceptibility to engage in biased political question is still a work in progress. Nonetheless, an examination of the following examples yields crucial considerations for future empirical investigations.

Friendships Between Klansmen and Black Anti-Racist and Civil Rights Activists

In the previous chapter, I argued that diversity in our close friendships (having friends of different social identities and ideological commitments than ourselves) would better aid in diminishing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition (in comparison to only having close friends of the same social identity and ideological commitments). Underlying this argument is the idea that it would be more difficult for close friends to recognize instances of each other's engagement in motivated reasoning if the ideological commitments influencing their political cognition were too similar to one another. Whereas the differences in ideological commitments influencing the political cognition of close friends of different social identities and ideological commitments would allow close friends to better recognize instances of each other's engagement in motivated reasoning.[117]

Given the deepening polarization of our current political culture, we might be skeptical of the plausibility of close friendships forming between two people who profoundly disagree about politics. Alternatively, even if we think the formation of such friendships is possible in this political climate, we might still be skeptical that

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[117] See pages 89-95 for more details.

such friendships could be effective in reducing our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. We might think such friendships are likely to fall apart and ultimately be unproductive. It seems likely that political discourse between two friends of different social identities and ideological commitments would proceed in a combative manner. Each discussion could be contentious to the degree that it is unproductive in yielding the depth of intimacy and insight into each friend's political cognition that is needed for them to aid one another in reducing their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. For example, imagine if Casey and Landry were to repeatedly debate global climate change in a combative manner. If their discussions are quite strained, it seems likely that they would never come to understand each other's political cognition well enough to aid each other in mitigating their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

To address this kind of skepticism of my proposal, we will examine the friendships of Daryl Davis (an anti-racism activist) with Klansmen and the friendship between C.P. Ellis (a Klansmen) and Ann Atwater (a civil rights activist). These friendships show that friendship can form between people of different social identities and opposing political commitments. From these friendships, we do gain valuable insights about the formation of friendships between people that profoundly disagree about politics.

Furthermore, through exploring the details of these friendships, it will become apparent that friendship had a role to play in the friends changing some of their beliefs about racial politics in America. At first pass, we might be tempted to infer

from this change in their beliefs that their susceptibility to engage in biased political

cognition was reduced. However, upon closer examination, it will become evident

that sufficient data does not exist to conclusively draw such an inference.

Nonetheless, through examining why this inference cannot be conclusively drawn, we

will discern that a search for existing examples of my proposal will have to contend

with complicated issues that make it challenging to support my proposal with

empirical evidence.

Daryl Davis and Klansmen

Daryl Davis has made it his life's mission to understand racism in America.

For the past 30 years, he has carried out this mission by befriending members of the

Ku Klux Klan; Davis documents his friendships in his book *Klan-Destine*

Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan. From his book, we

glimpse the formation of his friendships and instances of cooperative dialogue

between friends of different social identities and opposing political beliefs. I say

glimpse because Davis focuses on pivotal moments and first encounters, and he does

not go into great detail about the development of any one friendship.

Moreover, Davis actively seeks out friendships with strangers who regard him

as their political enemy; one effect of this intention is that Davis and his friends

discuss their political beliefs early on in their friendship, often in the first encounter.

Nevertheless, this contrasts with my proposal in the previous chapter that we allow

friendships to develop spontaneously through our normal social activities. Relatedly,

using his friendships as examples to support my proposal runs into an issue raised in the previous chapter: intentionally seeking out complete friendships to improve our political cognition runs the risk of those friendships being a form of utility friendships, and thus, not complete friendships. Since Davis has intentionally sought out friendships with Klansmen, we cannot be sure that the friendships he forms are complete friendships.

When considering this aspect of Davis's friendships, it does raise the following question regarding a search for existing examples of my proposal: how likely are we to find complete friendships that formed unintentionally where the friends initially held opposing political beliefs? While such friendships may exist, it does seem highly likely that most friendships we would find would be friendships where the friends share similar political beliefs and ideological commitments. For this reason, a future search for existing friendships to support my proposal would have to contend with the rarity of relevant examples.

Setting aside this concern for the moment, we might be surprised by the nature of Davis's activism and ask, "Why would someone intentionally seek out friendships with their political enemies?" To understand why Davis (as a black antiracist activist) befriends Klansmen, we must understand the ethos informing his endeavor. Davis credits certain dispositions cultivated by his parents as paramount to the ethos informing his work: seeking the inherent good in all people, withholding judgment about someone based on their social identity, and appreciation of diverse cultures and

peoples.[118] Additionally, from examining his conversations, it can be inferred that Davis brings an open-minded curiosity to his dialogues with Klansmen. When reflecting upon his engagement with Klansmen, he remarks, "To them, because of my skin, I am the enemy, and I must know why." For Davis, curiosity and understanding are not ends in themselves, but instead, he regards them as necessary for white and black participants in American democracy to move forward from a history of racial injustice and intolerance to finding common ground.[119] To put this in terms of this dissertation's analysis, Davis believes an open-minded curiosity is needed for people of political differences to engage in a cooperative, equitable public discourse that promotes the common good.

With this context in mind, let us shift to examining Davis's friendships. Two close friendships he forms are with Roger Kelly and Bob White, prominent leaders of Klan organizations in Maryland.[120] These friendships are notable in that, after years of friendship with Davis, both Kelly and White change their beliefs about racial politics to the degree that they resign from the Klan. Surveying Davis's first meetings with Kelly, White, and other Klansmen reveals a critical feature to how Davis maintains a cooperative dialogue: Davis goes into the first meeting aiming to understand his interlocutor's beliefs (not to aggressively criticize their beliefs and

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[118] Daryl Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan* (Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1998), xii.
[119] Davis, xxv, 5, 8.
[120] The Ku Klux Klan is not a unified group existing across the country or even within a state. In many states, it is common that there exist multiple Klan organizations.

undermine their worldview) and to establish common ground between his interlocutor and himself.[121]

For Davis, finding common ground means discovering how his friend and himself can regard each other in terms of their similarities, not just their differences.[122] In discussing a range of political issues with Kelly, they discover that they are "very much opposed to the recreational use of drugs." Having found a political issue where their beliefs converged, Davis asks Kelly if he would consider engaging in a joint effort with blacks and whites that are not Klan members to address drug abuse. To Davis surprise, Kelly had already reached out to his local NAACP chapter "about having a parade in which the Klan and the NAACP would march together in an anti-drug crusade through the streets of the low-income projects to denounce drugs."[123] Unsurprisingly, the NAACP turned down his suggestion.

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[121] In an interview with NPR, Davis explains the significance of finding common ground with someone possessing opposing political beliefs, "If you spend five minutes with your worst enemy — it doesn't have to be about race, it could be about anything...you will find that you both have something in common. As you build upon those commonalities, you're forming a relationship, and as you build about that relationship, you're forming a friendship. That's what would happen. I didn't convert anybody. They saw the light and converted themselves." Here we can ascertain two points: (1) Davis does not aim to convert his friends and (2) the conversion experience cannot be pinpointed to a single moment, but rather is a cumulative experience with each interaction between friends building upon the previous one. See Dwane Brown, "How One Man Convinced 200 Ku Klux Klan Members To Give Up Their Robes," Race, *NPR*, August 20, 2017, https://www.npr.org/2017/08/20 /544861933 /how-one-man-convinced-200-ku-klux-klan-members-to-give-up-their-robes.
[122] Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 71.
[123] Davis, 44.

His efforts to reach out to the NAACP extend beyond his suggestion: Kelly was a member of the NAACP for a year, and his membership was not renewed because he was a Klansman.[124] This point seems worth noting because maybe it should not be too surprising that Davis forms a close friendship with Kelly, given that Kelly has a previous history of reaching out to his political enemies. In comparison to other Klansmen that Davis meets, Kelly exhibits an immediate openness to a friendship with Davis, and this openness might be a result of his previous attempts to connect with his political enemies.

After their initial encounter, Davis reflects on their discussion. Based on his knowledge of the Klan, he had expected that it would have been impossible to have a two-hour conversation about politics with a Klan leader. He had expected that the meeting would have ended with violence. His experience with Kelly pushes him to revise his beliefs:

> I went looking for a violent man who hates people for no other reason than the difference in skin color. This quest failed. Roger Kelly does not hate, nor is he a violent man. Roger Kelly is a very opinionated man. Expecting to find that Roger Kelly and I had absolutely nothing in common, we found ourselves having some of the same concerns and sharing some of the same opinions. We disagreed on many things and saw humor in others, causing us both to laugh, thus proving that a Black man and a Klansman can stand on common ground, if only momentarily.[125]

Here we can see Davis recognizing the dissonance between his expectations and his experience, and, in turn, his willingness to revise his beliefs about a person of a social identity he profoundly disagrees with on political issues. While acknowledging that

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[124] Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 44.
[125] Davis, 54-55.

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there is deep disagreement about racial politics, he concedes that there are also points

of agreement. This concession prevents him from fixating on disagreement as an

obstacle to future cooperative dialogue.

As his friendship with Roger Kelly develops, Davis forms a friendship with

another Klan leader named Bob White. After their first meeting, Davis observes that

"though he seemed committed to his beliefs, he was receptive to change."[126] Since

Davis found it significant to note this observation, it seems we should not overlook

the importance of White's receptivity to change as an indicator of the potential to

revise his political beliefs. In this case, Bob White's willingness, as a white

Klansmen, to be friends with a black man indicated his receptivity to revising his

political beliefs. The main reason his willingness to be friends with a black man

should be regarded as an indication of receptivity to revising his political beliefs is

that the Klan's ideology condemns the association of blacks and whites; by

befriending Davis, he is challenging the Klan's political ideology.

In addition to detecting White's openness to revising his political beliefs,

Davis and White discover common ground between them on the most unexpected of

political issues. Along with being a Klansmen, White had previously been an officer

in the Baltimore City Police Department. Upon learning this about White, Davis

inquires into White's beliefs about the incident of police brutality involving Rodney

King and four white LAPD officers (keep in mind, it is the 1990s when Davis and

White begin their friendship). Given that White was a cop and Davis is an antiracism

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[126] Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 94.

activist, we might expect disagreement between them with each siding with the person of their own social identity: Davis perceiving the actions of the LAPD officers as a violation of Rodney King's civil rights and White believing the officers were justified in their use of force. Surprisingly, White and Davis agree that the LAPD officers were excessive in their use of force and blame their actions for the riots following their acquittal.[127]

However, when considering White's recollection of his time as a police officer, his beliefs about the incident involving Rodney King become less surprising. White recalls that many white officers he worked with often resorted to the use of intimidation, aggression, and violence in their interactions with the black community. In contrast, White found diplomacy to be a more effective means for enforcing the law.[128] Consequently, we should not be too surprised that the issue of police brutality would be an area of common ground between them.

While conversing with Bob White, Davis explains why he focuses on finding common ground with his friends. Davis inquires, "Bob, there has to be something we can do jointly where we can stand on common ground, even if it's just a small piece of common ground. Once this is accomplished, the fears are alleviated, and the

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[127] Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 102-103.

[128] For example, when receiving complaints about homeless people being loud drunks in a back alley and leaving broken glass everywhere, White's fellow officers would respond by intimidating and harassing the homeless drunks; whereas White politely asked them to keep the noise down and to deposit their empty bottles in the trash can. In exchange, White agreed to let them drink in the back alley without police interference. White found this diplomatic strategy to work well, as the police stopped receiving complaints about noise and broken glass bottles. See Daryl Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 95.

common ground widens."[129] Davis bases the pursuit of common ground on his conviction that establishing common ground creates enough familiarity that fear of those politically different from ourselves subsides and, in turn, common ground enlarges. It seems plausible to suppose that Davis believes that political disagreement among individuals of different social identities is not as deep and intractable as many of us tend to believe, especially for those of us that do not regularly interact with people that disagree with our political beliefs. Through friendship, Davis seems to believe that enough similarities in political beliefs can be found to foster cooperation that leads to progress on resolving pressing political issues, such as racial injustice.[130]

From Davis's account of his friendships, a person's prior experience of finding common ground with political opponents seems to indicate that he could find common ground in friendship with them. Similar to Roger Kelly's prior experience of openness to working with a political enemy (the NAACP), Bob White as well previously displayed an openness to working cooperatively with a political enemy. While incarcerated at a city jail, Bob White had worked closely with an inmate that was a member of the Black Panthers. They helped fellow inmates unfamiliar with the legal system to become more knowledgeable about their legal rights.[131]

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[129] Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 114.
[130] Davis, 117.
[131] As White explains, "He was a Black Panther, and I was a Ku Klux Klansman, and we were working side by side down there for everybody… It seemed odd to other people who saw us getting along pretty good together… We became pretty good friends." See Davis, *Klan-Destine Relationships*, 128-129.

This commonality between Roger Kelly and Bob White is striking because out of all the Klansmen that Davis writes about in his book, the two Klansmen with whom he develops enduring, close friendships both possess a personal history of reaching out to work with people with whom there is deep disagreement about political issues. Especially given that close friendship does not develop with every Klansman that Davis meets, I wonder if these personal histories are indispensable to their willingness to become friends with Davis.[132]

Moreover, these personal histories of making connections with political enemies raises a significant concern: when considering the cause of Kelly and White's changes in beliefs about racial politics, we can question whether it is their friendship with Davis or this aspect of their personal histories that can be attributed as the primary cause of the changes in their beliefs. As already mentioned, close friendship does not develop with every Klansman Davis meets, and presumably not every Klansman that Davis is close friends with ends up changing their beliefs about the Klan. As such, we can ask whether it is the close friendship that is doing the work here or is it this aspect of the friends that plays the decisive role in them changing their beliefs about the Klan.

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[132] Considering that 200 Klansmen befriended by Davis have quit the Klan, my point here might be better supported if we knew more about the individual stories of these 200 former Klansmen. It could be the case that many of them do have personal histories of working with their political opponents before becoming friends with Davis, or it may be that this commonality only emerged in the Klansmen discussed in his book.

Concerning a search for existing friendships that could provide support for my proposal, this question presents a serious challenge. For the sake of this argument, let us presume for the moment that changes in political beliefs indicate a reduction in one's susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition—in the next section, we will discuss why this presumption is problematic. It would be incredibly difficult to draw the conclusion that close friendship itself reduces our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, if, in fact, within the context of close friendship, it is a personal history of engaging with those socially and politically different from ourselves that plays the decisive role in ameliorating our susceptibility. Unfortunately, in Davis's account of his friendships, there is not enough data to determine which is the case. Nonetheless, in a future search for existing friendships to support my proposal, there would need to be a means of determining whether close friendship itself or personal history plays the primary causal role in order to determine if close friendship can ameliorate our susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

Limitations of Daryl Davis's Friendships as Examples of My Proposal

By the end of Davis's account, the reader gets the impression that, as a result of their friendship with Davis, Kelly and White change some of their beliefs about racial politics, and these changes are substantive enough to lead them to resign from the Klan. At first pass, we might be tempted to infer from this change in their beliefs that their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was lessened. We

might be inclined to conclude that, as Davis helps them to become more impartial in their political cognition concerning racial politics, they abandon the Klan's inaccurate understanding of race and commitment to exclusively advancing the interests of whites. As their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition decreases, their beliefs about racial politics are revised, and they decide to leave the Klan.

Though, upon closer inspection, such an inference cannot be conclusively drawn. It does seem plausible to infer that *some* substantive change has occurred in the political cognition of Kelly and White, that some shift in their thinking about race and the Klan preceded their decision to leave the Klan. Nonetheless, there is insufficient evidence in Davis's account to show that the shift in their thinking means their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was reduced.

To draw this conclusion, we would need to know more specific details about their engagement in biased political cognition. As we know little about the nature of their engagement in biased political cognition before friendship with Davis, we do not know the specific motivations that had been guiding their political cognition. Relatedly, there is no evidence to suggest that Davis successfully assisted them with (1) recognizing instances of their engagement in biased political cognition and (2) cultivating impartiality in their political cognition. In fact, we have no evidence that suggests they ever discussed the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition.

It does seem likely that they were motivated to express political beliefs that affirmed their membership in and loyalty to Christian, heterosexual, working-class

whites. Given the racist and homophobic remarks made in their conversations with Davis, their political cognition was likely motivated to form beliefs that protected this social identity at the expense of the interests of people of color and LBGTQ+ folks. Though, to be clear, this is a generous reading of Davis's account and is merely speculation on my part.

However, even if sufficient evidence for these claims existed, we still could not conclude that their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition lessened. It is possible that friendship with Davis facilitated Kelly and White to shift their beliefs about the Klan's effectiveness to secure the interests of their affinity group, but their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition remained unchanged. It could be the case that they are still committed to advancing the interests of Christian, heterosexual, working-class whites, but doubt that the Klan's actions advance their interests—in the next section, we will see this kind of shift in the thinking of Klansman C. P. Ellis.

Furthermore, even if we could establish that a reduced susceptibility was the effect of close friendship, we still could not establish that friendship was the cause of this effect. We have already discussed one reason why it would be challenging to conclusively assert that close friendship with Davis is the cause of reduced susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. One striking similarity between Kelly and White is that they both had personal histories of engaging with their political enemies. If they had reduced their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, it is quite possible that this aspect of their personal histories was

instrumental in achieving this effect. Without knowing more details of their political cognition and their friendship with Davis, it is difficult to determine whether friendship or their personal history was more decisive in improving their political cognition.

Related concerns about the cause of the change in Kelly and White's political cognition arise when considering Davis's character. Davis is an exceptional person with an unusual upbringing: he was taught to seek out the inherent good in all people, to withhold judgment, and to be curious about those who are different from himself. Also, Davis has made it his life's mission to understand racism. Further, given the Klan's history of violence, it is rather remarkable that Davis, as a black man, undertakes the work he has done in befriending Klansmen. With all this in mind, if Kelly and White's susceptibility were reduced, it seems reasonable to question to what degree Davis's character was instrumental in achieving that reduction.

Similarly, upon meeting White, Davis notes his receptivity to changing his beliefs. Thus, we as well can question how instrumental White's cognitive dispositions proved to be in achieving a reduction in his susceptibility. All in all, there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that friendship was the sole or primary cause of a reduction in their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition (if such reduction had occurred).

These concerns about conclusively determining that a reduction in susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition is an effect of close friendship and close friendship as the primary cause of said effect pose critical challenges for

finding empirical evidence to support my proposal. From examining Davis's account, it is clear that we cannot conclude from a significant revision of political beliefs that a reduction in susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition has occurred. Much more knowledge about the two friends' political cognition is needed to determine if friendship reduces their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.[133]

Ann Atwater and C. P. Ellis' Friendship and Its Limitations As An Example

Our examination of Daryl Davis's friendships with Klansmen revealed significant challenges that we would need to contend with to provide empirical evidence that supports my proposal. Given that Davis's account is written by one of the friends in the friendships being discussed, we might wonder if similar challenges regarding adequate evidence arise in an account of a friendship written by an author that is studying the friendship in question. It seems likely that someone purposefully studying a friendship might be better at gathering the relevant data needed for assessing whether or not the friendship aided in reducing the friends' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. The friendship between Ann Atwater and C. P. Ellis provides an example that allows us to explore this possibility, as the account of their friendship is based off interviews and historical research conducted by award-winning, non-fiction author Osha Gray Davidson. Through examining Davidson's account, we will encounter similar challenges to those that arose in examining

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[133] The specifics of the kind of knowledge needed is detailed in this chapter's final section. See page 160.

Davis's account. However, Davidson's account allows us to expand upon the description of the crucial challenges besetting a search for empirical evidence to support my proposal.

Atwater and Ellis' friendship provides an excellent example of political enemies who through working together on a common cause establish a friendship that leads to a significant erosion of the depth of political disagreement between them. When they began working together in July 1971 in Durham, North Carolina, Atwater was a militant black activist, and C. P. Ellis was the Exalted Grand Cyclops of the Durham Ku Klux Klan (meaning he was the official leader of the Klan in Durham). Though the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that segregated schools were unconstitutional, schools in Durham were still segregated in 1971. During the 1960s, desegregation was a central issue in the increasing racial tensions in Durham. To manage the integration of schools after the Durham district court ordered the desegregation of schools, the city council called for a charrette, a collaborative process that involved ten days of town meetings to resolve issues related to the implementation of the court order. Participants were recruited from the different demographic groups comprising Durham, and Atwater and Ellis were appointed to co-chair the meetings.

Charrettes bring together a diverse group of people with the explicit intention of working out differences. The meetings are designed to provide a controlled environment that generates intense reactions among participants during hours-long face-to-face meetings convened over subsequent nights. Osha Gray Davidson

describes charrettes in the following manner: "The trick was to draw out people's deepest longings and fears, their frustrations, and their dreams—while preventing these raw and antipodean emotions, once exposed, from combusting into violence… and then *redirect* that energy toward a healthier resolution."[134] As we will see with the tense back story between Atwater and Ellis, such a trick will seem like magic.

Though, before moving on to the tense back story between them, the fact that their friendship forms within the context of a charrette presents a challenge using this example as evidence supporting my proposal. For the moment, let us assume that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Atwater and Ellis' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition is reduced—later, we will examine the challenges besetting this assumption. Given the above description of the charrette, we could doubt that the primary cause of the reduction in their susceptibility was the friendship itself. Through the charrette's focus on participants confronting the underlying influences on their beliefs, it could be that the charrette cultivated the appropriate atmosphere for Ellis and Atwater confronting their engagement in biased political cognition and receiving the support they needed to become more impartial in their thinking about segregation. As such, it seems plausible that the charrette could have been the cause of the reduction in susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to conclusively know the cause of reduced susceptibility, even if we could establish that it occurred.

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[134] Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 249-50.

Concerning a future search for examples of friendships that could serve as evidence supporting my proposal, the problem of ascertaining the cause of reduced susceptibility in Atwater and Ellis' friendship serves an additional challenge to determining if friendship is the sole or primary cause of reduced susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. When discussing Daryl Davis's friendships with Klansmen, we discovered that the friends' character and personal histories could be potential causes of a reduced susceptibility, as opposed to features of the friendship itself (such as trust and intimacy). With Atwater and Ellis' friendship, it seems the context in which their friendship forms (i.e., the charrette) could as well be a potential cause. Thus, when studying potential examples, we need a way of determining the causal role played by features of the friends themselves (such as character and personal history) and the social context in which the friendship forms to ascertain if friendship reduces susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

With Davis's account of his friendships, one challenge that arose for determining if susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was reduced is that we did not know much about the political thought of the friends before their friendship with Davis formed. In Davidson's account, we get some insight into Atwater and Ellis' political thought before their friendship formed. Atwater and Ellis did not merely profoundly disagree about political issues related to civil rights but instead exhibited deep-seated animosity toward one another. In the years preceding the charrette, both had verbally quarreled at city council, school board, and county meetings. As Davidson describes in his account of their friendship, "Ann and C.P.

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sparred directly at city council meetings. The encounters were usually tense, with potential violence roiling just below the surface…"[135] The potential for violence is no exaggeration: each had once intended to kill the other.[136]

In light of this combative past, we might find it surprising that Atwater and Ellis not only were able to work together to integrate schools in Durham but develop a close friendship that endured until Ellis' passing in 2005. Thus, it would be helpful to have a sense of their lives before the formation of their friendship to understand the animosity that existed between them and appreciate the depth of personal transformation induced by their friendship. Growing up poor, black, and female in mid-twentieth-century South, Ann Atwater held very different beliefs than C.P. Ellis. Davidson describes Atwater as holding "the conviction that all whites were simply and unalterably bad. Yes, some of them had a pleasant exterior. But experience had taught her this much: scratch the surface, and you'll find the racist."[137]

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[135] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 230.

[136] During a city council meeting, as Ellis delivered his typical incendiary, vulgar, and racist rant to the city council, Atwater lost her composure. She reached into her purse and took out a knife. Ellis was unaware of what was going on behind him, as Atwater rose to her feet and headed toward him. She fixed her eyes on her target: a spot on his neck where she intended to shove the knife in him. Fortunately for both Ellis and Atwater, two of Atwater's friends were in front of her, and they grabbed her before she could complete her attack. Before this incident, during a civil rights protest being led by Atwater through downtown Durham, Ellis waited along the planned protest route with a shotgun concealed under an overcoat. He had planned to assassinate Atwater as she walked by him. Fortunately, the protest ended up taking a different route through Durham, and Atwater and Ellis' paths never crossed that day. See Osha Gray Davidson, *Best of Enemies*, 199, 233.

[137] Davidson, 4.

A life of hard work and poverty has contributed to Atwater developing what she would later describe as a "meanness—a shapeless and explosive anger that lay beneath the surface."[138] For Atwater, being a religious person only intensified her meanness: "…devotion transformed simple anger into righteous wrath. At these times, she resembled a biblical prophet, her face clouded over, her immense body trembling with holy rage, one finger thrust like a spear straight at the sinner's heart."[139] This meanness and righteous anger would manifest in her participation in public discourse.[140] Given Atwater's propensity to exhibit anger while engaging in public discourse with her political enemies, we see the severity of the challenge she faced when she had to work with the leader of Durham's Ku Klux Klan and how remarkable it is that them working together facilitated a close friendship between them.

While Ellis lacks Atwater's propensity for anger, he does have a propensity for volatile displays of hatred towards blacks when engaging in public discourse. Comparable to how the anguish of poverty gave rise to Atwater's anger, the anguish of poverty played a decisive role in Ellis' acceptance of the Klan's ideology of hate. Davidson provides the following stark description of Ellis' life prospects:

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[138] Davidson, *Best of Enemies*, 37.
[139] Davidson, 73.
[140] As an example, when a Durham school board official declined to listen to her and attempted to force her out of his office, Atwater seized the telephone from his desk and heaved it at his head. Though she missed, the official sensed it was in his best interest to sit down and talk over the issue Atwater had come to discuss with him. Incidents like this, where she fearlessly confronted white authorities, earned her the nickname "Roughhouse Annie." See, Davidson, *Best of Enemies*, 174, 183.

> C.P. and his one sister were raised in chaos and poverty, as their parents had been, and the future held for them nothing more than it had for those who had gone before: a few years of schooling and then the mills. If they didn't die there, amidst the chattering machinery and cotton dust, they could look forward to a brief and exhausted "retirement" before returning to the red Piedmont soil, their lives having slipped away, trivial and unnoticed.[141]

This poignant description illustrates the desperation that Ellis endures from his poverty, and why Ellis ardently believed in the Klan's ideology of hate. The Klan's political ideology not only explained the cause of his desperation but provided hope that it could be overcome. Equally important, the Klan provided Ellis with a community that emotionally supported him in persisting in the face of such desperation.

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, we discussed the findings of social psychologists that suggest our need for emotional connection and support and a sense of belonging within a community can significantly influence the political beliefs that we hold, and such needs can inhibit revision of our beliefs when they are challenged in public discourse. We can regard C. P. Ellis' decision to join the Klan, adopt their racist ideology, and remain committed to this ideology before working with Atwater as consistent with these findings. When Ellis joined the Klan as an adult, he soon found a sense of belonging within a community. In an interview with Davidson, remembering his official induction ceremony at the Klan hall in Durham, Ellis describes,

> "he felt the old shame of poverty, failure, and purposelessness melt away. A lifetime of being an outsider was over. He felt blissfully submerged into a new and yet familiar community. The Klansmen were the descendants of failed

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[141] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 63-4.

farmers and broken mill hands just like himself. C.P. knew that each one had his own story of struggle and disillusionment, and at that moment, he felt for them that deepest of all bonds, the bond of shared suffering.[142]

With the Klan providing him a profound sense of belonging, we can understand why Ellis expresses political beliefs riddled with hatred towards blacks when engaged in public discourse: public expressions of such political beliefs not only maintained his membership within his community, but they facilitated his promotion to the top leadership position in the Durham Ku Klux Klan. He has much to lose personally and socially from significantly revising his political beliefs.

This description of Atwater and Ellis before their friendship allows us to track the changes in their political beliefs concerning racial politics throughout the charrette and as the intimacy of their friendship deepens. Unfortunately, this description does not allow us to arrive at any conclusions concerning their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. It seems possible that Ellis is motivated to express racist beliefs in part to maintain his status within and express his loyalty to the Klan. At the same time, upon further investigation of his political cognition, it would not be surprising to learn that Ellis consciously reasons in a racist manner, in the sense that he is aware of and intends to hold political beliefs that express hatred of blacks. It seems just as likely that dogmatism, arrogance, and close-mindedness influence his reasoning about segregation as does a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

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[142] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 123.

Similarly, Atwater may be motivated to express beliefs about whites and segregation that maintain her status within and express her loyalty to Durham's impoverished black community. Likewise, upon further investigation of her political cognition, it would not be surprising to learn that Atwater is well aware of how her anger towards whites influences her reasoning about segregation. It could be the case that she consciously intends to engage in false generalizations of all whites as being racist as a way to rally the black community around her efforts to achieve integration. From the available evidence, it is not clear that she is engaged in biased political cognition, and thus, we cannot determine how it specifically manifests in her political cognition. Thus, we cannot conclusively show that their friendship reduced their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Nonetheless, their friendship is intriguing and inspiring in showing us how friendship can transform two people's opposing political beliefs, and in the process, change them from political enemies into close friends.

Through listening to one another and members of the community participating in the charrette, Atwater and Ellis begin to arrive at realizations that challenge their prior conceptions of not only each other but of their respective social identities. Akin to Daryl Davis's experiences of listening and talking with his political antagonists, Ellis begins to find that common ground exists between Atwater and himself and between the poor, black community and the poor, white community of Durham. As Davidson relays,

> For the first time in his life, C.P. really listened to black people, and he was
> stunned to hear, over and over, his own concerns coming from their

mouths. When arguments erupted among kids at school, it was the working-class children—black and white—who were always blamed and punished. New supplies went to the suburban schools, while inner-city schools made do with worn-out equipment. Teachers spent more time with kids from "better" homes and believed their excuses when papers were late or assignments lost. The poor kids were called "liars" and "cheaters." It had never occurred to C.P. that black children were treated as disdainfully as his kids were, and it puzzled him to hear it now.[143]

It begins to dawn on Ellis that the black community did not cause the struggles endured by his family. Instead, there exist black families struggling amidst poverty in similar ways as his own family and the families of Klansmen. The charrette became an experience that humanized blacks for Ellis. Similarly, for Atwater, "while a layer of racism may be nearly inevitable among white Americans... beneath [this layer] Ann discovered something more profound: a recognition of our shared humanity."[144]

As mentioned earlier, even if we had sufficient evidence to conclude that Atwater and Ellis' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was reduced, we still could not conclusively determine the cause of the reduction, as their participation in the charrette casts doubt on their friendship being the primary cause of a reduced susceptibility. From participating in the charrette, they acquired new information about members of social identities different from their own. As we will soon see, this new information about similarities between working-class whites and blacks in their experiences of poverty will play a key role in Ellis' decision to leave the Klan and to become a union organizer fighting for better working conditions for both black and white workers. If part of how these drastic life changes come about is

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[143] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 274-5.
[144] Davidson, 5.

through a reduced susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition when reasoning about racial politics, then it seems plausible that his participation in the charrette played an essential role in improving his political cognition.

However, even if we cannot determine the specific causal role played, it does seem that friendship with Atwater does play some role in shifting his political thought about racial politics. A crucial point that sparks the intimacy needed for close friendship to develop between them occurs during a private conversation following a charrette meeting. Ellis asks about Atwater's children's well-being, and Atwater admits that her children have been struggling at school as a result of her participation in the charrette. Teachers and kids tease Atwater's children by telling them that their mother is a fool for working with a Klansman. Ellis is stunned, as his children are teased for the same reason: teachers and kids are telling his children that their father is a sellout for working with a black woman. Atwater attempts to reassure her children that she is participating in the charrette to ensure they receive a quality education that provides them with a better future. Ellis is incredulous, as he tells his children the same thing.[145]

This exchange primed a candid discussion of the parenting struggles they face as a result of poverty and the poor conditions of their childhood. It struck them how familiar each other's stories were to one another. Even more perplexing was the realization that they were sharing their most intimate grievances, doubts, and failures

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[145] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 275.

with a person that they intensely despised. This deepening of intimacy between Ellis

and Atwater culminated in the following interaction, which they recount to Davidson:

> He looked at her and it was as if he was seeing her for the first time. He was
> stunned by what he saw. Mirrored in her face were the same deeply etched
> lines of work and worry that marked his own face. And suddenly he was
> crying. The tears came without warning, and once started, he was unable to
> stop them. Ann was dumbfounded, but she reacted instinctively by reaching
> out and taking his hand in her own. She tried to comfort him, stroking his
> hand and murmuring, "It's okay, it's okay," as he sobbed. Then she, too,
> began to cry. If anyone had walked into the auditorium just then, they would
> have found it hard to believe what they saw: the Exalted Cyclops of the Ku
> Klux Klan and Durham's most militant black leader sitting together, hand in
> hand, weeping copiously and oblivious to the world around them.[146]

Bear in mind, Ellis as well had shed tears during his induction ceremony. Then, he

was overcome by the moment, as he felt the deepest of all bonds binding him to his

fellow Klansmen: the bond of shared suffering. Here again, we see Ellis reduced to

tears as he feels that deepest of all bonds binding Atwater and himself.

While this powerful moment would prove key to Ellis' personal

transformation, the moment itself did not single-handedly bring about the overhaul of

Ellis' political beliefs about desegregation. As his entire social network resides within

the Klan, it would be unreasonable to expect him to abandon them suddenly.

Nonetheless, Ellis' experience with Atwater had profoundly moved him, and he

sensed changes in how he understood the world were coming. As Davidson

characterizes it, "…a door previously unknown to C.P. had been opened to him. But

he had not walked through it. And he did not want to."[147] Ellis was not ready to

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[146] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 276.
[147] Davidson, 277.

upend his life as he knew it. However, his experience with Atwater affected his engagement in the subsequent charrette meetings, as he found himself more open to listening to the perspectives of black community members and more attentive of the parallels between the struggles of working-class whites and working-class blacks.[148]

It is only as the charrette ends that Ellis significantly revises his beliefs about blacks, though not about school desegregation. He no longer believes that blacks are responsible for the generational poverty endured by working-class whites. Ellis now believes it is the middle and upper-class whites, the factory owners and businesspeople, that keep both working-class whites and blacks in generational poverty. Despite this realization, he was not confident that the desegregation of schools would improve the fortunes of working-class white children. Nonetheless, this realization was compelling enough for him to stop opposing the black community's efforts towards desegregation. Friendship here did not produce an agreement on divisive issues, but it did lessen the tension of disagreement enough to bring an end to public opposition: as the leader of the Klan, Ellis would no longer be standing in the way of integration of Durham's schools.[149]

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[148] Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 278.

[149] Davidson's telling of Ellis' revision of his political beliefs about blacks: "Hard as it was for him to accept, he had come to believe that [the Klan] had been fighting the wrong people for years. It wasn't that he loved blacks. He didn't, at least not as a group. And he still believed in social segregation. But he now realized that blacks simply were not the problem. 'How could they be?,' he reasoned. Except for a few executives over at the Mutual, blacks in Durham had no money or power. They could barely feed their own families. Their leaders had been unable to stop urban renewal from rumbling through the heart of the black community like a tank overrunning an enemy redoubt. C.P. had toured their crumbling and ill-equipped schools. He had visited the bleak housing projects and seen how people there were fighting each

Ann Atwater as well is transformed by the budding friendship with C. P. Ellis. The meanness and righteous anger that characterized her engagement in public discourse with members of the white community softens. She becomes more able to exhibit compassion to those that she profoundly disagrees with about desegregation, in particular, C. P. Ellis. While she does not agree with C. P. that schools should remain segregated, she does show compassion for the suffering he is experiencing as he finds himself revising his beliefs.[150]

From the depth of disagreement that erodes between them as they revise their beliefs about their social identities, at first pass, we might be inclined to think this is an indication that their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was reduced. We might think that the powerful moment that deepened intimacy between

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day for survival. These were the people who were supposedly oppressing whites? No, if any group was holding poor whites down, it was the wealthy white factory owners and businessmen who had called the shots in Durham since the days of Buck Duke—the same men who had been meeting behind the scenes with C.P. for years, slipping him a few dollars "for the cause" and telling him what a great job he was doing fighting the coloreds. He saw clearly now how those men had used him to keep poor blacks and poor whites fighting each other—while they kept control of the reins of power. And what, he wondered, had the Klan actually accomplished for white working people with the endless meetings and bitter fights against desegregation? Not a damned thing, he thought. All it had done was to make a miserable existence a little more miserable for poor and uneducated blacks—people with whom he had more in common than he had with the wealthy white citizens of Hope Valley and the other fashionable Durham neighborhoods" (Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 281-2).

[150] Recalling the celebration to conclude the charrette, Atwater remembers thinking of Ellis, "Poor man, she thought to herself, as she had several times during the past week. Ever since the night they had cried together in the auditorium, she saw how hard all of this was on him. She saw him suffering and wanted to ease his pain, but knew that that was beyond her power. Poor man, she thought again" See Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies*, 281.

Ellis and Atwater led them to grow closer as friends, especially since the charrette required that they spend much of their days working closely together. As their friendship developed and they worked together to resolve the issue of school segregation in Durham, they could have helped one another to become more aware of their engagement in biased political cognition and encouraged each other to be more motivated by accuracy and the common good in their reasoning about segregation. Through these efforts, their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition could have lessened. We might think that their ability to find common ground and regard one another more compassionately attests to the improvement of their political cognition. We might think it is evidence that they are becoming more impartial in their political cognition. This increased impartiality could have, in part, contributed to them agreeing to integrate the schools.

Though, upon closer examination, such claims and inferences cannot be supported. The main reason they cannot be supported is that Davidson's published account does not contain many details of their friendship following the powerful moment that deepened intimacy between Atwater and Ellis and the conclusion of the charrette where Ellis officially endorses desegregating Durham's schools. I say published account because it may be that in the notes and tapes from his interviews with Atwater and Ellis that there exist more details about how their friendship developed during that time, but, unfortunately, none of those details made it into the book.

At the same time, whatever evidence we did find that would be suggestive of this hypothetical trajectory of their friendship, it is highly likely that it would lack the relevant details to support it conclusively. One reason for this is that, at the time of the events being discussed (1971), scholarship on the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition was in its infancy. It is all but certain that they did not discuss identity-protective cognition or confirmation bias. Thus, whatever evidence we find that they did help one another to improve their political cognition would be merely suggestive.

This limitation of Davidson's account does bring up a critical challenge that a future search for examples of friendships would have to contend with to find empirical evidence in support of my proposal. A future search would need to find friendships where the friends possess knowledge of the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition. In Atwater and Ellis' case, their lack of knowledge can be attributed to their friendship having formed before such scholarship had been widely available. Nonetheless, we might still think many friendships that at first pass seem to be suitable candidates for supporting my proposal would be friendships where the friends are mostly ignorant of the relevant psychological phenomena. Even if the friends do possess some awareness of the psychological phenomena (for example, many folks have heard of confirmation bias), how likely is it that they have sufficiently studied such phenomena to effectively help their friend recognize instances where such phenomena manifest in their political cognition? It would not be unsurprising if it turned out that most friendships that

strike us as suitable for supporting my proposal contained friends that were

insufficiently knowledgeable of the psychological phenomena, and thus, they are

unable to offer us conclusive evidence in support of my proposal.

Friendships in A Divided Political Culture

Thus far, in the examples discussed in this chapter, the friendship *itself*

provides information about the very political issue for which the friends had been

presumedly engaged in motivated reasoning. For instance, in Roger Kelly and Bob

White's case, their alleged motivated reasoning is about another group of people

(blacks), a group to which their new friend, Daryl Davis, actually belongs. This is

quite different from the kind of political issue and friendship discussed in the

preceding chapters. In our discussions of Casey and Landry deliberating about global

climate change, the situation is very different in that the friendship itself does not

involve friends whose social identity itself is involved in the political issue for which

they are susceptible to engaging in biased political cognition. In contrast, the

examples provided in this chapter are examples where the beliefs challenged and

changed concern a social group for which the friend belongs. As such, in this section,

we will examine friendships of a different sort—the sort that more resemble Casey

and Landry from earlier chapters. These will be examples of friendship where the

political cognition being examined is not evaluative reasoning about a social group to

which the other friend belongs. In one case, the friendships will have formed before

discussing politics, which contrasts with the examples thus far where it is political issues that are central to the friendships' formation.

Nonetheless, similar to the examples considered thus far, we will encounter comparable challenges for using them as unqualified support for my proposal. There will be insufficient evidence for concluding that their friendship mitigated the friends' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. However, there will be enough evidence to suggest that these examples should be considered for future study, as they are suggestive of the kind of examples that could support my proposal.

In the NPR podcast *Next Door Strangers*, journalist Andrea Smardon explores the theme of "finding connection in a time of division."[151] Within our current polarized political culture, Smardon investigates how people of different social identities and political affiliations interpersonally connect with one another. Similar to this dissertation's aspiration, Smardon aims to inspire her listeners to form connections with people whose political views are drastically different from their own. Though she does not explicitly instruct her listeners to form close friendships, the podcast's episodes do focus on friendships that have formed between people of different political views.

In the second episode, Smardon interviews army veteran Jason Comstock. Upon returning from service in Iraq, Comstock soon found himself angry and depressed, and thus, he sought out therapy. During therapy, he discovered that one

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[151] "Next Door Strangers: NPR," *NPR*, accessed August 3, 2019, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/667408088/next-door-strangers.

thing he was missing in civilian life was the close friendships that he had formed in the army. As a result, Comstock joined his local chapter of the veterans' support group Team Red, White, and Blue. According to their mission statement, their primary goal is "to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity." One component for achieving this goal is "people: creating authentic connections (defined as genuine, quality, supportive relationships that generate mutual trust and accountability), reflected in an increased number of close relationships…"[152] From this description, we can infer that Team Red, White, and Blue seeks to cultivate close friendships among its members that resemble complete friendship concerning the features of mutual intimacy, trust, and emotional support. We also get the sense that unlike the friendships that we have considered thus far, political deliberation is not central to these friendships' formation. Instead, enriching the lives of veterans and providing them with a supportive community in their transition to civilian life is central to the friendships' formation.

Upon joining Team Red, White, and Blue, Comstock met other veterans and local supporters of veterans. They would go on hikes together and train for athletic events to benefit charitable causes. Through this time spent together, he formed close friendships with several of the group members. He found that his depression and angered lessened as he came to share his life with people that supported him daily. As

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[152] "Mission: Team RWB," *Team Red, White, and Blue*, accessed August 3, 2019, https://www.teamrwb.org/about-us/mission/.

Comstock reports, "Because I have these friends, I know that, when things do get

hard, I have people that are not going to ignore me or judge me, but who are going to

drop what they are doing to help me out."[153]

As trust and intimacy deepened within these friendships, politics became a

regular topic of discussion. Comstock discovered that his group of friends are "an

ideologically diverse group with different political views." He contends that this

aspect of his group of friends has opened up his mind about politics. When they go

running together, Comstock will raise a political issue on his mind and ask for his

friends' perspectives. Comstock declares,

> I hear these other points of view that I would not have otherwise heard, and it
> has formed my views and even changed some of my views. Thanks to this
> very tight group of friends, it has gotten to the point where I will wait to form
> a view until I have had a chance to visit with them. Because of these
> relationships, because of the love that I have for them, their views matter to
> me.[154]

Comstock self-report seems to indicate that his friendships have aided him in forming

political views that are responsive to viewpoints different from his own. Additionally,

he has come to value input from those whose ideological commitments are different

from his own when forming his political beliefs. Unfortunately, Smardon's interview

of Comstock does not provide any examples of this process for forming political

beliefs. Moreover, Smardon and Comstock never discuss which specific political

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[153] Jason Comstock and Andrea Smardon, "2: The Strength of Tribes," November 20, 2018, in *Next Door Strangers*, produced by KUER, podcast, MP3 audio, accessed August 3, 2019, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/667408088/next-door-strangers.
[154] Jason Comstock and Andrea Smardon, "2: The Strength of Tribes," November 20, 2018, in *Next Door Strangers*, produced by KUER, podcast, MP3 audio, accessed August 3, 2019, https://www.npr.org/podcasts/667408088/next-door-strangers.

issues for which his beliefs have changed and which issues his beliefs have formed only after consulting his friends. As such, we cannot be sure that his friends' input has aided him in being better motivated by accuracy and the common good in comparison to when he formed beliefs without the input of his friends.

Nevertheless, Comstock's self-report does seem to suggest that he is striving to improve his political cognition and his close friendships with those politically different from himself are aiding him in this endeavor. With further investigation, we might be able to determine if his close friendships have aided his political cognition to become more impartial and him being better motivated by accuracy and the common good when forming political beliefs than he was before the formation of his friendships.

The potential of this example for supporting my proposal highlights the limitations it currently possesses, which are similar to the examples considered previously. Given that no specific political belief or issue is mentioned in the episode, this example lacks sufficient evidence necessary to determine whether or not Comstock and his friends are engaged in biased political cognition. There as well is no evidence to suggest that he and his friends ever discussed the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition. Thus, there is no evidence from this example to conclude that close friendship in practice does aid in friends (1) becoming more aware of their engagement in biased political cognition and (2) reducing their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

From the interview, we as well do not get the impression that Comstock and his friends are actively helping each other to improve their political cognition. Unfortunately, we cannot point to a specific instance that clearly shows them aiding each other to be better motivated by accuracy and the common good when deliberating about politics. The only evidence we possess is Comstock's assertion that his friends have helped him to be more open-minded in his thinking about politics. We have to rely on his self-assessment, as he never provides evidence of how he became more open-minded regarding a specific political issue. Much like Davis's friendships and the friendship between Atwater and Ellis, Comstock's friendships are merely suggestive as evidence. Though, since these friendships are presently developing, it is possible that upon further investigation, we could gather sufficient evidence to assess whether or not my proposal works in practice.

Another potential source of evidence that could be used to assess my proposal is the friendships found within the Respect and Rebellion project. In the fifth episode of *Next Door Strangers*, Smardon interviews Liz Joyner and Jacob Hess, the project's leaders. This project "believes in the power of dialogue and disagreement. We spearhead a variety of programming centered around civility and community-building (especially among political opposites). Events and programs are created with the intent of fostering dialogue, encouraging disagreement, and ultimately, increasing empathy."[155]

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[155] "Respect + Rebellion: About Us," *Respect + Rebellion*, accessed August 3, 2019, https://respectandrebellion.com/about/.

The main program being offered involves pairs of friends with opposing political beliefs engaging in a respectful dialogue in front of audiences at college campuses. This program aims to offer an alternative to inviting controversial political figures to speak on college campuses, as their presence rarely generates respectful dialogue between political rivals. Respect and Rebellion's website features profiles of 21 pairs of friends that can be invited to speak on a college campus. These profiles outline the basic ideological differences between the friends and some of the benefits of their friendship that they can speak about (when invited to a college campus).

Like Daryl Davis, many of the individuals in these friendships intentionally pursued a close friendship with someone politically different from themselves. As an example, let us consider the friendship between Phil Nesser, who identifies as a conservative Mormon, and Jacob Hess (the project's leader), who identifies as a Marxist atheist. They met at a National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation meeting. Upon discovering that they deeply disagreed on all the political issues they briefly discussed, they decided to pursue a friendship together with the goal of better understanding and empathizing with each other.[156] On first pass, it seems possible that, after years of Nesser and Hess striving to understand and empathize with each other, their friendship has improved their political cognition. However, upon further investigation, it is not clear, what improvement, if any, to their political cognition has been achieved through their friendship.

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[156] "Jacob + Phil: Mormon + Marxist," *Respect + Rebellion*, accessed August 4, 2019, https://respectandrebellion.com/speakers/mormon-marxist/.

From examining their profile on Respect and Rebellion and an article they co-authored about their friendship for *The Huffington Post*, it seems that the primary benefit of their friendship is that it has taught them how to have respectful conversations with political adversaries.[157] They do not discuss if their friendship has benefited their political cognition, or if it has provided evidence that has led them to revise their political views. If anything, the reader gets the impression that their friendship has not led to any significant changes in their political cognition or beliefs; this observation can be gleaned from listening to their radio interview and considering the title of the book they coauthored: *You're Not as Crazy As I Thought (But You're Still Wrong)*.[158] They claim that the benefit of their friendship is that they are more understanding and charitable in their view of the ideology that each represents; nonetheless, they are adamant that each other's views about politics are "wrong."

When describing their discussions, Nesser and Hess write, "We would talk about our surprising discoveries in spending hours turning towards our deepest disagreements, including (a) Identifying what we really disagree about (vs. the stereotyped, soundbite portrayals of red/blue conflict), (b) Getting more clear on what we each believe and (c) Having a deeper shift in heart, without necessarily any kind of complete ideological 'conversion.'" Unfortunately, this description is too vague to

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[157] Jacob Hess and Phil Neisser, "Ten Reasons to Spend Time with Your Political Opposite," *The Huffington Post*, August 14, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/ten-reasons-to-spend-time_b_7989942.
[158] Lisa Pollak, Phil Nesser, and Jacob Hess, "478: Red State Blue State" November 2, 2012, in This American Life, produced by WBEZ, podcast, MP3 audio, accessed August 3, 2019, https://www.thisamericanlife.org/478/red-state-blue-state.

tell us precisely what benefits or specific influence, if any, their friendship has had on

their political cognition. However, it does raise important questions that could be

investigated in a future study: how has identifying the genuine nature of their

disagreements about politics influenced their thinking about the issues discussed? Is

there a political issue where they see each other as having valid and sound beliefs?

How does seeing this affect their own thinking about the political issue in question?

What do they mean by "a deeper shift in heart"? Has this shift affected their

reasoning about issues where there is disagreement? If so, how?

With these questions in mind, their friendship seems like a suitable subject of

study for finding support for my proposal. Hopefully, their work fostering respectful

dialogue has cultivated reciprocated good will toward one another and mutual trust

and intimacy. It could be the case that the charitability and empathy that they have

cultivated toward each other over the past years could be the basis of the

nonjudgmental and trusting atmosphere needed to begin the work of aiding one

another in reducing their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. If all of

this is the case, then their friendship would be useful in a future study that seeks to

determine if close friendship can reduce susceptibility to engage in biased political

cognition.

Further Considerations for A Search for Examples Supporting My Proposal

Thus far, the examples we have examined are merely suggestive of evidence

for my proposal. The accounts of these friendships lack sufficient evidence to

conclusively prove my proposal. We need more detailed knowledge of the friends' political cognition and their friendship to establish that the friends were susceptible to engaging in biased political cognition, their susceptibility was reduced, and that friendship is the cause of the reduction. In concluding this chapter, I will sketch some considerations for a future search of examples and a reservation I have about creating a psychological study to test my proposal.

In searching for examples that could be used to empirically support my proposal, the accounts of the friendships would need to possess evidence of the friends' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition before the formation of the friendship. Ideally, for each friend, we would need to know which political issues their engagement in biased political cognition tends to manifest itself and how it specifically manifests when thinking about those issues. Then, we would need a means of tracking their engagement in biased political cognition throughout the friendship, as well as detailed knowledge of their conversations about politics. Mainly, we would want to know the details of their discussions about biased political cognition (what revelatory insights and helpful advice they provided one another) and the effects of such discussions on their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. The underlying idea here is that we need to collect the relevant information for reliably determining whether or not their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition was reduced.

In the cases where we can establish that engagement in biased political cognition diminished, the account would need to have collected sufficient evidence

for verifying that friendship was the primary cause of that reduction. Davis's account attunes us to the possibility that the character and personal histories of friends can play a considerable role in changing how friends think about politics. Relatedly, Davidson's account of Atwater and Ellis' friendship attunes us to the possibility that the social context (such as a charrette) can play a significant role in changing two friends' reasoning about a contentious issue. As such, in cases where we can confirm that friends' susceptibility was reduced, we would need to be able to ascertain that the primary cause of the reduction is friendship and in doing so rule out other likely causes of the reduction.

These considerations about sufficient evidence raise concerns about a methodology for collection of evidence: how does sufficient evidence for assessing a reduced susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition get collected? Given that all of the examples we considered lack sufficient evidence, what could have the authors of the accounts done to collect sufficient evidence? One reasonable response to these questions is to propose a psychological study of biased political cognition and close friendship. It could be the case that the necessary evidence cannot be gathered through authors conducting interviews (Davidson) or friends' documenting intriguing details of their interactions (Davis). It may be that we need pairs of friends to participate in a psychological study that explicitly looks to gather the evidence needed for determining if close friendship reduces a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition.

While a psychological study is an intriguing proposal, it does raise some challenging questions. For example, how do we operationalize and measure the effects of friendship on susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition? Relatedly, how do we go about studying the shared experiences between friends to determine friendship as a cause of change in one's susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition? Answers to these challenging questions are critical to finding empirical evidence to support my proposal.

Unfortunately, providing substantive answers to these questions exceeds my abilities as a philosopher, and they are best answered by cognitive scientists and psychologists. Nevertheless, given the specifics of my proposal detailed in the previous chapter, I have one reservation about successfully operationalizing and measuring the effects of friendship and isolating friendship as a cause of decreased susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. In my proposal regarding friendship, I contended that it is the depth of intimacy and trust that develops in a close friendship that is critical to its potential to decrease susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. It is within the safety and comfort of a close friendship's trust and intimacy that friends can be vulnerable enough to explore their engagement in biased political cognition without feeling threatened. It seems that it would be difficult for the trust and intimacy of close friendship to develop if people outside of the friendship knew what was going on within the intimate exchanges of close friends. Relatedly, if researchers knew very personal things about two friends (the kinds of things that the friends only intended for each other to know), then it does not

seem that the two friends could genuinely trust each other. Thus, if we assume that researchers found existing friendships to use in a psychological study measuring the effects of friendship on the friends' susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, it does seem that they would be intruding upon the very trust and intimacy that is essential to the success of my proposal. Furthermore, it is not clear how researchers could collect the relevant evidence without such an intrusion.

This concern could be addressed by finding friends to volunteer to participate in a psychological study of their friendship. If we have pairs of friends volunteering to disclose the intimate details of their friendship (such as the pairs of friends in the Respect and Rebellion project that already disclose details of their friendship for audiences), then we would not be undermining the trust and intimacy between them. In this case, both friends will have consented to researchers knowing the intimate details of their friendship.

Daryl Davis's friendships, Ann Atwater and C. P. Ellis' friendship, Jason Comstock's friendships, and the Respect and Rebellion friendships show that there exist suitable examples for a study that aims to provide sufficient evidence for assessing the viability of my proposal. With further investigation, it seems we could determine whether or not close friendships between people politically different from each other can mitigate a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. While difficult challenges beset the creation of a study that operationalizes and measures the effects of friendship on susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition, I am

confident that such challenges can be overcome with the aid of researchers that study

the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition. Future

collaboration between social psychologists, cognitive scientists, and philosophers of

friendship could be fruitful in producing results that meaningfully extends the

analysis of this dissertation.

Conclusion

Through our exploration of the psychology of political cognition, we found there exists significant evidence that casts doubt on our ability to have accuracy and the common good be our primary motivations when processing information about morally significant, contentious political issues. Despite our best efforts to be impartial, we learned that it is plausible that without our awareness, we are susceptible to engaging in motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and identity protective cognition, as well as falling prey to the introspection illusion. I argued that we should be disconcerted by our susceptibility to engage in biased cognition regarding morally significant political issues, such as global climate change. We should be disconcerted because its effects are corrosive to efforts to resolve these pressing issues in ways that are inclusive of the members of our pluralistic society. Ultimately, the manifestation of these phenomena aid in undermining a cooperative, equitable public discourse indicative of a flourishing democracy.

After examining accounts of the psychological phenomena associated with biased political cognition from psychology and cognitive science, we considered recent accounts from philosophers examining the effects of biased political cognition on public discourse, in particular, the accounts offered by Jason Stanley and Joshua Greene. In my analysis of Stanley and Greene's proposals, I contended that their proposals overlook a crucial feature of biased political cognition: how an individual's social relationships contribute to their susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. An individual is susceptible to expressing political beliefs that convey their

membership in and loyalty to social groups that are essential to their identity and well-being. Moreover, given the self-interested need to have the emotional support of social groups central to our sense of identity, individuals are unlikely to revise their beliefs in accordance with an accurate evaluation of information and the common good representative of the interests of all stakeholders, especially when doing so goes against the accepted political beliefs of their social groups.

To build upon current philosophical accounts in a manner that adequately addresses the social context of a susceptibility to engage in biased cognition, I contended that forming close friendships with those politically different from ourselves can aid in mitigating a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. To support this contention, I made use of elements from the philosophical accounts of close friendship articulated by Aristotle and Alexander Nehemas. In these accounts, we found that the features indicative of close friendship lend themselves to cultivating a social context that alleviates a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. More specifically, the reciprocated trust, intimacy, and goodwill toward one another found in close friendship provides a social context where friends can aid one another in becoming more aware of their engagement in biased political cognition and support one another to reduce their susceptibility to do so.

Lastly, we explored several real-life friendships that suggest the possibility of empirical support for my proposal. Though, given the authors of the accounts of the examples considered did not conduct their investigation of the friendships with my proposal in mind, there was insufficient evidence to conclude that my proposal would

be successful in practice. Nonetheless, those examples suggested that there exist suitable examples for studying my proposal's effectiveness in practice. Thus, future research concerning my proposal is apt to be fruitful.

Though in considering future research on my proposal, it is worth questioning the importance of empirical evidence for the value and significance of my proposal. I dedicated an entire chapter to empirical evidence because empirical evidence strikes me as the gold standard for proving a theory true. It seems that my proposal is most convincing and most likely to be adopted by people if it can be supported by empirical evidence. It seems that empirical evidence would be the sure-fire way to overcome many of the skepticisms people might have of my proposal. As such, it struck me as worthwhile to explore what empirical evidence might exist for my proposal and how we might go about collecting such evidence.

However, it is as equally worthwhile to consider the possibility that empirical evidence cannot be gathered for my proposal. One reason that empirical evidence might be impossible to gather for my proposal could be because the main contention of my proposal is false. Empirical study might reveal that close friendship with those socially and politically different from ourselves does not mitigate a susceptibility to engage in biased political cognition. Though, a more likely reason is that the details of my proposal does not lend itself to scientific assessment. It may very well be the case that my optimism about a future study of my proposal is misplaced. Given I am not an expert in psychology or cognitive science, it could be the case that we could not operationalize and measure the variables of my proposal. For example, it might be

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the case that it is impossible to psychologically measure the effects of friendship. If this is the case, we could ask, "Would this be bad for my proposal? Is my proposal not worth taking seriously in our everyday lives unless it can be proven empirically?" My sincere hope is that we would still take seriously the need to improve our political cognition and to explore the possibility of how close friendships with those politically different from ourselves can aid in this goal.

Two reasons loom large in my mind for why I hope this would be the case. The first reason concerns the state of our political culture and public discourse in this country. Our political culture seems to grow ever more polarized. It seems that as disagreement deepens, the hope of finding common ground deteriorates evermore. Moreover, it seems that as a society, we are becoming resigned to deep disagreement about pressing political issues being the norm. This relates to the second reason why I would hope folks would take my proposal seriously. Our globalized world is beset by significant challenges whose ethical ramifications extend across the globe. One reason for using global climate change as the running example in this dissertation is that it is an excellent example of a political issue for which an effective response requires not only cooperation across political divides in our own country, but across social and cultural divides extending across the globe. Given the scale of the problems that need to be solved, my hope is that people will be willing to take an experimental attitude, and thus, consider surprising proposals like my own.

Moreover, global climate change is an issue for which it seems that a lack of an effective response would have major ethical ramifications reverberating across the

globe. The modern, globalized world brings more of us into closer contact with people different than ourselves than ever before. Furthermore, the modern, globalized world requires cooperation on an unprecedented scale to address pressing political issues affecting our globe. Given the high stakes, it seems worthwhile to take my proposal seriously, or at the very least to take seriously the problems it seeks to address.

Thus, even if my proposal cannot be supported with empirical evidence, it is worthwhile to consider the ways that close friends can help with improving our political cognition. It as well is worthwhile to continue to explore how our public discourse can be benefited from rethinking the social context in which public discourse takes place. A flourishing democracy that fairly represents the diversity within our pluralistic society and that adequately responds to the challenges that beset us should always remain the ultimate goal.

Appendix: Theoretical Considerations for Democratic Public Discourse

Epistemic Requirements for Democratic Public Discourse

Seeing as democratic public discourse is the main topic of this dissertation, let us begin by defining the scope of public discourse under analysis here; then, we shall turn to what is meant by *democratic*. Public discourse includes the formal political discussions taking place within public forums that include the government itself (whether it be elected representatives in Congress or lawyers and judges in a courtroom), experts at universities, members of the press, and people gathered in protest—this list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide a sense of the range of public forums in which formal political discussions take place. These discussions often occur in a public manner, or in principle are accessible by the public, and are often what comes to mind when we think of public discourse. While the sense of public discourse discussed in this study is inclusive of these public forums, it extends further to include the everyday conversations about politics by members of a democratic society.[159] Everyday conversations play a pivotal role in how we form, express, and refine our beliefs and attitudes that inform the decisions made in the voting booth. Though we tend to emphasize our casting of votes as central to a democracy, we should not downplay the importance of discussion beforehand. Our everyday conversations are just as vital as the more formal conversations by government officials, scholarly experts, and members of the press in determining the course of our society.

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[159] Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 88.

With this notion of public discourse in mind, let us turn to philosopher Elizabeth Anderson's influential article in social epistemology, "The Epistemology of Democracy," to deepen our understanding of what is meant by *democratic* with respect to public discourse. Two epistemic models of democracy Anderson considers are the Condorcet Jury Theorem and Dewey's experimentalist model. She evaluates these models with respect to their ability to model the epistemic functions of three constitutive features of democracy: the epistemic diversity of participants, the interaction of voting with discussion, and feedback mechanisms, such as periodic elections and protests. Here, epistemic diversity of participants entails how a democracy seeks to utilize knowledge dispersed across a wide variety of perspectives when responding to concerns of public interest; by accounting for the variety of interests affected by a potential proposal, a decision is more likely (though not necessarily guaranteed) to be one reflective of the public's interest. Through an epistemic lens, she views democracy in the following manner: "…as an institution for pooling widely distributed information about problems and policies of public interest by engaging the participation of epistemically diverse knowers. Democratic norms of free discourse, dissent, feedback, and accountability function to ensure collective, experimentally-based learning from the diverse experiences of different knowers."[160] From this description, we get a glimpse of the democratic norms that underlie the

[160] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 8.

epistemic requirements for public discourse. To develop this connection, let us

consider her evaluation of both models.[161]

Condorcet Jury Theorem

To better elucidate the upshot of the sense of Dewey's experimentalist model,

let us first explore the Condorcet Jury Theorem, which in Anderson's analysis is the

most popular epistemic account of democracy. This theorem holds that if voters (a)

face two options, (b) vote independently of one another, (c) vote their judgment of

what the right solution to the problem should be (meaning, they do not vote

strategically) and (d) have on average a greater than 50% probability of being right,

then as the number of voters approaches infinity, the probability of that the majority

vote will yield the right answer approaches 1.[162] The underlying assumption is that

the higher the percentage of votes for a policy initiative, the more a democratic

society should be confident that they have selected the correct solution to a problem

of public interest. From this model, we see that democratic roughly translates to

having a simple majority of votes or support, and ideally a supermajority of votes or

support. At first glance, this model may be intuitively appealing, as having a majority

vote/support is key to legitimating decisions in a democracy. Though when pondered

more deeply, we should find this model to be too reductive, as it overlooks the

importance of democratic norms mentioned earlier.

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[161] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 8-9.
[162] Anderson, 10.

With its emphasis on voting, the Condorcet Jury Theorem overlooks the importance of public dialogue taking place before we ever find ourselves casting a ballot. As Anderson explains, "Discussion is needed prior to voting to help voters determine what problems are genuinely of public concern."[163] Prior to voting, not only is public dialogue needed to determine problems of public interest, but also to determine what would be appropriate solutions considering such solutions affect a pluralistic society with diverse interests at play. Many problems our democracy faces are complex with unequally distributed effects on individuals based on their geographic location, social class, occupation, education, gender, race, age, and so forth. Since we are most familiar with the effects of problems and proposed solutions on ourselves and those close to us, knowledge about these effects is also unevenly distributed. The epistemic success of democracy is determined in part by its ability to pool the widely distributed information of its participants in determining the effects of problems and proposed solutions to create solutions responsive to (ideally) everyone's concerns. Epistemic success is a product of engaging the epistemic diversity of participants. By emphasizing merely securing a majority vote between two voting options, the Condorcet Jury Theorem does not ensure that epistemic diversity of participants is genuinely engaged.[164]

A further concern arises when we focus our sense of democracy on voting between two options and seeking a simple majority: such a limited scope of focus

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[163] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 11.
[164] Anderson, 11.

does not adequately account for dissent and feedback after policies are enacted following elections. Whether a policy is successful in addressing its intended concern is not a function of its popularity when voted upon, but rather of the consequences resulting from its adoption. As humans, our predictions are always fallible, as forecasted results do not always match actual results. In recognizing the fallibility of democratic decision making, we need feedback mechanisms that allow us to devise better solutions and correct course as new information develops about the consequences of polices we have enacted.[165] By focusing our sense of democratic exclusively on the casting of votes in elections, we are less likely to be mindful of the fallibility of our decisions and the need for vigilance after an election to ensure concerns are being adequately addressed. As such, the conception of democracy underlying the Condorcet Jury Theorem obscures the epistemic functioning of democratic institutions beyond the voting booth.

In addition to overlooking genuine engagement of society's epistemic diversity and the need for feedback mechanisms, the Condorcet Jury Theorem presumes that voters vote independently of one another. In other words, it assumes we do not influence one another's choices in the voting booth. Such a presumption is not tenable in our current political culture.[166] Candidates and political action committees spend millions of dollars on campaign advertisements in the hope of influencing us. Through online social media, it has become a normal occurrence for

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[165] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 12.
[166] Anderson, 11.

us to engage in discussion in attempt to influence each other's vote. The same can be said for those of us that go door-to-door or volunteer at phone banks on behalf of a candidate or policy initiative. All these efforts are examples of us seeking to influence each other's vote. Additionally, there exists newspaper articles, television and radio shows, YouTube channels, and podcasts that feature discussion of politics—exposure over time to such mediums of communication have some (though we may debate the degree of) influence on us as voters.

While we can disagree about the tenor of these forms of influence, hopefully we do not regard such attempts at influence as inherently anti-democratic. As Anderson contends, "Without access to public fora for sharing information and opinions beyond their immediate knowledge, voters are often uninformed and often helpless."[167] Anderson sees such attempts at influence as discussion among ourselves that help us determine which issues are of genuine public concern. "Without such discussion, they have little to go on but their private preferences. But unlaundered private preferences are not the best input into democratic decision making."[168] While the threat of manipulation and being misled exists, overall, our ability as voters to influence one another can broaden our political thought beyond our own private preferences towards a wider consideration of public interest.

Even though we will not settle on the sense of democratic found in the Condorcet Jury Theorem, it is still worth considering this model and its limitations, as

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[167] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 11.
[168] Anderson, 11.

oftentimes in public discourse we are confronted with the Condorcet Jury theorem's suppositions. It is not uncommon to encounter people whose sense of democratic participation is confined to merely voting in elections. Similarly, we encounter folks in public discourse whose sense of democratic is limited to voting between two options and achieving a simple majority, downplaying the importance of discussion beforehand and feedback mechanisms afterward. For some of us, it may be rare that we consider whether the two options before us and the one that secures the simple majority came about as the result of deliberation that genuinely engaged the epistemic diversity of our pluralistic society. And once the election cycle is over, we may find ourselves and/or others inattentive to the consequences of a policy's adoption, believing we have fulfilled our civic duty by voting. Though to be responsive to the epistemic diversity of our society and conscientious of the long-term effects of our votes, we should see that more than mere voting between two options and a simple majority is needed.

John Dewey's Experimentalist Model of Democracy

Having considered a popular, but insufficient model of democracy, now let us turn to the preferred model that coheres with the preceding analysis: John Dewey's experimentalist model. For Dewey, democracy is characterized by the use of what he terms 'social intelligence' to address concerns of practical interest. Social intelligence embodies an experimental method often practiced in science. Public discourse is a medium for thought experiments in which we collectively deliberate proposed

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solutions, attempting to predict the ramifications of implementing them. At this stage,

public discourse parallels scientists forming a hypothesis to test in an experiment. The

adoption of policy is then regarded as an experiment. Much like how conducting

experiments involves scientists collecting and evaluating data, enacting policy is

regarded as an experiment whereby we collect and evaluate the data resulting from

policy implementation. In a scientific spirit, unfavorable results—failures to

adequately respond to the concerns intended to be addressed or an adequate response

generating worse problems—should be taken as disconfirmation of our initial

hypothesis. And much like scientists, disconfirmation should serve as sufficient

reason for revision—we should aim to revise our policies to achieve our intended

result. In Dewey's model, social intelligence is the application of the scientific

method to problems and concerns of public interest. As Anderson pointedly sums up,

> This requires abandoning dogmatism, affirming fallibilism, and accepting
> observed consequences of our practices as the key evidence prompting us to
> revise them. Dewey took democratic decision-making to be the joint exercise
> of practical intelligence by citizens at large, in interactions with their
> representatives and other state officials. It is cooperative social
> experimentation.[169]

Of the three models we have considered, Dewey's model sufficiently

represents the epistemic powers of all three constitutive features of democracy:

diversity, discussion, and feedback. In *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey

highlights the paramount importance to a vibrant democracy of bringing people from

many diverse walks of life together to determine, through respectful discussion, what

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[169] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 13.

they take to be problems of public interest and to develop proposed solutions. He regarded universal inclusion of disparate perspectives as essential to the success of democratic decision-making. Exclusion casts doubt that the problems and solutions arrived at in public discourse are ones of genuine public interest. The legitimacy of collective, public action in a democracy necessitates responsiveness to all of us. From an epistemic standpoint, exclusion also undermines the ability of collective decision-making to take advantage of our situated knowledge—all of us come from different walks of life that result in us having different experiences of problems and policies of public interest. In a democracy, the knowledge arising from the diversity of our experiences is essential to developing policy proposals. Universal inclusion facilitates maximal use of our situated knowledge, which, as previously mentioned, is crucial to adequately responding to the complex problems that beset modern democracies.[170]

Dewey's experimentalist model emphasizes the need for mechanisms of feedback and accountability that facilitate the institutionalization of fallibilism and an experimental attitude towards policies enacted. Democratic institutions aiding in this endeavor include periodic elections, a free press skeptical of state power, petitions to the government from us, public opinion polling, protests, and feedback provided by us in public hearings on proposed regulations of administrative agencies, such as town hall meetings, city council meetings, etc. Thus, for Dewey democratic participation in public discourse extends well beyond the voting booth, and this larger

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[170] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 14.

sense of participation in public discourse is needed to push policy enacting

institutions to revise policy as evidence of their effectiveness comes to light.[171]

Thus far, our discussion of democratic public discourse has exclusively

focused on policy. While policy is indispensable to a democracy, a democracy is

more than governmental policy, laws, and regulations. At the heart of democracy lies

the culture of its participants; in a vibrant democracy, cultural practices embody

democratic values. Dewey believed his experimentalist model would only succeed if

we, when interacting with one another, welcome diversity in discussion and take an

experimental attitude regarding our social arrangements. In "Creative Democracy:

The Task Before Us," Dewey argues that American political culture needs to shift

away from dogmatism and tradition towards a more scientific ethos. If we are

dogmatic in our political thought, believing that social arrangements should follow

from tradition or appeal to the authority of principles laid down in historical and/or

religious texts, we will be incapable of openly assessing the troublesome, and in

certain cases disastrous, consequences of our current practices as evidence that

changes need to be made. Dogmatism and tradition blind us to the failures of our

experiments and hinder us from engaging in revision. As such, diversity in

discussion, vigilance of our fallibility in decision-making, and willingness to make

revisions in light of evidence need to be embodied in the cultural fabric of our civil

society.[172]

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[171] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 14.
[172] Anderson, 14-15.

One means of cultivating democracy in our culture is through us organizing ourselves into parties, associations, and movements. In doing so, we create social contexts for us to share our experiences, articulate common concerns and problems, and develop proposals for addressing the impact the current social arrangement has on us. Publicly organizing ourselves in such a fashion is a necessary step to ensuring that governmental institutions are not blind to the systematic and significant impacts of its policies on certain social groups. Though for this feedback to be received, in addition to organizing ourselves, there must exist open channels of communication amongst ourselves and with our government decision makers. As previously mentioned, this includes a free press, public hearings (such as town halls and city council meetings), and, given our present age, social media as well.[173]

Effective communication of policy proposals and feedback on current practices not only requires open access for us to speak our minds, but just as importantly, it requires that we be open to listening to one another. When we viciously vilify, shout down, and abuse those who disagree with us, or regard diversity of perspectives and worldviews as a threat, we exclude others and deprive their voice of being heard. In doing so, we create a toxic public discourse where our words fall on deaf ears. Dewey makes this point quite firmly, "Merely legal guarantees of the civil liberties of free belief, free expression, and free assembly are

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[173] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 14-15.

of little avail if in daily life freedom of communication, the give and take of ideas, facts, experiences, is choked by mutual suspicion, by abuse, by fear and hatred."[174]

Let us ponder this point for a moment, as it is pertinent to our discussion in the preceding chapters on friendship. When it comes to respectful dialogue and inclusion of those that disagree with us, our political culture of late has struggled to embody such democratic ideals. We need only to tune into a cable news network, attend a public protest, or read comments posted on social media to see the serious challenges that beset our ability to be respectful and inclusive. Looking back to the chapter on the psychology of biased political cognition, it should not come as too much of a surprise that we struggle in this regard. If already our own social identity and ideological commitments bias our political cognition, and thus we struggle to be genuinely open-minded to ideas and beliefs differing from our own, then it is understandable that we find it challenging to hear out others that are different from us in public discourse. In this vein, we should aim to transform the underlying mechanisms of our political cognition to transform the quality of our participation in equitable, productive public discourse.

Our current struggles to engage in respectful dialogue only highlights our need to habituate ourselves in both thought and action to be more open-minded and fair to the perspectives of others and more humble about our own convictions to enhance our ability to listen more openly and respectfully in public discourse. In other

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[174] John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us" in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, vol. 14, Essays*, ed. J. A. Boydston, 3-28. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press (1981).

words, if in our minds we can become fairer towards ideas disagreeable to us, then we can become more fair in public discourse to those who disagree with us. Understood in tandem with Dewey's experimentalist model, this is the hypothesis we seek to test. We want to discover if we can we habituate ourselves to more fully embody democratic ideals that give rise to an inclusive, diverse public discourse that is more effective at successfully addressing problems that affect our society. To this end, we also need an understanding of political disagreement that coheres with this goal.

The Epistemic Importance of Political Disagreement for a Flourishing Democracy

Developing an inclusive and respectful public discourse entails characterizing political disagreement as advantageous to a flourishing democracy. For some of us, our initial thoughts about disagreement may be that we regard it as undesirable and believe that our society should strive for wide consensus on contentious political issues. While this may appear ideal, we should recognize that such a goal is incompatible with our pluralistic society comprised of diverse viewpoints. In a diverse society, could we reasonably expect people from very different walks of life to agree on political issues? But recognizing that differences are not conducive to agreement need not be cause for despair, rather it should encourage us to consider how disagreement could be beneficial to a flourishing democracy. Instead of seeing disagreement as an aberration, Anderson believes that diversity and disagreement are central features of a democracy that should be represented at all stages of deliberation

in decision-making: before a decision, at the point of making a decision (voting), and after a decision has been made. Dewey's experimentalist account of democracy provides a role for disagreement at each of these stages.[175]

Before a decision, expression of disagreement in group deliberation should draw our attention to the diversity of perspectives on the problem under consideration. As mentioned beforehand, such expression of diversity is vital to determining the concerns and problems of genuine public interest, as opposed to merely private or partisan interest. Matters of genuine public interest are determined by comprehensive expression of how folks of different walks of life are impacted by a problem. Disagreements arising from expressions of diverse viewpoints serves as the impetus for mutual accommodation and compromise in arriving at proposed solutions to vote upon. When diverse interests are represented through mutual accommodations and compromises, it is in this sense that a collective decision is consonant with the autonomy of each of us. While it is impossible to be inclusive of *all* interests in any one collective decision, such a reality should remind us that no one collective decision completely resolves a matter of public interest, that more work lies ahead in making future collective decisions.[176]

Turning to the significance of disagreement at the stage of decision-making itself, at this stage, we might wonder, "Why recognize the decision of a majority as the valid decision for all of us? Shouldn't we strive for unanimity?" An obvious

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[175] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 15.
[176] Anderson, 16.

answer is that it seems hardly anything could be decided in a pluralistic society if we held ourselves to the standard of unanimity, especially in a society experiencing deepening polarization as our own.

A more sufficient reply factors in the epistemic costs of achieving consensus. When beset by pressing matters of public interest, collective decisions oftentimes are made from necessity and urgency. As such, requiring unanimity can easily lead to excessive pressure on and coercion of dissenting minorities. While coercion is itself objectionable, it also results in harsh epistemic costs. Consensus implies an agreement where all reservations to a proposal have been addressed or at least superseded by more salient considerations. On the pretense of this implication, all agreeing parties hold their peace after a decision is made. In turn, this represses public disclosure and responsiveness to the continuing objections dissenting individuals have about the collective decision. As Anderson is in favor of having open disagreement, she contends, "Majority rule, while it permits majorities to override minority objections, does not pretend to have fully answered those objections. Minority dissent remains open rather than suppressed, reminding us that any given decision remains beset by unresolved objections."[177] By allowing for minority opposition to keep the public aware of unanswered objections to collective decisions and to propose alternatives, decision makers can be held accountable and be compelled to reconsider their decisions. It is through continuing dissent after a

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[177] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 16.

collective decision is made that fallibialism and experimentalism can be realized in democratic institutions.[178]

A final intriguing point that Anderson makes about disagreement and autonomy: "Dissent prior to decision-making is a necessary condition for the formation of a genuinely collective will consistent with the autonomy of each member."[179] This may strike us as surprisingly odd, as we may not associate our disagreement with group members as an expression of our autonomy. Rather, we may think for a collective to genuinely will something as an expression of each member's autonomy that there must be agreement, that each member must individually will the decision. As such, how could disagreement be deemed necessary for a genuinely collective decision? Anderson responds to this challenge by asserting that we do not need consensus among all individuals, "but simply a willingness to accept the collective decision as authoritative for the group (even if one privately dissents), and to do one's part in upholding the decision."[180]

In our present period of deepening polarization and partisanship, we should stop to reflect on this point. Do we honestly think that we should be willing to accept a collective decision, even if we privately disagree? Or should our disagreement lead us to regard the group decision as not representative of us? Further, if our disagreement with a collective decision is on the basis of deeply held moral convictions, once enacted, do we believe that we have a responsibility to uphold the

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[178] Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy," 16-17.
[179] Anderson, 16.
[180] Anderson, 16.

decision? Or in dissenting, do we have a responsibility to defy and undermine the legitimacy of the collective decision? In asking these questions, I have in mind certain kinds of contributions made in public discourse: when some of us say something to the effect of, "Well I didn't vote for that person (or law), they (or it) do not represent me," or have bumper stickers that defiantly proclaim, "not my president." The underlying implication of these gestures seems to be that for some of us that a collective decision is only regarded as legitimate when it accords with our private preferences and personal commitments. Not that all or most people view the legitimacy of collective decision through such a narrow lens, but, as polarization deepens, such sentiments are worrisome and erode a flourishing democracy. If a democracy is to thrive, we must be willing to accept collective decisions as legitimate, even when at times we personally disagree with them, believing they violate deeply held convictions. At the same time, accepting collective decisions as legitimate does not mean blind subordination—when we disagree, we should be involved in actions aimed at revising collective decisions.

In adopting this sense of democratic public discourse from Dewey's experimentalist model, a question arises concerning whether this sense of *democratic*, and the implications entailed in the use of it, is tied to a particular conception of a democratic state or an overall theory of democracy itself. The intention of the preceding analysis is not to conceptually favor or disfavor any conception of a democratic state or theory of democracy. For example, the sense of democratic public

discourse that has been articulated here should strike us as equally relevant to a parliamentary system (as it is practiced in many European countries) as it is relevant to a presidential system (as it is practiced in the United States). While theories of democracy are related to the concerns discussed here—it may be that certain conceptions of democracy are better at diminishing the effects of cognitive bias—it is beyond the scope of our current discussion to account for such considerations at this juncture. In this study, I am most concerned with the political thinking of participants in public discourse and the immediate social context in which participants deliberate with one another. Questions concerning conceptions of the democratic state or theories of democracy exceed the scope of our present considerations, but nonetheless are warranted concerns that deserve their own extended discussion.

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