I thank Dean Kronman and President Levin for inviting me to join in these tercentennial DeVane Lectures. The structure of this series mirrors a central characteristic of democratic societies themselves: the belief that there is not a single conception of the good as expressed by a single professor, whatever her expertise may be, but rather that there are multiple conceptions of the good, and that such conceptions may well be in conflict. The source of this belief is another belief, embedded deep in the democratic soul, to use Dean Kronman’s phrase, that from such diversity will emerge an understanding of the world, and the place of living beings in it, that would otherwise remain outside our grasp, perhaps outside our very capacity to imagine.

In thinking about this lecture I naturally grew aware of my own good fortune in having lived the two and equal halves of my life so far, in two of the world’s largest, messiest, and in my thoroughly objective opinion, greatest democracies. Each has no doubt shaped me, and my thinking. Of the parts of which I am aware, I know that my belief in the dignity of the individual was no doubt shaped by the unique path of India’s independence from British rule, as was a firm belief in the right of a people to self-determination. In India I also learned about blatant, and therefore dangerous prejudices, while in the United States, I have studied less blatant and therefore dangerous prejudices.

Both countries offer stark examples of threats to the dignity of the individual because of their social group – in Hyderabad’s marriage market, for example, a skin imperceptibly darker than another will require a higher dowry and if lucky, a permit to a lifetime of minor abuses; in New York or New Milford or New Haven, a skin darker than another could fetch a bullet, and if lucky, merely a permit to a lifetime of minor abuses.

My own focus has been on the unconscious mental roots of such threats to the dignity of the individual, that is to say their origin in thought and feeling not always detected by the conscious mind. We are interested in them, for by their very nature, they
fool the senses and consciousness, existing as they do in the heretofore unexaminable parts of the mind. From this work on the mental mechanics of unconscious prejudice, I conclude that the evidence gives new meaning to the phrase “eternal vigilance” for the facts and figures that have been accumulated show that the threats to democracy’s ideals of fair and just treatment, lie in every mind.

II
(Slide: Lincoln in New Haven)

Let me begin with the 16th president of the United States. Opponent of slavery, author of the emancipation proclamation, Abraham Lincoln changed American history while elevating the standards by which the practice of democracy came to be measured. In a rousing speech here in New Haven, given before he was President, he argued that the system of slavery was morally reprehensible and that his party had no choice but to take up the challenge of dismantling it. In what is arguably among the greatest documents of human freedom he set his hand and affixed the seal of the United States to the words (SLIDE: Lincoln Emancipation Proclamation) “… all persons held as slaves … shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.” And later in this same short document, he expressed a hope “And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

Although I stand in the pulpit of a distinguished chapel, I cannot report whether Lincoln indeed received the gracious favor of Almighty God. But what I can report is that the judgment of humankind has been most considerate. Albert Einstein’s assessment of another freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi, comes closer to depicting this American President than perhaps any other: “Generations to come” Einstein said of the Mahatma, “it may well be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.” In dissolving the last system of slavery on the planet while holding the Union together, Abraham Lincoln evokes that sort of assessment.

So let me pose a paradox that will likely chill your spine. Abraham Lincoln also said the following words, whose place in judging his overall assessment, is much debated:

(SLIDE: Lincoln Quote Part 1 – Douglas Debate)
“I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races – that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. (see Basler, 1953, pp. 145-146)
(SLIDE: Lincoln Quote Part 2)

“And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. I say upon this occasion I do not perceive that because the white man is to have the superior position the Negro should be denied everything.”

The historian John Hope Franklin reminds us that if the emancipation of Black Americans was important to Lincoln it seemed so was their colonization, with one hundred thousand dollars reserved for the voluntary emigration of slaves from Washington DC to Haiti and Liberia. Calling Black leaders to the White House, he made the following pitch: “Your race suffer greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side. If this is admitted, it affords a reason why we should be separated.” (see Franklin, 1988, p.189)

How should we understand both sets of beliefs, both sets of actions? In Lincoln’s mind was there an acceptable psychological or moral consistency between the famous aspiration expressed in his 2nd inaugural address “With malice toward none; with charity for all” and his offering emancipated slaves a free boat ride to Liberia? Did he believe the emancipation proclamation fundamentally to be an act of justice as he entered into the proclamation itself while also believing that people of African descent were inherently inferior?

I will argue, like many fellow psychologists, that both Lincolns are true – that such fractures in thought, in feeling, and in behavior are fundamental characteristics of every mind. (And here, I would see it a bit differently from last week’s lecturer, Professor Bromwich, who said, at least as I read his speech on the web, that the unmasking of heroes like Lincoln deprives us of a “well-spring of hope”, that it fosters a “moral snobbery and self-satisfaction”.) My goal is to provoke an unmasking of ordinary folk like myself, by myself and for myself. I use the unmasking of Lincoln to show that we are each, in our own minds, both emancipators and deniers of justice; that in each of us, Lincoln The Emancipator, not only exists, but is a widely shared conscious American
sentiment. The 42nd President only a few days ago, gave voice to the Emancipator in him. On January 14th, in an OpEd piece in the NYT, William Jefferson Clinton called for a new beginning to the 21st century in which color is not the problem, but the promise, of America. A far cry from pleading for voluntary deportation, he spoke of the urgency to close “intolerable gaps” within the criminal justice system, in voting rights, in education, and health. The harder task we face is how to discover and after so doing, how to come to terms with the other, the White-Superior Lincoln that also resides in each of us. That is the task of our research program, geared as it is to discover the minute ways in which mental due process is denied.

III

From Lincoln and the nation, we now visit a place and time closer to our own, given the occasion for this lecture: Yale College in mid 20th century and its explicit and implicit anti-Semitism. Yale, a Jewish friend and colleague tells me, was well known to be inaccessible to Jews and especially so if they carried the double stigma of a public education. His father, he said, graduating salutatorian from the Bronx High School of Science in the late 1940’s was explicitly advised not to apply to Yale, for with his name, photo, and home address, he would be wasting his time. Tony Greenwald, my mentor and collaborator, also public-school educated, did apply and was admitted to Yale. I share an email message with his permission, sent to me a couple of years ago. (SLIDE: Greenwald Email).

“Your collaborator was also a freshman at Yale (in 1955) Yale was very different then, or so it would seem. Yale had an affirmative action program -- which favored applicants from private schools and sons (women need not apply) of alumni (probably still does). I think I was discriminated against in admissions because of a quota limiting Jews -- but it might have been an indirect one that sought geographical ‘diversity.’ I only got into Yale because I could play trumpet -- the band director lobbied for getting me in from the waiting list.”

A person of great integrity and objectivity, he is too modest to mention that he graduated near the top of his class and is now an eminent scientist.

These anecdotal accounts, I discovered, are consistent with the historical account provided by Dan Oren. (SLIDE: Dan Oren’s Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale) The expressions of prejudice range from explicitly degrading comments of applicants such as noting an applicant’s “thick Mediterranean lips” to anger at the change as voiced by a member of the Yale Corporation in the 1960’s: “Look around you at this table. These are America’s leaders. There are no Jews here. There are no public school graduates here”.
In exactly the decades captured by the anecdotes, we learn that indeed an implicit quota on admitting Jews by denying them financial aid and other privileges kept their numbers lower at Yale than at competitor schools. Many things changed the status of Jews at Yale --- most notably, the persistent and high-volume voices of Jews and non-Jews in administrative and other positions of power. The most eloquently outspoken voice was that of the young Eugene Rostow, who later rose to be Dean of Yale Law School, and who pointed out the insidiousness of hidden discrimination. He wrote: “While a realistic defense of Jewish segregation might be offered on the basis of a melancholy resignation to unalterable fact, no such proposal has ever been officially advanced. Authorities prefer a pretense of idealism to the forthrightness of a denial of an uncomfortable democracy, a dubious shadow of nobility to the honesty of consistent illiberalism. These policies, wherever they exist, represent a secret prostitution on the one principle which universities assert to be inviolable, the axiom, namely, that before all else, the University is a center of education and that no vitality in education can exist in an atmosphere of pious deceit and hypocritical profession of faith.”

In addition to the passionate voices such as Rostow’s, an action on the part of Dean DeVane after whom this very lecture series is named caused a dramatic change in the entry of Jews at Yale. According to Oren, who opens his book with a report by William Clyde DeVane to the university’s president in 1948, he asked that Yale seek “an intellectual eminence as great as her athletic or her social or her eminence in activity of all sorts”. To do so required a change in admission policies that favored academic achievement and merit over photo, name, and address, proxies for ethnicity, class, and social acceptability. Once Dean DeVane’s belief that Yale ought to be a leader in intellectual matters caught fire and was instituted into admissions practice, a meritocracy immediately changed the numbers of Jews at Yale and within two generations it ceased to be the issue it was.

I have the greatest admiration for this university; let there be no mistake about it. But in the unmasking of institutions we learn even more than we might from the unmasking of an individual. Institutional behavior, whether the institution be private or public, whether it be a club or a college, has higher velocity impact. So I’ve included Yale in my brief discussion because in celebrating its 300th anniversary and its unparalleled achievements, it is wise to remember that by active prejudices and passive ones, it slowed the speed of democracy by opening its gates slowly and reluctantly to each of many groups: Jews, Catholics, African-Americans, women, and even at this time, I would say to immigrant from non-European countries.
We have spoken of the past and the less distant past; of the nation and of this university. A quick peek at the 24th century is surely in order. To do so I’ll need to confess that I am a nerd. I have watched every episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation and I will confess, other associated series. For those of you who have missed this course in democracy, you have my condolences, and some background. In this clip the character called Data is an android; he has been assigned to temporarily captain a Starfleet ship. What you see in under 2 minutes is the resistance he encounters on account of his not being human, and his enviable response. (VIDEO CLIP: shows the prejudice of a Lt. Commander toward Data, who as an android was regarded unfit to command the ship and Data’s delightful android response.)

In one form or another, we have been interested in such beliefs that Klingons can’t be counselors, that Borellians are not suited to be engineers, that an android is not fit to lead. Replace Klingons with category Men, Borellians with the category Women and androids with your own favorite statistical minority and you have the groups that we work with.

IV

Lt. Commander Hobson’s choices, as you heard in this clip, we will call stereotypes which are colder beliefs, leaving the term attitude or prejudice to refer to the warmer aspects of the mind – that is to say, feelings.

To understand stereotypes and prejudice, and especially to understand how they operate in unconscious form, we can look at some general examples from psychology of phenomena that largely appear to occur unconsciously. I hope to make the point that social acts with moral consequences are rooted in ordinary cognition -- that is to say in the mental processes of attention, perception and memory.

NOTE: The following section may be difficult to follow because of the speaker’s reliance on visual aids.

(SLIDE: Basketball Video)
(SLIDE: Basketball Video again) Why are we surprised by this? We expect our visual system to detect and our minds to interpret the data that come before it. To find out that by counting passes, you’ve missed a gorilla, is intriguing at the least and it gives psychologists a clue about structure and function.

(SLIDE: Construction Worker from Dan Simons – describe scenario)
Demonstration points to the importance of what psychologists call top down processing. If you have a model of the world as operating in a certain way – that it is stable in certain regards, even if the data don’t fit, your mind will impose stability.

(SLIDE: Shepard Tables 1, 2) What causes the bias? Perspective, given by the placement of the legs (one table is parallel to line of vision while the other is perpendicular); the image on your retina is identical, but the image in your mind, overextends the one that parallels it.

Stroop 1, 2, 3
Describe the logic of the task. Automatic interference of meaning with color; in ability to control the incursion on meaning into consciousness.

V
We use an idea similar to this Stroop task except that it concerns social groups (Male, Female Old, young, Asian Am. European Am.). We do ask people about their conscious views about these groups – is this person or group American? Is this person strong? Is this person or group good? But also do something else – we make them respond under some pressure, simply demanding that they make some classifications rapidly. Just like Stroop (if slow, no difficulty). But when you go fast, when you bypass a feature of consciousness that we call control, it turns out that we see an interesting picture. If I asked you to rapidly pair faces of elderly people with concepts that represent “good” you would do this more slowly than if you were pairing youthful faces with “good”.

1. The inability to associate the qualities of good/bad to different social groups is well established. (SLIDE: Cunningham Data)
2. Sometimes such preferences are related to more conscious ones. GORE/BUSH. At times they point in the opposite direction. (SLIDE: Cunningham)
3. Does it matter whether you are Black or White etc.? Yes, the group to which you belong DOES make a difference to the type of effect and the magnitude of the effect you will show. KOREAN/JAPANESE AMERICANS data.

Look at two groups that don’t show quite this effect. (Race. Age.)
4. As unconscious as these effects may be, it would be incorrect to think they are stable. We think they change generationally – we expect that Lincoln’s implicit preferences may have shown more negativity than Clinton’s in part because of the time at which they live,
although we might also expect their conscious attitudes to be even more widely different – indicating the way in which our conscious thinking about social groups and equality have changed. But there are no good data on that point yet.

But we do know that we can see them waver−ing within short periods of time. Several students who received their PhD’s here: Irene Blair, Curtis Hardin, Biju Dasgupta, Siri Carpenter have shown that interventions of a relatively simple sort can produce greater or lesser favorability toward otherwise negatively construed groups. So, the elderly may be seen as more “good” after brief exposure to pictures of positively viewed elderly (Mother Theresa); or more positive associations to Black Americans after brief exposure to (MLK Jr. Michael Jordan, Denzel Washington). (Describe Siri’s Data)

Simple as these findings seem to be, they evoke many different responses indicating that they are not so simple at all. Brian Nosek, Tony Greenwald and I opened a website (www.yale.edu/implicit) in 1998 at which many have stopped to take a test – we have well over a million measures completed. There are those who accept the result and are proud of it, there are those who are troubled by it and use it to ask deeper questions about themselves and their society, and there are also yet others who are troubled by it and reject it as speaking to anything important. Our purpose is not to proselytize, and hence we offer no advice at the website about how one ought to interpret the meaning of any self−discovery. Yet I cannot help but invoke Dean Kronman’s reference to St. Paul who cried out “I do not what I want but the very thing I hate”. When such a discovery is palpable, we think it might serve as a moment of reflection -- who am I? What makes me this way? What must I do about the discrepancy between my conscious and unconscious selves?

I, who admit to showing many of these biases in quite robust ways, see them as saying something about my own mind and what has come to be in it – in part because of the time in which I live, because of the culture in which I live, because of the particular set of experiences I have had (including ones I can’t consciously remember). But I conclude that these do reflect a part of who I am – that is to say they are not only reflections of my culture but shapers of my culture. That they have a life of their own sometimes in opposition to my conscious egalitarian beliefs gives me pause. And they remind me that if I am to be a participant in the democratic process, that eternal vigilance about the threats to the dignity of the individual is ever so greater a need. That multiple conceptions of the good must never go unheard.
We have covered much ground and one consequence is always that we’ve been tourists rather than travelers. But I have been at this task for the past dozen years in one way or another. And I can tell you that from the first experiment that Tony Greenwald and I ever conducted on the unconscious limits on social judgment, it has been clear that there is a connection between these nitty-gritty experiments and ideas that lie seemingly far from them. In particular, that these experiments speak to questions about legal procedure, constitutional development, and the design of social and political systems.

In the year 2001, it is well-understood that any viable nation-state is likely to be composed of multiple ethnic and religious groups that differ in access to resources and that these are the fault lines along which we observe and will continue to observe tears in the fabric of society.

To deal with disparities, societies have each generated their own solutions: The Lebanese constitutional system for example, requires that the president must be a Maronite Christian, the premier a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the National Assembly a Shi’ite, with minor posts for other minorities. In Ireland, the lines were drawn physically – the Catholic south became Ireland, the Protestant north joined Britain but the presence of Ulster county, a Catholic enclave surrounded by Protestant territory continues to pose a challenge. And the most direct such experience for me was living in India at a time when there was an Urdu-speaking West Pakistan and a Bengali-speaking Each Pakistan, one country, two locations, separated by 2000 miles of India.

Although the Lebanese, Irish, and Pakistani solutions to diversity are illustrative of the scope and extent of human ingenuity, they are socially unstable and, at least to me, morally unsatisfactory. Structural flaws in existing solutions lead me, to thinking along the lines offered by John Rawls, who recognized that social “goods” as opposed to social “bads” are an intrinsic part of the resources that must be distributed fairly and justly. In his classic *A Theory of Justice* he offered the following principle:

“All social primary goods –liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored” (see Rawls, 1971, p.303).

If this view is appealing to you, as it is to me, I wonder if we might take it a bit further. I would argue that research on the implicit or unconscious bases of thought and feeling, belief and attitude can be newly used to enhance this notion by requiring the added recognition of implicit mental inequalities.

To make the connection between automatic category-based judgments that happen in 500 milliseconds to the broad design of social systems not only seems, but is, an unimaginable distance. But I remind us that science has been there before. In the
1930s the astrophysicist Subramaniam Chandrashekar used as microscopic a phenomenon as the orbital mechanics of a single electron to predict the existence of black holes – about as macroscopic a phenomenon as one can imagine. (It did not meet with much success initially, I should add because Nobel committees, like God, see the truth -- but wait. It took 50 years after this proposal for the idea to serve as the basis of his Nobel Prize).

I admit to harboring the belief that it is possible, even in matters of connections between mind and society, to imagine a bridge between the mechanics of the mind, and the larger universe they reflect and shape, in just that way.

References


