

Humanity's Changing Perspective

Original Oratory, 2014

Science is constantly changing. Stephen Hawking shows this in his book "A Brief History of Time" with the story of a scientist giving a lecture several centuries ago. In the lecture, he discusses how the earth orbits the sun and the sun orbits the center of our galaxy. After his speech the scientist is approached by a little old lady who refutes his teachings, saying that the earth is actually a flat plate on the back of a giant tortoise. When asked by the scientist what the tortoise is standing on, the lady replies "You think you're very clever, but it's turtles all the way down."

To us today, the idea that our planet is supported by an infinite number of tortoises seems absurd. Equally crazy are ideas like that everything around us is made up of only four basic elements, that the earth is at the center of the universe, and many other ideas that passed for science many years ago. But is it possible that what we think now will seem just as ridiculous to future generations? It is human nature to say, "No! What we currently believe is the truth and our ideas will stay around for centuries to come." Still, this same stubbornness was shared by the little old lady that thought the world existed on a titanic tower of tortoises. So today, let's take a look at all the ways science has been proven wrong throughout history. Then, we'll consider some of the modern scientific principles that could be disproven. Finally, I'll discuss why it's important for people to let go of the idea that humans already know everything about the universe.

The belief that the world is flat is just one of many scientific inaccuracies throughout time. Another major example of humanity's fallacy was the principle that the earth is the center of the universe, an idea originating with the ancient Greeks. A philosopher named Ptolemy created a model of this universe in the Second Century AD that became a widely accepted model for over a thousand years. It was only until the 16th and 17th centuries that astronomers such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler proposed that it is the earth that rotates around the sun, which we still hold true today.

The worrying thing is that Ptolemy's incorrect model of the universe was actually effective at predicting the movements of the planets and stars. Since it worked so well, people did not question it. I begin to wonder about the things that we currently believe that seem

accurate but are really incorrect. Who will be our modern Copernicus and challenge these widely accepted scientific principles? Will they also meet ridicule?

Some more recent scientific changes include the discovery in 1956 that humans have 46 chromosomes as opposed to the 48 that had been believed for half a century. There was also the theory of maternal impression: that a woman's thoughts and interactions while pregnant can be physically reflected in their children. By that logic, my mother's obsession with Johnny Depp should have given me dashing good looks, but now we know it is just a coincidence. And, of course, there is the very recent decision to rule out Pluto as an official planet. The ruling out of Pluto as a planet was not so much a discovery as it was a decision when scientists redefined the word "planet," which shows how even our definitions of things may change over time as we find definitions that are more suitable.

As one can see, history has been full of new ideas replacing old ones, with every generation believing they finally had everything figured out. But what sorts of things do we believe now that might be disproved tomorrow? Well, let's take the big bang theory for example. And I'm not talking about the TV show, although it is quite humorous. No, the theory of the big bang states that the universe started in an incredibly dense and incredibly small object that exploded outward approximately fourteen billion years ago and is still growing today. This fits in with Edwin Hubble's discovery that the universe is expanding, as shown by the fact that other galaxies are moving farther away from our own. Scientists are able to formulate arguments for and against the big bang theory, but it is likely it will remain just a theory for a long time to come, possibly forever. It's difficult to speculate on events that occurred at such a distant point in the past. Chances are we'll never know for certain exactly how the universe began.

Another idea on the chopping block is string theory, which attempts to describe what subatomic particles are made out of. Due to the incredibly miniscule size of the objects involved and the fact that many of its ideas are deemed unprovable, string theory is wrapped in speculation. Many scientists believe it can never be proven, which means that it's probable it will be replaced by another theory with more evidence.

Now, there is a principle relating to how ideas are constantly changing known as the "Half-Life of Knowledge." First coined by economist Fritz Machlup, the half-life of knowledge refers to how long it would take for half of all the ideas in a specific field of research to be

either replaced by better ideas or disproved entirely. Canadian psychologist Donald Hebb estimated that the half-life of knowledge in psychology was only five years.

Scientist and mathematician Samuel Arbesman has a book relating to this entitled “The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date.” In it, he measures the number of years it takes for half the material in a research paper to become obsolete. When investigating the research papers of different fields of study, he discovered that a physics paper had an average half-life of slightly over thirteen years, while for math it was only a little over nine, and several other subjects were even less. With all these scientific fields having such small half-lives, one can see that it is only a matter of time before a majority of what we believe now becomes disproven.

But why is it important for humanity to realize when an idea just needs to be let go? Well, it’s possible some of our scientific beliefs today may actually be detrimental to society. Take the principle of the “Four Humors,” for example. This was an idea of ancient Greek and Roman physicians that the human body has four distinct fluids: Yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and water. Too much of one of these fluids could lead to bad health and poor temperament. People even thought they had figured out specific emotions that corresponded with each fluid. Surprisingly, this belief lasted for over two thousand years and dominated medical practices across the globe, finally meeting its end in the 1800s. The idea of the four humors was harmful, as it led to practices such as blood-letting, a process in which doctors removed patients’ blood in an effort to reduce what they thought was an excess. Today we realize that removing blood can at times be helpful, but a majority of the patients of blood-letting were only harmed further.

Now, could our current medical practices also be harming us? Not only is it possible, but history shows us that it’s likely. Even if an incorrect scientific idea isn’t specifically hurting us, it’s certainly holding us back. People shouldn’t hold on to past beliefs just because they make sense or because it’s what they have always known. People need to be more open minded when it comes to scientific progress. Francis Crick was the co-discoverer of the DNA double helix. He once addressed people who would not let go of past ideas and accept the ones that have more scientific evidence, saying: “What everyone believed yesterday, and you believe today, only cranks will believe tomorrow.”

It’s true that humanity’s scientific capabilities are at an all time high right now, but they can only get better tomorrow. As humans keep making new discoveries, we will continue to

prove previous ideas wrong. It's important for people to swallow their pride and admit that our current beliefs could be wrong, because the idea that humans already have the whole universe figured out is as crazy as a giant tortoise holding up the earth.

Other

Original Oratory, 2015

It's a situation I'm sure many students know well. You sit down to a standardized test, and have to bubble in your name, your grade, and... your ethnicity. For most people, bubbling in their race is no problem. It's by far the *easiest* question on the test. But for others, like myself, things are not so simple.

I am multiracial. While my father is caucasian, my mother is hispanic, both her parents having moved here from Puerto Rico. For this reason, on standardized tests I am left with no choice but to fill in the bubble that says "Other," since I don't identify myself as either white or Hispanic alone. On the rare occasion when there is an opportunity to list myself as "multiracial," I do so, but never has there been the chance to fill in what races make up my mix. There are countless other students across the country with similar constraints, and this number is continuing to grow.

So, I'm going to present the unique problems that multiracial students are faced with in modern America. I'll do this by first discussing the psychological effects associated with being multiracial. Next, I'll show that this issue can not be ignored since the number of mixed-race people in America is at an all-time high and is continuing to grow. After that, I will explain what can be done to help address this issue, and what you can do to help.

Now, some people today think that multiracial and ethnic students only have benefits. Programs like affirmative action have been instituted to bring more students of color into colleges, and certain scholarships exist for ethnic students. But, many Americans are unaware that there is a major downside to being multiracial: psychological issues can often come with it.

In an article from 2013, the American Psychological Association outlined a series of things that could arise in a multiracial person's life and lead to psychological problems. For example, they say that a multiracial child can face discrimination even from their own *family*. Half-mexican and half-white Kareena Acree-Páez recalls how her grandmother treated her monoracial cousins better than she treated her, as did the other members of her family. This caused Kareena to resent going to family gatherings, and she even broke into tears when she was forced to attend one. In addition, the American Psychological Association says that multiracial kids feel that the multiracial community is small and there are no role models to look up to. And

the American Psychological Association even covers my example of only being able to choose one race on standardized tests, saying that this lack of control in being able to properly self identify has been shown to affect one's mental health.

Racism is also a huge problem. Half black and half white sixteen-year-old Brian Harris wrote about an incident where a classmate of his was *bragging* about how he had trained his dog to attack the black mailman. The classmate quickly added that he hadn't taught his dog to attack Mexicans, since that's what he thought Brian was, as that's what he looked like on the outside. It is very common for racist remarks to occur around mixed race people, since they are not obviously one race or another, and these comments can be scarring.

And I know a major issue for students today is wondering what race they should fill out to look best to colleges. There's no denying that race can play a major role in the decision that colleges make, and whether or not this is fair is an argument for another day. Still, I believe anyone should use whatever advantage they can get when applying to college, but no one should have to base their *entire identity* around what some college might prefer to see.

There are a few ways that I have experienced the downsides of being multiracial, and I'm not just referring to the very loud parades I have to endure being half Irish and half Puerto Rican. I still get odd looks from people when I first introduce my mom. I've even had one kid insist that she's not my mom, and another try to convince me that I'm adopted. I know that I don't resemble my mom, so I constantly anticipate peoples' confusion, and I don't get angry with them when they do make certain uninformed statements. But I can see how a multiracial child who faces discrimination, ignorance, or even bullying on a daily basis can certainly have psychological problems.

And the truth is, we aren't that far from the discriminatory America of the past. In 1958, Mildred Jeter, a woman of native-American and African descent, married Richard Loving, a white man. But, at this time, interracial relationships were still outlawed in Virginia, where they lived. The Lovings could have chosen to leave Virginia quietly and without protest, but instead they decided to *fight*, bringing the issue all the way to the Supreme Court in the case of Loving v. Virginia in 1967. The Supreme Court decided unanimously in favor of the Lovings, considering marriage a fundamental right, and all state laws banning interracial relationships were struck down as unconstitutional.

When NPR discussed this case they stated that things have obviously gotten better for mixed race couples, but that there is still discrimination out there. It amazes me to think that this court decision occurred during my parents' lifetimes.

So, now that it's clear that there is a psychological burden placed on many mixed race children, I'll show that it's essential that we address this problem quickly because the mixed-race population of America is rapidly expanding. With these people being such a large demographic group, their problems can no longer be ignored.

CNN explains that the year 2000 was the first in which the United States census allowed people to check off more than one race, saying that 6.8 million people did so that very first year. But, in only 10 years, that same number increased by 32 percent, making it one of the fastest growing racial categories on the census. The American Psychological Association also states that multiracial children are currently the largest demographic group among American citizens under the age of 18.

In a 2013 article from National Geographic, the magazine published a series of images depicting what the average American could look like in the year 2050. These images were of people from various mixed heritages. The woman at the front of the article had light brown skin, hazel eyes, and golden-brown hair. All the people were very unique and fascinating to look at, as they didn't fulfill the typical image associated with any one race. National Geographic supports the fact that racial mixing is increasing in America.

Finally, the Pew Research Center published results of a recent survey in America, showing how many newly married couples are of different races. The numbers varied across the different states, but overall they found that one in seven new marriages is between persons of different ethnicities. This is more than *double* the number in 1980.

There can be no doubt that the multiracial community in America is large and is continuously expanding. With such a big part of our country having certain psychological problems, something needs to be done to help them. So, now to the solutions.

The answer to my standardized test problem seems simple. I would suggest that these tests don't even ask you to fill in your race. In reality, race isn't a good indicator of anything. The book *What Are You* by Pearl Gaskins explains that people of the same race are no more genetically similar than people of different races, and only 0.01 percent of our genes affect skin color. Still, I understand that these tests aren't likely to stop asking for race any time soon. So,

the other answer is to simply let people fill in more than one race. If it comes to psychological health, I think the Scantron can handle a double bubble.

But, as I explained, this issue is much larger than just a penciled-in bubble on a piece of paper. When the American Psychological Association said that multiracial students lack multiracial role models, they stated that it is useful for them to find a community of others that are like them. Therefore, it stands to reason that schools could institute clubs for multiracial students, allowing them to feel like they are part of a bigger community and providing them with a group to talk to for support.

I am also happy to see that so many interracial relationships exist on television and in pop culture now. While the names of Kim Kardashian and Kanye West are not often said in the same sentence as the phrase “*good role models*,” their marriage does show young Americans that mixed-race relationships are normal parts of our society. Exposure to these types of relationships will help the average American to grow used to it and not even notice a difference when they see a mixed race couple on the street. So, while some institutions are still not there yet, it is clear that society as a whole is moving forward, which is essential, since race lines are becoming more and more blurred.

But, what can you do to help fix this problem? There are several simple things. First, and this should be obvious, don’t try to convince a mixed race person he’s adopted. It’s likely he might know better than you would. Second, since this is not an issue that gets much attention in today’s media, do your best to know about it, and even spread word about this problem. The more people that know an issue’s out there, the more likely it is to be resolved. Next, when you think that multiracial students only have benefits, with scholarships and affirmative action, keep in mind that there are downsides as well, these being the psychological effects many mixed race children are faced with. Lastly, do not buy into the rumor that multiracial people are “confused” or that they “struggle with their identities.” This is completely false. We may be mixed, but we are *not* mixed up. When it comes to race, I know exactly what I am, and it is not something that can be expressed with a single penciled bubble.

I hope that soon society will make it easier for others like myself to express what we truly are, unrestricted. As multiracial nineteen-year-old Candace Rea states, “I am not an other and have never been an other. I am a person of mixed race. I don’t belong in some outcast category. I am a person just like everyone else.”

Yellow With Envy

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Quick! If I say red, white, and blue, what's the first thing you think of? Perhaps you pictured the words "American flag" or "freedom" or just "USA." If you did, my question to you is, why? All I did was list three colors. What does that have to do with our country? Nothing really, just the fact that those colors happen to be the ones we decided to use on our flag. TIME magazine even admits that the colors had no official meaning when the flag was adopted in 1777. Great Britain used them and they looked nice together, and that was that.

And today, 24 countries have red, white, and blue flags. 850 million people live in these countries. That means that over ten percent of the world's population associate red, white, and blue, with their own specific country.

Colors are fascinating. Colors can be used to symbolize things as complicated as countries to things as simple as genders. But many of us don't stop to wonder why these colors represent these things. Why does green mean envy? Why is pink feminine? Not only do most of us blindly accept associations like these, but some color-related associations can be extremely harmful, and I hope to persuade each of you to think before you make a generalization about a color. So, today, I'll start by telling you how colors have evolved to represent different things throughout history. Next, I'll explain why affiliating colors with things without understanding why can be problematic. Finally, I'll show how we all can avoid making harmful associations about colors in the future.

Now, it's human nature to link things with traits without really stopping to think. We associate owls with intelligence and rain with sadness, but we don't really know why. But I'm focusing on colors, since humans have been using colors to symbolize things for centuries but few of us reflect on how these affiliations started.

So let's begin with purple. Purple doesn't symbolize much now, but hundreds of years ago, purple was used as the royal color in the Persian and Roman empires. History.com explains that in Rome it was even illegal for citizens to wear purple under penalty of death. The reason for purple's royal connotation was the rarity of purple dye. The dye was made from snails, and 250,000 snails were necessary to make a single ounce of the dye. This rareness caused purple

clothes to be ridiculously expensive, but the royal purple eventually fell out of use, especially when synthetic dyes reached the market.

Here's another fact that perhaps some of you have heard before: pink was not always for girls, and blue was not always for boys. In fact, it used to be reversed. The Smithsonian states that these colors started off as gender-neutral, but around World War 1 blue was used for girls and pink for boys. The 1918 trade publication *Earnshaw's Infants' Department* explained this association by saying pink is a strong color suitable for boys, while blue is a dainty color suitable for girls. This somewhat sexist ideology changed in the 1940s when, due to changing American preferences, the colors switched to what we use today.

And of course, most colors are associated with emotions. Sometimes the reason why a color fits an emotion is somewhat obvious, and sometimes there is no reason. For example, red is associated with anger. The simplest explanation relates to the fact that increased blood flow to the face during anger can make someone look red, in addition to the fact that symbols of violence like blood and fire are also red.

Blue, on the other hand, is more complicated. Blue has come to be associated with sadness, and even functions as an adjective that means sad. But why is that? People certainly don't look blue when they're sad, and tears are clear. Dictionary.com says the use of "blue" to mean "sad" dates back to the 1300s, while other sources say it's a more recent association. Not only do sources disagree on when blue started to mean sad, there are also many theories on why this started. Theories range from ships flying blue flags when someone on the crew died, to "blue" being a reference to "blue devils" which were demons thought to bring depression. Again, these are just theories, meaning no one alive truly knows why blue means sad, and yet we all still agree that it does.

Finally, perhaps the most odd sounding relationship is the association between green and envy. Where did this come from? Well, according to the Online Etymological Dictionary, the link dates back to Shakespeare, who used the phrase "green eyed monster" to mean jealousy in his play Othello. But to go back even further, Shakespeare probably made this connection due to the fact that jealousy was thought to be a medical condition caused by an overproduction of green-colored bile.

So, we've observed how relationships between colors and traits sometimes have a reason, but sometimes do not. But at this time, I'd like to explain why linking colors to traits can be problematic.

Perhaps you noticed that I left out something major when talking about colors throughout history: racism. For centuries, Europeans felt that they were better than other races and had the right to conquer them. They especially felt this way towards Africans, enslaving them in their colonies in the New World, and later partitioning the entire continent. The reasons Europeans felt they had the right to do these things are complex, but one main factor was the simple fact that they had different skin colors. Throughout history, and even today, white has represented purity and goodness, while black has represented evil and death. This helped Europeans justify the fact that they were supposedly the "dominant" race. But how did the colors white and black come to be associated with good and evil?

The simplest explanation is that humans have always feared the unsafe darkness and embraced the safety of the light. Many bible verses also condemn darkness and praise light, which would have been quite significant to the very religious Europeans. The best example is the third and fourth verses of Genesis, the very first chapter in the bible, which state: "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

This explains why the colors black and white have the connotations that they do, at least for Europeans. Nevertheless, there is no plausible way why associating black with darkness and therefore evil justifies subjugating an entire race to horrible treatments because of the color of their skin.

And it's not just black and white that can lead to bad treatment. Having yellow hair is associated with being dumb, and boys who like pink are often ridiculed for their unusual taste. Although neither of these can even compare to the evils of racism, these are all things that we must think about, since even minor things like these can be harmful to some people.

This is why associating colors with characteristics can be extremely problematic. We need to think about why we make the connections that we make. And if we don't know why, and if they're offensive, we should try to stop making them. So, finally, let's look at how we can cease to make color-related associations that don't make sense.

When you leave this room, I encourage you to look at something colorful, especially a piece of art. Observe the colors, and then think about the feelings that they elicit in you. Then ask yourself, why do you feel those feelings? Is it based on fact? For example, if you see green and it makes you think of nature, that makes sense. But if you see blue and it makes you feel sad, is that for a reason, or only because you've been taught that blue is a sad color?

Try doing this as often as you can. If you take this contemplative approach to life for a little while, thinking about why you make the associations that you make, you'll start to realize that a lot of your stereotypes lack true basis.

And, I want to be clear that it's not always bad for colors to represent things. The symbolism of colors is important in just about every piece of art and many works of literature, and countries use colors to allow something as simple as a flag to have intense symbolism. These color connections can be fascinating. But my request is that people don't just accept these associations as fact, since the symbolism that colors have was created by man and can be changed by man. And it is my hope that harmful associations *will* be changed, especially the idea of white vs. black, but these won't stop until we all think before we make connections.

Therefore, I hope that each of us can learn to take a more thoughtful approach to color and consider what it really means. It's not just colors that we make unwarranted associations for, but if we want to stop making connections without first understanding why, color is a good place to start.

Mars Matters

Original Oratory, 2016

One afternoon I was browsing the internet and I came across a clip on Youtube from The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore. On it, Larry was discussing how water had just been discovered on Mars. His guest panelists were scientist and TV star Bill Nye, as well as not-too-famous comedians Michelle Buteau and Ricky Velez. Bill Nye explained how awesome it was that flowing water was found on Mars, but the guest comedians weren't interested. They interrupted Bill to say how they cared more about Donald Trump or Caitlyn Jenner or just about anything other than another planet. This made people angry. The comments section had some pretty harsh words, but then again, what comments section doesn't.

While I was happy to see so many people uniting to defend science, I didn't feel the same anger towards these panelists. They bring up some questions that I'm sure many Americans have. How can we be concerned with what's going on on another planet when so much is going on here, from 2016 election fervor to the continued attacks of ISIS? Well, I'm here today to explain why Mars is just as important as these other topics, and why it deserves the attention of both the American public and the American government. Specifically, I'll be focusing on the two aspects that have brought Mars fame recently: the water that NASA discovered there, and the possibility of colonizing the planet. I'll begin by explaining these two topics a little more in depth. Next, I'll show why Mars is something that Americans and the government should be interested in. And finally, I'll explain what we can do to get Mars the attention it deserves.

Mars has been in the headlines recently for two reasons. The first is because, at the end of September, NASA confirmed evidence of liquid water flowing on it. Not just that there was once water, but there is water now. According to NASA's September 28th article, they used an imaging spectrometer on the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter to detect signatures of hydrated minerals where mysterious streaks are seen on slopes on Mars. That's some pretty complex stuff. But, existing water on Mars is of major importance, and I'll explain why in the next section.

The other reason Mars has been getting attention is because there has been a lot of talk about colonizing it, with a one-way trip to Mars taking between 7 to 10 months. In fact, the effort to colonize Mars has taken off so much recently that there are groups competing to be the first to do it. The first is Mars One, a non-profit foundation with the goal of starting a permanent human

settlement on Mars, sending out astronauts in 2026. The problem is, they are mostly financed by donations, and they've only raised around \$900,000 dollars. To put that into context, Mars One predicts that it will need, for the equipment and the first flight alone, six billion dollars. JOKE.

We also have SpaceX, a company dedicated to making advanced spacecraft with the eventual goal of colonizing other planets, starting with Mars. This company is led by Elon Musk, founder of PayPal and leader of Tesla Motors. SpaceX has mentioned the possibility of sending people to Mars by 2026, like Mars One. The difference is that SpaceX is much better funded, receiving money from big name companies like Google. But a lot of SpaceX's funding actually comes from NASA, which gives them money to develop technologies that NASA can then use. SpaceX is definitely a possible winner of the race to Mars.

The remaining option is NASA itself. NASA has announced plans to send humans to an asteroid by 2025 and to Mars in the 2030s. The difference between NASA and these other groups is that NASA is a government agency. You would think that that would mean NASA is better funded, but sadly that's not the case. The NASA budget has been steadily decreasing, peaking at over four percent of the US budget in the 60s, but now down to half of one percent. Right now, the NASA yearly budget is about 18 billion dollars, which sounds like a lot, but really isn't sufficient.

That's a lot of information to take in. It's so much information that most Americans don't even try to keep track of what's going on with Mars. But now I'd like to explain why this information is important to all of us, and why both American citizens and the American government should remain interested in Mars.

In terms of the flowing water discovered on Mars, the obvious implication is that there could possibly be life on Mars right now. What disappoints most people is the realization that this life would really only be microbes, not actual intelligent life that we could relate to. But, Bill Nye presented an interesting theory when he went on the Nightly Show. He said that if we found microbes on Mars, we could observe if they have DNA. If they do, and if their DNA is similar to the DNA of creatures on Earth, it is possible to suggest that life on Earth started on Mars, and was brought over by an asteroid several billion years ago. If this theory is true, that would simultaneously answer the age-old questions "Are we alone in the universe?" and "Where did we come from?"

But just answering philosophical questions doesn't interest most people. They want to know how Mars would directly affect them. Well, during NASA's moon missions, the organization had to develop many technologies for the mission to work. Many of these products are now used by Americans everyday. According to businessinsider, NASA developed the computer mouse, the adjustable smoke detector, and satellites that allow for long-distance communication, to list just a few of a really long list. If and when NASA decides to send a mission to Mars, they will have to develop many more technologies to make living there possible. It is extremely likely that the technologies that they will develop will become integral parts of life here on earth, just like what happened after the moon missions.

The final reason we should be interested in a colonization effort on Mars is more urgent. We might need to do it if we want to survive. While we have not yet passed the point of no return in terms of climate change, we might soon, leaving this planet uninhabitable. Renowned theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking has said he doesn't think humans will survive another 1,000 years without leaving earth, citing possible disasters like an asteroid collision or a nuclear war. There are so many things that could go wrong, so going to Mars could very well be essential for our survival.

So, now we can see that Americans should be interested in Mars, both due to its water that could be harboring life and the possibility of it being our future home. So finally, I want to explain what we can do to make Mars get the attention it deserves.

First, more of the federal budget should be given to NASA. As I explained, Mars One is not well funded enough to reach Mars. SpaceX could be successful, but a lot of its money comes from NASA. Therefore, if we want to get to Mars, NASA needs more money. I don't want to make this a political speech, but there is definitely room in the federal budget to add more money to NASA's funding. I would choose to reduce military spending to fund NASA, but that's just me. The man most in control of determining NASA's funding is the chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Space and Science. Currently, that man is none other than climate change denier Ted Cruz, Senator from Texas. Houston, we have a problem.

Now, some people argue that NASA funding should be cut entirely since NASA hardly does anything anymore. I contest that NASA doesn't do much as a result of not having sufficient funds, and by giving them more money we will see real results. Also, as I explained, giving money to NASA leads to the development of products that we use everyday. Plus, NASA has a

chart on their website saying that they actually boost the economy of every state. They might not be seen as the most reliable source, but if there's any organization I'd trust with numbers, it would have to be NASA.

As for the American public, to get more people interested in Mars, the media should cover it more. I don't just mean tabloids should publish articles about Martians or UFOs every week instead of every other week, but actual news about what discoveries have been made and what updates there are in the colonization effort. We have seen some of this already, as water on Mars was a big topic in the news lately. If the news covers Mars a lot, Americans will become more fascinated by it, and pressure the government to make Mars a priority. If the media really wanted, they have the power to create a country as space-crazed as in the 1960s.

So, today we've observed how Mars has been in the news due to the water that was found there and due to the colonization effort. These things should be important to Americans, not solely because we could soon discover we are not alone in the universe, but because colonizing Mars might be important for our survival. Plus, we'd get a lot of useful technology out of it. NASA should be better funded, and the media should care more about Mars, so that the American public understands how important this topic is. So, while I disagree with the Nightly Show comedians who couldn't understand why Mars matters, I'm glad they brought this issue to people's attention. With so much going on here on Earth, it's easy to forget about other planets, but Mars is clearly a topic that should not be ignored.

The Compromising Truth

Original Oratory, 2016

Throughout the past year, I've written several original oratories, but none of them have been big successes. I've written about things from colors to Mars, and while these topics fascinated *me*, they weren't that interesting to others. Eventually I recognized that to write a good OO, you have to compromise. Your topic can not just interest you: it has to interest your audience as well. This got me thinking...

Our society praises compromise. We teach the importance of compromise to toddlers, and we get outraged when our government refuses to agree on solutions to our problems. Compromises, big and small, surround us every day. But I'm here to argue that compromises are not always the great things we make them out to be. Today, I'll start by examining some of history's biggest compromises. Then, I'll explain why refusing to compromise can be the key to progress. Lastly, I'll describe the approach that each of us should take when making compromises in the future.

To take a look at compromises let's go back to the founding of our country. The Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia was made up of a diverse group of people. No, not in gender, race, religion, but in political ideologies. In order to set up a functioning system of government, these men had to compromise on many things. Federalists and Antifederalists had to agree on how to split power between a national government and state governments. Big states and small states had to settle on a system in which both had similar levels of power, meaning Rhode Island no longer had to sit at the kids table at Thanksgiving dinner. Obviously, some of these compromises were essential to set up a balanced government and to get everyone to agree to the Constitution. But even with these compromises in place, many Southern delegates still wouldn't sign the document.

Thus, ushistory.org explains that the most stunning and disturbing compromise at the convention came over the issue of slavery. In order to get the Constitution ratified, the Convention promised not to interfere with the slave trade until 1808 and to institute a strict fugitive slave policy in which all escaped slaves would be returned to their masters. Additionally, every slave was designated as three fifths of a person. Ironically, many Southerners considered

slaves as property and not as people at all, but this population boost allowed them to gain additional votes in Congress and ensure that the North could not interfere with slavery.

Then, during the 1800s, many related acts were passed, including the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, both of which involved keeping slavery alive in order to appease the South. Clearly, some of the biggest compromises in American history have had racist outcomes.

If you want a global example of how compromises can be catastrophic, consider Europe in the 1930s. Before World War II broke out, the Nazi government sought expansion. In 1938 Germany, Great Britain, and France reached a compromise called the Munich Agreement. This allowed the Nazis to take over the Sudetenland, a strategic region in Czechoslovakia, as long as they agreed to stop expanding. According to BBC history, this compromise was referred to by Czechoslovakians as the Munich betrayal, and the agreement helped the Nazis to be as powerful as they were when war broke out the following year.

Now, of course there have been positive compromises throughout history as well. What I'm trying to show is that compromise is not always a positive thing like people make it out to be, and some compromises can be disastrous. So next, I'd like to analyze why compromises can often have negative results and why refusal to compromise can be the true path to progress.

I recently attended a conference at the United Nations where a speaker described compromise as the alternative to conflict, and I'd agree with this statement. All of the compromises that I mentioned were efforts to prevent war. Since war is so horrific, compromise should be viewed as the first option to resolve conflicts. Thus, I can see why an organization like the UN would value compromise as a deterrent to violence.

But think about it. In America today, there is no longer the fear that the North and South will go to war if they don't agree on solutions, so compromises are less urgent than they were in the past. In fact, in modern America compromise can be the enemy to progress.

Now, this might sound counter-intuitive. Many feel that no progress is made by Congress as a result of their failure to compromise. The truth, however, is that when the people fighting for progress compromise with their opponents, very little progress is made. Thus, the true path to progress can be refusal to compromise. You may associate refusal to compromise with tyrannical dictators or Donald Trump. Oh, excuse me, I think I repeated myself there.

But let's look at true revolutionary leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. They did not compromise with their opponents. As the Huffington Post states, they demanded complete justice, and they demanded immediate justice, refusing to compromise with racists or oppressors. These men understood that sometimes, compromising with your enemy is the same as submitting to your enemy. If more American leaders had understood this, slavery would have ended much sooner. These revolutionaries make it clear that refusal to compromise can lead to progress, which is something many Americans don't realize.

If we fast forward to today, people are concerned about the polarization of America and how Congress can't get anything done because no one ever agrees on anything. But what if Congress did compromise on everything? We would wind up with a system of laws that neither Democrats or Republicans would approve of, and public opinion towards Congress would probably be even worse.

According to NPR, social science research indicates that voters want compromise but only when the other side is caving in. We claim to love it when both parties can agree, but when a leader actually compromises with the other side, they are accused of not sticking to their guns and breaking their campaign promises. A cynical person would conclude that Americans are hypocrites who praise compromise as long as it's compromise on their terms, which isn't compromise at all. This may be true, but it doesn't have to be this way. So, finally, I'd like to address the approach that each of us can take when it comes to compromises.

The first thing we have to realize is that it's okay to recognize compromises can be both positive and negative. Teachers have always told us to pick a side when we write an essay, but I'm going to break that rule, because it's false to say "all compromises are bad" just as it's false to say "all compromises are good." Each of us needs to learn to discern the difference, as do our leaders.

When it comes to the government, it's ridiculous that Congress refuses to compromise on minor issues, as occurred when the government shut down in 2013 because Congress couldn't pass a budget bill. Famous vlogger Hank Green summarized it well, saying if Congress were on fire, Congress couldn't pass the "Pour Water on Congress Act." With Congress being less productive than ever, compromise is clearly needed in order to get certain things done. However, for the big issues, the ones that will change the face of America, our leaders need to emulate the behavior of Dr. King and Gandhi. They should not compromise, as compromise will prevent

progress. Eventually, if our leaders do remain firm in what they believe in long enough, progress will come. History has shown that. If they give in, we could see a situation similar to the hundred year period in American history where Congress continuously agreed to protect slavery.

The advice I would give to Congress applies to each of you as well. To have healthy relationships with your parents, friends, spouses, boyfriends, and girlfriends you will have to compromise on some things. That's a part of life, and being excessively stubborn will get you nowhere. However, you should *not* compromise on the big things, like your goals, or especially your values. People need to understand that compromise in a relationship can be good, but it isn't always good. You shouldn't compromise on the things that you fundamentally believe in, nor should you expect others to compromise on the things that they fundamentally believe in.

So, today, we've examined compromises throughout history, and come to the startling conclusion that many of them had disastrous outcomes. We observed that refusing to compromise can be the key to progress, as shown by several revolutionary leaders throughout history. And finally we concluded that each of us should learn when to compromise and when not to compromise. So, after months of little success with my OOs, I think I finally compromised on a topic that matters to each and every one of us.

Unwrapping the Present

Original Oratory, 2017

No one likes the end of summer. It's a time for frantic parents to buy superfluous back-to-school supplies, while students skim the Sparknotes summary of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. I'm unlucky; my birthday is August 27th. I wind up spending the entire day worrying about all the things I have to finish before school starts. So, for the past five years, I've gone to the same place on my birthday. A place that, without fail, can bring peace to my hectic world. That place is Dave & Buster's. If you've ever been to Dave & Buster's you know that the flashing lights and loud beeps of the arcade games can be annoying, but these things distract me from my back-to-school concerns. In a stressful part of the year, Dave & Buster's helps me to focus on the present. There is no past, there is no future, there is only the game in front of me.

Living in the moment is a skill that most Americans lack. We're constantly reminiscing about what we've done or worrying about what we need to do. This is an unhealthy mindset, and I know this from experience. I've gone through high school with a lot of anxiety surrounding tasks I need to complete, so this year I've been searching for ways to focus on the present. I'd like to explore what causes people to ignore the present. Then, I want to discuss the effects of forgetting about the now. And finally, I'd like to offer some solutions so we can all live more focused lives.

In short, people ignore the present in favor of past and future events. As for the past, I'm sure many of you go through your day reminiscing on your summer vacation, thinking about how bad traffic was this morning, or, if you're like me, replaying past conversations in your head and cringing at your own awkwardness. If you're not busy reflecting on the past, you're probably worrying about that AP English essay due tomorrow or the project at work that you've procrastinated on. Both children and adults live lives full of obligations, and these distract us from the here and now. According to the Guardian, psychologists discovered that people spend 47% of their time thinking about something other than what they're actually doing.

Everyone has a tendency to ignore the present, but some people are more prone to it than others. According to the American Psychological Association, there is a theory in psychology, first introduced in the 1950s, that labels all people as having Type A or Type B personalities. Type A people are competitive, ambitious, outgoing, and aggressive, while Type B personalities

are more relaxed. For Type B, picture that laid back kid in your classes who never worries about any deadlines, while for Type A picture that annoying overachiever who gets upset at getting a 95 on a test. But, if you're involved with forensics, I'm guessing you are that kid. Psychologists today believe it's an oversimplification to group people as either A or B, but agree that there is some merit to this theory. Some people are naturally more ambitious and competitive; these individuals are likely to spend a good portion of their day worrying about future success instead of their present situation.

But Type A individuals are not the only group more likely to ignore the present. Another demographic that's particularly at risk is teenagers. TIME Magazine recently reported that depression and anxiety are sharply increasing among American teens. Many factors have contributed to this, like social media use, growing up in an unstable post-9/11 society, and the ever present desire to make your parents proud. All these stressors cause teens to ignore the present, but a lack of focus on the present only makes the situation worse. Therefore, if you have a Type A personality, or if you're a teenager, I hope you pay particular attention to the rest of this speech.

We've seen what can lead someone to ignore the present, so let's consider why it's important to live in the now.

When I'm talking to my parents or having dinner with my grandma, I'm often thinking about all the homework I have to finish that night. This means I'm not engaging with my family, and halfway through the conversation I'll discover that I didn't listen to anything they said. As you can see, your relationship with others suffers when you're distracted by things outside of the present. In order to have healthy relationships with those around you, listening is important. In fact, Psychology Today reports that listening is the number one key to happy relationships.

Not only can ignoring the present be bad for the way you communicate with others, but it's bad for your own mental health. According to a study conducted by Harvard psychologists, people are most happy when they focus on the activity at hand. Reminiscing, thinking ahead, and daydreaming tend to make people more miserable, even if you reminisce or daydream about something pleasant. The researchers concluded that a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. And, what task you're doing when your mind wanders off is irrelevant; not focusing on the now made people more miserable in every scenario. For example, you could be scrubbing toilets and daydreaming about a vacation in Hawaii, and that would still make you less happy than if you

focused on the task at hand. Learning from the past and planning for the future are useful abilities that humans possess, but if we overdo these things it can be detrimental to our own happiness.

Finally, living in the moment is essential to get work done. If you're working on one task, but you're thinking about all the other things you still need to complete, it will take you even longer to finish that very first task. If you want to be productive, focus is key.

Now that we know what happens when we ignore the present, let's examine what we can do to solve this problem.

When I talk about how to live in the moment, a lot of people probably think of meditation. Meditation is an ancient tradition that's used worldwide, so it would be a mistake to ignore it as some nonsense practice for hippies. If you think you're the type of person who would benefit from meditation, I encourage you to try it. I have, and it hasn't worked for me yet, but I plan to keep trying. While meditation hasn't worked, what does help to relieve my thoughts of the past and future is to just listen to music for 15 minutes. You can try this too: listen to music and do nothing else. A study conducted by the National Center for Biotechnology Information concluded that music helps people to ignore the stress surrounding future tasks.

Psychology Today offers its own list of ways to live life in the present. They encourage you to avoid multitasking, as it's impossible to focus on what you're doing if you're doing more than one thing. They also suggest you do less. Forensics kids are notorious for participating in a lot of clubs, and forensics judges often have jobs and families and still manage to come to tournaments on weekends. If you do fewer activities, though, you can focus more on the things that you really enjoy. Also, if you have control over your schedule, Psychology Today encourages you to avoid scheduling things close together. Leave some room for personal time.

Finally, notice when you're thinking about the future too much and try to stop yourself. This is the most important and most difficult thing you need to do to live in the moment. One way to do this is through writing. Whenever I notice myself worrying about AP Physics homework or my next debate tournament, I write down what I'm worried about. Turning thoughts into written words helps me to ignore them, and I don't have to worry that I'll forget to do something since I have it all on paper.

The truth is that, when it comes to psychological issues, there is no one answer that will work for everyone. Each of us have different brains and ways of thinking, so what works for me

might not work for you. I encourage each of you to try out a variety of techniques and discover which ones are successful at getting you to ignore everything except the present.

Today, we examined how everyone is prone to neglecting the present, but Type A personalities and teenagers are particularly at risk. We then discovered the negative effects of a wandering mind, namely that it can hurt your relationships with others and make you an unhappy person. Finally, we learned techniques to bring ourselves into the moment, from avoiding multitasking to writing down our problems. I'll always thank Dave Corriveau and Buster Corley for inspiring me to live in the present, and I hope each of you can find your own Dave & Buster's.