

## Getting Beyond Cheap Talk Fruitful Dialogue and Building Productive Working Relationships

Six years ago, Community Dialogue (CD) and the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation (SCCN) launched a project to explore how societies that had experienced years of violent division could best confront the challenges of creating a more peaceful future. This partnership itself was an interesting venture since it brought together practitioners and researchers from very different backgrounds. CD is a network of people from diverse political backgrounds who engage in promoting dialogue across the violent interfaces of Northern Ireland, and SCCN is a research center at Stanford University that studies conflict and conflict resolution. Because both CD and SCCN had people who were interested in practice and theory, we knew first-hand that practitioners and researcher didn't always see eye-to-eye. Not only this, Stanford University and Northern Ireland seemed very far apart both literally and figuratively. It is not hard to understand how some thought it an unlikely endeavor to begin with, but it turned out to be quite successful after all.

When CD and SCCN first launched the project, we realized that there were many important topics upon which we could have chosen to focus our attention. We could have decided to explore the role of political leadership in swaying political events. Alternatively, we might have looked at how outside forces like the EU or the global economy can help shape the prospects for reaching a stable settlement. More specifically, we could have studied the influence exerted by the British and Irish governments to see if it might be put to better use. Instead, we chose to focus our efforts on understanding the relationship between dialogue within grassroots communities and the social and political dynamics of reconciliation.

This topic of dialogue and reconciliation was closer both to our particular interests and to our experience and expertise. In addition, we felt that it was an area frequently overlooked by policy makers and scholars. Peace, if it ever comes to Northern Ireland, will have to be more than words in a document signed by political leaders. It will entail numerous unstated understandings and unspoken agreements, accepted modes of accommodation and tolerance, and acknowledged limits and respected boundaries that will all function in countless ways within and between local communities. The stability of any peace agreement will depend upon the concrete relationships that exist on the ground throughout Northern Ireland. We wanted to know what could be done to improve and promote these relationships.



It is best to think of our project as an extended conversation about what we found most interesting in each other's work. Unlike the New Yorker cartoon to the left, we didn't see ourselves "studying" each other or those that we encountered. More to the point of the cartoon, we also wanted to avoid the perception that those of us at Stanford University were personally and intellectually detached from the real life struggles that our Northern Ireland colleagues were going through. We instead wanted to talk with one another about the important challenges that we faced and the barriers that stood in the way of meeting them. Several stories have emerged in the course of our exploration. One was the story of how dialogue actually occurred

between and within the communities of Northern Ireland and what it accomplished. Another is a story of how CD and SCCN interacted, what issues we faced, where we agreed and disagreed, and what tensions emerged and how we resolved them. These are important stories that we have recounted in some of the reports and papers that we have written. However, the story that we want to tell here is a *theory story*—what did we learn about conflicts generally and about the efforts of people to resolve them creatively.

This is a story that we hope has relevance not only for Northern Ireland but also for the Middle East, race relations in the US, legal disputes, Cyprus, and even work-place conflicts in major corporations. We will narrate this story from an SCCN perspective, acknowledging and emphasizing that not all in CD would agree with what we say. We will also place our *SCCN theory story* in the context of a peace process that many have seriously questioned, especially whether what it produced was peace. These feelings of disappointment and despair are more universal than it may at first glance seem and arise to some extent wherever societies are attempting to move away from violence and destruction. Our goal is to tell a story that helps those who find themselves in similar situations and who want to create a future that is better than their past. We invite them to join our conversation as we hope also to join theirs.

### **Discovering the Obvious in a New Way**

Creating political agreement—to say nothing of achieving real and lasting peace—seems to involve a lot of talk. Politicians hold talks in public forums, explore each other's positions in confidential meeting settings, and strike deals in concealed backrooms. Community leaders exchange views in open community gatherings and chat informally over cups of coffee or, more likely, a pint or two. Religious leaders attend convocations to discuss and iron out their differences. People of various political stripes congregate on street corners to air opinions and test the prevailing moods. But, how many times does someone ask ordinary citizens for their views concerning what they really care about? Everyone seems to be talking except those who count themselves as normal, run of the mill community members. This is the problem we wanted to tackle.

Because ordinary people don't talk, they aren't often heard. Frequently, they have the feeling of being swept-up by events that have the power to change drastically their lives but over which they have little control. They find themselves forced into circumstances that they don't understand and into relationships that we don't trust. Things that serve the interests of others are done to them without their consent, and they feel powerless to shape their own lives. Faced with this situation, they wonder what their voices would sound like if they had the power to speak, but they also know deep down that there is another unanswered question: *Would they know what they really wanted to say and have the confidence to speak it if someone actually asked?*

There are many who would tell us that the problem is lack of understanding and political sophistication, but we think that lack of engagement is more often the cause. It is commonly said that people form their opinions as they hear and react to the opinions of others; however, it is more likely the case that they form good, solid opinions as they encounter others explaining different points of view. This is what we mean by engagement. Each of us is the world's foremost expert on what it is like to be me and to live my own life. Engagement is a process of encountering that expertise in one another. We test our lived experiences against those of another, and in the process our opinions become more firmly grounded and also more truly our own.

The particular type of engagement that we found most interesting was intra/intercommunity dialogue. Many people in Northern Ireland knew the positions put forth by their side, but few had ever been asked what they individually thought. The dialogue process launched by CD was designed to ask ordinary people what they thought, and it centered on three important questions.

1. What do you want?
2. Why do you want it?
3. Given that others disagree, what can you live with?

These questions are important for several reasons that we will highlight later on. For now, we just want to suggest that they are very good questions to ask whenever and wherever people find themselves in conflict. More to the point, dialogue around these questions can help people reach not only a greater understanding of their own views and feelings, but also a greater understanding of the views and feelings of those who disagree with them—and thus a greater understanding of the conflict itself. Indeed, this was our first insight: *the goal of dialogue was creating greater understanding.*

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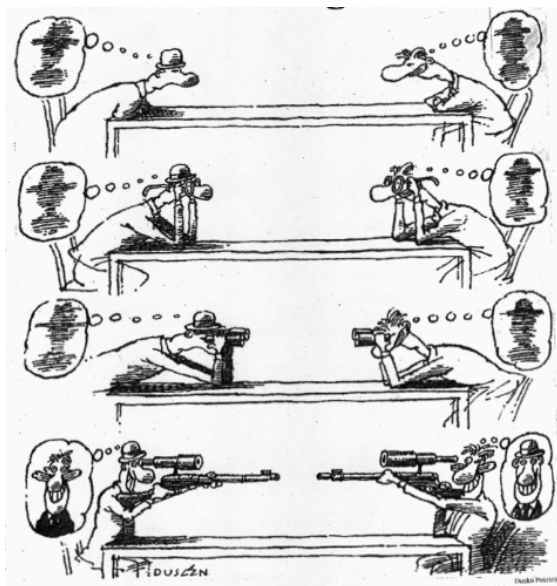
There is also another set of related questions that we found useful. This set concerns not what people want, but instead how people might get what they want. Take the list of things that, through dialogue, we have discovered that we really want. Then ask ourselves which of these things we or our side can get all by ourselves. We can do it alone and don't need the help or assistance of the other side or even their consent. We should have no problem acquiring these since these things are not subject to another's agreement or approval. Now ask which of these things we can't get without the help, assistance, or consent of the other side. Accomplishing these is going to require what SCCN calls *partnership*. It is important to realize that the need to develop these partnerships arises solely from our assessment of what we want to accomplish. If we find that the cost of partnership is too high, then we must decide how we are going to live without what we initially thought we wanted but now have come to realize we don't.

Let's suppose for the moment that this notion of partnership has something to do with what we mean when we speak of reconciliation. Now, it is easy to scoff at the idea of reconciliation and believe that it is an unattainable goal for a society that has undergone violent political conflict. Perhaps the most common way of making it irrelevant, if not actually harmful, is to define it primarily with reference to personal relationships and then apply it uncritically to the society at large. Reconciliation is never going to mean for two opposing communities what it means for two alienated individuals. We will discuss later whether reconciliation is a realistic or useful concept for the political conflicts of the type that Northern Ireland has experienced. In the meantime, allow us to define reconciliation as the creation of political partnerships for making a mutually beneficial future. Our second insight was more tentative but nevertheless important: *the goal of reconciliation was creating political partnership*.

We at SCCN put a lot of effort into trying to discover what a practical notion of political and social reconciliation might look like, and the idea that it involves the creation of political and social partnerships did not come easily. Indeed, there were many serious objections that we felt carried considerable weight. Probably the most noteworthy was the claim that reconciliation implied agreement. Another was the association that it had to do with friendship or at least friendly relationships. Some used reconciliation in a way that suggested the pacification of rival communities by somehow papering over important differences. A notion of reconciliation that failed to take these criticisms into account would be worthless. Still, we felt that the realization that certain important outcomes could not be achieved without the partnership of the other side offered a valuable insight that we wanted to highlight. Although there was considerable disagreement within CD, we thought that the term reconciliation could be made to capture this idea.

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We were now ready to take the first step in our project. How were dialogue and reconciliation related? What we discovered to our surprise was that they weren't as closely related as we first thought. Remember



that dialogue has as a goal *creating greater understanding* and that reconciliation has as a goal *creating political and social partnership*. Greater understanding can lead us toward the realization that partnership is either possible or impossible. For dialogue to be true to its objective of creating greater understanding, it had to be open-ended with regard to the conclusions reached concerning the creation of partnership. The outcome that social and political partnership with the other side was both possible and desirable could not be predetermined at the beginning of dialogue.

In retrospect, the tension between dialogue and reconciliation was obvious, and those with more practical experience of dialogue within Northern Ireland pushed the point hard. A dialogue that was

not truly open-ended would attract only those already committed to the idea of creating social and political partnerships. Many more who doubted, or at least questioned, this goal also needed to be engaged. These participants often came to dialogue with the intention of telling the other side how they were wrong, and there needed to be a place for this kind of exchange as well. Dialogue that was tied closely to reconciliation was much too restrictive for the broad process of engagement we had in mind. No doubt, these critics of our efforts to link dialogue and reconciliation were right.

Hidden in these thoughts about dialogue was a problem that would become clear only later in our project. Still, it is useful to mention it now. Dialogue is a means to greater understanding, and as such it is always about something. But what should dialogue be about? About what should it seek greater understanding? If dialogue is not about something, it can become an end in itself; and, if it is an end in itself, does it simply become talk about talk? And if it is about reaching an understanding about something, can it also remain truly open-ended? These concerns took concrete form in questions raised by some participants about where dialogue was “headed” and also in the frustration that some expressed about dialogue “spinning its wheels.” However at this point in the project, we were not ready or able to address these issues constructively.

### **New Horizons at Lower Attitudes**

Our initial goal of linking dialogue and reconciliation within a tight strategy had proven ill-conceived, and we needed to rethink our approach. Moreover, there had arisen strong objections to the goal of reconciliation itself. Notion of building partnerships seemed to be more than the present state of relationships in Northern Ireland could bear, and we needed to lower our aim if we wanted to have any realistic impact at all. Perhaps a more tangible goal would be the reduction of destructive social and political conflict. At least, this goal offered a more proven track record.

Within the field of conflict resolution, terms like conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation are used in different and overlapping ways. What one author may call one thing, another may call another. Still, it is possible to identify three distinct approaches based upon the strategies they employ.

*Conflict Management:* The goal of conflict management is simply to prevent conflicts from escalating out of control. There is no expectation of resolving anything, and the parties try to hold things at a lower level of hostility. The hope is that the relationships might improve over time so that progress could be made at a later date. But for now, the aim is to create a “live and let live” attitude based upon a mutual recognition of each other’s humanity. Conflict management adopts limited aspirations because it recognizes the danger of pushing things beyond what the relationships will allow. Trying to achieve too much can undo past accomplishments and cause antagonisms to rise. Conflict management tries to settle things down.

*Conflict Resolution:* Sometimes, the current situation is more pliant than the goals of conflict management suggest, but it will still not allow the parties to reach a final resolution or settlement in one step. There is simply too much disagreement and distrust separating the sides for a final resolution to be reached. Still, despite overall differences, there are smaller steps that which the parties can take toward a comprehensive settlement. Conflict resolution tried to break up the conflict into more manageable pieces that may be more resolvable. It is a process of taking modest, slow strides. The hope is that, as smaller and easier issues get resolved, the overall relationship between the parties improves so that the more difficult aspects of the conflict become increasingly more amenable to resolution.

The Oslo process in the Middle East was an example of this strategy. Gauged from where they started in these initially secret talks, the Israelis and Palestinians made tremendous progress and achieved a consensus on issues that many thought simply unimaginable. However, the Oslo process also exposed the pitfalls of this approach. Unless the relationship improves and people feel that they are better off in peace than in conflict, the process will collapse short of its goal of reaching a final resolution. Moreover, if all the easier issues are resolved and only the harder ones are left, it becomes more difficult to package trade-offs so that each side receives more in return than what it was asked to give up. Still, conflict resolution is an attractive approach if the relationships and conditions are right.

*Conflict Transformation:* There are other situations that call for bold action, and conflict transformation is the right response. With conflict transformation, the goal is to turn the conflict into a problem that we together need to solve. Often, it means turning an armed conflict into a political one. The use of the word *we* is critical. The parties come together around the need to find a mutually acceptable settlement and to undertake a mutually agreeable strategy to get there. The key component is that *we* have identified a common problem that *we* have agreed to solve. The sides engage in a creative process of both discovering hidden common ground and also constructing new common ground where possible. Conflict transformation is “thinking outside the box,” and it offers the most enduring and the most satisfying outcomes of any of these approaches.

This three part framework helped us better assess what we should be trying to achieve. The choice to engage in conflict management, conflict resolution, or conflict transformation was not based upon a decision about which approach corresponded best to our highest ideals but rather upon a judgment about what the relationships would bear in a given situation. If the relationships on the ground allowed for the formation of common cause, conflict transformation was the best choice. If the relationships were flexible to the extent that some immediate problems could be solved, conflict resolution was a good bet. However, if positions seemed to be hardening and a general sense of bitterness was on the rise, the safest option was conflict management.

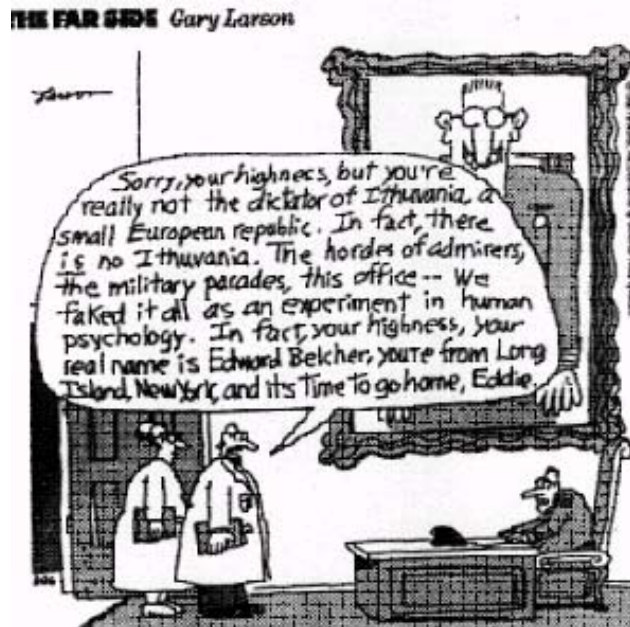
What we discovered was that different places in Northern Ireland were trying different things. It was neither possible nor desirable to impose one strategy on everyone. Instead, we needed to find ways to encourage whatever people were already trying and to increase the prospect of their success. The common thread that ran through each of these situations was an assessment of what seemed possible given the relationships involved. At the same time, people in each of these situations faced a common challenge. The success of their efforts depended upon the willingness of both sides to make things work. This common goal took concrete form in a set of interactions that we would call *productive working relationships*.

The notion of promoting *productive working relationships* seemed to underscore better the core concerns that we were trying to highlight when we spoke of creating *partnerships*, and it also gave greater emphasis to different ways that these partnerships might take shape. It placed emphasis on *working* in the sense of work done together rather than on *relationship* in the sense of fulfilling interactions. Productive working relationships could mean the type of partnership that reconciliation emphasized and that conflict transformation seems to need, but it could also mean relationships in which there was more discord and less sense of commonality. For example, conflict management will be successful only to the degree that the parties find a way to keep smaller local conflicts from escalating into larger explosive ones. The type of interactions that occur will be more tense and abrasive than those occurring within conflict transformation. Nevertheless, the parties need a way of working together that can handle a high level of dissension and still remain focused on the task of keeping things under control. Likewise, conflict resolution would involve interaction of a different nature, but these interactions would still need to have as its goal the task of making things work. A frontier of new ideas was opening before us.

### **Starting Over with Some New Ideas**

It was now time to redesign our project. Our original interest in promoting reconciliation was now better expressed as creating productive working relationships. We also agreed that the aim of dialogue was greater understanding and that the dialogue process had to be open-ended with regard to outcomes. In order to know how dialogue and productive working relationships might be related, we needed to know more about what both good dialogue and productive working relationships entailed.

We decided to turn to a major theme of SCCN's previous research—the notion of barriers. SCCN had been interested in situations where parties should be able to make deals but somehow couldn't manage to do so. For example, it is often easy to think of an outcome that would leave both parties to a conflict better off than they would be otherwise. In theory, the parties should have no problem agreeing to this settlement because each would benefit from striking the deal. Nevertheless, in reality, they are quite often unable to reach agreement and are left settling for much less than they might have received. There are many things that might stand in the way of people reaching this type of mutually beneficial settlement. Some have to do with the way people approach the conflict (strategic). Others have to do with the features of the situation in which conflict occurs (structural). Finally, there are problems associated with the way human beings see and understand the world (social-psychological). Anything that prevents people from reaching an agreement that would benefit their interests is what we called a barrier. We decided to see if this approach would help us see our way more clearly.



**Barriers to Greater Understanding:** If dialogue was about greater understanding, a barriers analysis would ask what prevented greater understanding. This was close to another question about which there was considerable psychological research—namely what were the sources of misunderstanding and misinformation. We were able to identify three sources of misunderstanding and misinformation as especially important barriers that dialogue could play an important role in overcoming—(1) naïve realism, (2) false polarization, and (3) reactive devaluation.

#### (A) Naïve Realism

The best way to understand naïve realism is by way of a saying attributed to the comedian George Carlin. Joking about driving on the freeway, Carlin allegedly asked, “Did you ever notice that everyone going slower than you is an idiot and everyone going faster is a maniac?” It seems that neither those driving faster nor those driving slower have managed to determine what a reasonable, safe speed would be. Only we and others like us properly understand what safety requires. Carlin’s humor rests on an implicit assumption that we make all the time; namely, that we see reality as it really is. This is naïve realism in a nutshell.

The importance of naïve realism arises from three related commonsense beliefs that we have about ourselves and the people around us. First, as the George Carlin hinted, we think that we see the world pretty much as it really is. This confidence we have about our ability to apprehend the world stands to reason since we would obviously change the way we view things if we really thought that the world was actually different from how we understand it. The second arises when we meet real people who actually do see the world in a dissimilar way. The problem, we assume, must be that they have not been given the right kind of information or they have not had an opportunity to assess it in an open-minded and thoughtful manner. We think that, if they are fair-minded and reasonably intelligent, they should be able to see their mistake.

It is easy at this point to see why dialogue is initially appealing to many people engaged in political conflict. We enter into dialogue frequently because we truly do want to hear the views of others, but we also, perhaps more importantly, want to present our own view more clearly and forcefully. We really believe that, if they are good and well-meaning people, they will come to see the error of their ways and

start agreeing with us. Here we quite often encounter something troubling—the people we want to change persist in holding opinions and beliefs different from our own. The third and most consequential principle of naïve realism arises from our effort to understand why.

Before we entered in to dialogue with them, it was plausible to think that their disagreement with us involved relatively innocent motives. But now that they have been confronted with the facts as we see them, it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to continue to believe in their innocence. It could be that they are influenced by factors of which they are unaware. Perhaps they are biased by self-interest, ideology, or some other personal experience. Still, it would be unfair to argue that we don't have interests, beliefs, and special experiences of our own. But these seem to provide us with greater insight and understanding while the opposite appears to be the case with them. Then again, maybe they are aware of what they are doing, and what we are seeing is the evil, sinister nature of their character and the threatening and dangerous nature of intentions. Or perhaps, both these explanations are true. It is easy to see how things can spiral downward.



***“Right. How could anyone look at a rotting zebra corpse and not believe there’s a God?”***

At this point, dialogue will either fall apart or go deeper. Not a few become disillusioned with dialogue and feel that it serves little real purpose. The failure to impact the deeply-held view of those who differ from us encourages some to think that further dialogue will result in little progress. However, others understand that more may be at work than a superficial exchange of views, and they begin to see a different path opening up. The differences separating us cannot be easily overcome, but we can come to appreciate that these conflicts arise from heartfelt, authentic experiences. The same sincerity that characterizes our opinions also characterizes their views. We can't ignore our disagreements, but we can take a more sympathetic and serious view of the factors that lead to them.

At best, dialogue can cause us to consider whether things are as black and white as we might have initially thought. In other words, we realize that we sometimes disagree because we both value friendships and family, want to see justice served, respect fair play, admire compassion for the less fortunate, hold personal responsibility in the highest regard—this list could go on—but that we do so in different and contradictory ways. The authenticity of both our views reflects these noble qualities as well as other less honorable ones that we also share. The novelist Ivo Andric writes of his homeland, Bosnia, that there are few countries that have the “elevated strength of character, so much tender and loving passion, such depth of feeling, of loyalty and unshakeable devotion, or with such a thirst for justice.” Still, the Bosnian people love their country “in three or four different ways which are mutually exclusive, often come to blows, and hate each other to death.” (Andric, “A letter from 1920”) Dialogue helps us see if there is another way.

In dialogue we don't necessarily come to agreement, but we learn to disagree in a more insightful and constructive way. Naïve realism is a statement about how normal, regular human beings see and understand the world. Without some trust that we really do see the world as it actually is, we would be unable to function. What naïve realism cautions us about is thinking that our ways of seeing the world is the only legitimate way of seeing the world. It encourages us to realize that there might be other equally authentic ways and that these other ways are not necessarily more or less valid than our own.

### (B) False Polarization

In many ways, false polarization—as well as reactive devaluation—is merely a special instance of naïve realism. It arises from the belief that only we have found the precise point where practical considerations and matters of conviction converge on a particular issue. Those to the left of us are reckless and inexperienced and those to the right lack courage and compassion. We however are as liberal or as conservative as it is reasonable to be—no more, no less. Thus, when we present our position to those who disagree with us, we explain the strong points that favor what we think. We also tend to overlook, ignore, or minimize those things about which we feel ambivalent or to which we have some objections. These doubts and misgivings that both sides invariably feel rarely enter into our conversation. As a result, the public debate that rages around us often seems more polarized than it actually is.

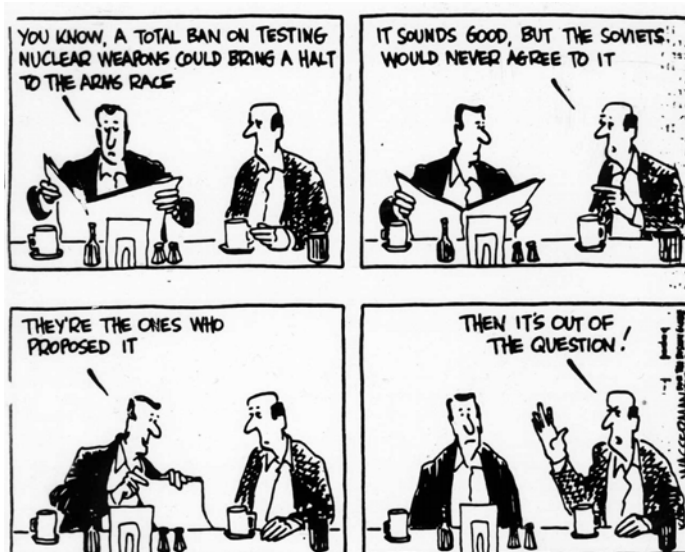
Studies of polarized issues in the US—abortion, affirmative action, date rape, etc.—show that, while there is considerable disagreement, it is almost always less than the participants think. Each party thinks that the other side is more extreme and monolithic in its views than is actually the case. These studies also show that this misperception is due to our underestimation of the qualms that the other side has about its position. It is important to emphasize that people really are disagreeing, that their disagreements are about important things, and that they feel very strongly about what is at stake. Their differences need to be aired and discussed thoroughly. Nevertheless, it is equally important to give voice to the uncertainties and reservations that we also have and to explore where our opinions actually overlap.

Dialogue can also play an important role in bringing this potential common ground to light. To do so however, it will need to employ a particular strategy. Having the parties give the arguments put forth by the opposing side—an approach that is frequently used in dialogue—tends to highlight the most extreme and monolithic points they make rather than emphasizing the points where common ground may exist. As an alternative, we suggest asking the parties to give from their own point of view what they think are the strongest arguments that the other side makes. This approach will instead bring to the forefront those points over which our opinions may tend to converge.

A bit more needs to be said about the nature of common ground between conflicting sides. CD's three initial dialogue questions were insightful precisely because they pushed the participants to focus concretely on what they really wanted. Common ground, if it exists at all in divided societies, will almost always involve what people want for themselves, their families, and their communities and also what they want in and for their daily lives. These are the things that make life enjoyable and rewarding. They are also the things that each can destroy for the other but that they almost always need the other to create. Dialogue can't create common ground where it does not exist, but it can expose common ground that people have too easily overlooked.

### (C) Reactive Devaluation

The Cold War era cartoon on the right shows two men in coffee shop. The man reading the newspaper says to the person sitting beside him: "You know, a total test ban on testing nuclear weapons could bring a halt to the arms race." The second man responds, "It sounds good, but the Soviets would never agree to it." The first replies, "They are the ones who proposed." The second retorts, "Then it's out of the question!" This little exchange captures the essence of reactive devaluation.



Reactive devaluation maintains that a proposition—or concession as it is often put—is immediately devalued once it is actually placed on offer. Before the concession is presented, it looks very attractive or seems valuable. Nevertheless, the mere act of placing it on the table causes the offer to lose value in our eyes. You can imagine the confusion, if not anger, reactive devaluation triggers in those who see themselves making a generous, maybe even kindhearted, gesture and are met with a belittling response.

Politics in Northern Ireland as well as other divided societies is replete with examples of reactive devaluation. One stands out in our mind, but we caution strongly against thinking that reactive devaluation somehow happens more on one side than on another. It is a characteristic of human beings generally and no more typical of unionists than nationalist or of republicans than loyalists. In this instance, we were meeting with a political leader and asked him to comment on the IRA decommissioning issue. He responded as one might expect that inspecting caches of weapons was nice but what really mattered was turning in guns. We asked him if he would be more satisfied if the IRA offered to turn in guns but refused to allow inspection of weapon caches. Realizing the switch in his sentiments, he smiled and said no. Whatever was not on offer was more valued than what was on offer. More significantly, the perceived value of a proposal is often determined primarily by the fact it is not being offered. Once it is put forth, it loses the value we once thought it had.

The explanation for this curious phenomenon can be found in the atmosphere of distrust that often surrounds hostile relationships. If a shady adversary makes an unexpected and perhaps uncharacteristic concession, we begin to wonder why. We doubt that they have changed and have now decided to wish us well by acting charitably toward us. We deeply distrust their motives and think either that we have misjudged the value of their offer or that it involves some hidden trick. In response, we hastily downgrade our assessment of their concession to correspond to what we believe are their true intentions. Distrust becomes the lens through which we view every transaction, dramatically influencing how we interpret events.

Dialogue can help overcome reactive devaluation in a very important way. Whenever we are offered a concession, it is natural for us to wonder what the other side is up to. We ask ourselves an important question, and we ask it in three important ways.

1. **Why** are they making this concession now?
2. Why are they making *this* concession now?
3. Why are they making this concession *now*?

If they have not provided us with believable answers, we will answer these questions for ourselves, and our answers will most often reflect the distrust we feel toward them. As a result, we tend to respond coolly to what the other side may rightfully believe is a painful and difficult good-will gesture on its part. Instead of an escalating cycle of positive interactions, we find ourselves caught in an unexpected downward turn—and all this because one side offered something it saw as constructive! Dialogue can alter the course of events by giving the parties an opportunity for the parties to explain their motivation and intentions and to put their actions into a positive framework.

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In summary, dialogue can overcome the barriers to greater understanding by helping people (1) recognize the authenticity of another's views, (2) discover hidden common ground, and (3) assess conciliatory motives and gestures in a more accurate and even-handed way. As will become apparent, each of these will play an important role as we turn our attention to building productive working relationships. For dialogue to be successful in this area, it must ultimately build trust, and yet no dialogue strategy can by itself build trust if there are better reasons to distrust. This raises a difficult question about the foundations upon which trust must rest.

It is important to note that there are several different kinds of trust. One is *person-based trust*—we trust certain individuals to take our interests into consideration when deciding how to act. We do this

because of the confidence we have in their personal character—their personal trustworthiness. Another, but somewhat related version places trust in a person not because of their personal traits but because of the role they play in our lives—family members, close friends, reliable neighbors, and upright community members—their personal dependability. They may or may not like us or even care much about us, but they act responsibly toward us because they recognize the value of maintaining a trustworthy relationship with us. A slight variation places trust in the institution that the role or person represents. In all of these instances, we trust people to understand and respect what our welfare entails and to act accordingly.

However, there is also another type of trust that is more relevant to conflictual relationships. This kind is called *situation-based trust*. With it, we don't much expect the other side to take our interests and welfare into account—that is, unless promoting our interests also promotes theirs. This point is key: we trust the other side to act in a certain way only because it is in their interest to do so—no more, no less. Some might say that this sort of trust is not trust at all, and there would be some merit to this claim. Still, we would counter that trust is involved because we need to believe that they will not to act needlessly against our interests if it is not in their interest to do so.

Trust in the real world is probably always some mixture of all of these. However, in deeply divided societies, it is often necessarily to start with situation-based trust because it may be all that we have. Strong situation-based trust can lead to more dependable and responsible forms of trust, although this outcome is far from being inevitable. Still, we don't necessarily need these to gain greater understanding; situation-based trust can sometime provide a minimal foundation for moving ahead.

**Barriers to Better Working Relationships:** So far, we have avoided raising an issue that stirred heated debate among us and some prominent CD participants—the role of relationships. In the end, many of us came to feel that much of the storm was over semantics, but our discussions forced us to think carefully about our objectives. As a result, we reached some important insights and clarifications that deepened our understanding and are therefore worth recounting.

Looking back with the clarity of hindsight, much of the dispute was over the tension that existed between two different meanings of the term *reconciliation*. The more contemporary meaning emphasizes the establishment of a certain type of relationship between the parties. We were using this meaning when, as mentioned earlier, we decided to define this reconciliation as partnership. However, there is also an older meaning that was concerned primarily with how the parties adapt to the political and social circumstances that surround them. We sometimes speak of people becoming reconciled to a new situation in which they now find themselves. Those who supported the first view felt that our focus should be on improving the interactions between the parties while those supporting the second view wanted to concentrate on the conflicting and often incompatible responses that the parties had to the new and evolving political context in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say that we saw ourselves quarreling over the meaning of reconciliation. Indeed, we never argued any of our points of view in these terms and would have adamantly denied that this was the real issue. Still, upon reflection, this framework best captures the subtle differences that were often a matter of emphasis more than anything else but that led us to some starkly opposing strategies for dialogue. More importantly, it highlights the value inherent in both points of view and encourages us to give each of them the serious attention they deserve.\*

If, on the one hand, we took the older meaning, then the challenge we faced was helping people reconcile themselves to the emerging political and social landscape in Northern Ireland. The goal of dialogue became gaining useful knowledge about the other side and assessing its impact on us. What

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\* A disclaimer: CD uses the term *phase 1* and *phase 2* dialogue to distinguish two types of dialogue strategies that only roughly correspond to the two meanings of reconciliation that we have identified. We are not maintaining that our distinction concerning reconciliation captures exactly the difference between the two types of dialogue.

people did with this knowledge was both beyond the scope of dialogue and ultimately unknowable anyway. It was important to follow and nurture the dialogue process itself allowing it to unfold according to its own dynamics. The key element was the greater understanding that people gained of what was happening within their social and political lives and to them personally.

If, on the other hand, we started with the newer meaning, then the challenge was helping people explore the evolving relationships within the new emerging Northern Ireland context. This approach differed from the one above by including within the scope what people did in response to their newly discovered knowledge. Indeed, the goal of dialogue was to move people into an assessment of what this greater understanding meant for the possibility of creating a future together. The important thing was to structure the dialogue so that it moved toward an opened-ended exploration of what living together peacefully actually entailed. The key element became helping people come to a greater appreciation of what made living together either possible or impossible.

The consensus that eventually emerged was that these two approaches were much more complementary than we had initially thought. In fact, some people were willing to entertain relationship questions only after they had overcome some of their resistance to the social and political context that was unfolding in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. For others, resistance to the new Northern Ireland context was lowered only as they envisioned potential relationships with the other side that they found bearable. As we often discovered, different people in Northern Ireland were doing different things. Still, when this way of looking at our strategies took hold, an important new perspective began to surface. If we broadened the concept of relationship to include any set of interactions in which the activities of one party impinge on the activities of another and vice versa, the substantive issues between us started to fade away.

A slightly different way of putting this is that a relationship is an indication of interdependence. From this perspective, conflict itself is a type of relationship because conflict is often a consequence of interdependence. Conflicts arise only when interests that are at cross-purposes become entangled with one another.\* To resolve these conflicts, one must either realign or disentangle these interests. The insight that emerges—one that is initially hard to grasp—is that both greater association and greater separation imply a type of relationship because it takes a great deal of coordinated effort either to realign interests that are at cross-purposes or to separate interests that have been previously entangled. Moreover, both parties, irrespective of whether they seek greater association or greater separation, must be committed to making whatever course of action they have chosen work—hence our notion of *productive working relationships*.

When we asked what stood in the way of creating productive working relationships, the answer that came roaring back at us was *almost everything*. Several times, we had the experience of asking people what they wanted to talk about and having the walls of the room quickly filled with poster paper listing virtually everything that one could reasonably imagine. After we thought about it, it made sense because people in divided societies tend to feel that everything is at risk and, of course, everything is connected to everything else. We hadn't expected to encounter this dilemma and struggle to find ways to listen with new ears.

We asked ourselves if there were common themes running through the various issues and concerns that people raised. We discovered that there were. Four of these themes seemed central, and the failure to address them to each other's satisfaction represented the barriers to productive working relationship that we sought. They were (1) the vision of a peaceful shared future, (2) the issue of trustworthiness, (3) the problem of loss, and (4) the question of just entitlements.

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\* Obviously, parties that have no social, political, economic, or geographical interconnectedness have no relationship. But, they also have no conflict because there is nothing to have a conflict about.

(1) The vision of a peaceful “shared future”

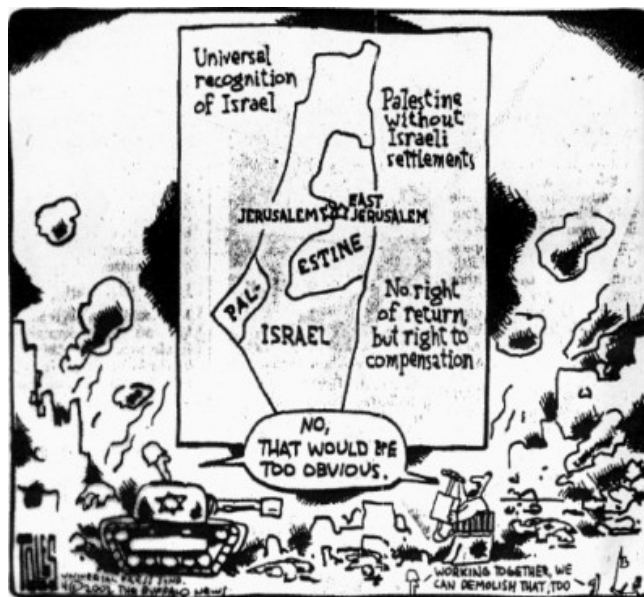
From the very beginning of our project, we have never encountered a person who didn’t claim to want peace. If the question was whether people sought peace, the answer was clearly and always yes. However, wanting peace was never really the problem anyway. As it is with every divided society, the hitch was not with the desire to have peace; it was with the kind of peace people desired. Indeed, the failure to agree on what peace should look like was the source of the conflict itself. In fact, this is the reason that we often call the challenge to create a peaceful vision of a shared future the *peace question*.

The conflict in divided societies is never simply about immediate interests; it is always to some degree about the future and how it will evolve. The need to hear the other side articulate a vision of the future with which that we can live is fundamental and more straightforward than we may at first imagine. Do our adversaries see their lives unfolding in a way that affords us a place that we find bearable or, perhaps even better, attractive? If they don’t, then it stands to reason that we will oppose them, and we will do so even to the point of violence and bloodshed if the differences separating us are serious enough.

The judgment that a particular future would be “bearable” is always a subjective assessment fraught with loads of ambiguity. What makes something bearable is often hard to say with any precision, and it certainly eludes formulation as a set of objective criteria. Sometimes, we seem to object more to the idea that something abhorrent might occur than we do to what concretely happens when it does happen. At

other time, we discover that the grind of daily living tends to lessen the prominence of what we thought would be unacceptable. We find ways to cope with or to avoid altogether what we believed to be intolerable and, in the end, things so that they turn out to be quite bearable after all. Given this fluidity, the best that we can do is perhaps to specify what we mean by *unbearable* and let, by inference, everything else count as *bearable*. It seems sensible that something would be unbearable if one would resort to violence to prevent or change it. Everything else is bearable since, in actual fact, we do bear it.<sup>†</sup>

Agreement on the broad outlines of a shared future may or may not be sufficient to produce peace—a point we will discuss later on—but it is undeniably necessary. The Middle East provides an all-too-clear example of what we are talking about. Israelis who foresee a Greater Israel stretching from the Jordan to the Mediterranean proclaim a future that has little place for the Palestinians—or at least no place that many Palestinians are likely to accept. It is the same with Palestinians who envision a Greater Palestine with no Israelis and few Jews in it. The mission of every peace effort—beginning actually with some talks that SCCN held in the early 1990s but especially since Oslo and on through the recent Geneva Accords and Nusseibeh/Alayon Plan—has been to develop this vision of shared future that both sides could and would find tolerable, even if it fell far short of both sides’ highest dreams and expectations.<sup>‡</sup>



\* A particular vision of the future may appear attractive not only with regard to the status quo but also with regard to the uninviting prospects associated with continuing the struggle.

† In the psychological literature, these observations are called focalism and immune neglect.

‡ Speaking broadly, Palestinians and Israelis—or the conflicting parties within any divided society—are divided because they want very different outcomes. They may prefer to get these outcomes as

This notion of a *place* is not simply a matter of geography. It relates to the type of everyday existence we enjoy. *Place* means control over our own destiny and concerns how we hold our heads, whom we can look in the eye, where we walk and gather, what music we can listen to, and how we speak to neighbors, fellow citizens, and even strangers. It is often a matter of status—what we receive not only by virtue of what we accomplish but also by virtue of who we are. *Place* has to do with the roles and opportunities that are open to us and whether the society as a whole values and respects us and our contributions. *Place* means making the future our home, even if it is not the castle of our dreams.

The really important part is to remember that this is a two-sided equation. We tend to focus solely on what would make the future our home without realizing that the other side must find a home there, too. In fact, our place in the future will depend upon their finding their place. Not only must we hear them endorse a future that we could find bearable, we must also speak to them about a future that they could find tolerable. Indeed, the real impact of the peace question is the emphasis it puts on thinking about the kind of future we are offering them. Is it one that they can live with? Could it be made more attractive with little cost to us? What are the features that we might hold in common? Where is great separation preferable?

We have heard many times people exclaim that they want for the other side only what they want for themselves. It is an honorable gesture that echoes the Golden Rule—*do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. It is a good rule to follow if others happen to want what we want. But, if they don't, our actions will likely fall short of what is needed. In these instances, you must want for the other side what it wants for itself and find ways to help bring it about. In fact, for us to have any real confidence in a vision of a shared future, we must believe that *they* really believe that a shared future with us will be livable and bearable. The motivation to act in this fashion doesn't need to arise from some affinity or affection for them. It is just what living peacefully together both entails and requires.

One further observation is worthy of consideration before moving on. "Solving" the shared futures problem establishes a range of mutually acceptable futures, and this range founds the domain of politics—and also, as we will later see, a domain of trust. The enticements offered for a political settlement over continued violence are often concerned with the mutual benefits that this arrangement confers on the warring parties. However, the possibility of politics arises not because the benefits are great but because the losses and risks are acceptable. People engage in politics only when they can afford to lose and still face a bearable future. The ultimate test of politics occurs not when the parties receive their payoffs, but when the parties contend with the losses that political defeat imposed. Thus, the shared future question is fundamental to the stabilization of politics in situations of protracted conflict.

## (2) The problem of trustworthiness

There is an old saying that goes: *Prophecy is difficult especially when it is about the future*. The first question—the peace or shared futures question—raises issues about how the parties see history unfolding and where they see themselves and the other side in this process. This discussion will always take place in broad terms and will concern how the parties feel generally about certain things. The topics of conversation will at best hover at one level of abstraction above the nitty-gritty facts that make up real life. But we all know that the devil is primarily in the details, and this next question—the problem of trustworthiness—addresses these matters.

Before addressing the topic of trustworthiness, it is necessarily to say a word about the nature of trust. Obviously, trust has something to do with fulfilling another's expectations in a positive, constructive way, principally in a risky situation. I trust you to the degree that you further my interests as you pursue your own, especially in situations where you might have done otherwise. This viewpoint differs from many popular notions that make trust an emotional attachment or ethical commitment. Instead, it grounds trust in

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peacefully as possible, but they want them more than they want peace itself. Mediators, negotiators, conflict resolution experts have instead a very different set of objectives. The foremost thing they want is peace, and any outcome that will get them peace will do. To be effective, third party interveners must recognize and respect these divergent goals.

a perception of another's interests as they relate to my own. This notion of trust is known as *encapsulated interest*, namely the recognition that my interests are folded—*encapsulated*—within yours and the belief that you also recognize this fact.

Conceived in this way, trust becomes closely related to the question of “shared futures.” When you envision a future that offers me a bearable life, you encapsulate my interests within yours. Indeed, we sometimes speak of this range of mutually acceptable futures as the *domain of trust*. I trust you because I *know* that my interests will be advanced, however minimally, by your effort to further your own and *believe* that you will act accordingly.

Still, how do I know that you aren't deceiving me when you say that you want a future that includes me? In a nutshell, this is the problem of trustworthiness. Although words are important, I can only really tell if you are telling the truth by your actions. I have to demonstrate my commitment to a shared future through my actions, and I need to see you do the same. The problem of trustworthiness is about the mutual demonstration of a commitment to live together in a shared future, and it breaks down into three subparts: (1) the coordination of steps, (2) the status of interim arrangements, and (3) the dual nature of cooperation.

A stark, albeit overly simplistic, example makes our first point crystal clear. Imagine two people with loaded guns pointed at each other's head. Both agree that they would be better off having the guns lowered and thrown away, and each also knows that the other feels the same way. Both propose that the other first lower his/her gun and pledges to follow suit. Neither thinks that this is a particularly good idea because he/she doesn't really trust the other to follow through. There are clear short-term advantages to having no gun pointed at one's own head while, at the same time, having a gun pointing at the other's head, and both think that the other will find this situation reassuring. Once in an advantageous position, the other may very well decide that it is a very good place to stop and wait for greater trust to develop before proceeding further. As you can see, the problem here is not where they want to go but how to get there. An interim stage that leaves one party in a promising position with regard to the other can cause the process to stall since the advantaged party will have little incentive to move beyond this point.

The second problem that frequently arises concerns what in any intermediate arrangement must be stipulated and thus settled—a *closed* arrangement—and what must be left unstipulated and thus subject to revision—an *open* arrangement. As you might imagine, this nexus of open and closed arrangements poses some very thorny problems. Some arrangement must be reached because no stability is possible unless there is a way to manage the day-to-day disagreements that inevitably arise. From the view point of conflict management, we should settle as much as we can. However, some issues must be left open not because the parties don't want to work out an arrangement but because they can't—they don't agree. These open issues have a way of undermining the stability of the current arrangement and thus threaten to unravel agreements previously reached. Working out this complex interplay between what can be and



cannot be agreed against the need to manage daily interactions is a major challenge that must be addressed.\*

Striking the proper balance between open and closed agreements is particularly difficult when there are important power differences at play between the parties. The weaker party will want to hold open the possibility of revisiting agreements that it feels were unfairly imposed when the power relationships between the parties become more balanced. Of course, revising agreements when the weaker party foresees the possibility of a better deal is exactly what the stronger party fears most. The more powerful party wants agreements that lock in place for all time, no matter what the future will bring, what they may feel are their legitimate interests. Both parties can, of course, agree to leave particular issues “open” in recognition that agreements on particular issues cannot be reached in the context of the present political situation. By consent, there will be an on-going process of review and revision. What must be avoided, however, is a situation wherein one party’s acceptance of an agreement is contingent on the assumption that it will be regarded as closed, while the other party’s acceptance is contingent on the assumption that it will be regarded as open.

Finally, there is the problem of the dual nature of cooperation. In our example of the two people with guns pointed at each other heads, cooperation at any stage comes about, if at all, because the parties *agree* about where they want to go. However, cooperation can also emerge in a different setting marked by the pursuit of different goals. In this instance, the parties *disagree* about where they want to go but can agree on the next step or series of steps to be taken. In other words, cooperation occurs precisely because they have different assessments of where an agreed upon arrangement will actually lead. I think that it will lead to point A, and you think it will lead to point B. We can agree on an intermediate step because each of us is willing to make an historical wager that we are right about how things will unfold in the future. None of this is a problem as long as point A and B fall with the parameters of the shared futures question raised above. If this is not the case, the process of getting from here to there will likely blow up in our faces.

To deal with these three problems—the coordination of steps, the status of interim arrangements, and the dual nature of cooperation—the parties often adopt a strategy of gradualism. Gradualism is principally concerned with devising ways to get from “here to there” and is, in some important ways, broader than the problem of trustworthiness, although no strategy of gradualism can avoid this core issue. To be successful, a strategy of gradualism must meet three additional, but complementary criteria. First, grassroots communities across the board must feel that they are better off at peace than they were in the midst of the conflict. Secondly, the parties must feel that both their immediate and long-term interests are served better by trading concessions now rather than by withholding or delaying them. Finally, issues that seem both critically important and intractable now must come to be seen by the parties as less critical to their everyday happiness and security. More specifically, the parties must come to feel that their well-being will not depend on the precise details of the way in which these issues are resolved.

### (3) The mutual acknowledgment of loss

A cynical friend of ours once said that politicians will promise you the stars in the sky and, at the end of the day, this is exactly what you are left with—the stars in the sky. It is somewhat the same with peace. What we have been promised—what we have been lead to believe we could have or what we have been enticed to hope for and dream about—will almost always far exceed what we actually get. The peace we

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\* It comes as no surprise that we want the agreements that we like to be final and closed to review and those we dislike to be merely temporary and open to future revision. As a result, people tend to view a settlement in one of two ways. We want the provisions we approve of implemented strictly according to the letter of the law—*just do want it clearly says*. And we want the provisions we disapprove of implemented flexibly in response to evolving relationships, unfolding events, and new developments—*just honor the spirit what the agreement is really about*. Needless to say, neither side comes to think the other is honoring the agreement it thought it signed.

must eventually live with—the only real peace possible given the compromises and tradeoffs that must be made—is inevitably disappointing.

A deep mutual sense of loss pervades the aftermath of virtually every negotiated peace agreement. Often, this sentiment is vague and difficult to articulate, and it can cover a variety of concerns. Ordinary people are apt to feel a diminished sense of certainty and stability and a growing sense that we are no longer masters of our own destiny. We may believe that our identity is under attack and that the foundations upon which our self-worth had previously rested are becoming increasingly shaky. We may suspect that we are being asked to give more and receive less than those on the other side and that what we are asked to give is real and concretely while what we get in return are meaningless promises and empty gestures. Needless to say, we feel that what we are offering is more valuable than what we are receiving in return. Furthermore, we may harbor diminishing expectations regarding the future and thus feel that what we are losing is hope. This list might go on.

There are many reasons for why we feel a sense of dissatisfaction and even despair. As we alluded above, the most plausible explanation is that our feelings have some basis in fact—the peace of compromise obviously pales when compared to the peace of victory that we hoped for. Still, there is a deeper reason pertaining to human beings generally that should be noted. The simple fact is that we value prospective losses much more than we value prospective gains. Our daily life is filled with examples that illustrate this point. Simply think of the irritation and upset that comes from losing a \$10 bill versus the momentary joy of finding one. Or, think of something special that we could not bear to part with for say under \$200 that we would not even consider paying \$200 to replace. Finally, most of us would more willingly pay cash to avoid a \$20 surcharge than to gain a \$20 discount. Some may not connect with each of these examples, but we think the point is clear.

This insight goes by the name of *loss aversion*, and it poses no mystery since we have first-hand experience of what we may lose but not of what we may gain. It means in practice that those who want to offset the losses we feel as a result of a peace agreement by highlighting the gains that it may afford us are making a point that is very difficult to sell. We will most likely feel that the costs imposed by the peace agreement far outweigh any gains that might come our way. What's more is that we will entertain insane risks to try to prevent a certain loss and will refuse even the smallest risk for the sake of potentially valuable gains. More significantly, loss aversion frequently causes both parties, looking at the same time at the same agreement, to feel that it calls for them to give up everything important and to receive peanuts in return while it gives everything to the other side and asks them for nothing.<sup>1</sup>

There is no simple way to overcome the barriers created by *loss aversion*. Loss will always remain painful, and risk will always appear threatening. Knowing that *loss aversion* exists and how it affects our perception may help some, but arguing that losses and risks aren't really losses and risks if looked at from a certain perspective is not likely to move many people. Whatever approach we take is bound to leave us frustrated and disgruntled. One important way to counteract this barrier is to recognize that maintaining the status quo also involves tradeoffs and risks. The aftermath of the failure of Oslo and Taba is a case in point. When proposals on the table were rejected, it did not simply return the two sides to an unsatisfactory but relatively non-violent stalemate that was the previous status quo. Both societies and both political leaderships endured losses that proved to be much more widespread and costly than either Palestinian or Israeli hardliners had anticipated.

The only practical way out of this dilemma is both limited and indirect, and it involves the creation of political respect. In any interaction, we care as much about how we are treated as we do about any of the outcomes we may receive. We want to have our voices heard and our experiences acknowledged even if this has little bearing on what will follow. However, political respect begins further back with the realization that we are not alone in our feeling of loss. We must come to understand the depth of each other's losses. It isn't necessary for us to believe that the other side's concessions and sacrifices are as heavy or as unwarranted as their own. Nevertheless, it is important that we recognize that their feelings are authentic, that they relate to deep concerns of social and cultural identity, and that they both threaten cherished notions about the past and create misgivings about the future. We need to acknowledge our awareness of their loss, but this acknowledgment must never be simply a one-way street. To deal

effectively with loss, this recognition must be mutual. It is a process of giving and receiving respect as well as conferring and accepting dignity and honor.

Political respect also requires that both sides understand and appreciate what it has taken for the other side to get to this point in the peace process. Merely expressing the truism that one must make peace with our enemies and not just with our friends—those on the other side with whom we already enjoy a good working relationship—takes personal and political courage. Indeed, few occurrences in the dialogue process are as moving and effective as having those on each side tell the story of the personal journey that has taken them from opposition to support for the peace process—a story about how their loyalty and commitment to their own side has led them to this important moment.

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There is one loss that stands out far beyond the rest—the loss of a loved one to the violence of conflict. The pain and hurt put this loss in a different category from all the others. For those who have undergone this tragedy, no peace can justify the loss they feel. To apply a *loss aversion* analysis to it can be insulting and disrespectful, and we want to exclude this kind of loss from the comments made above. At some level, all loss is connected and painful, but the loss of a loved one calls for greater sensitivity, deference, and courtesy than the conversation suggested above allows.

However, our reasons for separating the loss of a loved one from other kinds of losses go beyond simple civility and relate to the definition of reconciliation as the creation of political partnerships. These partnerships have a future orientation, but they are also influenced by what has occurred in the past. The need for divided societies to put a violent past to rest is both difficult and fundamental. While we think that dialogue is an appropriate mechanism for creating these future-orientated partnerships, we don't necessarily think that it is the best means for dealing with all that the past calls up. Complex issues like forgiveness, healing, and retribution often come into play; and, when they do, we begin to enter a different type of discussion.

The past is one of those issues that can only be dealt with when it has become less important, and this occurs when the past is truly about the past and not about determining the future. Dialogue can help to establish the future direction in which we will move and, in doing so, make the past really the past by loosening its claim on the future. Nevertheless, the death of a loved one requires something very, if not completely, different and, in any case, should never be made less important.

#### (4) The issue of “just entitlements”

When it comes to human action, only our sense of justice rivals the role that self-interest plays. Given this, it comes as no surprise that a concern for justice will play a prominent role in our efforts to achieve peace as well. The belief that we have reached a just peace adds stability and legitimacy to the settlement because we think that a just peace is a lasting peace, a real peace, a peace that commands our allegiance. Indeed, if asked, few would claim that they seek anything more or would settle for something less than a just peace. It is what we feel entitled to demand and also duty-bound to offer.

If we discover that we have received an outcome that is not to our mind minimally just, we feel we have the right to change it whenever we can. We may feel that an unjust settlement represents no real agreement at all but instead only reflects what the more powerful party could impose at the time the deal was struck. Not surprisingly, we anticipate that the settlement will change when the power relationships allow us to assert more forcefully our own preferences. However one cuts it, the stability and legitimacy of peace declines as the amount of injustice the parties feel increases.

Unfortunately, differing notions about what would be fair are inevitable. They arise from the different ways we perceive the past—what was the root cause of the conflict, who was where first, who did what to whom, who offered and who squander opportunities for agreement in the past, etc. Given these differences, it is not surprising that we have conflicting views about the entitlements we are due. In fact, if

we happened to agree about past events and therefore present entitlements, our overlapping senses of justice would lead us to converge on a common point of agreed fairness. In these circumstances, the mutual demand and quest for justice would play a positive in the search for peace and the development of positive working relationships.

However, agreement between divided communities is rare, and what one side deems just the other side deems unjust. As a result, assertions about the requirements of justice are likely to breed ill will and distrust. From the perspective of an outside, neutral third party, the problem is typically less that either one side or the other is *wrong* and more that both sides are right! Both sides really do have legitimate claims that are in fundamental contradiction with the legitimate claims of the other side. As a consequence, no agreement can be framed that fully addresses simultaneously what both side feel are their legitimate entitlements. Instead of promoting accommodation, the pursuit of justice becomes a serious barrier to the development of better working relationships. All this occurs despite the fact that it is usually possible to identify several arrangements that would leave both parties better off than they are at the present.

Typically, conflict resolution experts tell both sides to forget about justice and focus instead on making the situation better for each of them. We don't think that this is necessarily sound advice. It is worth reflecting on the fact that all of us have a lot of experience in dealing with imperfect justice. Our daily lives are filled with instances in which we feel that we get less than we deserve. Sometimes we complain or take action to bring about change; other times we simply grit our teeth and bear the situation. Sometimes we rebel, and sometimes we don't. Sometimes we bear very great injustices without feeling victimized and sometimes we take offense at the slightest violation. Whatever we do, it is not simply a matter of whether or not we can do something about it—whether or not we see ourselves as wasting our time. Under what conditions, do we accept recognized injustices; and, under what conditions, do we rebel? These are two important questions that social psychologists have not fully answered, and they pinpoint an area of research that we hope to investigate more thoroughly in the near future. One thing we can say is that we tend to accept outcomes we feel are less than just when we feel that we have been engaged in some sort of process that was fair.

Having said all this, it is important to note that our concern about maximal justice and its relationship to peace is somewhat contrived. In every day life, no one ever experiences complete justice and certainly not complete justice with a lasting, stable peace. Instead, we try to cope with varying degrees of *injustice* because we judge worthwhile the peace that accompanies this level of injustice. The real dilemma that we face is about balancing how much injustice for what kind of peace. If this is the case, our attention should be directed toward lessening the injustice that peace imposes on people rather than maximizing our particular notion of what complete justice would entail. This recasting of the question is more significant than it may at first appear.

Parties in conflict may not be able to reach agreement about what constitutes justice, but they can often agree that a specific set of circumstances constitutes a serious injustice and ought to be addressed. In other words, instead of seeking consensus about what our just entitlements should be, the parties ought to focus on the injustices that they might correct. The reason for thinking that this approach may be more successful is that it frames the justice question as an issue of making the status quo better for both sides one step at a time. Each time that we reach an understanding about an injustice and how to address it, we expand ever so slowly our notions of justice to include more and more the just entitlements that the other side feels it is due. In doing so, we lessen the distance between us and make justice more like a magnet drawing our expectations together, and thus facilitating if not greater and greater agreement then perhaps less and less disagreement.

### **Taking Dialogue a Step Further: A Non-Humiliating Peace**

Throughout our project, CD's initial three questions—(1) What do you want? (2) Why do you want it? and (3) What can you live with, given that others disagree?—remained the point of departure for our exploration of dialogue. Over time, the outlines of a new issue came into sharper focus. CD's three questions were leading us at SCCN to ponder a fourth: *What exactly did living together peacefully actually mean?* We started questioning whether CD's third question—what disagreeing people were willing to live

with—fully addressed this challenge. We felt that dialogue may need at some point to take an additional step and engage more forcefully what living together as peacefully as possible might concretely look like. We weren't looking for utopian visions; instead, we wondered what peace might minimally require.

In retrospect, we can see that we were searching for a way to capture what disagreeing and distrustful people might pragmatically hope for. We were also trying to respond to the misgivings expressed by our CD colleagues about the idealistic formulations and clichés that attend academic discussions of peace. We had already dismissed anything suggesting concord or harmony and were questioning more deeply whether the notion of a just peace provided any realistic help. The idea of an accommodating or tolerating peace also went quickly to the wayside because it was too closely associated with a stance of “peace at any price.” Sometimes peace was imposed from above, and perhaps we should talk about a begrudging or disgruntled peace. However, this image seemed to speak of pacification, which was not close to what we were trying to express. The answer we were looking for came from some discussions we were having with Avishai Margalit, an Israeli philosopher, who has had a great influence on our work.

Margalit has written extensively on the minimal responsibilities that people owe each other as product of their shared humanity as opposed to the additional responsibilities that they may take on as a consequence of the specific relationship that exists between them. In this context, he has given particular attention to the concept of *humiliation* and the need for a “*non-humiliating peace*.” Margalit shared some of his ideas with us in a talk provocatively entitled “*Is Peace and Justice like Fish and Chips?*” The question he posed was whether it was better to think of peace and justice as “one thing” or, more accurately, two components of one thing that somehow naturally went together—“fish ‘n chips”—or to think of them as two separate things—“fish” and then “chip” that did not go together and did not necessarily form a unit. His contention was that justice and peace were not only separable but that, in virtually every ongoing protracted struggle, they must be separated because full justice for one side could not be achieved without invariably imposing some amount of injustice on the other side. Instead of insisting on a just peace, Margalit encouraged us to seek a non-humiliating peace.

Margalit went on to spell out the requirements of a non-humiliating peace, and they essentially involve honoring the respect and dignity that we owe people by virtue of their membership in the human community. We have recently begun to think about our four themes—the vision of a shared peaceful future, the issue of open and closed agreements, the problem of loss, and the issue of just entitlements—in relationship to this notion of a non-humiliating peace. We have only begun to explore this line of thinking and want to end our *theory story* by raising some initial reflections.

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When thinking about what a non-humiliating peace might entail, it is helpful to begin with a distinction that Margalit draws between red and white emotions. Red emotions reflect the embarrassment that we feel when we have not lived up to our expectations. We are caught delinquent in our duties and get called out. We have not been all that we could or should be, and our shortcomings are held up for public view. In contrast, white emotions arise when we are diminished both in our own eyes and in the eyes of another. It is more than just an undeserving slight that we find upsetting. With white emotions, we are brought low; our self-esteem is under attack. Our sense of our own human dignity has been denigrated. The loss of personal pride and self-respect that we have experienced causes us to feel humiliated.

It is tempting to list the many ways that we see humiliation fueling animosity and undermining serious engagement between parties in a peace process. Elaborating on them would raise some important issues concerning the kinds of engagement we should be seeking with our adversaries. For example, one powerful source of humiliation is the effort to force our opponents to acknowledge something that they cannot afford to admit because the costs of recognition are just too psychologically or politically damaging for them to bear. Another is making them feel beholden to our good graces for the personal and communal well-being that they experience. Humiliation often arises out of severe power imbalances that allow one side to determine to an overwhelming extent what life for the other side will ultimately look like—where they can go and not go, what kinds of economic opportunities they can pursue, where they can build their

houses, schools, and hospitals, etc. However, we want to resist this approach for the moment and highlight instead something that seems to capture what a non-humiliating peace is ideally about.

During the 1980s, everyone thought that South Africa was fated for massive inter-communal bloodshed. The miraculous transition from apartheid to majority rule that took place in the early 90s was nothing short of astounding. The question that has stumped more than a few political analysts concerns why de Klerk “gave it all away,” especially when he didn’t really have to—at least not at that particular time. Although under severe pressure, de Klerk clearly had the means and wherewithal to hold out well for something better well into the foreseeable future. The prevalent answer given is that de Klerk found himself on a slippery slope that eventually did him in. One concession led to another until he was faced with either accepting majority rule and an interim government that would ensure ANC dominance or having the whole peace process collapse before his eyes. There is little doubt that he felt that each of his previous compromises would be the key to striking a deal that would leave him and the Nationalist (Afrikaner) Party in control. But, it didn’t happen this way; and, in the end, de Klerk opted for a settlement that seemed as inexplicable as it was unimaginable.

There is undoubtedly much in this explanation that rings true. However, a close look at the interactions between Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk in reaching this settlement suggests that an important psychological shift also took place within de Klerk and the broader Afrikaner community. Throughout his time in prison, Mandela had received numerous offers of freedom if he would accept conditions that would have effectively removed him from political life. Prime Minister Vorster pledged to release him if he would retire to a bantustan and refrain from making further political pronouncements. Mandela refused. Later, P. W. Botha issued a series of overtures granting Mandela his freedom if he would variously renounce violence, disavow the South Africa Communist Party, and forgo majority rule. Again, Mandela refused. Each of these prime ministers saw Mandela as the African that would deliver him the victory, and Mandela turned each of them down, declining to play this role. Realizing that the political and economic crisis gripping South Africa in the late 80s and early 90s made Mandela’s release unavoidable, de Klerk released him but sought to control him by roping him into a negotiation process designed to produce the outcomes that the Afrikaners sought. As we all now know, his strategy failed as well.

Over the course of their interactions, something else—something deeply psychological, something transformative, occurred. De Klerk stopped seeing Mandela as the African whom he needed to control in order to secure the victory he wanted and came to see Mandela as the African that he could afford to lose to. In de Klerk’s mind, he didn’t surrender, and he didn’t betray the fundamental interests of the Afrikaner. Instead, he moved the process forward because he began to see Mandela with new eyes. Mandela became the trustworthy custodian of the painful concessions that were previously deemed too risky even to consider. The compromises that de Klerk offered Mandela were bearable because Mandela could be trusted to honor the losses that they entailed for the Afrikaner.

We have been asked particularly by Israelis how to find their Palestinian Mandela. We tell them to show us the Palestinian that they are willing to lose to; this person will be their Mandela. Like Vorster and Botha before them, Israelis want to find a Palestinian Mandela who will deliver them the victory they seek. Like de Klerk, they will only find their Mandela in the person to whom they are willing to make the difficult and painful concessions that they are at present unwilling to make. Finding their Mandela will be no easy task. It will involve finding the person who will offer both them and the Palestinians a future that each can live with. Wishful thinking and naive optimism have no place in this endeavor as the stakes are deadly serious. Nevertheless, creating a non-humiliating peace begins with finding your Mandela.

This way of putting it is obviously far too grandiose. We are not talking about heroic surrender. Capitulation sets a standard that is much too costly and demeaning for anyone to consider seriously. Why should we place anything in jeopardy when we find ourselves in such vulnerable positions? Still, political realism compels us to confront the fact that progress will sometime require us to make concessions or live with the consequences of stalemate. This way of thinking is much less idealistic than it initially appears. To further our own interests, we may sometime need to shift our attention away from what we might be able to win and toward what we might afford to concede. Which of the previously impossible concessions—ones that we pledged never to make—might we now find seriously consider? We should

emphasize that people will undoubtedly reject any attempt to move in this direction until they are convinced that the costs of continuing the stalemate have become too great to bear. Those of us at SCCN will need to find better ways to ground this insight in the daily give and take of conflicting community. Nevertheless, identifying what we can afford to lose and the person to whom we are willing to lose presents the core challenge of what a non-humiliating peace involves.

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We started by saying that we wanted to tell a *theory* story. Throughout, we have raised questions and issues that we have felt that dialogue should address. At times, we have provided suggestions for how the parties might best approach these issues and questions, but we have offered no final answers. Perhaps there are no final answers, and we can only seek answers for each day as it comes. It may be that this is all that peace can ever be—today’s answers for today’s questions—and to think it could be more is both to fool and to diminish ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> *Loss aversion* has another important lesson to teach us, but it would seem to take us on tangent from the point being made. Whether something is a loss or a gain cannot be determined without reference to some predetermined point. Take for example a £10 note. Is it a loss or a gain? It will depend upon whether you were expecting £5 or £20. This reference point also determines how big or small your loss or gain is and how great or small your disappointment or elation. As you can see, a great deal of what you feel about this £10 note is governed by the benchmark to which you compare it, even though its value—£10—remains exactly the same.

Quite often the parties to a conflict use different reference points to measure gain or loss, and this in itself causes them to assess things very differently. Nevertheless, there is another aspect of *loss aversion* that has equal, if not greater, impact, and it has to do with how the parties view the status quo. People unthinkingly assume that the choice of maintaining the status has no cost, and this is almost never the case. For example, many Israelis and Palestinians felt rightly or wrongly at the time of Taba meetings that the proposals on the table would inflict harsh costs on them. As everyone knows, what little remained of the peace process went into a disastrous tailspin. Looking back from where things stand today, it seems at least plausible that many Israelis and Palestinians who felt justified in not accepting Taba proposals would now feel justified in viewing them as positive steps forward. The lesson is that the appropriate reference point is not the current status quo but where the status will be if no action is taken.