

Addressing the Leadership Challenge of Polarization and Groupishness

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**CENTER FOR
PUBLIC DELIBERATION
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

*Dedicated to enhancing local democracy through improved
public communication and community problem solving*

Overview

- The Bad News about our Brains
- The Bad News about our Interactions and Processes
- So what can we do and what is the role of leaders?

What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

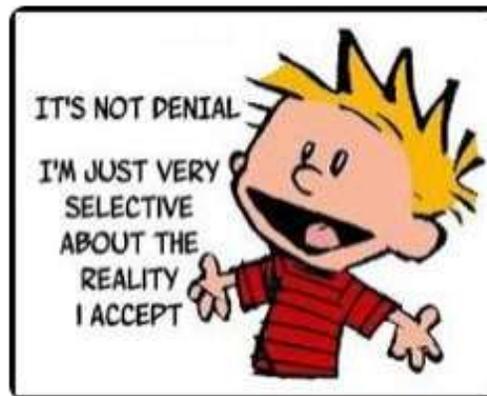
The Problematic

We crave certainty and consistency

We are suckers for the good v. evil narrative

We are “groupish” (prefer to gather with like-minded)

We filter & cherry pick evidence to support our views



What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Stages of motivated reasoning

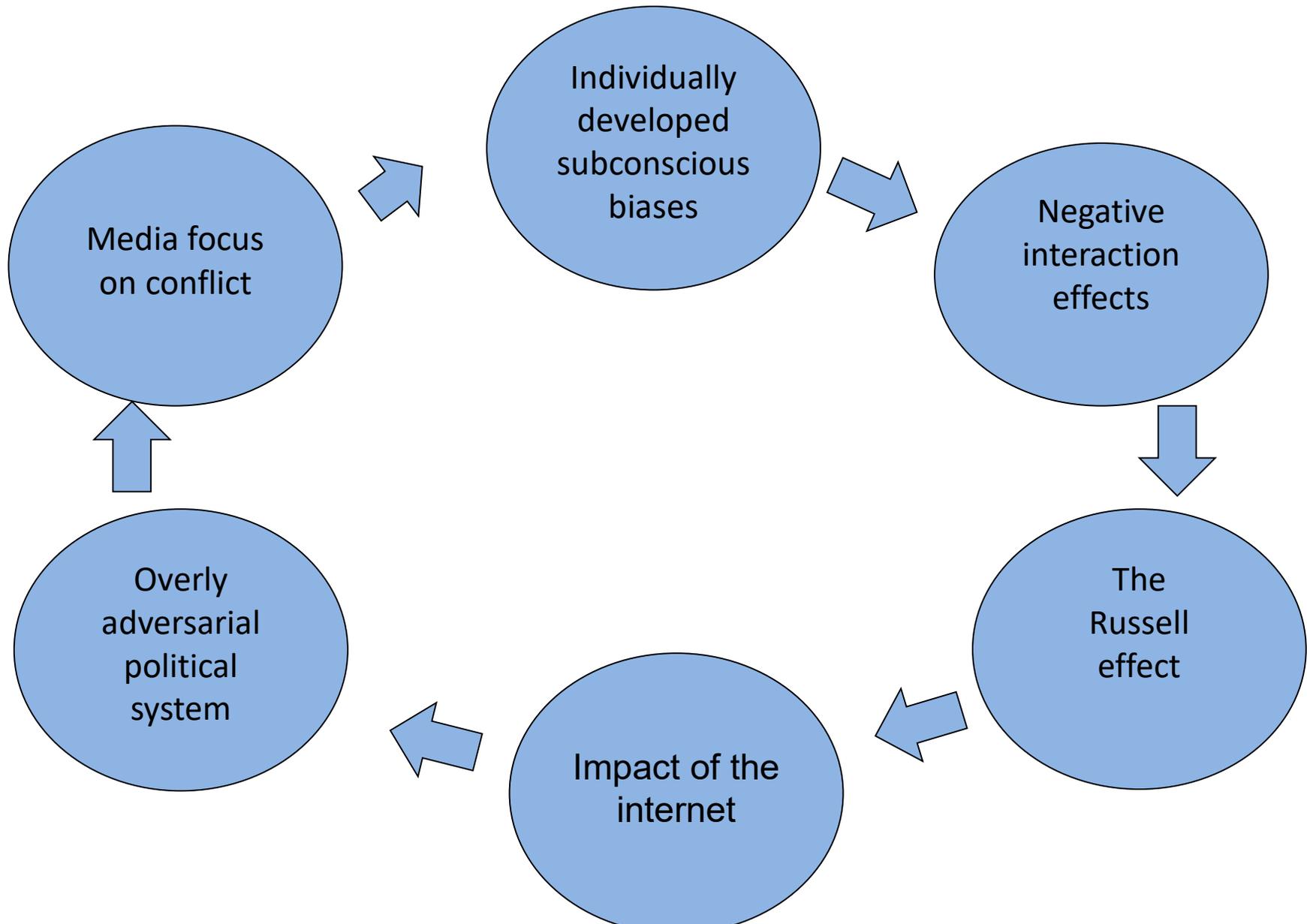
What and who we expose ourselves to	<i>selective exposure /echo chambers</i>
How we interpret new evidence	<i>confirmation bias</i>
How we make attributions and tell stories	<i>egoism, illusory correlation, negativity bias</i>
How we make decisions	<i>heuristics, self-serving bias, social proof</i>
What we remember	<i>availability bias</i>

How we interpret new evidence

“when we want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Can I believe it?’ Then...we search for supporting evidence, and if we find even a single piece of pseudo-evidence, we can stop thinking.... In contrast, when we don’t want to believe something, we ask ourselves, ‘Must I believe it?’ Then we search for contrary evidence, and if we find a single reason to doubt the claim, we can dismiss it“

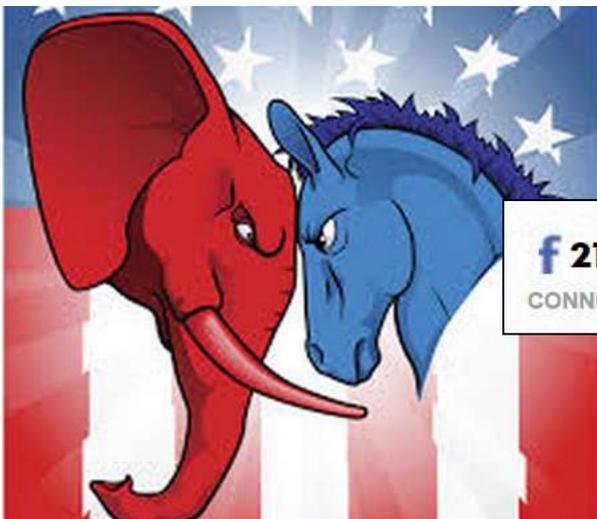
- *Jonathan Haidt and Tom Gilovich*

The Vicious Cycle of Exaggerated Polarization



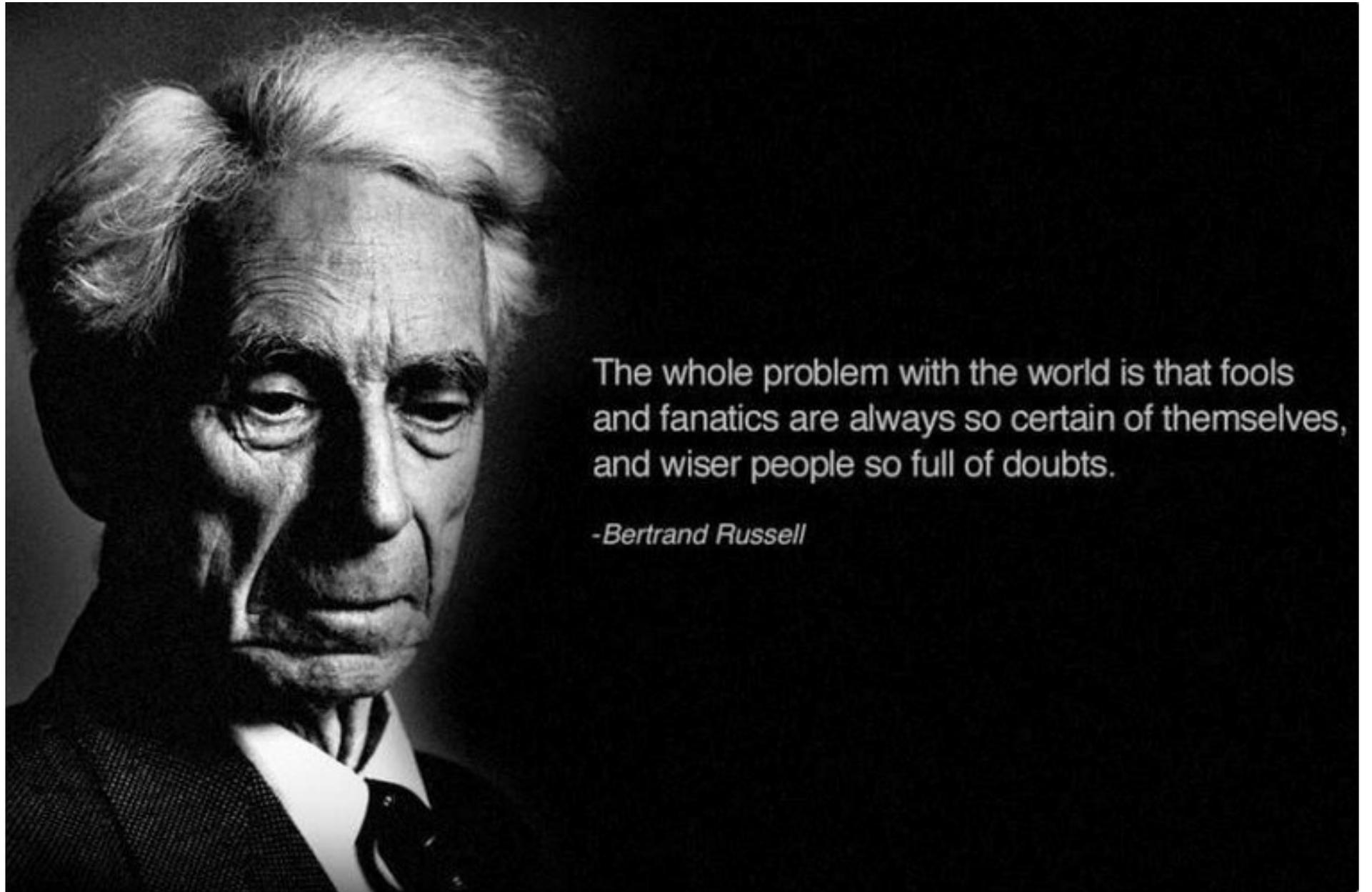
The Problem We Face

Most of our processes for public engagement and community problem solving primarily activate the most negative aspects of human nature, and rarely tap into or nurture the positive.



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The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.

-Bertrand Russell

Three Suggestions

- Your leadership style
- Developing wise collaborators
- Build capacity for better engagement processes

Traditional v. Facilitative Leadership

Traditional

- *Strong, clear opinion*
- *Charisma*
- *Public speaking skills*
- *Mobilization of the like-minded*

Facilitative

- *More comfortable with uncertainty*
- *Trust and respect*
- *Process and facilitation skills*
- *Collaboration between broad perspectives*

What We Are Learning from Social Psychology and Brain Science

The Good

We are inherently social and seek purpose and community

We are inherently pragmatic and creative

We can overcome our bad tendencies and build better habits



What We Are Learning from Brain Science and Social Psychology?

Bottom line: The most powerful thing to help people overcome their biases, refine their opinion, and build community is **genuine conversation with people they respect.**

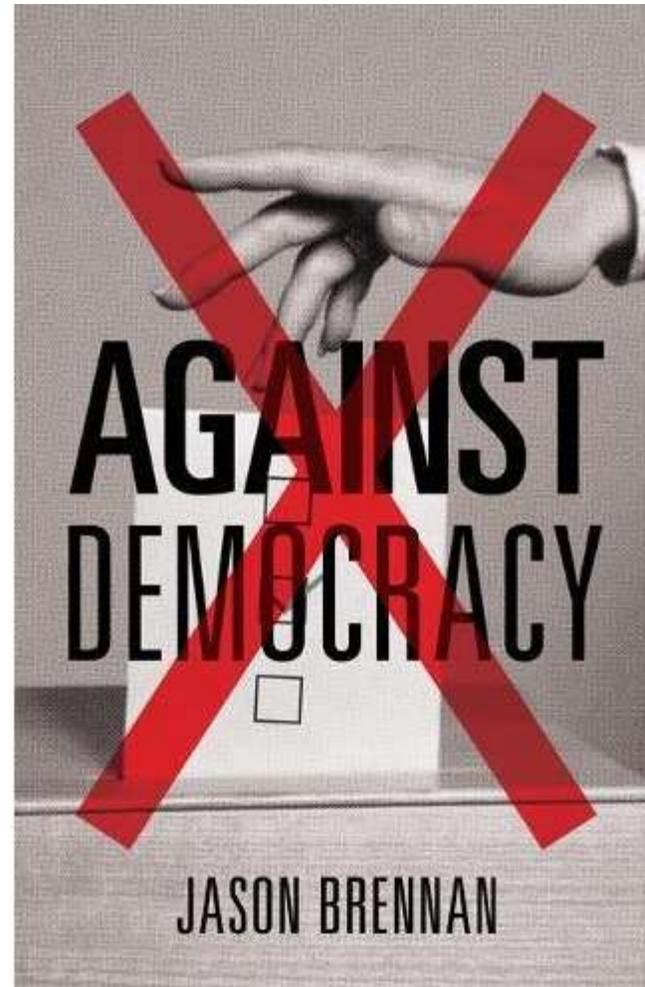


Brennan's *Against Democracy*

Three types of citizens:

- Hobbits
- Hooligans
- ~~Vulcans~~

Wise collaborators



The Four Key Shifts of Deliberative Engagement

- From wicked people → to wicked problems
- From adversaries → to collaborators
- From inciting the worst of human nature → to bringing out the best of human nature
- From facts as cherry picked ammunition or “fake news” → to facts as tools for addressing problems together