

## OPENING REMARKS<sup>1</sup>

In thinking about my opening address to this conference, I started wondering about the purpose of conferences. We all go to them, and we all get out of them only what we put in. I remember the terror of my first conference paper – just getting through those fifteen minutes of talking was what I worried about. And then a lazy middle period where I was one of those sad young men who liked to spend my time thinking of the most difficult, self-promoting question to ask. So I guess I want to say enjoy the terror but don't fall into the error of an arrogant young man.

I also started thinking about a Dean from another University I was chatting to about what makes for a great academic culture and the best quality work. He was very much of the view that it was the quality of our networks, the company that we keep, the people who read and comment on our work, and of course the people that we read in return, that makes a critical difference. Those who talk with, read with, discuss with the best people from around the world are those that ultimately produce the best work.

I found myself thinking of a famous academic double act: Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman.<sup>2</sup> The thing I knew about them was that they used to go for long walks and spend hours just talking, one on one, to refine, test, reject and ultimately build their ideas. Conferences, I was tempted to say, are opportunities for such moments of friendship and collaboration. And so they are. But in truth though Tversky reputedly had a sharp tongue. Of evolutionary psychologists, he said, 'Listen to evolutionary psychologists long enough, and you'll stop believing in evolution'. When asked about artificial intelligence, Tversky – a famous psychologist of course - replied, 'We study natural stupidity'. One line wisdom was something of a forte: 'The secret to doing good research' he said, 'is always to be a little underemployed. You waste years by not being able to waste hours'. Jokes, it turns out, can sometimes be good advice.

And rather than being a simple story of friendship and collaboration, Kahneman's first meeting with Tversky at a seminar involved Kahneman thinking Tversky experiments, 'incredibly stupid'. He went after Tversky hard. Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler tell us,

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<sup>1</sup> These opening remarks were made by Professor Moorhead at the opening of the 2017 UCL Postgraduate and Early Careers Conference, 30 March 2017.

<sup>2</sup> My thoughts, and the quotes that follow, are drawn from, Cass R. Sunstein and Richard Thaler, 'The Two Friends Who Changed How We Think About How We Think', *The New Yorker*, 7 December 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-two-friends-who-changed-how-we-think-about-how-we-think>.

Tversky almost never lost an argument, but he lost this one. And, very much in character, Tversky reacted to this loss by coming back for more. The strength of their relationship, of their work, was Danny was always sure he was wrong. Amos was always sure he was right. Belief and doubt worked side by side.

So whilst I was going to say at the start of this conference, play nice. Make friends. Go for walks! I was persuaded by that story to say only this: be authentic. Talk about your ideas. Articulate them as clearly and simply as you can. And let them be criticized. Listen to the criticism. And enjoy. Enjoy the day and the night, because tomorrow you have to write and today can make that both better and part of a shared endeavour. You really can waste years by not being able to waste hours.

Richard Moorhead

*Vice Dean (Research) and Professor of Law, UCL*