



2025-26 FALL

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

WEEK 6

PERSON PERCEPTION

Core Questions

1. How do we form impressions of others?
2. How do we communicate nonverbally?
3. How do we explain other people's behavior?
4. Why do we misjudge one another?

INTRODUCTION

- **Person perceptions:**
People's perceptions of one another based on **initial impressions** of their **behavior** and **assumptions** concerning what characteristics correspond with that behavior.



<https://www.istockphoto.com/t/r/search/2/image>



<https://ro.vanzare2021.com/>

Impression Formation

- integrating sources of information about others into a unified and consistent judgment
- decide very quickly based on minimal information

Impressions & Expectations

- First impressions are automatic and may be harmless in many cases.
- Impressions and person perceptions can have an important influence on how social interactions go.
- When our expectations about someone else change our behaviors, which then change the other person's behaviors such that they fulfill our expectation, a **self-fulfilling prophecy** has occurred.

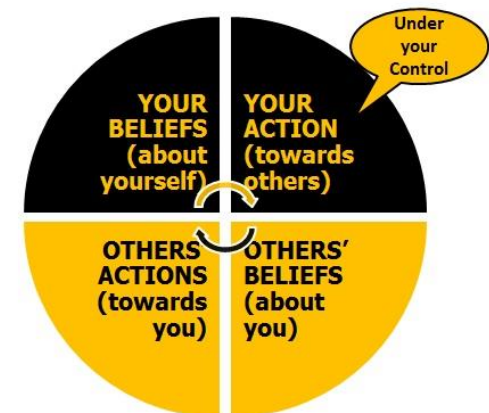
Pygmalion effect

- Self-fulfilling prophecies are sometimes called the Pygmalion effect.
- In the Greek myth, the shy sculptor Pygmalion fell in love with his own sculpture of Galatea, the most beautiful woman he could imagine. He asked the goddess Aphrodite to breathe life into her.
- With the twisted humor characteristic of Greek gods, Aphrodite granted his request but did not allow Galatea to love him back.
- This story illustrates the idea of wishing something into being. This is the psychological basis for self-fulfilling prophecies, when something comes true because we imagined it already was true.



<https://www.statisticshowto.com/pygmalion-effect-rosenthal/>

INFLUENCING OTHERS' BEHAVIOR BY CHANGING YOURS



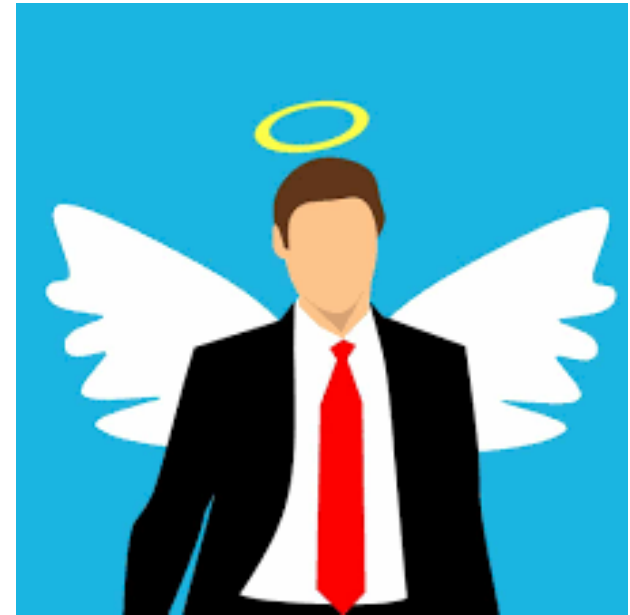
<https://sites.psu.edu/kpadams26psu/2015/06/14/wfed884-the-pygmalion-effect/>

What information do we use?

- **roles**
- **physical cues** – appearance and behavior
- **salience**: stimuli that stand out against a background (bright, noisy, moving, novel characteristics attract our attention)
- **context effects**:
 - contrast: perception of increased difference from the context
 - assimilation: perception of increased similarity to the context
- we quickly move from **observations** to infer personality traits
 - – more economic (simpler)
 - – automatic
- **implicit personality theory**: assumptions and naive belief system about which traits and behaviors go together
- **categorization**: perceive individuals as group members
- **continuum model of impression formation**: category-based, stereotypical impressions,
- careful and systematic processing of information for individuated impressions
- **dual-processing**

Integrating Impressions

- **Evaluative consistency:** view people as consistently good / bad even when contradictions exist
- **Halo effect:** When an entire social perception of a person is constructed around a single trait.
- **Central trait:** A major characteristic of an individual's personality that indicates the presence of several associated traits, together creating a unified impression about the entire person.



<https://www.free-power-pointtemplates.com/articles/understanding-the-halo-effect-for-counteracting-cognitive-bias/>

Integrating Impressions

- **Negativity effect:** negative traits given more weight in evaluations
- **Positivity bias:** tend to evaluate people in a favorable light (“rose colored glasses”)
- **Primacy / recency effects:** first / last bits of information carries more weight
- **Emotional expressions** also influence our impressions

Integrating Impressions

➤ **motivated person perception:**

- our goals and feelings about another person influence the information we gather
- forming impressions, anticipate future interactions, need for accuracy, prior expectations / experiences, outcome dependency etc.
- our cognitive and emotional state also matters

What-Is-Beautiful-Is-Good

- physical attractiveness creates a strange first impression halo effect called the what-is-beautiful-is-good effect
- When physical attractiveness creates a halo effect such that individuals who are beautiful are also perceived to have several other positive characteristics.
 - teachers rate physically attractive children as smarter
 - pretty people get higher starting salaries and more raises at work
 - attractive defendants in court are given lighter prison sentences
 - people with attractive profile photos on Facebook are more likely to get friend requests from strangers



<https://tamly.blog/hieu-ung-hao-quang-vi-sao-xau-cung-la-mot-cai-toi/>

The benefits and privileges society gives to beautiful people allow them to have more status, education, and attention.

attributional ambiguity

- Physically attractive people do have a few problems:
 - Highly attractive people may have difficulty diagnosing the sincerity of any compliments they receive about their skills or abilities. They may be unclear whether compliments are sincere or whether the person giving the compliment simply wants to manipulate them somehow.
- This confusion over why someone is treating you in a particular way is called **attributional ambiguity**.
- Despite the “what-is-beautiful-is-good” bias, highly attractive women do not always report having higher self-esteem. And occasionally, being “too” attractive might lead to jealousy and discrimination.

Prophecy and Experimenter Bias

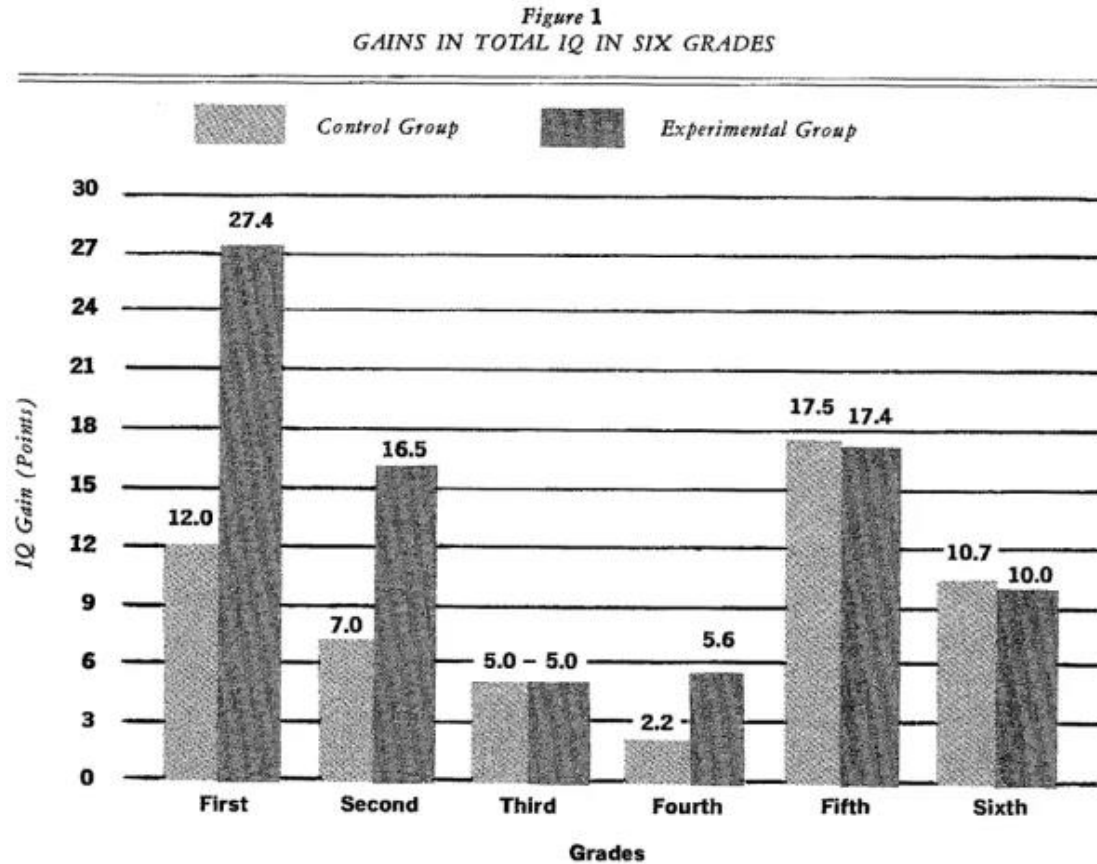
- Social psychology research on self-fulfilling prophecies started in the 1960s with the work of Robert **Rosenthal**.
- In his first self-fulfilling prophecy experiment, Rosenthal's student-experimenters thought that they were training their lab rats to run a maze.
- But Rosenthal was really testing whether the student-experimenters' expectations would influence how well the rats could run that maze.
- Half of the student-experimenters were led to believe their rats were "maze bright," and the other half believed their rats were "maze dull."
- What the student-experimenters expected to happen, happened. Somehow, the students had affected the actual results of how well the rats ran the mazes.
- This might be an important lesson for all researchers; we should be alert for **experimenter biases**.

Prophecy and Elementary Schoolchildren

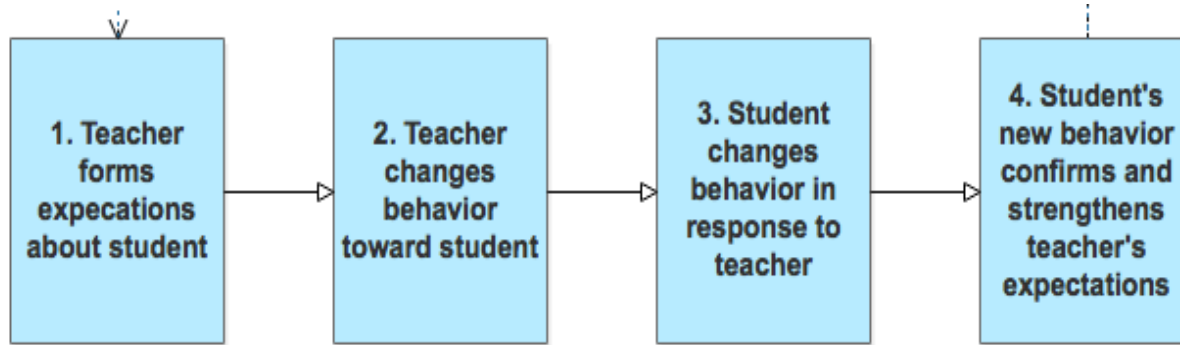
- Social psychologist Robert Rosenthal & Lenore Jacobsen, a school principal in San Francisco.
- The Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition
- They used the so-called test to give teachers **bogus feedback** about students in their classroom.
- 20% of students across six grade levels were expected to be “**intellectual bloomers**” who would “show surprising gains in intellectual competence during the next eight months of school” (Rosenthal, 2002).
- In reality, the students had been selected completely at random.

Prophecy and Elementary Schoolchildren

- Teachers described the children in the experimental group as more likely to succeed, more interesting, more curious, more appealing, better adjusted, less in need of social approval, and even happier.



<https://www.vernieuwenderwijs.nl/het-pygmalion-effect-de-invloed-van-verwachtingen/>



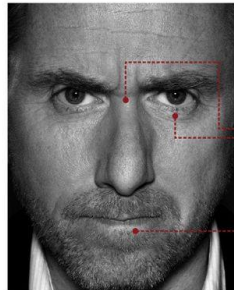
How self-fulfilling prophecies become true in a classroom

1. ***Emotional climate***, through nonverbal cues that create a warmer social-emotional environment.
2. ***Expectations of effort***, by teaching more material and more difficult material.
3. ***Increased opportunities***, by giving students more opportunities to respond, including more time to respond.
4. ***Differential feedback***, by giving certain students more individualized feedback that allows them to assess their own progress.

How Do We Communicate Nonverbally?

- **Nonverbal communication:** The many ways individuals communicate through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.
- **Universality hypothesis:** The idea that nonverbal facial expressions are universal, regardless of culture.

“universal” emotions



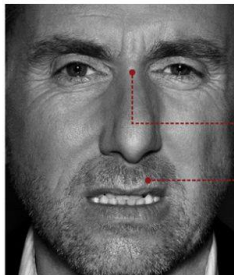
anger

- ① eyebrows down and together
- ② eyes glare
- ③ narrowing of the lips



contempt

- ① lip corner tightened and raised on only one side of face



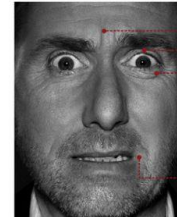
disgust

- ① nose wrinkling
- ② upper lip raised

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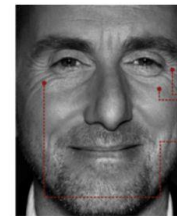
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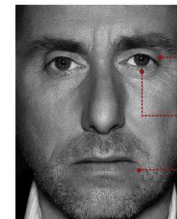
fear

- ① eyebrows raised and pulled together
- ② raised upper eyelids
- ③ tensed lower eyelids
- ④ lips slightly stretched horizontally back to ears



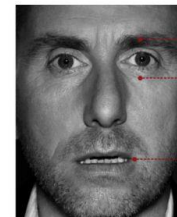
happiness

- A real smile always includes:
- ① crow's feet wrinkles
 - ② pushed up cheeks
 - ③ movement from muscle that orbits the eye



sadness

- ① drooping upper eyelids
- ② losing focus in eyes
- ③ slight pulling down of lip corners



surprise

- Lasts for only one second:
- ① eyebrows raised
 - ② eyes widened
 - ③ mouth open

Can You Tell When People Are Lying?

- Despite the universality of emotional expressions, our faces are still not always easy to read.
- Imagine, for example, that you have been pulled over by a police officer for driving too fast. You might smile politely at the officer, hoping to avoid a ticket. However, it's a phony smile and an experienced officer probably recognizes it.
- **Facial leakage** occurs whenever concealed emotions are betrayed by automatic muscle responses

Lie to me*

- **Micro-expression:** An involuntary flash of emotional honesty.
- **Duping delight:** The facial smirk that appears when people think that they have gotten away with a lie.
- **Duchenne smile:** A genuine, felt smile.

* The television series Lie to Me (2009–2011) was based on a man who was supposedly the world's leading expert in reading facial expressions, including whether people were telling the truth.

Duchenne smile OR Pan-am smile ?



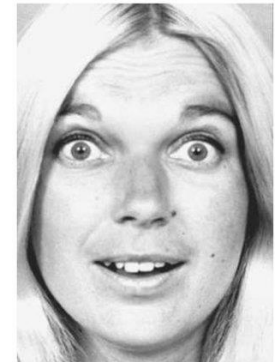
<https://thesmileroutine.com/2013/11/23/50-shades-of-smiles/>

People are complicated

- **Affect blend:** When two or more contradictory emotions are shown on different parts of an individual's face, making it difficult to accurately understand his or her expression.
- When a friend is engaged to marry someone you think is a very bad match. Your face will display an affect blend of contradictory emotions. Your eyes may wrinkle with genuine happiness for your friend, but your mouth may tighten into a forced smile.

The Face of Multiple Emotions

Often, people express more than one emotion at the same time. Can you tell which emotions these people are expressing? (Adapted from Ekman & Friesen, 1975)



Source: The Paul Ekman Group, LLC

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PEARSON

<https://en.ppt-online.org/140321>

Culturemes Communicate Social Impressions

- While many studies indicate that facial expressions are understood regardless of culture, other types of nonverbal communication are culture specific.
- **Cultureme:** Culture-specific nonverbal communication such as inside jokes, religious symbols, official government seals, and corporate branding that represent cultural communication not understood by those outside of the culture and convey widely shared social impressions.



<https://thesocietypages.org/toolbox/cultural-symbols/>

Bush salutes Satan?



Jan. 20, 2005, Washington

- The meaning of a gesture can vary greatly from one culture to another.
- During his inauguration on January 20, 2005, President George W. Bush used a gesture known as “Hook ‘em, horns,” the salute of the University of Texas Longhorns.
- What he apparently didn’t know was that in Mediterranean cultures, this gesture implies that a man has an unfaithful wife, and in parts of Africa it is used to impose a curse on another person.

How Do We Explain Other People's Behavior?

- Understanding one another is hard work (and cultural differences don't make it any easier). Fortunately, the human brain is relentlessly curious.
- Having any explanation sometimes seems to be more important than having an accurate explanation.
- So what influences how we answer the “why” question about one another's behavior?

We Try to Isolate the Cause of Behavior

- **Attribution theory:** The idea that individuals attempt to understand the behavior of those around them by forming commonsense explanations for the cause of others' behavior.
- **Attributions:** How individuals explain the causes of others' actions and events.
- **Principle of noncommon effects:** The idea that individuals make attributions by looking for a single factor that seems to account for what occurred based on its degree of difference from the other possible factors.

principle of noncommon effects

- Imagine your friend gets engaged to someone who is mean-spirited, unmotivated, dishonest, and extremely wealthy.
- You might notice that three of these traits are negative while one is usually considered positive (or, at least, attractive in a potential marriage partner)—so it's easy to make the attribution that your friend is marrying for money.
- Wealth is the noncommon factor that stands out as different from the others, and it therefore becomes salient as the most probable explanation.

We Make Internal and External Attributions

- **Internal attributions:** Explanations for an individual's behavior that are based on factors that are within the person's control, such as an individual's personality or conscious choices.
- **External attributions:** Explanations for an individual's behavior that are based on factors that are outside of the person's control, such as getting sick, the weather, or bad luck.

The Danger of Internal Attributions: Victim Blaming

- some observers of rape victims will make internal attributions leading to the false beliefs that they were “asking for it” or somehow deserved to be assaulted
 - the same pattern is found in victims of domestic violence
- **Internal attributions can thus place blame on people when really, an external attribution is the cause.**

The Injustice of Believing in a Just World

- Internal attributions seem cruel when people have already suffered some terrible misfortune.
- Most of us don't want to be cruel, vicious, judgmental, or unkind, so why do we tend to blame the victim?
- The **just world hypothesis** asserts that individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve.
- We reveal our belief in a just world when we say things like, "What goes around comes around" or "Karma will catch up with him."

Defensive Attributions

- Making internal attributions about those who are victims of life's many peculiarities is a defensive attribution; it makes us **feel better** and **brings us comfort**.
- One explanation for this defensive strategy comes from **terror management theory**, which suggests that an awareness of such injustices, including our **unavoidable death**, is profoundly **disturbing**.

Terror management theory

1. Humans, as a species, are uniquely aware of our own eventual mortality.
2. Thinking about our own unavoidable death is terrifying.
3. When possible, we will distract ourselves from mortality by making meaning out of our lives, such as through beliefs about cultural values or religions that comfort us.
4. When forced to confront the possibility of death, we will cling to beliefs that help us feel comforted or meaningful. These beliefs are called our **worldviews**.

Why Do We Misjudge One Another?

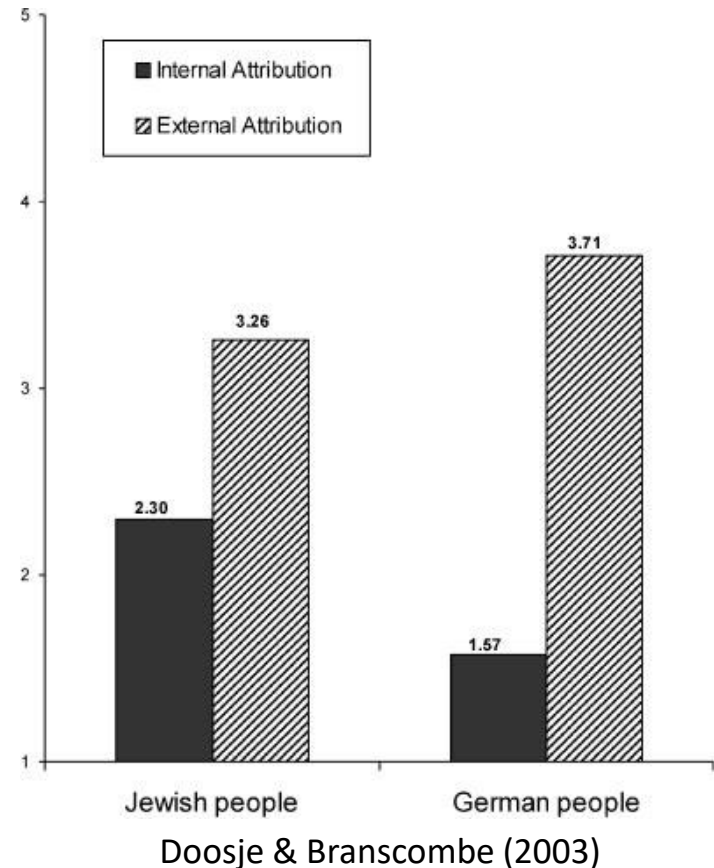
- Cognitive errors accumulate into flawed perceptions.
- One of our most common flawed perceptions is:
- **Fundamental attribution error:** The tendency to overestimate the influence of personality and underestimate the power of the situation when making attributions about other people's behaviors.
- Attributing behavior to personality (internal or dispositional causes) rather than to situations (external causes) is deeply ingrained in our causal reasoning.
- waiter/tip, bus driver

Why Do We Misjudge One Another?

- We are the experts about our own lives, and we can see how our own behavior or outcomes change based on the situation.
- However, when we see other people behaving in a certain way, we don't have the same information. All we have to observe is what's happening right now, so it's easy to focus on the behavior instead of what might have led up to it.
- **Actor-observer bias:** An individual's tendency to think of personality when explaining other people's behavior but external, situational causes when explaining their own behavior.
- Why? Because it is perceptual: actors look at situation, observers look at actors. They both have **access to different information**

Attributions to Explain History

- non-Jewish Germans & non-German Jews waiting in the line to rate two simple statements:
- “I think the Germans mistreated the Jews because Germans are aggressive by nature.” (*A dispositional attribution*)
- “It is important to consider the behavior of the Germans towards the Jews in a historical context, rather than judge their acts in isolation.” (*A situational attribution*)



We Make Self-Serving Attributions

- **False-consensus effect:** The false assumption that other people share our values perceptions, and beliefs.
- **Truly false consensus effect:** Occurs when individuals believe that others share their beliefs, even after they have objective, statistical information that contradicts that belief.
- **The false uniqueness bias:** The belief that we are more unique than others when it comes to socially desirable traits. (Ninety-nine percent of pet owners think their pet is above average in intelligence.)



https://www.123rf.com/photo_117530097_cute-beagle-puppy-in-a-graduation-cap.html

social experiment - A Violinist in the Metro

- A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning.
- He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, since it was rush hour, it was calculated that thousands of people went through the station.
- Only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32.
- When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition. No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world.
- He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.
- Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston and the seats averaged \$100 a piece.

social experiment - A Violinist in the Metro

- This is a real story. Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of an social experiment about perception, taste and priorities of people.
- Do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context?
- If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing the best music ever written, how many other things are we missing?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZeSZFYCNRw>