

# THE WEEK

What makes human beings the most successful of all earthly creatures? Earlier this year a book advanced the theory that it's our singular ability to deny reality when it's staring us in the face. Ajit Varki

and Danny Brower argued that consciousness brings no evolutionary advantage if it awakens us to the depressing fact that we're doomed to die. The first person to have that "all-encompassing, persistent, terror-filled realization," they wrote, would likely lose out in the struggle to find a mate and pass on his or her genes. So unlike self-aware chimpanzees, dolphins, and orcas, said the authors of *Denial: Self-Deception, False Beliefs, and the Origins of the Human Mind*, humans developed "neural mechanisms for denying reality." That's why we're running the show on this planet, but it's also why we eat in ways we know will kill us and keep spewing out enough carbon to cause the seas to rise.

This intriguing theory came to mind this week, thanks to the lavish feast of denial laid out by Toronto Mayor Rob Ford (see page 13). After months of insisting he didn't use drugs, Ford finally admitted that he had smoked crack cocaine in "one of my drunken stupors." He said he would rein in his excessive drinking in public, while insisting that he's no alcoholic and will keep right on drinking in his basement. His half-defiant explanation—"I'm only human"—may be cause for some sympathy. But it's a poor excuse for chronic misbehaving. As Varki and Brower wrote, "It is only by understanding reality denial as an enemy within that we might be able to overcome it." To Ford and the rest of us reality-deniers, I say good luck with that.

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