

Professor William J. le Noble

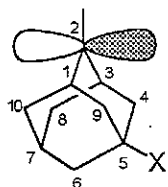
Biographical Sketch

William J. le Noble was born July 19, 1928, in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where he spent his early years. He graduated with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from the Advanced Engineering School in Dordrecht in 1949. After emigrating in the same year, he served in the U.S. Army in Korea until 1953. Subsequently he attended the University of Chicago, where he graduated in 1957 with a thesis project supervised by the late Professor G. W. Wheland. After a postdoctoral stint with the late Professor N. Kornblum at Purdue, he joined the Faculty at Stony Brook, which was then in its third year of operation. He is now Professor Emeritus of Chemistry; his service to the Department of Chemistry has included a term as Chair. He is the author of 175 publications including several chapters, a graduate level text ("Highlights of Organic Chemistry"), two articles invited by the Encyclopedia of Science and Technology ("Resonance" and "Physical Organic Chemistry") and one by the Encyclopedia of Life Sciences ("Organic Reaction Mechanisms").

His two principal research interests have been the use of pressure as a tool in mechanistic investigations, and stereochemistry. He has served as Visiting Professor at the Universities of Amsterdam, Groningen and Leiden in the Netherlands, of Oulu in Finland and of Oita in Japan. He was awarded a Senior U.S. Scientist Award by the Humboldt Foundation in 1985, and a Senior Scientist Award by Mombusho (Japan Ministry of Education and Science) in 1987. His colleagues in high-pressure chemistry both in the U.S. and abroad honored him recently with a Special Issue of the Journal "High Pressure Chemistry." He served as Senior Editor of the Journal of Organic Chemistry under Professor F. D. Greene from 1977-1988, and he has held the same position with the *Recueil de Travaux Chimiques des Pays-bas*.

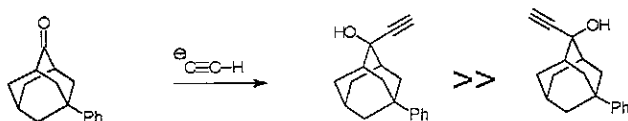
Research Summary and Publications

The contributions of Professor W. J. le Noble to organic chemistry are in two main areas. The first of these is the study of electronic face selection in the chemistry of trigonal carbon; this is the research to be recognized by the award for which this nomination is written. The second is the study of organic reactions in compressed solutions; this was the focus of le Noble's earlier research. Reference numbers below refer to the list of publications.



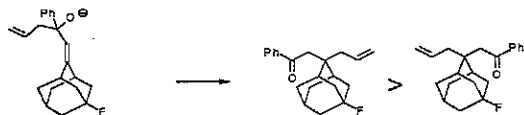
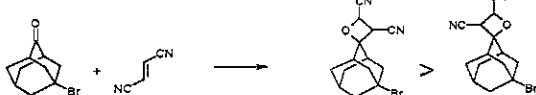
The work on face selection is based on the use of 5-substituted 2-adamantylidene derivatives. The virtues of this probe are several: the two faces are sterically virtually identical, it is conformationally constrained, and addition gives two products both of which are achiral. Like most adamantanes, the products are generally solids, easily separated and purified; the configurations can be assigned by a variety of physical techniques.

This work began in the mid seventies with the observation (then unexpected) that ethynylation of 5-phenyladamantanone is not stereorandom but gives the *E*- and *Z*-propargyl alcohols in a 3:1 ratio.⁷¹ All the literature on the subject of 4-substituted cyclohexanes up to that time had been solidly based on the assumption that the cross-ring substituents have no effect upon the chemistry at the 1-position; the deviation from a 50/50 product distribution in this case clearly showed that the assumption was wrong.

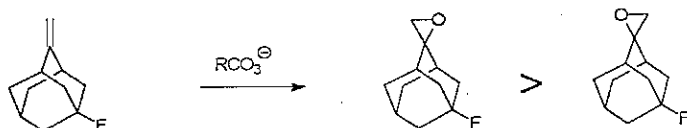


Subsequent investigations showed that nucleophiles such as NaBH_4 , LiAlH_4 , CH_3Li , CH_3MgBr , $p\text{-X-C}_6\text{H}_4\text{MgBr}$, $\text{C}_2\text{F}_5\text{Li}$ and $\text{H-C}\equiv\text{C-}$

always preferentially attack the *zu* face of the adamantanone if the 5-substituent is electron withdrawing^{115,128} (halogen, hydroxy, trifluoromethyl, phenyl, *p*-nitrophenyl), and the *en* face if it is electron donating (trimethylsilyl, trimethylstannyl).¹³⁵



both of olefins and ketones.¹³⁷

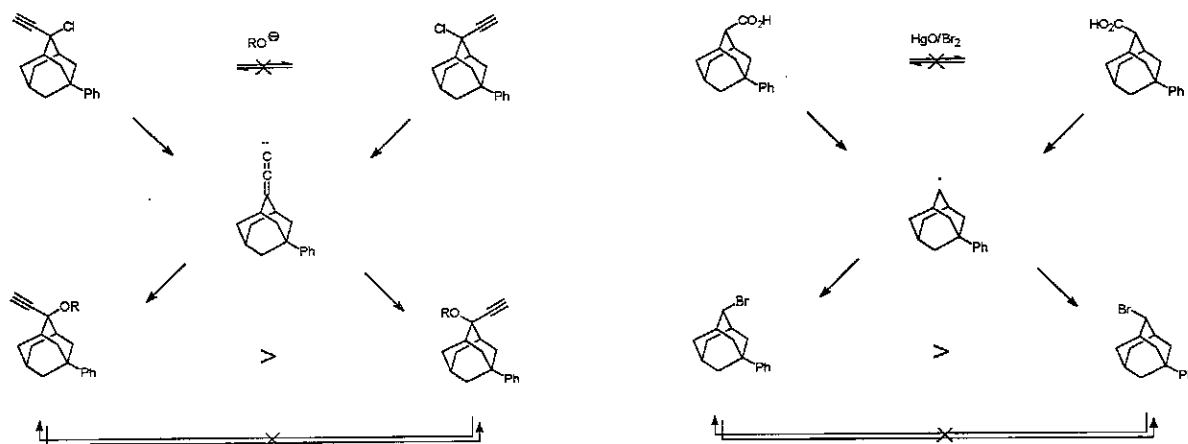


The same selectivity is observed in pericyclic reactions. Examples include Diels-Alder cycloaddition,¹⁴³ photocycloaddition,¹⁴⁴ the oxy-Cope rearrangement¹³² and Claisen rearrangement. In the Diels-Alder reaction, it was shown that the same selectivity characterizes both reaction partners,¹⁴⁴ and in the Claisen rearrangement,¹⁵⁶ that it applies at both termini.¹⁵⁶

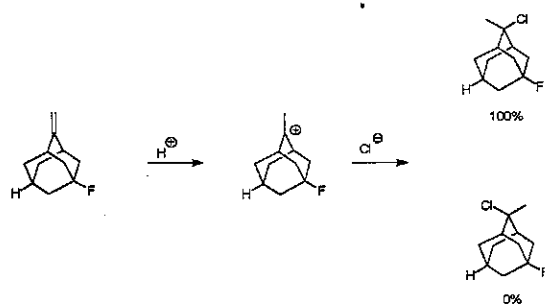
Electrophiles attacking 5-substituted 2-methyleneadamantanes also preferentially do so on the side *syn* to an electron withdrawing group such as phenyl or fluoro, for example, carbene capture, hydroboration, oxymercuration¹¹⁸ and bromination,

Transient trigonal carbon species are no exception either; carbenes,⁷¹ radicals¹⁴¹ and carbocations⁶⁵ are included. Other additions have been the metal

complexation of olefins¹⁴⁴ and the oxidation of sulfides.¹⁵⁴ Substituting C₅ by positive nitrogen greatly magnifies the effect.¹⁴⁵



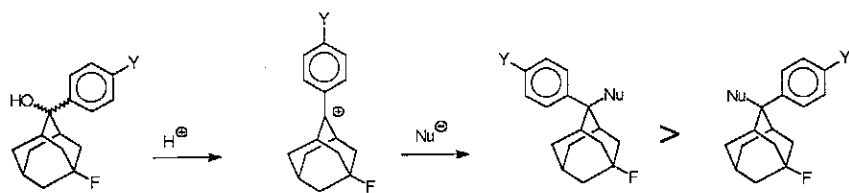
All of these observations (no exceptions have been found to date) empirically fit the rule that the preferred face is the one anti-periplanar to the more electron rich bond(s). Thus, the 5-halo-substituted substrates, are attacked from the *syn* side since that places the more electron-rich CC-bonds, C₁C₈ and C₃C₁₀ in the antiperiplanar positions.



To explain these results, le Noble favors the notion offered by Cieplak to account for the oft-observed preference of nucleophiles to attack cyclohexanones at the (more hindered) axial face. In this model, antiperiplanar vicinal bonds stabilize the transition state via hyperconjugative delocalization into the sigma* component of the newly forming bond. le Noble fitted all of his initial results on that basis, and furthermore greatly expanded its usefulness by unifying

it with Winstein's sigma delocalization. The main difference between the two concepts, in le Noble's view, is provided by the recipient orbital: the σ^* -orbital in addition reactions, and the vacant p-orbital in carbocations. This insight allowed him to answer several questions left unresolved during the "carbonium ion controversy," among them the similarity -often pointed out by H. C. Brown- of the stereochemistries of ketone reduction and carbocation capture and formation. In fact, the notion of sigma delocalization itself was still controversial, even after the long and inconclusive battle against steric and solvent-separated-ion-pair explanations of retentive solvolysis; however, le Noble's experiments with the adamantyl substrates refute these alternatives. Thus, 5-deuterio-2-adamantyl tosylate hydrolyzes with retention;¹¹⁵ the steric explanation is ruled out in this case. Furthermore, the same face selection obtains whichever precursor alcohol (E or Z) produces the cation, so that solvent-separated ion-pairs cannot be responsible either.

Having thus ruled out the alternative theories for the 2-adamantyl cation, le Noble was in a position to test the validity of the principal argument that had been used so vigorously against sigma participation in the 2-norbornyl ion, to wit, that cation stabilizing substituents fail to suppress it. He found that the 2-p-phenyl-substituted 5-fluoro-2-adamantyl cations all capture nucleophiles such as Cl⁻ or BH₄⁻ with the same *syn/anti* ratio (3.2 ± 0.2), from Y = CF₃ to Y = OMe. Even a methoxy group bound directly to the carbocationic center does not reduce its face selectivity!



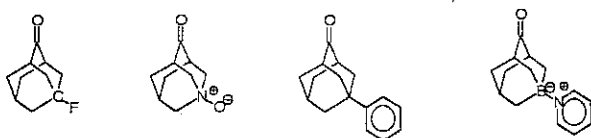
Clearly, the premise used in the 2-norbornyl studies was never valid to begin with; cation-stabilizing substituents, so effective in

suppressing π participation, are irrelevant in studies of sigma participation.¹²⁷ Dramatic proof of this assertion is found in the fact that σ -participation-induced stereoselection is subject to orbital symmetry control, while π participation is not.^{137,153} Further work is in progress. The insights gained will sharpen the organic chemists' ability to predict face selection in the more complex cases where the steric and conformational simplicity of the adamantyl system are absent.



Work in the other major area, that of high-pressure chemistry, began soon after le Noble had joined the Chemistry Department at SUNY Stony Brook in 1959. The relations $-RT\delta\ln k$ (or K)/ $\delta P = \Delta V^\ddagger$ (or ΔV), where ΔV^\ddagger and ΔV are the activation and

reaction volumes, respectively, were well known at that time, and a handful of reactions had been studied under pressure. le Noble learned that measurements of these volume differences and of the molar volumes



of the starting materials and products led to volume profiles of reactions and that these profiles gave remarkable insights into the mechanisms of reactions.^{69,133} These insights derive from the following simple facts. When a given species

dissociates without change of overall charge, the volume increases, and hence pressure inhibits such dissociation, and promotes association. When dissociation is in the form of ionization, the volume strongly decreases, due to the powerful attraction of solvent molecules by the ions; hence ionization is promoted by pressure, and neutralization inhibited. The Born equation formalizing this dependence furthermore shows that the attraction is diminished when the charge is delocalized; thus, the ionization of acetic acid is less enhanced by pressure than that of water. By means of these simple generalizations, le Noble was able to learn details of the mechanisms of reactions that had remained obscure or controversial before. Some examples follow.

le Noble found the activation volume to be a good criterion for concertedness. Thus, pressure causes a large acceleration in concerted cycloadditions because both pairs of termini are in the process of becoming covalently bonded.⁷⁷ In diradical stepwise analogs, the acceleration is much smaller;⁶⁸ in zwitterionic processes, the appearance of the charges makes the acceleration extraordinarily large.⁵⁰ This same basic criterion has also been applied to sigmatropic shifts⁹⁹ and to fragmentation reactions.⁵² It is so reliable that an unusual value of ΔV^\ddagger became the initial hint that something was amiss in the case of one fragmentation, the products of which were eventually found to be formed in a highly circuitous indirect route.³⁹

The activation volume was also used to learn whether neutral transient intermediates are generated free, or bound to solvent. Thus, dihalocarbenes¹⁴ and fluoronitrene²³ are formed in solvolysis reactions that are strongly inhibited by pressure; this can only mean that the rate is controlled by bond cleavage to produce the free intermediates. On the other hand, the presumed formation of the metaphosphate intermediate is accelerated by pressure. The volume decreases in the process, and this suggests strongly that metaphosphate becomes bound even as it is released; in other words, it does not have a free existence in water.¹¹⁶

When non-classical ions and sigma participation were still controversial notions, le Noble used high pressure to show that these ions are formed in processes that are pressure-enhanced, but less so than analogous reactions that produce localized ions.²¹ This was a clear argument for sigma delocalization. Later on, when high pressure variable temperature NMR became available, le Noble was able to confirm this notion by showing that the racemization of a classical ion such as 1,2-dimethoxy-2-norbornyl via the nonclassical transition state is retarded by pressure,⁷² in contrast to the non-classical 7-methylnorbornadienyl cation which undergoes the bridge flipping process via a classical transition state.⁸²

Other uses of high pressure as a tool in le Noble's laboratory have included studies of cyclodextrins as enzyme models (in collaboration with R. Breslow),⁸⁴ of the remarkable dehydration that accompanies the migration of cations through vesicle walls (in collaboration with C. Springer),⁸⁵ and of the outstanding acceleration of sterically hindered processes.³² It was clear even in the earliest papers⁸ on the subject that high pressure had a synthetic potential, and his knowledge has in recent years begun to diffuse throughout the organic chemical community. (+)

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by
W. J. le Noble

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