

Education, Democracy and Living with Disagreement

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This paper will revisit issues to do with the roles of education and an ostensibly liberal democracy in a world rife with disagreement. It seems certain that the outcome of the revisiting will be an insistence that to be true to themselves, the provision of education at both the individual and societal level must cling hard to the key notions of truth, objectivity, and rational justification in a world that perhaps more than any other time is inclined to doubt whether in any final sense these notions have much going for them. Disagreement is the challenge and spur to the reaffirming of our belief in the importance of rational debate in both the private and public spheres.

There comes a time when taking stock—as it were—seems both opportune and timely. Now seems such a moment. This seems a good time to reflect again on topics that are clearly hugely important and to which recent events and tendencies in our social and intellectual worlds have given fresh urgency. These events and tendencies have cast a shadow over certain ideals we typically associate with the idea of Education and the practice of Democracy as an exercise in deliberative discourse. The very ideas of Reason, Truth, Objectivity, Knowledge, and Understanding are being assailed in a manner that undermines the immense importance so many of us attach to them, particularly in the name of education and democracy as preferred social and political practices. It is a recognition of these trends that prompts the following reflections.

I am firmly of the opinion that the philosophical task is essentially and pre-eminently clarificatory. The philosophical task is to bring to light the deepest presuppositions underlying and informing key areas of human life, the values finding expression in those areas of life, and, very importantly, laying bare the obscurities of language characterising given areas of concern. Hence the various philosophies of art, science, history, literature, language, math, ethics and aesthetics, and so on. Whether it is properly the role of Philosophy to be normative in its pretensions, whether philosophers qua philosophers should take it upon themselves to tell others how they ought to conduct themselves or try to lay down norms for conduct across the spread of human activities, I won't comment on. But even if that were the case, doing so to the degree to which it can be done would infer that philosophy had already fulfilled its clarificatory role. We identified our presuppositions and understood their full import; we understood what our values were and stood for and had scrutinised them to good effect and we were clear that the language through which our prescriptions were formulated was in good order.

Enough by way of prefatory comment. Aristotle opined that men were rational creatures. It is trite wisdom that by this observation he did not mean that men always acted rationally in the sense that whatever they did, they did for good reasons, reasons that were relevant and which in the round justified their actions, beliefs, and opinions. He meant, minimally, that we humans typically do things under the aegis of reason. Typically, we act as we do for reasons, good or bad. Of anything that men do as against things that happen to them, to the questions of “why did you do that; why do you think that” the response is in terms of some reason explaining why such was/is the case. Wittgenstein¹ raises the issue of the difference between my arm raising and my raising my arm. Reflecting on the difference inevitably brings

¹ Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical Investigations* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 161. [Editor's note]

to the fore the distinction between the behaviour we call action, for which presumptively we can be held responsible and, let us call it on the other hand, mere behaviour. Mere behaviour is to be accounted for in purely causal terms. There is no temptation to look for reasons or beliefs to account for why (say) my arm raised. No suggestion of agency at work. The arm raising might be accounted for (for example) by reference to some condition of the brain. I had a colleague who, rather disconcertingly and to his embarrassment, was afflicted by his arm randomly shooting up in all kinds of situations and over which he had no control. And indeed, he was diagnosed with a brain condition which caused these random occurrences. The contrast to that situation with that of me raising my arm seems clear enough. My raising my arm is an action I do, intentionally and purposively, for a reason. The precise significance of my action depends on just why I am raising my arm. I might be hailing a friend across the room. I might be toasting someone, my arm might be raised in praise of a deity, and so on. It is, of course, a matter of some philosophical debate as to whether the distinction between reason and cause in the arena of human behaviour can be sustained. For example, we are familiar with that brand of materialism which talks of folk psychology. It is characterised by talk of intention, purpose, motive, goals, hopes, aspirations, reasons, beliefs, etc., as being pragmatically useful in giving us purchase on human behaviour, but which in principle, when suitable science is at hand, could be dispensed with. A proper and more adequate explanation of human behaviour in all of its manifestations will be in terms neural firings, states of the brain. For our purposes I don't think we need to take a stance on the issue. We are where we are. We have a rich vocabulary which, merely pragmatically or not as it may turn out, serves our purposes very well. The world of reason and rationality provides the natural arena within which the justification of beliefs and the pursuit understanding, knowledge and truth is paramount.

Like many others, I came to the Philosophy of Education during the heyday of Richard Peters as Professor of Education at the Institute of Education at the University of London. Peters' work came to my attention while I was doing graduate work at the University of Oxford at a time when I was feeling slightly dissatisfied with what seemed to be the remoteness from real life concerns of a great deal of the work going on in Ethics and Political Philosophy. And the application of the analytic method to the world of schooling and education held great attraction. It's perhaps difficult at this distance, unless one was there as it were, to fully appreciate just how pervasive and influential the efforts of Peters and others at the Institute were as they sought to cleanse the language of educational discourse. Key to bringing new rigour to the Philosophy of Education and helping to cut swathes through the 'undifferentiated mush' so typical of the educational discourse Peters paid close attention and railed against how language is ordinarily used. The philosophical orthodoxy of the time was ordinary language philosophy. Close attention to the vagaries of everyday discourse embodying as it did all those distinctions that had been found useful and fruitful as individuals lived their lives would reveal what 'we' meant when we talked about, for instance, what it was to be educated, what constituted an educational method, or how we might distinguish forms of teaching that served educational ends against those of someone bent on indoctrination. This was somewhat abstracted in the sense that context—social and political and cultural—seemed not to signify as elements that might bear upon a better understanding of education and its purposes. This was an issue that soon came under severe criticism. Who were the 'we' commenting on the meaning of education with such confidence? Was the characterization of education coming forth from this 'we' not more of a tribute to the experiences and partialities of a middle class set of individuals living their lives in North Oxford? The better view, it was suggested, was that different groups living different lives in different social and political contexts might well have differing conceptions of what education was about and how its purposes might be served. This is clearly a debate of some significance. For my own part, I think that to discuss education in the abstract, without locating the context in which education (and its aim and purpose) is being pursued, is a mistake. But one thing that must be clung onto hard from the efforts of Peters and others is the insistence that education is an epistemic, epistemological and cognitive enterprise. Education of whatever guise, for the moment anyway, is in the business of encouraging the growth of reason across the whole range of the most distinctive human enterprises.

Truth, understanding, knowledge, true belief, justification are the cognitive ends of the business of education in any of its guises. Taking education seriously as a human endeavour is a tribute to the fact that we are rational creatures and that why we educate is to allow we humans to maximize through the exercise of reason all that of which we have it within our capacities to achieve, become who we might be. How we might achieve such lofty ambitions is a matter of great moment. What all of that might mean in terms of learning experiences, curricular provision and the like equally so. And no doubt relevant to answering such questions are issues to do with the different ages and levels of development of candidates for being educated, the cultural contexts in which education is being pursued, whether the provision is formal or informal, whether we avail ourselves schooling in a more traditional sense or are reliant on the possibilities of the new technology. So, education has a fundamental role in the shaping and developing of individual lives. Successful education transforms individual lives by making possible whole areas of activity born of the enhanced understanding a good education brings in its wake. One can choose to engage in activities that afford great satisfaction because one has been exposed to the knowledge and understanding that have made them, as human accomplishments, possible. A whole range of cultural accomplishments are now accessible to which we can, in small and large ways, contribute to or engage in. We are social creatures. Our lives have an impact on other lives, and theirs on ours. We have to live together. Social arrangements have to be in place that enable us to live in relative harmony and, of course, arising out of our common lives and endeavours, are those bodies of knowledge and understanding that inform our lives together. Acquiring knowledge and understanding is not a purely individual achievement. There is an inescapable social dimension to the ways in which we make sense of the world: scientifically, politically, morally, historically, aesthetically, socially, and psychologically. Across the board, exploration of the links between the individual and the social is of crucial importance. I want to now comment on some of the important issues about education that are arising within our very particular context of an ostensibly liberal democratic society.

I have suggested that taking education and its status as a provision of great importance requires a recognition of the fact that we humans are rational creatures and that, as creatures of reason, it is incumbent within the liberal democratic society that provision be made to advance the cause of reason at both the individual and social level. A point of intimate connection between education and liberal democratic theory is that both stand in the same relationship to the importance of reason in human affairs. At the individual level, the enlargement of cognitive powers better equips the individual to do (and be) what he or she wants. He or she is rendered more capable in pursuing ends and purposes that will afford satisfactions and pleasures. Using rather imprecise language: the voyage of self-discovery becomes more attainable. Dare I say it, more authentic lives beckon. A system of social cooperation premised upon the embracing of the theory and practice of liberal democratic theory goes very much in the same set of directions. Why do I say that? At the very heart of democratic theory lies the notion of the individual enjoying a life which, as far as possible and within limits, represents those interests he or she wishes instantiated in that life. One is also always conscious of the fact that such a sentiment is owed to all others with whom one is passing one's life. Mechanisms need be put in place that allow for the best conciliation of the diversity of interests being pursued within any given group or society. This comes with a resistance to the idea that others should decide for you what your interests are and where they lie. Presumptively, individuals are the best judge of their own interests and should be afforded the opportunity to give expression to what those interests are. And in the determination of those interests, the exercise of reason has a key role to play. Understanding ourselves, the world, and what is (not) possible and why, puts us individually and collectively in a better position to determine and enjoy our best interests.

We are beginning to sketch a vision of democracy as an exercise in deliberative discourse. We should conduct our social lives, determined to use our rationality as a critical tool that helps in determining both our individual and social lives. We look to reason to help us to make better judgements as to how to live our lives, against the background of—at the social level—putting in place mechanisms informed by reason that maximise, across the board lives, our individual and social interests. All of this is fleshed out by those

commitments that ostensibly democratic societies certainly give lip service to: freedom of speech and opinion, the freedom of the press, the right to education, tolerance extended to views which for one reason or another are deemed unpalatable. In short, values that are both a tribute to reason and which further the cause of reason within democracy as an exercise in deliberative discourse.

We look to educational institutions to serve all kinds of diverse ends. And much controversy surrounds an almost endlessly ongoing debate about what those ends should paramountly be at any particular point in time. Given the expense of running and financing such institutions we should not be surprised that those responsible for coming up with the money for our schools and universities demand a say in the shaping of curricular provision, as provision reflects a preferred set of priorities in terms of ends being encouraged and pursued. We are all familiar with talk of satisfying the needs of the economy, equipping individuals with the necessary skills to obtain a job and contribute to the economy, making sure we have a work force familiar with the latest technologies and possessed of the scientific and mathematical wherewithal to take advantage of that technology, and the like, as driving curricular provision. No matter how desirable and obviously necessary such provision is, there is always an anxiety lurking in the minds of others that such an emphasis is too limiting in the name of education. High minded—justifiably I might add—discourse about doing things for their own sake, activities being possessed of intrinsic value and being valuable in themselves can be heard clamouring for attention. So, literature, music, art, drama, philosophy (even) have their respective cases pressed, cast in such terms. Irrespective of where one stands in respect of the appropriate rationales for curricular inclusion—whether in schools, higher education institutions, vocational or academic in the accepted senses—there is large debate to be had. But informing all this debate is the sense that, true to its epistemic and cognitive ambitions, the successful outcome of such activity is an enlargement of reason in the conduct of those undergoing such educational programmes. Putative justification of things done, views adopted, practices pursued is to the extent an education in a given area has been successful more readily forthcoming. Reasons are forthcoming, the demand for rationality has been more adequately satisfied.

Individuals have been cognitively enhanced, if I can rather pompously put it. They now understand more and better. They are armed to do more, or argue more persuasively than previously, and to see more clearly than was the case the why of things. It is interesting though to remind ourselves of how dependent such cognitive enhancement is on others. How knowledge and understanding are not purely individually acquired. It is worth reminding ourselves that there is reason to be cautious of how much we actually 'know' at any point in time, 'Know' if we look to the notion of knowing being a function of justified true belief. In surely the vast number of educational transactions, our 'knowledge' is a consequence of relying upon words of others who enjoy a position of authority over us. It certainly isn't the case that it is our own perceptions, our own individual experiences that validate and guarantee so many of our claims to knowledge. Our reliance upon the words of others, our reliance upon what we see written on the page, is frequently the key to our confidence in what we now incorporate into our lives. We rely upon others and what they tell us through their writings, talks and conversations with us to an extraordinary extent. Just going about our day to day business we rely on what others tell us to a very high degree. Asking someone 'am I going in the right direction for...?' 'what time is the next show?,' 'where can I get a coffee?', 'which way to the theatre?' etc. etc. points to how we acquire true beliefs in innumerable ways and situations. The testimony of others oils the way to our sought after objectives: a coffee, getting to the correct station, being at the theatre on time, and so on and so on. To be sure there are deep problems posed by testimony as a source of knowledge and, if not knowledge, true belief. Is—and why is—our trust in the testimony of others justified? If not, why not? If it is, in what circumstances is that trust justified? Can testimony, without more, ever be a source of knowledge? Or is true belief the best we can hope for? Perhaps true belief will do for all ordinary purposes other than in the rarefied domain of epistemology. What is the significance of the distinction between believing a person and believing what a person says in this context? I could go on. The newly flourishing area of social epistemology is much exercised by these issues. I leave them for their attention. But it is very much worth recognising how crucial testimony is in the education of so many. In the ordinary course of events,

learners have no reason not to trust their teachers and mentors. They don't have any basis in knowledge and understanding or previous experience to doubt what they are told. It may or may not be the case that in the future, on the basis of what they have come to know and understand, they will be able to view more sceptically things they are told or are presented as fact. But the vast majority of educational transactions involve some kind of deference to authority. Not until, and even then, perhaps, education has been successfully pursued can there be much chance of, let us call it, epistemic *agency* being practiced. That is, assertions made, things said being critically evaluated and actively engaged with such that what has been said and asserted is now assessed simply as pieces of evidence for some conclusion or another. The authority of the source is of no significance to the claims being made, or piece of knowledge now established. I mention this against the background of an issue that was of some prominence some time back: the distinction between education and indoctrination and around which much writing has been spilt. I rather suspect that working through the implications of how just how much of what we think we know, or have true beliefs about, is rooted in testimony rather than individual perception will soften that distinction so often paraded and deplored of the closed mind of the indoctrinated individual as against the critical and open mind of the successful outcome of the educational process. But that is for another occasion. What I do emphasise is how crucial the notion of Trust is in the reliance upon testimony as a valuable guide to how things are and ought to be. Absent of trust, so much of our everyday discourse and communication would flounder, leaving us adrift in a world of uncertainty and confusion. Why I mention this now is clear. We have to be very careful in making large claims about how the claims of truth, reason, objectivity, rational justification, true belief upon us are under threat in contemporary society. But there must be significance in the fact - and fact it surely is - that there is emerging alarm reflected in the talk of living in a post truth world, a world of alternative facts, a world where disinformation is rife and social media lends itself to all kinds of possibilities, making it difficult to determine just what is the case. The web is awash with doctored images carrying this or that misleading message; it is awash with statements that are designed to convey information at variance with the truth of things. And how many of us have not too easily taken at face value something seen or read online as gospel. I am not suggesting that testimony within educational institutions has been infected by these influences. But, in our social lives, an assault of truth is very much abroad. How and why this sense of alarm at the flight from truth is quite so prevalent now is a deeply complicated issue. But recognising the reality of the situation, it is incumbent upon those who prize rationality to find ways of affirming the importance of rationality in our affairs at both the individual and social/political levels. It is necessary to give expression to rationality in the conduct of our lives and affairs. And, in expressing commitment to the role of reason in our democracy, as an exercise in deliberative discourse, serve the end of epistemic justice.

Disagreement is everywhere. There can be disagreement over pretty well nearly everything. From the most trifling matters through to the most weighty. From matters that can be easily resolved through to matters of so-called deep disagreement where one is very unsure whether any resolution is possible. From matters that in the end one is not too exercised by through to those which seem of the deepest existential significance for oneself and for humanity even. And there can be apparent disagreements that are not really disagreements at all, but rather are issues that disappear once the parties get clear as to just what each party is actually claiming. Within liberal democratic theory tolerance is a much espoused virtue. 'I don't agree with you but I will defend to the death your right to hold that opinion' is a cliché wheeled out as the expression of tolerance. Maybe at the end of the day, tolerance has to be the order of the day. But as an automatic response to significant disagreements across the political, religious, and moral domains, it is to pass on the claims of reason in our affairs and in those domains. Disagreement exists when parties to an issue have different beliefs as to what is the case, or what ought to be the case. Beliefs take truth as their object. Even in the case of beliefs tentatively held—'I am inclined to believe on balance that x is or ought to be case—the claim is being made that x on balance is the truth or more likely to the truth of things. For the rational agent, the fact of disagreement should involve taking a step back and thinking afresh his or her own beliefs. Time should be given to examining the credentials of the individual

holding contrary views. And part of that examination might/should involve reflecting on whether—a point much emphasised in some of the literature of social epistemology—the other's epistemological credentials should give you pause for thought. Is there epistemological parity between the two of you? Are they as bright as I am, have they enjoyed in respect of the matter under dispute the same access as I have to the relevant sources? Have they given the same hard thought to the issues as myself? Perhaps, being honest, they are much brighter than I am. They are informed on the issue in a way I am not, they really are reputed scholars on these matters. In short, in this regard, they are my epistemological superiors. Or of course, they might not be my peer or superior. All the evidence might be they have little if any epistemological standing on an issue at all. There is no evidence of having studied the issue, they don't seem very intelligent, there is no obvious reason why I should give any credence to their beliefs. In all these different scenarios as to epistemic standing, I might feel encouraged to simply affirm my view because their standing affords no obvious reason why I should give up my belief. I might feel I should very much reflect on my belief since my peers see things differently, or I might think very hard about deferring to a much more expert opinion. In these circumstances, any such reaction would be rational. But, of course, in any of the scenarios, one or other party might on the issue of substance be right. The experts might be wrong, the ignorant has truth of his or her side. And in the case of one's peers there is everything to play for. Disagreement is an occasion of argument. And it is to argument that, in the name of reason we look, when parties to an issue hold differing beliefs.

If democracy as deliberative discourse is going to mean anything, it must reflect the belief that argument within the polity is key to determining what in any given instance represents the best conciliation of the competing interests at stake within a live and functioning democracy. The likely complexity of any such debates is not a reason to give up on coming up with argued conclusions that at any time in many of the ongoing debates within a democratic society represent the best and most acceptable outcomes of those debates. A profound complicating factor within democracies is not just the getting clear the facts surrounding a given issue, but the nexus of values within which discussion goes on. The concerns for Equality, Freedom, the importance of Justice as an end to be served, Privacy, Democracy itself, the Rule of Law, Human Rights and so on, all at different times, and maybe at the same time, clamour for recognition when issues are being argued out. The sheer complexity of social and political issues is not a reason to too easily give up on seeking the most reasoned outcome. We do have to live with the possibility that at the end of the day, a conclusion acceptable to all, with all the best will in the world on display, will not be achieved. At that juncture, tolerance extended on all sides of the debate may have to prevail. But there will be a recognition that issues may be revisited in the light of practice and outcomes might demand and replay a revisit. A world within which disagreement may be intractable is not in and of itself a world in which we can lend ourselves to the proposition that any one opinion is as good as any other. Embracing such a posture is to have given up on the very idea of democracy as deliberative discourse, and Reason itself.

The ideal of deliberative democracy is of a polity of well-informed individuals having interests and ideas operating in a space inhabited by similarly well-informed individuals who may or may not share the same interests and ideals. The ideal is, rather, committed through argument and reason to finding what is or ought to be case. In the most fully-fledged instance of such a democracy, elections for governments take place and the electorate vote for those individuals and government that at the end of the day and discussion persuade them that a particular programme on offer, is the best way forward. We know this is the ideal. And we equally well know how short of the ideal we are likely to fall. All kinds of agency are at work to shape sentiment and influence for all kinds of dubious reasons what individuals come to believe. Most of these agencies are certainly careless as to the role of reason in shaping outlooks. Advertising, of all of kinds, judges success not in how grounded in reason sentiment is, but that certain preferred likes and dislikes are the result of the advertising efforts. Perhaps the gloom surrounding the possibilities of our democracies nowadays in certain circles lies in the recognition that social media is so adept at shaping sentiment and outlook by deliberately subverting and bypassing the role of reason in shaping opinion.

It is important to recognise that a functioning democracy is about more than having regular elections. It represents a whole way of life, of discussion and debate across all levels and arenas of life. It permeates the entirety of our social living. The deepest fear of those gloomy about democratic sentiment and practice is that the flight from reason is now all-pervasive. Reason is being assailed as never before. Everywhere we look there are forces at work undermining the reliance upon reason. It has never been more incumbent upon those who think of themselves as liberal democrats to assert how important it is, in the scheme of things, to adhere to the norms of rational discourse. And this certainly fuels the need to be prepared to argue when disagreement is evident. How the disagreement is resolved is of significance, not only in individual lives, but also to the society. The background to argument is disagreement. Differing beliefs and opinions are on display. To argue is not to deliberately seek confrontation with the one with whom one disagrees. One could, of course, just seek to shout the other down, impugn his motives for holding such a position, suggest that he is OBVIOUSLY wrong, that he or she is stupid, or typical of her class or race. There are innumerable ways to refuse to engage with the views, beliefs, and opinions with which one disagrees. More generally, there are a multitude of ways in which the refusal to engage with the disagreements of others might be effective in leading to those views being discounted. But if the commitment to reason, getting at the truth of things, or coming up with the best solution to issue or another, is to be recognised, it is argument that holds the key and should be on both the educational and political agenda.

There are overtones associated with the idea of arguing which hint at aggression, shouting at another, being unamenable to quiet persuasion, yet argument as we see it within the educational, social, moral, legal and political context speaks to, and certainly should speak of, something quite different. It is an addressing of differing, sometimes conflicting, beliefs with a view to seeing the truth of things, where the best advantage lies between divergent opinions. It is a matter of seeking to justify to one another, and in principle to some detached other, one view rather than another. Or if nothing quite so final, at least why consideration might and should be given to both sets of views. And argument, if successfully, conducted allows us to see and understand what considerations persuaded the parties to a debate, why they took the stands they did, and why one view is to be preferred to another, or, if not that outcome, why the outcome of the argument is indeterminate. But argument is conducted with reference to some sense of what constitutes argument as against having recourse to taking on another's ideas and beliefs with no regard to logic, concern for coherence and consistency of reasoning. Something to be seen on a daily basis, witnessing the exchange of views so typical of disagreement is evidenced on Facebook (say) on matters religious, moral and political. As constitutive of what argument is, reference to good reasoning and logic can scarcely be overstated. In our individual lives, whether just getting on with things or having disagreements with our peers, to live by reason is in keeping with our standing as rational beings and allows us to pursue our ends and ambitions more effectively. A society trying to pass itself off as a deliberative democracy both in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and its ongoing practices must cling to a recognition of what comes with an identification of the importance of reason in human affairs. How to further and encourage the spread of good reasoning in our affairs is a large problem. What educational institutions might do to promote the exercise of reason in our affairs as an aid to mitigating the worst effects of unreason is perplexing. There may be merits in classes in critical thinking. It can't do any harm, but for my own part it seems to me that the largest aim should be to produce individuals for whom it is almost second nature to wonder why another thinks as they do and is of a mind to question also the reasons they themselves adduce. How to bring off such a cast of mind is of the essence. But certainly practice within educational institutions where the merits and virtues of argument are always on show seems likely to make it certainly more likely—even if only slightly so—that students catch the attachment to argument as of the last importance.

What I am certain of is that it should be the business of educational institutions to rectify what are palpable injustices and that it is within the power of education to identify and to provide rationales to tackle. The commitment to reason may well highlight what is indefensible and what is within the purview of education to highlight and, in the instances I have in mind, enhance the quality of our democracy as a

species of deliberative discourse. Educational institutions in the name of alleviating what Miranda Fricker (2007) has usefully labelled as ‘epistemic injustice’ can have no truck with those forms of injustice rooted in race, sexism and class. Importantly, equal opportunities must always be extended all groups of children irrespective of race, gender, class. Their educational interests should be as represented and delivered as any other groups of children. In addition, however, we know racism, sexism, and discriminating on the basis of class and the like, are irrational. And, in line with this fact, those who are the victims of such irrationality should be equipped with the knowledge and understanding that allows them to understand how and why they have been the victims of such prejudice and disfavor: a knowledge and understanding they can avail themselves of as they insist on equal standing alongside all others. A democracy which both recognises and actively promotes the dignity of all of its members, irrespective of class, race, and gender is truly one that is a tribute to the paramouncy of reason in our affairs. In this way, educational institutions and our democracies are true to their inspiration: the importance of our being rational creatures instantiating to the best we are capable of when it comes to being reasoners.

The recently published *The Death of Truth* by Michiko Kakatuni conveys a vivid picture of the assault on truth in recent times. I recommend it unreservedly to all who might be interested. The last paragraph in the book carries the following message:

Without commonly agreed upon facts—not Republican facts, not Democratic facts, not alternative facts of today's silo world—there can be no rational debate over policies, no substantive means of evaluating candidates for political office, and no way to hold elected officials accountable to the people. WITHOUT TRUTH, DEMOCRACY IS HOBBLLED. The founders recognised this, and those seeking democracy's survival must recognise it today (Kakatuni, 2018).

No matter how hard and uphill the struggle in the contemporary world, we owe to our rational selves to cling hard to notions such as Truth, rational justification, critical thinking, the possibility of objective knowledge and understanding. And if educational institutions fail to stand up for these ideals, then they are betraying the very notion of Education itself.

And what is true of Educational institutions and their practitioners is as true of the apostles of liberal democracy as an exercise in deliberative discourse. It is claimed by some that liberal democracy is either dead or under the most severe pressure. What is quite certain is that if those who believe in democracy as a form of deliberative discourse give up on its defining notions and ambitions as directed toward objectivity, the idea of truth as an ultimate goal and value, and the triumph of reason in our social and political affairs, then by default it will wither on the vine and die.

References

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