

Teaching “A Sense of Collective Identity”: An Urgent Educative Imperative

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The Need for A Sense of Collective Identity

Climate change is knocking at the door. There have been record-breaking floods in Pakistan, summer wildfires in the Mediterranean area, and a heat wave in Europe that left many dead and strained infrastructure. With regard to climate disasters, Western Canada is pretty much the poster girl, having experienced a “heat dome” in 2021 which caused hundreds of deaths and monstrous wildfires (completely destroying a small town), which was followed by the unprecedented flooding of agricultural land caused by “atmospheric rivers,” which was then book-ended by a drought.

Despite all of this, despite the fact that global catastrophe is at our doorstep, *Homo sapiens*—wise beings that we are—are not only refusing to take the threat seriously, we are surreptitiously seducing the monster into our only home. In his new book, *A Philosopher’s Guide to Natural Capitalism* (2023), Wayne Henry asks what we ought to make of this.

He suggests that the answer is anchored in the fact that many of us see the world through different narratives, i.e., we have different values and hold different assumptions. This makes constructive dialogue, and hence the possibility of collective action, difficult. Henry goes on to quote Jeremy Rifkin from his book *The Green New Deal* (2019) who writes:

At this critical juncture in history, the Green New Deal story lines need to be put together in a coherent economic and philosophic narrative that can create a sense of our collective identity as a species and bring humanity into a new world-view, giving us a global heartbeat. (p. 211)

And that is the topic that we would like to focus on here. Can global heartbeats be cultivated in educational gardens that focus on producing that harvest?

In what is to follow, we will first make the case that, though our species is rife with division, evidence suggests that in fact, we are all pretty much the same, and that therefore there are grounds for perceiving the pursuit of a collective identity as genuinely legitimate. We will then explore the many factors that have helped to “normalize” the particularly vicious forms of divisiveness that we are experiencing today. These include: 1) the necessity to divide the world between good and bad that is the forerunner of the emergence of self-consciousness (Mead, 1965); 2) the tribalism that served as the evolutionary force for our increasing capacity for cooperation (Greene, 2014); 3) an economic system that divides us as competitors, and 4) a virtual reality that has created a new economy of binary status.

Still, although *Homo sapiens* have survived and flourished for millions of years despite our habits of divisiveness, we suggest that our collective challenges now seem too great to ignore the deadly threat that our “divisionist” tendencies now pose. It is against this assumption that it will be argued that we need an educative emergency plan that has the potential to inaugurate a remedial “*culture of inquiry*” that has within it the seeds of spawning a pervasive growth of collective identity. Such a plan, we suggest, would include 1) that the emergency be acknowledged, 2) that truth be overtly recognized as a regulative ideal, 3) that young people understand what “reasonable” looks like, 4) that young people acquire a “nuanced” understanding of their species, and 5) that young people gain practice in “*communities of inquiry*” thereby gaining an inkling of how a “*culture of inquiry*” might function.

That great educators were once considered leaders is evidenced by the distinguished universities of old and the once-flourishing discipline of philosophy. Our economic freight train, however, traveling at warp speed, has thrown many educators into the enabling caboose. Our present emergency suggests that educators climb back into the driver seat and unite in an effort to promote “a *culture of inquiry*,” and with it a pervasive sense of collective identity—something that may not be sufficient but is most certainly necessary if we are to meet the challenges ahead.

Pushback Against the Pursuit of a Collective Identity

On Christmas Eve in 2016, a professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia tweeted, “All I want for Christmas is White Genocide” (Criss, 2016), and he followed this up the next day with, “To clarify: when the whites were massacred during the Haitian Revolution, that was a good thing indeed.”

This phenomenon of one group of *Homo sapiens* wishing ill of another group is one that is fanned by many “culture warriors.” One such protagonist is Ibram X Kendi, who, in the book *Stamped from the Beginning* (2016), argues that such thinkers as John Locke, Linnaeus, Voltaire, Hume, Kant, and Hegel were all racist for trying to figure out why European countries were so different in terms of technology, education, standard of living, and governance from the cultures newly encountered in

Africa and elsewhere. Kendi also suggests that slavery was a White invention by emphasizing that the Portuguese first starting trading in African slaves in 1444 (p. 23).

And in the kids' version of *Stamped* (Reynolds and Kendi, 2021), Europeans are referred to as the "first haters"¹ (p. 9) due to their colonizing activity, and "racist" for presuming that Africans are Black because of the weather in Africa (p. 12).

And then there is Robin Diangelo who, in her book *White Fragility* (2018), argues that all white people have "deeply internalized patterns of domination and submission" (p. 16), that anti-blackness is foundational to the very identities of white people (p. 91), that if a white person suggests that we ought to just see one another as "human," that is indicative of the fact that that white person wants to see themselves as representatives of humanity (p. 27) and that the promotion of such "color blindness"² (41), rather than being a potential remedy for racism, is in fact a strategy adopted by white people to make themselves feel better (p. 42, p. 73, p. 108), to protect the racial status quo (p. 78), and to function as a form of bullying (p. 112).

In light of these views, the suggestion offered here that we ought now to attempt to pursue a collective identity at this moment in history may, to some, seem insulting.

One can empathize with the above position by briefly reflecting on the infamous feud between two American families, the Hatfields and the McCoys, that lasted for thirty years after the American Civil War. If it had been suggested to the Hatfields that it is time to "make nice" shortly after the McCoys had slaughtered many of their family members, one could easily understand if their response had been "Yes, of course—but after we have had our revenge."

Such, inevitably, is the difficulty of suggesting a truce after one group has suffered at the hands of another. How might we respond to such pushback?

Response To the Pushback

Aside from noting that revenge attitudes inevitably prolong the potential for human suffering, or in Gandhi's words, that such eye-for-an-eye attitudes make the whole world blind, the present anger that boils up over the recent past, particularly toward Europeans and those of European descent, might be assuaged by framing it within a larger context so that the commonalties that weave through our species become more evident.

¹ A Rasmussen Report survey asked whether people agreed with the statement "It's OK to be white." Twenty-six per cent of Black respondents disagreed. This prompted Scott Adams, the creator of the popular Dilbert comic strip to call Black people "a racist hate group" during an online video show thus creating an elementary school playground atmosphere of who can most successfully call people names (*The Province*, 2023, p. 29).

² Which is, in essence, what we are suggesting here.

With regard to slavery, for example, it is uncontested that slavery has been an intimate part of human history since civilizations emerged in Mesopotamia around 3500 BCE. By 2500 BCE, the Sumerian people in present day Iraq, and who referred to themselves as "Black Headed Ones"³, had a permanent underclass of slaves (Wright, 2004, p. 63). The Egyptian, Mayan and Aztec Empires all practiced slavery, Japan had an official slave system from the 3rd to the 16th century, slavery was widespread in Africa in many forms before European contact,⁴ and many Indigenous peoples, such as the Haida and Tlingit from the Northwest coast of North America, were traditionally known as fierce warriors and slave-traders, raiding as far as California.⁵ In fact, archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the institution of slavery is as old as civilized society itself.⁶

As well, for those who suggest that white people are unique in their capacity for evil, as DiAngelo does, it behoves us to accept that we are all descendants of genocidal mass murderers. Historian Roland Wright describes in his book, *A Short History of Progress* (2004), how, after an unimaginably long struggle (approximately 10,000 years), the whole world belonged to *our* kind, i.e., Cro Magnons, and the classic Neanderthal was gone forever (p. 24)—the implication being that the propensity to do harm to one another is in all our genes.

And aside from killing each other, *Homo sapiens* have also serial killed all other life forms. Fossil history shows us that soon after *Homo sapiens* have shown up in new lands, the big game start to go missing (Wright, 2004, p. 37). Wright suggests that a bad smell of extinction follows *Homo sapiens* wherever they go (p. 37), and he describes pre-industrial slaughter sites “as virtually industrial in size,” with 1,000 mammoths at one such site, and more than 100,000 horses at another” (p. 38). In Alberta, Canada, at a place called Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, 100,000 buffalo met their death by being run off the cliff.⁷

The overall picture suggests that we *Homo sapiens*, like all other animals, have always moved from areas of depleted resources and population squeeze to areas that have more plentiful resources and a lower occupation ratio. And this, interestingly, is precisely the dynamic that underwrote European colonization.

At the time that Columbus set sail to discover lands “less trampled” in 1492, there were approximately 400 million *Homo sapiens* in the world, 68 million lived in Europe and only 2 million lived in North America⁸. If we add to these numbers the fact that Europe occupies a land mass of 4

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Africa

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_among_the_indigenous_peoples_of_the_Americas

⁶ For one recent example that summarizes much of this archaeological evidence, see Graeber & Wengrow (2023).

⁷ <https://timetraveltrek.com/head-smashed-in-buffalo-jump/>

⁸ https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/najiro/population_in_year_1500_by_continent/

million square miles while North America occupies more than twice the land mass at almost 10 million square miles, Europe was 80 times more congested than North America.⁹

None of which is to say that we ought not to celebrate the evolution (or what Appiah (2011) calls the “revolution”) of our moral understanding. Despite the fact that tribalism and vicious practices such as slavery and world-wide forced prostitution were once considered perfectly acceptable social norms, there have been fundamental shifts regarding what is *now* considered honourable and just (p. 114), and this, we suggest is something that ought to be eulogized.

As historian Lynn Hunt reminds us (Hunt, 2002), we are all diminished when contemporary standards are weaponized by a “presentism” perspective, which, Hunt argues, inevitably leads to finding ourselves morally superior, and hence morally complacent. This suggestion dovetails with the one being offered here, namely that attempting to characterize one race or tribe or human group as intrinsically different from all other humans—not only does not accord with human history, but is ethically suspect, particularly in light of our collective need to work together to solve common problems.

Why Are We So Focused on Division?

It may be beneficial to pause for a moment and remind ourselves that the struggle in the last century for justice and equality, as articulated by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others, was premised on emphasizing the similarities we share as humans and minimizing our differences. The divisionism of contemporary discourse turns this on its head by emphasizing difference. It should be emphasized that there is nothing wrong in principle with celebrating difference and/or multiculturalism, but when these differences are weaponized to “down-rank” (Nussbaum, 2019, p. 29) the other, we can expect that this will make shared inquiry difficult, if not impossible.

How did we get to this?

Given the fact that we are presently embroiled in a sea of “divisionist” judgements based on criteria *other than* the actions of presently living agents, the question that now demands attention is why we humans seem to go out of our way to find excuses for making divisions.

The answer seems to be that our propensity to divide the world up between good and bad, and between us and them, has actually served *Homo sapiens* well thus far since it facilitated the emergence of self-consciousness, expanded our capacity for (inter-tribal) cooperation, helped fuel our wealth-producing economic system, and is a side-effect of the connectedness made possible by virtual reality.

⁹ Pomeranz (2000) quoted by Piketty (2022, P. 51) estimated that imports such as cotton, sugar, and wood received by England from the colonies corresponded to the exploitation of more than 10 million hectares of arable land or between 1.5 and 2 times the amount of arable land in the United Kingdom—land already under cultivation.

We will deal with these in turn.

The Emergence of Co-operative Self-Consciousness

As the young child becomes aware that there is a correlation between the changing affect (or response) of the other and particular units of her own behaviour, she learns that some of her behaviours are “good,” and others are “bad.” It is in this way that she becomes aware of her actions (Mead, 1965). Thus, according to Mead, self-consciousness, rather than being some mysterious exudate of the brain, is rather an awareness of one’s behaviour through the fact that it is *valued either positively or negatively by others*—a theory that is empirically supported by experiment carried out by Gallup (1977) who showed that the self-consciousness evident in chimps as measured by mirror-related activities is absent in chimps raised in isolation.

What is of particular note with regard to this depiction of the emergence of self-consciousness is that selves quite literally emerge only because youngsters are able to differentiate between the signals “that is good” and “that is bad”; their very existence as self-conscious entities, in other words, is a product of adopting a kind of Manichean good/bad dualistic view that the world.

It is also of interest to note that a not-uncommon defence mechanism employed by those who experience anxiety in the face of complexity is called “splitting,” which is a tendency to divide up the world (including people) according to categories of good and bad (Bond et al., 1983). This image-distorting strategy helps alleviate anxiety by significantly simplifying the kind of environmental cues that demand a response.

Tribalism Nudging Cooperation

All *Homo sapiens* are born with the proclivity to divide those they meet into “us” and “them,” a fact supported by a vast amount of evidence cited in Joshua Greene’s book, *Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (2014). Greene argues that this finding should not be surprising as tribalism affords humans a giant evolutionary advantage. Since “evolution is an inherently competitive process” (Greene, 2014, p. 23), seeing *some* others as those we are required to out-compete, serves as an evolutionary catalyst for the development of *within-group cooperation* (including evolving symbolic language) in an effort to *outcompete* those others. According to Greene, biologically speaking “humans were designed for cooperation, *but only with some people*. Our moral brains evolved for cooperation *within groups*” (p. 23). Greene argues that cooperation evolved not because it is “nice,” but because it confers a survival advantage. “And thus, insofar as morality is a biological adaptation, it evolved not only as a device for putting Us ahead of Me, but as a device for putting Us ahead of Them” (p. 24).

Classical Liberalism

In its purest form, the basic assumption of classical liberalism is that we must be left free to act on purely selfish impulses in the marketplace. This is preferable to any kind of government intervention to regulate the economy because, left maximally free, we enter into a state of perfectly fair competition that drives innovation and the most efficient allocation of resources. Under these circumstances, we are all of us made better off by the enhanced levels of production, a bigger pie to share.¹⁰

So, on the face of it, classical liberalism seems like the perfect way to organize human activity in a way that both nurtures individual creativity and maximizes liberty. In accord with this view, Milton Friedman (1970) argues that one of the greatest virtues of private enterprise is that it forces people to be responsible for their own actions and makes exploitation of others difficult (p. 4).

The reality, though, is not so rosy. Like any *pharmakon*, i.e., something that is at once a good and an evil, at once a remedy and a poison (Stiegler, 2013, p. 10), where classical liberalism flounders is the attitude that seems to be its inevitable side-effect: we see one another as mortal competitors.

If it is agreed that we meet one another as competitors in the market, then public declarations to the contrary, negotiations are always zero-sum. That is, for me to win, the other party to the deal must lose—either the job is mine, or it is yours; either my product or your product will take a lion's share of the market; if you get the gold medal for top marks, that ensures that I do not; if you publish your scientific findings first, mine will then appear as second-rate. We swim, in other words, in a sea of economic transactions through which we surreptitiously wish for the demise of all potential rivals.

Virtual Reality: A New Economy of Binary Status

While there is a sense in which capitalism is “divisionist” in that it infects us with the wish to see potential rivals stumble, since there are an infinite number of ways to accrue status within the system (if I do not win this race, I may win the next; if I am not good in sports, I may be an exceptional musician), and since there is a healthy middle ground (I may not get into medical school but I can become an IT wizard or an always-in-demand plumber), the maintenance of the competitive atmosphere of classical liberalism is something that has the potential to be “relatively” inclusive and “relatively” open to continuing improvement through, in Adam Gopnik's words, “a thousand small sanities” (2019). Within classical liberalism, the engine that drives competition is talent, which is precisely why, from an overall perspective, a competition that spurs individuals to become the best that they can be is good for everyone.

Not so with the new “virtual economy” of binary status.

¹⁰ Of course, it is not denied that governments must impose such conditions as are required to ensure trust in the markets, but this is little more than ensuring the stringent protection of property laws and the rule of law: contracts will be honored and, if not, remedy can be sought through the courts.

Virtual reality, since its essence is crowd communication, prompts users to utilize simplified, i.e., propagandizing messages (Bernays, 1928/2005) to attract followers. As a result, this new reality serves as a force to create a new economy: one based on binary status—you are either with us or against us. It is in this sense that Eric Hoffer, in his book *The True Believer* (1951) argues that this sort of simplified un-nuanced mass communication (something at which the Nazis excelled) inevitably creates tribal associations that cultivates the idea of sin (p. 54) with the corresponding belief that salvation requires total submission to the tribal doctrine (p. 79). And because the faithful know they are continually watched, they strive to escape suspicion by adhering zealously to prescribed behavior and opinion (p. 124) and to being publicly on the lookout for saboteurs, spies, and traitors (p. 125), all of which fan the flames of fanaticism, hatred, and intolerance (p. xi).

Lukianoff and Haidt (2019) likewise argue that virally enhanced contemporary social movements have succeeded in portraying life as a battle between good and evil (p. 53). Pluckrose and Lindsay (2020) also argue that “applied postmodernist” movements have become new religions (p. 17) that simplistically divide up the world between the oppressor and oppressed (p. 86), the saints and the sinners. And in their book *The Rise of Victimhood Culture* (2018), Campbell and Manning argue that the new goal is to accrue status based on suffering and neediness, and to demonize those with privilege (p. 22). They note that since this “is a culture that valorizes the victims and demonizes the privileged—moral concepts are defined so the latter (quite simply) can do no right and the former can do no harm” (p. 93). And Keeney (2022) adds that “wokeism advances a historical view that bifurcates society into oppressors and victims based on . . . immutable characteristics” (p. 6). And McWhorter, in his book *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (2021), suggests that this otherwise confusing phenomenon is more easily understood if we see it as a religion with the “Elect” (p. 19), a.k.a. “hyper-wokesters” (p. xii) seeing themselves as justified in persecuting heretics in the same way that medieval Catholics passionately defended persecuting Jews and Muslims (p. 19).

This, then, is the new economy in which social media influencers and social justice warriors are the new Capitalists exploiting the less powerful with the promise of protection from down-ranking (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 29) in a manner not dissimilar from the way old-style Capitalists promised workers protection from starvation *as long as they did what they were told*—though the new Capitalists have the added advantage of algorithms that aid in amplifying their messages by curating input on the simplified basis of thumbs up or thumbs down.

Review

We are a species divided by overlapping forces built on the emergence of self-consciousness that requires that we divide the world between good and bad, the need to form tribes in aid of the emergence of in-group co-operation, our economic system that requires that we view others as rivals, and electronic crowd communication systems that require simplified messages that creates divisions between the saints and the sinners.

We thus find ourselves in a time and place in which one group of *Homo sapiens* wishes for the extermination of another group of *Homo sapiens*, in which one group of *Homo sapiens* perceives another group as the incarnation of the devil, and we have a new culture in which hating the “Other” has become the new “sexy.” In light of all of this, one would be excused for believing that those who hope for the possibility of promoting a sense of collective identity are on a fool’s errand.

But let us forge ahead, nonetheless. Having surveyed some of the reasons that explain why we have moved so far from the insight shared by Gandhi and King that we ought to emphasize our similarities rather our differences, let us now explore what we take to be a potential solution, namely the educative cultivation of “communal inquiry” that is strategically fortified so as to germinate the seeds of a “culture of inquiry” and, with it, a sense of collective identity.

Solution: A Culture of Inquiry

An educative practice that has the potential to germinate the seeds of a “culture of inquiry” will require 1) that the emergency be acknowledged, 2) that truth be overtly recognized as a regulative ideal, 3) that young people understand what “reasonable” looks like, 4) that young people acquire a “nuanced” understanding of our species, and 5) that young people gain practice in “communities of inquiry” thereby gaining an inkling of how “a culture of inquiry” might function.

1. Acknowledge the Emergency

Acknowledging the emergency of climate change and environmental destruction is harder than it may at first appear. Thus, for instance, psychoanalyst Sally Weintrobe (2020), along with a number of other theorists (e.g., Lewis, 2020; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009) suggest that the pervasive societal attitudes toward climate change is a combination of denial and disavowal that are held in place by an array of defence mechanisms that protect us from recognizing reality, and that our emotional fragility is such that, on this topic, few of us are capable of engaging in authentic dialogue (Gardner et al. 2015). Given that this is the case, it is suggested that, rather than getting bogged down in accusations of “fake news,” we suggest that the following be adopted as the guiding message: Let us not get bogged down on whether the evidence of the sort presented by Durwall in *The Age of Global Warming: A History* (2013) or by Reefe in *The Age of Climate Change: A Rite of Passage* (2021) is or is not accurate. Let us, instead begin with the following conditional claim: if the evidence for climate change is accurate, do you believe that collective action is necessary? If so, do you believe that the all-too-human-divisionist tendencies might stand in the way of collective action? If so, what personal responsibility do individuals have to moderate the all-too-human tendency to divide Us from Them?

2. Embrace Truth as a Regulative Ideal

-The world is round. No, it isn’t. The world is flat.

-Covid-19 is caused by a virus. No, it isn't. It is a media hoax.

-Global warming is caused by the burning of fossil fuels that creates a greenhouse effect in the atmosphere. No, it isn't: "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive."¹¹

-Indigenous groups frequently fought with each other prior to European contact. That is something that shouldn't be allowed to be said.¹²

If you do not believe in truth, then the moon is made of green cheese, for all you know. And if you do not believe in truth, it follows, with certainty, that there is absolutely no possibility that you will be interested in engaging in dialogue with others in order to collectively meet the challenges that we, as a species, face. What would be the point of engaging in dialogue if anything anyone says is as true as anything that anyone else says? And if there is no such thing as truth, what would be the point of reflecting on the merits of competing solutions, if any solution or no solution is as good as any other?

Truth has taken a beating recently largely, we suggest, because of a conceptual confusion. People assume that the concept of truth is like the concept of tree: you ought to be able to see it when you bump up into it. But people don't argue about whether this is or is not a tree; they do, however, argue about whether a claim is or is not true. So, at best, the concept of truth is confused, at worst it is nonsensical.

The problem with all of this is the laundry! You have never seen perfectly clean clothes, but you nonetheless are able to discern if one t-shirt is cleaner, or less dirty, than another. Similarly, you will never get to absolute Truth with a capital "T," but this doesn't stop you from asserting that one claim is more truthful, or less faulty, than another (Gardner, 2009, pp. 28-36).

The belief that we can discern which, amongst an array of options, is the least faulty, or least problematic, is precisely the belief necessary for us to engage in dialogue with one another so that we can access multiple options and so open the way to choosing the best path forward.

3. Know What "Reasonable" Looks Like

First, decide what you think is right in any given situation and then look for strong reasons to support that position. For many, this command accurately describes what "reasonable" looks like. Following this command also "feels" reasonable: "I have been thinking very hard to come up with these reasons, so surely that makes me a reasonable and thoughtful person. Right?"

Wrong. In Jonathan Haidt's words (2001), this is like a tail thinking that it is wagging the dog.

¹¹ Tweeted by Donald Trump in 2012. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Climate_change_conspiracy_theory

¹² Yang (2022).

Almost anyone can come up with reasons to believe almost anything. What you need to do when estimating the truth of any claim is to *also* come up with reasons for the counterclaim. If you have just read, *We Never Went to the Moon: America's Thirty Billion Dollar Swindle* (Kaysing, 1976), and you have come to believe that it is reasonable to believe that the moon landing was all staged in Hollywood, then in order for it to be deemed reasonable, you need to consider and respond to reasons offered by the other side. How do you account for the fact that hundreds of pounds of moon rocks have been studied around the world and verified as being of extraterrestrial origin, or how do you explain why scientists from around the globe willingly participated in the American space agency's hoax, or can you provide a plausible account as to how it was possible that there wasn't a leak from anyone for such an elaborate hoax, from people like the folks who supplied the actors' lunch or who delivered the equipment?

It is only by weighing up the reasons on both sides, and then being persuaded by the most *probable* answer, that you have grounds for claiming that you are reasonable.

A Nuanced Understanding of Our Species

Philosophers and religious thinkers have, through the ages and with the recent help of those in other disciplines, attempted to articulate what our species is all about. They have tried to create a regulative ideal of the best to which humans can aspire, while posting warnings about lethal detours. Here, we will just mention a few educative “rules of thumb” that might help blunt the force of potentially lethal divisionist tendencies. These include suggesting to young people 1) that they wear “complexity glasses” when viewing others, 2) that they eschew hatred, and 3) that they be alert to the process of their own self-creation.

i. Wear Complexity Glasses

In her book *Don't Label me* (2019), Manji argues that we are all more than the sum of our labels (p. 37); that we are all “plurals” who cannot be known by looking but only by engaging (p. 39); and that, therefore, the mark of a plural is to be the first listener in service of the commitment to modify their views if they hear better arguments (p. 137). For that reason, she argues, we all ought to encourage the “Other” to communicate rather than try to humiliate (p. 145). Manji goes on to say that “dynamic plurals are the opposite of inert things; they stay true by not staying stuck. To not stay stuck, they go out of their way to encounter different points of views” (p. 142).

What is interesting about putting on the sort of complexity glasses that Manji suggests is that it not only precludes labeling others (hence the title of Manji's book), it also precludes adopting a label for oneself, and in particular, the popular contemporary label of a victim. (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

In her book *Dignity: The essential role it plays in resolving conflict* (2011), Donna Hicks argues that while playing the victim card is almost irresistibly tempting, it should be avoided at all costs. Thus, she says:

The temptation to see the other person as the perpetrator and oneself as the innocent victim is one of the greatest obstacles to resolving conflict in relationships. Our need to be both right and done wrong by is an outdated survival strategy that creates big problems for us today. (p. 143)

And even, Paulo Freire, despite being a well-known advocate for the oppressed, also argues that playing the victim is often used as a shield against judgment and hence the self-development that accrues through growth-inspiring feedback (1970, p. 124).

According to Manji (2021, p. 180), we all need to “unfollow the fad” of taking offense as an avenue of power, and instead see one another simply as members of the perfectly imperfect species that we are, and potential co-thinkers in the service of trying to find a viable path forward for ourselves.

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that none of this is to suggest that we ought to adopt a sort of kumbaya attitude that connecting with others will always be possible. Like all other “learners,” human beings can be corrupted by experience and circumstance. Thus, for instance, on just one page of the *Vancouver Sun* on Thursday, January 12, 2023 (p. NP2), it was reported that Putin was doubling down on his attempt to conquer Ukraine, six random people were stabbed in a train station in Paris, robbers in Chile stole 4.4 million in copper during shipping, a New York congressman is being investigated for financial irregularities and for fabricating most of his resume, and a suicide bomber killed 5 and injured 40 outside the Afghan foreign ministry in Kabul. And this is just one page on one day of reporting! One would be a fool not to realize that the world is full of unsavory people that have not earned the right to be liked. But this also is true of vicious dogs! Nevertheless, the fact that you would be a damn fool to approach a snarling Rottweiler does not justify a blanket negative view of Rottweilers, let alone a blanket negative view of dogs. Each dog, like each human, deserves the respect to be seen for who it actually is.

ii. Don't Hate Thy Neighbour

In the *Brothers Karamazov*, the Grand Inquisitor admonished Christ for asking too much of his people (Dostoyevsky, 2001, p. 173). With this sentiment, we wholeheartedly concur, particularly with regard to the command that we ought to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37–39). In its place, we suggest the much less onerous edict that we at least try not hate our neighbours.¹³

¹³ Bloom, in his book *Against Empathy* (2016, p.240) quotes Steven Pinker (2011, p. 591.) as saying “But frankly, I don't love my neighbors, to say nothing of my enemies. Better, then, is the following idea: don't kill your neighbors or your enemies, even if you don't love them. . . .” We are suggesting here that you not hate them either.

In her book *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (2016), Nussbaum argues that the hatred that emerges from anger ought to be abandoned since it is conceptually confused and normatively pernicious. It assumes that the suffering of the wrongdoer restores the thing that was damaged, but in fact, it betrays an all-too-lively interest in one's *relative* status by humiliating the other. At their core, she argues that anger and resentment are at the same time infantile and harmful (p. 29).

And David Brooks, in his book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (2019) argues that we ought to abandon the "ticket entry" hatred that is required for tribal membership. He argues that tribal ties are not the same as the bonds of community. "Community is connection based on mutual affection. Tribalism. . . is connection based on mutual hatred. Community is based on common humanity; tribalism on a common foe." Brooks describes tribalism as "a community for lonely narcissists" and that, these days, partisanship for many people is not about which political party has better policies but picking sides between "the saved and the damned" (p. 35).

Again, it is important to stress that the admonition that one ought to avoid hatred does not imply that one ought not to judge others. It is, rather, to suggest that we follow the lead suggested by St. Augustine in his Letter 211 (c. 424) that while we ought to maintain a quasi-positive attitude toward others in the sense of knowing that "there but for the grace of God go I," we are nonetheless not only justified but morally obliged to negatively judge bad behaviour—something that is often translated into "love the sinner but hate the sin." Or, as Garrison puts it (2006, p. 13), we must not mistake being critical of others for critical thinking. Yes, we can be critical of others, but if we are serious about reasoning together in the service of making genuine progress in overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of a better world, we must engage in critical thinking *with* one another, i.e., in evaluating the reasons with a critical view, but we must not let our critical view of the other interfere with the process (Anderson et al., 2021, p. 30).

iii. Be Alert to Your Own Self-creation

In his play, *The Flies*, Sartre (2001) has the protagonist Orestes say that the "most cowardly of murderers is he who feels remorse" (P. 39). On the face of it, this comment seems shocking as "common garden morality" would seem to dictate that, of all transgressors, a murderer most certainly ought to feel remorse. On deeper reflection, however, nudged along by the presence of the flies, i.e., the Furies or the goddesses of remorse (p. 37), it becomes evident that remorse emerges to bite its victim only when one acts without sufficient "objective" reflection to "own" what one did; to be able to say, "I looked at both sides of the issue and, under the circumstances, it seemed to me that the action I chose was the best of all possible options." "Group think" or overwhelming emotion, often preclude such reflection and it is for that reason that acting under such pressure can indeed lead to remorse. Though after the fact, remorse can be a good thing as it opens up the way for healthy repentance for past mistakes (Fan, 2019), the point Sartre is trying to make is that it is better to reflect

beforehand, rather than after the fact, since poorly thought-out actions, like butterfly wings¹⁴, can have enormous ramifications.

Coaching Interpersonal Dialogue

Listening to those who think differently about issues is difficult in the extreme. The most common practice, at least for those people who are polite, is to listen quietly but only to refute. “Yes, but...” is a common refrain. This is not surprising. Someone who has an opposing view implicitly suggests that you are silly (or worse). Since this thought is insulting, it virtually guarantees that you will not seriously reflect on opposing viewpoints. And if, per chance, some credible opposing reasons slip in, the likelihood of changing your mind is almost nil, as doing so will publicly demonstrate that you were somehow stupid for believing what you did.

Engaging in authentic dialogue (Gardner et al., 2015) is as rare and difficult as it is important. For that reason, we all need practice and good coaching to be able to articulate our viewpoints sufficiently succinctly so that others will listen, stay open to and genuinely reflect on opposing viewpoints, believe deep down that pursuing truth by throwing out what is false is the highest pinnacle to which we *Homo sapiens* can aspire, and that, therefore, changing one’s mind, rather than being evidence of stupidity, is the exact reverse.

Such coaching, within what is referred to as a “Community of Inquiry” is potentially available wherever “Philosophy for Children” is taught.¹⁵ We use the modifier “potentially” because contemporary culture wars, and the binary communicative environment that has emerged out of the milieu created by social media, has the potential to infect contributions to the dialogue so that it gets hijacked by attempts to blame and shame.

In such a situation, it is our hope that the messages contained herein will fortify the facilitator to remind participants that history testifies to the fact that no race, tribe, or group of humans is intrinsically different from any other, and that our collective well-being depends on seeing one another as species-mates, each of whom potentially can help to complexify the issue and so deepen our understanding, and each of whom potentially has a valuable insight to contribute to the articulation of workable solutions to the many challenges that we face. And perhaps most importantly, participants need to be reminded that we are at a crisis point in history, and that it is *only* by learning to genuinely dialogue across difference that we will be able to unite in an effort to promote “a *culture* of inquiry,” and with it a pervasive sense of collective identity, and that, though this may not be sufficient to meet the challenges ahead, it is most certainly necessary.

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect

¹⁵ <https://www.icpic.org/>

Conclusion

At the beginning of his book *A Short History of Progress*. (2004), Ronald Wright writes:

The future of everything we have accomplished since our intelligence evolved will depend on the wisdom of our actions over the next few years. Like all creatures, humans have made their way in the world so far by trial and error; unlike other creatures, we have a presence so colossal that error is a luxury we can no longer afford. The world has grown too small to forgive us any big mistakes. (p. 3)

And Manji (2019), bemoaning our present divisionist culture, wonders if we should pray for intergalactic aliens to storm Planet Earth so we can all act together in fear of the new Them (p. 130).

Without the luck of alien visitors, but in the face of existential challenges of our own making, we suggest that educators, who of necessity are now primarily footservants to the market, find a new compass-bearing from the urgent earth-shaking call of the future, and instead strive to educate so that each of us, as individuals, recognize other members of our species as “species-mates,” and, in so doing, strive to engage with those others in cooperative inquiry as to how best to face the challenges ahead.

If we save ourselves from mass extinction it might be said that, after all, we *Homo sapiens* are worthy of respect. If we do not, our fateful condemnation will be well deserved.

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