



has retained that groundedness in their lives. But professions, or in fact any role, can alter how we see the life, and put us in a position where we may have to make difficult decisions that challenge our own sense of who we are. Sometimes they might go against some of our beliefs in order to achieve something that might be seen as progress. So it is a difficult psychological concept, I think, for people to grasp in terms of maintaining that sense of self. Let's suppose we ask people whether they recognize themselves towards the end of their career from where they started out. Politicians have written some interesting autobiographies about this kind of

thing. More interestingly, a lot of people have left politics, I would say, because they felt they can no longer retain the sense of who they used to be. They realize that that's a sign that they should leave the profession in order to get themselves back. So it is a real challenge and it's important that we have, as you say, the checks and balances, so that if someone starts to behave in a way that is really quite unreasonable and different from the kind of person we're used to seeing, we can say, "Well, hang on a minute, let's just check what's happening here. Do you need help even?"

Since the earliest time, I mean, since the ancient Greeks, they understood

that there are three elements to governance: ethos, logos, and pathos. So, there is that legacy. But some might argue that democracy as a system should be more about rationality than emotions. Or, in other words, the role of emotions in current democracies, in the West at least, is more pronounced than it should be. What's your take on that?

Looking at recent events, if I pick a couple of examples, in the American presidential elections and also the Brexit elections in the UK and possibly the presidential elections in Brazil which we're seeing in the news, emotions are really spilling onto the streets and people are expressing how they feel in important ways. Having said that, emotions are very much part of how we make decisions about what ties us to our political beliefs and identities. If we deny those emotions, then perhaps we could argue we're denying something of what we believe as well. Emotions are very much a natural part of being human.

It's of course fair to suggest that political decisions should be purely rational. It's an interesting aspiration, but it very often is at odds with how we experience the world as individuals. Yet, when you're making a decision on behalf of people or huge numbers of people, then one has to be careful about one's own emotions since you're trying to take account of everybody in that case, and that's where, in making decisions on behalf of people, our level of rationality becomes much more important. Because then otherwise decisions may be made, which lead people to a lot of trouble and conflict, because an individual leader might feel, "Well, this is what I want to happen," and that might be something that makes a lot of people very unhappy indeed, and may not be the best course of action.

Therefore, there's an imperative for leaders to be more rational. I think you're right. But in terms of democracy, if we see it as involving everybody, it's hard to keep emotions out of the picture. Therefore, we need to take account of and recognize them.

Again, the importance of people having a voice, whether it's in a democratic system or not, is that there's an expression for that so that people know that, "I've been heard. I told people what I think." And maybe change can happen. So it's a complex mix: There's no doubt we need the rationality, but we can't deny the emotions.

My impression is that you agree with the description that your publisher gave to the world, that democracy is under threat across the board. What is the most important threat from your point of view?

Gosh, it's a good question. There have been a number of books published in the last five or six years suggesting that democracy is under threat, perhaps

most often from within the democratic systems, where there are groups and political factions who do not want people to have a say based on democratic principles, perhaps trying to subvert those in some way by maybe misrepresenting facts so that people don't necessarily know what's going on or that people's emotions are whipped up to a point where it's very hard to have democratic dialogue and it excludes some of that rationality that we need.

There is one key threat. What we often do as a human species, regardless of our political systems, is to take things for granted. We're very good as humans at one thing: We're attuned to spot change and potential threats to what's happening to our lives. But sometimes, if you had something, such as a political system, in place for a long period of time, we take it for granted, assuming that it's going to carry on. And yet, like anything, like our environment around us, political systems need nurturing. They need careful attention. If we don't pay that attention, then that system, again like our environment, is very much under threat. So complacency is probably the biggest threat, if I dare say that. So, in terms of the threats, some of those are from perhaps our natural human inclinations, which is to be complacent about things and to forget that there are human beings making decisions as politicians. Hopefully we can link with them in some kind of way. We can reach out. And that's much better to have a dialogue than to demonize or to distance someone. Hopefully, there's always a channel for communication.

Here is my last question. We've had a series of conversations on utopian/dystopian thinking with several scholars. Most of them agree that the dystopian sentiment has been on the rise for the past five or six years, or even from the financial crisis in the United States. That means, people are more attracted to apocalyptic versions or accounts of the world, and hope is missing. What can we do to reclaim the hope that we need to be constructive in politics?

I think that's a great question, if I may say. You're right in that the economic crash and subsequent political events around the world, and the environmental crisis that we're all facing, are enemies of hope, should we say, and they have made it harder to believe that there's a positive future. And yet, we're still here as a species. We have survived millions of years, and many different kinds of disasters, such as worldwide conflicts as well as global challenges. So the fact that we have come through, suggests that actually we have a good evolutionary trait of surviving things. That in itself is a good reason to be hopeful. Moreover, because we've evolved many different systems for communication, for learning from one another



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er—and there are systems of learning all over the world in every nation – we have the means to learn the lessons that perhaps were not learned in the past, and to do things differently. We seem to be struggling to do that globally in terms of our environment, and that's where things need to change. Another reason why people often find it hard to see hope is that on social media, there are so much which so many people have access to: There are images of things which are negative, or of destruction in some kind of way. Again, that's part of what we do as humans. We watch out for the threats. That's one reason why we survived: We tend to see them, we learn from them, and then we go on from there. So I think we're hardwired to be hopeful, but we may not necessarily express that when we see a lot of the images that we do. But we also know that change is possible. And I do have a phrase: "Progress is slow, change is possible, but persistence is the key." So I think these are key messages. And there's a message of hope that we should keep saying it, and let young people know in particular: Things can be different. And we need to show that difference by politicians taking a decision that means there's something that they can do which re-instills the hope

in some kind of way. We all have that responsibility. Perhaps politicians more than most.

Right. If I remember correctly, that quote about the change was also mentioned in the preface of your book.

Yes, you're right. That's wonderfully well remembered. I was sitting outside during the pandemic. It was during one of the lockdowns where we couldn't go anywhere. It was hard for all of us to think of messages of hope at that time; wasn't it? My mind kept going back in history and thinking, well, we've had plagues, we've had things happened before, but we've come out the other end of those as humans. So that persistence for me was the key: If we stick around long enough, then hopefully we'll find an answer.

Hopefully! If you have any final points to share with us, I would be more than glad to hear and convey. No. Thank you for your stimulating and thought provoking questions.

Sure thing. Thank you for actually putting so much effort in introducing the politicians for who they are, which they try to hide! You're very kind! Thank you very much indeed.

CONCLUDED

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