
WORLD: A Framework for Discussion — I

A Way to Discuss Mainly
Social Topics/Issues in
Hopefully a Better Way

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April 23, 2023

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1 Introduction and Motivation

I think the motivation for this entry is unfortunately obvious to see in today's societal climate. I don't think this is just the case for the UK, but may be the case also in other countries. Of course I can't know for sure, but I imagine it's highly likely.

The particular motivation which I mean is that many topics today are in essence being swept under the carpet as being either assumed, ignored, or treated as too sensitive to talk about. I may be wrong in saying that many topics are treated this way, but at the very least I'm sure we can all think of at least one such subject

that is as I describe.

I've been thinking about how we might be able to solve this problem, especially if it will increase in potency. And so, I propose here a few ideas on how we might be able to solve it, which includes identifying problems which hinder these possible solutions. It is worth noting here also that I may add to this list of possible solutions in future entries on this topic.

2 Places

The first step that I think is needed, is to create a serious place of discussion, where people can talk to each other in pursuit of getting at the truth of the mat-

ter, and where all may exercise their right to truly speak.

The fact is, I cannot for the life of me think of such a place that exists publicly now, beyond discussions with friends or between two or three people on mostly personal matters. Anywhere that exists in the public sphere now, whether virtual or physical, 1) seems either loaded with bias and assumptions that aren't being tackled (when those are really what should be addressed), 2) or just doesn't seem serious in tackling the issue, whatever it may be. Furthermore, even if these two things are overcome, there definitely doesn't seem to be 3) a place of discussion that is open to all people as well, without biased weight on certain people before they speak.

The closest thing we have is social media probably, especially on the last point I mention. However, it easily fails everywhere else. I've essentially never heard of anyone giving credit to social media for being serious on any matter. And even if there is a serious attitude to tackling certain issues, the mob driven nature of social media forces any issue to be settled rather too quickly, with eventually little room for discussion. To put it more bluntly, on the common forums of social media, I always see points being made, but never any questions being truly asked.

Another example of a place that should be for honest discussion in the pursuit of truth is in Parliament. What I mean is that I think it surely should be a place to seek what is truly good for the people of

this country. However, more often than not, all I see is rhetoric piled upon more rhetoric, and often much of it quite used already, and sometimes childish. I don't claim that our current politicians aren't doing their job right, or that I know how to do it. I just find it incredibly hard to see, whenever I watch Prime Minister's Questions, how the discussions which are had or the questions being asked are the most helpful. I know that what happens does work, and I'm grateful for that, but I just think it could be better.

Politics often seems like it has adopted some sort of artificial unique culture or attitude in the places of its discussion. This alone makes it seem like politics is about doing its own thing, and not so much about what it ought to be doing — namely, how people should govern their

nation, given the problems at hand.

Another place that ought to not have the three problems I outline initially is the university. Having been to one, I can say that there are very few places to have a larger discussion on especially topics that are assumed to be settled, or simply controversial. If a topic can't be talked about seriously in a university, I would ask where on earth can it be? Maybe it's the same in any organisation, but in university it seems there is an underlying air of what should and what shouldn't be publically questioned. Now this may be just my assumption, and I definitely accept that, but it indeed seems to the case to me. I would like to test my assumption if I can, but that would be for another entry.

Now, the solution to this problem is, quite obviously, to create places that are open to all (so all can speak and ask questions, most likely in a limited capacity due to time), where bias and assumptions can be tackled (by allowing questions to be asked about those assumptions), and where things are dealt with seriously (where nothing is assumed to be unimportant without reason).

Furthermore, the purpose of discussion must be made clear in such places. Too often I see debates and discussions as simply being about winning sides and exercising persuasion. These things do have their value, but they are only consequences of discussion, not the qualities of a good discussion. And so, I propose that the purpose in every discussion is simply to get the full story of all perspectives, and

to understand where all are coming from. Many times people write off discussions because “I won’t change your mind, and you won’t change mine”, and leave things by agreeing to disagree. I’ve always felt a bit annoyed whenever I’ve seen this happen, because the point isn’t to *change* anyone’s mind, but to *understand* their mind. Any mind changing that happens is either a happy or sad consequence of the discussion, but not the point of it.

How exactly this solution is to be implemented, I am not sure. I would have to explore that in another entry I think. But nonetheless, a few things might be made clear. Firstly, in order for things to be serious, the place cannot be virtual (on the internet). People need to see who they are talking to face-to-face. Naturally, it is hard to take anyone seriously

if they are not serious enough to stand before you plainly. Also, I think that these discussions must be local in some way, between people who have a common interest in the given topic being discussed. That way, people can know that everyone has a common good at heart, and that therefore they would like to take heed to what is being said. Furthermore, because it would be local, they know that some change would be possible, precisely because the local scale is somewhat changeable, even if the discussions may be about large topics (providing the incentive of effectful discussion).

I don't know how useful the above may be, but hopefully it at least might lead to something useful.

3 Words

A huge issue in discussions is that the words used by people are either misunderstood, or go over people's heads. Especially in politics and for societal issues, it really helps to be precise. It is a huge problem, where no one knows what x-'ism' or y-'ism' really means, nor what it really means to be x-'ist' or y-'ic'.

Therefore, in short, I propose that in such discussions, all/most words (depending on the topic) that end with such suffixes be banned. Sure, it means people have to use more words to clarify their meaning, but that's surely what you want in a discussion.

An example would be of discussions that

need to use the word “racist”. The problem here is that it is used to mean something specific, but no one knows what that is until it’s clarified — not to mention how charged the word can be in today’s climate. And so, according to my proposal, I would ban the use of that word in discussions. Someone would have to say something like “thoughts containing prejudice towards someone because of their race, or racial appearance”, or, “physical violence aimed at driving away someone purely because of their race”. Both phrases have quite big differences in meaning and consequence, yet are both today put under the umbrella term of “racist”. And so, by banning such a broad word like “racist”, I hope you can see how much more precise things have to be, which can only help a discussion.

4 Problems

Another thing that I find is that if an issue is discussed, the problem or issue itself is mostly only assumed to be the actual issue. That can be fine, since maybe we all have to assume what the problem is at some level (as we can't know for sure). But I rarely see large scale and serious discussion about just what the problems may be in society or an organisation. Of course I could be wrong here since such discussions may be behind closed doors. But at the very least, I've seen most people chase after a solution to a problem without first explaining why the problem they identified is the real problem, or indeed the only one.

An example would be something I watched

this morning. I try to watch as often as possible some Japanese news to improve my vocabulary and listening comprehension. For anyone interested, I usually go for FNN News (on YouTube). But anyway, the video I saw was on how there was a problem in recent years with Starlings causing a nuisance to city-dwellers, since increasing numbers (possibly hundreds in each flock) have chosen to occupy city trees, especially in the evenings until the morning after they come back from feeding in the country. The issue has arisen since around 5 years ago in most cities apparently. Their droppings are an obvious annoyance (as well as them possibly containing infectious bacteria or toxic substances to humans), but also their tweets are up to 80 decibels if you are near a tree with resting Starlings nearby. And so, a few city councils decided to cut

down trees in the streets that were affected. However, the Starlings just started resting on the outcroppings and edges of buildings nearby.

And so I hope this might be seen as an example (albeit of a more practical problem than a societal issue) of how the problem wasn't correctly identified. The city councils that just cut down the trees, saw the problem as just being that the birds were on those trees, and shouldn't be there. However, especially if these issues arose since around 5 years ago, the problem really must be something to do with why these birds are seeking refuge in the city at all, and not in the countryside, especially if trees are more plentiful in the country. But anyhow, I don't claim to know the answer, just that I know the problem couldn't have been what those

city councils must've assumed it to be.

Now, if the underlying issues of such an observable phenomenon can be mistaken, then how much more would we easily mistake the underlying issues of phenomena in society that are not easily observable, or that are even purposely hidden. Furthermore, how easily then would it be to mistake the underlying issues of phenomena that involve the actions of individual people, since it is probably safe to say that the human person is indeed anything but simple to understand.

With all that being said, I simply want to say that maybe a problem with today's climate of discussion on societal problems is that we aren't discussing what we think to be the underlying problems enough as we should. As an engineering student,

I can safely say that the most important thing is identifying the right problem, and I don't think that just matters for engineering.

5 Conclusion

I don't claim that what I have said is enough to create a full so-called “framework for discussion”, but I hope it might be a step in the right direction in actually creating one.

Thank you for reading.

END