



This time round we can all behave with more dignity

John Sturrock

Things are not as they should be. We know that. There is a sense that the politics of polarisation are seeping into the very fabric of who we are and what we think. There has been a change in mood and behaviour. Attitudes seem more brutal, less compassionate, more divisive, less outward-looking. There are things we can control and things we can't.

Most of us can't do much about President Trump or, sadly, about the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians. But we can take responsibility for what is happening in our own country. Whatever we think about another independence referendum, what many people fear more than the outcome are the effects of further divisiveness. We can address that. It is within our individual and collective grasp to behave in a manner that befits a 21st-century nation trying to come to terms with its constitutional future. In past times, we resorted to

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bloody fighting. We don't do that now. However, the fear and anger remains, manifested in unwelcome behaviour on social media, antagonistic political speeches and lurid post-truth claims.

We can do better. We can transcend the fight or flight default setting which, when threatened, exists in us all. To do so needs conscious thought and action. It takes humility, responsibility, self-discipline and courage.

In the 2014 referendum, Collaborative Scotland, set up by individuals to promote civil debate, ran newspaper ads with support for its commitment to respectful dialogue and these words: "We believe that it is a privilege to engage in discussions about our future. How we engage with each other may be just as important as the outcome. We believe that it is in the interests of a flourishing Scotland that all discussions are conducted with civility and dignity."

Signatories committed to show respect and courtesy; acknowledge different points of view; use language and listen carefully; avoid offensive personal remarks; ask questions; express views clearly and honestly; and look for common ground at all times. That is really all we need to transform the conversation. It's easier said than done. It would be a start if all campaigners signed up to this commitment. But it needs more. How do we hold ourselves to account? Might that be a role for an enlightened organ of the media?

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