

Reflections about Facebook

With the emergence of presidential politics comes an increased lack of civility, which led me to reflect on the nature of Facebook. I recommend Phillip Selznick's *The Commonwealth*, particularly, his discussion of civility.

Facebook is an easy and useful way:

- To **keep in touch** with family and friends, including sharing photographs and communications, e.g. birthday and holiday greetings.
- To **test new ideas** and seek information from others.
- To **communicate quickly** and efficiently with all your “friends.”
- To **plan joint events**, including reunions, professional meetings, etc.
- To **stay well informed** with friends, associates, and acquaintances around the world—you are only a few clicks away from those halfway on the other side of the globe.
- To **keep abreast** of the changing and trending nature of contemporary culture.

But Facebook brings with it some disquieting features:

- **Coarseness** in discourse is increasing—there is virtually no filtering of postings; rants and raves of individuals are quite common.
- **Intolerance** for conflicting ideas and people with different perspectives is on the rise—a tone of self-righteousness, dogmatism, and accusation often pervades the tone of the postings.
- **Incivility**—intolerance has produced a general lack of civility. Civility is more than being respectful and courteous. Civility supports norms of impersonality, rationality, and inclusion whereas the growing incivility undermines these tendencies. Personal and passionate attacks have replaced rational and mindful analyses. Civility regulates diversity, safeguards individual expression, and encourages tolerance, three critical elements of rational and open discourse, which are being steadily eroded on Facebook.
- **Self-absorption**—Increasingly Facebook has become an arena for individual self-righteousness and self-absorption. Mocking others with divergent beliefs; passionate, personal attacks have replaced diversity and thoughtful analyses.

- **Addictive**—frequent use of Facebook leads to a craving to speak out on virtually anything and everything, which is a practice that weakens your inclination to take on hard tasks or difficult problems. Quick fixes become substitutes for more thoughtful action. Your brain craves a quick response at the slightest provocation or hint of monotony.
- **False Information**—Increasingly information on the Facebook is becoming misleading and false.
- **Commercialism**—Increasing strategically placed ads capitalize on individual desires and biases as data mining makes individual participants vulnerable to slick advertising.

There are significant costs to using Facebook, but in my view the greatest are the loss of civility among “friends,” false information, and personal information used for algorithms, which can be used to control and manipulate us.