

Why We Have Protesting Today Instead of Dialogue

Protesting has seemingly becoming the preferred method of “discourse” today.

In part, the apparent [increase in protests](#) is due to the expanded coverage offered by news and social media today.

However, [as philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has argued](#), the increase in protests is also a result of relativism and the consequent breakdown in rational discourse. “It is easy,” he writes, “to understand why *protest* becomes a distinctive moral feature of the modern age and why *indignation* is a predominant modern emotion.”

You see, if values are not considered objectively true—that is, true independently of whether or not people think they’re true—then they appear to be the product of arbitrary will or desire. As a result, in an increasingly relativist society like ours, those who feel disenfranchised frequently accuse certain laws and policies—both at the governmental and institutional levels—as being the means to preserve the self-interest of “privileged” individuals or groups at their expense.

Faced with this situation, what do the disenfranchised resort to? Not rational dialogue. In a relativist society in which values are merely the expressions of personal preference, power, and will, what would be the point? Instead, they resort to protest.

MacIntyre clarifies that there *is* a positive form of protest that “bear[s] witness to something,” i.e., an objective truth. But, he laments, most protests today are characterized by their irrationality, and are merely another form of the will to power:

“Protest is now almost entirely that negative phenomenon which characteristically occurs as a reaction to the alleged invasion of someone’s rights in the name of someone else’s utility. The self-assertive shrillness of protest arises because the facts of incommensurability ensure that protestors can never win an argument; the indignant self-righteousness of protest arises because the facts of incommensurability ensure that protestors rarely have anyone else to talk to but themselves. This is not to say that protest cannot be effective; it is to say that it cannot be rationally effective and that its dominant modes of expression give evidence of a certain perhaps unconscious awareness of this.”

Is there a way to save rational discourse in the coming years? Or, does the prevalence of relativism in today’s society mean that non-rational means will be the only way to defend one’s values?