

Review of: "Who's Afraid of Disagreement about Disagreement?"

Oscar Eybers¹

¹ University of Pretoria

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Professor Ruth Weintraub of Tel Aviv University addresses a topic that is relevant to social, natural, digital and scientists of all domains. Specifically, she analyses the complex subject of intellectual argumentation. Weintraub's perspectives are relevant to scholars and members of the general public. Accordingly, knowledge is built, conflict is resolved, and negotiation is unavoidable when two or more individuals navigate disagreement. If the value of argumentation, intellectual dialectic, and negotiation of logic and fallacies around sensitive issues are unclear to the reader, there are numerous present-day examples evincing their absence.

As evidence of individuals', communities' and nations' incapacities to negotiate divergent viewpoints - the current war in Ukraine is relevant. Certainly, the reality of war warrants the claim that human beings have not mastered the process of negotiating principles, and fallacies - after acknowledging significant differences. Weintraub's analysis speaks to tensions around un-negotiated logic. For instance, she highlights the notion of "disagreement about disagreement" (DAD). While awareness of DAD is essential for fostering collegialism and the generation of new knowledge in educational contexts, undeniably - all actors in universities, and certainly in greater society do not embrace negotiative modes of navigating divergent viewpoints. Indeed, as Weintraub alludes, scholars, politicians and the common human often advance 'steadfastness' while circumventing a principle of "equal weight" (EW) around diverging views. As a result, intellectual, political, and cultural incapacities to embrace the EW principle fosters the absence of consensual reasoning, negotiation, and compromise. Instead, tensions between interlocutors, communities and nations transpire.

One of the outcomes of un-negotiated logic and fallacies in educational, political settings is what Weintraub labels SUP, or "the problem of self-undermining". That is, as weaker, subordinate or less powerful individuals, communities and nations enter disagreement with more powerful actors - there emerges the propensity to devalue personal, and local stances regarding vital problems, challenges and issues confronting human societies. In other words, as Weintraub's text suggests - if not managed sensitively, disagreements can demote local and personal knowledge systems through acts of coercion, physical violence and oppression. Unfortunately, instantiations of epistemic suppression are not restricted to political playing fields. Instead, as Weintraub alerts readers - violence against knowledge systems and cultural knowledge systems may penetrate institutions of higher learning and disciplines. Evidence of un-negotiated logic and fallacies around disagreement - as referenced by Weintraub, include domaticism, scholarly rivalry and a violation of intellectual ideals, including the value of argumentation.

Weintraub's text and claims presents alternatives to un-negotiated logic in academic, political, and cultural contexts. One

the one hand, she highlights the notion of conciliation. Conciliation, according to this reviewer's interpretation, involves a willingness on the part of disagreeing parties to minimally designate principles, ethics, and values that determine acceptable and unacceptable modes of disagreeing. For instance, colleagues may agree that personal insults, un-negotiated data and ethnocentrism are not conducive to knowledge building. Further, conciliation also requires disagreeing entities to identify and negotiate acceptable principles for navigating disagreement. As evidence, rationality, a multicultural outlook and acknowledgement of diverse cultural histories among discordant parties could generate solutions and harmonious relations.

In summary, this review commends and recommends Weintraub's texts for academics, cultural communities and nations. Professor's Weintraub's vision is realistic in that she acknowledges humans will, and cannot always agree. Yet, she highlights the powers of reasoning, epistemic awareness and conciliation as practical methods for circumventing the often violent (physical and non-physical) outcomes of un-negotiated disagreement. Weintraub's logic also enables scholars and civic actors to visualise the possibilities of “splitting the differences” among discordant parties in modes that allow practical solutions to problems to emerge through argumentation. Finally, Weintraub's reasoning is applicable to academic disciplines, cultural discord and political tension. However, her propositions are not applicable if ethnocentrism, and all the other isms trump the value of negotiated logic and the human desire facilitate peace for upcoming generations.