

As I pace, far away in a friendly, loving land, one ignorantly defamed with so much else by our president-elect, two things begin to stand out in my jumble of perplexity. The first concerns our responsibilities as educators to the next president, who has promised much to an impassioned following with little evidence of careful planning about what or how to follow through. The other concerns our responsibilities as educators to understand and work against the decay of dialogue evident in the execrable discourse of the extended campaign, evident on one side in a crass disdain for truth and on the other in the complacent satisfaction of a meretricious meritocracy.

One, the haunting voice of Dionne Warwick, poses that question each and all of us have been thrust into the world asking, and having to answer, each in our inward way, now more inescapably than ever. The other, a concept central to a most difficult, least studied, yet the deepest reflection on the formation of the human person and the humane spirit, sets before us the vital measure of educational and political effort, which people throughout history have been forever seeking, animated by hope, and disappointed by their limits, manifestly so in the present juncture.

For the one, search web for “what’s it all about, Alfie?” Listen to the many renditions on YouTube. Let the haunting, questioning melody of the opening verse seep you’re your background awareness. Study the lyrics. Let the question sink it. What does it mean that “we just exist” without true love? What sort of existence just exists? Is that a person or a pebble or anything else with no inner life, no inescapably experienced sense of meaning for self and sentient other?

Most, not attuned to 60s filmography, might ask, what kind of person did the Alfie of the song represent? Ah, the movie, *Alfie*, told his story and we might say that its Alfie was a plebian Donny, a womanizer, always objectifying the other, seeking always to get his way, and when he didn’t to redefine his way to conform to what he got. But then, being plebian but always a winner, Alfie’s string of zero-sum games, usually ones of coital conquest, were bigly subject to the law of diminishing returns, and the movie ends with Alfie, deserted, awakening to wonder, with the song then sung as the credits roll.

The “I alone,” central to Trump’s acceptance of the Republican nomination, does not answer the question, What’s it all about? And we have little evidence that he has asked it throughout his cult of winning, yet we construct meaning value, purpose by asking it

How can we move on from this long, dismal campaign, relentlessly negative, in which the least prepared, most obnoxious candidate somehow won the presidency while losing the vote? Those of us on the left suddenly face the prospect of a prolonged eclipse issuing from a marginal defeat. Trump squeaked into office; the Republicans barely held the Senate. The election decreed no mandate, but clearly shifted the powers of state.

Historical experience, not other measures, assesses the quality of education, and Henry Adams stands as the greatest among other writers on education for his clear perception of that reality. The historical experience of the 2016 election makes crystal clear that neither professional educators nor the “well educated” establishment understood the education they had been providing the American populace across several generations. What does that imply for the future, short-term and long?

Short-term, the historical die has been cast and we must pray. “Luck be a lady tonight!” If *fortuna*, as she often has, continues to look on Americans favorably, we may avoid reaping the whirlwind of our ignorance as educators. Long-term, the outcome of the election likely has aggravated truly objective problems such as climate change and made the fulfillment of worthy ideals more problematic.