

“Another problem with people who fail to examine themselves is that they often prove all too easily influenced. When a talented demagogue addressed the Athenians with moving rhetoric but bad arguments, they were all too ready to be swayed, without ever examining the argument”

Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010).

How to win the election

Is it not remarkable that president Donald Trump was elected even though he generalizes groups of people, wants to break the law by building a wall around Mexico, and overall lies about important things such as statistics considering criminals? Martha Nussbaum explains this phenomenon by stating: Those who don't examine themselves are easily influenced by rhetoric. People seem to follow those who can speak with great passion, who use *pathos* to get their message across, who play with language as if it were a way of hypnotising people in order to get them to think what they want them to think. This essay will discuss to what extent people are able to examine themselves, and will answer the question how one wins the election.

From the day you were born until this very moment you were influenced by many sources other than yourself. Your parents were the first to give you a piece of identity. They taught you words in a certain language that became the main language you would keep speaking the rest of your life. Here is where the inability to be truly rational and examine yourself starts. Words are defined by other words that humans created and secondly, different languages implicate different things. In some countries, there are no words for he and she, which implicates that gender is not found as important as in countries that do have words that create a difference between genders. You were raised by people who read certain newspapers – newspapers are not reliable either for they make you believe some things are more important than others. For example, no one finds it weird that their neighbour is not written about when she goes to another school, but Dutch king Willem-Alexander's youngest daughter actually was in the news when she went to another school.

Last week a social science class from Nijmegen took part in an experiment in which every student got handed a news item on the same murder case. Then they were asked to write down what the main reason was for the man in charge to commit the crime, but what they did not know, was that one article emphasised the mental disorders that the murderer suffered from, another stated that the gun policy in America was inefficient, and again another article emphasised the possible racism that could have led to the murder. Every student (apart from one) who had read the article that emphasised the mental disorders, chose that to be the cause of the murder, and the same goes for the other groups. Mass media has such a big influence on how we think, it seems impossible to have a clear view of the situation. So using language and informing yourself via media does not seem like a good idea to form unbiased beliefs either.

Framing plays an enormous role in our opinion forming. It is all about how something is put, how you want to get your message across. Using rhetoric is therefore a remarkably effective way to plant an opinion in someone's brain. Jean Paul Sartre mentioned we have complete freedom in our mind. One could still be free in prison because he has full responsibility for what he does and has full control over his thoughts. It is important to discuss whether that is true.

Your identity depends on cultural habits, the people you surround yourself with, the way you were raised, the law et cetera. If all of those aspects were taken away, what would be left? If you were born where there would be no people and no media, you would be completely unbiased, but as soon as you communicate, you are being influenced. For example, even just the words 'Good morning' have an influence on your beliefs: It is normal to greet people when meeting them, to look them in the eyes, and to wish them well. If everyone greeted each other by calling them by their blood type, hypothetically, everyone would accept that as normal and teach their own children to do that as well, because people decided what is good and what is not and that what most people think is good, is good. That is why we set up laws – to make sure everyone knows what most people think is good and to make them act that way. Killing someone, for example, is in most countries not seen as something good to do and therefore, a murderer gets punished by being sent to jail, or having to pay an amount of money. So laws are based on social perception, which means that 'good' and 'bad' might not exist independently from people. We are taught to think the things we think, we can never fully control what we think.

Try to examine yourself and think rationally after realising that there is no truth to be found, just agreements, and you will find that it is at least a difficult task. Because rational decisions are considered those that are in line with the most common social perception, that are in line with what most people think is good. In conclusion, people are unable to truly make rational decisions for they cannot know their ratio, just what they have unconsciously learned to believe by continuously being influenced by their parents, mass media, cultural aspects and laws. All of these are forms of communication; they are meant to get a message across, which is exactly what rhetoric is: getting your message across by using words in a way they make people think what you want them to think. Until we find out how to reach an absolute truth, I will have to conclude that the one who is the most capable of translating his message into something that reaches the inside of people's minds, the one who knows how to influence by using just the right words, wins the election.