THE FRAGMENTATION OF TRUTH

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““For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?””—John 18:37-38

When a company invents a new grocery product, it has trouble getting grocery chains to stock the item because, with limited shelf space, each new product displaces another. This is a good analogy for giving relative amounts of attention to people in history. The question is, how much space should be given to each?

The analogy also works for making space for truths in the mind. The increasing specialization of knowledge has resulted in a fragmentation of truth. No one mind can hold all that is now humanly known. Consequently, different configurations of partial knowledge result in different understandings of reality. (On top of which we must add the problem of deliberate misrepresentations of the truth, such as deliberate conspiracy theories.)

Four years ago David Brooks wrote, “One of the things we’ve lost in this country is our story. It is the narrative that unites us around a common multigenerational project, that gives an overarching sense of meaning and purpose to our history.” Brooks claimed that the over-arching story America has lost is the exodus narrative. (Brooks, David. “The Unifying American Story.” *New York Times* [21 Mar. 2017]. 5 July 2021. Web.)

But there are truths that we Americans still agree on. Here are five, from the beginning of paragraph 2 of the “Declaration of Independence”:

We hold these truths to be self-evident,

that all men are created equal,

that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,

that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—

That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it . . .