I began this book by talking about intellectual freedom, and following J. S. Mill’s classic and mostly persuasive defence of liberty, I then distinguished freedom of enquiry and freedom of expression. I expressed concern at a phenomenon described satirically by George Orwell as crimestop, which he describes (in the words of the fictitious Goldstein) as the habit of stopping at the threshold of a dangerous thought, as if by instinct. My thoughts were deliberately impressionistic, leaving argument for later. While I do not believe that impressions, feelings or instincts are in any way infallible, they are often a useful starting point before embarking on an intellectual exercise of building up a case, scrutinising it in the light of counterarguments, refining it and quite possibly abandoning it. Philosophical enquiry is most productive when fired by a sense that there is something that matters deeply, even if the case is initially hard to build, and even accepting the possibility that the ideals deeply valued cannot be defended at all.

I was motivated to write this book because there was something that mattered to me, that I felt was under attack from people at opposite ends of the social and political spectrum. This was that human wellbeing requires a moral atmosphere, inseparable from an intellectual atmosphere,
in which tolerance, thoughtfulness, acceptance of one’s own fallibility, uncertainty, ambivalence, mercy, forgiveness and a desire to find the best in people, can flourish. To protect that atmosphere, we need to accept that many basically decent people have bad ideas. We should eschew moralism but understand that it can have benign roots. We should be willing to understand that there is often a complex personal history behind even the most difficult people we have to deal with and that moral or political convictions that seem thoroughly misguided or even odious can have origins in things we can admire. We should hold to a presumption against shaming people for what they say or trying to shut them up. We should encourage free and bold enquiry among the young, finding a way to foster critical thinking as something intrinsically valuable as well as a method of promoting tolerance. We should not succumb to the misguided notion that these vital intellectual skills are somehow dangerous, because they might cause people to question their identity or cause them to doubt the values of the groups they belong to.

However, as we saw, people raise objections to the ideal described, or at least to traditionally liberal ways to promote it. It might seem fanciful, or merely obvious and platitudinous. More seriously, and prominently in the culture wars, the ideal may be attacked for being in some way supremacist: this ideal is all very well for the privileged. It is easy to defend this liberal atmosphere if the company is congenial to you. But it takes little account of people in vulnerable positions who must endure racist jokes, sexually demeaning remarks and bigoted comments in general. This issue is at the heart of the debate about the limits of what people ought to say or be allowed to say. But it has a legacy in the modish idea that concern about free expression is somehow ‘right wing’. Sadly, this view is becoming commonplace in academia. In the past, it would have been assumed – perhaps a little uncritically – that truth can be attained only by careful enquiry and debate, even if this incidentally offends some people. Nowadays, academia is increasingly dominated by people who produce apparently sophisticated attacks on the ideal of free enquiry itself, though they sometimes deny that they are doing this.

Clearly, the moral atmosphere I yearn for requires civility. This means that you usually do not mock people or speak rudely about their beliefs unless this is necessary to shake people out of attitudes or beliefs that are
seriously harmful. You do not pick arguments, unless the issue is genuinely important and there is some chance of making sense prevail. You listen, and interrupt only when the other person shows no inclination to shut up, or when the flow of talk contains so many doubtful assumptions that you will forget them unless they stop talking. Civility requires a degree of self-censorship based on consideration for others’ feelings. It is often not necessary to point out someone’s ignorance or likely bias, their dubious reasoning, or their over-emotionality. If people who worry about the free exchange of difficult ideas were worried only about incivility, it would be hard to disagree.

However, as we saw, the problem goes deeper than this. With the rise of new epistemologies (which began in the rarefied atmosphere of academia but filtered out into the wider culture) came the view that no one has a right to speak or even to have an opinion on a matter pertaining to the collective experience of a particular group, unless the opinion is authorized by the group itself. This raises the awkward question of whether the group in question – such as BAME people, women, or transgender people – should be trying to persuade outsiders to join their cause. That many outsiders do join in and become ‘allies’ is obvious from the Black Lives Matter demonstrations that are taking place as I write, and it has already been clear for decades. Large numbers of young white people are joining in and are being accepted by black demonstrators. Many are joining because they have become convinced, on being presented with arguments and evidence, that there continues to be a serious problem of racism in societies like Britain and the US. The arguments that persuade them are those that can appeal to anyone capable of rational thought, whatever their racial background. Whether or not we should agree with all the claims associated with the movement, apart from the obvious truths that racism exists and is bad, this is an example of reason at work, accessible to all.

People use reason and appeal to evidence to reach conclusions that others find badly misguided or even profoundly offensive. But the only rational solution to this is to point out the errors of reasoning and failures of perception, which may very well be caused by biases of some kind, and try to get them to acquire better beliefs. But this brings us right back to
the idea that belief in uninhibited enquiry and the dissemination of its fruits is itself dubious, or ‘right wing’.

**Is the Concern to Promote Reason and Free Speech Right Wing?**

The obvious response is to ask left wingers if they take their own beliefs to be true, and if so, whether they hope to persuade others of them. If the answer is yes to both questions, the next and obvious question is of how they propose to persuade others. Revolutionary leftists may not be interested in persuasion, but only in seizing power. But most leftists are not revolutionary. They seek to persuade others and even win democratic elections, though they might be irritated by having to discuss profound injustices in a calm tone, as if they were matters of idle curiosity.

But verbal persuasion must allow for dissent. Dogmatists of all stripes love talking. Sometimes they allow questions. But the real test of good faith is whether they allow follow-ups to their answers. Once there are follow-ups, discussion has got going and unexpected ideas may come up. Some of these ideas might be upsetting or seem outrageous. They may seem to be obviously the products of ignorance or prejudice. But these things are fully exposed only by patient explanation in ways that do not patronise or shame those proposing them.

To see how sensitive this could be, take the intense media attention given to the Black Lives Matter marches that were rekindled in June 2020. No decent person denies that it is appalling that a black man, George Floyd, was killed by a police officer who pressed his knee on his neck for about nine minutes, causing him to die of asphyxiation. Nor can anyone reasonably deny that the US has a long and dreadful history of racism directed against black people. It is absurd to think this is all history and that the problem went away after the civil rights movement and the end of formal segregation. But in a calm discursive atmosphere, questions will be raised about some surrounding issues. Someone might ask whether we can be sure that the killing of George Floyd was a racist killing, i.e. that he was killed because he was black.¹ To answer this, it would
be relevant to find out whether the white officer who killed him had also brutalized white people. Again, someone else might ask what exactly ‘structural racism’ is, and whether its existence is proved by inequalities in various outcomes for white and black people. It will also be asked whether black people can be racist, or whether white people can be victims of racism. These questions will be shocking to some and clearly reasonable to others, but in probing investigations in which people feel entirely free to speak their minds, they will certainly be raised. No doubt, such questions will be raised by some people who hate or feel threatened by the Black Lives Matter movement and wish it would go away. But the questions themselves require reasoned responses.

Such reasoned responses are often given. But for them to be given properly, there must be an atmosphere in which people are not deterred by a sense of taboo from following up the answers. Conservatives are sometimes pilloried because of their proneness to mutter remarks like: ‘Of course, you’re not allowed to say X or Y these days – it isn’t politically correct’, and the online readers’ comments sections of relatively conservative publications are full of remarks like this. But in a liberal democracy, people who react in this way have the same voting and participation rights as anyone else. If they feel they cannot speak because of real or imagined taboos, they will become resentful. The liberal moral atmosphere I advocate is necessary to defuse such resentment. If left wing opinions are true, they should be able to withstand rational scrutiny. We should invoke Mill again, especially his second main argument for free discussion, which I expounded in Chap. 1: that there is usually some truth on both sides of a dispute. The ‘populist’ idea that there is ‘truth in the crowd’ is also relevant here. When enough voices are heard, sensible ideas will emerge, even in an emotional atmosphere.

If the ideals of open discussion and objective enquiry are not right wing, how do we explain the widespread belief that they are? Much of the problem is that elements within the left – certainly not the left as such – have explicitly disavowed these ideals and been drawn to the worse varieties of identity politics and identity-based epistemologies, as discussed in the previous chapter. These movements have recently been denounced as ‘cultural Marxism’ by its most vocal critics, and there has been a vigorous campaign against them, spearheaded by recent cultural heroes (or
villains) like the psychologist Jordan Peterson and promoted by large numbers of their online supporters. But unfortunately, the term is a misnomer. Originally, ‘cultural Marxism’ referred to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, which was an attempt beginning in the 1920s and 30s to promote a version of Marxism that acknowledged the role of the culture and the self-image of people in a historical period as a factor in social change. But Marxism itself is not a relativist theory.

However, what critics like Peterson are really referring to is the association of ideas known under the umbrella term ‘postmodernism’, and they blame it for many of our cultural ills. Certainly, there are influential strands of postmodern relativism in intellectual left-wing movements, but there is no necessary connection between relativism and the left. Indeed, if one is a relativist and of the left, one will find it hard to say that left wing ideas are objectively any better than right wing ones, or that the reasoning the left uses to reach its conclusions is objectively more truth-conducive than the reasoning used by the right. But left wingers who denigrate traditionally liberal ideas of objective enquiry, science, free thought, and unfettered discussion often associate those ideals with the right. This is noticed by people on the right, who consequently think of themselves as the sole defenders of truth and reason.

There was never any need for this. Central to the disagreements between left and right are differences relating to (for example) the intrinsic value of equality; state redistribution of wealth; the right to inherit social advantages; market regulation, and the value of traditional ideals such as marriage, religion, authority and loyalty to the nation. It should be possible to discuss the merits of these ideals in a rational way.

Admittedly, this faces obstacles. As the psychologist Jonathan Haidt points out in his bestselling book *The Righteous Mind* (Haidt 2012: 131–49) political disagreements substantially correspond with different ‘moral taste buds’, such as those that detect unfairness and unkindness (vices especially detested by left-liberals and to a lesser extent by social conservatives) and those that detect disloyalty, disobedience and degradation (vices especially detested by social conservatives). Non-rational factors largely explain which moral taste buds are activated when we make moral judgements, and Haidt provocatively suggests that political views
are partly explained by personality traits that have substantially genetic causes. Naturally risk-averse people, for example, are more conservative. Nevertheless, there is still some room for rational disagreement; people can and do change their moral or political views, even if their personalities remain stable. In any case, even if argument does not change people’s minds as much as we might hope or think, such arguments can still be rationally assessed for their soundness.

Obstacles to Sound Judgements and Productive Conversations

As Haidt shows, psychology provides fascinating insights into people’s moral personalities. But there are also branches of philosophy, especially epistemology and informal logic, that can help us to see obstacles to making good judgements in a wide of areas, including ethics and politics. There are many irrational tendencies that obfuscate the current culture wars debates.

Many of the obstacles to forming sound judgements are succinctly described by Stephen Law, in his book *Believing Bullshit* (Law 2011). He tells how absurd beliefs are created or maintained by such strategies as appealing to mystery; confusing data that fit a hypothesis with data that confirm it; appealing to brute inner conviction (‘I Just Know!’); piling up anecdotes, and the manipulation of emotional vulnerabilities (‘Pressing Your Buttons’). Many of Law’s targets are beliefs associated with religion, but he sometimes uses examples from politics.

Anecdotal Evidence

Following Law’s ideas, but not necessarily using examples he comes up with, we can see how anecdotal evidence is often used to support social or political stances, creating a false impression that the anecdotes, even if true, give an accurate impression of the overall picture. For example, the fact that there are people who start from humble beginnings and later
become rich and successful is often used to ‘prove’ that people can become whatever they want, such as a CEO, a star athlete or even a country’s President, if they try hard enough and believe in themselves. The obvious flaw is that the anecdotes, even if true, tell us nothing about the many people who work hard and are full of self-belief, but do not achieve their dreams. Similarly, one might hope to show that there is a societal crisis – for example of misogyny – by accumulating numerous anecdotes about terrible things men do to women. Evidence like this is all too frequently regarded as ‘proof’ in socio-political debates. But while the conclusions drawn may be true, the reliance on anecdotal evidence alone is insufficient to make the case. Regarding the prevalence of misogyny, we would also need to know how common it is for men to behave well towards women, in situations when they might easily conduct themselves badly. Sometimes, in fact, data are collected by researchers with an unshakeable belief, based on ‘just knowing’ something, who then notice only things that fit their initial hypothesis. But evidence confirms a hypothesis not only if it fits it but also if alternative hypotheses can be ruled less likely than the favoured one. To show this is often a complex and painstaking process. If the research is agenda-led, conducted by researchers who expect or desire a particular headline-grabbing conclusion to be true, and especially if it is funded by grant-giving bodies with the same preconceptions, these careful processes can easily go by the board.

Conformity

Law’s chapter on ‘Pressing Your Buttons’ (Law 2011: 195–207) is largely about techniques of non-rational persuasion, including brainwashing, that are sometimes practised by religious or political cults. But the idea of ‘button-pressing’ can be applied to the forces of conformity that I have already briefly touched upon. Brainwashing is a rare and extreme example of inducing beliefs by non-rational means, and involves such pressures as isolation, repetition of slogans, rewarding ‘good’ responses and punishing ‘bad’ ones, imposing strenuous work, creating fear and uncertainty, and restricting information sources. But as Law notes, brainwashing and more everyday types of persuasion are on a continuum. If a
certain ideological movement acquires an enthusiastic following among your peers, you may be afraid to challenge it openly for fear of becoming unpopular or being regarded as ignorant or stupid. Moreover, as discussed earlier, you may also come to doubt your own perceptions and internalize the expected disapproval of others if you find yourself thinking out of line. This will be worse if you experience shame or guilt, bearing in mind what I discussed in Chap. 5 about how beliefs and attitudes can manifest moral stupidity, an amalgam of moral and epistemic vice. Of course, we should bear in mind what others think when we form opinions and if there are independent reasons for supposing that others have a mostly good judgement, that is a reason to consider revising your own views if you disagree with the others. (The extreme opposite of the vice of conformity is contrarianism, the disposition to disbelieve received opinion, and like conformity, it is an epistemic vice. In Aristotelian fashion, epistemic virtue, in respect of taking account of others’ judgements, is a mean, flanked on either side by the vices of conformity and contrarianism).

However, to take account of others’ views in an appropriate way, it is relevant to ask how they themselves acquired them. Are they too attentive to what others think, or not attentive enough? We should always remember that once the core assumptions of a traditional view are successfully challenged by a popular radical movement, it is likely that what was true, as well as what was false, in old assumptions will be dismissed or forgotten. Consequently, there is nothing inherently unlikely in large numbers of well-intentioned, educated, and reflective people having utterly absurd beliefs.

The liberal moral atmosphere I defend allows this to be recognised. People with unpopular perspectives can sometimes see obvious flaws in widely shared assumptions and if they feel ashamed to point this out because of a social ‘mood’ that dictates that ‘you can’t say or even think that!’, they will feel, and probably resent, the consequent need to self-censor. Moreover, important truths may be lost. Elements within the contemporary left have contributed to this oppressive moral atmosphere and in Chap. 4 I illustrated this with reference to taboos against denying that differences between men’s and women’s psychology can only have socially oppressive causes. Yet if this point is unwelcome, we should
recognise that many changes the left celebrates came about only because of the lifting of inhibitions about challenging assumptions and practices hitherto taken for granted.

Take, as an illustration, the concept of ‘microaggression’. Many on the right despise the term. For them it only signals the hypersensitivity of minorities to perfectly harmless phrases, questions, or jokes. But although some people are hypersensitive, the term also describes something that is real and a proper cause for concern. For years, members of ethnic minorities, often born in the country where they lived, were expected not to object to questions like ‘Where do you come from?’ Some, no doubt, did not feel especially offended, but others found the regularity of this talk demeaning, seeming to insinuate that they did not really belong in the country of their birth. And for years, they put up with it, not wanting a reputation for hypersensitivity if they complained. Nowadays there is far more awareness of this problem. But the important point is that complaints about microaggressions were made possible by the liberal moral atmosphere I am recommending. The forces of conformity forbade the voicing of these concerns, but the conformity was eventually shattered by non-conformists speaking their minds.

To Law’s account of non-rational forces that shape beliefs and can inhibit a liberal atmosphere, it is time to add some other common obstacles to truth-seeking and free discussion. These may not strictly amount to informal errors of logic or errors of scientific reasoning, but are often rhetorical moves designed to distract, shame, or induce us to lose perspective.

**Guilt by Association**

One such is the tactic of attempting to discredit a view by associating it with people or opinions that most people agree are disreputable. It is the creation of *guilt by association*. Suppose someone expresses an opinion, only for someone else indignantly to point out that a known racist also says this, or a known communist. Hearers are invited, if not quite explicitly, to draw the conclusion that the viewpoint in question is racist or communist, and therefore should be rejected without further discussion. Indeed, the person proposing it should feel ashamed.
Of course, the guilt by association move is often logically no better than the following textbook fallacy: ‘All dogs have tails, all cats have tails, therefore all dogs are cats.’\textsuperscript{2} The ridiculous conclusion makes it easy to see the fallacy: just because all dogs and all cats have something in common (and obviously, they have many things in common) it does not follow that there are no differences. For example, dogs bark but cats do not. Yet the tactic is frequently used to obfuscate discussions and smear opponents. When Jeremy Corbyn was Leader of the UK Labour Party, from 2015 to 2020, it was often alleged that he was a Marxist, and therefore obviously dangerous. People were alarmed at the prospect of a Marxist Prime Minister of a liberal democracy. I do not judge here whether Corbyn was either a Marxist or dangerous, but only make the point that if he shared some beliefs with Marxists, that did not \textit{per se} make him a Marxist. Perhaps there was enough similarity between his views and the core doctrines of Marxism for the allegation to be defensible. But it was designed to close off discussion of whether there were also significant dissimilarities – something that certainly should have been addressed.

Sometimes an issue is so sensitive or susceptible to misinterpretation that people avoid discussing it altogether, even if they privately admit uncertainty about it. Institutions have been driven to panic by the thought that their researchers are pursuing questions that might lead to conclusions that could seem to legitimate some obvious evil. In late 2018, a young social scientist, Noah Carl, was summarily dismissed, soon after a petition against him, from a prestigious research post at St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge. He had said that the question of whether average differences in cognitive abilities between different population groups could be partly caused by genes, should be discussible (Quillette Magazine, May 28\textsuperscript{th}, 2019). Those petitioning for his dismissal clearly thought that Carl was entertaining the possibility that racism might be scientifically justifiable; after all, there is a long history of racists appealing to (supposed) science to justify their racist ideas. But the fallacy in the thinking should be clear. Just because someone believes (or regards as legitimately discussible) that genes might have a role in explaining these small differences (assuming they exist), and just because racists also believe this, it does not follow that someone who holds this view is a racist. Carl said nothing that implies that discrimination on racial grounds is
justified in any circumstances. In fact, something that amounts to this very point was succinctly stated by Peter Singer – hardly a racist or of the political right – more than forty years ago (Singer 1979: 23–8). Nor did Carl say, or imply, that cognitive ability has any relevance to a person’s worth. His abrupt dismissal was clearly unjust. It was the cowardly, dishonest appeasement of petitioners, most of whom were not experts in Carl’s field, based on a highly implausible case against him.

**Ideological Hypervigilance**

A liberal atmosphere in which ideas may be pursued without fear of shaming is incompatible with what I call ideological hypervigilance. People will often remain silent rather than voice questions and opinions, or use language, that might be seized upon as evidence of some serious flaw of thinking or character.

Whether a reaction is hypervigilant, rather than properly vigilant, is a moot question. Objections to certain terms that are nowadays commonly, and rightly, regarded as unjustly discriminatory would have been thought hypervigilant two or three decades ago. For example, in polite society nowadays we rarely see references to ‘spastics,’ ‘the mentally subnormal,’ or ‘illegitimate children.’ Certain ways of referring to people – especially women and minorities – were deemed to, and often genuinely did, reveal a contemptuous attitude towards them, and sometimes functioned to justify disrespectful treatment. Nevertheless, whether a form of words is denigrating or reasonable can be hard to tell. The hypervigilance shows itself in the unquestioning assumption that the words are harmful and leads to endless demands for corrections which can make it impossible to say what needs to be said. It also holds up the flow of discussion, redirecting it into unproductive tributaries that go nowhere, and from which there is no way back, since its original subject has been forgotten.

The problem is one of combining a liberal atmosphere with the discouragement of language or ideas which are rightly found offensive or harmful. Well-meaning people might use the terms in question, without realising that they cause offence. It may take vigilant individuals to challenge such terms. When their objections persuade enough other people,
the language in question slowly disappears by consensus. The problem of hypervigilance emerges when the vigilantes comes to see their own interpretations as unquestionable. Critics may regard the new terminology as euphemistic and unable to alter or cover up an underlying reality that needs to be dealt with. To determine whether the abolition of old terms would only lead to their replacement by euphemisms (which are unlikely to solve real problems) is obviously difficult. But problems require facing up to reality. When ideological hypervigilance takes over, the chances of solving these problems diminishes.

The Normalisation of Hyperbole

An often-noted feature of the culture wars is Manicheanism, or as Lukianoff and Haidt (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018) diagnose it, the belief that the world is divided into good people and bad people (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018: 53–77). I have discussed this problem in Chap. 5. But it is associated with another problem, which I call the normalisation of hyperbole. People who hold certain views are regarded as evil rather than ordinarily flawed. Social problems are not just problems, but disasters. Shock-jock radio presenters and tabloid journalists trade in hyperbole – that is their job. But talk of ‘epidemics’ of such things as mental illness, sexism, or ‘cultural Marxists’ dominating universities, is increasingly common and used by commentators of many different persuasions. Many people find it hard to admit that there are degrees of good and evil, perhaps because it is platitudinous to do so. It is also hard for many to accept that genuine evils such as racism come in degrees – that only a few people are virulently racist, and more people mildly so.

However, the admission that evils come in degrees is easily misinterpreted as a denial of the evil’s existence or seriousness. Someone who admits that there is a societal problem of sexism, but thinks society is only mildly sexist, is readily interpreted as saying that sexism is not a problem anyone should worry about. There might, of course, be a conversational implicature to this effect, as when we are told ‘not to worry too much’ about some problem. But a grasp of reality requires us to see both good and evil as coming in degrees, and more importantly, people’s
virtues and vices in the same way. It may take exaggeration to spur people to action. But truth is often less dramatic than it is portrayed as being. A Manichean mentality may be an effective force for social change, but it is also a force for social division. Radicals and conservatives, of course, will differ over whether divisiveness is really a problem. I think it is, especially bearing in mind the hounding of individuals for their ideological stances that I discussed in Chap. 5.

Conclusion: A Spiritual Malaise

I conclude with a mere suggestion, which is that many aspects of the culture wars that I have discussed – the attempts to curb the expression of considered opinion, the sceptical attitudes to truth and objectivity and the rise of what Lukianoff and Haidt call ‘common enemy identity politics’ (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018: 62–77) are, in a way, spiritual malaises. By ‘spiritual’ is not meant anything implying the truth of traditional religious doctrines, though religion and spirituality are natural allies. Spirituality in a broader sense concerns love, gratitude, generosity of spirit, forgiveness, humility, and mercy. It tolerates fallibility and uncertainty and accepts the unavoidable fragility of the human endeavour. Sometimes it is contrasted with reason, but this is a mistake. Truth is the goal of reason, and the pursuit of truth, combined with scepticism about any claim to have found it for certain, is a moral necessity.

One of the most helpful tools in the quest is the Socratic method of question and answer, the patient putting forward of propositions and then subjecting them to counterarguments, dealing with the counterarguments by seeing whether refined versions of the original propositions can survive. It would be an excellent thing if schools and universities made the Socratic method integral to their teaching methods. In this way, the emotional reactions generated by certain ideas and words, generated by what Daniel Kahnemann (Kahnemann 2011) calls ‘fast thinking’ could be tempered by slow and patient thinking, which allows the emergence of difficult and counterintuitive conclusions. Achieving this requires us to play a long game, and we are often deterred from admitting we have been wrong, because we suspect that our ideological opponents
will not do likewise and forgive us our mistakes. But encouraging people to think of themselves as partaking of a shared humanity, with a shared capacity for virtue and reflection, might in time do some good.

Post-COVID-19

When the first draft of this book was well advanced, most of the world was struck by the unexpected disaster of the COVID-19 coronavirus. I wondered whether the concerns I was addressing were inconsequential, whether the culture wars, arguments about Brexit, identity politics and tribalism would be forgotten, or dimly remembered as the decadent prelude to a catastrophe. The anti-racism protests occasioned by the killing of George Floyd seem to give the lie to that. But early in the pandemic, there was much celebration of how we were all ‘coming together’, with individuals taking responsibility for others with acts of kindness. A terrible number of people are still dying or suffering bereavement due to the pandemic, tragedies they could not possibly have predicted only a few weeks previously. When the world recovers, which will be a slow and painful process, old enmities will probably reignite. But it is only to be hoped that our collective confrontation with a natural disaster will leave a memory of the cooperation that emerged and bequeath a lesson for the future.

Notes

1. In view of America’s long history of racism, I have little doubt that the police officer’s treatment of George Floyd was motivated by racism. But an exhaustive enquiry could raise the question.
2. Pedants will point out that Manx cats do not have tails. But let that pass.
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