

Sir

Ed Miliband is again facing personal attacks for his political victory over his brother, David. His opponents accuse him of moral deficits: mendacity, disloyalty and stab-in-the-back ruthlessness.

I have another view: that democratic debate and process must be free from any personally seductive or coercive influence. Ideas must be offered, evaluated and contested completely independently of all personal factors. The more we allow exceptions – often framed as 'loyalty' - the greater our nepotism and corruption. A fraternal political battle may be confusing and disturbing to our emotions and sense of order, but it is also a good example of essential, raw and naked democracy. Viewers likely to be upset should look away now.

This principle is very widely applicable. For example, working as a doctor in the NHS, I see daily how imperatives for 'loyalty' to employing Trusts or Commissioning Groups often subverts individual conscience and integrity of practice. Mid-Staffs is just one example of what can then happen. There are innumerable others.

Real democracy and dialogue is often messy and uncomfortable. Longer term, their exclusion is far worse.

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