

# Disagreement

by Bill Herbst

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Someone disagrees with you.

I repeat: **someone** disagrees with **you**.

For the sake of clarity, I don't mean anyone **in particular**, nor do I mean **about anything** in particular. This is an altogether general statement about reality and human beings. By suggesting that someone disagrees with you, I mean that if we take the entire kit-'n-kaboodle of everything you espouse or believe, we can find some human being who disagrees with each opinion or belief. It doesn't matter if you have a mountain of evidence and a ton of facts to support your opinion, nor how compelling or convincing your arguments may be for your beliefs. Someone will still disagree. And we can find enough of those disagreeing humans to start a potentially unpleasant and possibly violent argument about every opinion or belief you hold. We won't find one single belief, assumption, or perception that is held in common by **all** human beings. Amazing, isn't it?

Whatever you hold to be true and sacred, someone else on this planet holds to be not merely false but also profane. What is proven beyond a doubt for one person is just an addle-brained illusion for another person. Serious for one is silly for another. Brilliant for one is just plain stupid for another.

When I was younger (and more ignorant than I am today, if such is possible), I thought that differences in belief, opinion, or perception might be chalked up to semantics and language, at least to some extent. I hoped that one could learn a non-confrontational style of interacting, so as not to force the other person into a defensive role as adversary, and thus if not insure peace and tranquility at least move the social bar a little in that direction. And, in fact, mastering semantics, adaptive language, and maintaining an interactive stance of trust and empathy does work to produce more agreement — but only if the person with whom you are interacting has studied the same techniques and is willing to play by the same rules. (It took me almost 30 years to figure out that one.)

This is roughly the equivalent of preventing a bar fight with an inebriated patron after said drunk has made his bellicose intentions toward you quite clear. You might as well get in one good punch and then run the hell away, because no

diplomatic technique of negotiation ever invented is going to dissuade your adversary from his broken-bottles-and-fisticuffs wishes.

Of course, certain individuals who occupy important role niches in our lives might be less inclined to disagree. Best friends and lovers come to mind immediately. But while best friends and lovers might be statistically more agreeable, such is not always that case. I have known friend or lover pairs (and, in my earlier life, actually had both) who were downright combative in their perpetual disagreement. With best friends, constant disagreement reflects a kind of fraternal rough-house play that results too often in the metaphorical bloody nose or some other form of at least slightly injurious emotional abuse. And with lovers, well, who among us has not experienced that strangely violent argumentativeness that is the perverse spice of sexual passion? The term used for temporary release of such pent-up hostility is "make-up sex."

And, on the other, far side of the affection scale, even our worst enemy and most hated family relation is likely to agree with us from time to time, even if only in the rarest and most surprising of circumstances.

Disagreements are not limited to interaction. Not only do others disagree with us, but we often disagree with ourselves. At least I do. Much of what I like or believe in is contentious even inside myself, challenged by different perspectives or conflicting points of view. No sooner do I think to myself, "I like this or believe in that," than my mind cranks out, "But on the other hand..." Good and bad, OK and not so hot — endlessly dancing around each other. What would it be like to absolutely believe in something with no reservations and complete faith? That must be very comforting, even if it means living in a fantasy world. But then, I suppose that's exactly where many human beings live — Republicans, religious fundamentalists, supporters of President Trump. It's all black and white for them, with no uncertainty or doubt. Or so it appears from where I'm sitting.

OK, so what's the point here? Is this just a puff piece, a bit of vaudeville? Well, sure it is. At one level, that's all it is: A throwaway piece of fluff for another week's commentary.

At another level, it's the revelation of a private technique for keeping myself moderately sane. See, the world routinely gets me down. Really hard. Why? Because this world of human-caused suffering, madness, and violence isn't the world I'd like it to be. For an endless number of reasons, and in seemingly infinite ways, the world is bigger and messier and more awful than I wish it were, with disagreements between people and the impossibility of simple truths being merely the most obvious, routine examples. Not spectacular examples, like nuclear war or the death of the oceans or brutal societies where the rich steal from the poor (which are the rule, not the exception), but just ordinary, banal, day-to-day insults that everyone suffers.

And when the pain overwhelms the beauty of this crazy world for me, I sometimes think of the parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant, or my study of astrological archetypes, which don't care at all about my longing for a simpler, easier, more pleasant reality. That helps a little bit in reminding me to straighten up, dry my tears, let go of my angst, put down my despair, and maybe even crack a wry smile at reality — because of everything and also in spite of everything.

My time here will be short (as will yours), and I remind myself frequently to let go of disagreements as quickly as possible, as well as the discontent and aggravation that accompanies them. I succeed in those efforts only partially, but sometimes that's all I can do, and it has to be enough.