

Civil Conversation in an Angry Age

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My Story: From Fundamentalist to Progressive

- A journey of (faith and) reason
- Conversations along the way
 - Family and friends
 - Successes and failures
- Beyond civil: meaningful, productive, and useful conversations about the big three
- To converse or not to converse—that is the question

Civility: Introduction

- Civility defined
 - “Formal politeness and courtesy in behavior or speech”
(Oxford Dictionary)
 - “Treating others with appropriate courtesy and respect”
(Edward Langerak)
 - From Latin *civilis* “relating to citizens”

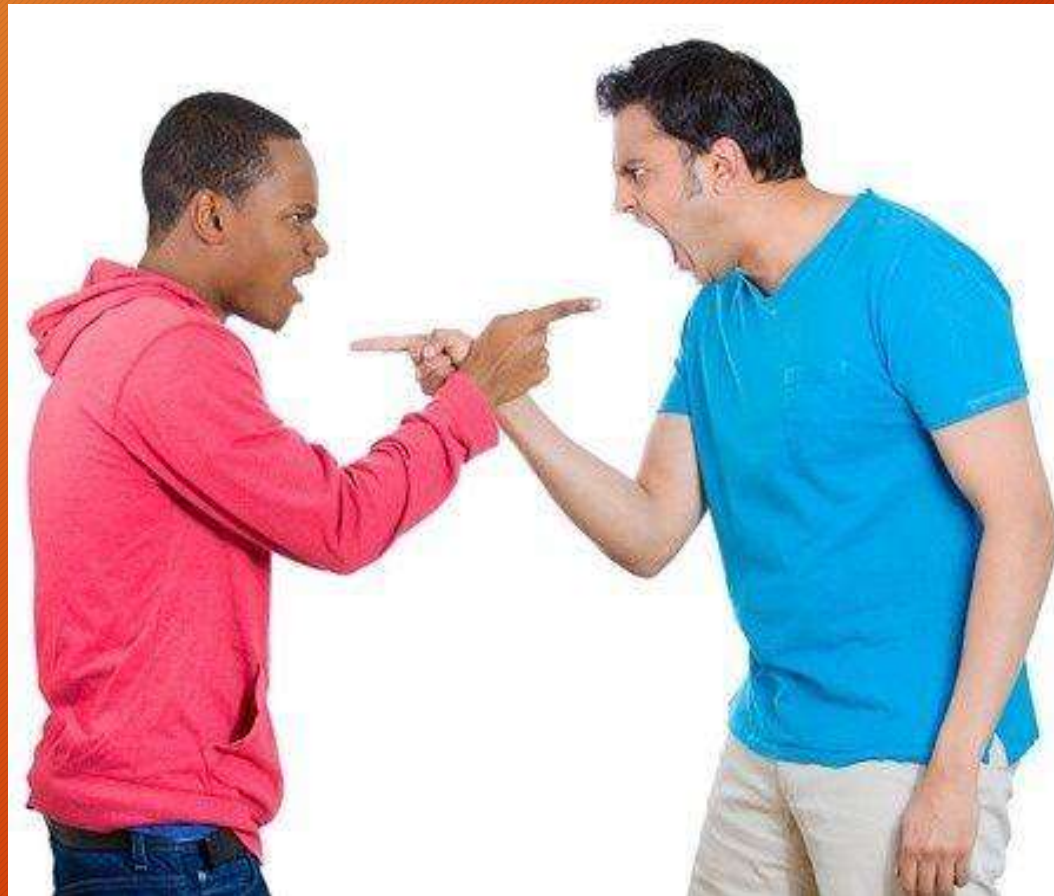
Disagreement over Truth Claims

- Truth as that which corresponds to reality
- Reality as that which existed or happened in the past, or exists or is happening in the present
- We all have our own beliefs about truth, but not our own truth

Three Types of Truth Claims

- Semantic: the meanings of words and the things that they signify
- Empirical: sense-based/scientific
- Normative: value-based (ethics, aesthetics, religion, politics, economics, etc.)

Causes of Incivility (mostly subconscious)



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- Failure to recognize my own limitations
(intelligence, knowledge, and experience)
- Bias: *We want* our own beliefs to be true and right
- Identity: I don't just *believe*—I am!
- The incivility of the other
- Emotion...but why?
Ideas create the world
- Affirmation: I want it from you. Too much!
- Closed-mindedness: conviction and open-mindedness

Ingredients in the Recipe of Civility (Langerak/DS)



Ingredients in the Recipe of Civility (Revision of Langerak)

- Virtue (displaying character, especially humility, self-control, forbearance, and courage)
- Commonality (recognizing the humanness of the other and understanding the process of belief formation)
- Intentionality (focusing on civility before, during, and after the dialogue)
- Communication (speaking AND listening, disagreeing AND agreeing/affirming)

Conclusion

- To converse or not to converse? That is the question.
 - Picking our conversation partners carefully
(His or her tolerance level, my tolerance level, my priorities)
 - Purpose: debate, dialogue, or other?
 - Appetizer before the full meal
- Those outside the boundaries of reasonableness
 - Exclusion from serious discourse (e.g. Holocaust deniers)
 - Forced conformity (e.g. slave owners)
- Final question: Is incivility ever appropriate?