

Preface – Please Try to Not Be a Bitch

I'm going to explain the point of this title, starting with a definition of "bitch".

From The Myriam-Webster Dictionary:

1: the female of the dog or some other carnivorous mammals

2a often offensive: a lewd or immoral woman **2b often offensive :** a malicious, spiteful, or overbearing woman —sometimes used as a generalized term of abuse

3: something that is extremely difficult, objectionable, or unpleasant

4: COMPLAINT

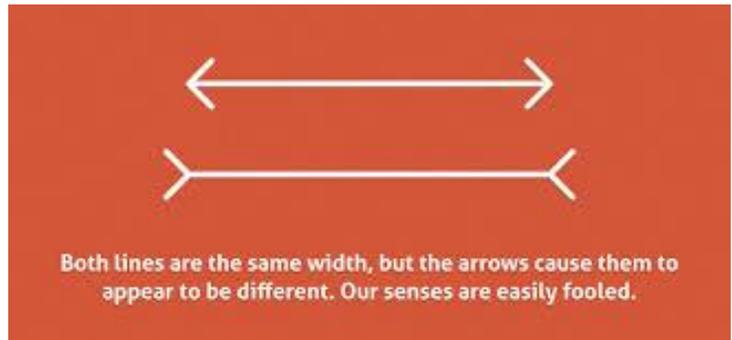
I would not use the word "bitch" to describe a female human. Not under any circumstances, ever! However, I'm starting to be open to describing some men that way. One thing that I'm convinced of, however, is that my dog Daisy is a bitch, in more ways than one.

Daisy is extremely friendly and playful with dogs and people whom she recognizes, but she barks at those who are unfamiliar. She doesn't stray far from me (or our family and friends) and is constantly on the lookout for anyone new. Heck, even *anything* new. I have a video of her barking at a 3-foot high pile of rocks that wasn't there the day before. It's exactly as if she is protecting the members of her tribe against whatever she recognizes to be a potential threat, which could be anything unrecognizable to her. This makes her a good watchdog. However, there continue to be many instances where she barks at someone, usually a stranger, whom I believe to not be an actual threat. This is annoying, especially when I'm trying to exchange pleasantries with someone new, maybe someone who is just going for a nice walk in the woods, and she has to bark at them! Naturally, this really scares some people, they go into-fight-or-flight mode, and who can blame them? "She's not good at small talk" I try to joke, but there's often no way to manage a cordial exchange with a stranger after you've yelled at them, which is an outright aggressive act tantamount to labeling them "the enemy" or "evil".

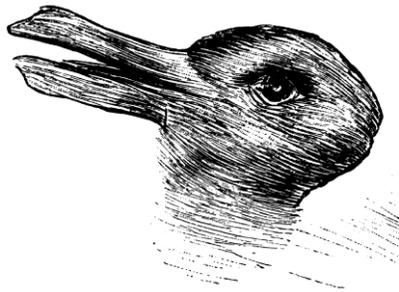
Daisy's perception is simply wrong. The unfamiliar person or thing is not a threat. She doesn't need to launch into road rage, but hey, she's just a dog, and her brain is small. On the other hand, when humans make similar mistakes, verbally attacking unfamiliar people or unfamiliar ideas (often escalating in full-fledged conflict, which seems to be occurring a lot lately) I'm less likely to accept the "small brain" excuse. Big brains give humans much more power, but also more opportunities for mistakes; because we don't just make mistakes of perception, but also of conception and confirmation. Let me explain.

Mistakes of perception.

It can be argued (and indeed has been) that it is very difficult, maybe impossible, to see things “as they actually are”. None of our senses cannot be trusted as “perfect”, since they function to perform tasks required to enhance our survival fitness, not necessarily for ALL tasks that we can imagine. This is what makes illusion possible. Brain researchers and good magicians understand this very well.



Furthermore, the way our senses operate at a strictly biological level varies from person to person, which we normally don't notice, until we are presented with an object that is near a critical boundary that reveals these differences, as in the famous dress example. This can be upsetting, as evidenced by how many people are willing to verbally attack others who perceive things differently.

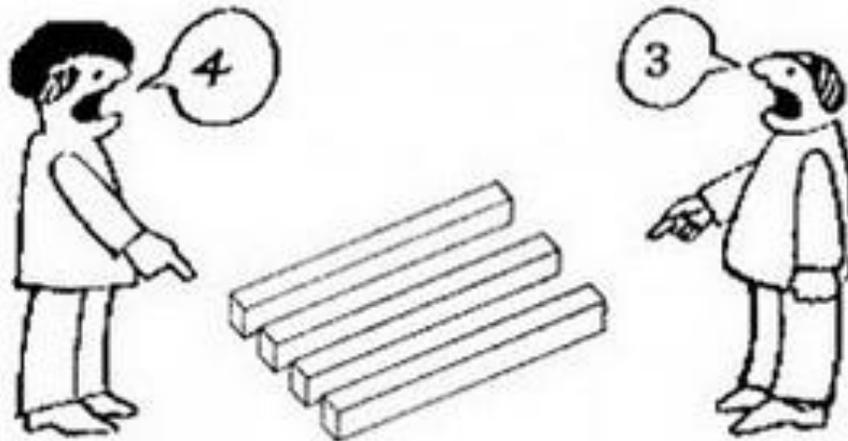


To take matters a step further, different people very often view the same phenomenon differently, depending on a multitude of factors, some of which we do not fully understand. Psychologists and philosophers, like Ludwig Wittgenstein (who made the rabbit-duck drawing famous in 1882), have been studying this effect for centuries, and still haven't explained it to everyone's satisfaction.

Refusing to recognize, accept, tolerate, and amiably discuss such differences is just one big mistake that can lead to conflict very early on in the perception process.

Hypothetically, if we could eliminate biological differences, would this prevent conflict? No, because we can still perceive things from different physical angles or perspectives.

These men below are looking at the same thing, but don't agree over what they see, because they have different perspectives. It doesn't help that they are looking at something confusing, maybe complex. Look at this closely. The lines are drawn in such a way that it is not obvious at first glance what's going on, even to the neutral observer (you, the reader, who can see both sides equally). Nonetheless, it can be seen with a little patience and effort.



Philosophical Note: An Empiricist might say something like this: "There is an objective universe out there and we can determine what is true by inventorying the data (post priori) coming through our senses." The reason Empiricism cannot resolve conflict is that we frequently fail to agree on what this data actually is. This is because our sensory biological mechanisms, in addition to our points-of-view, can vary from person to person. In fact, even physicists have been increasingly appreciating over the last 150 years the fact that it is not possible to separate the observer from the observed; that we actually do not have conscious access to an objective world "out there".

The ability to gracefully and truthfully resolve disagreements over perception is a fundamental characteristic of masculinity. We have no chance of doing this if we do not dedicate ourselves to making observations as objectively as humanly possible, prior to cloaking them in interpretation, and then articulating these observations honestly to others.

In order to have a conversation, we must accept the first truth on which we can all agree: that there can indeed be two different perspectives (including those arising from biological differences) on the same observed phenomenon. Masculinity values the truth, and constantly works hard to discover it. However, humans also crave certainty*, and are willing to trade the difficult/confusing truth for the certainty that comes from believing anything, even if it's a falsehood. But lying is bad, right? If I pursue truth, I do my best to see different perspectives, and this is best accomplished by focusing on observations independent of motives, and sharing as much information as possible. Furthermore, this sharing is best done face-to-face where the maximum amount of information, not just that of which we are conscious, can be sensed and communicated (as opposed to virtual interaction, like texting, snapchat, Whatsup, etc) *See Appendix 1: The Psychology of Original Sin



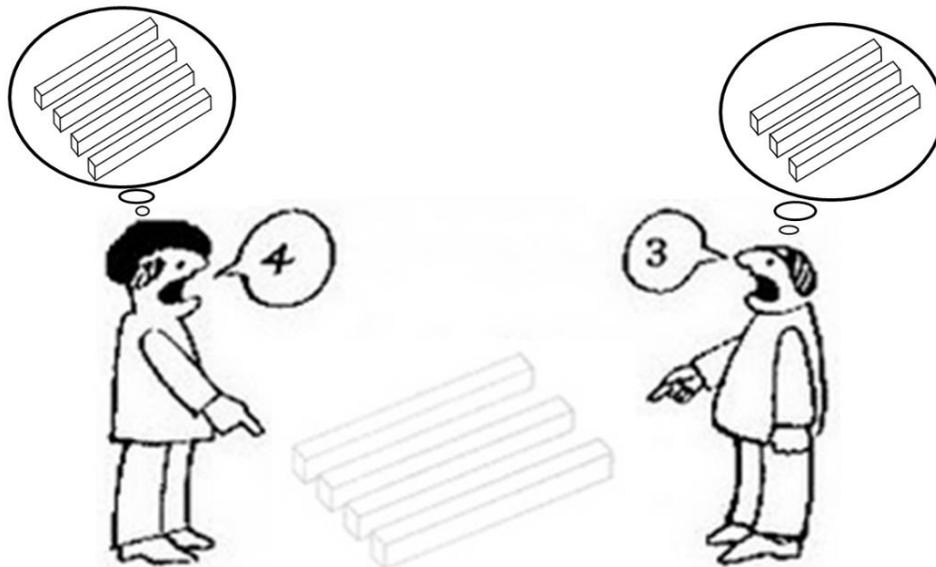
Note: This “3 versus 4” cartoon is intended as a model, not as an example. It portrays a difference in physical vantage point that causes a difference in perception, but going forward I will use it as a metaphor for any perceived, conceived, and/or confirmed difference, as a tool for describing the phenomenon of conflict in general.

Any of a variety of variables among our fellow humans can cause conflict. Whether we label these variables biological (nature), cultural (nurture), or psychological, or some combination, can be important distinctions while we negotiate “what to do about it”, but it does not matter at the moment for the purpose of acknowledging that these variables do indeed exist.

To the extent that modern psychologists are correct, under the category of “biological differences” we can add inborn personality differences. This may or may not come into play if we’re talking about the operation of our senses themselves, but personality traits may influence how we perceive things, and certainly how we interpret or conceive things. As a group, all of these differences lead quickly and perilously to what we can then be called “mistakes of conception”.

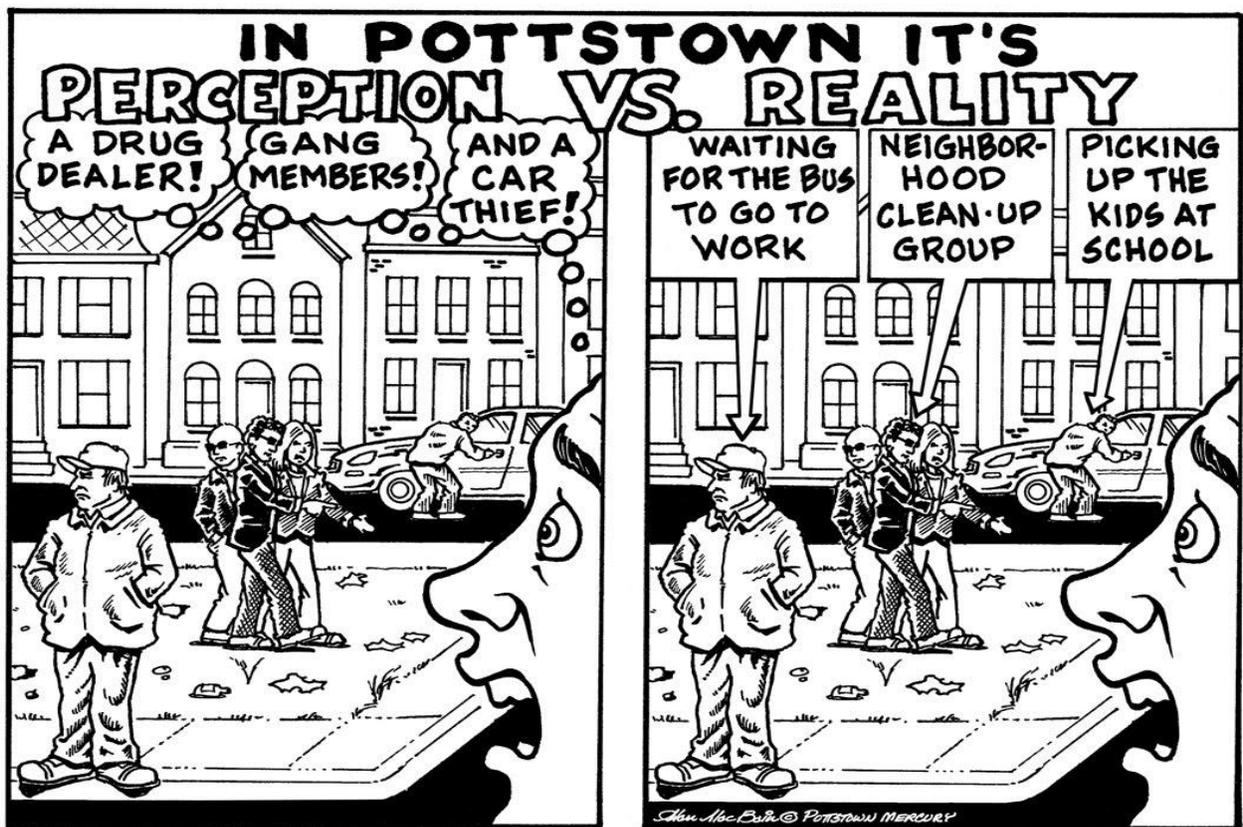
Mistakes of Conception

It is easy for the reader of these words, the neutral observer, to see the problem - that each man sees it only what he perceives, and does not see the entire picture. The drive for certainty in “my side”, this fleeing from the confusion of objective neutrality, is enabled and amplified by the fact that we are now living in a primarily virtual manmade environment, in which sensory acuity is not substantially rewarded or valued. Even though we cannot rely on our purely sensory observations in the first place, they fade, and we argue over our interpretations, which are highly subjective.



Now we are arguing over *not* what's coming through our senses, but over concepts - what we *think* is coming through our senses...over non-sense, literally. When we are "certain" that we our concepts are "correct", the ancient pleasure circuits in our brains get activated, which exactly like a drug, can be addictive. When someone challenges the "certain correctness" of our concepts, the ancient predatory detection circuits in our brains get activated. The fight-or-flight response kicks in, and we are now defending our concepts as if our physical selves are being attacked, and we get further attached to what we're "thinking" and less likely to see the truth that there are indeed at least two perspectives on a fairly complex thing.

Another great contributor to mistaken conception is the fact that what we conceive is largely a function of what we *want and/or expect* to conceive; which is unconsciously determined by subjective influences - our particular socialization and conditioning – giving us different points-of-view which tend to be the source of yet more disagreement.



Philosophical Note: A Rationalist would say something like this: "We can determine what is true by applying universal natural laws (a priori) - like reason and logic - to our perceived phenomenon and extract what makes sense and discard what does not." The reason Rationalism cannot resolve conflict is that it can do so only to the degree that humans can be rational, logical, and objective. This is hard, not only because, again, different people have differences in biology and points-of-view; but they also have different personalities, backgrounds, motives, agendas, and desires. Furthermore, as psychologists have been increasingly appreciating over the last 150 years, these differences (biases) are mostly unconscious.

As our arguments get more sophisticated, and as we convince ourselves of their moral superiority, we take pride in our concepts, and they become “true” to us. In this strange way, we are cursed by our own good intentions and intelligence, and our unconscious cravings for certainty.

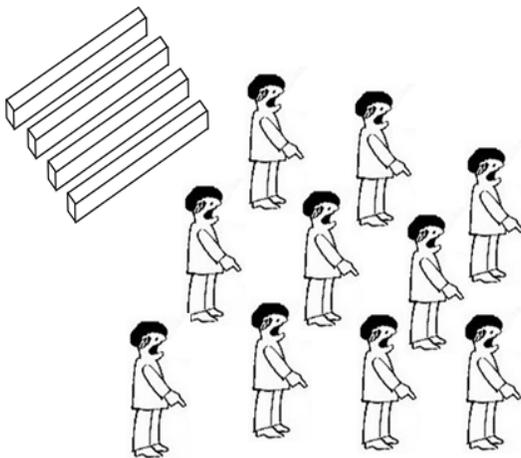
Here’s the good news: At this point of the disagreement, we are in a “safe space”, in our minds. We can have a conversation over items that exist in our minds and are communicated with words and without fists, knives, or guns. There is not yet a physically real threat that is preventing us from playing out your concepts versus my concepts, rationally discussing the pros and cons of both positions, and quite peacefully reaching some type of resolution.

Mistakes of Confirmation

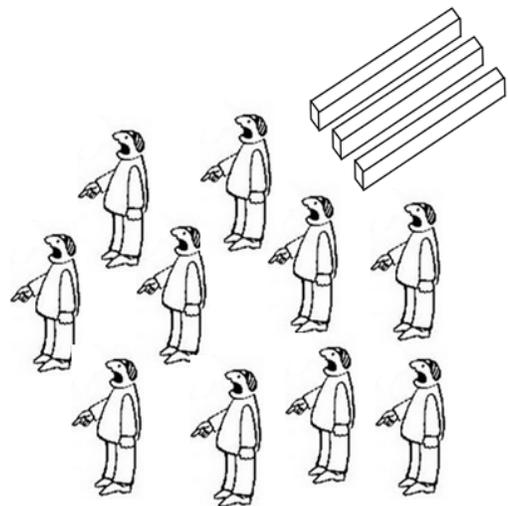
It is easy for the reader of these words, the neutral observer, to see the problem - that each man perceives differently, gets attached to what he conceives of his perceptions; and refuses to see the entire picture. At this point, in order to prevent the escalation, it would behoove these men to realize that they are making mistakes of perception and conception, in order to prevent the escalation of conflict; but this doesn’t often happen. Peace doesn’t come easy.

Instead, we tend to double-down. We seek out information that validates and builds our position, which has never been easier thanks to the internet and other technosocial media. We join together with others who “think” the same way, those people who have the same concepts, while encouraging, praising, and rewarding our teammates – all of which only serves to confirm our self-righteous moral certainty. This banding together exposes us to practically irresistible confirmation biases. What started out as partial (hence flawed) perceptions have become concepts, then beliefs, then ideologies over which we feel morally justified in our willingness to fight. It quickly becomes the good guys versus the bad guys.

We know that the answer is “4”, and we can explain it to you. If you do not agree with “4”, then you must be either ignorant or evil.



We know that the answer is “3”, and we can explain it to you. If you do not agree with “3”, then you must be either ignorant or evil.



Being with the good guys trigger pleasure circuitry, and encountering the bad guys trigger predator detection circuitry. But the bad guys are not actual predators. It's all an unconscious mistake, that can be fixed by consciously halting it earlier in the process, at the stage of perception or conception. Sports is a great example. It feels good to be a contributing member of a team that has a particular goal, in particular to defeat an opponent. Practically nothing compares to the unity, comradery, and bonding that one feels when belonging to a team, nor to the exhilaration of having won or the agony of having lost. Even if only a spectator, I choose and identify with one team over another – experiencing the same joy of victory and pain of defeat, often saying “we won” or “we lost” when the team I root for wins or loses. We have a very deep, ancient, unconscious affinity for belonging to a tribe whose purpose is twofold: to band together and to destroy an enemy. But why?

First of all, life is hard, and we must do something that we feel is worthwhile, something that makes the suffering worth it, preferably something that we are convinced is good; otherwise we suffer even more. We can make goals for ourselves, and we can join a group that already espouses a righteous cause, which is certainly easier than going alone for goodness sake.

Secondly, man is a social animal and evolved in association with families and tribes.....and enemies as well. We are intensely driven to join with others who agree with us, not only to increase our feelings of righteousness and certainty, but also to satisfy our hunger for belonging to a group. Belonging to a tribe is not a simple preference, but an evolutionary adaptation which is necessary for survival. The group must maintain boundaries for protection against external threats, mainly the violence and germs of other tribes. However, in the modern world, these threats are no longer physically real threats, but virtual and abstract threats. In the distant past, humans would often be killed or infected. Today, we react in fight-or-flight mode to concepts as if they are actual viruses that can physically harm us. This, again, is the essential mistake of conception.

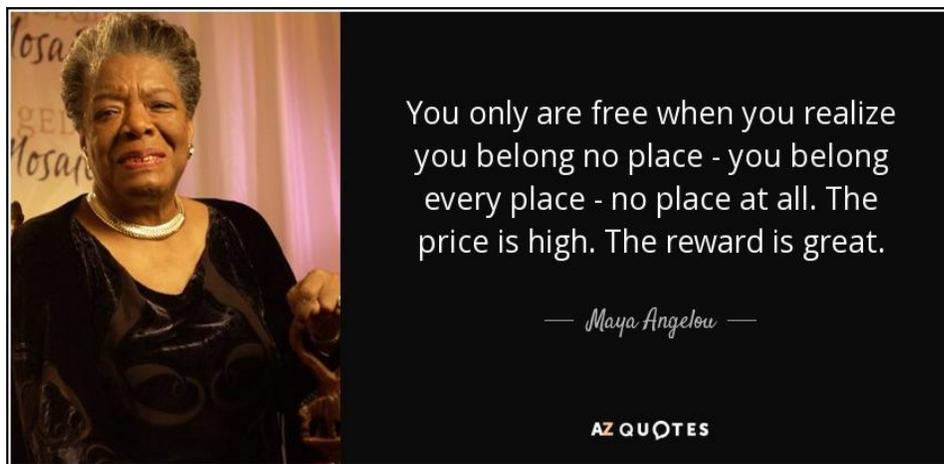
We tend to love those on our team and fear or even hate those we do not know or those we believe to be the enemy. In fact, mere suspicion is sufficient for our rush to label and destroy. Just being neutral is often tantamount to being seen as the enemy. Since this tribal defensiveness is natural and unconscious, but at the same time quite dangerous (we could be wrong about our observations and/or wrong about our opponents' thinking, yet we are fighting), it is very hard to resist the urge to vilify and attack anyone who has not shown allegiance to our team. If they have not agreed with us, and done so immediately, we automatically ascribe to characteristics (they believe differently because they're ignorant, or worse, evil) to them that may not be true, but that doesn't matter. It's critical for the righteousness and cohesion of our tribe that we unify against an enemy. Truth is secondary.

You, the reader/observer who can see that the conflict is rooted in a misperception by both sides as well as a desire to belong, also become the enemy simply by virtue of your neutrality. Don't believe it? Let's look at a familiar example: What if one side is Democrat and the other is Republican. If you are the rare neutral non-conformist who says “It is merely a misperception by both,” what happens? The more you broadcast your neutrality, the more you will be attacked. Try it.

Rodney King said, "Can't we all just get along?" With an estimated IQ of only about 75, technically mentally retarded, he was able to ask the most important question of all. The observation that this conflict is not necessary has nothing to do with intelligence.

It may be the case that it is better to see "4" than "3", or vice versa, provided that we can agree on what "better" means. It depends on what you want. For example, suppose that "better" means "what's best for our physical health" and we are arguing over whether eating animal fat is good or bad for you. Or, "better" means "what is best for the safety of American citizens" or "what is best for the disadvantaged from war-torn countries", and we are arguing over a ban on immigrants. One point-of-view may be better than the other, but we will never find out, because we welcome no sincere comparison. Neither side is listening to the other. Both sides are digging their heels in and insisting that the other side see it from their point-of-view, while both are hurling insults ("you're ignorant, or maybe evil") over the wall, like hand grenades.

I suggest not joining a group founded on abstract ideology if any of its members are willing to commit violent acts. Just belonging to such a group inadvertently gives members license to behave hatefully and raises the likelihood that unnecessary destruction will ensue. There are other things we can do before making this mistake of rushing to belong.



What can we do?

Simple: Love your enemy.

Love your enemy. Love your shadow. Love, no matter what. In his sermon "Loving Your Enemies", Martin Luther King Jr. articulated it perfectly, in my opinion. He borrowed from the Greek language to describe the three basic forms of love:

- *Eros*, or aesthetic love, a deep yearning for another (which has come to mean infatuation, or romantic love).
- *Philia*, which is friendship. On this level you love because you are loved. It's a reciprocal love. You love the people that you like.

- *Agape*, which is understanding and redemptive goodwill for all humans. Agape seeks nothing in return. It is genuine brotherly and sisterly love. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart, and what Jesus meant when he said, “Love your enemies”.

It is unreasonable to feel eros or philio for your enemy, but feeling agape is different. In my estimation, the way to love your enemy is to dedicate yourself to the difficult task of understanding his point of view, to “walk in his shoes”. Don’t worry, it’s all abstract, so no harm can possibly result – at least for the short term. We are still in the symbolic “safe space” of concepts and words.

Saying “I understand, but...” does not bring down the wall. In order to convince your opponent that you truly understand, your opponent must be listening to you, and he won’t listen unless you’ve *proven*, not merely stated, that you understand. This can be accomplished by temporarily suspending your urge to explain your own side, by trying to see it from your opponent’s side, and by *demonstrating* that you understand by explaining his point-of-view **at least as well as your opponent can**.

Once this is done, he will believe you, he will be willing to listen to you, and the wall will come down, so that you can easily walk him over to your side and show him what you’ve been seeing. Now you can both clearly see both sides. Then, together, you have a chance to decide which perspective, if either, is better.

Again, this all occurs in the realm of concepts, pure abstractions, so nobody will be harmed. It’s a true “safe space”.

As a rule of thumb, never join a group, or attend a march, or pledge your allegiance to any ideology until you first have demonstrated your capacity to love your enemy by explaining his point-of-view at least as well as he can.

Admittedly, loving your enemy is hard to do, even though it is simple. It may be like lifting a 500 pound weight over your head. Difficult but simple. However, here’s what makes it even harder: Ever since we acquired the ability to “think” abstractly, then invented the printing press, then left our farms during the Industrial Revolution, then invented electronic technologies – the phone, email, internet, “social media” – we have been growing more and more distanced from our direct sensory experience, from nature, and more attached to images, literally to nonsense. We are proud of having used our minds to conquer the majority of physical survival threats and of having figured out how to meet the basic needs of billions of people. We continue to do so, but we fail to notice much of what is real, particularly the potential negative consequences of our great accomplishments...the costs that we can sense directly if we pay attention to them. This growing trend, this blindness that it born of ideology and pride, is not masculine at all.

By being so attached to what we’re consciously thinking, our nonsense – beliefs, models, hopes, ideals, ideologies, interpretations, perspectives – as opposed to what is coming through our senses; we are making ourselves vulnerable to being controlled by memetic (meme-based, not gene-based) cultural/linguistic agents that unconsciously direct our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Naturally, these agents may not have the preservation of our lives and liberties among its objectives. In fact, the more we are becoming consumed by, and willing to argue over, non-sense; the more easily we are relinquishing/extinguishing life and liberty.

Furthermore, our conscious goals – largely to be successful and happy – keep us “too busy” to dedicate the time and energy necessary to notice what is “actually” happening, what is coming through our senses, below the surface of conscious awareness. This type of open-minded noticing is hard. It requires patience, discipline, and non-conformity – the dedication to doing what is right, even if you’re doing it alone. It is far easier to just blend in with the group and insist that my group’s ideology equals truth and leave it at that.

It is my wish that we can put forth the time and effort required in collectively re-directing our attention to the raw observations coming through our senses, and to do so to the extent that we can assess what actual problems, if any, we may be facing. Solving our problems can best be done after first understanding them, and after doing so from all angles. In those cases where we disagree over what we observe, I hope that we can resist our primordial tribal urge so that we can love our enemies, as it is the only proven way to achieve understanding and peace. I ask the reader to keep in mind that this peace is my ultimate goal, while the path to understanding how to reach this goal begins with reflecting on masculinity, nature, culture, and pride.