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FREE, AS IN BEER

How To Disagree Well

Deacon Jeff Moore
Alumnus Contributor

Having entered a non-technical field after graduating Olin, I am an ardent advocate for the many “soft-skills” that are consciously and subconsciously built into the Olin experience, as these have been enormously beneficial to me even outside of engineering. Learning how to give presentations and work in teams is useful in any field, of course, but today I want to highlight one of the most important lessons that our non-anonymous, Honor Code culture taught me: how to disagree well.

I came in to Olin already full of strong opinions and already burning to fight for them. And WOW did I do a really poor job of it at first (c.f. Randomness archives, 2006-2008). But at a place as small as Olin, being a jerk is not a sustainable enterprise, and I slowly learned to be better. With your permission, then, I would like to offer the best-practices I learned at Olin and have worked to improve in the Facebook flame-wars that still sustain my deep-seated need to argue.

Goals: Most important in disagreements is to have

an appropriate goal in mind. For most of us, our natural inclination is to desire to “win”, either by changing a person’s mind or by humiliating them in their obvious stupidity. But these are really bad goals, primarily because they do not acknowledge or respect the humanity and intelligence of the discussion partner. Over time, my goal has become “to better understand our disagreements and to identify our nearest point of agreement,” and this has worked well for me. Framing a debate as a mutual exploration of ideas turns a disagreement into a collaborative exercise to which both parties can contribute, and orienting that collaboration toward identifying shared values lays a foundation on which future real-world collaboration might be built. Of course, a disagreement remains a disagreement, but both parties are far more receptive to the enterprise when they know that the other person is pushing back in order to understand and be understood, rather than to humiliate.

Bad Habits: Because most of us start with a deficient goal, we often fall into bad habits. We like to

look superior by focusing on small, incidental mistakes, or by arguing about a poorly chosen word, or by linking the present argument to a larger, easier to reject narrative (c.f. Godwin’s Law). We like to talk about logical fallacies, as if naming them will somehow immediately end the debate and crown us the winner. We like to infer our adversary’s motivation and argue against that, rather than against the arguments at hand. But all of these are the enemies of good dialogue because they are oriented toward winning, rather than toward understanding; they miss the shape of the forest because a few trees are out of place.

Good Habits: Instead, I have found that the old scholastic principle works well: always argue against the best version of your opponents’ argument. Iron the creases, ignore the missteps, and sometimes even offer a better line of reasoning for their belief than even they presented. Does this make it hard to win? Absolutely. Does it make for a much better, more mature, more intelligent, and more humane discussion? Without a doubt.

continued on next page

Further, always, always, ALWAYS begin your response by acknowledging what you like about their argument, which parts you can agree with, and which parts you cannot agree with but in which you at least recognize that their reasoning is strong. This sends a clear message that they have been heard and understood, and that you are ready to move forward in your common exploration.

Hard Habits: If there is one thing that is omnipresent in debates, that will destroy relationships, and that will ignite the flamingest of flame wars, it is pride. The hardest lessons I have had to learn have been to admit when I am wrong, I acknowledge when my opponent makes a fair point, to confess when I do not know, and to walk away because I am angry and endangering

a friendship. I have also had to apologize for being mean or sarcastic more times than I can remember, but I have never regretted doing it. And nothing has engendered more good will than regularly allowing my discussion partner to have the last word.

Feelings: Because I love ideas so much, it took me a long time to figure out feelings. It turns out that feelings are both true and false, which makes them tricky. They are true, insofar as they were actually and legitimately felt. You cannot tell a person they did not feel something (pro-tip: they actually did), and it is often very helpful to recognize and legitimize their feelings. However, feelings are false insofar as they are not generalizable. The fact that a person felt a certain way is not a good standard by which to

resolve an issue that affects an entire population, especially because a feeling cannot be shared and evaluated in the same way that facts and figures can be. This is an understanding that has been slow to dawn for me, so I have no further insight on what to do about all this.

You know, it occurs to me that I should have been more clear at the beginning: these are not lessons that I have mastered, these are lessons than I have glimpsed from my repeated failures. I am working desperately to remember and actually follow these lessons, and I am hoping that by writing about them, we can make them a collaborative exercise.

Deacon Jeff Moore is a member of the Class of 2010 (E:C), and soon to be a priest of the Catholic Church. He sort of lives in Seattle.

How Bad Are Bananas?

Kelsey Breseman
Alumnus Contributor

I checked this book out because I wanted to learn a bit more about the impacts of diet on the environment: is it worth your while, impact-wise, to become vegetarian? What's the relative impact of eating some plentiful fish versus bananas imported from Ecuador? There's no point in giving up some food you love to eat if:

1. You don't really know how harmful it is and
2. You continue to eat something else that's more harmful but you care about

less, because you don't know any better.

As it turns out, this book is not about food. A lot of food impacts are listed, but the book's scope is actually more useful than that. In the author's words:

"I want to give you a carbon instinct ... I hope by the time you have read about [the impacts of the items in the book], you will have gained such a sense about where carbon impacts come from that you will be able to make a reasonable guesstimate of the footprint of more or less anything and everything that you come across."

I think the author accomplished his goal in this remarkably quick read. It's all short sections, memorable pointers, and non-guilty practical suggestions.

I also really liked the author's ability to contextualize these decisions. He used the framework of a 10-ton carbon lifestyle—a fairly manageable reduction—to help you budget the impact of individual choices. This framework was referenced throughout the book.

Here are a few of the gems that stood out to me:

- Berners-Lee uses the concept of CO₂e: carbon di-

oxide equivalent. This is a clever way to use “carbon” as shorthand for all greenhouse gases, by converting them to the amount of carbon dioxide that has the same warming impact.

- Any time dairy is introduced (e.g. in the “a cup of tea” section) it dwarfs the other factors. Cows take a lot of land and (as ruminants) emit methane (high CO₂e). A cup of black tea (including the water-boiling process) can be as low as 21g CO₂e, more than doubled to 53g CO₂e when milk is added.

- Heating with gas is generally more efficient than heating with electricity, whether it’s your kettle, shower, or house.

- Fruits and vegetables shipped from afar are pretty low emission unless they have to be airlifted to stay fresh. So, bananas and oranges are low-CO₂e any time of year; strawberries and asparagus (assuming they’re out of season) are CO₂e-intensive. A banana (generally boat-shipped) is worth 80g CO₂e; an out-of-season punnet of strawberries (airlifted in or grown in a hothouse) takes 1800g CO₂e. Those same strawberries, local & in season, are 150g CO₂e: an order of

magnitude less.

- If you pour a glass of water down the drain, it’s 4x more CO₂e to treat that wastewater than it was to get you the clean water to fill the glass. Water is only 0.14g CO₂e/pint, so it’s not a lot, but you might as well water a plant rather than pouring it down the drain.

- Sometimes, disposables release less CO₂e than their reusable counterparts. This is because the reusable item usually requires more CO₂e to produce than something meant to be used once (like heavy-duty shopping bags- 50g CO₂e, compared to 10g CO₂e for the plastic bag-that you buy but forget to bring to the store every time). This can also be the case if it takes a lot of energy it takes to clean the reusable item for re-use. Cloth diapers, for example, are high-CO₂e to produce and then consistent causes of emissions if you tumble-dry them. A disposable diaper is 145g CO₂e, and a cotton diaper washed and dried “normally” over all its uses comes out to 280g CO₂e. You only save carbon if you line-dry the reusable diaper every time (89g CO₂e).

- Junk mail causes a lot of unnecessary emissions. This isn’t surprising, but the

impact was higher than I expected (1,600g CO₂e for a small catalog sent to a landfill). Paper processing uses a lot of chemicals; demand for paper contributes to deforestation; and disposal of paper into landfill causes nasty emissions. What is surprising: it’s really easy to stop getting this load of mail that you don’t want anyway. If you’re in the United States, here’s a link: <http://www.ecocycle.org/junkmail>. Similar services exist in many countries, and it’s worth Googling for.

- Berners-Lee also includes a short chapter on food at the end, with suggestions to cut up to 60% of the CO₂e you emit in that realm (assuming you currently cook and eat like an average UK resident). That’s huge, because food is about 20% of an average individual’s footprint (in the UK, though I imagine it is not too far different in the United States).

Ultimately, it takes more than little lifestyle changes to have a strong effect on global climate change. But if you want to do better (and why not?), reading this book is an entertaining, non-guilt-intensive way to be conscious of the emissions implications of everyday choices.

Out of the Ashes

Leon Lam
Contributor

Chapter 6
[SOME SAY KNIGHTS ARE INHUMAN. ARE THEY WRONG?]

“Not entirely,” you reply. “The procedure... it changes us. Makes us stronger and harder to kill. Makes us...” you struggle with the words.

“Better?” Adrian suggests. He seems slightly un-

easy at the thought.

“More,” you say. “More in some ways, but less in others. I don’t know exactly what I am—”

You are inadequate, your Master told you on the day

you met him. *Weak iron, riddled with impurity. But I will temper you; I will break you down and put you back together; and I will forge you into steel.*

“—but I know enough,” you continue, curling the fingers of one hand into a fist. “Right from wrong. Ally from enemy.” A moment’s consideration. “I hope so, at least.”

Your colleague claps you on the shoulder. “I think you do.”

You nod in... acknowledgement? Thanks? You’re not entirely sure.

Then—

“We were on a boat for *three weeks*,” Lord Anselm says from the door, and the two of you snap to attention. “Don’t you think it’s a little late to start getting acquainted?”

“Well, my lord, the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago...” Adrian counters, trying but failing to hide a grin.

Your superior rolls his eyes. “Save some of your platitudes for tonight,” he says. “We’ll need them in the palace.”

Li finds you not too long before you’re scheduled to depart, pressing the completed letter into your hands. The effects of his torture, both physical and otherwise, still show plainly on his body and mannerism — bandages and stitches on his skin, a nervous twitch whenever anyone makes a sudden movement — but you also see something else.

Hope.

Good luck, he mouths. *And thank you.*

“We will do whatever we can,” you say in Reshanese. Something unfamiliar pulses in your chest — you are used to commendation and condemnation alike, but this... this is new. “Rest well. We will return shortly.”

Then a servant arrives and bids you join the Lady Jin in her carriage, and you leave him behind.

~

The three of you — diplomat, magician and bodyguard — enter Lady Jin’s carriage, which trundles into motion at a snap of the coachman’s reins. Looking around, you see Adrian and Lord Anselm in similar coats of Imvarri red, while Lady Jin, your Reshanese host, is resplendent in a dress of blue and purple silk. An ornate silver tiara shimmers in her hair as she laughs and makes small talk with Lord Anselm, and you busy yourself by keeping watch at the window.

The evening sky darkens slowly but surely before your eyes. Rain-laden clouds creep in from the south, encroaching on the last golden rays of the setting sun, and the western edge of the city comes into full view as the carriage rounds a bend on its sedate uphill journey.

From your current position, high above the rest of the Northern Capital, you see everything — the docks are a mass of brightly-colored sails, the western gates a river in flood, full of bursting with travelers and pilgrims and tradesmen. The

crowd is a mile away, yet faces leap out at you: here a portly-looking merchant, there a callow youth, over there a nervous mother-to-be...

It seems like every soul in Reshan has turned up to partake in the festivities, you think, forcing your vision to blur once again. *There must be at least a hundred thousand people here.*

A query comes to mind, then. *Why build your capital on a mountain? Why bother with the risk of rockslides and the hassle of sloping construction? There’s flat ground conveniently within reach.*

You suppose, after a moment’s thought, that kings tend not to care about risk or hassle or convenience. Kings like standing *above*. They like looking down on the world and saying, *this is mine*.

Still, you decide to ask Lady Jin just in case. She frowns after you pose the question, as if trying to extricate herself from some conundrum, then says: “*The mountain is the Phoenix. The Phoenix is the mountain.*”

“There are no longer any who live who have seen it awaken. Anger in the heart of the world, life-bringer and death-sower... it ruled us in the dark days, spreading wings of fire and cinder across the land, burning all within its sight.

“But the First Emperor, blessed be his name, trapped its soul in a golden crown. With his newfound power he mastered its sibling-enemy, and when both great spirits

were bound he built his leg-
acy between their domains –
above the mountain, beneath
the sky.

"Some believe this a mere
story, but I know the truth. I
have seen the Dragon for
myself."

Lord Anselm nods grim-
ly. "The Broken Isles," he
says. You remember reading
a book in the libraries of the
Golden Tower, describing an
event historians called the
Shattering...

"They called themselves
the Land of the Dawn, but
the Emperor took their sun
from them. For twenty days
and nights the Dragon
rained death on their world,
darkening the sky with cloud
and thunder; drowning them
beneath the waves. Now only
fragments of their nation re-
main."

"Who," you wonder
aloud, "could do such a
thing?" By your side, Adri-
an nods in agreement. *The
death toll— armies, yes,
but...*

"Someone who brings
magic to bear against ordi-
nary people," Lord Anselm
says sharply, and you see
admonishment in his gaze
as he looks upon the both
of you. "Someone who be-
lieves in cutting down a doz-
en hapless foreigners to save
the life of one countryman."

"My lord, I—" you open
your mouth for some retort,
something to prove him
wrong, that you're *not like
that*—

"It's not the same," Adri-
an says, before you can re-
spond. "We fought *soldiers*.
They made a choice."

"A soldier needs food.

He needs clothing, armor,
weapons. If any of those are
not present, he cannot fight."
The anger is gone from
Lord Anselm's voice – only
cold logic remains. "Yes,
the soldier deserves blame
for the wounds he inflicts,
but make no mistake; be-
hind each fighting man is a
farmer, a weaver, a miner, a
smith. Would you not attack
a caravan to prevent it from
supplying an enemy force?
Striking at the source elimi-
nates the capacity—"

"Children, then," you in-
terrupt. "Innocents. Is that
what you want, my lord?
For me to stalk the enemy's
living-places, tearing the
next generation of soldiers
and farmers and weavers
from the womb?" Cold anger
spreads through your limbs,
and you struggle to keep
your voice even.

You welcome the sensa-
tion – desperate for some-
thing, anything to take your
mind off the possibility
that your superior might be
right...

Adrian and Lady Jin lean
ever-so-slightly away, but
Lord Anselm looks almost
amused. "Tell me, Forty
Seven: would you obey such
an order?"

"No, my lord," you say.
"*Never*. Not even if it came
from the Primus himself."

"Then we have nothing
further to discuss," he says,
and turns away.

~
The rest of the carriage
ride passes in stony silence.
Lord Anselm seems utterly
unperturbed and Lady Jin
is inscrutable as always, but
Adrian frowns and curls his

fingers idly, forcing the air
around his hand into a myr-
riad of transparent forms –
*writhing tendrils grasping at
their surroundings, geomet-
ric shapes spinning and slid-
ing through each other* – in
an attempt to calm his mind.

You wish you could do
the same; leave Lord An-
selm's stinging words be-
hind for the clear simplicity
of combat, where 'right' is
victory and 'wrong' is de-
feat—

But you have killed sev-
en hundred and twenty two
times in the name of vic-
tory. *In taking those lives,
how many deaths did I truly
prevent?* you wonder. *Was it
enough?*

~
The Palace Compound's
walls grow from the moun-
tainside in fifty-foot waves,
wings of dark stone clutch-
ing the peak in their timeless
embrace. Keen-eyed guards
in filigreed armor scurry to
and fro atop the crenella-
tions, clutching halberds and
crossbows. A few of them
carry matchlocks – hollow
tubes of metal that eat lead
shot and black powder, spit-
ting fire and death – and
Lord Anselm grunts at the
sight.

"I thought it'd take a few
more years," he mutters as
the carriage heads through a
checkpoint at the open gates
and comes to a halt within.
"So much for a technologi-
cal advantage."

"We must change with
the times or perish, my
dear Ambassador," Lady
Jin replies. A servant opens
the carriage door and steps
aside, bowing deeply.

“Armies most of all.”

As you descend from the carriage, the first thing you see is a great stone-tiled plaza, large enough to accommodate several thousand soldiers standing in formation. At the far end, the Palace itself looms in the dying light of the sun, its eight levels of sloped roofs lit by countless lanterns. It rises from the earth like the mountain it was built on, reaching up and up and up for the clouds...

“The Emperor lives between stone and sky, commanding all in Heaven and on Earth,” Lady Jin whispers.

A veritable army of servants flanks a carpet of gold silk that stretches all the way to the doors of the Palace. Ten men would walk side by side on its surface with room to spare, yet it seems narrow as a thread in comparison to the doors.

“Fancy,” Lord Anselm mutters, and you can’t help but grin at the sheer magnitude of his understatement.

“Might be a bit cramped on the inside,” Adrian chimes in, and you make a choking noise.

“Don’t you dare laugh,” your superior warns. “That’s how diplomatic incidents happen.”

~
Lord Anselm was wrong, as it turns out. *This* is how diplomatic incidents happen:

Imagine a gathering of the major powers from every corner of the world – Vol-sung from their mountain halls in sealskin and carven

ivory, Nua-im from the east in light wool and cotton, Ad-an-gme from the lush southern riverlands with hands and faces meticulously painted.

Officials from Reshan’s numerous vassal states stand in a tight cluster, conferring in hushed voices, and a dozen or so representatives from the Great Sea’s countless islands and archipelagoes look vaguely overwhelmed by the opulence on display.

Then, in the shadow of the Palace’s massive doors, someone hisses: “*Abomination*,” and you turn. The ambassador of the Clans cuts a striking figure in fur and velvet, but she flinches as you meet her hateful gaze and force a smile.

“Hail, Ambassador.” You offer a traditional greeting, for all the good it’ll do. “May the gods smile on you.” You see mild surprise in the eyes of her retinue – it’s as if...

As if an animal had opened its mouth to speak, you think. All of them react – all but one. His eyes meet yours, and you see grim purpose in their depths.

“The gods may smile,” the ambassador spits back, “*but never on your kind.*”

You try to form some sort of response, but Lord Anselm saves you the trouble. “Ambassador Yesui,” he says. “I look forward to working with you again.” You blink in surprise – he sounds almost *happy*.

Against all odds, Ambassador Yesui’s face softens. “Lord Anselm,” she replies, in a long-suffering tone. “I should’ve known.”

“Pay my retinue no heed,” your superior continues. “You know how it is with those military types...” He waves a hand dismissively.

“I know all too well,” Yesui says, and for the briefest of moments you see a crack in her smiling mask. Old pain brought back to the surface by the dredge of memory, despair warring with hope...

Then the Ambassador regains control, and the mask is perfect and diplomatic and unmarred. “Very well,” she says, and you let out a small breath of relief. “I see no reason to concern myself with your hangers-on...”

“I killed one of your kind, Abomination,” the man from her retinue says quietly. “He fought well, but not well enough—”

“Not another word,” Yesui snaps, her voice sharp and cold. “There will be peace between us.”

It is at this moment that a nervously orbiting courtier clears his throat, beckoning the gathered dignitaries inward as the massive doors swing open...

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

1. [Ignore him. *The past is of no consequence to you.*]
2. [Find out more. *Your fellow Knight deserves remembrance.*]
3. [Challenge him to a duel. *There is only one way this can end – in blood.*]

SERV Activity Update

Kelly Brennan
Contributor

The Daily Table: Service Activity Leadership by Emily Yeh

Volunteer at the Daily Table in Dorchester! Daily Table is a nonprofit organization that sells affordable and healthy food to people with low incomes. A group from Olin will be volunteering there every weekend, starting soon - check the Carpediem mailing list! If you have any questions, please contact Emily Yeh.

The Food Recovery Network: Led by Mackenzie Frackleton and Issac Vandenbor with GROW

FRN is excited to continue this school year and looking for volunteers! Contact Isaac if you're interested, or if you have a car and are willing to drive between Framingham and Olin (20 minutes each way). Olin van and zipcar drivers are also welcome, FRN just can't happen without drivers! Plus, SERV will reimburse mileage expenses! **Youth CITIES: Andrew Holmes**

Last semester, Andrew was one of several mentors for the Youth CITIES March to

May Bootcamp, an entrepreneurship program that teaches students how to leverage their local resources and define a business idea based around a specific problem they face in their community. Andrew advised and helped specific students prepare for their final presentation in front of venture capitalists and entrepreneurs. If there is enough interest, Andrew would like to gather a group of Oliners that could volunteer for this fall's Youth CITIES program that focuses on product development in the healthcare industry.

Big Brother Big Sister College Campus Program

Big Brothers Big Sisters provides children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships that change their lives for the better, forever. At Olin, Big Brothers Big Sisters works with Babson College and the Gallivan Housing Development to match Babson and Olin students as 'Bigs' with children from Gallivan as 'Littles'. Bigs met with their Littles on Babson's campus once every one to two weeks to participate in various activities. Next semester,

BBBS plans to reunite Bigs and Littles from last year and hopefully create some new matches from any students who sign up. Any interested Oliners can email rkossar@bbbsmb.org and/or lmiller@bbbsmb.org for more information. It's never too late to apply to be a Big, but the sooner the better!

Blood Drive

Olin's fall Blood Drive is October 14. Donor and Volunteer sign ups will be available starting late September. Lookout for the sign up table in the dining hall as the date approaches! Contact Frankie (Frances.Devanbu@students.olin.edu) or Ariana (Ariana.Olson@students.olin.edu) with any questions.

Peer Advocates

Welcoming new PAs to the team: Michael Costello, Emily Engel, Kaitlyn Keil, Louise Nielsen, and Taylor Sheneman! They'll be trained in the Fall, right before New Student Orientation. Also: we want to make sure people know that the Climate Survey results are out, and Alison Black will be hosting two talks about the results next week (May 2nd and 5th).

Meet an Olin alumnus. Find an awesome mentor. Discuss life at Olin, how to adult, what you did last week, and everything in between. Hindsight is 20/20! Borrow some perspective from someone who's been there. Visit olinalumni.org/resources/banter/

Olin Banter

To Help The Children

Aaron Greiner

Contributor

“I just really wanted to come to help the children”, I hear the white girl across from me say. She pushes her straight blonde hair back over her left ear and lays her Ray-Ban sunglasses on the plastic table. She sits in a blue plastic chair with “Pepsi” written on the back, under a tent that leans such that it looks as if it could topple at any moment. On the wall across her is a bare cement building with “Chakula House” in colorful paint on the wall and written again on the Pepsi-branded sign. On both sides of the long table sit Tanzanian men and women, eating wali, ugali and mshikaki. “Chips”, she says to the young woman with an apron who walks up next to her. “Chips, you understand?” she repeats. The woman nods her head.

From my quick interaction I am already forming her backstory. She comes from California, just out of college. She has always wanted to go to Africa, doesn't really matter where, since last year when her friend went. On the weekdays she goes

to orphanages and hospitals where she plays with the kids and unsuccessfully tries to teach them english. On the weekends she goes on safari, lounges by the pool, and goes to all the clubs. Her Instagram is a mix between her with the little children with captions about how happy they are even though their situation is so tragic, and selfies with elephants. Her profile picture is her in the middle a group of African (she doesn't specify the country) kids. She is White Savior Barbie. She is everything I complain about to my other mzungu friends.

But am I all that different? I am in Arusha, Tanzania for two months, I go out on the weekends, post pictures of landscapes on Instagram, and speak a few words of broken Swahili. I like to think I came to Arusha to do something that mattered and get experience in international development, but I am also having a good time and a new experience living in another country. There are no doubt things that separate me from her. I am not pretending I know what is best for Tanzania, I take the bus and ride my bike

through the local entrance of the national park, I live without many of the luxuries of home, and my profile picture is not of me with a group of Tanzanian children. I want to believe that I am not a “white savior”, but there is a part of me is not sure and it makes my stomach hurt.

One night, after a long talk about what were were really doing in Tanzania, my friend said to me, “The people who are thinking about the things and questioning if they are really making a difference are usually the ones that are.” So hopefully, by recognizing that I have the privilege to be able to go here (and the privilege to leave whenever I want), that I am not a savior, and that I do not know what is best for Tanzania, I don't have to be like the girl sitting across from me. It is okay for me to go to Tanzania for a summer. It is okay for me to have an experience where I live in another country, learn about international development, do my best to help, and even go on small trips on the weekends. But I did not just really want to come to Africa to help the children.

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