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# THE STOIC

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## THE ART OF BEING CIVIL

We are all comfortable in our little worlds. People who are different from us and who differ with us create in us some insecurity. This type of insecurity is sometimes nurtured for political purposes.

Judging from what is happening in our world now, one can say that our world is polarized to such an extent that many find it hard to be civil. We perceive people who are different from us or who have different views as enemies.

But that is not the way of nature. A tall tree is not against a shrub, the rain is not against the wind, the sun is not against the moon. Nature works in harmony. Even when there is apparent disharmony in nature, things work together in the larger scheme of things.

Underlying our uncivility is our conceit, anger, resentment, and a sense of entitlement.

When someone disagrees with us, we become upset. We are too conceited even to think that perhaps we are mistaken in our thinking. In this issue our contributors offer different perspectives on this.

Quoting Epictetus, Erik Rankin reminds us that maybe the other person is right. But our conceit keeps us ignorant because we think we already know and the other person has nothing to teach us.

*What is the first business of one who practices philosophy? To get rid of self-conceit. For it is impossible for anyone to begin to learn that which he thinks he already knows. (Epictetus Discourses 2.17)*

This is particularly timely during the election period when intolerance is carried to its extreme and incivility becomes a virtue.

We are carried away by our anger and upset. We fail to listen.

*Pay careful attention to what people say. Try your best to understand where they are coming from. (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 6.53)*

If we do, we are more likely to be civil.

It is naive to expect that people shouldn't be different from us or shouldn't have different views. Echoing Marcus Aurelius' sentiments, Sharon Lebell offers an alternative perspective: "We always have the power to care: about each other, to care about doing something to upgrade the condition of the world we find ourselves in; the power to care about small domestic beautiful things that lift the heart and create a chain of goodness radiating to other people."

Much of our anger and uncivility is the result of our sense of entitlement. As Jonas Salzgeber points out, "We're spoiled and kick and scream like a child when the world doesn't bend to our king's perspective. We only have in mind what we think the world owes us." If we drop our sense of entitlement, there is no reason to be offended and there is no reason to be offensive.

Where do we start? As Flora Bernard points out "Questioning our assumptions and our initial impressions is a good way to start."