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# The First Troll: Identified!

by Henry Farrell on ~~December 14, 2009~~

From the “blog”:[http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=559:conversation-hackers-trolls-argumentation&catid=32:oliviers-blog&Itemid=34](http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=559:conversation-hackers-trolls-argumentation&catid=32:oliviers-blog&Itemid=34) of the International Culture and Cognition Institute.

Yet more or less impersonal discussions did exist before the creation of Usenet (1979) – in newspapers or gazettes, in the public places of big cities, etc. We should find Trolls there too. Indeed, we can find them in some of the first public places where free conversation between strangers was allowed, on a variety of topics : the antique Forum, grandfather of the virtual forums of today, womb of all Trolls. There you may find the antique equivalent of Trolls : what people at the time called ‘sophists’ or ‘philosophers’ – two words that were used interchangeably by the man on the Forum. Many Sophists did not want to endorse the label – sophistry was frowned upon or downright illegal in many places – and insisted on being called Philosophers. But the average citizen did not distinguish much between all these varieties of arguers. It is clear from most outsiders’ accounts that sophists/philosophers were perceived as disrupting the usual rules of conversation in a noxious way.

Two important men are having a careful conversation on military training. What do you call the guy who, having no particular competence or interest in the matter at hand, jumps in the conversation, systematically contradicts everyone with contrived arguments, ridicules the two competent discussants, orients the conversation on a completely different topic, then leaves the audience baffled and walks away, laughing? That Troll is Socrates in Plato’s Laches.

One man’s muops being another man’s bridge-dweller. I hope John Emerson is happy ...

{ 59 comments }

[1](#)

christian h. 12.14.09 at 6:10 am

Yeah always found the guy to be incredibly snotty and condescending. Of course his discourse “partners” are not usually blog material – modern trolls should be so lucky to have people only answer in strings of particles meaning “yes”...

[2](#)

[Chris Bertram](#) 12.14.09 at 8:28 am

And he looked like a troll, by all accounts.

[3](#)

Jim Buck 12.14.09 at 9:22 am

Wiseguy, eh!?

[4](#)

[Mario Diana](#) 12.14.09 at 11:03 am

At risk of there being no safe way to comment on this thread, Socrates [completed two years of military training, served as a hoplite, and then distinguished himself in battle.](#)

[5](#)

nickhayw 12.14.09 at 11:30 am

I’m sure Socrates is referred to somewhere as ‘strutting like a goose’ on the battlefield. Might be in Laches. I always got a lot of mileage out of that description.

Philosophers might be trolls (how do you define ‘troll’?) but not all trolls are philosophers. Depending on who you are and what you do, the philosopher-troll is either better or worse company than the non-philosopher-troll. I would certainly prefer the former.

[6](#)

mollymooly 12.14.09 at 1:05 pm

In the ideal thread, all trolls are philosophers.

[7](#)

kid bitzer 12.14.09 at 2:16 pm

the comparison is unfair to socrates. this worries me far less, however, than the fact that the comparison flatters internet trolls.

i'm afraid that this just gives the same mindless pricks a new trope of trollery, to wit "i'm just being a gad-fly, man! and your attempt to prevent me from derailing your thread is just like the execution of socrates! banning me from your blog is just high-tech hemlock!"

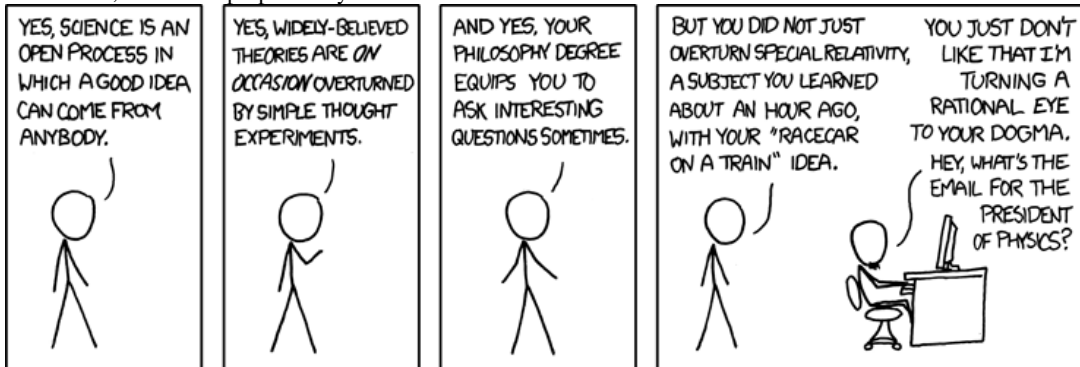
which brings up another trollery problem: if there is an on-line conversation rolling down a thread where it is inevitably going to run over five hitlers, but you could switch topics so that it crushed a very fat troll instead, would you derail the conversation?

if so, then you're the real racist, man!

[8](#)

[Henry](#) 12.14.09 at 2:29 pm

I had thought of making this post itself more directly trollish but decided against, given how recent attempts at CT-humour have gone down. Meanwhile, XKCD is apropos today:



[9](#)

[kid bitzer](#) 12.14.09 at 2:40 pm

sure, but randall made it easy by giving the guy a goatee.

no way socrates wore a goatee.

(and \*does\* a philosophy degree equip you to ask interesting questions?)

[10](#)

[belle le triste](#) 12.14.09 at 2:42 pm

I have read — probably not very attentively and a while ago — about 10% of the Socratic dialogues. Is there any point in them where Mr S the Heroic Hoplite ever says, "You know what? You're right!" — or in any sense allows himself to be seen using the encounter to learn things himself?

If not: troll. Not mindless troll, of course — but it's the mindful one's do the most toxic damage, in my experience.

[11](#)

[belle le triste](#) 12.14.09 at 2:43 pm

one's s/b ones

[12](#)

[kid bitzer](#) 12.14.09 at 2:49 pm

i think in the original greek it's easier to distinguish the muops from the psyops.

[13](#)

[digamma](#) 12.14.09 at 2:59 pm

Euthyphro: Another time, Socrates; for I am in a hurry, and must go now.

Socrates: Alas! my companion, and will you leave me in despair? I was hoping that you would instruct me in the nature of piety and impiety; and then I might have cleared myself of Meletus and his indictment. I would have told him that I had been enlightened by Euthyphro, and had given up rash innovations and speculations, in which I indulged only through ignorance, and that now I am about to lead a better life.

Seriously, that guy was a troll.

[14](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.14.09 at 3:18 pm

I miss Usenet—the guys (including women) who’d keep up an exchange of phrase-by-phrase picking apart of each other’s post, several posts a day, for days at a time, periodically getting in jabs like “feminists are evil because they try to trick a man into putting a ring on their finger.”

[15](#)

rea 12.14.09 at 3:30 pm

Link to the Laches dilogue here:

<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laches.html>

Socrates doesn’t trollishly jump into the conversation, but participates by invitation, due to his acknowledged expertise:

“Laches: . . . But why, instead of consulting us, do you not consult our friend Socrates about the education of the youths? He is of the same deme with you, and is always passing his time in places where the youth have any noble study or pursuit, such as you are enquiring after.

Lysimachus: Why, Laches, has Socrates ever attended to matters of this sort?

La: Certainly, Lysimachus.

Nicias: That I have the means of knowing as well as Laches; for quite lately he supplied me with a teacher of music for my sons,—Damon, the disciple of Agathocles, who is a most accomplished man in every way, as well as a musician, and a companion of inestimable value for young men at their age.

Lys: Those who have reached my time of life, Socrates and Nicias and Laches, fall out of acquaintance with the young, because they are generally detained at home by old age; but you, O son of Sophroniscus[e.g., Socrates], should let your fellow demesman have the benefits of any advice which you are able to give. Moreover I have a claim upon you as an old friend of your father; for I and he were always companions and friends, and to the hour of his death there never was a difference between us; and now it comes back to me, at the mention of your name, that I have heard these lads talking to one another at home, and often speaking of Socrates in terms of the highest praise; but I have never thought to ask them whether the son of Sophroniscus was the person whom they meant. Tell me, my boys, whether this is the Socrates of whom you have often spoken?

Son: Certainly, father, this is he.

Lys: I am delighted to hear, Socrates, that you maintain the name of your father, who was a most excellent man; and I further rejoice at the prospect of our family ties being renewed.

La: Indeed, Lysimachus, you ought not to give him up; for I can assure you that I have seen him maintaining, not only his father’s, but also his country’s name. He was my companion in the retreat from Delium, and I can tell you that if others had only been like him, the honour of our country would have been upheld, and the great defeat would never have occurred.

[16](#)

Eugene Marshall 12.14.09 at 3:56 pm

@belle le triste: I’ll come to Socrates’s defense here, for fun.

In the *Parmenides*, Socrates acknowledges that his view has problems that he cannot answer (at least, that’s how I read it — there’s no consensus on the issue). Of course, in this dialogue, it is *young* Socrates we meet, so it may not really exonerate older Socrates.

In the *Protagoras*, on the other hand, Socrates admits that the position he began with was wrong and takes up his opponent’s initial view. The character of Protagoras, Socrates’ interlocutor, actually switches his view as well.

So perhaps that allows Socrates to escape the brand of Troll?

[17](#)

rea 12.14.09 at 3:57 pm

*It’s™ m sure Socrates is referred to somewhere as “strutting like a goose™ on the battlefield. Might be in Laches.*

It’s in *Symposium*; drunken Alcibiades describing Socrates’ behavior during the retreat after the disastrous Battle of Delium. Picture Socrates in heavy hoplite armor, protecting a gaggle of fugitives from the pursuing Theban light troops

[18](#)

novakant 12.14.09 at 4:03 pm

*I miss Usenet™ the guys (including women) who™ d keep up an exchange of phrase-by-phrase picking apart of each other™ s post, several posts a day, for days at a time*

I think I know what you mean. I’ve never been on usenet, but I’ve seen it on blogs and message boards. I have to frequent some of the latter to keep up to date with software and hardware as part of my job and they are very useful, but there are people who hang out there all day and can get into bitter and drawn-out fights over the proper way of measuring the quality of motion blur generated by different render engines and suchlike.

Discussing worthy political and philosophical topics on blogs seems to have a bit more of a justification, but the rhetorical methods as well as the psychological driving forces are quite similar, so that I seriously wonder if all of this is not a colossal waste of time and instead we should fight global injustices or help out in our local soup kitchen.

[19](#)

kid bitzer 12.14.09 at 4:13 pm

socrates' peculiar gait was already part of the caricature back in aristophanes' clouds ( line 362) back when socrates was still in his mid-40s and plato was in nappies.

but the action was nothing like "goose-stepping". if anything, the opposite--some sort of loose-limbed, shambling swagger that radiated nonchalance and unconcern.

[20](#)

[tom s.](#) 12.14.09 at 4:16 pm

"does a philosophy degree equip you to ask interesting questions?"

Not an interesting question.

[21](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.14.09 at 5:19 pm

novakant, if this were Usenet, I'd have to say *Really? ... Then how could you possibly know what I mean?*, and *Just because you're too ignorant of the subject matter to find the discussion interesting, doesn't mean the people who do are psychopaths*, and so on.

The post Henry links to mixes together a few things. Corporate e-mail guidelines are a whole nother beast. I know someone who worked at a bank that was just getting e-mail for the first time somewhere around 1990. They had a consultant come in to tell them how e-mail should and shouldn't be used. It was not to be used for corporate announcements such as press releases, for example, which were to be handled as traditionally, in meetings or by putting paper press releases in people's mailboxes, though presumably bulletin board postings were okay too. It made no sense and I never knew of a tech company that instituted rules anything like those.

But around the time blogs started appearing, new rules also started appearing on Usenet. I don't mean that there were subtle indications that new people had new expectations. These were bold proclamations made by apparent regulars: no top posting, the first person to post on a thread "owns" the subject matter and is the arbiter of what's on topic, no picking apart arguments paragraph by paragraph, no joining other people's discussions. Oh, and Tim W. reminds me, bizarre definitions of *ad hominem*. This was on humanities, not technical newsgroups. Those are important parts of many people's work and, I think, remain so, though there was also an uptick, it seemed, in people asking for help with their jobs, as opposed to their homework (of the kind you wouldn't give if it were homework).

[22](#)

Salient 12.14.09 at 5:20 pm

Dear world (wide web): we've completely given up on the definition of "troll" that bears any resemblance to fishing, haven't we.

"Troll" now means "aggressive interlocutory irritant with a billy club" and "begging the question" now means "prompting the question." One of these decades I'll get used to it. Sigh.

[23](#)

kid bitzer 12.14.09 at 5:34 pm

as far as i understand, "troll" is originally the name of an ancient yuletide carol.

[24](#)

[Substance McGravitas](#) 12.14.09 at 5:50 pm

novakant, if this were Usenet, I'd have to say *Really? Then how could you possibly know what I mean?*, and *Just because you're too ignorant of the subject matter to find the discussion interesting, doesn't mean the people who do are psychopaths*, and so on.

I miss [the cascades](#).

[25](#)

Cryptic Ned 12.14.09 at 6:24 pm

*Dear world (wide web): we've completely given up on the definition of "troll" that bears any resemblance to fishing, haven't we.*

*"Troll" now means "aggressive interlocutory irritant with a billy club" and "begging the question" now means "prompting the question." One of these decades I'll get used to it. Sigh.*

This was already the most condescending thing written on planet Earth that particular hour of the day, and then you capped it off with “Sigh.”, putting it possibly in first place for the entire week! Well done old boy.

[26](#)

Mrs Tilton 12.14.09 at 6:42 pm

Bianca @14, Novakant @18,

on Usenet, everybody is Comic Book Guy (regardless of the subject under discussion).

[27](#)

Mrs Tilton 12.14.09 at 6:44 pm

Cryptic Ned @26,

the lurkers support Salient in emails.

[28](#)

Mrs Tilton 12.14.09 at 6:47 pm

But since we’re on the topic of Usenet, “Serd\*r Argic & The Criminal Armenian Grandparents” would be a great band name.

[29](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.14.09 at 7:23 pm

I miss the cascades.

I miss being in a ng close enough to the bottom of the pecking order that people can say, “Maybe this is the wrong place for you, if you think the kind of discussion people are having here isn’t high caliber enough. Maybe you should try Crooked Timber.”

[30](#)

yabonn 12.14.09 at 8:12 pm

Never ascribe to malice, etc : I believe in nutters and idiots more than in trolls. Plus the “I was just trolling” is a face saving move for said nutters and idiots.

Also, if we are on the subject of Usenet folklore, I suppose this thread wouldn’t be complete without a link [here](#).

Ferrous cranuses, I don’t miss you.

[31](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.14.09 at 8:33 pm

@29: Obviously intending one to innocently follow their “advice” and get tromped upon, of course.

[32](#)

Salient 12.14.09 at 8:39 pm

*Well done old boy.*

I win!

Trolling is actually kind of hard when you don’t feel any emotional investment in it, and I usually screw it up abominably, but yes, I was proud of that one. I liked the “billy” club, and the part about “begging the question” sounds both completely sincere and completely unaware that, y’know, *maybe this thought had already occurred to someone somewhere*.

(To anyone who *didn’t* snicker at it, I’m sorry. I’ll be good now.)

An effective troll puts their ignorance on display without revealing their awareness of their own ignorance, which is obtuseness and buffoonery manifest; they venture immediately from the topic at hand to something truly unrelated through some tenuous connection — and then they say something so obtuse, and so *revealing of their own lack of self-awareness*, that the irony begs for resolution. That’s what prompts people to respond: that desire to resolve the irony derived from a perceived discrepancy between the troll’s self-awareness and the reader’s orders-of-magnitude-larger awareness.

(This is why I think most trolls don’t conceptualize themselves as trolls: because this discrepancy in awareness is actual, not feigned by the troll.)

From the Plato I’ve read it’s easy to see Socrates as a troll, and an intentional troll, because he feigns ignorance. This feigned ignorance may be productive and useful, in his case, but the interactive dynamic’s the same.

[33](#)

Doctor Slack 12.14.09 at 10:06 pm

Nice save, Salient.

[34](#)

[Phil](#) 12.14.09 at 10:54 pm

Friends of mine – well, foaves of mine – used to practise trolling with intent, crossposting from froups like a.f.u and a.r.k to less savvy areas & making ridiculous statements guaranteed to get rebutted at great length. I remember someone arguing that ATMs \*had\* to be printing money, because otherwise they'd keep running out of money and someone would have to keep restocking them, and that just wouldn't make \*economic sense\*. On a.f.u we were the snottiest and most pendantic of all rebutters, but we never let anyone troll us. We won, in other words.

[35](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.14.09 at 11:06 pm

A troll is best defined as anyone whose arguments are outside whatever binary oppositions are favored by the majority (this being the anglophone web, binary oppositions are a given.

Example: On a car blog, in the context of an earnest discussion of low mpg ratings ratings and responsible environmentalism, anyone would be labeled a troll for reminding the majority that public transportation is often more efficient.

[36](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.14.09 at 11:47 pm

Phil@34, So there really aren't any libertarians who refuse to believe full-serve gasoline costs less in NJ than in PA because of supply and demand? And the feminist-ring guy couldn't possibly have believed that, and was just trying to get Muffy Whatsername to waste time answering him? (If Muffy were fifteen years younger, she'd probably have Megan McArdle's job.)

And Novakant, I didn't mean to imply you were ignorant of what was being discussed, and I'm sorry if that came across wrong.

[37](#)

belle le triste 12.14.09 at 11:51 pm

“this being the anglophone web, binary oppositions are a given”

Certainly in any other language, this kind of statement is literally impossible.

[38](#)

Salient 12.15.09 at 12:33 am

*A troll is best defined as anyone whose arguments are outside whatever binary oppositions are favored by the majority (this being the anglophone web, binary oppositions are a given.*

I disagree. Therefore, I think what I am going to do with my life, beginning now, is attempt to follow in the footsteps of giant Harry Frankfurt: pursue a philosophy Ph.D. with emphasis in moral philosophy and philosophy of mind and eventually write a searching but lighthearted paper, *On Trolling*, which will be converted into a book at just the right time for a receptive audience and will become the next surprise crossover bestseller. It should only take, what, amplifying my insight somehow and investing a few decades of dedicated work?

I am going to do this because someone is wrong on the Internet.

About trolling.

...

Such a book could be taken on from any number of angles. On Trolling; Troll Management: Theory and Best Practices; The Joy of Trolling; The Five Trolls You Meet In Limbo (bonus relevancy points because one of them would surely be Socrates); Pride and Prejudice and Trolls.

More seriously (before I get nicked under [section 21 of the SSA](#)), I think trolling is one of the most interesting social phenomena to emerge from the transition to substantial Internet communication in the developed world, and have from time to time been deeply disappointed to find (for example) that an essay promisingly titled “Who Is a Troll? Not a Simple Answer” concerned itself with *patent law*. (This begs the question of whether the term ‘troll’ derived from this usage, since apparently the term ‘patent troll’ has been around since pre-Internet days.)

So, thank you Henry for cuing us in to Morin and Claudel. Their strict definition of a troll precludes anyone who doesn't *intend* to troll, that is, it excludes people who might be acting like trolls without being aware of it, but I like how they finesse the restrictions that definition imposes in the “Argumentation gone wild” section. Hopefully this can be extended further to explore the relationship between argumentation and righteousness. Consider the intricate relationship between trolling, rumor-mongering, and denunciation of kitten killers:

<http://slacktivist.typepad.com/slacktivist/2008/10/false-witnesses-2.html>

(Ignore the first three paragraphs or so.)

[39](#)

idlemind 12.15.09 at 3:54 am

I've got to say, I miss Mark V Shaney's Usenet "trolls" most of all. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark\\_V\\_Shaney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_V_Shaney).) Actually, I miss the responses where people take "him" seriously. Sort of a lexical Rorschach test...

[40](#)

[Substance McGravitas](#) 12.15.09 at 4:04 am

Iâ€™ve got to say, I miss Mark V Shaneyâ€™s Usenet â€™trollsâ€™ most of all.

Gee whiz, some people are automating trolling to this very day.

[41](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.15.09 at 4:06 am

When I go on to right wing sites and try to engage their arguments, throwing every bit of hard data I can at them to refute them, I get called a troll.  
Am I?

â€™this being the anglophone web, binary oppositions are a givenâ€™  
"Certainly in any other language, this kind of statement is literally impossible."

In some other countries the web is less-self selecting for fans of technology as such. More people see it simply as a way to communicate. The web is used connection and escape. The culture of the anglophone web is a culture of technology and progress and the discussions on many subjects tend to operate within the bounds of those preoccupations, interests, or "biases." I do not think the English literature web does not have the importance of its equivalents in Farsi or Mandarin.

[42](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.15.09 at 4:08 am

"I do not think the English literature web HAS the importance of its equivalents in Farsi or Mandarin."

[43](#)

[Substance McGravitas](#) 12.15.09 at 4:15 am

When I go on to right wing sites and try to engage their arguments, throwing every bit of hard data I can at them to refute them, I get called a troll.  
Am I?

That's not a clear enough example. Are you there to make 'em go nuts? Make it impossible to pass by your posts without commenting? If you are there for that purpose, my friend, good arguments or bad, you are a troll.

[44](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.15.09 at 4:54 am

A troll is someone who insists on standing outside a social network while peppering its membership with questions.  
That's all.

I'll leave this discussion to Emerson, if he's interested.

[45](#)

[Lee A. Arnold](#) 12.15.09 at 7:08 am

The U.S. is falling behind in troll technology:  
<http://www.kuroshin.org/story/2003/2/7/15465/00373>  
Good comments there too.

[46](#)

[Phil](#) 12.15.09 at 8:04 am

bianca – argh, the gas price in New Jersey! I think that was another sub-species of troll, though – the guy (usually) who cross-posts Urgent and Important Information to a bunch of groups and watches to see if the locals to say Thankyou. Sometimes they say something other than Thankyou and hilarity ensues.

O my Usenet of old. There are functioning newsgroups out there – I was a regular on soc.history.what-if for several years, and that still seems to be going – but a.f.u is full of tumbleweed these days.

[47](#)

bob mcmanus 12.15.09 at 1:53 pm

No self-respecting troll would comment on this thread.

[48](#)

chris y 12.15.09 at 2:04 pm

Bob, where's your self-respect, man?

[49](#)

Jim Buck 12.15.09 at 2:07 pm

Yahoo has insisted, recently, that all their groups be open access; so the trolls and trollops are hurrying out from under the bridges. This purveyor of piffle:

<http://stevemoxon.blogspot.com/>  
...is particularly active on [evolutionary-psychology@yahoogroups.com](mailto:evolutionary-psychology@yahoogroups.com)

[50](#)

novakant 12.15.09 at 9:16 pm

Don't worry, Bianca. If I understood you correctly, you were arguing that things have gotten better since the usenet days. Should that be the case, I'm glad I thought back then that it was something for quasi-autistic geeks and never took part in it. (Though I have to be a bit of a geek to do my job, I'm not one by nature really and had my first computer at the ripe age of 25, lol).

[51](#)

engels 12.15.09 at 9:33 pm

*When I go on to right wing sites and try to engage their arguments, throwing every bit of hard data I can at them to refute them, I get called a troll.  
Am I?*

If by 'hard data' you mean stuff like your comment above about how 'the pathetic limitations of the binary logic of your English so-called language are all too apparent to ME!' then yes.

[52](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.16.09 at 3:48 am

This shouldn't be so difficult:

Let's play alternate history for a minute: pretend the internet was up an running in 1955:

A chatroom or listserv or whatever for classical musicians and discussion of theory, technique, job offers etc. But one violinist, let's call him Louis Farrakhan, insists on talking only about the fact that he can't get a job, because he's black. Except for mention of the internet, the rest is all true.

1971. A feminist website for discussion and organization, fundraising and strategy etc. Except for one or two women who won't shut up about Betty Friedan's anti-lesbian bigotry.

In technical discussion you have collegiality among experts, and you can have relatively simple divisions between expert and non-expert, insider and outsider. But wider culture, even the wider intellectual culture is never a culture of expertise. Most of what anyone writes whether academic or not, within 20 years will become historicized, periodized, or dated. Dated not in the sense that there's been any advancement, only change.

Some things evolve, others devolve.

"A troll is someone who insists on standing outside a social network while peppering its membership with questions. That's all." That's the best least ideological definition of a troll there is; any other simply picks sides. And if you think that in 2009 we've reached the age where history, for the truly morally and intellectually serious [as opposed to the rest, and we know who they are], has stopped...

You're wrong.

[53](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.16.09 at 2:29 pm

If disagreement and argument played no role within groups that share expertise, there would be no reason to operate a discussion group for those people on the topic of their expertise. If this were the case, dividing people up into "inside" and "outside" might make sense. However, that isn't the case.

[54](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.16.09 at 4:53 pm

That's not to say that inside/outside (expert/nonexpert) is a matter only of invidious distinctions—sociology, group dynamics, psychological needs to feel belonging by contrast to those who don't belong—which could be overcome with different social arrangements, people getting over the need to exclude others, and so forth. (Excluding those who exclude others by making invidious distinctions is not the same thing at all, though sometimes it seems difficult to figure out which elements of their speech indicate that they belong to the group in question.)



[55](#)

Salient 12.16.09 at 5:05 pm

I kinda like Dr. Oblivious' approach to defining trolling, maybe re-characterized pithily as "trolls attempt to lead without attempting to belong." This variant of troll attempts to appropriate communities for his/her own ends, and feels frustrated when the community won't oblige. It's a nice complement to the variant of troll identified by Morin and Claudel.

[56](#)

[bianca steele](#) 12.16.09 at 6:15 pm

Salient, I don't want to put words in your mouth, and I don't mean to suggest that "like" in your @55 is no more than aesthetic, but given your caginess about whether you're a man or a woman, and given your so emphatic defense of women's speech rights a little while ago: The statement, as you read it, of course denies that women ought to be led by men, as (barring theories of reincarnation) no man has ever belonged to womankind. With which sentiment I heartily agree. But given your past history here it may have resonances you did not intend to be considered as your opinion.

[57](#)

Salient 12.18.09 at 1:27 am

bianca, I don't visit this site in order to be subjected to a sustained attack, especially one which doesn't specify what exactly I've done to wrong you and/or how you would like for this to be remedied. I've tried to ignore/deflect what I can, and be pleasant and continue to engage with your comments in a friendly way, but frankly, these various proxy fights aren't any fun for me whatsoever, and don't seem to serve any useful purpose to the community at large. I generally don't feel I've done anything to deliberately or even unintentionally initiate any ongoing hostility, but if there \*is\* something which needs my attention to remedy, please at least explicitly clarify what that something is.

Excepting that step toward resolution, I would appreciate it greatly if you'd agree to just refrain from responding to my comments on CT from now on. I will be happy to reciprocate. Thanks.

[58](#)

Dr. Oblivious 12.18.09 at 6:05 pm

Briefly back to the subject:  
I was thinking about the recent "vaguely passive-aggressive [post](#) on commenters."

Any community is a community because of shared values and assumptions. And in an open community there will always be a tension between members and outsiders. But a fondness for binary distinctions and every community's inflated sense of place make communities built on a foundational association of intellectualism with science more fraught than most. Every man likes the sound of their own bullshit. But as someone once said. "Fact Value! Value Fact!"

Intellectualism should never be defined as purely technical. Sometimes, but only sometimes, annoying outsiders are right.

[59](#)

David 12.18.09 at 7:58 pm

Two more insufferable trollish types:

Eubulides of Miletus

Zeno of Elea

Ban them!

Comments on this entry are closed.

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