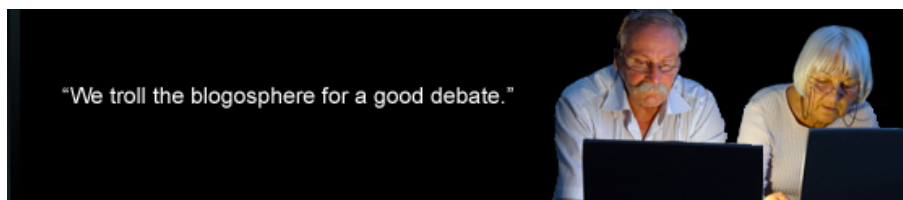


We've Got Those Blues On The Run

bayes.wordpress.com (<https://bayes.wordpress.com/2009/12/15/weve-got-those-blues-on-the-run/>) · by horbrastar



Via cshalizi's delicious (<http://delicious.com/cshalizi>), I quite enjoyed this essay about trolling, argumentation, and the internet (http://www.cognitionandculture.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=559:conversation-hackers-trolls-argumentation&catid=32:oliviers-blog&Itemid=34) this morning ("a Troll worth of the name cannot endorse the label in front of his victims, while he is 'trolling' them"). In particular, the sections about recognizing one's own "inner troll" rung true to me.

There is another reason to make peace with Trolls: they are much less alien than we'd like to think. Everyone has their inner Troll ; everyone has their urges to argue pointlessly with people they know they won't convince. Anti-Troll norms might keep our inner Trolls in check. But they might also foster a spirit of intolerance for other people's pig-headedness, and encourage us to deny our own trolling proclivities. Anti-Troll brigades are full of Trolls, Anti-Trolling being one of their best weapons. On the other hand, experienced Trolls gone to the bright side are better than most people at guiding arguments in interesting directions - which is why they often become newsgroup moderators. As usual, a system's hacker is often the best expert in the security of that system. Knowing that pig-headed discussions will never disappear from this world, there is sense in preferring to deal with proud and savvy Trolls, instead of clumsy, insecure and aggressive pig-heads. To quote our informant again: "*those who do not know about trolling troll unconsciously*". One might want to chose the conscious version.

Lots of other good stuff, including trolls-throughout-history, hot troll-on-troll action, and Troll Leagues. For me, the relevant reference is probably "lifemanship," but your mileage may vary.

This strikes a chord with me because I *have* lately been trying to uncover and meditate on my own troll-like tendencies. I think this shows up here on the blog with political posts: the absolute urge to respond, to argue, and to have the last

comment too. It's no better over email and (as most of you already know) it's the worst in person: R actually accused me of trolling *her* the other evening, although not quite in those word — I think she said, “deliberately obtuse.”

And maybe it'd be worthwhile to differentiate the so-called “professional trolls,” who really do argue in a completely artificial and direct manner, from the “psychological trolls” who merely obey the inscrutable exhortations of their own souls; the essay above connects the two along a single continuous spectrum but I believe that they arise from different sources of derangement. All trolling is context-dependent of course, and those who insist that there could be an “objective” definition of a troll are merely Trolls of a Higher Order themselves — perhaps it's trolls all the way down, an infinite Troll Sandwich, one man's interlocutor another man's troll.

So I'll finish with a trollish apology to the entire internets (starting with my own family): if I have argued with you, if I have *trolled you*, then I sincerely apologize. I didn't mean to make you angry. You said it was one way, and I innocently wondered why it couldn't have been another. Why is there something, rather than something else? But just because I was right and you were — and continue to be — wrong, that's no reason to get in a fight about it.

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