

Versions of truth

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We each harbor our own versions of truth.

This is easily understood when considering religion, politics and the meaning of life. Less so when we consider memories of events that actually happened and should, one might think, be recoverable without partisan shading.

I mean, if it happened, the details should be clear and consistent, regardless of whose memory is tapped for recall. But this is seldom the case, is it?

I recall the door was red and you, orange. We can dismiss this difference as a 'close call' in terms of the visual spectrum or even just a trick of lighting. Same with blue and green, beige and brown, etc. But what if I say red and you say blue? Is the difference in our perceptions as readily discountable as the discrepancy becomes more distinct?

There are, of course, several factors that might account for versions that seem at odds but are actually simply effects of parallax - we may have viewed the door at different times or from different angles, and so on.

This also applies to our memories of the people in our lives. People hear what they think was said or frequently, hear what they want to hear. And of course, we don't each and all have memories of precisely the same incidents, encounters, discussions.

A person of my acquaintance is dying. Nothing dramatic, just one of the standard illnesses after a long life. And the differences in folks' reactions are stark. Some have very clear, positive memories of the time she did this or said that. Of trips to the theatre and special Christmas gifts. Others are less sanguine in their recollection, due to different memories. Or even different views of the same memory. Shading makes the portrait.

In the end, perhaps it isn't the value of the life ending that we should consider but rather, the needs of the lives continuing. Mourners don't need consensus, but they do crave understanding. Loss is loss, regardless of whether we agree on the value of the misplaced object. And discounting another's loss may be one of the paramount cruelties.

Does it matter if you agree with a person's reasons for feeling pain or is it simply important to acknowledge that they do?

Truth is a slippery and very individual concept and, seems to me, less important than empathy.