

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

I Argue with People I'll Never Meet

How to Stop Donating Your Evenings
to Internet Comments



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—
and have a laugh along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRO	1
Chapter 1 - The Comment That Hijacks Your Brain	10
Chapter 2 - You Are Not the Internet's Emergency Department.....	22
Chapter 3 - Why Being Right Feels So Expensive	35
Chapter 4 - Anger Is a Terrible Social Media Manager	48
Chapter 5 - Stop Entering Rooms Designed to Annoy You ..	61
Chapter 6 - The Last Word Is Not a Prize.....	74
Chapter 7 - Stop Mistaking Stimulation for Importance	89
Chapter 8 - Your Identity Does Not Need a Comment Section Bodyguard	103
Chapter 9 - Give Arguments a Budget	118
Chapter 10 - Write the Reply That Does Not Create Five More Replies.....	131
Chapter 11 - Decide Before You Open the Comments.....	145
Chapter 12 - Build a Better Exit Than "I'll Just Check Once More"	157
Chapter 13 - Move Important Conversations Somewhere Better	171
Chapter 14 - Ask Questions That Can Actually End the Argument.....	185
Chapter 15 - What to Do When You Already Know Better and Still Reply	200
Chapter 16 - What to Do When the Other Person Is Someone You Cannot Mute.....	214

Chapter 17 - What to Do When You Actually Have Something Worth Saying	229
Chapter 18 - Notice the Relapse Before You Are Forty Comments Deep	243
Chapter 19 - Build a Default Internet That Does Not Require Heroic Self-Control.....	256
Chapter 20 - Keep Your Evening.....	268

INTRO

It is 9:47 p.m., and you are having an argument with a man named Trevor who lives somewhere you have never been, works in an industry you know nothing about, and has a profile picture featuring sunglasses, a pickup truck, and what may or may not be a bass fish.

You did not plan this.

At 8:30, you were going to relax. Maybe watch an episode of something. Read a little. Talk to your partner. Go to bed at a reasonable hour and wake up tomorrow feeling like a person whose life is broadly under control.

Then you made one small tactical error.

You opened the comments.

Someone had written something ridiculous under a post. Not merely incorrect. Incorrect in a way that seemed to have been handcrafted specifically to irritate you. You stared at it for a few seconds and experienced the dangerous thought that has ruined millions of otherwise perfectly serviceable evenings:

I should probably explain this to them.

This is how it begins.

You type a short reply. Calm. Rational. Almost diplomatic. You are not arguing, obviously. You are simply adding useful context for the benefit of civilization. Five minutes later Trevor responds with twelve words, three spelling mistakes, and enough confidence to power a small regional airport.

Now you have a problem.

Because Trevor has misunderstood you.

You cannot allow that.

So you clarify.

Trevor clarifies his clarification.

Someone called EagleDad77 enters the discussion.

A woman named Melissa replies only, "Wow."

You are no longer sure whether Melissa agrees with you, disagrees with you, or simply dropped her phone while typing, but unfortunately your brain has opened an investigation.

By 10:06 p.m., you have cited two sources, rewritten one paragraph four times, checked Trevor's profile to determine what kind of person you are dealing with, and briefly considered whether his 2019 post about lawn fertilizer reveals anything about his current political reasoning.

Your evening is gone.

Trevor is making a sandwich.

This book is about that.

Not Trevor specifically. Trevor is probably fine. Somewhere, at this exact moment, he may be telling his spouse about the unreasonable stranger he encountered online. In Trevor's version of the story, you are Trevor.

That is one of the first unpleasant facts we will have to deal with.

The internet makes it incredibly easy to donate large portions of your life to people who will never remember your name. You can spend forty minutes carefully constructing a response to someone who reads the first sentence, rolls their eyes, and goes back to watching a video of a raccoon stealing cat food.

This would be less of a problem if online arguments were satisfying.

Usually they are not.

You rarely finish one thinking, Excellent. That was a wise investment of my finite time on Earth.

More often, you close the app with your jaw slightly tighter than before, replay the conversation in your head while brushing your teeth, invent a much better comeback in the shower, and check the thread again the next morning to see whether someone has finally recognized that you were obviously correct.

Congratulations.

You have created unpaid overnight customer support for your own irritation.

The strange part is that you may know all of this already. You know internet arguments are often pointless. You know strangers rarely change their worldview because someone named MikeFromOhio posted a devastating fourth reply. You know that replying while angry usually makes you more angry.

And yet there you are.

Typing.

Why?

Because online arguments are not powered only by logic. They are powered by irritation, status, identity, justice, boredom, anxiety, tribal loyalty, curiosity, and the deeply human desire to correct someone who is wrong in public.

Especially when they are very wrong.

Your brain does not experience every ridiculous comment as meaningless text on a screen. Sometimes it experiences it

as a tiny violation that requires action. Someone has misrepresented something you believe. Someone has insulted a group you belong to. Someone has posted information you think is dangerous. Someone has been smug in a way that should probably require a permit.

The urge to respond can feel surprisingly physical.

You see the comment.

Your attention locks on.

A reply begins composing itself in your head before you have consciously decided to participate.

At that moment, the argument stops being about information. It becomes unfinished business.

And the human brain hates unfinished business almost as much as it hates being corrected by someone whose username contains six random numbers.

This is why simply telling yourself, "Stop arguing online," tends to work about as well as telling yourself, "Stop thinking about snacks."

Excellent idea.

Very elegant.

Please inform the brain.

The solution is not to become indifferent to everything. It is not to delete the internet, move into a cabin, and communicate exclusively through handwritten notes delivered by a well-trained goat.

You are allowed to care.

You are allowed to disagree.

You are allowed to correct misinformation, defend someone, challenge a bad argument, discuss politics, debate

culture, or tell a stranger that no, microwaving aluminum foil is not "basically fine if you watch it."

The goal is not silence.

The goal is choice.

You should be able to decide when a conversation deserves your time instead of discovering forty-seven minutes later that your nervous system has been subcontracted to the comment section.

That distinction matters.

A useful discussion can teach you something, sharpen your thinking, solve a misunderstanding, influence people who are genuinely listening, or help someone who is watching quietly from the sidelines. Online conversation is not inherently pointless. Plenty of valuable conversations happen between strangers.

But there is a difference between participating in a conversation and being dragged behind one like a shopping cart with a broken wheel.

You probably already know the feeling.

You want to leave.

Then someone replies.

Now you must clarify one thing.

Then another person misunderstands the clarification.

Now you cannot leave because leaving would look like losing.

So you remain.

At some point, you are no longer trying to communicate. You are trying to achieve emotional closure from people who have no intention of providing it.

This is approximately as reliable as asking a casino to let you know when you have gambled enough.

The house has other plans.

Over the next twenty chapters, we are going to make this problem smaller in practical ways. You will learn how to recognize the exact moment when a discussion stops being useful, how to interrupt the urge to reply before it becomes a forty-minute side quest, how to decide which conversations deserve engagement, and how to leave without spending the next three hours mentally defending your departure.

We will also deal with the harder situations: when the person is genuinely offensive, when misinformation matters, when the argument involves someone you actually know, when you have already typed half the reply, and when your brain insists that this particular stranger absolutely must understand your point before you can peacefully continue living.

Spoiler: they do not.

You will learn ways to make your phone and social feeds less effective at pulling you back into arguments, but this will not be one of those books that tells you to turn off every notification, uninstall every app, buy a notebook made from ethically sourced bark, and become a person who wakes naturally at sunrise.

We are aiming lower.

Much lower.

We are aiming for you to see a ridiculous comment at 9:15 p.m. and somehow still be doing something enjoyable at 9:20.

That is progress.

Because the real cost of internet arguments is not that strangers sometimes annoy you. Strangers have been annoying each other since the invention of roads.

The cost is what you give them.

Your attention.

Your mood.

Your evening.

Your sleep.

The conversation you were going to have.

The movie you were going to watch.

The book you were going to read.

The completely respectable twenty minutes you intended to spend staring into the refrigerator even though you already knew what was inside.

Your life happens in those minutes.

You do not need to win every argument.

You need to stop losing your evening.

Trevor can keep his opinion.

He already has plenty.

Chapter 1 - The Comment That Hijacks Your Brain

You are scrolling without a mission. This is important, because the internet behaves differently when you arrive without one. You open an app to “check something,” which is a phrase so vague it could mean answering one message or accidentally becoming an amateur expert on maritime law.

Then you see it.

A comment so spectacularly wrong that your thumb stops moving.

You read it once.

Then again, because perhaps your eyes committed a clerical error.

They did not.

The person really wrote that.

Your first reaction is not even a decision. It is a physical little spark: irritation, disbelief, maybe a tightening in your chest. Then comes the thought.

Someone needs to correct this.

Conveniently, someone is available.

You.

This is the first thing to understand about online arguments: the argument usually begins before you consciously choose to participate.

By the time you are thinking, Should I reply?, your brain may already be halfway through the opening paragraph.