

# Why Many People Are Resorting to Anger in Debates

It's extremely frustrating and happens all too frequently: You're having a conversation with someone over a point of disagreement, and the other person quickly gets angry. End of conversation; end of dialogue.

What causes this to happen so often? Why do differences over politics, morality, and worldviews often devolve into anger and hurt feelings? Why must arguments result in quarrels?

Three principal reasons come to mind. We've discussed the first two before in different forms; the third may surprise you:

## 1) An inadequate education.

In his novel [August 1914](#), one of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's characters says, "Intolerance is the first sign of an inadequate education. An ill-educated person behaves with arrogant impatience, whereas truly profound education breeds humility."

I think the term ["inadequate education"](#) is key. I've met plenty of bright people who have years of schooling and letters after their names, yet quickly lose their cool when they encounter dissent from their worldview. A thorough education in the great thinkers, ideas, and events of the past helps quell such adverse reactions, and the pride and insecurity that causes them. It can make you profoundly aware of how much you don't know, of how many shades of meaning there are, and of how arduous and unending the process is of arriving at truth. In other words, a thorough education can provide you with more humility.

## 2) A sign of being ruled by the passions.

Plato described the human soul as having three parts—intelligence, emotions, and appetites. Anger belongs to the middle category of the emotions and is considered a “passion” because it is something we “suffer,” i.e., that happens to us without our free deliberation and consent. Plato (and the Western tradition after him) believed that the lifelong struggle for the human person is to gain control of passions like anger. In a famous passage in the [Phaedrus](#), Plato likens the intellectual part of the soul to a charioteer who must reign in the two horses of the emotions and the appetites.

When people get angry when we disagree with them, it is a sign that they have not yet reigned in that passion of anger. In a society where education and child-rearing less often involves conscious training in the virtues, it’s likely that more people will remain enslaved to this passion. Anger will also be [a favored weapon](#) in a relativist society where beliefs and positions are increasingly thought of as mere irrational preferences.

### 3) Technology?

French philosopher Jacques Ellul believed that life in a [technological society](#) increasingly required people to be *reactive* rather than *reflective*. In a documentary called “The Betrayal by Technology” (which I have included below), he expounds upon this requirement:

*“Technology... obliges us to live more and more quickly. Inner reflection is replaced by reflex. Reflection means that, after I have undergone an experience, I think about that experience. In the case of a reflex, you know immediately what you must do in a certain situation. Without thinking. Technology requires us no longer to think about things. If you are driving a car at 160 kilometers an hour and you think, you’ll have an accident. Everything depends on reflexes. The only thing technology requires of us is: Don’t*

*think about it. Use your reflexes."*

If Ellul is right, in the technological society, it's possible that the reactionary response required of us by technology spills over into other human activities. It's even possible that education—the very thing that is supposed to teach one to be reflective—becomes merely a training in the reactions to certain persons, terms, and ideas.