

Facts can lead to an incomplete conclusion and a distorted valuation!

In interactions with colleagues and friends, we are often influenced by some fact or facts about that person. Sometimes a fact may shock us or even repel us; such is human nature. But the presentation of only one or a few facts, not all of them, can lead to a false or inappropriate impression. Consider the following.

Fact: Deadly bacteria are found in water.

Fact: Toxic chemicals are spread using water.

Fact: All drownings are caused by water.

Fact: Flooding is one of the biggest problems in some areas of the world.

Fact: All drug abusers drink water.

Fact: Everyone who drinks water will die.

This sort of amusing array of facts shows how the value of water can be distorted. Similarly, the value of a person can be distorted and even damaged in this way.

In some situations, considering only a few facts is necessary, such as in a job interview. But it seems we should not always forget that there is a larger reality and bigger picture. We have a tendency is to believe what we are told, even if it is only part of the truth. Some think that belief is sort of our default system; it is easy. But, it takes energy and effort to weigh, think about, and not believe something. Human nature has saved our species, but it is not absolutely always the best director of our actions in a specific case. This is one of the tenets of collegial ethics.

Still other human tendencies can make this more dangerous for us. For example, we have a "negativity bias", where we attach a higher value to negative or bad events than to positive ones, even though it is not always warranted; evolution gives us the cautious "better safe than sorry" tendency. Presentation of a single negative fact about a colleague produces a negative reaction which may not be easy to overcome. Another example is demonization; demonization of another almost always does not consider all of the facts.

Collegial ethics suggests that we need to be more aware of our natural tendencies (such as being overly impacted by a single fact), and hopefully the awareness will allow us more choices in our actions.

(The use of water in this essay derives from a homily given by Dr Anthony Makar on Sunday, 5/10/2015, and from the internet (<http://i.imgur.com/EvmNb.jpg>, accessed on May 12, 2015). Also, an essay by Marcia Barbosa (New Scientist, 4 April, 2015) discusses beliefs, their sources, and other tendencies that we have. "Negativity bias" can be easily searched on the internet.)