

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #17

Perspective

The concept of *perspective* has been part of the Restorative Justice program since the beginning. Over the years we have talked about *perspective* from several different angles. And I have enjoyed hearing all the different views that participants have brought to the circle.

Recently, and especially, because of today's discussions of the widespread conversation about race, I have been thinking about *perspective* and why it's so important in our relationships with other people. It helps me to turn the gem of a idea around and look at its many facets...and its many roles in our lives.

Perspective a bit of a slippery word, because it can be understood and used in many different situations.

This image and the statement struck me during a worship service focused on care for creation.

When astronauts first showed us our planet from the moon they changed our perspective and our theology forever.

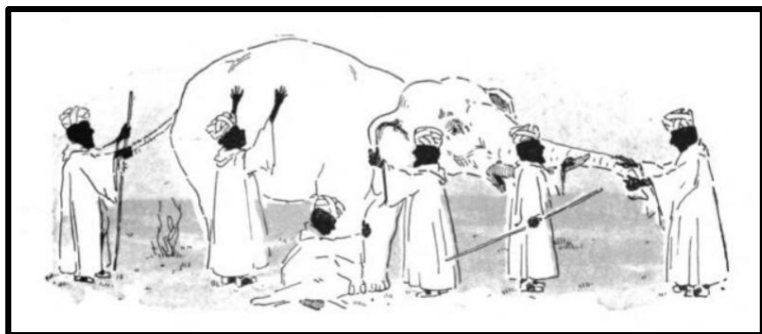


An online art blot offered this use of perspective:

***Perspective** is an art technique for creating an illusion of three-dimensions (depth and space) on a two-dimensional (flat) surface. Perspective is what makes a painting seem to have form, distance, and look "real." The same rules of perspective apply to all subjects, whether it's a landscape, seascape, still life, interior scene, portrait, or figure painting.*

~ From **Understanding Perspective in Art**, by Marion Boddy-Evans

And just recently I remembered this story about the blind men and the elephant:



The parable of the **Blind Men and an Elephant** originated in the ancient Indian subcontinent, from where it has been widely diffused. It is a story of a group of blind men who have never come across an elephant before and who learn and conceptualize what the elephant is like by touching it. Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant's body, but only one part, such as the side or the tusk. They then

describe the elephant based on their limited experience and their descriptions of the elephant are different from each other. In some versions, they come to suspect that the other person is dishonest and they come to

blows. The moral of the parable is that humans have a tendency to claim absolute truth based on their limited, subjective experience as they ignore other people's limited, subjective experiences which may be equally true.

From Wikipedia

And then there are the dictionary (Merriam-Webster) definitions of *perspective*:

1. **a:** a mental view or prospect
to gain a broader *perspective* on the international scene— *Current Biography*
b: a visible scene *especially* :
one giving a distinctive impression of distance : VISTA
2. **a:** the interrelation in which a subject or its parts are mentally viewed
places the issues in proper *perspective* *also* : POINT OF VIEW
b: the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance
trying to maintain my *perspective*
3. the appearance to the eye of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions

And the synonyms:

angle, eye view, feeling, impression, judgment, mind, mindset, notion, opinion, outlook, perception, persuasion, sentiment, shoes, slant, standpoint, take, vantage point, verdict, view, viewpoint

Phrases Synonymous with *perspective*

- frame of reference
- point of view

All of these descriptions of *perspective* talk about how we (all of us) see things differently. Whether we are looking from a distance or up close we each encounter the world and other people in our own ways. Each of us has different experience, needs, abilities that affect how we view the world and each other.

One reason we talk about perspective in Restorative Justice is to better understand all the things that have led to our personal *perspective*: family, school, religion, prison, births and deaths, reading, television, community...the list goes on. Our circle discussion helps us to learn more about ourselves as well as others and their particular situations in life.

All of this is difficult because we can never fully stand in someone else's shoes.

However, we can listen with care to another person's story. We can take in the events, circumstances of birth, and society that have brought that person to today.

I never imagined that I would find myself wanting to go into a prison. Prison was, and is, far removed from the world I live in. And certainly, nothing in my life prepared me to become comfortable in a circle listening to the stories of people whose lives are so very different from my own. But meeting you who live in prison has changed my *perspective*. You not only share your lives, but you share *YOUR perspective* on life and the world. And, like the blind men, I am eager to share what I have learned because you share yourselves with us, the volunteers. What I can tell the people who live outside gives them a more personal and lively understanding of prison and its residents, and hopefully, will enable them to change their *perspective* also.

~ Ms. Pugh, Restorative Justice Volunteer