

## Hume on Miracles and Social Media

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This paper addresses a very simple issue that seems to be beyond comprehension of many U.S. citizens. The issue is how we are to respond and evaluate the many outlandish, clearly false and fabricated claims provided in the press and social media by certain political partisans. The response to this is obvious for anyone with a modicum of skill in critical thinking. However, given the prevalent tendency in our political discourse, it seems necessary for someone to spell out how we should think about such fabulous claims as, for example, Hilary Clinton running a sex-trafficking operation out of a pizza parlor. That is a “Qanon” conspiracy as I understand things, but there are plenty of other examples such as the Big Lie of Donald Trump that he lost the election due to fraud, and more recently when an issue of gas stoves was raised as a public health concern, some people immediately spread the claim that the Biden “government” was going to outlaw gas stoves. All of these claims are patently false. Now I do not intend to explain why people believe such things, and it should be obvious why people spread such claims, but my goal is to explain how reasonable people evaluate such claims. I draw my inspiration from David Hume’s discussion “Of Miracles” from his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*,<sup>1</sup> who brilliantly laid out the criteria by which we should judge any testimony about miracles. I explain his analysis and extend it to the context of traditional media (newspapers, magazines, TV) and social media (Internet platforms). It is my hope that those who read this will spread the lessons to others.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1966), pp. 120-145.

## 1. Hume's Analysis of Testimony of Miracles.

It is important to understand Hume's target from the Eighteenth Century as that helps to see the application to our Twenty-First Century targets. Hume's "Of Miracles" is, as the title says, concerned with belief in miracles, especially miracle stories from the Christian bible. For example, a human walking on water, rising from the dead, turning water into wine, and parting the Red Sea are all fair game. Writing from his viewpoint of Eighteenth Century England, Hume is quick to point out that the only evidence for the occurrence of such "miracles and prodigies"<sup>2</sup> is testimony. Regardless of how one may consider apostles "eye witnesses," at the present moment the accounts given by them are no more than hearsay testimony. Hume then reflects on how such testimony is to be evaluated.

He notes that with matters of fact, the sole basis of evaluation is *experience*. When testimony is used as evidence for a factual claim about the world, one can only assess it by what one knows about the world from your own experience (and of course, that includes learning of the experiences of others—this is not restricted to a single individual, but a general appeal to the experience of humanity as to how the world works). This experience is both of human nature and of the world at large. Hume is careful to separate the two considerations. On the one hand, testimony asserts that such-and-such event occurred, either something marvelous or mundane. We respond to that claim by comparing it with what we already know about the world. We, then, are led to assign a degree of probability that the event occurred as the testimony asserted. On the other hand, we must assess the veracity of the testimony itself, or the person or authority giving testimony. We weigh the testimony against what we already know about human nature and its

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

propensities for being deceived or deceiving. Here we are led to assign a probability to the testimony itself. This distinction is important.

In general, Hume points out that experience is reliable, but it is not infallible. Any reasoning based on your experience, any inferences or conclusions you draw about present or future experience based on past experience, suffers from the possibility of being false. This is the basic principle of inductive reasoning. No amount of past or present experience can guarantee the future will be as you believe. Because experience gives no guarantee, the reasonable person bases his/her belief on the probability the evidence warrants. Simple examples make this clear. Consider the case of deciding the likelihood that a certain event, say the presence of police at a specific location along a highway. If you have travelled that same road for a hundred consecutive days and each time the police are there in the same spot, then you would be led to expect the police on the hundred and first trip. The probability is high that police will be there with radar gun in hand. But there's no guarantee, of course, but it would be foolish to exceed the speed limit at that place having that body of experience from which to draw a conclusion. Hume punctuates this point by noting that "[a] wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence."<sup>3</sup> In this case, as just explained, this means one follows the higher probability.

In contrast, if you had made the hundred trips along that stretch of highway but found police there only one time, then the likelihood of police being there on the one hundred and first trip would be small. The 1/100 frequency does not instill confidence in the belief that you should slow down. It is possible the radar gun is waiting, but the probabilities say not. People make these sorts of judgments every day, though they rarely know the reasoning they use to come to their belief. People also rush to conclusions too often without the necessary reflection on the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

“proportion” of evidence bearing on the belief. The most common mistake is confusing “possibility” with “probability.” It is always possible that the police are there, but if my experience shows a frequency of 1/100, then it is not probable. To think otherwise is to fail to proportion your belief to the available evidence. The same follows in the case where it is possible for the police *not* to be there, but the experience is 100/101 that the radar gun is there. To think that “it is possible for the police not to be there” is a good reason for speeding would be fallacious. Life is filled with these sorts of calculations which we perform both well and ill throughout our lives. Good reasoning is our only protection from falling into traps that, in many cases, lead to dire consequences. So, with this understanding of probabilities and of the maxim of reason which enjoins us to proportion belief to the evidence, or probability, let us return to testimony and its two-part evaluation.

Now when a claim is asserted about the world, about events, occurrences, or actions by people, one must assess two things. First, there is the claim itself—given human experience in general and your own experience in particular—that must be assessed. If the claim is mundane and consistent with most generally accepted beliefs about the world, then one would naturally accept that the claim is true—probably. So, for example, if a neighbor tells me that the water company is digging up Alton street and so I should avoid that street in my travels, then, given my knowledge about the routine activities of city utilities on other streets, I have no trouble believing what I was told. It sounds like a typical utility company activity that I have seen countless times in the past. Implicit in this judgment is the belief that the neighbor telling me this is not deceiving me or has not been deceived herself about the facts. Consequently, there is a second judgment about the reliability of the testimony given. If the person is known to me to be honest, then I judge the person is probably telling the truth. In this case, the probability of the testimony being reliable is

high, and the probability that the fact the testimony is asserting is also high. So, I conclude that I should avoid Alton street; a helpful neighbor gives me a “heads-up.”

But now consider the case where the neighbor told me there was an alien spaceship on Alton street, and I should stay away if I know what’s good for me. Here I assess the probability that the event actually occurred, using my background knowledge about the world. The only “aliens” and their spaceships I have ever seen are on TV or movies. The frequency of certified actual cases of alien spaceships in real life is virtually nil (I will allow all the talk about Roswell, New Mexico and other UFO sightings to count for something). The fact is that there is no public record of such events—everything I know about the world does not include interaction with intergalactic beings. I conclude that my neighbor is “putting me on.” But further, when she insists that it is true, note that my attitude now changes to questioning her intentions and thus the reliability of her testimony. I look at her suspiciously thinking she is trying to deceive me or she is herself deceived. This because the claim she makes is extremely improbable—beyond the bounds of reasonable belief.

Hume tells us to weigh the probability of the event being true against the probability that the testimony is reliable. In this case, to proportion your belief correctly, one should clearly see that the probability of the event occurring is miniscule while the probability of the testimony being deceitful (deceiving or result of being deceived) is extremely high. People deceive and are themselves deceived in far greater frequency than there are landings of alien spaceships on public city streets. So, reasonable people will reject this claim and the testimony on which it is based. This lends credence to the observation that the very incredibleness of a claim undermines the veracity of the testimony that asserts it. When people make outlandish claims, reasonable people dismiss such claims because of this proportion of evidence or probability. Someone prone to tall

tales is not to be believed. The tallness of the tale—the fabrication or lie, if you like—is evidence of the probability of deception (either intentionally deceiving or themselves deceived). Hume makes a very prescient statement that has great traction at this moment in American politics: “A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villany, has no manner of authority with us.”<sup>4</sup> Or, we might say, *should not* have authority with us.

To conclude this brief exegesis of Hume, let us consider what he says about “miracles,” as that is his intended target. Hume says the very meaning of “miracle” involves recognizing that it is wildly in conflict with our commonsense and the obviously known facts about the world. Since I have explained Hume with little direct quotation to this point, allow me to let Hume speak for himself. The passage is a classic piece of philosophical writing:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable, that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be, that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or in other words, a miracle to prevent them?<sup>5</sup> Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 123. What I see as “prescient” is that this is such an apt description of a certain businessman-cum-politician and the people that follow him.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-127.

It is important to note in this quotation that “miracles” are the most unusual of all occurrences—being contrary to all observed human experience. A “violation of a law of nature,” like gravity, is really unbelievable. Hume’s definition is a strict one, for not just any event can be a “miracle.” Only those that have that “uniform experience” against them are truly considered miracles. A merely “unlikely” event is no miracle, nor is a coincidence. These cases are too commonly canvassed by our general experience which shows a frequency much greater than zero. The probability of a “miracle” would be zero, or virtually that (if we are lenient).

If this is understood, then Hume concludes with a maxim that people should follow when evaluating whether to believe the testimony for the occurrence of a miracle. In a really nice turn of phrase, Hume dryly asserts this maxim: “That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish;...”<sup>6</sup> This maxim of evaluation is simple, direct, and effective. He invites us to reason with him that the probability of an “authority” or “testimony” being false (deceiving or deceived) is always going to be higher than the probability that the event actually occurred. If you could say that it would be a miracle that a person was deceived or deceiving, then you might believe that the miracle actually occurred. To believe this of any human being would be completely ungrounded in the experience of the human race—the frequency liars, deceivers, and those deceived is far greater than any frequency of miracles. Let us allow Hume to show how to apply his maxim:

When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.<sup>7</sup>

To say that testimony is “more miraculous” than the miracle being attested to, is to say that the probability of the testimony being false would be even lower than the virtually impossible event being vouched for. It seems Hume believes this could never happen, and so his maxim remains a challenge to anyone proclaiming miraculous or wildly outlandish occurrences. The simplest way of encapsulating this is to recognize that “*Probability*(testimony being false) will always be greater than *Probability*(event occurred).” The frequency of experienced deceivers and those deceived will always be greater than the frequency of occurrences of the miracle or outlandish event. It is no miracle that someone lies or is deceived, but the particular event is miraculous and so he rejects the “greater miracle.”

The closing touch on this exposition is acknowledging Hume’s insight into what we should look for when judging the authority behind the testimony. He provides a list that goes beyond the usual criteria of expertise and unbiasedness. Typically, we consider authorities reliable when, minimally, they meet these two criteria: they are qualified or expert in the field or topic under discussion, and they have no reason to suppress information or otherwise twist facts to favor a certain viewpoint. Hume outlines five criteria which can be best expressed as a series of questions we should ask:

1. Are there sufficient numbers of reliable authorities agreeing to the testimony?
2. Are all these people of unquestioned good sense, education, and learning?
3. Are all these people of undoubted integrity, putting them beyond suspicion of deceit?

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

4. Do all of these people possess credit or reputation such that they would lose this respect if they were found out telling deliberate falsehoods?
5. Are all these people attesting to facts known to the public such that any lies would be obvious?<sup>8</sup>

One must satisfy all five questions properly in order, as Hume puts it, “to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.”<sup>9</sup>

When you add this line of questioning to the preceding analysis of judging the testimony of miracles, it seems clear that meeting the conditions of all five questions will be hard-pressed to succeed in cases of extreme outlandish or miraculous testimony. This underscores Hume’s point that the probability of testimony being false will always outweigh the probability that the miraculous or outlandish event occurred. We, philosophers, would say that the five criteria (questions) are jointly sufficient and individually necessary for accepting such testimony. The failure of even one criterion undermines the veracity of the authority.

## **2. Application of this Lesson.**

All media is testimony. Whether it is the traditional media (newspapers, TV, magazines, journals, etc.) or the newly developed “social” media (internet platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.), all of these present information as a report, a testimony, that certain events occurred or certain claims are true. The consumer of these (the viewer, listener, reader) must evaluate what they are being told. How to proceed?

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129

Reasonable people are alert to extreme language, tall tales, and outlandish claims. When someone tells you that there is a cover-up of some extravagant claim, like alien spaceship landings, and accuses the government of hiding the truth from its citizens, how do you respond? One first looks for publicly known facts that might support such a claim. One cannot claim that the lack of facts exposing a cover-up is evidence of how good the cover-up is. That is the fallacy of appeal to ignorance: lack of evidence against a claim is not evidence in favor of it, and vice versa. So, outlandish claims must come with some such facts to substantiate them. In the absence of facts, the probability of the event occurring would be assigned a number near zero. It's just someone saying something. Here's where Hume's maxim comes into play. One needs to assess the probability that such testimony is deceiving or deceived. The probability of that is significant, significant enough to outweigh the probability that the event occurred.

Shift your focus from talk of aliens to more mundane claims about particular people, people in the public eye, and what they are said to be involved in. The example here is the Qanon nonsense about Hillary Clinton being in charge of a sex trafficking operation out of a pizza restaurant. Or that liberal politicians are pedophiles, or that Trump was cheated out of the presidency due to widespread election fraud. While none of these rise to the level of a "miracle" in Hume's sense, they stand on the same footing and are amenable to the same analysis. What is the probability that Hillary Clinton, an established public figure whose life is well-known, can escape notice as a nefarious sex trafficker? Compare that probability with the probability that the source of that claim is deceived or deliberately deceiving. The results are predictable: in a context where certain political partisans engage in demonizing their opponents and spread negative misinformation about them, the probability that the testimony is deceiving is very high. We see this all the time. It is not the mainstream press (traditional media) that is making the charge, but

those on the social media side. In this case, it would, indeed, be a miracle that the testimony was not false. It is just the opposite: the probability that the testimony is false is absolutely greater than the probability that the event actually occurred or is occurring. Reasonable people dismiss this claim as lunacy.

Similarly, with Trump's claim of election fraud. The assertion of fraud came with no factual basis other than the strident voices of Trump and his associates and FoxNews. What is the probability that Trump was deceived or deliberately deceiving? Very great, for he had a clear vested interest in overturning the election results. The probability that election fraud occurred was very low due to the precautions put in place to protect the ballot box since the 2016 election where there were authenticated cases of foreign interference. Given all the public efforts to protect against election fraud, the probability of such fraud on the scale that Trump claimed is virtually nil. His failed lawsuits are evidence of this. So, in this case the probability of someone lying, being deceived or deliberately deceiving is wildly greater than the probability that the fraud actually occurred. Reasonable people dismiss such talk as that of an embittered loser.

These are just two examples that demonstrate that such claims have no standing with reasonably educated people. One could multiply these cases across "social" media, citing claims made by people against those who are disliked or who they oppose. When we assess less extravagant claims such as "this politician took a bribe" or "this person got special privileges from the government," the probability that such events actually occurred rises. The probability that the "authority" behind the claim, or testimony, is false also rises. I would submit that in these cases, the likelihood of false testimony will outweigh the probability of the event. If you recall the five questions Hume suggests we ask of "authorities" and their testimony, then it is clear that failure is more likely than not. Yes, there is a greater than zero probability that someone took a bribe or

influenced someone illegally or unethically, but the testimony for this has the greater probability of being false. This tracks back to the point that something is possible although it is not probable. It is possible the testimony is true, but it is highly improbable.

Let us reflect on these two examples. First, the Qanon claim about Hillary Clinton is exclusively pandered on social media, a media that remains ungoverned and unsanctioned by general criteria of critical thinking. Anyone can post “information” on a website without their qualifications, credentials, character, and ethical standards being vetted by others. This is the central failing of social media. One person tells a story, either deceived or deceiving, and others read it and multiply its presence by repeating it uncritically. Many people start to believe the story because so many others have posted the story or have endorsed it. To believe something just because a lot of people say it or agree with it is to fall for the fallacy of appeal to popularity or appeal to people. Just because a bunch of people “say so” does not make it so. To believe something is true on this basis is fallacious, and it is especially fallacious because, per Hume’s questions, the people are not all of the same high quality of education, expertise, reputation, and character.

The point is further exacerbated when it is acknowledged that such information is “contained” in chatrooms—websites that exist only for those who want to talk exclusively about specific topics and a specific view of a topic. People in these chatrooms already have a mind to believe anything that reinforces their preconceived ideas about people and the world. If you get your “news” exclusively from social media, you are getting information that is not vetted, substantiated, or in any way objectively-based. So, it is not “news” at all but propaganda—tall tales to assuage those who engage these websites. One has to ask all five of Hume’s questions about these “authorities” to gauge whether there is any probability to their assertions. Recall that Hume

asks us to consider the number of reliable authorities agreeing to the claim as well as the education, integrity, reputation of those giving such testimony. Lastly, one must check on the public nature of the facts attested in order to detect obvious lies.

In contrast, traditional media has well-established standards of reporting as well as standard hiring criteria for those who do such work. Reporting for a major newspaper or TV network or cable network means one has demonstrated qualifications such as a college degree and a commitment to ethical reporting. At a minimum, this means not telling lies or deliberately twisting descriptions of facts. The exception to this is FoxNews which is merely a propaganda arm of the conservative (Republican) right. The recent Dominion lawsuit against FoxNews, which was settled for nearly a billion dollars, is clear evidence of this. They pretend to be “mainstream” but they are not. Otherwise, news reporting goes along well enough at other networks and newspapers such as ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, the New York Times, Washington Post, etc (among many others).

The exception, FoxNews, is really an attempt at a wide-scale “chat room” masquerading as “established” media. Again, the Dominion lawsuit proves this point as one of the central “reasons” for perpetrating Trump’s Lie about election fraud: FoxNews was afraid of losing market share or viewers if they reported truthfully about the election. So, they lied. If you were in a chat room for believers in a “flat earth” and the organizers of the chat room started affirming that the earth was not flat, then you might tune out. This because, to such people, allegiance to their own beliefs is more important than a commitment to knowing the truth. FoxNews counts on that mind-set for its bottom line.

Reflecting on what we know about social media in general and FoxNews in particular, it is clear that Hume’s analysis tells us to beware of any information out of the ordinary from either of these sources. The number of agreeing experts on the content being disseminated as well as the

credentials, education, reputation, and character of those expressing the information all will tell poorly on these “authorities.” The blunt conclusion is simply: you should not believe ANYTHING from either of these sources *unless it is consistent with the reporting of mainstream traditional media*. In fact, one is better off just ignoring these sources as they are not reliable, and are proved so, especially in the FoxNews case. The claim that FoxNews could not be wrong is the “greater miracle” that we must reject. The claim that social media posts could not be wrong is also the same. Critical thinkers expect information and its disseminators to have been vetted to a minimal extent that eliminates crackpots, fools, and dupes. The frequency of these appearing in social media is immensely greater than what you find in traditional media.

### **3. Conclusion and Some Cause for Concern.**

Hume teaches us to be vigilant against the fallacy of Appeal to Authority—to evaluate the source of information for deception and incompetence. Do people sharing information on social media do so with appropriate thoughtfulness and expertise? Do people sharing information on social media seek the truth or only promote their own prejudices and beliefs? The probability that this occurs, especially with outlandish claims such as the “government is coming for your guns” or “immigrants are a tactic to replace white folk in the voting populace,” is extremely high. Who comes up with such “theories” or “conspiracies” and spreads them? The sources for these must be vetted, that is, examined to see whether they pass Hume’s five questions.

Hume teaches us to weigh such claims against what is commonly known about the world, facts that are verified in the public realm. He enjoins us to think of the probabilities of such events occurring as reported and compare that to more obviously known facts. For example, it is claimed by some that the U.S. never really set foot on the moon—it was a set-up, staged in some desert in the southwest of the U.S. What facts are evident in the public realm that suggest that this is very

unlikely? There are plenty, but one in particular is telling. If that were true, then it would require the (then existing) U.S.S.R. to conspire with the U.S. to support this illusion. The U.S.S.R. was in a “space race” with the U.S. at the time and had plenty of capability to monitor rocket launches and determine whether they were fake or real. If they were fake, the U.S.S.R. would have exposed that fact. But no such thing occurred. To claim a conspiracy among two bitter political enemies over this singular event, the moon landing, is an incredible assertion with no factual basis. It would, indeed, be a miracle that the U.S and U.S.S.R. so conspired. The probability that the source of these claims is deceived or deceiving is quite high, much higher than the probability of such a conspiracy and the resulting belief in a staged event by the U.S. government. So, we reject such claims.

Hume shows us how to think *critically* about these matters. It is our major defense against being duped by propaganda, lies, and deceit. The one thing I will add to Hume’s account here, and it is something presupposed in all his writings, is that *critical thinking is not a bias*. To raise these questions, to weigh probabilities of such events occurring against known facts better established than the purported “miracle” is not a “bias” or “prejudice” against what it exposes as false. It is just critical thinking. When a child reasons for herself that Santa Claus is not real, this is not evidence of a prejudice against the “Christmas spirit” or a bias against elves and gift-giving. It is just critical thinking leading to a reasonable conclusion.

So, we come to this: All media is testimony. But testimony must be examined and weighed against the known facts of the world and the facts of human nature—the propensity of humans to perpetrate lies to gain advantage over others. The necessary condition for being on guard against questionable testimony is strong critical thinking skills, such as Hume has shown us.

Once we acknowledge this, we are in a better position to judge media and social media in particular.

There are concerns, however, that need mentioning. Hume presupposes that most, if not all, of us have a “reasonable” view of factual information, and that we have an allegiance to truth as the surest guide in life. This means, partly, that we all know basic facts like the earth revolves around the sun, not vice versa and that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. This means, partly, that most people will abide by truth and not tolerate lies when they discover them. This presupposition is now being challenged because of both social media and extreme partisan politics. The frequency of deliberate lying by a wide range of people, but especially by elected officials, reveals that many people have no allegiance to the truth. Moreover, and beyond this point, with the development of the internet with its panoply of platforms and websites, it becomes possible for people to no longer engage with the world directly, but only indirectly via a computer. Sure, nearly every fact that is known can be accessed by the internet, but what *experience* accompanies that? What I worry is that a generation or a society addicted to a life “online” will lose both critical thinking skills and a broad general knowledge of the world. When one no longer needs to think about something to figure it out because you can just google it, or when one no longer needs to remember basic facts because it is there to be googled on the internet, then the human individual loses his capacity for autonomous thought. “Thinking for yourself” is rather difficult when there is no retained information in your brain other than instructions on how to keystroke to a website. It is doubly difficult when one lacks basic skills in critical thinking such as a knowledge of basic logic and informal fallacies. Hume instructs us in critical thinking and in the understanding of probability that is central to good reasoning, and it is hoped that these lessons will help to increase critical awareness when digesting information online.

The fear I have is that when critical thinking skills and basic information are thin, then there may be no guard rail against rampant lies or propaganda that serve the political purposes of anti-democratic, authoritarian leaders. I rely on an observation by Paolo Freire in his *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1969) who succinctly noted that “One subverts democracy (even though one does this in the name of democracy) by making it irrational;...”<sup>10</sup> Freire is famous for his work in Brazil against authoritarian rule and defending democratic processes. His first-hand knowledge of such a struggle should make us all pause to reflect on how the toleration of lies and liars in our own society makes our character more irrational. “Irrational” means not abiding by basic principles of good reasoning and refusing to reject lies and liars. When people no longer critically think or understand the fallacies of propaganda, then that society is vulnerable to irrational forces. When lies and threat of harm are common, when scare tactics are a first response to disagreement (think death threats to public figures), and when policies are imposed that are not reasonably reflective of the majority of people, then society is irrational and one no longer has a democracy. Believing in the Big Lie or the outlandish claims that are spread on social media are all a part of making America irrational. The time is nigh for multitudes of people to show their dismay with this descent we have taken by showing their commitment to critical thinking and their allegiance to the truth. Only these ideas can save us from a dismal authoritarian future.

Alton, Illinois

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<sup>10</sup> Paolo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum Pub., 1992), p. 58. Originally published in 1969.