

Fact vs. Truth?

Carol Iannone

Friends, are you getting tired of “narratives”? Are you weary of hearing the word “truth” prefaced with possessive pronouns? Are you finding that—contrary to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s caution that “everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not his own facts”—numerous prominent people nowadays are indeed being allowed “their own facts”?

Perhaps you fondly recall the better days when we could more easily separate fiction (what Mommy read to us at bedtime) from non-fiction (what Daddy read in the newspaper after work), or vice versa.

And you may have done a disconcerted double take when you heard the current occupant of the White House emphatically declare during the 2020 presidential campaign, “We choose truth over facts!”

Well, you’ve come to the right place, because here at *AQ* we don’t believe we have to choose between truth and facts since we can have both, often at the same time!

This issue features a number of articles that deal with the crucial importance of having a solid foundation in facts. If you’ve been wondering about the rise of the oxymoronic phrase “woke capitalism,” or what Michael Rectenwald calls “corporate socialism” (“capitalism with Chinese characteristics”), author Emre Kuvvet explains that nowadays, “Even Finance Professors Lean Left.” Kuvvet, who teaches finance at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, presents extensive data showing the extreme leftwing orientation of the professoriate at the top twenty finance departments for which information is available. Additional data shows, moreover, that even the editorial staffs of the major academic finance publications lean left. No wonder Delta and Coca Cola are bowing the knee to Baal.

Emeritus professor of chemistry at Virginia Polytechnic Institute Henry H. Bauer points out that “science” and “facts” are not identical, and the scientific

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consensus at any particular time can be based on faulty information, as was the case with “the sorry history of eugenics,” for example, in which some 70,000 Americans were forcibly sterilized. So far has much contemporary scientific opinion strayed from facts that Bauer recommends a “Science Court” to assess whether so called “settled science” should really be settled.

Social scientists Craig Frisby and Robert Maranto declare unequivocally that “Diversity Training is Unscientific, and Divisive.” Based on many decades of participation, observation, fieldwork, and reviews of the relevant literature, they “state the matter bluntly: diversity programs do not work, and they often result in negative unintended consequences that are far worse than the problems that such programs were originally designed to address.”

Elizabeth Weiss and James W. Springer, in “Repatriation and the Threat to Objective Knowledge,” discuss the dangers to scholarship when tribal mythology, honorable in its own sphere, is allowed to override scientific study of archeological finds.

John Staddon does some fact-checking in “The Behaviorist Plot,” in which he anatomizes *World as Laboratory: Mice, Mazes and Men* (2011) by Rebecca Lemov, who, despite being Professor of History of Science at Harvard, home of B.F. Skinner’s radical behaviorism, doesn’t understand behavioral science; she gets almost everything wrong about Skinner and his assistant Richard Herrnstein. (For the record, Staddon points out, the “behaviorists used *rats* and pigeons not mice, but alliteration rules” in Lemov’s title.) In his review essay, “Can Science Be Saved?,” Staddon also looks at a current book, Stuart Ritchie’s *Science Fictions: How Fraud, Bias, Negligence, and Hype Undermine the Search for Truth*, which accuses contemporary science of harboring “a dizzying array of incompetence, delusion, lies and self-deception.”

Other of this issue’s articles approach truth more analytically and argumentatively. In “Kipling, Orwell, and the Humanities,” Glynn Custred discusses these two writers, both born in India and active there during the height of the British Empire. Perhaps surprisingly, Custred finds Kipling’s poetry about life on the subcontinent more expansive than Orwell’s prose.

John S. Rosenberg assesses the state of the preference regime after fifty years of quotas and on the threshold of the possibility of yet another Supreme Court case, in “Affirmative Action: R.I.P. or Release 3.0?”

Mark Mercer, in “Self-Censorship and the Academic Mission,” argues that self-defeating self-censorship in the current McCarthyite resurgence could

lessen if academics would re-dedicate themselves to their mission--developing knowledge, sharpening understanding, and figuring things out, instead of serving as advertisements for identity politics.

In "Social Justice 101: Intro. to Cancel Culture," Steven Kessler finds the source of cancel culture in belief in the perfectibility of man.

Three brisk Short Takes highlight literacy, Harvard, and the need for humility in human life. Jackson Toby, "Students Are Literate but They Do Not Read," argues that the best way to enjoy reading is . . . to read. External reinforcements worked on B.F. Skinner's rats and pigeons, but self-reinforcement is best for homo sapiens and their expansive minds. Old School college president Nathan Pusey saw the lamentable future of academia in the Harvard of fifty years ago, as Daniel Pipes explains in "Anticipating Academia's Decline Already in 1971." Bruce Brasington, "STEM and stuff," shares his experience teaching a course on accidents and disasters—"epidemics of smallpox and yellow fever, mining explosions, collapsing bridges, sinking ships, structural fires," such as the terrible Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911 in New York City. The students grew angry and the professor was pleased that they had to acknowledge the Gradgrindian limitations of cold "facts." The more disasters the students learned about, "the more skeptical they grew toward technocrats, whether past or present . . . ," coming away from the course with a healthy willingness to reconsider the notion that "'facts,' rightly interpreted with technical expertise, can always master the future."

James V. Shuls sparked some ongoing opposition with his critical remarks on Sandra Stotsky's 2018 book, *Changing the Course of Failure: How Schools and Parents Can Help Low-Achieving Students*, which he reviewed in Fall 2019 along with Eva Moskowitz's *The Education of Eva Moskowitz: A Memoir*. Stotsky and Shuls continued the discussion in that issue and Stotsky offered further context in Winter 2019. Now, in another round of Debate, Richard Phelps writes "In Defense of Sandra Stotsky," and Shuls responds, "Sandra Stotsky Needs No Defense, Her Ideas Do."

At issue is Stotsky's main point in that book, that "massive adolescent underachievement is a social problem, one that has not been solved by our educational institutions in over fifty years."

In reviews, Bruce P. Frohnen appreciates Peter Wood's *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project*; Timothy W. Burns looks into what's happening in our neighbor to the north, as illuminated by Hugh Donald Forbes's *Multiculturalism*

in *Canada: Constructing a Model Multiculture with Multicultural Values*; David Randall assesses *How to Think Like Shakespeare: Lessons from a Renaissance Education* by Scott Newstok; Gene Dattel values Fred Siegel's astute essays collected in *The Crisis of Liberalism: The Prelude to Trump*; Alexander Riley gives a frank assessment of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X. Kendi; Dan Asia cannot quite share Yuval Levin's optimism in *A Time to Build: From Family and Community to Congress and the Campus: How Recommitting to Our Institutions Can Revive the American Dream*. In poetry, Donald M. Hassler muses evocatively on past and present.

A final note: We've become so used to the blatant double standards in current public discourse that it can come as a surprise to find that rules are sometimes applied evenly. Psychiatrist Bandy Xenobia Lee, about whom Bruce Gilley wrote in Spring 2021 ("The Minjung Millenarianism of Bandy X. Lee"), was relieved of her teaching post at Yale in May 2020, evidently due to her varied and voluble evaluations of the "shared psychosis" of President Donald J. Trump *and* his supporters, including his lawyer Alan Dershowitz, rendered without any personal or professional consultation whatsoever, a breach of the ethics rules of the American Psychiatric Association. Lee is suing Yale. As police detective Joe Friday of the famed TV series, *Dragnet*, might say, "All we know are the facts, ma'am."