

The Passy Press[®]

Letters to the Editor

From: Charles Deahl <charlesdeahl@undisclosed.com>
To: Nick Gardiner <enpg@thepassypress.com>
Sent: 27 November 2017 at 22:29:43 CET
Subject: Peter Barnet Essay, October 2017

Dear Sir:

In “Fake News in the Post Truth Era and How to Fix It,” Peter Barnet suggests holding providers of information on the internet responsible for what they circulate, regardless of whether or not they originated the content. Aside from difficulties of identification and enforcement, the essential problem would seem to be not one of responsibility, but one of attribution. If a blogger maliciously promulgates lies generated by someone else, she is reprehensible, but the heart of the crime is plagiarism.

We have always had fake news with us. Sometimes it is called propaganda, sometimes it is called rumor. Yes, it can have a new look via the computer or cell phone screen; it can be formatted like news, but it is still propaganda, falsehood designed to seduce the unwary or the uncaring. And there we have it. It is not the information, disinformation, news or fake news that makes the difference; it is the receiver, the reader, the voter who makes the difference.

We are told that Hillary, or the Democrats, or the Society disregarded the white male working class voter, plunging him into bitterness, and he responded by inking the bubble for chaos and hatred of this fellow citizens. Bitter, doubtless, he may have been, but he knew what he was doing in that voting booth. He knows who he is, and you and I know who he is, and who she is, the millions of his female cooperators. When they believed that a candidate for President was running a child pornography ring from the basement of a pizza parlor, they were not misled by illegitimate reporting. Their belief was strong, but it was a belief in their own inner impulse to hate, to smash, to destroy – what Emily Dickinson calls “a withdrawn delight” that “affords a bliss like murder – omnipotent – acute.”

If we are resorting now to poetry, maybe we should consider Keats’s attempt at an ultimate definition of truth: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” It is in quotation marks in the poem, just as it is in my sentence. Keats did not create the statement; he uses the best explanation that the language has been able to come up with. If we seek betterment by chasing after a relentlessly elusive factuality, we will have nothing to show for it but a pointless and self-defeating rhetoric. Our only hope is to search for beauty, to attack the ugliness of racism and inequality.

Sincerely,

Charles Deahl

Charles Deahl is an American educator living in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York and a member of the Junto founded by Benjamin Franklin.