

Fake News

Is the fuss over “fake news” in itself a fake issue?

Who really believed in the objectivity of journalists? As students we used to debate which was preferable—the Western system of arbitrary rich men owning newspapers, motivated by self-interest and the flow of advertising in determining what sells and what is news, or the communist system of a group of party ideologues deciding what should be published for the public good in *Pravda* or *Izvestia*? We knew perfectly well that each side was doctoring the news one way or another.

In the Britain of my youth, we knew where the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, and *The Times* stood on the political issues of the day. In Israel we know where *Haaretz* stands and where *The Jerusalem Post* sits. In New York we know the difference between *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* and their journalists. We are under no illusions of objectivity. Fake news has always been around. Just think of Jews drinking blood on the Seder night. Many Christians and Muslims have believed it for hundreds of years. And there is a fine line between completely fake stories, doctored documents and photos, biased editorial opinion and lies. But if we are thinking people, we will try to check the facts, read multiple opinions, and decide for ourselves.

It is true that in my youth we thought the BBC was objective. But enough evidence has emerged since of vested interests, government interference, jobs for the boys, and just plain corruption to know that there is no such thing as unbiased, objective news. In the same way, as a child I was taught that the police were honest, incorruptible public servants and the tax authorities carried out their investigations honestly and objectively. It is now abundantly clear that both assumptions were wrong, and those who maintained such views often lived to regret it. You needed to lawyer up or face the consequences. Unlike my father, I would now tell my children not to trust any of them.

So reading the NYT this week, I was not surprised to read that its editorial declares that the wall (fence) that Israel erected “does not work”. It was using this claim to make fun of Donald Trump’s Mexican border wall. Well, if you need a better example of dishonest reporting, you can’t beat this. I had to check that it wasn’t April Fool’s Day. Why doesn’t the wall work? Because, says the NYT, one can send missiles over walls. Yes, of course that’s true, and fighter planes, and IBMs, and indeed nuclear bombs. But that doesn’t mean the wall is not working.

Whether one agrees with it or not, whether it is unaesthetic or the route it took was incompetent or venal, whatever one’s position on the conflict, the number of suicide bombers coming into Israel from the West Bank has been dramatically reduced. Of course, there are ways of getting over and around, and there has been a spike in vehicles mowing down ordinary people, knifings, and lone wolf attacks on civilians. But nothing to compare to the rash of

suicide bombs that characterized the previous intifada. Just because you can ram down a front door, that doesn't mean the front door is useless and should not be locked. And just because some criminals get away with it, that doesn't mean it is pointless to have security.

Why is it so silly for nations to define their borders? Particularly if there is problem with illegal immigration? Don't countries have the right to restrict entry? Even if one welcomes refugees as one should, there still needs to be some sort of order and regulation. Whether peace comes, which we all pray for, the wall will not be a factor one way or another. But clearly the NYT is consistent with its agenda, which is to only see the worst in Israel (and there's enough without manufacturing more). Fair enough, so long as it doesn't claim it is trying to be objective. And I agree, objectivity is not everything. Why shouldn't one pursue one's moral objectives? It is being honest about it that I am insisting on.

Let me go further and say that the Bible is not objective. It has an agenda. I may approve of the agenda, but that does not mean there might not be another point of view. Perhaps the Canaanites were lovable, hippy tree-huggers. History is often written by the victors. The Egyptians and the Hittites never recorded their defeats! Only the Bible did. But that was because it required its people to uphold certain standards, and its agenda was that if they failed there would be consequences. Objective or not, we can agree that it is an amazing document of law, lore, poetry, and tradition.

Or take the Exodus. Did the Israelites borrow, beg, or steal Egyptian gold and silver when they left? Or did they simply ask for back pay? Better not ask Palestinian ideologues, because they claim there weren't any Israelites in the Middle East until Zionism. We consider the Exodus from Egypt to be a glorious release and the start of something great. Two thousand years ago, the Egyptian priest Manetho thought we were a bunch of diseased, disaffected slaves who rebelled, killed off all the good guys, and took off for Canaan.

I don't mind hearing other points of view. I am happy to read Freud's fanciful *Moses and Monotheism*, in which Moses was a pal of Akhenaten, who briefly overthrew the old order. When he himself was kicked out, Moses lost his job. He looked around for a leaderless people and foisted himself on them. When he tried to impose too many restrictions, they killed him. And it was the guilt that drove them into this crazy religion they've had ever since. Well, you could knock me down with a feather. But so what? A good education requires one to face different and often difficult ideas. That was why my father introduced me to Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*! I do not fear contrary opinions, and it seems to me that if some people and some religions do, then it is a sure sign of their insecurity.

Liberal America has become an effete, pathetic, gutless collection of whining college students complaining about being subjected to different points of view and adults who should know better pissing in their pants and throwing hissy fits because someone they cannot bear won an election. Quit whining, for goodness' sake. Life is all about facing challenges, not overprotecting disappointed people to the point of an incapacity to cope. So long as we are protected by a judicial system and laws we should "always look on the bright

side of life" and enjoy our Holy Days.