

You Have a Right to Be Wrong



by Lee Duigon

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“Misinformation” is a lively buzzword, these days. Our so-called government is trying to stamp it out. For our own good, of course. Otherwise we might actually listen to someone who is spreading “misinformation” about our beloved COVID-19 vaccines, Climate Change, or that pure-as-the-driven snow election that we had in 2020. Free speech is all well and good... but we don’t want to be subjected to Wrong Speech, do we?

But sometimes “wrong” turns out to be right, after all.

Consider Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis (1818-1865), a pioneer of antiseptic procedures (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignaz_Semmelweis). In those days, “childbed fever” was a killer. Women died from infections that set in during the birthing process. Semmelweis came up with the novel idea of requiring doctors to wash their hands before moving on to the next patient. He thus reduced the mortality rate among his patients to less than 1 percent.

You’d have thought he’d be hailed as a hero for saving all those lives. But you’d be wrong. Semmelweis scandalized the scientific establishment of his time. He went against the Settled Science! He was condemned, mocked, punished—and finally locked away in a lunatic asylum, where he died, probably as a result of being beaten by his keepers. They said

he was crazy, evil, totally wrong.

But he was right. His Wrong Science is now the right science. Too late to do him any good, though. Because in his day, he was accused of Misinformation. By saving birthing women's lives, he became a villain and a laughing-stock.

He wouldn't have fared much better today. By bucking the establishment, he set himself up for a big-time hurt. Today he'd be censored, de-platformed, banned for life from the social media, deleted, and silenced. Probably they wouldn't kill him today, but only because they don't much do that anymore: just write him off as another misinformation-spreader. And cut him off from his audience.

Winston Churchill was wrong—and mocked and vilified for it—when he said they shouldn't trust Hitler to honor his agreements and keep the peace. He turned out to be right, and it was a good thing he was still around to save his country when they needed him.

A general named Nicias was Wrong when he opposed the Athenian democracy's hysterical decision to widen the Peloponnesian War by attacking Syracuse. Nicias was so hated for his unwelcome advice that they punished him by putting him in charge of the invasion. No one came back alive from that adventure. Nicias had been right, after all.

Even if "misinformation" doesn't turn out to be true, our country's founders still thought it well worthwhile to guarantee free speech. Truth can be made stronger by colliding with error. Sometimes the result of that collision is a third way that no one had yet thought of, and that way proves to be the right way. But when error is ruthlessly suppressed, no third way will be found.

Our own opinion-leaders try to silence all opinions but their own. That's how they use the social media. They also egg on their followers to shout down "wrong" opinions and resort to

riot if shouting doesn't work. You can see that in action at many of our alleged universities.

You do not lose your First Amendment rights because other people think you're wrong. Indeed, the amendment was drawn up to prevent that. Can you imagine Thomas Jefferson adding a clause that reads "except for Climate Change deniers, gender fluidity deniers, election deniers, and anyone else who dares to take issue with the prevailing point of view"?

We have a constitutional republic, not a "democracy." God forbid we ever wind up in the clutches of "democracy."

I have discussed these and other topics throughout the week in my blog, <http://leeduigon.com/> . Click the link and drop in for a visit: we don't care if you're wrong from time to time! My articles can also be found at www.chalcedon.edu/ .

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