

Is hope a fallacy?

(a short essay to examine those concepts through critical eyes)

'My last car was blue and it drove really well. All my future cars will be blue because I want them to drive well too.' Really?

'You can't prove there's no life on Mars, so I believe that there must be life there.' Really? The absence of evidence is ... proof for belief?

'That dog bit me ... so all dogs must be bad.' Surely there are some sweet well-behaved canines as pets or as clever working dogs?

A fallacy is a mistaken acceptance that something is true, based on unsound arguments. Usually, the disconnect is quite obvious. Someone is trying to trick us ... perhaps to con or scam or, at least, to influence us.

But, if we are hurried or frustrated by the busyness of life ... it's easy to look for simplistic solutions to save us from thinking too much.

It's a kind of wishful thinking ... maybe even a hope!

So why might people accept such flawed ideas to be true?

Advertisers use the *availability heuristic*.¹ If their selling message is seen and heard everywhere ... we think it must be true. It conditions the brain.

Social media platforms use their algorithms for *confirmation bias*² – they keep sending you messages similar to those you have liked in the past. That creates an *echo chamber*³ of ideas from people who might think like you. You rarely hear alternative views. Therefore, your opinion is confirmed.

The way a question is framed or asked can channel your response.

Is your answer yes or no? as if there could be no other possibility.

Isn't it bad that 20% of the children are below the expected literacy level for their age? But 80% are **at or above** the expected level ... isn't that good?

And how is the age expectation derived and measured anyway?

A favourite for news headlines is **quoting opinion polls as true indicators** of national views. *The Prime Minister's approval rating has dropped from 52% to 50%, within the margin of error.* 'Wow!'

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Availability_heuristic

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confirmation_bias

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echo_chamber_\(media\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Echo_chamber_(media))

Did the pollsters lay out their methodology? Who was questioned? How big was the sample? How was the question framed? Who sponsored this opinion analysis? Who determines what that margin of error might be?

Would this ‘margin of error’ be more significant than many other amusing future-tellers ... **such as looking into a crystal ball or reading the tea leaves?** While polling certainly has a role in testing opinion, media channels present such polling data as being **serious reflections of a nation’s thinking** ... **because** ... they are readily available and give a storyline for discussion.

We live in a mass-information world, where dodgy ‘*truths*’ are often **proclaimed as fact** (without testable evidence), delivered by people in normally trustworthy public positions. *What is happening? Confusion!* Influencers can saturate free-to-air media with declarations or misinformation ... that might manipulate our views about institutional processes and eliminate any objections *by fear* ... controlling the narrative. **This is not new in human history ... but its proliferation in a fast-changing technological world is difficult to absorb.** *Bewilderment!*

Hope and **fear** have long been used by ‘authorities’ to **influence behaviour**. Government spokespeople have **dismissed challenges** to ‘declared public understandings’ as **conspiracy theories** – **hoping** for community ‘buy-in’ to the official line. However, that argument can lose some credibility when trusted institutions have pushed public storylines, shown to be patently false.

To illustrate with but one example among many: the Warren Commission (WC) of 1964 in the USA produced an **assertive conclusion** about the assassination of President Kennedy.

That conclusion has been demonstrated (by successive Congressional committees,⁴ multiple independent analyses and the release of declassified documents) to have denied, distorted and manipulated evidence – **obvious now in the public domain**.

So, it is highly unlikely that the WC ‘verdict’ is accurate ‘beyond any reasonable doubt’. Yet, any challenges to the veracity of the ‘official report’ are still conveniently **ignored** as *conspiracy theories* ... unprovable now, with

⁴ US Senate Select Committee (chaired by Frank Church) into government operations 1975
US House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations 1976 (HSCA)
US House Task Force on the Declassification of Federal Secrets (chaired by Anna Paulina Luna) 2026

the passing of time. **The irony is that the assassination of the president was the actual conspiracy with the cover-up compounding the deception.**

The power and control of the public messaging tried to generate a chaotic information swamp to dull the people into a numbed compliance that it was all too hard to challenge – backed up by a dose of **actual** intimidation. The then CIA chief of Counter-Intelligence called this ‘the wilderness of mirrors’⁵ – appropriating a term created by poet TS Eliot – for the clouding effect of deception and deceit in espionage and national security.

Now, stop to consider how public narratives are presented to you, today.

How well do the public accountability measures work for you?

We have corruption commissions, legal processes, senate enquiries, royal commissions – all of which are intended to inspire confidence and trust in public institutions – to give you **hope** for the future.

But is hope itself a comforting fallacy?

Why should the next generation have things better than we have had? **It is an assumption in prosperous countries ... but not in places where survival is the priority.** See my previous essay *Self-interest v Survival: which will win out?* **What really are the most avoided questions for the planet?**

The world is on a trajectory to be very vulnerable to ecosystem damage, viral pandemics, threats to technology, geological earth changes, the ‘gaming’ of social organising systems (designed for previous centuries), and a collapse of ‘tower of cards’ economic assumptions. Military ‘dictatorships’ are a real and present danger – **not just in autocracies.**

Is trust in hope the answer to curbing this short-sighted power craziness?

Hope, without a collective global strategy, is but wishful thinking ... a leap-of-faith ... that a saviour miracle might appear of its own volition? It won’t!

Covid 19 showed the way – when even the most powerful could fall victim to an invisible virus. Then, there was a **painful non-discriminatory wake-up call for respectful co-operative global leadership.**

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Jesus_Angleton

<https://www.jamesvermillion.com/notebook/mirrors>

<https://ia601807.us.archive.org/9/items/library-of-counterintelligence/003.pdf> David C Martin 2018

Disregard of unchecked power-lust threatens planetary survival.

To get a collective strategy, there needs to be a **predictable commitment** to the **urgency of peaceful sustainability**.

To quote the Nuremberg war crime trials and the Tokyo surrender statements:

Justice Robert Jackson, Nuremberg Trials, 21 November 1945:

*'The privilege of opening the first trial in history for crimes against the peace of the world imposes a grave responsibility. The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant and so devastating, that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored because it cannot survive their being repeated.'*⁶

General Douglas MacArthur, Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945:

*'We are gathered here, representatives of the major warring powers – to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored. The issues involving divergent ideals and ideologies have been determined on the battlefields of the world.'*⁷

If **Hope** is to be more than a **wishful dream** – it will require **public awareness and education in critical-thinking skills** – solidarity towards **targeted-outcome strategies for the sustainability of the planet**.

(No place for self-serving despots there.)

The means to achieving that scenario are as complex and painful as human relationships usually are – the **tough love** of **agreeing** to the **compromise** of **guiding norms** and accepting the unpleasant personal consequences if such norms are breached. *(No place for righteous absolutism there.)*

But tough love implies **using unpleasant consequences!**

It's about **planetary responsibility** ... not just **individual rights!**

But the blind following of fallacies is a recipe for precipitating catastrophic global aftermaths. Choose **critical thinking and awareness** as a start.

Read **The Most Avoided Questions: a philosophical morality challenge**.⁸

<https://jimreaywriter.net/the-most-avoided-questions/>

⁶ https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/JACKSON_SPEECH-TEXT.pdf

⁷ <https://www.sageamericanhistory.net/worldwar2/docs/Macarthurtokyo.html>

⁸ ISBN 9780994377846 (paperback) 9780994377852 (eBook) First published 2017