

# Character and . . .

# Transitions

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ANNALEE R. WARD

*Character and Transitions*

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*The faculty essays presented here emerge from a semester-long process of reading and writing together in an environment of critique and review. Nevertheless, this invited journal of essays represents the authors' views and not necessarily the views of the Wendt Center for Character Education or the University of Dubuque.*

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# Does the Truth Matter? Truth-Telling as Resistance and Hope in a Post-Truth Era

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Mary Emily Briehl Duba

## Abstract

*We deceive one another in big ways and small. Some have even proposed that we are transitioning into a “post-truth” culture in which truth is a devalued currency. Does the truth matter anymore? Not only does the truth matter, this essay argues, but telling the truth is the first necessary step toward facing well the numerous crises of our day, from a global pandemic to climate change. Truth-telling is an act of faithful resistance and practical hope.*

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I deceived my daughter. At the very least, I didn't tell her the truth. My daughter had broken her favorite headband. Made of rigid purple plastic molded to look like a chain of flowers, it snapped in half when she flexed it too far. Sobbing, she walked the pieces over to our recycling bin, laid them in tenderly, and said—with all the sincerity of a preschooler trying to be brave—“I hope it gets made into a new headband for another little girl.” It soothed her tears to do this, so I did nothing to discourage her from imagining an idyllic cycle of transformation by which everything old can become new again and everything broken can be melted down into a new purpose and joy. “I hope so, too,” I told her.

The broken pieces stayed in the recycling bin until garbage night when, after she was fast asleep, I moved them to the trash. I didn't want to tell her the truth: her headband wasn't stamped with the familiar recycling symbol. It wasn't made of the right type of plastic. From the moment it was made that

headband was destined for the landfill. It was a small deceit to let her think otherwise, but that is only the beginning.

When it comes to recycling, we have all been fed a lie. Here is what happened: in the 1980s, the plastic industry faced a crisis of disapproval. Concerned citizens were worried about the growing mass of plastic in landfills and oceans so they encouraged their cities to pass bans on certain plastics, like those used for disposable cups, razors, and take-out containers. But the plastic industry wanted to sell more plastic, not less, so they devised a plan. Over the next few years, they spent millions of dollars on a media campaign designed to convince the American public that plastic is an environmentally sound choice because it can be recycled. The plastic industry sold us the promise of recycling in order to sell more plastic (Young).



*The amount of plastics in landfills has quadrupled since the 1980s.*

The trouble is that they did this knowing that recycling plastic is not economically viable. It costs more to recycle plastic than it costs to put it in a landfill, which is exactly what happens to most plastic waste. Less than 10% of the plastic produced in the past forty years has ever been recycled (*Plastics*). It was a profitable deceit. As for the mass of plastic in our landfills those citizens were concerned about? It has quadrupled since the 1980s (Young).<sup>1</sup>


More pernicious than plastic is the problem of deceit. We deceive one another in big ways and small, from well-funded misinformation campaigns to the everyday fibs and half-truths we tell one another. Deceit manipulates another's perception of reality, usually in a way that benefits the deceiver. Whether between a mother and daughter or a multibillion-dollar industry and the public, deceit is a violation of trust and a misuse of power.

While deceit is nothing new, it is swiftly becoming a cultural norm. Political leaders and pundits peddle false realities and "alternative facts" that suit their interests. Corporations lie to the public about the safety of their products.<sup>2</sup> Public influencers cast doubt on time-honored ways of pursuing truth: scientific study, scholarly research, and investigative journalism. Conspiracy theories masquerade as reality and lure us into their dangerous web of magical thinking. Social media amplifies false stories, spreading them faster and wider than the truth (Vosoughi et al.).<sup>3</sup> Put it all together and

some cultural observers propose that our growing disregard for the truth marks our transition to a “post-truth” era.

The timing couldn’t be worse. At the very moment that the truth is becoming a devalued currency, we face numerous crises that only truth-telling can begin to address: a global pandemic, racial injustices, economic inequalities, and the existential threat of climate change. Faced with these crises, many are using misinformation, lies, deceit, and denial to pretend they aren’t real or important.

We have a choice to make, as individuals and as a society. Will we seek out and speak the truth about these hard realities so that we can work together for a more just, humane, and peaceful world? Or will we continue to deny their severity, deceive ourselves and one another, and contribute to a culture of distrust and division? I hope we choose the former. I believe that only on the firm foundation of true shared reality will we be able to trust one another and work together to cultivate a world in which all people and creation flourish together.



*More pernicious than plastic is the problem of deceit.*

Truth-telling, I argue, is an act of faithful resistance and practical hope in this time of critical transition. To this end, I begin by discussing the allures and dangers of deceit, focusing on the ways it breeds distrust and division. Then, I show how telling the truth—to ourselves, to one another, and to power—builds trust and true shared reality, which in turn opens the way to peace. I close by proposing some ways we can practice truth-telling in our everyday lives as an act of a faithful resistance and practical hope.

## The Dangers of Deceit

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Deceit poses real dangers to our life together in human community. Deceit violates trust and fractures our shared reality, without which we cannot live well together. When we deceive someone, we invite them into a false reality. As tempting as it may be, such deceit is dangerous because it undermines trust, breeds division and chaos, and thwarts the possibility of peace, community, and collective action for the common good. But before we can grasp the dangers of deceit, we must first appreciate what deceit is and why it is so alluring.

*What Is Deceit?*

We deceive others when we lead them to believe something untrue. Deceit promotes a false sense of reality. Lying is one way

to deceive, but not all deception is lying. We can also deceive one another by manipulating or omitting facts, manufacturing doubt or denial in order to mislead someone, or undermining the credibility of someone speaking the truth.

I didn't lie to my daughter about the fate of her headband, but I did deceive her by omitting facts (like that the plastic wasn't recyclable) and encouraging her to hope for something I knew was not possible. Lying is saying that President Trump's inauguration drew "the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration" (it didn't) (Hunt); but deception is also cropping a photo of the inauguration in a way that makes the crowd appear bigger than it was.<sup>4</sup> Both violate people's trust. Both promote a false sense of reality.



2017 inauguration crowd (uncropped)

### *The Allure of Deceit*

We live today at the convergence of many hard realities. From our ecological crisis to social and economic injustices and a global pandemic, the truths about our world are hard to bear. Creation itself—the common ground of our life together—cries out under human misuse and abuse. People worldwide already are displaced by the droughts, famines, and shrinking coastal lands caused by the rising tides and temperatures of climate change.<sup>5</sup> Our Black, Latinx, Asian-American, undocumented, and Indigenous neighbors cry out—in the streets, from their homes, in prisons, at work, and on the borders—for breath, dignity, and justice. The pandemic has changed our way of life, marking our shared reality with loss, loneliness, and exhaustion.

When reality is hard, deceit—along with its sidekicks, denial and distraction—becomes increasingly attractive. We deceive ourselves about hard realities because facing them requires us to do hard things like accept complicity, feel regret, repair harm, make amends, try something new. This is true in my own life. The more a new piece of information asks of me, the more fervently I resist it. I don't want it to be true. I don't want to do the hard thing.

Deceit and denial seem to offer an escape from difficult realities. They allow us to convince others (and even ourselves) that reality is different than it is: *I'm not complicit. We couldn't have known. It's not that bad.* In this way, deceit and denial are distorted forms of regret and hope. I *wish* I hadn't

done it. We *regret* our complicity. We *wish* we had acted on what we knew. We *hope* it can be made right.

We also seek escape from hard realities in distraction. Perhaps this is why we spend more than half of each day looking at screens and connected to media: approximately 12 hours and 20 minutes of every 24 hours (“Nielsen”). We barely look up. Our encounter with the world—our experience of life itself—is heavily mediated by influencers, pundits, advertisements, content curated by algorithms to keep us scrolling. This means that by escaping in distraction, we make ourselves more susceptible to the deceptions and misinformation campaigns that flourish online. We are a captive audience for those who wish to manipulate our perception of reality.

Deceit, denial, and distraction allow us to take shelter from hard truths in alternative realities built of “alternative facts.” They allow us to hide in sanitized histories that ease our consciences of complicity in colonialism, slavery, and their aftermaths. We turn up the music so we don’t have to hear creation crying out from under the collapse of the very life systems upon which we depend. But—like hiding in a tent during a tornado—the false realities sold to us will not protect us from the truth for long and, when it catches up to us, the consequences will be devastating.

*The Dangers of Deceit*      The dangers of deceit are multiple and overlapping. Deceit generates distrust between people and undermines our shared reality. In technical terms, “shared reality” means a world of experience that we inhabit together and feel similarly about. When we watch a movie with a friend and laugh at the same scenes, we are sharing that reality. When we reminisce about childhood Sundays in grandma’s backyard with our cousins, we are inhabiting the same memories of a shared reality. When we attend a support group where everyone present shares a common experience of loss or struggle, we take comfort in sharing that reality. Whether for a fleeting moment with a stranger or over a lifetime with a beloved, shared reality is the basis of human relationship and connection. Indeed, a longing for shared reality is part of being human.<sup>6</sup>


*Deceit, denial, and distraction allow us to take shelter from hard truths.*

Deceit undermines shared reality. When I didn’t tell my daughter the truth about her headband’s landfill destiny, I invited her into a fantasy that I do not share. I drove a wedge between the worlds we inhabit. Similarly, when those in power deceive the public—misleading and manipulating all of

us together—it harms the fabric of society by distorting our sense of true shared reality.

Deceit denies equal access to facts, which damages democracy and prevents us from working well together to address the crises we face. Remember the plastic industry’s profitable deceit? If they had told us the truth—that recycling plastic was not (at least not *yet*) an economically or ecologically viable solution to the problem of plastic waste—we could have worked together to prevent the tons of plastic that have since exploded in our landfills. We could have invested more in recycling infrastructures. We could have reduced our production of the plastics hardest to recycle. But we were denied those opportunities by deceit.

Deceit—along with denial and distraction—contributes to our emerging post-truth culture. A post-truth culture is one where facts lose their value, the pursuits of truth are undermined, and every truth-claim is chalked-up to someone’s perspective.<sup>7</sup> Post-truth is defending an idea that is demonstrably false without concern for facts. More than deception, it is willful ignorance and disregard for the truth. Post-truth is shamelessly touting something we know to be untrue and *just don’t care*. Post-truth is all the evidence pointing to a suspect’s innocence and the jury deciding he just *seems* guilty. Post-truth is all the evidence pointing to human-caused changing climate and still deciding it doesn’t *feel possible*. When we choose easy feelings and disregard truths inconvenient to us, the false peace we cultivate always comes at the expense of some neighbor.



*When we choose easy feelings and disregard truths inconvenient to us, the false peace we cultivate always comes at the expense of some neighbor.*

Without a commitment to pursuing and telling the truth, we lose the ability to live well together. Society has no common ground, no basis for relationship, conversation, trust, or decision-making. We talk past one another, rather than with one another. We become polarized and conflict erupts. We look at one another with suspicion, doubt one

another’s intentions, words, and actions. We presume the worst. When we cannot trust one another, we isolate ourselves, build walls around our hearts, our homes, and our nation.

The trouble is that those in power benefit from a post-truth environment, at least in the short term. It allows them to peddle false realities handcrafted to



perpetuate their own authority. It allows them to manipulate the public with appeals to emotion, to make us trust their self-serving versions of reality rather than the true shared reality we inhabit together. But eventually, false realities and the deceits that create them always fall apart: the emperor has no clothes. But cracking the illusion of a false reality requires that we—like the little girl in the story who boldly declared the naked fact of the foolish and deceived emperor—commit to telling the truth.

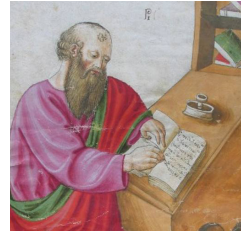
## Truth-Telling as Faithful Resistance and Practical Hope

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How should we live, then, in the face of powers that deceive and divide us? To what forms of resistance should people of integrity commit in the face of temptations to distract and deceive even ourselves? I have proposed that we begin by telling the truth—to ourselves, to one another, and to power. Now, in this section, we look more closely at truth-telling: what it is, how it is a form of faithful resistance and practical hope for a world of peace and wholeness, and where we can find examples of this kind of truth-telling in the Christian tradition.

### *What Is Truth-Telling?*

Over 2,300 years ago, Aristotle defined truth-telling this way: “to say of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not, is true” (1011b25). He is pointing to a kind of correspondence between *reality* (what is) and what we *say*. He was a wise one, that Aristotle, but truth-telling is about more than words. It is also about actions and relationships—how we live, what we stand for, what we love.



*Aristotle*


For our purposes, let’s define *truth-telling* as the practice of living in a way that reflects and responds to reality, even when it is hard, and faithfully resists the powers that deceive. Truth-telling is faithful resistance to every power that would seek to deceive, divide, and disorient us. It is faithful resistance to everything in and around us that would distract us from the good work of cultivating common ground, community, and a more just, humane, and peaceful world. Since truth-telling contributes to this good work, it is also a form of practical, lived hope for a better future.

Telling the truth entails more than not lying. We tell the truth when our lives—our words, deeds, and relationships—reflect and respond to what is real. When our neighbor suffers, a truth-teller acknowledges the reality of this suffering and responds with good medicine—whether companionship,

compassion, or advocacy. When the earth stuns us with beauty and goodness, a truth-teller's life erupts in joy and gratitude. Truth-tellers are honest about the reality of the world *as it is* (faithful resistance to deception about the world) and invest in the world *as it can be* (practical hope).

And it can be hard. For one thing, telling the truth is hard because *knowing* the truth can be hard. Scientists spend their working lives discerning nature's patterns and discovering the sources and trajectories of everything from viruses to cosmic light. Philosophers and theologians pursue truths borne by ancestral testimony and wisdom, truths revealed by love and poured out in suffering. Yet the best among such truth-seekers readily admit their "learned ignorance"—their awareness of how much they do not know.<sup>8</sup> Such humility is itself a form of truthfulness.

*Truthfulness as the Trustworthy Ground of Peace* Truthfulness always matters, but the stakes are high in a time of transition. One of the important tasks of a social transition is to take stock of our shared reality and to articulate who we want to be in the future. Doing that work together requires trust and the cultivation of a shared vision of the future, each of which is possible only when we commit to pursuing and practicing truthfulness.



*Truthfulness always matters, but the stakes are high in a time of transition.*

Truth-telling is an invitation to trust, even across differences in experience. When we speak honestly and listen to one another with humility and openness, we build trust across differences, not based on identical experience, but on the basis of neighborly hospitality, which is itself sacred common ground.

Speaking truthfully, we invite one another to inhabit the world of experience that we ourselves trust and inhabit. (Deceit, on the other hand, invites someone into a world we know to be false.) In this way, truth-telling builds trust, which is the prerequisite for life together in community.

Truth-telling is the basis of *shalom*. *Shalom* is a biblical concept often translated as peace, though the meaning is far richer. *Shalom* is a communal state of well-being rooted in trust, justice, wholeness, and health. Theologian Jürgen Moltmann puts it plainly: "Truth creates trust and trust creates peace, and without peace, life is not possible." *Shalom* is not a private or merely spiritual peace, Native theologian Randy Woodley reminds us: "The whole community must have shalom or no one has shalom. As long


as there are hungry people in a community that is well fed, there can be no shalom. Shalom is not for the many, while a few suffer; nor is it for the few while many suffer” (21). *Shalom* is not an impossible utopian vision, but the shared reality God intends and desires for creation.

Truth-telling honors this reality. For Christians, one of the deepest realities is that the world itself is God’s good creation. The world is saturated with God’s presence, sustained by God’s love, and oriented toward God’s desire for *shalom*—here as in heaven. All reality runs toward this peace. All fleeting moments of shared reality prepare for the joy of *this* shared reality. Truth-telling is a form of faithful resistance to all that would undermine God’s desire for the *shalom* of creation.

*Exemplars of Truth-Telling as Resistance and Hope* Throughout the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, we find examples of truth-telling as faithful resistance and practical hope. When the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness, God gave them the law (Torah) to guide them in building a humane, just, and peaceful world. As the Jewish tradition reminds us, “The entire Torah is for the sake of the way of shalom” (Gittin 59b qtd. in Woodley 11, n. 6).<sup>9</sup> In the Torah, one of the ten commandments prohibits bearing false witness—that is, giving false testimony against one another in court. This commandment is, as biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann writes, “a simple requirement that neighbors not distort shared reality” and a reminder that “reality is not an innocent product of *power*” (71). When we tell the truth, we resist those forces that would put reality up for grabs to the highest bidder. Telling the truth, we honor shared reality and hold it in sacred trust with our neighbors. Truth-telling is faithfulness to God’s law and to our neighbors whose welfare is entrusted to us and bound to the same reality as our own.

The prophets of the Old Testament also spoke hard truths as an act of faithful resistance and practical hope. In a time in which the inhabitants of Judah had fallen into self-deception, prophets like Isaiah called the people back into right relationship with God. They called the people to face reality:

while they were busy fasting and offering showy sacrifices to God, they were also bickering among themselves and oppressing their own workers (Isa. 58.3-5). The prophets called the people back to their grounding reality: the God who had brought them out of Egypt and through the wilderness, the



*When we tell the truth,  
we resist those forces that  
would put reality up for  
grabs to the highest bidder.*

God who had made a true and trustworthy covenant with them, the God who is rightly worshiped by releasing the bonds of injustice, letting the oppressed go free, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the homeless (58.6-7). In short, the prophets told the hard truth: true worship is practicing *shalom*—everything else is a distraction.



*A prophet speaks truth to power.*

The prophets also spoke truth to power. While kings hired false prophets to tell them what they wanted to hear (the ancient world’s version of confirmation bias!), true prophets told the hard truths that no one wanted to hear: “the Lord is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants” (NRSV Isa. 24.1).

But the prophets didn’t merely warn, they connected the dots from truth to consequence: “the earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers. . . . The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (24.5). The hard truth is this, says the prophet: our relationship with earth and with God are part of the same shared reality.

At the center of the Christian faith is a mystery: in Jesus, God entered into the shared reality of creation and human life. This is the meaning of the incarnation. Born as a vulnerable baby, God entered into our world of shared experience: a world of friendship and finitude, of beauty and brokenness, joy and suffering. In Jesus, God shared our reality in order to forge common ground and make peace with us for the sake of the whole creation. Trusting this, we can dare to speak honestly about reality, including the realities of suffering, injustice, and our participation in them.


When we tell the truth—to ourselves, to one another, and to power—we can take courage from those faithful truth-tellers who have gone before us.

## **Practices for Truth-Tellers**

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In an era in the throes of transition into post-truth, living out a commitment to truth-telling takes both courage and community. Here are some practices that I have learned from others along the way for practicing truth-telling as an act of faithful resistance and practical hope.

First, faithful resistance requires that we rest from the constant barrage of deceit and distraction. Go outside without your phone. At least once a day, immerse yourself in the world unmediated by words and images. Creation itself is our bedrock shared reality. Soils and rivers, trees and rocks, oceans and all-surrounding atmosphere: this is our literal common ground. According to Jewish and Christian Scripture, God calls this shared reality *good*.<sup>10</sup> Together with other creatures, human beings inhabit this good place as our “common home,” our shared reality (Pope Francis). Here, we share the reality of our *humanness*, our life as creatures who are both finite and free, both dust and glory. So, touch the ground. Listen to the leaves rustling in the trees. Rest in the peace of the unmediated real.



*Our relationship with earth and with God are part of the same shared reality.*

Second, adopt a practice of self-reflection that allows you to seek the truth about yourself. Perhaps you need to hear the truth of your own beauty and dignity in resistance to the harmful untruths you have received elsewhere. Or perhaps you need to speak the hard truth of your own weaknesses—a propensity for self-distraction or the ways you deceive yourself. Whether in relationship with a friend, in a faith community, or in your own journal, establish a practice that allows you to hold yourself accountable to both hard and affirming truths. For me, this is best done in community. I belong to a faith community where, each week, we confess together the ways we have fallen short of God’s vision of *shalom*. Then, together, we receive the persistent truth of God’s forgiveness and love. Speaking these hard truths and receiving the truth of mercy frees me for the week ahead.

Third, in your own media consumption, try to get out of your own echo chamber. Subscribe to a source outside your own cultural and religious background. Friend the local mosque or a local organization supporting immigrants on Facebook so that you can follow the news through their eyes. Whatever you are reading or viewing, employ tools of critical analysis. In other words, ask questions of what you see and read in order to unmask the hidden powers and agendas behind truth-claims. When I read something and wonder about its angle, I ask myself *who benefits* from this interpretation of reality? Which empire is bolstered by this claim? Then, I also ask the corollary: *who doesn’t benefit?* Whose testimony is silenced and whose wellbeing is thwarted by this interpretation of reality?

Fourth, commit to holding those in power accountable to shared reality. Whether in ballots or direct action, with your money or your pen, insist that our leaders and those wielding great power over our shared reality tell the truth. Get inspired for this work by listening to brave truth-tellers like Greta Thunberg and Brian Stevenson who, in their own areas of passion and expertise, work to set the record straight on behalf of justice and ecological flourishing.<sup>11</sup> Their witness can inspire our own commitment to speaking and living the truth, even in the face of powerful denials.



*Protestors demand truth.*

Finally, commit to telling the truth to one another and to building trust and common ground with those with different lived experiences. Talk to your neighbors. Make friends with people of other faith traditions, languages, cultures, and life experiences. Travel abroad, if opportunity arises. While power will seek to divide (and so to conquer) us with distortions, truth-telling builds trust and relationship. For example, as our international politics become more precarious, my family has committed to video-chatting with our friends in Iran more regularly. Together, we are building trust and shared reality between our daughters and teaching them the way of peace (*salaam*, in Arabic).

## Conclusion

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Someday I will tell my daughter the whole truth. I will tell her about moving her broken headband to the garbage and how I hoped she wouldn't see. Perhaps we will laugh about it, and I will apologize for this and all the other mistakes I have made as a parent. As she grows up, I will invite her more fully into the many hard and beautiful realities of our world and I will journey with her as she discovers others for herself. We will talk about the allures of deceit and the hope I believe is found only in honesty about reality.

*Living out a commitment to truth-telling takes both courage and community.*

Who knows? Perhaps by living as truth-tellers in matters big and small, she and I will walk together—with you and all our neighbors near and far—into a new shared reality built on the firm foundation of trust, humanity, justice, and peace. Until then, let truth-telling be our act of faithful resistance

against all that would deceive and divide us. Let truth-telling be our act of hope for our world.

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Photo credit “Waste” p. 55: Ben Kerckx, Pixabay.com

Photo credit “2017 Presidential Inauguration” p. 57: National Parks Service/Public Domain

Image of Aristotle p. 60: Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain

Image “An Old Prophet Denounces the Proceedings at a Lavish Sacrifice” p. 63: Science Museum Group, United Kingdom, CC BY 4.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), lightened

Photo credit “Flashmob for Truth” p. 65: Master Steve Rapport, CC By 2.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/), lightened

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The story of the plastic industry’s profitable deceit is told in the PBS Frontline documentary, *Plastic Wars*, which premiered March 31, 2020, bringing this issue into public consciousness. To hear the whole story, stream the documentary at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/plastic-wars](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/plastic-wars).

<sup>2</sup> The Tobacco industry wrote the playbook for public deceit when they denied what they knew to be true: smoking is hazardous to your health. Since then, other industries—including the fossil fuel industry—have followed their lead. To learn more about these profitable deceptions, I recommend Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway’s *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, also available as a documentary.

<sup>3</sup> A study of Twitter trends shows that false stories spread six times faster—and significantly wider—than true news. For an accessible account of this MIT study, see “The Spread of True and False News Online” by Vosoughi et al.

<sup>4</sup> It was Sean Spicer, then White House Press Secretary, who lied about the size of the 2017 inauguration crowd: see Hunt, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/trump-inauguration-crowd-sean-spicers-claims-versus-the-evidence](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/trump-inauguration-crowd-sean-spicers-claims-versus-the-evidence). On the editing of crowd photos to manufacture a sense of a robust crowd, see Swaine, [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/donald-trump-inauguration-crowd-size-](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/donald-trump-inauguration-crowd-size-)

photos-edited.

<sup>5</sup> NASA maps the rise in global surface temperature from 1884-2020 here: “Global Temperature,” [climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/](https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/). To learn more about human displacement that is caused by climate change I recommend the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: see “Climate Change and Disaster Displacement,” [www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html](https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/climate-change-and-disasters.html).

<sup>6</sup> On shared reality and its role in human life, see, E. Tory Higgins’ *Shared Reality: What Makes Us Strong and Tears Us Apart*.

<sup>7</sup> “Post-truth” was named the 2016’s word of the year, according to the Oxford Dictionaries. To learn more about the emerging concept of post-truth, I recommend Lee McIntyre’s *Post-Truth*.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) spoke of the importance of “learned ignorance” (*docta ignorantia*, in Latin) as a gift of the Holy Spirit to those who humbly pursue knowledge of God, but it was Nicolas of Cusa who made the term famous in his 1440 essay, *On Learned Ignorance*.

<sup>9</sup> The Torah—which means the *teachings* or *law of God*—includes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which Christians also hold as sacred Scripture. The quote in Woodley comes from a set of Jewish teachings called the Talmud, Gittin 59b.

<sup>10</sup> God declares the goodness of creation in Genesis 1-2.4a.

<sup>11</sup> To learn more about the work of Brian Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative, see: [justmercy.eji.org/](https://justmercy.eji.org/). Hear climate activist Greta Thunberg testify about the reality of climate change to world leaders during the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit, at the age of 16, here: [www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit](https://www.npr.org/2019/09/23/763452863/transcript-greta-thunbergs-speech-at-the-u-n-climate-action-summit).

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