

The Role of Credulity in Failed Problem Solving

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Abstract. Credulity is the predisposition to be easily, and often too easily, accepting of new information and arguments in the absence of evidence that the information is, or the arguments are, credible. I suggest that the greatest problem faced today by many problem solvers is not lack of problem solving knowledge or skills but, rather, credulity. Authoritarian leaders know this and take advantage of it. IQs rose 30 points during the 20th century, but despite this, credulity is at astonishingly high levels. If people are credulous, then all their problem solving skills can be for naught. I discuss the problem and suggest solutions to it.

Because I am a university professor, most of my friends and colleagues are also university professors. A few are in allied fields, such as academic administration and elementary/secondary education. And then there is Joachim Funke, who spent most of his life as a university professor but, improbably, is also a DJ (disc jockey). As an adolescent, I had some favorite DJs—Cousin Brucie and Harry Harrison on WABC Radio, New York City—but I never expected actually to meet one. And then along came Jofu, as his friends call him (and I hope I am included in their number).

Complex Problem Solving: The European Tradition

Jofu has made many different contributions to psychology, but I will focus on one—his research on complex problem solving. Once upon a time, there were two major approaches to research on complex problem solving. The “American” perspective emphasized fairly well-structured problems, such as the Missionaries and Cannibals problem and the Tower of Hanoi problem (Sternberg & Frensch, 1991). The approach was probably best represented by the classic work of Newell and Simon (1972) on human problem solving.

The American approach, I believe, declined because it had no viable future. The problems were too unlike real-world problems. They suffered from many of the same issues as conventional intelligence tests (Sternberg, 2020b). They were well-structured, decontextualized, somewhat sterile, unrealistic, emotionally uninvolved, for low or no stakes, simplistic, and characterized by unique or almost unique paths to solution. In contrast, problems studied in the European, and mostly German, tradition were richer and realistic. They resembled problems in the world whose solutions matter.

It is always hard to pin the start of a tradition to any one person’s work, but certainly, the work on Lohhausen initiated by Dietrich Dörner and his colleagues would be considered seminal (e.g., Bick et al., 1994). Being mayor of a city, as in the work on the Lohhausen problem, more reflects actual life challenges or organizations and competing interests than does the work on the Missionaries and Cannibals problem.

As a professor in an American university, I am scarcely in a position to assess the state of German work on problem solving, but from my vantage point on the other West-to-East side of the Atlantic Ocean, Jofu would appear today to be the most eminent, or certainly among the handful of most eminent, immediate successors to Dörner. His work has investigated, in a somewhat more structured way than his predecessors, the psychological processes involved in complex problem solving. It has been a great success, as shown by the roughly 10,000 citations of his work on Google Scholar.

Much of my own work in recent years has been at the very least related to work in the complex European tradition (e.g., Sternberg, 2020a; Sternberg & Sternberg, 2017; Sternberg et al., 2017, 2019, 2021). My colleagues and I have examined complex problem solving in the contexts of scientific problem solving and intercultural problem solving. I have also looked at real-world problem solving as the basis for what I have come to call adaptive intelligence (Sternberg, 2021a, 2022). I further have suggested that two processes—seeking internal coherence and seeking external correspondence—underlie adaptive intelligence (Sternberg, 2021b). Internal coherence is the property of the parts of the whole of a solution fitting together logically or empirically. External correspondence is the property of the solution fitting the facts of the real world.

My goal in this particular essay is not to review my own work on problem solving but, rather, to discuss a fundamental obstacle to the kinds of cognitive approaches to problem solving many of us, including myself, have taken. I question whether, when I write in mid-2022, the greatest challenge of studying complex problem solving is as much studying people's ability to intelligently solve complex problems as it is studying their desire to do so.

Laying Out the Welcome Mat for Authoritarians

We are living in a time when authoritarians are making a comeback—not only in far-flung places such as China, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Iran, and Saudi Arabia but also in Europe: in Hungary, Poland, and most of all, Russia, which has descended from being merely authoritarian to being a brutal dictatorship reminiscent of Axis countries during World War II. It may be a coincidence or it may be that something more is going on. Young, and even middle-aged and most older people today did not live through World War II. To them, authoritarian leaders of the past are, well, past. Democracy presents its own set of challenges. What if we are at a point in a cycle where people know the challenges of democracy and have tired of democracy and its challenges but do not well know the challenges of authoritarianism? What is for sure is that democracy is on the decline (Albright, 2018; Coppedge et al.,

2022; Klass, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2018). And the authoritarians are getting elected, not elevating themselves to power through coups d'état. They may stay in power through attempts to falsify election results, as Donald Trump tried to do (Chowdhury et al., 2022) and as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil appears to be attempting to prepare to do (Ecarma, 2022). But initially, at least, they often get themselves elected through popular will.

What if, as seems to be happening, the problems of the world seem overwhelming and it becomes much easier simply to accept the solutions of others, particularly people one respects—perhaps someone who sets himself up (and it is almost always a “him”) as a populist who will serve the people? Many people are hurting, and they are ready to blame others for their misfortune. They are also ready to hear a false populist claim that he knows the enemy, and the enemy is right there undermining you!

But what then, if the authorities one respects do not think in a respectable way? What if the authorities are people who are not, well, even respectable as people? Then the greatest problem may become one of not falling into the trap of credulity. That, I believe, is the challenge of the present age: credulity. Things have reached such a low point, at least in the United States, that a government official from Arizona, Rusty Bowers, testified about how he was illegally pressured to manipulate the tallying of votes to support Donald Trump in the 2020 US presidential election, and then, after describing the illegal pressure, said he would vote for Trump again if Trump ran again in 2024 (Graham, 2022). Really, how bizarre is that?

Credulity as a Basis for A-rational Thought

Credulity is “a tendency to be too ready to believe that something is real or true” ([Online search engine result for the query “credulity”], n.d.b). It is similar but not quite identical to gullibility. In particular, the difference between credulity and gullibility is that “credulity is a willingness to believe in someone or something in the absence of reasonable proof,while gullibility is the quality of readily

believing information, truthful or otherwise, usually to an absurd extent” (Credulity vs Gullibility—What’s the difference?, n.d.a). Credulity is also different from persuasibility. The question is not how easily you are persuaded but, rather, how easily you are persuaded in the absence or near-absence of evidence, or in the presence of weak or flawed evidence.

Credulity is a combination of a skill and an attitude. One needs the skills to recognize that one is too easily accepting what one is told or what one reads; one needs the attitude of wanting to apply the skill. These skills probably derive from some combination of general intelligence, adaptive or practical intelligence, and rationality. The attitude is largely a desire to hold oneself to a higher standard of thinking than many people are willing to hold themselves. I suggest in this essay that the greater problem is the attitude, not the skill set. For example, despite revelations that Fox News hosts in the United States lied through their teeth and said what they believed their audience wanted to hear, knowing it was false (Friedland, 2023), Fox News is the top cable news channel (Watson, 2023) in terms of viewership. Put another way, many people want to be lied to, so long as the lies confirm what they want to believe. They do not want to disconfirm their false beliefs. Ideology trumps rational thinking. For many people, it is not even a contest. The problem, then, is that often people lie because they realize their audience wants to be lied to (Serwer, 2023).

What is the cause of people’s credulity? There probably is no one cause, but people seem to have a very strong need to belong or affiliate with others who are like-minded (Murray, 1938) and to feel as though they are part of something greater. Credulity meets those needs.

Gilbert (1991) proposed that people, when confronted with new information, go through two basic steps. The first step is to encode and potentially store the information. At this point, one accepts the information as true. The second step is to evaluate the credibility of the information. Someone could be an excellent learner, with a vast store of information and, presumably, a high level of crystallized intelligence (Carroll, 1993; Cattell, 1971) because they are highly adept at Gilbert’s first step; but having high crystallized intelligence does not guarantee that they will

seriously engage the second step of evaluating the information. Even having high fluid intelligence does not guarantee they will do so. Their high fluid intelligence may facilitate the quality of their analysis, but first, the people have to decide that they even want to do the evaluation, and to do it objectively. In the United States, at least, it often is very difficult, and may even be considered somewhat blasphemous, to question orthodoxies. Thus, someone could be highly intelligent with respect to abilities but not with respect to attitudes (Sternberg, 2021a)—they have the abilities but not the disposition to apply those abilities, even sometimes in crucial circumstances. For some, whatever dispositions they had to question orthodoxies were drilled out of them—often in the name of patriotism or religion or ideology—in the home, the school, or society in general. In the final section of this article, I discuss how the disposition to question can be drilled back in.

Fiedler (2012, 2019) has dealt with a related problem in his work on metacognitive myopia. He found that people are accurate in using information but are relatively oblivious to the source of the information. So, if people only read and listen to truth-challenged, flawed media, they may commend themselves for using that information accurately while spouting off false and even ridiculous statements because their sources are factually challenged or, as it turns out in the case of Fox News, purposely lying to them to increase appeal to audience biases and prejudices (Friedland, 2023). Much of the political dysfunction seen today in the world, certainly in the United States, can be attributed to this kind of cognitive myopia and the credulity that results from it. Sadly, people often seek only news outlets that appeal to their already-existing confirmation biases, and so effectively shield themselves from being able to see things in any but their preferred myopic way.

Even having a high level of ability in abstract analysis and the desire to apply it does not always help in discerning what is true. In our own series of studies on scientific reasoning (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2017; Sternberg et al., 2017, 2019, 2020), we found that students' analytical skills, as measured by fluid-ability tests and standardized tests used for college admissions in the US (SAT and ACT), were weak and sometimes even negative predictors of the students' successful

application of these skills as applied to STEM (science-technology-engineering-mathematics) reasoning problems. In other words, IQ-related skills did not hold up when they were applied outside a relatively abstract-analytical domain.

Why Is Credulity Important to Understand?

Why is credulity so important a construct, at least as we approach the middle of the 21st century? There are several major reasons.

First, skillful problem solving (of the kind studied by Joachim Funke, among others) requires an Enlightenment mindset—that the truth matters. If one does not care what the true solution or, at least, an optimal solution to a problem is, then one's problem solving is likely to be defective, no matter what one's level of problem solving skills. In other words, one's attitude toward problem solving may matter at least as much as one's skills. People who are satisfied with Big Lies, as is much of the United States—perhaps 30 % (Devega, 2021), and likely more if one includes big lies on the left as well as the right—are going to be bad problem solvers, no matter what their cognitive skills may be. In Russia, Putin's popularity rating is over 80% while he is responsible for a massive genocide rivaling those of World War II (Statista Research Department, 2022). For them, cognitively-based research on problem solving is largely irrelevant. Cognitive research fails to capture their failure in problem solving. If 80% of a population can approve of genocide, does it matter how they would perform either on the Missionaries and Cannibals problem or on a problem in which they are mayor of a small city? Maybe not, unless one is interested in how they decide which innocent people in their city to execute, based on a fantasy about the town's history. If this sounds too cynical, well, so is genocide being committed with people's approval. One could argue, of course, that they do not know what is happening, but willful ignorance is perhaps not such a great excuse for ignorance (see Goldhagen, 1997). When all news is cut off except the government's line, one can be pretty sure one is being fed propaganda, as anyone who lives in a formerly Communist country should know.

The Russians use a “firehose of falsehood” model for their propaganda (Paul & Mathews, 2016). The main characteristics of this model, according to Paul and Mathews, are that (a) there are many channels of government propaganda, (b) the government is shamefully willing to disseminate outright falsehoods or, at best, partial truths, (c) the information is fed in a rapid, continuous, and repetitive way, and (d) there is no attempt to be consistent. The story can change quickly, as when Russia recently first said it had no intention of invading Ukraine and then invaded anyway. As late as February 21, 2022, the BBC was suggesting that Russia might well not invade (Gardner, 2022). Other news outlets carried similar optimistic analyses. Russia invaded on February 24, three days later.

Second, although propagandists have become better at what they do, it is not at all clear that ordinary laypersons—and probably many professionals in various fields—have become better at mentally defending against propaganda, including outright falsehoods. Indeed, people are often extremely gullible (Forgas & Baumeister, 2019). To the extent that important problems need veridical solutions, people must be able to defend themselves against propaganda, but are often unable to do so (Paul & Mathews, 2016).

Third, people overestimate their ability to discern truth from falsehood (Bond & DePaulo, 2006). Often, the least able and the most credulous have the highest opinion of their skills, the so-called Dunning–Kruger effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Zimmerman, 2016). The point of the effect is that people who are not competent at a job often do not even have the competence to recognize their own incompetence. The result is that people may believe that they are immune to propaganda when, in fact, they are not.

Fourth, intelligence, as defined traditionally in terms of IQ, general intelligence (g), or whatever, is not only not protective against persuasion attempts but can actually be detrimental. The reason is that people who are intelligent believe that intelligence is protective against crude persuasion attempts, whereas it is not. Credulity stems from foolishness, not from low intelligence (Sternberg, 2018). Foolishness is lack of wisdom, not lack of intelligence. Many supporters of Trump’s Big Lie had graduated from top Ivy League universities in the United States. Their

degrees did not save them from foolishness. IQs rose 30 points during the 20th century (Flynn, 1987, 2012, 2016), but these increases in IQ seem to have done little or nothing to reduce people's credulity.

Fifth and finally, toxic leaders count on people's credulity. They invent patently false memes—that the brutal, genocidal invasion of Ukraine is a “special military operation”; that the US presidential election of 2020 was “stolen”; that the way to stop gun violence is with more guns—and millions of people will believe them. The US Supreme Court, on the day I am writing, June 23, 2022, just declared a New York State law restricting guns to be unconstitutional—this after countless mass shootings in the United States that sets it apart from any other country in the world. The number of deaths seems never to be quite high enough for the five Ivy-League-educated Supreme Court justices who voted in favor of more guns. Of course, one who voted for more guns did not go to an Ivy League School but graduated with highest honors from Notre Dame, a prestigious if not Ivy League law school.

The role of toxic leaders in preying upon people's credulity can hardly be overestimated. People are attracted to toxic leaders—to their self-confidence, their charisma, their sense of self-importance, their pretense of caring for people who believe they have been victimized, their seeming infallibility. And toxic leaders know that, to achieve power and stay in power, they need to generate, as much as they can, blind conformity by appealing to the credulity of their followers and of those whom they would like to persuade, or if necessary, force to be followers (Sternberg, 2022, 2023).

Toxic leaders show characteristics personally and in their leadership styles of the dark triad (Paulus & Williams, 2002). They are narcissistic and care only about themselves and their self-aggrandizement. They have little or no empathy or compassion. Life, for them, is a zero-sum game that they are destined to win at everyone else's expense. They also are Machiavellian. They are schemers. They are willing to use almost any means to get their way, no matter how underhanded or amoral. They see other people as tools to exploit for their own purposes. Finally, they are psychopathic. They have no conscience, no concern for others,

no compassion, no remorse. If they fool others, they are happy because it shows what they already know: that they are omnipotent, and others are like clay in their hands. Thus, these leaders are human but show few of the traits that we associate with humanity. Rather, they try to pretend that they care about humanity and often do so successfully because any deception is, to them, fair game. How do dark-triad toxic leaders prey upon people's credulity?

The Mechanisms for Preying on Credulity

There are many possible mechanisms for exploiting people's credulity and thereby bypassing their normal problem solving processes. This list, therefore, is only partial.

Redefining the problem: In recent reports, various Fox News commentators in the United States have claimed that the January 6 hearings by the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the US Capitol have not "moved the needle" (see Milbank, 2022), meaning, presumably, that they have not changed the situation noticeably. Reports in other news outlets that do not adhere to the "Trump line," such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, and CNN, give a completely different impression.

The question that underlies these columns is: what needle? The most damaging revelations about a president in the history of the United States have not "moved the needle"? Revelations that a US president planned a coup d'état have not "moved the needle"? One needle the revelations may not have moved is the faith of the followers of Donald Trump that they will vote for him if he runs for US president again. That, presumably, was what the Fox pundits were talking about. But the hearings were not about moving poll numbers or about voting plans. They were about a president who openly was planning a coup.

A way to take advantage of credulity is to redefine the problem. Instead of talking about a likely treasonous president, the pundits, seeking to influence their listeners to welcome an authoritarian, talked about support of Trump's devotees or of Republicans more generally, many or most of whom are devotees. Pinochet and

his devotees talked about his economic success, not his authoritarian government and brutal suppression of dissent (Codevilla, 1993). Putin talks about destiny and Peter the Great, not about genocide (MOCKBA, 2022). President Joe Biden talked about how the drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan proceeded “in a secure and orderly way” (The White House, 2021), which could not have been further from the truth. The withdrawal was marked by utter chaos and disorder (Shepp, 2021) and left the country bereft and subject to a brutal takeover by the Taliban. In the fashion of a true politician who blames the last guy, Biden’s secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, blamed Biden’s predecessor, Donald Trump, for the incompetence of Biden’s withdrawal plan (Desiderio, 2021). So, a disaster of Biden’s making was redefined as an orderly transition where any problems were due not to Biden but to Trump.

It would be a great lesson for young people if any politician who made a mistake would actually own up to the mistake without being forced to do so, as Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was forced to for parties held at 10 Downing Street during lockdown (Diffley, 2022). Johnson also, predictably, announced he would not resign. Young people might learn that everyone makes mistakes and that, rather than redefining the blame, some adults actually take it upon themselves without being forced to do so.

Ideological resonance: When it comes to ideology, IQ doesn’t matter. The judges of the US Supreme Court almost all, or possibly all, have very high IQs. It is not trivial to be appointed to the highest court in the nation. The large majority, as noted above, have gone to the best universities in the country. For example, “Certain Ivy law schools have a track record of producing Supreme Court justices. Four of the eight justices appointed so far in the 21st century earned law degrees from Harvard, and another three graduated from Yale Law School” (Kowarski, 2022). Thus, seven of the eight have law degrees from two of the most selective law schools in the nation. Yet, the Supreme Court of 2022 has six justices with close ties to the ultra-conservative Federalist Society (Feldman, 2021). There is nothing special about this group of Supreme Court justices aside from their conservative ideology.

Intelligence provides a way for us to justify to ourselves and others what we wish to believe, based on the knowledge or supposition of knowledge and beliefs we share with others like ourselves. What makes the current members of the Supreme Court different from past members is not their intellect but their list of associates and friends. A notable example is Harlan Crow, who has provided Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and his wife free luxury vacations worth hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of many years, including use of his private plane for personal trips (Kaplan et al., 2023). People are convinced, for the most part, not by intellectual firepower, but, rather, by ideological resonance. However, they attribute their ideas to their intellectual skills, regardless of how unimportant those skills may be.

Repetition: Before February 2022, had you ever heard of a “special military operation”? Neither had I; and I have been around a long time! Look at Google, and you now will find 1.21 billion references to this term. Almost all of them are dated after February 24, 2022, when Vladimir Putin announced the so-called “special military operation” against Ukraine.

Russians talk about special military operations a lot because, in true 1984 fashion, Russia has made it against the law to refer to the invasion and the war as either an “invasion” or a “war” (Simon, 2022). So, if one is Russian, one hears over and over again about the “special military operation.” This is part of the firehose of falsehood model described above. One also hears over and over again an imaginary history of Ukraine as an indivisible part of Russia (Greenberg & Jacobson, 2022).

Dictatorships always rewrite history, as China is doing now in Hong Kong (Oung, 2022). The new syllabus in Hong Kong for teaching its history mentions “national security” more than 400 times in 121 pages (Oung, 2022). Dictators such as Xi and would-be dictators such as Trump know that big lies often are easier to sell than small ones (Rosza, 2022).

Multiple but redundant sourcing: For a toxic leader trying to prey on credulous or even not so credulous individuals, it is helpful for a lie to be repeated not only many times but also by multiple sources. Again, this is part of the firehose of falsehood model. One way to ensure that the multiple sourcing comes through is to

make it illegal to say anything other than the government line. In Russia today, for example, spreading “false information” about the military (i.e., true information) is punishable by a 15-year prison sentence (Mathers, 2022). And as we all learned from the case of Alexei Navalny, prison sentences can be indefinitely extended with additional concocted fake charges (Reuters, 2022). Most people do not want to fill the martyr role that Alexei Navalny is filling. So, the independent press has either left the country or shut down or become non-independent. Thus, multiple sources are repeating the same lies. As the January 6 hearings have shown, there have been multiple liars willing to tout Trump’s “Big Lie” about the stolen 2020 US presidential election in the United States. Willing liars are to be found everywhere, and those who are not willing often simply shut up.

Need for affiliation: McClelland (1961/2010) proposed that people have three basic needs: for achievement, power, and affiliation. Toxic leaders are characterized by an overwhelming need for power. Although they may seek to achieve things, these achievements tend overwhelmingly to be ones that will increase their power. When they feel that their power is threatened, they will seek new achievements that will enhance their power. Hence, Putin has overseen the invasion of Ukraine and Xi may very well oversee the invasion of Taiwan.

Their need for power plays into people’s needs for affiliation. For a toxic leader, conformity on the part of followers is paramount. Toxic leaders rule by fear. In Russia or China, if you disobey, you risk jail or death. In the United States, the democratic system has not decayed as much as in Russia or China, so would-be dictators such as Trump use their power to humiliate and suppress their enemies. Trump incites violence, so that one never knows when his followers will come after one. It is not only Trump, unfortunately. In the United States, the extreme left demands conformity as much as the extreme (and not so extreme) right, and people, such as professors who do not conform, risk being humiliated or fired.

People want to belong. They want to be part of something greater than themselves. For some, religion has been a way of finding that something greater. But in some countries, including the US, cynical clerics have subverted and perverted religious doctrine to make it subordinate to a political and ideological agenda and

have had success because the most credulous are so ready to believe (Armaly et al., 2022; Whitehead, 2021). In the case of credulity for conspiracy theories, it might seem odd that credulous people often will go for lies, the more outlandish the better. Why not find things to believe in that everyone knows about? But the advantage of the outlandish is that it makes one special to know about it. The ordinary stuff everyone knows; but the credulous person can feel like part of the deeper cognoscenti by knowing things that other people are, they think, too disconnected or fact-resistant to accept (Jarrett, 2022; Van Prooijen, 2019).

False omniscience: If people keep hearing the same things over and over again from sources they trust, they may come to believe that they have not only reporting, but truth. And this is probably why, in the words of the Fox commentators, the January 6 hearings have not moved the needle. People believe they already know what there is to know. They are foolish in their false sense of omniscience, but view themselves as wise (Sternberg, 2004, 2005).

False omniscience is the opposite of epistemic humility, which is an essential part of wisdom (Grossmann et al., 2020). As one would think people would want to be wise or, at least, appear to be wise, would they want to come across as falsely omniscient? If one looks at leaders around the world, there seem to be more who are falsely omniscient than who are wise. As Lipman-Blumen (1986) and many others (e.g., Örtenblad, 2021; Sternberg, 2021c) have recognized, people are more likely to follow toxic leaders who act falsely omniscient than to follow wise leaders. Sadly, people are attracted precisely to the leaders who often will do the worst by their followers. They are credulous of toxic leaders, ignoring the more balanced and positive views of the wise ones. If things are not going well in one's life, how much easier it is to play the role of the victim and to blame others—the “red meat” of the toxic leader's appeal—than to look for inadequacies in oneself.

How Does a Society Counteract Credulity?

This essay has focused on the truly unfortunate societal conditions that promote credulity and arational thinking. But, as Fiedler (2019) and others (e.g., Stanovich,

2009, 2021) have pointed out, it does not take much for people to think in ways that are less than rational. Misguided thinking is part of everyday life. What can be done to address the credulity that undermines rational and adaptive thinking?

The ways to counteract credulity are scarcely surprising. They are part of any good education.

1. ***Develop and encourage critical thinking:*** Students need to learn to distinguish accurate sources of information from inaccurate ones—to recognize when information is internally consistent and externally correspondent to the truth (Sternberg, 2021b). Critical and rational thinking can help protect people from believing false information (Stanovich, 2009, 2021; Stanovich et al., 2013). IQ in itself will not.
2. ***Develop and encourage wisdom:*** Wise thinking seeks a common good (Sternberg, 2019). It discourages thinking about how one’s own group has a special destiny that leads it, necessarily, to be overlords controlling some other group.
3. ***Provide complete information:*** Censoring information, as Russia, China, and so many other countries do, leads people to think erroneously. In many problem solving studies, people are given complete information needed to solve a problem. In the real world, information too often is deliberately withheld.
4. ***Encourage beneficence:*** There is far too little of it in the world right now. Often, countries are starting to see their nations, and the commonwealth of nations, as a zero-sum game. The United States, for example, is in an advanced state of degeneration, where Republicans and Democrats often seem to place ideological loyalties and loyalties to people like themselves over any kind of national unity. It has become a contest, with “takeovers,” such as the takeover of the Supreme Court of the United States by aggressively ideological conservatives, viewed as a victory by conservatives and as a loss by liberals and many moderates. Only one justice—the Chief Justice, a

conservative—is at all a swing vote, and a generally useless one because of the supermajority of extreme and partisan conservatives. Donald Trump’s brazen attempt to subvert the United States government seems not to have mattered much to many conservatives.

5. ***Remember to teach young people that the truth matters:*** In the United States, at least, and really in a number of other countries, some people have forgotten what it means for something to be true, substituting instead what they wish to be true. It is truth rather than authority that matters in the determination of facts. So, young people must learn to question authority, which is becoming increasingly difficult as more and more of the world succumbs to authoritarian governments and, worse, authoritarian mindsets.

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