I am pleased to inform you that if you have ever wondered about the veracity of the information you get on the internet, those days may be coming to an end. The worrisome concern over bias, misrepresentation of facts, exclusion of alternate points of view that may have merit, is about to be solved by our planet’s supreme authority on truth and error. I refer, of course, to Google.

Google, according the March 2015 New Scientist magazine, is working on an algorithm that would rank websites according to veracity, and sort results according to those rankings. Call it Google Truth. Currently, the search engine ranks pages according to popularity, which means that pages containing unsubstantiated celebrity gossip, medical myths or conspiracy theories, for example, show up very high. Instead, Google wants to move toward “rank[ing] websites based on facts, not links.” Web pages that contain contradictory information are bumped down the rankings.

On the surface this is a welcome development. The attempt to recognize and comprehend the truth is central to the Christian revelation. Jesus said, “The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” To which the person to whom he said these words, Pontius Pilate, cynically retorted, “What is Truth?” Pilate, to his credit, was at least asking the question, and subsequently recognized Jesus’s innocence, although he was too passive and weak to face the implications of that. We might say Pilate was in a place of untruth relative to the truth in front of him. Today, however, we are faced with a situation where the cultural elites—the Pontius Pilates of modernity—are not content merely to question or deny the truth, but are actively engaged in displacing truth with falsehood. Untruth has progressed to anti-truth, where rhetoric displaces argument; popularity trumps evidence; the
view of the moment displaces millennia of collected human wisdom, and religious conviction is a form of suspect bias.

How does Google know what’s true and what’s false? You might ask. The improved software would work by tapping into the Knowledge Vault, the vast store of facts that Google has pulled off the internet. Google Truth will be built on the principle that “facts the web unanimously agrees on are considered a reasonable proxy for truth.” For issues of policy and theory, the algorithm would automate the work of “fact checkers” at sites like Politico and FactCheck.org, to prefer sites and articles that are in compliance with their findings. Since by definition no facts to be checked are ever unanimous, the algorithm weighs the amount of agreement versus disagreement. In tests, 85 percent agreement was enough to move contradictory sites to the bottom half of the rankings. For Google, truth, it turns out, is just another form of popularity.

Anthony Watts, who runs the world’s largest website questioning the global warming consensus, says, “I worry about this issue greatly. My site gets a significant portion of its daily traffic from Google. . . . It is a very slippery and dangerous slope because there’s no arguing with a machine.”

Rich Noyes, research director at the Media Research Center, worries about left-wing bias in the fact checkers that would likely be influencing these truth rankings. “They’re very good at debunking myths if they upset liberals,” he said, “but if it’s a liberal or left-wing falsehood, the fact-checkers don’t seem as excited about debunking it.”

My experience with “fact checkers” and popular media in the past year strongly confirms Noyes’s and Watts’s concerns. In February, I published a study on children raised by same-sex parents which employed the highest quality of data sources and strongest methodology to date on that topic. In this field, the average sample size for children with same-sex parents consists of only thirty-nine children; the largest random population sample of such children prior to my study looked at forty-four children raised by lesbians, with no gay male parents. A retrospective study by Mark Regnerus based on a randomized sample of 3,000 young adults found only fifty-one cases of children who had probably lived with same-sex parents for at least a year. By contrast, I examined a sample of 582 children who were currently residing with same-sex parents—406 lesbian couples, 176 gay male couples—for at least the past year, drawn from 207,000 cases on the National Health Interview Survey, a large public health survey collected by the U.S. Census under the direction of the Centers for Disease Control.

I didn’t do anything particularly new or exotic or questionable in the study. I was not the first to use this sample of children with same-sex parents, and my methods and variable definitions were adopted from previous
CDC studies. The methods I employed were simple comparisons based on t-tests and logistic regression models such as are widely used in the social sciences and are taught in most first-year social-statistics courses. But before the study had even been published, it was widely denounced as flawed and discredited. Why? Because unlike almost every prior study of this topic, I found that children with same-sex parents are at about twice the risk of emotional problems such as depression and anxiety as are children in the care of a man and a woman. The difference persists if you compare children with same-sex parents with the least stable forms of heterosexual families, and increases to over four times the risk if you compare them with families headed by intact married parents. Most troubling of all, to the critics, is that the differences disappear if you control for biological parentage. Children raised by their own biological mother and father have notably lower emotional distress than children who are not; the problem for same-sex parents being that no children they raise can be their own joint biological offspring.

International scientists and foreign scholars have widely confirmed the quality and accuracy of my findings. But with a few exceptions the US press has denounced the findings, largely because I am Catholic. The Atlantic, after pointing out I was a Catholic priest and a professor at Catholic University, called it a “veneer of science used to disguise an argument for a deeply held moral or religious belief.” ThinkProgress.org, a pro-gay site, under an unflattering photo of me in my clerical collar speaking at this conference two years ago, also notes that I am “a Fourth Degree member of the Knights of Columbus, which has funneled millions of dollars into fighting marriage equality over the past decade.” And these are two of the more polite and less screedy responses to the study.

To many today, opposition to gay marriage is an expression of invidious discrimination, even if and maybe especially because it stems from religious convictions. Why do people think this? In part, because of the false belief that the overwhelming consensus of scientific evidence shows that having two parents of the same-sex is innocuous for child well-being, to the point that there is no longer any doubt about it. As one Stanford University scholar told a reporter regarding my paper, “I don’t think you can characterize the research and debates on children raised by same-sex couples as ‘a back and forth,’ any more than the debate over global warming or the debate over whether smoking causes cancer. . . . Research . . . has developed a scholarly consensus that shows that children raised by same-sex couples are at no important disadvantage. There is a noisy fringe of academics who claim that children raised by same-sex couples are in disastrous peril,” a viewpoint which “has little or no credibility
within academia.” Sadly, this scholar’s description of the state of the debate is accurate.

In 2004 the American Psychological Association concluded that “research has shown that the adjustment, development, and psychological well-being of children are unrelated to parental sexual orientation and that the children of lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those of heterosexual parents to flourish.” The accompanying research summary stated, “Not a single study has found children of lesbian of gay parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.”¹ (Hereafter I refer to this view as the “harm denial” thesis.) Last April’s APA Obergefell brief adds: “The APA has continued to monitor the state of the scientific research and confirms that this conclusion continues to be accurate.”

This absolutist claim of total research unanimity, which is mirrored by similar statements from most other major social science associations, is not the result of disinterested science, but of the imposition of political will on the research process to prevent, exclude, discredit, or ignore research that shows, or may show, such disadvantages. Despite the strong unconditional language regarding a “consensus,”² or unanimous³ conclusion, it does not reflect the actual state of research in this area. Here’s how it happened.

Until 1985 research reflected a healthy variety of perspectives and findings on the question of child welfare with same-sex parents. In that year the APA’s Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns (hereafter “LGB Concerns Committee”) established a Task Force on Non-Homophobic Research, which produced detailed guidelines on avoiding research determined to be “heterosexist,” defined as “conceptualizing human experience in strictly heterosexual terms and consequently ignoring, invalidating, or derogating homosexual behaviors and sexual orientation, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual relationships and lifestyles.”⁴ The guidelines are prominently displayed on the APA website,⁵ and its contents are vigorously enforced by the LGB Concerns Committee, whose mission, in part, is “to reduce prejudice, discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay and bisexual people,” and who also publish the list of research supporting the harm denial thesis.

It is not hard to see how such a norm can bias the objective pursuit of knowledge regarding children with same-sex parents. How can a researcher who has discovered negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents publish such findings without “invalidating” (or being perceived as invalidating) “lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships”? Even worse, how can a researcher who suspects that he or she may find such outcomes find
funding or support for the research? And if she or he does manage to publish, who would dare to cite such research? Is not the hypothesis, even the mere thought, that same-sex parents may not be as beneficial for children as opposite-sex ones are, prima facie heterosexist, by the definition above?

In practice, the LGB Concerns Committee has rejected as heterosexist any research which uses married biological parents as a comparison group—a restriction which eliminates the most widely observed cause of differences in child outcomes, and relativizes family structure a priori. When same-sex couples, as a group, are compared to opposite-sex couples as a group—lumping together married, divorced, cohabiting, step-families, and often even single parents—most differences between the groups pertinent to the question of marriage are blurred. Yet this is APA policy.

Studies with weak methodology that support harm denial have been included on the roster of gay parenting studies with little comment or even with praise, while studies with strong methodology that contradict harm denial have been excluded on specious pretexts, such as that the journal is not prestigious enough or that the study is not widely cited, or on the basis of a one-sided accounting of a study’s supposed “flaws” with no chance for author response, or of a concerted attempt to find flaws to justify the exclusion. For the LGB Concerns Committee, the mere fact that a study challenges or contradicts the harm denial thesis can itself be reason to exclude the study from the roster. An early study by Sarantakos, an expert on research methods, that found lower developmental outcomes for children with same-sex parents by means of a strong matched-sample design, was excluded from the APA roster because, in part, its findings were published in an Australian journal which “cannot be considered a source upon which one should rely for understanding the state of scientific knowledge in this field, particularly when the results contradict those that have been repeatedly replicated in studies published in better known scientific journals.”

We don’t need Max Weber to point out that this is an appeal to traditional authority, on the basis of which the APA simply rules genuine scientific evidence to be irrelevant. On the other hand, the APA roster includes a number of studies published in obscure journals with very small readership, and even several unpublished dissertations—but which support, rather than challenge, the harm denial thesis.

Journal editors that publish findings contrary to harm denial have faced intimidating detraction. When three years ago Professor Regnerus of the University of Texas, using much stronger data than most prior studies, published a study that found negative outcomes among children with same-sex parents, both Regnerus and the journal editor were widely viliﬁed by scholars. In his history of the controversy, Peter Wood wrote that
the scholarly reaction to Regnerus’s study came “some of it in the form of criticisms of his analytical methods and handling of statistical data, but much more of it in the form of character assassination and vituperative denunciation.” The journal editor himself confirmed, in a subsequent issue of the journal discussing the affair, “I was not prepared for the nastiness and vituperation that quickly ensued [on publication of Regnerus’s paper, much of it directed at me personally.” A board member appointed as an “internal auditor” to assess the editor’s decisions had already gone on record against the study, and publicly displayed lurid ideological and religious bias, writing, “Believe me, I know there is a vast right wing conspiracy and that Mark Regnerus is a part of it! . . . How did the study get through peer review? The peers are right wing Christianists!” This was not the measured, thoughtful response of scientists encountering an interesting contrary finding, but of ideologues repudiating a doctrinal heresy. Just as Sarantakos did not conform to the ideologically approved canon of publications, Regnerus and Wright transgressed a fundamental article of faith.

More often, contrary findings have simply been ignored. A study comparing eight dissertations with results favorable to same-sex parents with four of equivalent methodology whose results had been unfavorable found that the first group had been included in review articles and cited 238 times while the second group had been cited only once. Another study found that of three similar articles, two with results favorable to gay parenting and one with unfavorable results, the first two had been cited twenty-eight and thirty-seven times, respectively, while the latter study had been cited only twice. To compound the inequity, the APA then cites low citations as a reason to exclude studies with contrary findings from the roster. For example, several studies with contrary findings from one researcher are rejected because, “unlike research that makes a contribution to science, his key findings and conclusions have rarely been cited by subsequent scientific studies published in peer-reviewed journals as informing their scientific inquiry.” Studies that find harm are not cited, which then becomes a reason to say that they should not be cited.

This bias is part of a wider problem of pervasive discrimination against conservative ideas among academic psychologists. Redding, in an article titled “The Sociopolitical Groupthink of (Social) Psychologists,” summarizes the “growing empirical evidence of discrimination against conservative (right-of-center) people and ideas . . . in social and personality psychology . . . [and] within the academy generally.” A recent survey of 800 psychologists on this question found that “in decisions ranging from paper reviews to hiring, many [up to 38 percent of] social and personality
psychologists said that they would discriminate against openly conservative colleagues.”\textsuperscript{17} Former APA President Nicholas Cummings has written that in the APA since the mid-1970s “advocacy for scientific and professional concerns has been usurped by agenda-driven ideologues who show little regard for either scientific validation or professional efficacy,” and the result of this is that “topics that are deemed politically incorrect . . . are neither published nor funded.”\textsuperscript{18}

At this point it will not surprise anyone to learn that in the Obergefell brief, appended to the APA’s statement asserting a unanimous consensus finding of no harm to children with same-sex parents is a footnote explaining that the work of four researchers coming to opposing conclusions—Sarantakos, Regnerus, Douglas Allen, and me—“[has] been resoundingly rejected by the mainstream scientific community,” by which they mean the ideologically biased reviewers at the APA.

I don’t know if Google Truth will ever actually implement a metric of truth by popularity, but in a real sense it doesn’t have to. The American scientific establishment is already there. To oppose gay marriage or gay parenting today is not simply to hold an unpopular opinion or assert a minority view; it is to be a kind of flat earther, who refuses to accept what everyone knows to be obvious.

In this way, on this issue, science has progressed from untruth to anti-truth, ripening into a kind of secular fundamentalism. Modernity has moved beyond exploring its own autonomous theology into pronouncing its own autonomous dogma. And like religious fundamentalism of a century ago, those who deny the dogma simply do not count, no matter how much incontrovertible evidence or compelling logic to the contrary they may assert. Unlike religious fundamentalism of old, though, today’s secular fundamentalism enjoys almost unchallenged dominance in the elite centers of cultural production—media, entertainment, government, jurisprudence, and academia. From this vantage point all those who are not true believers in the modernist dogma are easily defined as irrelevant.

Anthony Giddens has aptly characterized modernity today as a juggernaut, a behemoth that has gotten out of control and carries away all opposition in its path with a force of inevitability. It’s a good image, because a juggernaut doesn’t directly oppose the obstacles in its path; rather, it sweeps them aside with the curve of its hull. Those of us who question the cultural falsehoods of the modern pseudoscientific establishment or who dare to assert an earlier, deeper wisdom in the face of the intellectual fad of the moment have not been argued with and proven wrong; we’ve just been swept aside as irrelevant. We are marginalized as a noisy fringe, on the wrong side of history, wanting to turn back the clock or out of touch.
The happy news, though, is that marginalizing opposing views is growing increasingly difficult. After the uproar over Regnerus’s study, I concluded that an American journal was unlikely to risk publishing my study, so I published it in an up-and-coming international open-source journal oriented to medical research. It is, after all, an analysis of the world’s largest public health survey. This exposed me to a more rigorous set of methodological and technical standards for peer review, but without any particular political bias. Because denunciation by American social scientists would have no effect on the journal, the response to my study in the USA has been much more muted than Regnerus received.

In open-source science, everything is public and transparent, making it easy to respond to critics. The names of the editors and reviewers are published in the article masthead, and their critiques, and author responses, are made public along with the article. The most persistent critic of Regnerus initially charged that the peer review of my study was weak and too short—a standard charge which has been made against virtually all studies finding negative outcomes for children with same-sex parents—because it took only six weeks, but when I pointed out that this was typical of medical journals—\textit{JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Association)} promises an initial review decision in just three days, and the \textit{BMJ (British Medical Journal)} promises no more than three weeks from start to finish for peer review—and that all the reviewer comments and my responses were posted online with the article, where anyone could see that (a) the editor assigned twice the usual number of reviewers to the article and (b) there were three rounds of revision with extensive reviews, including one reviewer who practically revised the whole article using “track changes”; this critic revised his characterization of the review from “thin” to “punishing.”

The APA and affiliates have tried to suppress and discredit the study, but it doesn’t matter. International scientists and foreign scholars have widely confirmed the accuracy and relevance of my findings. In “post-publication peer review,” an open-source practice providing for scholarly critique and rebuttal after a study’s publication, there has not yet been a single critical public comment. Freely available on the web, it has been viewed over 40,000 times and downloaded over 5,000 times since February. Of the 10,000 articles posted on SSRN in the past year, it is number 35 in highest number of downloads. The journal has highlighted it as its most influential article of the year. Besides being cited numerous times in Obergefell amicus briefs, the study has also influenced and informed discourse over gay marriage or gay-parenting issues in Ireland, Italy, Australia, Japan, Brazil, Chile and Colombia. The editor who approved the
study is an Italian medical professor, so it has gotten a lot of attention in Italy, which is considering a referendum on gay adoption. In Colombia, which has the distinction of being the only other country besides the United States to have gay marriage imposed by its supreme court on a populace that had rejected it by a substantial majority, the study was influential in convincing the court last April to severely restrict gay adoptions.

I share all this to make a simple, and I hope encouraging, point. One small expression of truth can have a powerful effect. Anti-truth may appear dominant and inevitable, but it is not—that’s part of the lie. In fact, anti-truth is inherently fragile and weak, and has no defense against truth fearlessly expressed. That’s why the APA and ASA work so hard to control the discourse, and work so vigorously to silence any opposing views.

The image of a juggernaut is accurate, but the conclusion to be drawn from it is not that there’s nothing we can do. The truth is not that secularism is so strong and inevitable but that its opposition has grown so weak and easy to assimilate. The way to stop a juggernaut surging with inevitable momentum is not to stand in its way to wrestle it down, but to drill holes in its hull. Everyone in this room has an apprehension of the truth and a sphere in which you can express that for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. Each of us may be able to drill only a small hole, speak one small word of truth, but if enough of us do that, the juggernaut will sink under its own weight.

The power the juggernaut of modernity has is that too many of us in this room are afraid to speak the truth. Secular anti-truth can present itself as inevitable and irresistible only when those with alternative convictions are scattered, scared and silent. Secular social scientists can falsely but convincing claim to have the only truth that matters only when Catholic social scientists are intimidated into silence. This Society exists, in no small part, to encourage us not to be silent.

The fear of opposition is rational and well-founded. If you speak the truth, it may harm your career and reputation. You may be publicly denounced and discredited, or quietly marginalized in your department or institution. It may well impede your career advancement. Don’t depend on the bishops to support you; too many of them are afraid as well. But, my dear friends, speak the truth anyway, fearlessly and boldly. The truth itself demands nothing less of us, and in this way we will become like our Lord, who came, as I said at the beginning of this address, to bear witness to the truth for those who could hear it. Jesus was crucified for doing so. Was he a failure? Is the example of Jesus a cautionary tale teaching us what to avoid in our own lives, or a call for us to be like our master? Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds
of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.” Careers are short, but eternity is long. How foolish it is to forego eternal blessing for mere temporary vanity of status and position. Jesus adds, “For so they persecuted the prophets before you.” In many ways, scientists are the prophets of the modern age. We have many false prophets today. I urge you to go forth and prophesy truly, to speak the truth, no matter what the cost, in the name of the true and living God.

Notes

11. Ibid., 1341 (“Sherkat [the auditor] was an early and ferocious critic of the Regnerus study”).


17. Yoel Inbar and Joris Lammers, “Political Diversity in Social and Personality Psychology,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7(5) (September 1, 2012): 496; doi:10.1177/1745691612448792; including biased research and active discrimination against conservatives. We surveyed a large number (combined N = 800).