

## THE ABSENT LINKS

From time to time, we will share detailed analyses and/or proposed solutions to important societal problems that have been put forth by informed and well-respected persons in science, mathematics, technology and other fields.

### Background

Upon hearing or reading about a public interest issue and/or proposal, did you receive the underlying facts, evidence, and analyses that allowed you to make an informed judgment? If not, did you agree with the proposal because it seemed to be in line with tradition, or you unquestionably accepted the authority of the source, or you just thought it must be OK?

“I want to move on from evidence, which is a good reason for believing something, and warn you against three bad reasons for believing anything. They are called tradition, authority, and revelation.”

From: Good and Bad Reasons for Believing, Richard Dawkins’s letter to his ten-year old daughter Juliet. Dawkins goes on to elaborate on tradition, authority, and revelation as reasons for believing anything.

**Tradition:** Often, people are asked what they believe about a current news event. Their beliefs frequently have no connection with evidence. They just trot out the beliefs of others they know or heard about that are also not based upon evidence. The trouble with tradition is that no matter how long ago a belief was made up, it is still as true or untrue as the original version. If you make up a belief that isn't valid, handing it down over and over again doesn't make it more valid!

**Authority:** Authority means believing something because you are told by somebody important. If the important somebody is ignorant or has little or no skills relating to the item in question, you are on very shaky ground.

**Revelation:** When people have a feeling something must be true, even though there is no evidence for it, they call their feeling "revelation." We all have such feelings; sometimes they turn out to be right and sometimes they don't. Since different people have opposite feelings, how are we to decide whose feeling is right?

Although evidence is indispensable for a full understanding of a public interest issue and/or proposal, it is far from adequate. Many problems confronting society involve complex aspects in science, mathematics, technology and other fields that require the analytical skills of well-respected and knowledgeable persons. Without these skills, the general public has little or no chance of understanding any given problem and/or solution. Many public officials, media analysts and citizens have little or no background in these fields. Despite this fact, however, public officials and media analysts still present explanations or solutions to these societal problems that are not in the best interest of the public.

The defects in this state of affairs abound:

1. Distortions or biases may occur due to self- serving aims.
2. Facts may be only partially revealed, released in an untimely manner, or deliberately withheld in order to achieve purposes that contradict, influence or distort public policy. This betrays the rational and unbiased objectivity to which politicians ideally are bound.
3. Advice may be based on ignorance, uncertainty, or errors in judgment.

Our commitment is to provide the absent links, i.e., the detailed and valid analyses of important societal problems and/or proposed solutions that avoid the aforementioned pitfalls.