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How to Resist Harmful and Misleading Rhetoric

The death of Charlie Kirk made the need for understanding rhetoric blatantly clear for me. Within minutes of his murder my social media was flooded with speculation disguised as fact. Influencers, podcasters, and screen activists (those who impersonate experts from behind a computer screen to avoid any accountability or responsibility) posted endless conjecture, opinion, and subjective ideation without any consideration for objectivity, authority or truth. My threads painted Kirk as a bigoted, racist, hypocritical Christian who blamed inclusive social programming and higher education for the downfall of modern society. At the same time, my brother-in-law's social media painted a picture of Kirk as a righteous and moral demigod, the second coming of Jesus himself.

The problem is that we both believed that what we were witnessing was truth. The algorithmic rhetoric continued to feed us and suggest to us only messaging that was in line with our previously searched interests and did so overwhelmingly. At Christmas dinner we argued incessantly over Kirk's questionable heroism, each believing the version of Kirk designed by our social media was the true version of the man so convincingly that neither of us would even consider an alternative. This lead not just to a very tense dinner but to real anger, confusion, distrust, and hopelessness.

Name-calling followed. Then came silence. Neither of us believed the other had the capacity for logical reasoning. The algorithmic rhetoric had misled us to absolute division.

The only way to combat such harmful influence is critical thought. The individual needs to seriously consider both the message and the messenger of all communication because rhetoric has become monetized. The individual needs to question the validity of evidence and authority of the source because

passivity and indifference breeds conformity and apathy. The individual needs to think about not just what is being communicated but, more importantly, how it's being communicated. Or we can just become sheep.