Twitter Thread by Trespassers William

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Read this thread from @lilithsaintcrow. I really mean it. Just read it. Because if what she is saying is true (and I happen to think it is) it explains *so much*

An example using the Flat Earthers: A thread of many parts:

> Let me explain something to those of you who didn't grow up around violently abusive white supremacists.
>
> *They absolutely do not believe their own bullshit*, but it's useful for them to pretend they do.
>
> — Lili Saintcrow (@lilithsaintcrow) January 7, 2021

I'm firmly convinced that the flat Earth thing was started by some adolescent trolls with nothing more productive to do. They didn't believe it, but they thought it was entertaining to keep pretending that they did.

You can't engage with them, because they *are playing a game*. They think it's fun to see if they can get anybody to engage with something completely stupid as though it's true.

If you challenge them, the rules of the game state that they have to argue as hard and a spuriously as they like, but *never* to admit that the Earth is not in fact flat. I suppose you have to make up your own entertainment on 4chan or whatever hole this was conceived in.

It's annoying as hell, but I suppose it doesn't do much harm.. except to folks like this: https://t.co/zsCejvkrkr

and this: https://t.co/hRInMK6vEU

So, yeah there are people who fell for it. Hook, line, sinker, rod, umbrella, and copy of Angling Times.

There's now people out there now who genuinely believe that the Earth is flat because of this game, and this has distorted their worldview (heh) because it has trained them to distrust the folks who are not playing the game and are genuinely arguing that the Earth is round

(because we have to do that now). It's socially disruptive, completely pointless, and a bit cruel. Perfect for teenaged trolls to get a kick out of it.

So how does this translate into the really *really* important thread I quoted at the beginning?

It's training.

The core idea is that you can just say "I believe the Earth is flat" and *nobody* can prove you don't. Evidence is irrelevant, because we are *playing a game*.

It doesn't matter how fallacious the argument, or crap the logic is, all you have to do to win is keep saying "I believe the Earth is flat" and eventually you win.

Now everyone wants to believe that they're the hero of their own story, and everyone decides what they think is true based on a range of evidence, preconceptions, outside influences etc.

We know that people are more likely to believe things that prop up existing beliefs (confirmation bias) and we know that you can't *make* someone articulate whether they do or don't believe something (eg the Spanish Inquisition - Amazing, they were finally useful for something).

So what does that mean?

1) People will rationalise their existing ideas. E.g. I don't like fat people, because... they're lazy, or they smell, or they are genetically inferior, or it's Tuesday or whatever insane reason you like.

2) People will use shaky rationalisations to justify their actions, even if the rationalisations are clearly (to you and me) bullshit.

3) People will repeat the rationalisations to others who are also trying to prop up their own existing ideas

4) It is impossible to *prove* whether someone genuinely believes it or not. To be fair, I expect that some of them don't even know.

5) If it goes on long enough, with enough intensity, you'll get people who do genuinely believe it because they are too badly educated to spot that it is, in fact, insane.

6) People make shocking decisions on the basis of shit data.

So what now?

Well I expect that some people are a lost cause. They have got so completely lost in a maze of justifications and lies that they are impossible to reach.

They have accepted a worldview that is so completely at odds with the real world, that they are a danger to themselves and others. It's basically a cult.

What do we do with the others?

I'd argue that this kind of thing is largely the product of *ignorance*. Now I don't mean that we aren't arguing effectively - there are many cleverer and more eloquent people than me working on this. I think it's to do with *experience*.

It's easy to make generalisations about people you don't know or abstract theories that don't have a concrete physical presence. A medieval peasant can perfectly well believe that there are dragons in a far off country if...

... someone who is well travelled comes back from the blank bit of the map and says they saw one. It doesn't even really matter if someone else who's been there before says there aren't - because then there's two experts arguing -

... and the poor peasant doesn't have the tools to work out which is right. The peasant might be the cleverest person in the world, but they simply don't have the data to make the decision.

So how would we convince the peasant that there are no dragons in the wilds of Lincolnshire (or somewhere)? We'd have to *take them* and *show them* what Lincolnshire looks like (flat, bit damp, not many trees, No Dragons).

What I think I mean (as I desperately try and bring this in to land) is that until there is some way (and I don't necessarily know what it is) to

1) stop peddling bullshit, and

2) re-introduce the people who think that Covid or climate change is a hoax, (or whatever) to the genuine real-world experienced reality of those things we're going to continue to have a problem.

Also consequences. Because, seriously if you want to dress up as a Nazi and assault people in the street, you've bloody well earned some consequences.

Ignorance is sort of understandable, but that doesn't mean you get to avoid experiencing reality - that's exactly how we ended up in this mess.