

DEPTH BEYOND DISPLAY

A Haimesian principle of fair inquiry, fallibility, and resistance to persuasive appearance

Prepared for the Haimesian System

Central thesis

Human beings need filters. We cannot treat every request, advertisement, headline, vote, or argument as trustworthy at face value. Yet the same filters that protect us can become barriers that prevent correction. A rational person therefore needs a disciplined middle position: neither credulous acceptance nor reflexive rejection, but fair investigation of credible evidence, especially when it threatens a cherished conclusion.

The proposed Haimesian principle

No position should be accepted merely because it is vivid, popular, familiar, emotionally pleasing, or skillfully presented. No position should be rejected merely because it is unfamiliar, poorly presented, unpopular, or personally threatening. A rational person should investigate the underlying reasons, evidence, counterevidence, definitions, incentives, and repeatability of a claim, while proportioning confidence to the strength of that examination.

Compressed form

Do not confuse what most attracts the mind with what most deserves the mind's assent.

Why reasonable people fail to update

A person may sincerely believe that they would change their mind if proven wrong, yet still fail to change when evidence arrives. The problem is often not simply bad presentation. It can involve motivated reasoning, distrust of the source, fear of losing identity or status, attachment to a group, financial interests, or the discomfort of admitting error. The person may also mistake a challenge to one argument for a challenge to their worth.

Presentation does matter because it determines whether evidence receives a fair hearing. A true position can be badly explained; a false position can be made attractive. But presentation is only an entry condition. It may earn attention without earning belief. The proper question is not merely, "Was this persuasive?" but, "What remains true after the persuasive surface has

been examined?”

Filters and barriers

A filter asks whether a claim deserves investigation. A barrier decides in advance that the claim cannot be considered. The first is protective reasoning; the second is epistemic self-sealing. Haimesian inquiry should preserve the filter while refusing the barrier.

The tree, the sound, and the unseen truth

A falling tree may produce physical vibrations whether or not anyone hears them. Whether one calls those vibrations a “sound” depends on the definition being used. The same distinction applies to disputed ideas: a position may be true whether or not it is attractively displayed, widely believed, or presently recognized. What we first encounter is only the display—the report, argument, image, or testimony. The underlying truth requires further examination.

This yields a useful separation:

Display	What first reaches attention: wording, image, confidence, popularity, emotional force, or presentation.
Depth	What survives examination: definitions, evidence, objections, independent confirmation, prediction, and explanatory power.

Intellectual ancestors and close parallels

The principle is distinctively formulated here, but it stands in a strong line of thought. Several earlier thinkers identified parts of the same discipline: hearing the opposing case, resisting premature certainty, keeping inquiry open, and distinguishing appearances from what is itself.

Plato. Republic. Book V. 475e-476b (c. 380 BCE)

“The lovers of sounds and sights ... are fond of fine tones and colours and forms ... but their mind is incapable of seeing or loving absolute beauty.”

Plato distinguishes attraction to beautiful appearances from apprehension of the underlying reality. The wording varies by translation; this quotation follows the MIT/Benjamin Jowett tradition.

Francis Bacon. Novum Organum. Aphorism XIX (1620)

“If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.”

Bacon warns that inquiry must not begin by treating favored conclusions as secure. The Haimesian addition is that doubt must be disciplined by evidence rather than turned into permanent skepticism.

John Stuart Mill. On Liberty. Chapter II (1859)

“He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that.”

Mill argues that a person cannot fully understand even a true position without knowing the strongest opposing reasons. This is one of the closest predecessors of the proposed principle.

Charles S. Peirce, “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life,” Cambridge Lectures (1898)

“Do not block the way of inquiry.”

Peirce presents this as a corollary of the first rule of reason: to learn, one must desire to learn and not remain satisfied with what one already inclines to think.

Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. II, Chapter 24 (1945; revised editions)

“I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth.”

Popper describes reasonableness as readiness to listen to criticism and learn from experience. The quotation is a concise expression of fallibilism and cooperative inquiry.

Mill provides the closest direct parallel. Plato supplies the distinction between surface appeal and deeper reality. Bacon supplies the warning against premature certainty. Peirce supplies the imperative not to obstruct inquiry. Popper supplies the attitude of fallibility. The Haimesian formulation combines these strands with an explicit account of the psychological and survival-based function of filters.

The method implied by the principle

The principle is not a command to believe every contrary claim. It is a procedure for deciding what deserves belief.

1. Identify the display

What exactly attracted attention? A headline, confidence, emotional appeal, majority, authority, novelty, or fear?

2. State the claim precisely

What is being asserted, and what would count as evidence for or against it?

3. Examine incentives

Who benefits if I accept this? Who benefits if I reject it? Incentives do not disprove a claim, but they affect how carefully it should be checked.

4. Reconstruct the strongest opposing case

Do not attack a caricature. State the opposing position in a form its best defender would recognize.

5. Test the evidence

Ask whether it is relevant, independently confirmed, repeatable, appropriately measured, and capable of distinguishing the claim from alternatives.

6. Update proportionally

Increase or decrease confidence by degrees. A single impressive display rarely warrants absolute certainty.

7. Preserve revision

Record what evidence would change the conclusion. A position that cannot possibly be revised has become an identity-protection device rather than an inquiry.

The method protects against two opposite failures: credulity, which mistakes persuasive presentation for truth, and closed-mindedness, which dismisses truth because it arrives through an unwelcome source or an unattractive presentation.

Science, voting, and consensus

The scientific method illustrates depth beyond display because a result gains credibility through repeated observation, independent checking, successful prediction, and attempted refutation. Repetition does not create certainty by itself; it creates stronger justification when the conditions are controlled and the result remains stable.

Majority voting serves a different purpose. It may be a practical method for choosing among leaders and preventing a power vacuum, but a majority is not automatically a discovery of truth. It is evidence of collective preference, not proof that the selected person is best in every relevant sense. The same distinction applies to “nine out of ten dentists” advertising: the statement may report a preference under a limited question, while leaving open what “best” means and whether the product performs best for the specific purpose under consideration.

Objections and limits

Objection 1: Must every side receive equal attention? No. Fair examination does not require equal time, equal credibility, or equal resources for claims with radically unequal evidence. It requires enough attention to determine whether the opposing claim has been understood and whether it contains a serious challenge.

Objection 2: Can this produce endless doubt? It can if “open-mindedness” is misunderstood as refusing to conclude. The principle requires proportionate confidence, not perpetual suspension. Once a position has survived serious testing, accepting it provisionally is rational.

Objection 3: Are emotions always barriers? No. Emotion can signal that something matters and can motivate investigation. The danger arises when emotional attachment determines the result before the evidence is assessed.

Objection 4: Is attractive presentation necessarily deceptive? No. Good communication can make truth accessible. The error is treating attractiveness as sufficient evidence. Presentation may open the door; examination determines whether the claim should remain inside.

Placement in the Haimesian System

This principle belongs in the epistemological core of the Haimesian System, near the themes that reason is the most powerful thing that exists, that understanding leads toward peace, and that arguments should preserve what is good. It gives practical form to love of truth: one loves truth enough to allow it to correct one’s preferred appearance of truth.

Proposed canonical entry

Name: The Principle of Depth Beyond Display

Domain: Epistemology, reasoning, intellectual ethics

Core claim: A rational person must distinguish the attractiveness of a presentation from the truth of what it presents, fairly investigate credible opposing evidence, and proportion confidence to the quality of the resulting examination.

Failure condition: The principle is violated when a person accepts a claim because it is pleasing or popular, or rejects a credible challenge solely because it is unfamiliar, inconvenient, or badly presented.

Falsifier or open problem: The principle would need revision if a reliable method showed that fair exposure to opposing evidence systematically reduced rather than improved the accuracy of belief across relevant domains.

Final formulation

Because any cherished conclusion may be only a pleasing display, reason requires serious examination of credible opposing evidence before confidence is increased or preserved. The goal is not to love disagreement for its own sake. The goal is to love reality more than the appearance that one has already found it.

Sources and textual notes

The quotations below are brief excerpts from the works identified in the body. Translation and edition differences can change wording, especially in Plato. Dates refer to composition or original publication where stated; later editions may differ.

Plato. Republic, Book V, 475e–476b. c. 380 BCE. English translation consulted: Benjamin Jowett, The Republic of Plato; MIT Internet Classics Archive and Perseus Digital Library versions.

Bacon, Francis. Novum Organum. Aphorism XIX. 1620. English wording consulted through digitized editions of the work.

Mill, John Stuart. On Liberty. Chapter II, “Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion.” 1859. Online Library of Liberty edition.

Peirce, Charles Sanders. “Philosophy and the Conduct of Life,” Cambridge Conferences Lectures. 1898. Also collected in Collected Papers, 1.135–1.136 and later editions of his essays.

Popper, Karl. The Open Society and Its Enemies. Vol. II, Chapter 24, “Oracular Philosophy and the Revolt Against Reason.” 1945; quotation retained in revised editions.

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