

Anticorrectness

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I've noticed a pattern without a name, and started calling it "anticorrectness."

When you're anticorrect about something, you're also incorrect. It's just more specific: an anticorrect statement is *the exact opposite* of its correct pair.

Basic examples

For example:

- "winter is colder than summer" is correct¹
- "winter isn't really different from summer" is just incorrect
- "winters are warmer than summers" is not only incorrect, but anticorrect too

Again:

- correct: "righty tighty, lefty loosey"
- anticorrect: "turn a bolt counterclockwise to tighten it"²
- incorrect: "it is impossible to unscrew things. good luck!"

And a third time:

- correct: "coughing on people gets them sick"³
- incorrect: "all these idiots are get mad when I cough on them for some reason"
- anticorrect: "cough on people to keep them nice and healthy!"

Political examples

These examples seem—and are—stupidly contrived. That's because anticorrectness most frequently occurs in ambiguous, uncertain, and complex scenarios. And by that, I mean in politics.

It's pretty easy to spot: look for issues where two passionate sides, who claim to have the same goal in mind, propose opposite policies. Most of the time, such conflicts indicate some underlying anticorrectness: the sides agree on the goal and the lever, but disagree on *how* we should move it. From each side's perspective, the other is being stubbornly (or maliciously) anticorrect.

That's pretty abstract. Here are some American examples (keep in mind that, by nature of the underlying epistemology, such topics are extremely controversial):

- **Gun violence & availability.** Both sides agree that fewer people should die in gun-related crimes. The left argues that massively curtailing access to guns would fix the problem at its root; the right replies that we would actually be better off if more people had guns, so that criminals were warier and got stopped faster. Both sides share a common goal, but their proposed approaches are exact opposites.
- **Municipal construction & zoning policy.** Two unfriendly groups both want healthier cities, with lots of affordable housing. NIMBYs say “[do] not [build new market-rate homes and infrastructure] in my back yard,” preferring other policies. YIMBYs say the opposite: “yes, in my back yard.” This one is clear, as the anticorrectness conflict is in the groups’ names.
- **Government regulation & market freedom.** I don’t know anyone who doesn’t want products to be more high quality, cheap, widely available, and ethically made. But some say that the government must step in to ensure that everything is done properly, while others insist that the main effect of government input is to cause or preserve problems that would otherwise get fixed. The goal is shared; the prescriptions are antithetical.

My list could go on, but its flavor is clear. In case after case, good-hearted people with shared intentions line up to do battle, because they have their hands on the

same lever, and can't agree which way to pull it.

You can see how discussion on these topics breaks down. To a stalwart NIMBY, any given YIMBY is obviously some combination of deluded, evil, and stupid. Why else would they actively wish to push the lever in the *wrong* direction and make the world worse? So they voice that thought online. And does the average YIMBY brush over the misunderstanding? No, they take offense—"look, it's proof those evil NIMBYs are out to get us!"—and return fire. In this all-too-familiar way, such debates inevitably devolve into flurries of insult and misunderstanding.

Hormesis, sisemroh, and positive feedback loops to hell

Hormesis is a medical term that basically means "a little is good, but a lot is bad." Alcohol consumption is an example: drinking a little is allegedly healthy, but alcoholism can ruin your life and kill you. Similarly, "beginner's luck" can be dangerous in a casino; if you make a little money and don't stop while you're ahead, you'll eventually lose it all.

The opposite of hormesis doesn't have a name, so I creatively call it "sisemroh." This is the essence of the saying "it gets worse before it gets better": a small change is bad, but going even further will reverse that harm and improve things significantly, even compared to the beginning. A good example is quitting an addiction cold turkey: you suffer for a bit, but are better off months later.

Hormesis and sisemroh *really* complicate anticorrectness debates. This is because their potential existence make empirical tests unclear. If all responses were linear, each side could agree to a test: push the lever a little bit down, and see if good things happened. But if "a little bit down" turns out bad, the "push the lever down" partisans can say "Oh, it's just sisemrotic! It gets worse before it gets better! You didn't go far enough!" and refuse to change their minds.

It sounds like a cop-out, but sometimes they're right, so the response can't be dismissed outright without testing the full-scale intervention. And of course the

"push the lever up" people won't agree to that test, because they think it would directly and actively inflame the problem. So the sides can't test, and must only argue, until one or another side has enough power to force their intervention through over the other's cries.

And here's where anticorrectness gets dangerous, and why it's important to watch out for: what happens if one side seizes power and yanks the lever as far as they can in their preferred direction... only to be wrong and willfully cause a catastrophe? There are four possible responses:

1. They can **deny** it, insisting that the result was actually good.
2. They can **double down**, insisting that we need to do even *more*.
3. They can **blame** alleged saboteurs (usually from the "pull the lever the other way" group, who they already know are inherently bad people) for undermining an intervention that *would have* worked otherwise.
4. ...or they can **admit** they were anticorrect, that their enemies were correct, and decide to change course 180°.

Which reaction do you think we humans are most likely to have? Well, it's not #4.

And when a group starts defending the honor of their past mistakes, they stop focusing on the problem. In this way, problems can be made worse and then abandoned by well-meaning people who desperately want to fix them.

In the tragic worst case, those in power *keep doubling down* on their anticorrect ideas, aggravating the problem they so desperately care about until it's as bad as possible. Eventually, the damage is so severe that it would be unacceptably shameful to admit their past errors; all they can do is dig in until they die.

(Identifying examples from history is left as an exercise to the reader.)

1. precision for pedants: winter is colder than summer, on average, in the northern hemisphere ↫

2. precision for pedants: flammable gas lines and left-side bike pedals are typically reverse-threaded ↵
3. precision for pedants: coughing on people when you're actively contagious with an air-transmissible disease increases the likelihood that they will contract said illness from you ↵