

Can You Believe What You Hear?

PART of what we read and hear every day is true. Part of it may be lies, misstatements, errors, fiction or something else.

Our problem is to figure out which is which, assuming that we really want to know the facts about anything. The ready acceptance of untruths by many suggests that this desire may not be universal.

Our search for truth is complicated by the persistent and apparently growing practice of mixing fact and fiction. This may be done by such means as dramatized documentaries, romanticized history, propagandized news or advertising, and pseudo-scientific reports.

Real people are presented in imaginary situations and imaginary or cartoon characters are brought before us in print or on TV to portray actual circumstances. How can we tell what is truth?

Prof. Paul Kurtz of State University of New York, who has studied such matters, was interviewed by U.S. News & World Report. He said the American public is increasingly

mixing fiction with fact because they are being overwhelmed and confused by the electronic media.

He cited "The Bermuda Triangle," exorcism, reincarnation and TV shows called "docu-dramas" as examples of fiction offered as facts.

Television is not the only source of mind-warping presentations. Printed pages may offer just as many, or more.

John Cheever, noted novelist and short story writer, said recently: "Fiction is our most intimate and acute means of communication." Then he added, "when I write, I count very much on an intelligent reader agreeing with what I've put down on paper."

Therein lies a great danger. Some people will believe anything they read in newspapers or in novels, and anything they hear on radio or TV news, historical dramas or so-called documentaries.

In the same way they may accept political or ideological positions. Public officials have been known to come before TV audiences and

make untrue statements or misinterpret legislation.

In an article titled "America's New Class," Newsweek magazine described this new segment as being several million strong, with its own economic interests and with potential for corruption and power over our national life.

The "New Class" members are the brain workers, Newsweek said, "the mass-produced intelligentsia of educators, planners, policymakers and communicators who service the nation's post-industrial society."

Leftists say "the New Class" has abandoned "democratic socialism" to advance corporate interests, while spokesmen for private enterprise seem to believe "the New Class" uses its talents mainly to promote socialistic reforms and government-centered lives.

We might need to consider every statement with a bit of doubt and demand proof for many. Even then, those who would control us may try to rearrange facts and truth in order to mislead us.