Wikipedia defines [social engineering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_engineering_(security)) as:

“In the context of [information security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_security), **social engineering** is the [psychological manipulation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_manipulation) of people into performing actions or divulging [confidential information](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confidentiality).”

And those of us who work in and around information technology (which is almost everyone) are routinely required by our employing institutions to take training in recognizing how to spot and thereby avoid the scams that come with many of the social engineering attempts we see across the internet such as phishing. We learned to accept and live with the fact that scammers routinely attempt to manipulate us – in short to con us.

But curiously, very few of us are willing to admit that conventional media, advertising, and social media would ever stoop so low as to manipulate us. Of course, their approach isn’t as coarse and, for that matter, honest as a [Nigerian scam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advance-fee_scam), where the con artist simply wants the mark’s money. Our modern scam infrastructure aims higher or lower. The following quote, taken from Chapter 1 of the book Propaganda by Edward Bernays, the father of modern public relations and advertising puts it this way:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

Makes one wonder as to who is doing the real social engineering.

Now onto the columns.

The famous movie, *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* had a running joke about there being two kinds of people in this world: people at the end of rope and the people who do the cutting or the people with loaded guns and those who dig. This month’s [Aristotle2Digital](https://aristotle2digital.blogwyrm.com/?p=1724) looks that the two kinds of people in this world who look at times series data: those who analyze what has passed and those who are looking at the data real time. The techniques of the moving average and the exponential smoothing are contrasted against each other as useful tools for those two types of analysts.

There is something that seems to be lost in the recent controversy over In-N-Out burger announcing its one and only shop closing ever in Oakland. On one side are those who believe enough is enough and In-N-Out should be able to leave with no strings attached (call them the laissez-faire crowd). On the other side there are those who maintain that the closing is a cynical move on the part of a big corporation that simply didn’t see enough profit and is using ‘crime’ as an excuse to cut ties with a marginalized community (call them noblesse oblige crowd). What [CommonCents](http://commoncents.blogwyrm.com/?p=1294) points out is that while everyone is focused on which of these two crowds’ perspective is right nobody seems to be pointing out the laisse-faire attitude the government has to their own noblesse oblige to keep crime down and provide opportunities to those who are underserved.

The old saying “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts” is apropos of the collective phenomenon of phase transitions. Familiar forms of phase transitions cover the melting of ice to water or the boiling of water to steam. This month’s [UndertheHood](https://underthehood.blogwyrm.com/?p=2190) looks at a simple but physically relevant model of phase transitions called percolation. Despite its simple rules, the percolation model exhibits some surprising collective behaviors.

Enjoy!