On Validity

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by Nils Borg

Welcome to another hopelessly oversized post. In the previous two posts I have been talking about truth, and argued that it comes in two shapes, put simply, natural and cultural truth, the former being the accurate representation of mind independent domains of reality, and the latter the relationship between our beliefs and socially constructed domains of reality. In this post I will talk about why I think both of these shapes of truth are, on the whole, irrelevant for the future of human life on this planet. The reasons for this are twofold: even if people wanted to live in truth we could not as ours is a life in epistemological twilight where every assertion is somewhere on a grey scale, and secondly people are not interested in truth as much as their own happiness. Instead of idealistically hoping that truth shall save the world, I want to develop a pragmatic two dimensional epistemology where validity of any idea derives not only from its relationship to the natural and cultural world, but also its relationship to the believer and their behaviour. I believe that it is from this primary validity the secondary conventional epistemological validity derives its authority.“Truth” as the accurate relationship between an idea and the world should step down and give way to “vitality” as the healthy relationship between the idea and the believer and their behaviour.

What is a valid thought? What does it mean for a thought to be valid? If it is not valid, should we avoid it? Can invalid thoughts be avoided? Traditionally, that is to say in intellectual traditions, valid ideas are true, assumed to be true or reasonable guesses, and from that outlook has sprung different schools of so called *epistemology*, i.e. theories about what knowledge is and how to arrive at true knowledge. While the philosopher and scientists were busy trying to clarify those epistemological issues men of real power and influence, politicians, priests and patrons, were busy trying to control what thoughts people actually had. The criteria used by the men in power have never been very aligned with the distinction of what is true of false, but what would benefit their specific purposes. Men of power have always realized that the thoughts of the people have an immense importance and that this importance does not stem from whether they are true or not. That is why more efforts have been made to control people´s thoughts than perhaps anything else. This is so because thoughts have a weight far beyond that of accurate representation of reality. People´s thoughts define their identity and their behaviour. Only a small section of the population is actually interested in finding a true representation of reality. Most people need to feel safe, appreciated, happy and entertained. Because the field of thought is vastly bigger than that covered by truth, validity cannot be limited to the true alone. Ironically however the academic discipline dedicated to establishing validity – epistemology -has been run by that small fraction of the population actually passionate about truth. As much as I personally love truth, I must bow my head to reality and accept that in the life of most people it plays a minor role. So I ask myself, where else can we find validity, and how can we distinguish it from the bad, toxic, false or evil?

Towards a two dimensional epistemology

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There is no pre-established harmony between the furtherance of truth and the well-being of mankind.

Nietzsche

Human All Too Human

Postmodernism is a dead end. That is why it is called *post*, because it has nothing new to offer, it only points out the faults of modernism. Where modernism believed in absolute foundations, progress, objective truth, postmoderninsm emphasized subjectivity, multiplicity, incompatibility, incommensurability and incompleteness. As a consequence of postmodern philosophy it is common today to hear people talk about having "different truths", especially when considering the different forms of human life and different beliefs and ambitions people hold. "You cannot compare people´s beliefs", they say, "since there is no absolute truth and no objective value scale against which to compare". This is seen as some kind of solution to the challenge that inevitably arises when open-minded people consider the fact that they could have been born anywhere and thus would have held radically different set of beliefs and ambitions they now hold.

The logical undercurrent might, if articulated, go something like

1. My beliefs are true
2. My beliefs are shaped by the influences of my childhood
3. I could have been born anywhere
4. Hence, all beliefs all people hold are true

If the beliefs and ambitions I hold should have any weight, validity and dignity – else how could I carry on living? – and at the same time I am to respect other cultures and grant them the same privilege, how am I to avoid having to accept beliefs contradictory to mine to be equally valid? If I realize that I am innocent in regards to where I was born, and accept that where I was born determines to a large extent my belief system, am I not forced into to a logical, and often ethical, dilemma? How can I believe it is wrong to stone a thief, and at the same time accept it to be right or true since I could have been born in Saudi Arabia? That means that I have to accept that x is both true and false, not in relation to facts but depending on where I was born. While it can be seem spiritually liberating to take a hyped up version of Kuhn´s *incommensurability thesis* on a world tour its blessings are short lived. Relativity is illogical at best and paralysing and depressive at worst. It may seem as if postmodernists are trying to democratise epistemology, but I have argued elsewhere how it may very well pave way for fascism. Today I want to set myself up in the crossfire and offer my alternative solution to this dilemma.

Both modern objectivism and postmodern relativism are based on some idea of *truth*. The former says there is one and that it has it, and the latter that there are many and that it belongs to everybody. I believe the solution lies in rethinking the fundamental problem. Classically knowledge is about finding true descriptions of, and explanations for, facts, and epistemology is concerned with how we know this and what is to be considered valid knowledge. The fundamental question I think we must come back to is why it matters if our knowledge is true if it does not benefit life? Why do we need to know things? What is the purpose of our enquiry? It seems to me the fundamental question for epistemology is not what knowledge is true, but what knowledge makes life better.

Truth deals with the relationship between a statement and a fact, whether objective, socially constructed or private. At the same time a belief is held by a believer, and has an effect on the believer, his behaviour, and thus the environment. A belief is psychoactive, and how it affects the believer is not only dependent on its truth value but the nature of the believer, his social context and present life situation. I am proposing that to move forward intellectually to something that is not just post-something we need to shift our attention away from propositional truth and focus on the pragmatic relationship between the belief and the believer. This dimension of a belief is not logical, but psycho-logical. The validity of beliefs along this second axis should not be judged by its correspondence with facts but by how it affects the believer emotionally and pragmatically at a given moment in time. (Pragma you remember meaning action.) And just like you can think what you like but not act as you like, in so far as beliefs have practical implications, we can judge and compare them. And we do. Even the most radical postmodern relativist opposes public stoning. We

need a two dimensional validity concept that reflects not only the relationship between our ideas and the world, but the relationship between our ideas and ourselves. Where classical epistemology and both natural science and its postmodern critics operate along the axis of veracity, this second axis I am proposing should judge ideas on their vitality.
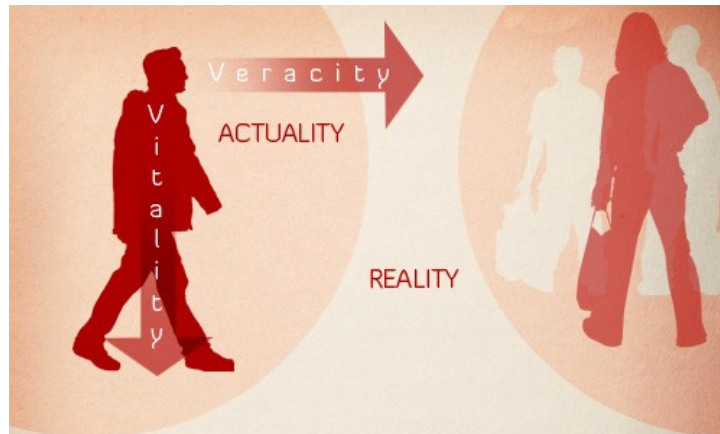
The solution to the logical dilemma above lies in accepting that it is the vitality of an idea that is relative, not its veracity. It is true or false – or neither -, for all people in all times, but it is not equally healthy for all people of all times to believe, and it does not always have the same practical consequences. I can accept that a false idea is vital to someone else, not that it would be true to them and false to me.

Evolutionary Validity: The Vitality of an Idea

> *"The falseness of a judgement is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgement…*
> *The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving,*
> *perhaps even species-cultivating."*
> Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil

> *"I don´t think false beliefs have Darwinian survival value. ...I care about the truth…I*
> *want to face reality fair and square."*
> Richard Dawkins, Hard Talk

It seems naïve to me to link a species level of knowledge and its capacity for survival. If a species survives, in so far as it is on its own merits, is the decisive factor how it behaves or what it thinks? Is it not obvious that when it comes to survival the only thing that matters is behaviour? Reality exhorts certain inescapable demands on living beings, and unless they behave so as to cope with those demands that is it, end of the line. As far as survival is concerned ideas are important in as much as they affect behaviour. If it is our survival we care about, the first question we have to ask in this context is: *Of the ideas that affect our behaviour which ones help us grow stronger and improve our chances of survival?* Is it the truthful ones or is there another more important quality they have? It is not hard to see that knowledge and survival does not necessarily go hand in hand. With our knowledge we have built weapons powerful enough to blow ourselves to pieces some 30 times over (I realize it would be hard to do it more than once). By the same token, if we thought we could fly and threw ourselves off a cliff we would also die. Hence it is not the truthfulness of the ideas that matters, but whether or not they lead to advantageous behaviour.

Thus my first definition of epistemological vitality is: **An idea is valid if it helps to improve the believer's chances of survival.**

That would be a rudimentary form of validity and intuitively I feel that the validity of truth is rather a derivative from this primary form of validity. As it stand it is very crude. At first this seems to be a fine definition, but on further consideration it becomes problematic since there is nothing stopping

an epistemology and morality based in mere survival casting Hitler and Pol Pot as superheroes. From the point of view of mere survival by any means, there is the same kind of validity in a way of thinking that supports survival as in using a weapon or a tool, but we want to consider the human situation as a whole, from a more civilized stance. We want to see if rethinking what epistemological validity is could help improve healthy human coexistence. Postmodern relativity, even if it is motivated by tolerance, really offers nothing to the party. If I have to accept whatever is acceptable to another culture then genocide must be OK as well. Hitler was democratically elected remember. Human values are not all relative nor arbitrary, and while there is multiplicity and vast variety, at the very least tolerance is one of those universal human values. If postmodern relativity was right why would we not also have to tolerate intolerance? Because there is a line, and that line is the demarcation between what is crossculturally acceptable and what is not, and that is where epistemological vitality lives.

A more civilised definition of epistemological vitality would be: **An idea is valid if it helps to improve the believer´s chances of survival without having destructive influence on the believer ´s coexistence with others.**

Such a definition is not neutral, it does not pretend to hide behind "truth" as a shield. In the world we now live in, a world with clashing civilisations, I believe we need to modify our concept of validity and accept that as long as a way of thinking does not lead to destructive behaviour it is valid. Outside my café window in Dubai are two groups of women: one all covered in black showing only their eyes, the others showing virtually everything but the D&G covered eyes. They coexist and tolerate each other. Yesterday across the gulf, Iran declared itself a nuclear state, and thereby sped up what Koestler saw as the final countdown for humanity. Since the moment mankind learnt about nuclear reactions it was inevitable that one day nuclear technology would be widespread and easily accessible. That day is here. Knowledge is not neutral and therefore it is cowardice to pretend epistemology does not have ethical, ecological and psychological dimensions. The diplomatic postmodern efforts to apologetically relativise truth leads to as state where no one is right or wrong, and that is paralysing. If instead we evaluate the validity of ideas from a pragmatic stand point, we can still compare cultures and beliefs, still establish what is better and worse, without depriving people of the religious myths that tie them together and give their lives meaning. Both postmodern relativism and James´ pragmatism are trying to expand epistemological validity. James famously wrote a massive study on the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and was defending the will to believe as something positive. I fully agree with the motive behind both of these movements, namely to expand what is valid or worthy of consideration to include all forms of human experience. I think it is defeating that purpose however when it is trying to achieve that by hijacking the concepts of truth and reality. **Truth is not relative and it is not whatever happens to be expedient**. Experiences and beliefs can be valid even if they are delusional from a scientific or even common sense point of view. To realize why this must be so one only has to consider how much of human life is made up of pure fictions.

Reality & Actuality

If you look up *reality* and *actuality* in the Oxford Dictionary it says they mean the same thing, but as a matter of fact they have different etymological roots and histories. Reality comes from latin *res*, thing, thus reality is the world of things. Actuality on the other hand come from latin *agere*, to act, and hence means that which acts. When it comes to human beings, what makes us act is clearly not just the world of things, but equally the world of ideas, whether those be naturally or reflexively true or false. If reality is how the world is in itself, actuality is how we make it out to be. It is not a new distinction. The Greeks called reality *logos*, and actuality *mythos*, the Hindus divided into *brahman* and *maya*, and philosophers have a long tradition of analysing the real thing from the perceived thing. The world we inhabit have variously been called a *cave* (Plato, 400BC), the *world of phenomena* (Kant,1781), the *life world* (Husserl,1919), *socially constructed*, the *matrix* etc., and

each tradition describes the structure and development differently.

Politicians have long known that truth and reality is irrelevant to society. It is what people believe that makes all the difference. In his influential book *Public Opinion* (1922) Walter Lippmann, the American journalist and adviser to president Woodrow Wilson, writes:

> "The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event. That is why until we know what others think they know, we cannot truly understand their acts. [All human behavior has got] one common factor. It is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it is behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates. If the behavior is not a practical act, but what we call roughly thought and emotion, it may be a long time before there is any noticeable break in the texture of the fictitious world. But when the stimulus of the pseudo-fact results in action on things or other people, contradiction soon develops. /…/ what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him. If his atlas tells him that the world is flat he will not sail near what he believes to be the edge of our planet for fear of falling off. If his maps include a fountain of eternal youth, a Ponce de Leon will go in quest of it. If someone digs up yellow dirt that looks like gold, he will for a time act exactly as if he had found gold. The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do. It does not determine what they will achieve. It determines their effort, their feelings, their hopes, not their accomplishments and results. "

There is one reality with different domains – natural, cultural and personal – but what we act on is not a true image of it, but our beliefs about it. On the whole those beliefs are not based in our own first hand experience but in what others have told us. Myths, folklore, disinformation, fiction are all mixed up with facts, scientific theories and honest testimonies. Between us and reality there is this pseudo-environment that seems impenetrable.

For Lippmann the pseudo-environment is made up of stereotypes, which he coined in the modern meaning of a simplified symbol with only limited correspondence to the complex facts it refers to.

> "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.
>
> But modern life is hurried and multifarious, above all physical distance separates men who are often in vital contact with each other, such as employer and employee, official and voter. There is neither time nor opportunity for intimate acquaintance. Instead we notice a trait which marks a well known type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotypes we carry about in our heads. "

Even if there is an inevitable layer between us and reality, and that in that our actions are based, what is to say the psuedo-environment is not an accurate reflection of how the world really is? There are two reasons why actuality is not reality. The first is that we have imperfect knowledge. In the domain of things we can know our knowledge is tainted by all kinds of human frailties, ignorance, breakdown of communication, misunderstanding, manipulation etc. These "problems" of knowledge and information are being addressed in our modern academic world, but apart from the in-principle-knowable there is the entire domain of the unknowable which will never match up well with reality. There are at least three types of unknowables,

1. the transcendental: that which is beyond the grasp of our minds and nervous system
2. the missed opportunities: we can never know what would have happened if so and so had not happened
3. the future: not yet accessible, not yet understood, the unforeseen.

Since humanity will not live forever in practice there will always be unknowns of all three types. This means we cannot know reality even if we wanted to. My basic assumption however is that we are epistemologically greedy, we want or need to "know" more than we can possibly know. Hence we fill the gap with guesswork, stories and myths, or we have it filled for us by someone else and the tradition we are born into.

The reason we need to have more ideas than the information available to us can vouch for, is something vastly underestimated: the psychoactive function of ideas. We use ideas as Prozac to cope with the essential tension and our fear of uncertainty. We feel our happiness depends on having an identity, even though whatever we identify with is bound to be fictional. It may be the idea of a country, a god, a profession, a football team or a marriage, but they are all mental constructs we use to overlay reality with our view of the world, how we want the world to be. We are emotional beings and our thoughts are driven by our fears and desires. There are entire metaphysical belief systems constructed out of pure air just to make us feel more important than we suspect we are. Our need for myths will not go away, as society is a patchwork woven out of our fabrications. When facts come knocking on the door we still prefer to live in denial. Very few individuals are prepared to give up their beliefs because reality tells them otherwise. Susan Blackmore, a Bristol based paranormal researcher is one of them.

> "Imagine this … Imagine a world in which if you love someone enough, or need them enough, your minds will communicate across the world wherever you are, regardless of space and time. Imagine a world in which, if only you can think a thought clearly and powerfully enough it can take on a life of its own, moving objects and influencing the outcome of events far away. Imagine a world in which each of us has a special inner core – a 'real self' – that makes us who we are, that can think and move independently of our coarse physical body, and that ultimately survives death, giving meaning to our otherwise short and pointless lives. This is (roughly speaking) how most people think the world is. It is how I used to think -and even hope – that the world is. I devoted 25 years of my life to trying to find out whether it is. Now I have given up.

> If any one of these three possibilities turned out to be true then the world is a fundamentally different place from the one we think we know, and much of our science would have to be overthrown. /…/ I am often accosted by people who seem to think that I think as follows:- (Note – I don't!) "I am a scientist. I know the truth about the universe from reading my science books. I know that telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and life after death are impossible. I don't want to see any evidence that they exist. I am terrified that I might be wrong." The way I really think is more like this "I am a scientist. I think the way to the truth is by investigation. I suspect that telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and life after death do not exist because I have been looking in vain for them for 25 years. I have been wrong lots of times before and am not afraid of it".

> I long ago threw out my own previous beliefs in a soul, telepathy and an astral world, but even then I kept on searching for evidence that my new skepticism was misplaced, and for new theories that might explain the paranormal if it existed (Blackmore, 1996). I kept doing experiments and investigating claims of psychic powers. Finally I have given up that too.

> One of the reasons I have given up is probably a trivial and selfish one – that I have

simply had enough of fighting the same old battles, of endlessly being accused of being scared of the truth or even of trying to suppress the truth; of being told that if I don't come and investigate x (my near-death experience, my psychic twin, Edgar Cayce, the miracle of Lourdes, D.D.Hume, or the haunted pub round the corner) that proves I have a closed mind. It doesn't. It only proves that after years of searching for paranormal phenomena and not finding them, I am no longer prepared to spend my precious time and limited energy in documenting yet another NDE, setting up more carefully designed experiments to test telepathy in twins, going over all the reams of published argument about Cayce, Lourdes or Hume, or sitting up all night waiting for the ghost that (because I am a psi-inhibitory experimenter) will never come."

Why are we so reluctant to accept reality? Fundamentally because we are afraid to discover that we are worthless in the universe as portrayed by science. We are afraid of reality, and suspect it might not make us feel good. Our well-being depends on us feeling important and nothing in science seems to feed into our need to be in the centre of the world.

Psychological Validity: Therapeutic Myths

"Siempre hay algo que te auyda adelante, no importa tan mal estes."

Alcoholic in the street of Granada.

"I think the world is constantly improving, and that overall we are always moving towards more and more democracy".

From some conversation

"I believe that if you really want to do something the world will help you make it happen".

Paulo Coehlo

In general, the way I am trying to think about epistemology is from a medical point of view. Thoughts are not abstract representations, they are integral parts of the human organism, and they guide our emotional life and our behaviour. Only a naïve religious view of the universe would maintain that a true image of reality can guarantee well-being for all. What ideas help to improve mental health and personal growth is different for different people, at different moments and different stages in life. At the recent disaster the people of Haiti were encouraged to look for consolation in their faith. Even in such a moment when it must be hardest to believe it may save people from total psychological breakdown. A doctor would not prescribe the same drug to every patient at all times, likewise you do not console children and adults in the same way.

An idea is valid if it increases the mental health of the believer.

Religious people want a God that

- created the world with us in mind,
- is sociable, listens to and cares for each one of us, and
- can change and break the laws of nature as of when it pleases him.

Are these beliefs true? No, not unless everything else we know about the universe is wrong. Even a short introduction course in modern cosmology and a pinch of probability theory makes it painfully apparent what a tall order this is. Even for an infinite and omniscient intelligence it is impossible to predict exactly what will happen even 5 minutes from now and stacking tiny uncertainties on top of each other a few billion times no one, divine or otherwise, could have predicted the exact appearance of the human race. Furthermore, given not only opposing desires between people, but

even opposing desires inside a person, the most caring God imaginable could not always satisfy the needs of one person without doing harm, either to another or the same person. And finally, if a law of nature is broken once and in one location, all other laws are broken in all other locations as well as they are all connected. As a matter of fact, there could be no laws at all if they could break. I cannot see how such a God could exist.

Are such beliefs psychologically valid? Absolutely. People with strong reality anxiety need to have firm opinions about things about which we cannot know. Like a placebo has no active ingredient, an idea needs to have no resemblance to truth to have a healthy effect on the believer. I think the aim of human existence for the time being is to achieve sustainable happy living for as many as possible, and I am prone to believe that myths and outright fabrications will always play a crucial part in that drama.

The Red or the Blue Pill

I hear you object: "Seeing our myths were born at a time when we did not know much about the world, is not the obvious road ahead that people should simply discard their superstitious fictions in favour of more accurate models of the universe? Is the solution not one where people instead of rewriting their myths adapt to reality as it is?" Our environment is different from that of any other animal. The reality to which we would need to adapt involves nebulous objects to which we cannot adapt as they are intrinsically unknowable. Part of the human world is both anticipation of the future, psychological reflexive guesswork and metaphysical imagination, neither of which have concrete determined facts for objects. Animals on the whole do not ponder their own death, theorize about what others are thinking (particularly not about them) or if the universe was designed with any particular purpose in mind. Reality is not a mechanical clockwork but is made up of natural, historical and personal times unfolding in unpredictable and self-referential ways. How do we adapt to a reality we help create? Should I for instance adapt myself to a social reality where people are collaborating or where they only look after themselves? Both are possible but they depend on what others adapt to. Should I adapt to a personal reality where I am insignificant and disposable or one where we I am appreciated and unique? Again, both are possible ways of reading most of our lives, but each reading helps bring about a different story.

Furthermore, there are at least two different red pills to swallow: first to accept natural reality and secondly to accept social reality. The former would include at least accepting as a possibility that humans have no value in the universe, and that if we blow ourselves up that is just one less noise to be heard in our galaxy. The latter would mean to really emotionally take in the injustices that exist in society. Things like:

- The nasty people without conscience makes the money the rest needs.
- The people with the least empathy can climb over others and become their leaders.
- The people with the least to say shout the loudest.
- The people with the sickest lives make the headlines.
- The people who need love the most are least likely to get it.

My point is that the Matrix is trying to make it black or white, when in fact it is not. They also cast those who knowingly choose to believe in myths as evil. Again, it is how you behave, not what you believe that matters.

Political Validity: Reflexive Potentials and Auxiliary Beliefs

Our behaviour is the bridge between the imaginary world we live in and the natural world around us. Our behaviour is the converter, the actualiser, between our more or less true beliefs, and our environment. Just like a diesel engine can run on a variety of combustible fuels human behaviour can run on all sorts of beliefs. Our minds live in actuality but our bodies live in reality and thus the

consequences of acting based on a false belief are real. So how come we survive? Why is there not more of a "break in the texture"? I know two things, a) we believe in things that are not there and b) we are alive, thus we have survived. That means it is possible to live happily in a fiction. I assume we could have gone extinct by now had we lived by beliefs whose ecological consequences were so grave that we would have destroyed the basis of our own survival. Beliefs with destructive consequences can be false, but they do not need to be. Is there a limit to how deluded I can be and still survive? If those beliefs are tied to behaviour yes. The outer limit would be the limit of evolutionary validity.

If we reverse this thinking, instead of asking "how deluded can we be and still survive?" we can ask, "could our survival be dependent on us believing in myths?" According to chaos theory the future of any complex open system is undecided and dependent on tiny changes. Each change feeds back into the system and opens up a different set of possibilities. For conscious agents certain future potentials only exist if they are aware of them. You only have a choice if you are conscious of having one. There is no such thing as an unconscious choice. Therefore our future depend to a large extent on our beliefs about the future. The future is made up to a large extent of reflexive potentials. Following the logic developed around evolutionary validity however we can ask whether the belief about a future potential needs to be true or not for it to really exist. I would maintain that beliefs about the future cannot be true or false, but can be more or less realistic. Thus does the future potential depend on a realistic belief? Do I need to believe I can win X-factor to be able to win X-factor? It is unlikely, but not unthinkable, that I would enter the competition without believing I stood a chance, but maybe I did it as a joke. In reality I need to enter the competition and impress the judges, but in my actuality perhaps I believe I won because God wanted me to. Without feeling God on my side I would never have overcome the nerves to enter. My belief in God would then be an auxiliary belief for this reflexive potential to exist. If I was a willing suicide bomber, without my belief in a life after death I would not be prepared to blow myself up. Can we come out of the financial crisis without believing that we can? It seems to me that many potentials depend on auxiliary beliefs to actually exist. Those beliefs do not need to be realistic, but they can nevertheless open up certain potentials that would otherwise not exist. This is getting a bit technical. Sorry.

Say that you were the political leader of the world, and you realised that unless people changed their ways they would suffer catastrophic consequences. At the same time you realized that no amount of rational persuasion or simple educational campaign had the necessary practical effect. Would it then be valid for you to manipulate people to believe in lies if that was the only way you could make them change their ways? What if your vision gave them meaning? What if there was a purpose everyone could buy into, that tallied up with scientific facts and still could be boosted by endless mythologisations and artistic creations? I can think of a purpose that would blow all other purposes out of the water, something that is universal, something every healthy human being should care about, something that would, if taken to heart, change most political policies. In my mind I can think of no higher purpose than the well-being of our grandchildren. Make that your new religion, give the well-being of our grandchildren a God, a marketing campaign, a lobby, a TV station, preachers and priests, print T-shirts, make dolls and dollars. You might ask why our grandchildren would be more precious than us currently living? I don´t think they are, but they will suffer the consequences of our current stupidity, and I think we are too immature, irrational and weak to make the sacrifices required without something transcendental, something beyond ourselves that give our lives a direction and meaning.

Black Lies & La Via Negativa

I am not really suggesting the intellectual and political elite should invent any myths so as to manipulate the masses. History is paved with those skeletons already. It seems leaders tend not to be very good, and cannot be trusted to be as wise as Plato would have wished. Moreover I think political validity needs to be treated separately from psychological vitality since the demands of

transparency, truth, scientific accuracy, honesty and accuracy that citizens can demand of the state are not the same as anyone can demand of an individual. The more I think about validity and what are healthy thoughts the harder it gets to find clear definitions and criteria. It seems to me it is almost impossible to say for sure if a line of thinking will lead to positive or negative consequences, and whether that can even be established without first defining whose well-being we are concerned with. One man´s bread and all that. Instead of trying to establish exactly what thoughts are healthy I do think it is a lot easier to establish what thoughts are unhealthy. Just like Popper realised it is easier to prove something false than it is to prove it true, it is easier to prove a belief unhealthy than to positively healthy. I am saying this because I believe that the role of intellectuals should not be to ram their wisdom down the throats of those with a simpler constitution but to try to identify when certain lines of thought definitely go astray. People do not have time to think, and the mental food they get is shallow and controlled. Currently the intelligentsia is engaged in getting the non-thinkers to consume. How much of the mental capacity of mankind is applied to actually making the world better and for us to solve real problems? If critically minded people acted as filter against sick ideas the world would be a better place. When people start to act aggressively and destructively something is likely to be sick in their belief system as well. Just like wealth does not produce happiness, does poverty not produce destructiveness. Something more is required. When China is warning the West from even talking to one of the most peaceful man in the world, and when Iran is arresting citizens for expressing their opinions and blocking their access to information, then something is not right. That is the subject of the next post…whenever I get the time.

I leave you with some questions that probably will keep me busy for the rest of my life. If you can answer them for me I will send you a jar of pickled herring.

- Will life be better if people were forced to give up their myths?
- Is there dangerous knowledge?
- Are there situations where true knowledge can kill?
- What is the relationship between the delusional belief of a mad man and his hallucination?

For a chance to win an extra mackerel maybe you could have a guess at whether reality is

1.meaningless for humans and we must invent myths to stay sane
2.meaningful but too complex for us to comprehend, therefore we need myths
3.meaningful and comprehensible, no need for delusions
4.meaningless but better to be depressed than delusional

Like I said…your chance to win some juicy fish!