

Have a rant: The strange case of news

Belief and disbelief in “fact” are at best forms of elitism, but I fear they are slightly worse than that. Ask yourself, Why do people believe and disbelieve reported “facts” ?

I think that people believe “facts” as a means of supporting their opinions, reinforcing beliefs, or worse —for those who lack, distrust, or prefer beliefs to, opinions— providing them, providing a security blanket.

Similarly, people disbelieve “facts” as a means of reinforcing their beliefs — peculiarly, often ones deeming “fact” sources disreputable. That such people often cite ‘contradictory personal experience’ as the foundation of these beliefs should (therefore) make us wary.

We should not be surprised at the similarity between belief and disbelief —we should not let language deceive us— : belief and disbelief are the same; they are both belief. In this sense belief in “fact” is, like any belief, no more or less than a faith, and its sternest followers are as elitist, cruel, and unforgiving as those of any religion.

We must face the overwhelming likelihood that most people in the world have no way of critically judging reported “facts” outside or even inside their areas of expertise. Yet the vast majority of people in the world believe despite this that they are critical digesters (and regurgitators) of news. They deceive themselves, creating a false sense of security, just as do the millions of people who ask religion to answer their questions —no matter the answer— . This behavior should not surprise us either: it is as natural as the baby reaching for its blanket.

Belief and disbelief are the same, and are not opposites: one need not believe something one doesn’t disbelieve, and one need not disbelieve something one doesn’t believe. The true alternative is nonbelief. Ask yourself, Are beliefs necessary where opinion or aesthetic judgement would suffice? Quantum mechanics, the existence of the Holocaust, God: ask yourself, In what ways have we suffered because of belief and disbelief in these as “fact” ? (I would have used an example from recent politics, but that would not have been fair to both sides, since people almost always believe “facts” about politics.)

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