

Experts ← → *Alternative Facts!*

Discussion at *The Park*

Wednesday 31 January 2018 7:30pm at *The Park Tavern, Macclesfield*

Introduction

Perhaps it was all started by Michael Gove when he said [1]:-
“*People in this country have had enough of experts*”.

Discussion

1. Going around our circle: How did we react?
2. Again: Do any of us consider ourselves to be an expert? If not - why not? If so – in what?
3. What is our concept of an expert?
4. It seems that we don't always believe everything experts say; that we don't always trust an expert opinion [2,3].
What is it that causes us to be wary of experts, to not *trust* them?
5. *Confirmation Bias* is our preference to prefer information that agrees with our existing world picture [5]. Humans also have a desire for *certainty*.
Do we as individuals select what we read and believe?
6. Mankind has so much knowledge and information these days, no one can be familiar with it all; this was not so a few hundred years ago.
Do we suffer from *Information Overload*?
7. There is a new lexicon; eg *Alternative Facts*, *Fake News* [7], *Post Truth* [6], *Alterative Reality* etc.
What is an *Alternative Fact*? Is it not a self-contradiction? Do some people prefer them?
8. And then there is denial. Climate Change [4], Holocaust, Moon landing, Evolution
Does anyone in the circle deny?
9. Epistemology.
How do we know the things we (think) we know? And how do experts know?
10. There are experts and experts.
Which experts do we / don't we trust? [8]

References

- [1] Financial Times, 3 June 2016,
<https://www.ft.com/content/3be49734-29cb-11e6-83e4-abc22d5d108c>
- [2] MMR vaccine controversy, A fraudulent paper was published in 1998 and led to a sharp drop in vaccination rates. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMR_vaccine_controversy
- [3] A woman was wrongfully convicted of killing her two babies.
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2007/mar/17/childrenservices.uknews>
- [4] An Inconvenient Truth; see the film by Al Gore
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Inconvenient_Truth
- [5] Confirmation Bias; see *Thinking, Fast and Slow* by D Kahnmann, Allen Lane, 2011.
- [6] Evan Davis, *Post Truth, Why we have Reached Peak Bullshit*, Littlebrown, 2017.
- [7] Daniel Levitan, *A Field Guide to Lies and Statistics*, Viking, 2017.
- [8] The Ipsos MORI Veracity Index 2017 <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/politicians-remain-least-trusted-profession-britain>