

News vs. Fake News: Boolean Bullshit

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

George Boole (1815-1864) was a self-taught mathematician and philosopher who developed the algebra for a truth function in a logical system: true or false. Something is blue, or something is not blue. A Boolean function can only have either of two values (on, or off, 1, or 0). However, most things that are of value to us humans cannot be captured in the Boolean functions. Is art true, or is science true? And if it appears to be possible to capture something in such function, the value cannot be determined. Is something art or not? Is something beautiful or ugly, good or bad, new or old? Trying to capture our world in Boolean values will soon turn out to become a worthless exercise that leads to absolutism (populism) and simplification. Therefore it's only of little surprise that Donald Trump began to advocate a simplified worldview, in which something is either good (his own actions and qualities) or bad (anyone who does not believe in his "good"). Moreover, something is news or fake news. The world according to [warning, here's just one opinion] a dictatorial idiot!

Unfortunately, Trump holds the position of one of the most influential people in our world. At present, it's almost everywhere accepted that news, or science (or basically everything that matters to us) has only two values: true or false. In the Netherlands data scientist Maurice de Hond, for instance, posted on FaceBook and LinkedIn insights that contradicted somewhat to the main WHO view on the uncertainties of the Corona virus that he derived through machine learning and logical arguments. Subsequently he was thrown off social media with the predicate "fake news". This would make George Boole turn in his grave [warning from the fact checkers: fake news: 1. a dead person is no longer fully present after 156 years and 2. a dead person cannot perceive, think and move autonomously].

Our world can be described as an extremely complex system (consisting of millions of complex subsystems), which cannot be captured with simplifications. Can we rely on what we experience as real? Or do we believe what we have learned? We have learned that we live on a gigantic sphere, without falling off. Do we experience this? Of course not, we experience our life in the flat plane, and we experience that things fall off a ball, but not off a table. That's because of gravity, we say in unison, when a child asks us why we don't fall off our "ball". Our knowing suppresses our experience here, because they simply don't go together. Imagination, fantasy, and dreams preceded new insights, and wisdom would never come if every step on the road to insight had been fact-checked.

Simplifications are like tumor cells, dividing without taking into account the complex system of which they are a part. They do not exist for the collective, or the whole (which is often more, or less than the sum of its parts), but for itself. They exist only for itself, and after a short period of success they make their own existence impossible. With the end of the organism in which they proliferate, their own end is also irrevocable. With a simplification of our complex reality to True and False, we will inevitably destroy our understanding of the world in the end.

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PS I just heard that Maurice de Hond's article on Corona is accepted and published in the most important scientific peer reviewed Dutch journal of medicine. Fortunately science doesn't always get involved in the news-versus-fake news madness!