

**Fake News and Post Truth:  
Does Philosophy have anything to  
Say to Science (Forestry)?**

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# 1 Fake News.

1. Human fallibility – we get things wrong
2. Fake News 1 - sort our true from false and convey the false!
3. Fake News 2 – do not care about what is true or false
4. How much fake new is there? Nothing on the Internet tells what is fake! Trust?
5. Edelman Trust Barometer (global communications marketing firm):
  - ‘The 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that trust is in crisis around the world. The general population’s trust in all four key institutions — business, government, NGOs, and media — has declined broadly ...’
6. Are they right? Global versus local scepticism.

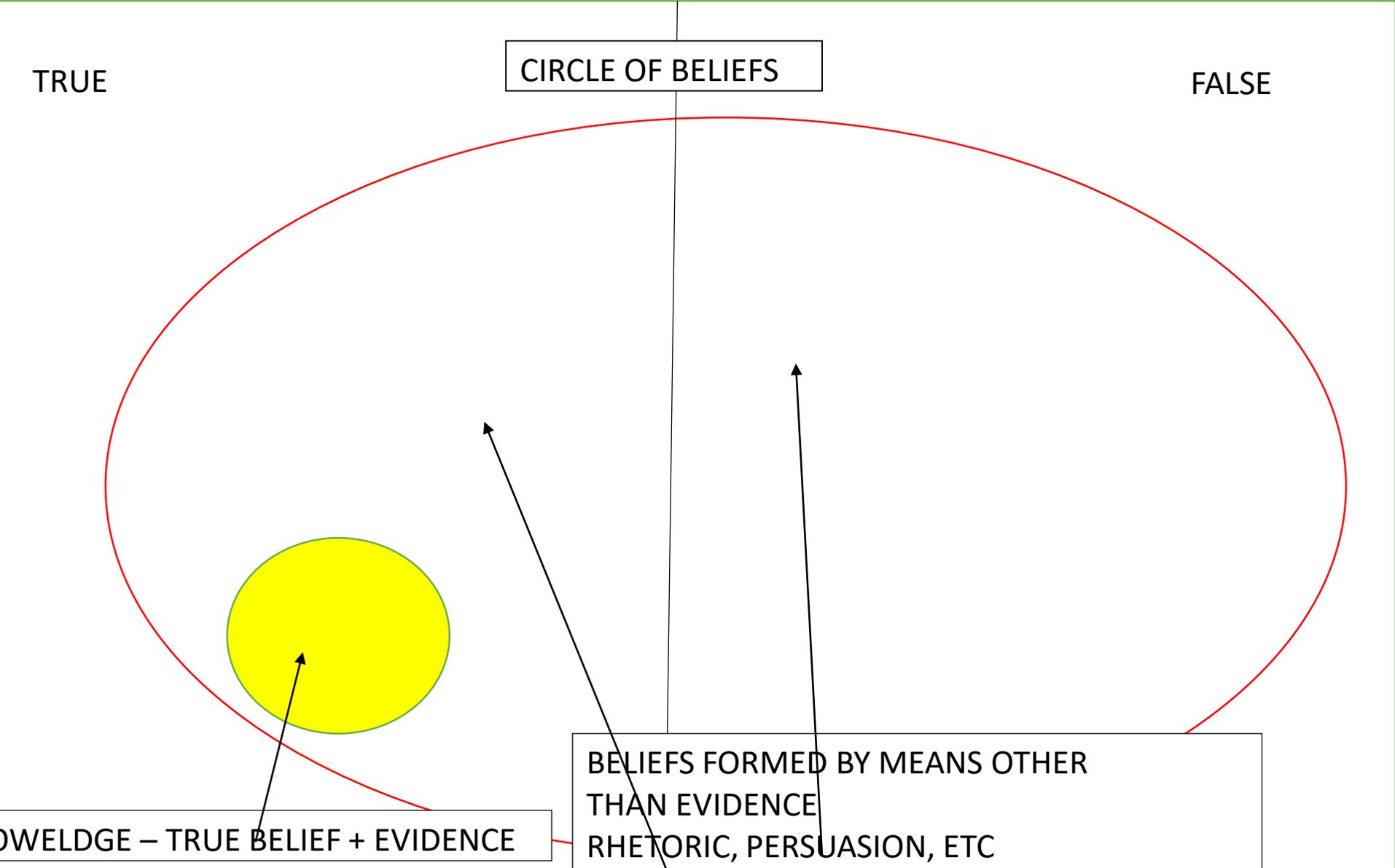
## 2 Post-Truth

1. Oxford Dictionaries make 'post-truth' their international word for 2016.
  2. 'post-truth' coined in 1990s. The phenomenon it refers to is 2,400 years old!
  3. Definition: 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'.
  4. Definition: 'True' = 'what is based in objective fact'. 'False' = 'not so based'.
  5. Rational shapers of public opinion: truths. Question: how often is this so?
  6. Non-Rational shapers of Public opinion: emotions & personal belief.
- Ancient Greeks recognised: persuasion; rhetoric; the powers others exert on us to accept what they say; accepting beliefs which induce happiness or pleasure; accepting beliefs which fit our interests, or belief which fulfil our wishes; etc
  - Modern times: conformational bias; brain washing; the whole panoply of techniques of persuasion due to advertising; etc.
  - Examples: Farage; Trump (birther claims), etc

# 3 Are You Entitled to Your Own Opinion?

- Two kinds of entitlement – legal and evidential
- Have a legal entitlement to freedom of speech – guaranteed by Bill of Rights. Can say just about anything – e.g., ‘vaccines cause autism’, etc.
- Have an evidential entitlement for what you say. Evidential entitlement based on evidence & reason – you have to argue for your belief.
- Legal entitlement  $\neq$  evidential entitlement
- Post-truthers put emphasis on personal belief which may have no evidential entitlement – and no appeal to truth either. But you have a legal right to believe it!

# 4 The Shapers of Belief in a Post-Truth World



# 5 An Example of Trust in Science?

- Student quiz: (1) Sun orbits the Earth. (2) Earth orbits the Sun?
- How do they do?
- What is the evidence for your belief, (1) or (2)? Most students have no evidence!
- Conclusion: they do not know that the Earth orbits the Sun – though they have a true belief!
- Do we reject the definition of knowledge or do we keep it?
- Distinguish knowledge by evidence from knowledge by trust. Is this of use?
- What are the trustworthy sources? Books, journals, lecturers, your local guru, etc?

# 6 What is warranted trust in science?

- The lay public has **warranted trust** in a body of experts as a providers of information (i.e., they have knowledge by trust) =
  - 1) the lay public believes that the information has been honestly (i.e. truthfully, accurately and wholly) communicated to them by the experts;
  - 2) the lay public takes the fact that the information has been so communicated to be a strong reason to believe the information;
  - 3) the lay public believes that the information results from reliable scientific research carried out by the experts (i.e., the lay public believe that experts have knowledge by evidence even though they do not get their knowledge this way.)

# Comments on knowledge by trust

- a) Cannot state knowledge by trust without appeal to truth, evidence, etc. Fake news and post-truth undermine knowledge by trust.
- b) Ought we be trustful? My Doctor says “No” about pharmaceutical firms. No good record of negative results.
- c) (3) is a strong condition which requires knowledge by evidence.
- d) Account is deficient in that it needs to say something about scientific consensus and what to do about dissensus.
- e) Degree of belief in knowledge by trust? To what extent should we accept what scientific papers say? Scientific papers do not tell us this – but they should.
- f) Also degrees of belief will alter as the science progresses.