GROW's INTERNATIONAL SECTION - in English

THEME: ETHICS

From TRUE-FALSE, RIGHT-WRONG to GOOD and BAD
– about Truth, Ethics and Morality

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WHEN I CAME TO UPPSALA in 1960 and entered the big university building I was met by a huge sign with the inscription:

"*Tänka fritt är stort*
men tänka rätt är större".

(Free thinking is great
but right thinking is greater.)

IT SOUNDED GOOD AT THAT TIME, but today I should like to change the inscription to:

"*Free thinking is great*
but good thinking is better".

I will come back to the reason why I have changed the empahsize of right-wrong and true-false to good and bad.

Illustration: Sergey Nivens

WHAT IS ETHICS? AND WHAT IS MORAL?

WHEN DISCUSSING areas like ethics and moral it is important to start with clarifying what we mean with these concepts. **ETHICS** and **MORAL** are about **what is good and bad, right and wrong.** But it is important to distinguish between what is right and wrong according to legal laws and from an ethical perspective. That something is right according to the law does not automatically mean that it is right according to ethics.

What then, is the difference between Ethics and Moral?

ETHICS = Thinking about **what** is right and wrong and **why** it is right or wrong.
MORAL = What people actually **do**, based on different ethical rules.

However, there are many other factors that influnce the morality of our actions, for instance our basic *biological needs*.
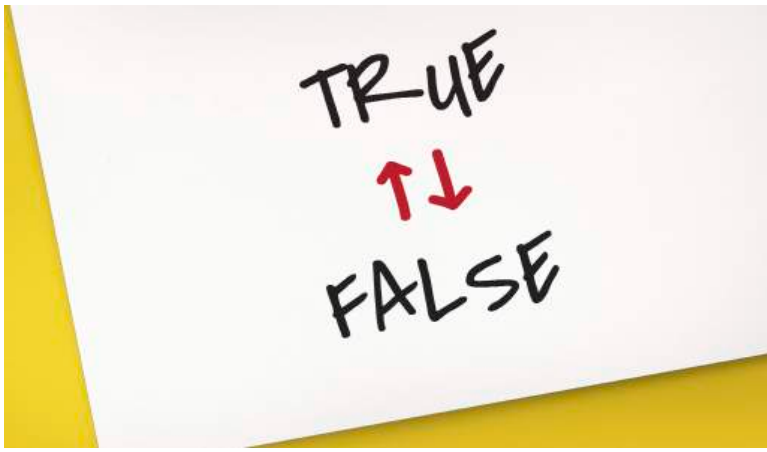First food – then Moral (Bertolt Brecht).
But are both of these concepts subjective ones or can we find some general and more objective criteria for ethics and moral?
The subjective, group and cultural differences are of course very obvious.
What is good for one can be bad for someone else.

»*FREE THINKING is great, but GOOD THINKING is better.*«

Illustration: rawpixel.com

TRUTHs

WHEN I STUDIED PHILOSOPHY and areas like ethics and moral, there was also another similar area of big importance - the questions of what **truth** is.

What, then, is truth?

The question turns out to be very difficult to solve. Every child knows what truth is but the experts do not know. The concept of truth has been debated ever since Plato and Aristotle and the debate continues today – but the experts (mostly philosophers and scientists) have not been able to agree about a common definition of truth.

Operational definitions like "*1 + 1 = 2*" or "*Trump is a human being*" are easy to get a common agreement upon, but disagreement starts by just adding one word like "*Trump is an honest human being* ".

Some few experts mean that there is no truth at all, but most experts are united about the opinion that truth exists, but they have different opinions of what it is.

Here are some examples of different schools:

Objective truth, *Subjective truth*, *Realistic truth*, *Constructivist truth*, *Minimalistic truth*, *Relativistic truth*, etc.

There are also different opinions about what it is that can be true or false, for example, and can the Truth concept be used in the area of Ethics and Moral?

Hundred years ago many philosophers began to answer no to that question, among them philosophers from the so called Uppsala School. Normative statements were neither true nor false, but just an expression of the speakers´approval or disapproval.

This position was called *nihilism* and had a major impact in Sweden. Contrary to scientific areas, moral and evaluative statements do not evaluate and comment reality.

SCIENCE

SCIENCE HAS BEEN DESCRIBED as a systematic search for truth and when discussing science, it is assumed that the purpose of science is to arrive at true claims.

However, today's scientific truths can easily become tomorrow´s lies. It is of utmost importance to maintain a sound skepticism of what is currently considered as scientific truth. True science is constantly practicing self-criticism and old truths are constantly re-examined.
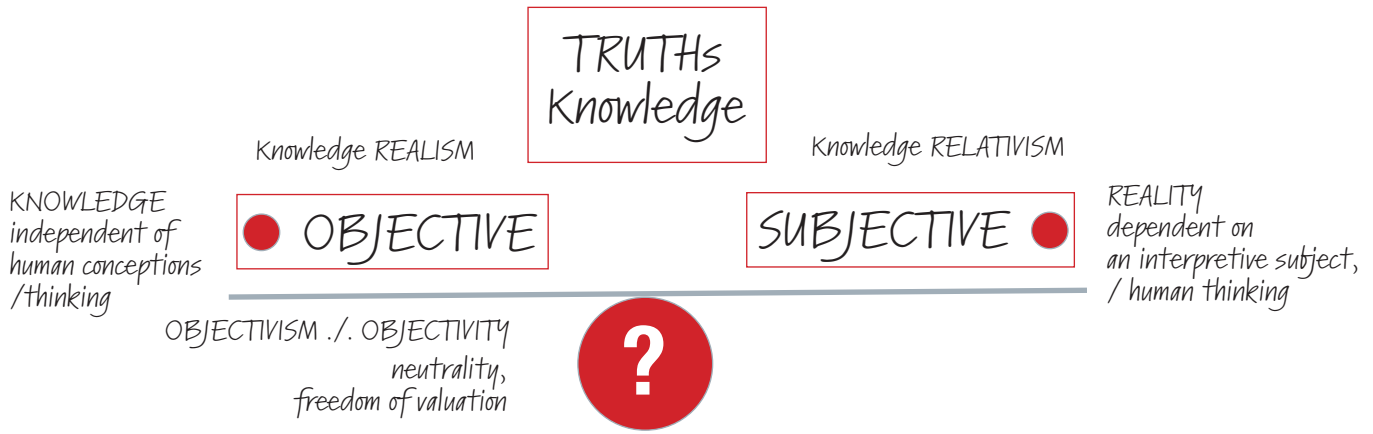
The continous modification and changes of so called scientific truths has made some experts to question whether the concept of Truth may need to be abolished even in science. But before making a brief review of some of the attempts to define and describe the Truth concept, I want to give some interesting examples of truth paradoxes. First two classical examples:

The Liar's Paradox - known since ancient times. In the classic version of this paradox, a man from Crete says that everyone from Crete always lies. If his statement is true, then his statement must be false.

Illustrations: WikimediaCommons

Antiquity highlighted several such paradoxes, such as the famous **Story of a Race between the Fast-Footed Achilles and a Turtle** that gets a head start. When Achilles got to the place where the turtle started the turtle is still ahead. And when Achilles come to this second point the turtle is still a little in front. Thus Achilles will never reach or pass the turtle.

TRUTHs
Knowledge

Knowledge REALISM

Knowledge RELATIVISM

KNOWLEDGE
independent of
human conceptions
/thinking

● OBJECTIVE

SUBJECTIVE ●

REALITY
dependent on
an interpretive subject,
/ human thinking

OBJECTIVISM ./. OBJECTIVITY
neutrality,
freedom of valuation

?

EXAMPELS OF TRUTH "SCHOOLS"

IS THERA A REASONABLE **definition of what it means to say that a statement is true?**

Such a definition should be used as a test for all types of claims. Let us look at some of the schools.

OBJECTIVE and SUBJECTIVE TRUTHS
The objective truth, **according to the objectivists,**
should be the criterion of demarcation for science, i e, it should be possible to distinguish through falsification what is objectively true from that which is not objectively true.
However, with such a criterion, we are forced to exclude much of today's science from science - not to say everything.
At the same time, it is precisely such scientific orthodoxy that researchers in postmodernity are facing. The objectivists believe that it is possible to produce objective knowledge - knowledge completely independent of human conceptions.

The opposite is subjectivism, where reality is dependent on an interpretive subject. *Knowledge realism* is opposed to *knowledge relativism*. Knowledge is assumed to be either based on an "*objective reality*" or dependent on "*human thinking*".
The dichotomism between these positions means that many researchers are forced to take a stand for one or the other. One solution is to distinguish between reality and knowledge of it. Research also distinguishes between *objectivism* and *objectivity*, where *objectivity* is linked to neutrality and freedom of valuation.

Illustrations: WikimediaCommons

Mathematics, as a science of truths, emerged as part of the philosophy of antiquity. Its laws are so regular that it has been adopted by scientists as something pre-existing. Since ancient times, mathematics has been influenced by **Platonic idealism**.

In the Platonic world of ideas, *every idea is original, absolute and true.* Plato considered that if the mathematical objects are ideal and exist independently in a world outside of time and space, then other objects can exist in the same way. *Here is the truth an absolute and eternal phenomenon.* However, even at that time Plato had to fight a battle against **the truths of the Sophists**, *who believed that each individual and society had its truths.* **In other words**, **the ancients already had thoughts which today are referred to as Truth Relativistic**.

The Platonic ideas have continued throughout the centuries with **Immanuel Kant´s understanding of mathematics as true a priori,** i e, without empiricism (experience).

A Swedish example is Olof Rudbeck, who during the 17th century made Uppsala university to a center for revealing the "Truth". He also claimed that Uppland, in Sweden, was Plato's Atlantis and its temple was located where Uppsala university is today.
The sign which I met about the importance of "true thinking" when I came to Uppsala has Rudbeck as an origin. As a result of this approach to what is and what is not "true thinking", hundreds of people were executed due to their "false believes and ideas", and millions throughout history.

FOUR DEFINITIONS OF TRUTH

HOW THEN, IS IT POSSIBLE TO FIND THE TRUTH IN A PRACTICAL AND USEABLE WAY?

Here are four ways which could be used:

❶ CORRESPONDENCE Truth: To determine if a statement (S) is true, one investigates if S is in agreement with "reality".

❷ COHERENCE Truth: To determine whether S is true, one checks how S is logically related to other statements that one assumes are true.

❸ INTUITIVE Truth: S is considered true if you have a strong inner belief that S is true. You simply cannot doubt S. ("Cogito, ergo sum", "I think, therefore I am", René Descartes).

❹ PRAGMATIC Truth: To determine if S is true, one sees what the consequences of assuming S are true. If the consequences are good enough, one chooses to consider S as true.

❶ CORRESPONDENCE Truth ● Is S in agreement with "reality"?

❷ COHERENCE Truth ● Is S logically related to other statements I believe is true?

S the Statement

❸ INTUITIVE Truth ● Is my assumption that S is true based on a strong inner belief?

❹ PRAGMATIC Truth ● Are the consequences of assuming that S is true good enough?

I HAVE CHOSEN NUMBER 4, PRAGMATIC TRUTH / **the Consequence Model** for my way at looking at Ethics, Moral and Truths.
I will choose the **Subjective Truth** which has the best effects and consequences for as many people as possible (including me).

TWO EXAMPLES:

SOME YEARS AGO I published the Swedish version of Gary E. Schwartz's book *Contact with the Other Side. Pioneering Scientific Research about Life after Death / Kontakt med andra sidan? Banbrytande vetenskapliga experiment om fortsatt existens efter döden*. I mention in the preface about a friend who does not believe at all in a life after death (or Life after Life, as I use to call it). However, my friend and I have the same philosophy about truth (the consequences decides what is right), so I succeeded to convince him that I was right in regards to Life after Life with two arguments:

1. **Independent if he or I are "scientifically" right,** my opinion will help people to get a bigger meaning in Life, as Life will not only be a short period on earth. As this belief will bring more happiness and meaningfulness as a consequence, it is right.

2. **If he is right we will never find out.** If I am right, we will. Thus, I am right.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE:

When I get the question: *"Do you believe in God?"*. My answer usually is:
"No I don´t believe in God. I know that God exists and therefore I do not have to believe".
The next question is usually:
"How do you know that God exists?"
My answer, in a short version, is:
"The first requirement for questions about God is to unite about a definition. God is a concept even if we try to humanize 'him' in the various religions, a concept about the eternal and indestructible energy behind time and space. However, as the human brain and our dominant consciousness is limited to time and space (we can not understand the eternal), we need to humanize God in order to understand 'him'. This has mainly been done through human beings like Jesus, Mohamed, Buddha etc, who in alternative states of consciousness have succeeded to come in contact with God."

The next step is to 'translate' these contacts to the human world by using words. Even if the main description is the same in the various religions, the conflicts have arise due to the small differences in these descriptions. There are various ways to God, (naturally there are only one God), and instead of quarreling about which way is the right one I use to say:
"I am glad that I have found my way to God through Christianity and I am glad that you, as a Muslim, have found your way."

FROM TRUTH TO ETHICS/MORALITY

THUS, I HAVE CHOSEN THE CONSEQUENCE MODEL in deciding what is true. *This model is also one of the three most common models in Ethics/Morality:*

● DUTY ETHICS
The right thing to do is determined by law and norms.
One problem with this is that both laws and norms can vary much in time and place.
I took part in the World Congress in Psychiatry in Honolulu 1977 where the famous *Hawaii doctrine about Ethics in Psychiatry* was decided. One reason for this doctrine was 140 cases from the Sovjet Union where people had been placed in psychiatric hospitals due to obvious political reasons.

● ALIGNMENT or MIND-SET ETHICS
It is why you do it, the motive behind an act, which decide the Ethics.
If you think you're doing the right thing, it is the right thing even though others may see it as immoral and completely wrong.

● CONSEQUENCE ETHICS
This is the model of Ethics which I prefer. It says that **the best is always the thought and the act that gives most happiness to most people.**
It is not the act in itself or the intention that is the most important, it is the consequences and the effects it has, short-term and long-term. One common law in duty ethics is for instance: "Never lie". On the other hand, experts in this area will tell you that everyone lies every day both unintentionally due to the "false memory syndrom" but also often intentionally and that this has both negative and positive effects on the recipients. Straight communication is sometimes understood as : "You should say whatver you think and whatever opinion you have." But if you want agreement from other people it may be better to choose another way.
Inspite of the problems with this model, for instance to determine the consequences especially the long-term ones, I prefer this model both in the area of Truth and Ethics / Morality.

FROM TRUE and FALSE, RIGHT and WRONG – to GOOD and BAD

WHEN I STARTED MY STUDIES in Clinical Psychology and in Psychotherapy, the main goal for therapy was to get Insight – to find my True Self, even if that made me feel bad and depressed.
When I got the "insight" that there is not any truth in itself, my goal became to help myself and others to develop our Best Selves. It has also changed many potential disagreements and quarrels into an acceptance and respect for other people´s subjective truths.

ETHICS AND MENTAL STRENGTH

ON THE FLIGHT FROM GERMANY THE OTHER DAY, I read in SAS Scandinavian Traveler that the Swedish singer Agnes Carlsson has a "very strong work ethic", she never gives up. "Without saying too much, she´s the same in her private life", says her partner Pontare. "If she wants to learn to embroider, she will go all-in and can sit in front of instruction videos for hours."

IN THE BEGINNING OF MENTAL TRAINING I also emphasized the attitude of never give up. But then I made an experience which made me to modify this rule. During my year as a visiting professor at the university of Hawaii I learned to know a colleague who told me that her biggest goal in life had been to get a family and children, to meet the "right" man who she could share the rest of her life with. During the last 20 years (she was now 40), she had had five relations, where each of them had lasted between three and four years before she gave up. When she asked for my advice, I told her that not giving up is an admirable skill but that this had to do with the goals, and not the ways to the goals. *Do not give up your goals, but give up the way as soon as you find that it does not lead to the goal.* If you continue to wait 3-4 years to see if you have found the right man, then your life is soon over without having reached your goal. "What about from now on to spend not more than four months to decide if you have met the man you want?" Since then I have included the common statement **"Never give up"** in my booklet *49 Common Myths*, **not in relation to the goals, but to the ways and means.**

THE GOAL AS A WAY

HOWEVER, IT CAN ALSO BE A MYTH in the area of goal setting if the goal is a way to a higher goal. To "never give up" is mostly a recommendable attitude in regards to attaining goals. But sometimes also there, the goal can be the way to something bigger and then the "wrong way principle" of giving up fast, will be valid here too.

The goal for Agnes Carlsson, for instance, was to get a "dreamlife" by becoming a famous international artist. But after 10 years she found that this goal did not give her what she wanted to have from a "dreamlife".

Often our goals are ways to some higher goals. If the profession of your dreams as young is to become a police officer, you may have an image of that profession which is not in agreement with reality. And the "reality" can vary, depending on expectations from others.

DEFINING THE GOAL IN ORDER TO FIND THE RIGHT WAY

THE FIRST YEARS AFTER INTRODUCING Mental Training at the Police Academy, I used to have one day of introduction before a mental trainer took over with the practical training. I started with a goal question:
"*Why are you here*?"
The common answer was: "*To become a police officer!*"
My next question was: "*But is not your goal higher than that? Is it not to become a 'good police officer'?*"
The response was: "*Yes, of course.*"
I then went on with:
"*Our goals should not only be attractive, they should also be clear and concrete. So this means that we have to decide what a 'good police officer' is*".
It turned out to be a lot of discussions about that as the description of a good policeman/woman vary depending if you ask the educational board, the police society board, your colleagues or the general public.

THE NEED TO FIND AN OVERALL GOAL for our goals is important for both the individual and the society. When we entered the new millenium I asked some politicians about the overall goal for Sweden during the 20th century. The common answer was: "*To create a 'folkhem', a socIety with high welfare, economy and living conditions.*" My next question was: "*But what is the overall goal?*"
After much thoughts, reflections and discussions the overall goal for a good society came – that the citizens will feel satisfied, happy and healthy.
We then decided to make a short comparison betweeen 1950 and 2000. The measures we found (like sickness rates, headache among teenagers /boys, etc) showed that despite a dramatic increase in welfare and wellness, the measures on wellbeing had dropped precariously.

» *IT IS MUCH EASIER to be ethical and have high morals in theory and in speaking, compared to practise and in daily acting.* «

THE CONSEQUENCE MODEL HERE TOO

ANOTHER ETHICAL QUESTION that has to do with goals and ways, is to think through all consequences before choosing how to reach the goal. Honesty is for example regarded as a good ethical behavior, saying what you think, standing for your opinions, etc. On the other hand this can sometimes be contradictory to a higher goal of cooperation, happiness and wellbeing for all.

I use to divide communication in the 3 D:s: Debate, Discussion, Dialogue. **A debate** often finish with bigger divergenciers and antagonism than before, while **the dialogue**, where you are willing to listen to others views and where acceptance and your willingness to compromise, will give a better result. In JOSEPH O´CONNOR's book *Coaching with NLP*, he mentions a business-man with the good ethical goal of giving his family a good life. However he defined this goal in economical terms and choosed a way which made him to be so much away from the familiy that they left him.

> » *AN ETHICAL QUESTION that has to do with goal setting is to think through all consequences before choosing the way to reach the goal.* «

VISION OF A BETTER WORLD

IT IS MUCH MORE EASY TO BE ETHICAL and have high morals in theory and in speaking compared to practice and in daily acting.

When I started Ledarhögskolan and the Scandinavian International University, I choosed the vision: "*Education and Training for a Better World and for Every Human Being*".
We discussed that vision in a national television program, where all of the participants expressed their willingness to base their lives on such a vision.
But as one effect of visions should be that they permeate everything we do, I turned to one of the participant, a very well-known author, and asked her:
"*So you agree to this vision?*" Yes, of course, she said.
"*But this means that your books can not be evaluated according to the common critera: literary quality. The only critera for a good book, according to that vision, will be that the reader will get a better life through your books.*"
As you may understand, she did not agree, since it would change the judgment critera for books, journals, papers, films, etc.

PREDICTING THE CONSEQUENCES

MENTAL TRAINING is, as you probably know, based on a constructivistic model, where everyone becomes her/his own author, writing the life manuscript before taking over the director role. We are also offered the main role (and also the role of a team leader for our various ego-states). This "Creating your Own Future" is in accordance with the quantum physic view of changing the external reality to a better reality, a part of our consciousness, which we can affect and change in a much better way than when we place reality outside ourselves. This gives the important feeling of Empowerment and make it also much easier to predict the consequences

GOOD LUCK!

BOOKS mentioned in the article:
Kontakt med andra sidan? Banbrytande vetenskapliga experiment om fortsatt existens efter döden,
av Gary E. Schwartz (2004)
Coaching with NLP: How to be a Master Coach
by Joseph O'Connor (2004)