

What if false beliefs are useful?

The Skeptic's Dilemma

Is the truth sometimes harmful?



Default assumption

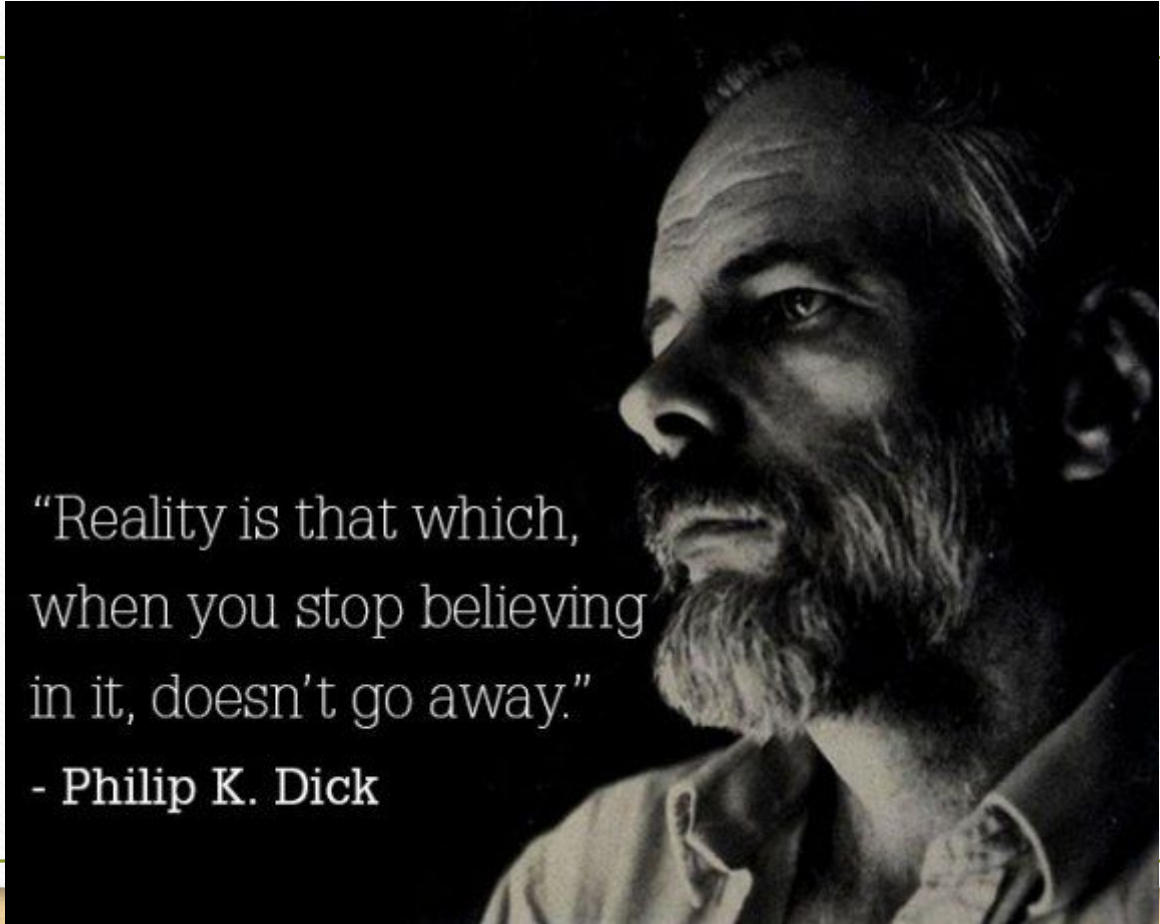
- What if false beliefs...
 - make you happy?
 - are useful for society?
- The Skeptic's Dilemma



False beliefs can be dangerous

- Beliefs are levers for action
 - E.g. faith healing
 - E.g. overconfidence and war
- Inevitable collision with reality

The Revenge of Reality

A black and white portrait of Philip K. Dick, showing him from the chest up, looking slightly to the left. He has a beard and is wearing a collared shirt. The portrait is set against a dark background and is framed by a thin green border.

"Reality is that which,
when you stop believing
in it, doesn't go away."

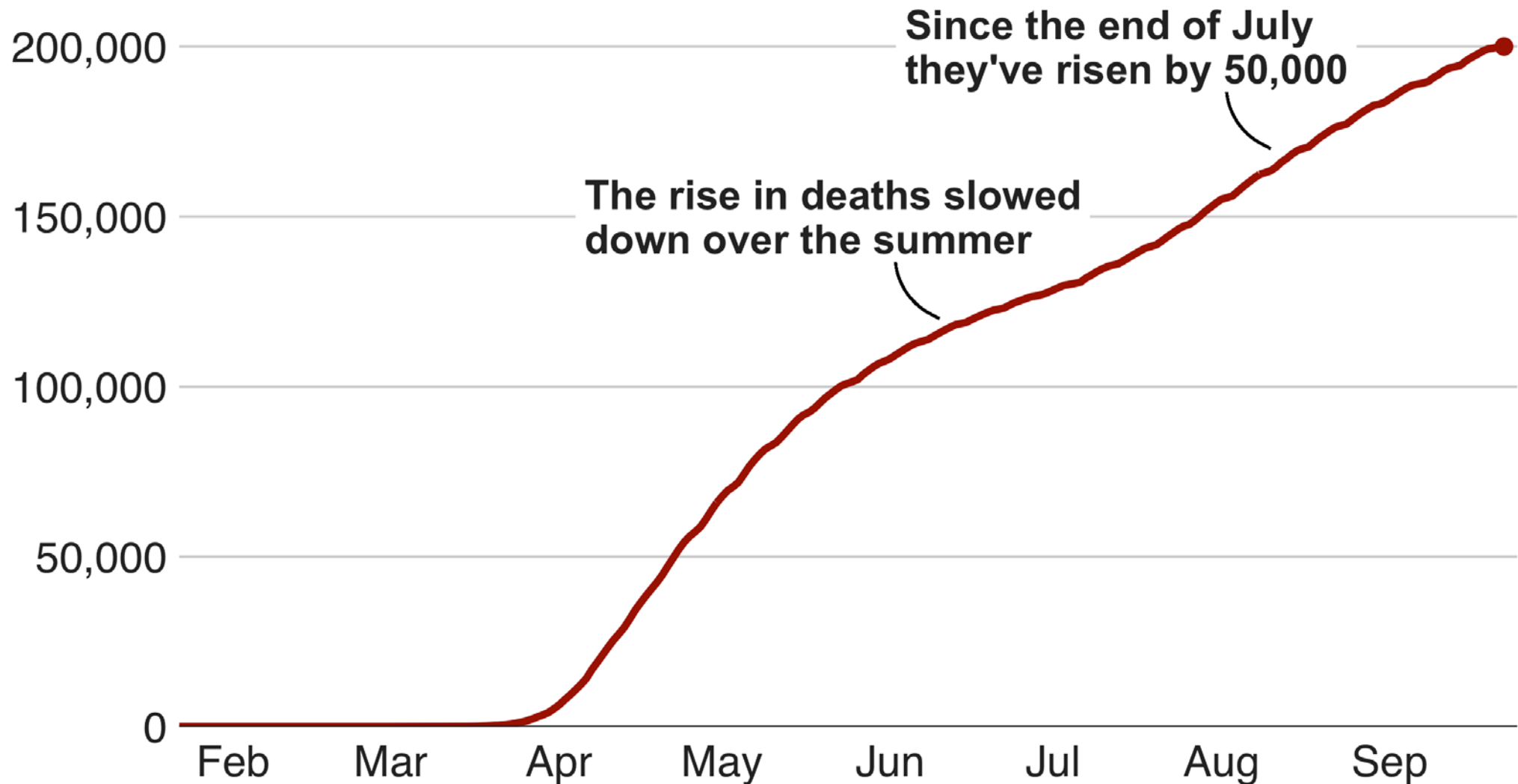
- Philip K. Dick

The pandemic



US deaths pass 200,000

Cumulative number of reported coronavirus deaths



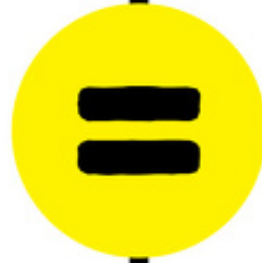
Source: Johns Hopkins University. Data to 22 Sep

BBC

What about deceiving *others*?

- Paternalistic deception
 - White lies
 - In their own interest
- Deceivers keeps an eye on reality





One side-effect...

... It erodes trust in doctors





COVID 19 IS A
HOAX 5G IS
THE KILLER

White lies?

- “They’re useless for the public”
- “They don’t really work.”
- “It gives a false sense of security”

→ Real reason: shortage of masks

The Revenge of Reality

- Inevitably, the truth comes to light
- Experts have to backtrack
- Next time around, who will trust them?

Donald Trump was aware of the dangers of coronavirus and chose to 'play it down', new book reveals

By chief foreign correspondent [Philip Williams](#) in Washington DC

Posted Thu 10 Sep 2020 at 4:51am, updated Thu 10 Sep 2020 at 5:40am



Schools



Truth is always better

- Distorting or bending the truth
- Don't be patronizing!
- Explain to the public
 - Masks can be helpful
 - But they are much more important for health workers
 - So please don't stock them

The truth
will set
you free,
but first
it will piss
you off.

Gloria Steinem