


Avoid News

Towards a Healthy News Diet

By Rolf Dobelli

Prologue

This article is the antidote to news. It is long, and you probably won't be able to skim it. Thanks to heavy news consumption, many people have lost the reading habit and struggle to absorb more than four pages straight. This article will show you how to get out of this trap – if you are not already too deeply in it.



News is to the mind what sugar is to the body

We are so well informed and yet we know so little. Why?

We are in this sad condition because 200 years ago we invented a toxic form of knowledge called “news.” The time has come to recognize the detrimental effects that news has on individuals and societies, and to take the necessary steps to shield yourself from its dangers.

At core, human beings are cavemen in suits and dresses. Our brains are optimized for our original hunter-gatherer environment where we lived in small bands of 25 to 100 individuals with limited sources of food and information. Our brains (and our bodies) now live in a world that is the opposite

of what we are designed to handle. This leads to great risk and to inappropriate, outright dangerous behavior.

In the past few decades, the fortunate among us have recognized the hazards of living with an overabundance of food (obesity, diabetes) and have started to shift our diets. But most of us do not yet understand that news is to the mind what sugar is to the body. News is easy to digest. The media feeds us small bites of trivial matter, tidbits that don't really concern our lives and don't require thinking. That's why we experience almost no saturation. Unlike reading books and long, deep magazine articles (which requires thinking), we can swallow limitless quantities of news flashes, like bright-colored candies for the mind.

Today, we have reached the same point in relation to information overload that we faced 20 years ago in regard to food intake. We are beginning to recognize how toxic news can be and we are learning to take the first steps toward an information diet.

This is my attempt to clarify the toxic dangers of news – and to recommend some ways to deal with it. I have now gone without news for a year, so I can see, feel and report the effects of this freedom first hand: *less disruption, more time, less anxiety, deeper thinking, more insights*. It's not easy, but it's worth it.

My good friend Nassim Nicholas Taleb, author of *The Black Swan*, was one of the first people to recognize news consumption as a serious problem. I owe many of the following insights to him.

No 1 – News misleads us systematically

News reports do not represent the real world.

Our brains are wired to pay attention to visible, large, scandalous, sensational, shocking, people-related, story-formatted, fast changing, loud, graphic onslaughts of stimuli. Our brains have limited attention to spend on more subtle pieces of intelligence that are small, abstract, ambivalent, complex, slow to develop and quiet, much less silent. News organizations systematically exploit this bias.

News media outlets, by and large, focus on the highly visible. They display whatever information they can convey with gripping stories and lurid pictures, and they systematically ignore the subtle and insidious, even if that material is more important. News grabs our attention; that's how its business model works. Even if the advertising model didn't exist, we would still soak up news pieces because they are easy to digest and superficially quite tasty.

The highly visible misleads us.

Take the following event. A car drives over a bridge, and the bridge collapses. What does the news media focus on? On the car. On the person in the car. Where he came from. Where he planned to go. How he experienced the crash (if he survived). What kind of person he is (was). But – that is all completely irrelevant. What's relevant? The structural stability of the bridge. That's the underlying risk that has been lurking and could lurk in other bridges. That is the lesson to be learned from this event.

The car doesn't matter at all. Any car could have caused the bridge to collapse. It could have been a strong wind or a dog walking over the bridge. So, why does the media cover the car? Because it's flashy, it's dramatic, it's a person (non-abstract), and it's news that's cheap to produce.

As a result of news, we walk around with the completely *wrong risk map* in our heads.

- Terrorism is overrated. Chronic stress is underrated.
- The collapse of Lehman Brothers is overrated. Fiscal irresponsibility is underrated.
- Astronauts are overrated. Nurses are underrated.
- Britney Spears is overrated. IPCC reports are underrated.
- Airplane crashes are overrated. Resistance to antibiotics is underrated.

We are not rational enough to be exposed to the news-mongering press. It is a very dangerous thing, because the probabilistic mapping we get from consuming news is entirely different from the actual risks that we face. Watching an airplane crash on television is going to change your attitude toward that risk regardless of its real probability, no matter your intellectual sophistication. If you think you can compensate for this bias with the strength of your own inner contemplation, you are wrong. Bankers and economists – who have powerful incentives to compensate for news-borne hazards – have shown that they cannot. The only solution: cut yourself off from news consumption entirely.

No 2 – News is irrelevant

Out of the approximately 10,000 news stories you have read in the last 12 months, name one that – because you consumed it – allowed you to make a better decision about a serious matter affecting

your life, your career, your business – compared to what you would have known if you hadn't swallowed that morsel of news.

The point is: the consumption of news is irrelevant to the forces that really matter in your life. At its best, it is entertaining, but it is still irrelevant.

Assume that, against all odds, you found one piece of news that substantially increased the quality of your life – compared to how your life would have unfolded if you hadn't read or seen it. How much trivia did your brain have to digest to get to that one relevant nugget? Even that question is a hindsight analysis. Looking forward, we can't possibly identify the value of a piece of news before we see it, so we are forced to digest everything on the news buffet line. Is that worthwhile? Probably not.

In 1914, the news story about the assassination in Sarajevo dwarfed all other reports in terms of its global significance. But, the murder in Sarajevo was just one of several thousand stories in circulation that day. No news organization treated this historically pivotal homicide as anything more than just another politically inspired assassination.

The first Internet browser debuted in 1995. The public birth of this hugely relevant piece of software barely made it into the press despite its vast future impact.

People find it very difficult to recognize what's *relevant*. It's much easier to recognize what's *new*. We are not equipped with sensory organs for relevance. Relevance doesn't come naturally. News does. That's why the media plays on the new. (If our minds were structured the other way round, the media would certainly play on the relevant.) The relevant versus the new is the fundamental battle of the modern man.

News floods you with a worldview that is not relevant to your life. What does relevance mean? It means: what is important to you personally. *Relevance is a personal choice*. Don't take the media's view for it. To the media, any tale that sells lots of copies is relevant – Darfur, Paris

Hilton, a train crash in China, some idiotic world record (like someone who ate 78 cheeseburgers in an hour). This swindle is at the core of the news industry's business model. It sells the relevant, but delivers the new.

Media organizations want you to believe that news offers individuals some sort of a competitive advantage. Many people fall for that. We get anxious when we're cut off from the flow of news. We fear we're missing something important. In reality, news consumption is a *competitive disadvantage*. The less news you consume the bigger the advantage you have.

Afraid you will miss "something important"? From my experience, if something really important happens, you will hear about it, even if you live in a cocoon that protects you from the news. Friends and colleagues will tell you about relevant events far more reliably than any news organization. They will fill you in with the added benefit of meta-information, since they know your priorities and you know how they think. You will learn far more about really important events and societal shifts by reading about them in specialized journals, in-depth magazines or good books and by talking to the people who know.



No 3 – News limits understanding

News has no explanatory power. News items are little bubbles popping on the surface of a deeper world.

News organizations pride themselves on correctly reporting the facts, but the facts that they prize are just epiphenomena of deeper causes. Both news organizations and news consumers mistake knowing a litany of facts for understanding the world.

It's not "news facts" that are important, but the threads that connect them. What we really want is

to *understand the underlying processes*, how things happen. Unfortunately, precariously few news organizations manage to explain causation because the underlying processes that govern significant social, political and environmental movements mostly are invisible. They are complex, non-linear and hard for our (and the journalists') brains to digest. Why do news organizations go for the light stuff, the anecdotes, scandals, people-stories and pictures? The answer is simple: because they are cheap to produce.

The important stories are non-stories: slow, powerful movements that develop below the journalists' radar but have a transforming effect.

Most people believe that having more information helps them make better decisions. News organizations support this belief. Hell, it's in their interest. Will accumulating facts help you understand the world? Sadly, no. The relationship is actually inverted. The more "news factoids" you digest, the less of the big picture you will understand.

No evidence exists to indicate that information junkies are better decision makers. They are certainly not more successful than the average Joe. If more information leads to higher economic success, we would expect journalists to be at the top of the pyramid. That's not the case. Quite the contrary. We don't know what makes people successful, but amassing news tidbits is certainly not it.

Reading news to understand the world is worse than not reading anything. What's best: cut yourself off from daily news consumption entirely. Read books and thoughtful journals instead of gulping down flashing headlines.

No 4 – News is toxic to your body

News constantly triggers the limbic system. Panicky stories spur the release of cascades of glucocorticoid (cortisol). This deregulates your immune system and inhibits the release of growth hormones. In other words, your body finds itself in a state of chronic stress. High glucocorticoid levels cause impaired digestion, lack of growth (cell, hair, bone), nervousness and susceptibility to infections. *News consumers risk impairing their physical health.* The other potential side effects of news include fear, aggression, tunnel-vision and desensitization.

No 5 – News massively increases cognitive errors

News feeds the mother of all cognitive errors: *confirmation bias*. We automatically, systematically filter out evidence that contradicts our preconceptions in favor of evidence that confirms our beliefs. In the words of Warren Buffett: "What the human being is best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their prior conclusions remain intact." That is the confirmation bias. News consumption, especially customized news intake, exacerbates this human flaw. The result is that we walk around in a cloud of seemingly confirming data – even when our theories about the world and ourselves may be wrong. We become prone to overconfidence, take stupid risks and misjudge opportunities.

News not only feeds the confirmation bias, it exacerbates another cognitive error: the *story bias*. Our brains crave stories that "make sense" – even if they don't correspond to reality. And news organizations are happy to deliver those fake stories. Instead of just reporting that the stock market declined (or increased) by 2%, TV news anchors proclaim, "The market declined by 2% *because of X.*" This X could be a bank profit

forecast, fear about the Euro, non-farm payroll statistics, a Fed decision, a terrorist attack in Madrid, a subway strike in New York, a handshake between two presidents, anything, really.

This reminds me of high school. My history textbook specified seven reasons (not six, not eight) why the French Revolution erupted. The fact is, we don't know why the French Revolution broke out. And especially not why it exploded specifically in 1789. And we don't know why the stock market moves as it moves. Too many factors go into such shifts. We don't know why a war breaks out, a technological breakthrough is achieved or why the oil price jumps. Any journalist who writes, "The market moved because of X" or "the company went bankrupt because of Y" is an idiot. Of course, X might have had a casual influence, but it's far from established, and other influences may be much more meaningful. To a large degree, news reports consist of nothing but stories and anecdotes that end up substituting for coherent analyses. I am fed up with this cheap way of "explaining" the world. It's inappropriate. It's irrational. It's forgery. And I refuse to let it contaminate my thinking.

No 6 – News inhibits thinking

Thinking requires concentration. Concentration requires uninterrupted time. News items are like free-floating radicals that interfere with clear thinking. News pieces are specifically engineered to interrupt you. They are like viruses that steal attention for their own purposes. This is not about stealing time (see reason 8). This is about the inability to think clearly because you have opened yourself up to the disruptive factoid stream.

News makes us shallow thinkers. But it's worse than that. News severely affects memory.

There are two types of memory. Long-range memory's capacity is nearly infinite, but working memory is limited to a minimum amount of slippery data (try repeating a 10-digit phone number after you hear it for the first time). The path from short-term to long-term memory is a choke-point in the brain, but anything you want to understand must pass through it. If this passageway is disrupted, nothing passes through. Because news disrupts concentration, it actively weakens comprehension.

You don't visit Paris for just one hour or speed through the Museum of Modern Art in two minutes. Why not? Because the brain needs spool-up time. Building up concentration takes a minimum of a 10-minute read. Given less time, your brain will process the information superficially and barely store it. News pieces are like wind hitting your cheek. Ask yourself: What are the top ten news items from a month ago (that are no longer in the news today)? If you have a hard time remembering, you are not alone. Why would you want to consume something that doesn't add to your body of knowledge?

The online news has an even worse impact. In a 2001 study¹ two scholars in Canada showed that comprehension declines as the number of hyperlinks in a document increase. Why? Because whenever a link appears, your brain has to at least make the choice not to click, which in itself is distracting.

News consumers are suckers for irrelevancy, and online news consumers are the biggest suckers. News is an interruption system. It seizes your attention only to scramble it. Besides a lack of glucose in your blood stream, news distraction is the biggest barricade to clear thinking.

¹ Nicholas Carr: The Web Shatters Focus, Rewires Brains, *Wired*, May 2010

No 7 – News changes the structure of your brain

News works like a drug. As stories develop, we naturally want to know how they continue. With hundreds of arbitrary story lines in our heads, this craving is increasingly compelling and hard to ignore.

Why is news addictive? Once you get into the habit of checking the news, you are driven to check it even more often. Your attention is set on fast-breaking events, so you hunger for more data about them. This has to do with a process called “long-term potentiation” (LTP) and the reward circuits in your brain. Addicts seek more of an addictive substance to get their fix, because they need more stimulation than non-addicts to reach a satisfying reward threshold. If you set your attention on other things – like literature, science, art, history, cooking, pet grooming, whatever – you will become more focused on those things. That’s just how the brain works.

Science used to think that our brain, the dense connections formed among the 100 billion neurons inside our skulls, was largely fixed by the time we reached adulthood. Today we know that this is not the case. The human brain is highly plastic. Nerve cells routinely break old connections and form new ones. When we adapt to a new cultural phenomenon, including the consumption of news, we end up with a different brain. Adaptation to news occurs at a biological level. News reprograms us. That means our brain works differently even when we’re not consuming news. And that’s dangerous.

The more news we consume, the more we exercise the neural circuits devoted to skimming and multitasking while ignoring those used for reading deeply and thinking with profound focus. Most news consumers – even if they used to be avid book readers – have lost the ability to read and absorb lengthy articles or books. After four, five pages they get tired, their concentration vanishes, they become restless. It’s not because

they got older or their schedules became more onerous. It’s because the physical structure of their brains has changed. In the words of Professor Michael Merzenich (University of California, San Francisco), a pioneer in the field of neuroplasticity: “We are training our brains to pay attention to the crap.”

Deep reading is indistinguishable from deep thinking. When you consume news, your brain structurally changes. This means that the way you think changes. Regaining the capacity for concentration and contemplation will take nothing less than a radical news-free diet.

No 8 – News is costly

News wastes time. It exacts exorbitant costs.

News taxes productivity three ways. First, count the consumption-time that news demands. That’s the time you actually waste reading, listening to or watching the news.

Second, tally up the refocusing time – or switching cost. That’s the time you waste trying to get back to what you were doing before the news interrupted you. You have to collect your thoughts. What were you about to do? Every time you disrupt your work to check the news, reorienting yourself wastes more time.

Third, news distracts us even hours after we’ve digested today’s hot items. News stories and images may pop into your mind hours, sometimes days later, constantly interrupting your train of thought. Why would you want to do that to yourself?

If you read the newspaper for 15 minutes each morning, then check the news for 15 minutes during lunch and 15 minutes before you go to bed, you’re eating substantial time. Then, add five minutes here and there when you’re at work, plus distraction and refocusing time. You will lose

productive hours totaling at least *half a day every week*. Half a day – and for what?

On a global level, the loss in potential productivity is huge. Take the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, where terrorists murdered some 200 people in an act of chilling exhibitionism. Imagine that a billion people devoted, on average, one hour of their attention to the Mumbai tragedy: following the news, watching some talking head on TV, thinking about it. The number is a wild guess, but the guess is far from a wild number. India, alone, has more than a billion people. Many of them spent whole days following the drama. One billion people times one hour is one billion hours, which is more than 100,000 years. The global average life expectancy is today 66 years. So nearly 2,000 lives were swallowed by news consumption. It's far more than the number of people murdered. In a sense, the newscasters became unwilling bedfellows of the terrorists. At least the Mumbai attacks had actual impact. Look at the hours lost when Michael Jackson died – no real content in the stories, and millions of hours wasted.

Information is no longer a scarce commodity. But attention is. Why give it away so easily? You are not that irresponsible with your money, your reputation or your health. Why give away your mind?

No 9 – News sunders the relationship between reputation and achievement

Reputation affects how people cooperate in society. In our ancestral past, a person's reputation was directly linked to his or her achievements. You saw that your fellow tribe member killed a tiger single handedly and you spread word of his bravery.

With the advent of mass-produced news, the strange concept of "fame" entered our society.

Fame is misleading because generally people become famous for reasons that have little relevance to our lives. The media grants fame to movie stars and news anchors for scant reason. News sunders the relationship between reputation and achievement. The tragedy is that pop notoriety crowds out the achievements of those who make more substantive contributions.

No 10 – News is produced by journalists

Good professional journalists take time with their stories, authenticate their facts and try to think things through. But like any profession, journalism has some incompetent, unfair practitioners who don't have the time – or the capacity – for deep analysis. You might not be able to tell the difference between a polished professional report and a rushed, glib, paid-by-the-piece article by a writer with an ax to grind. It all looks like news.

My estimate: fewer than 10% of the news stories are original. Less than 1% are truly investigative. And only once every 50 years do journalists uncover a Watergate. Many reporters cobble together the rest of the news from other people's reports, common knowledge, shallow thinking and whatever the journalist can find on the internet. Some reporters copy from each other or refer to old pieces, without necessarily catching up with any interim corrections. The copying and the copying of the copies multiply the flaws in the stories and their irrelevance.

No 11 – Reported facts are sometimes wrong, forecasts always

Sometimes, reported facts are simply mistaken. With reduced editorial budgets at major publications, fact checking may be an endangered step in the news process.

The New Yorker magazine is legendary for its fact checking. The story goes that when an article mentioned the Empire State Building, someone from the fact-checking department would go out and visually verify that, in fact, the building was still standing. I don't know if the story is true, but it highlights a point. Today, the fact checker is an endangered species at most news companies (though still alive and well at *The New Yorker*).

Many news stories include predictions, but accurately predicting anything in a complex world is impossible. Overwhelming evidence indicates that forecasts by journalists and by experts in finance, social development, global conflicts and technology are almost always completely wrong. So, why consume that junk?

Did the newspapers predict World War I, the Great Depression, the sexual revolution, the fall of the Soviet empire, the rise of the Internet, resistance to antibiotics, the fall of Europe's birth rate or the explosion in depression cases? Maybe, you'd find one or two correct predictions in a sea of millions of mistaken ones. *Incorrect forecast are not only useless, they are harmful.*

To increase the accuracy of your predictions, cut out the news and roll the dice or, if you are ready for depth, read books and knowledgeable journals to understand the invisible generators that affect our world.



No 12 – News is manipulative

Our evolutionary past has equipped us with a good bullshit detector for face-to-face interactions. We automatically use many clues to detect manipulation, clues that go beyond the verbal message and include gesture, facial expression, and signs of nervousness such as sweaty palms, blushing and body odor. Living in small bands of people, we almost always knew the background of the messenger. Information always came with a rich set of meta-data. Today, even conscientious readers find that distinguishing even-handed news stories from ones that have a private agenda is difficult and energy consuming. Why go through that?

Stories are selected or slanted to please advertisers (advertising bias) or the owners of the media (corporate bias), and each media outlet has a tendency to report what everyone else is reporting, and to avoid stories that will offend anyone (mainstream bias).

The public relations (PR) industry is as large as the news reporting industry – the best proof that journalists and news organizations *can* be manipulated, or at least influenced or swayed. Corporations, interest groups and other organizations would not expend such huge sums on PR if it didn't work. If spinmeisters can manipulate journalists, who have a natural skepticism toward powerful organizations, what makes you think you can escape their trickery?

Take the Nurse Nayirah story. Nayirah was a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl who testified to the U.S. Congress during the run up to the 1991 Gulf War. She alleged that she had witnessed the murder of infant children by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait. Virtually every media outlet covered the story. The U.S. public was outraged, which in turn pushed Congress closer to approving the war. Her testimony, which all media outlets regarded as credible at the time, has since come to be regarded as wartime propaganda.

Journalism shapes a common picture of the world and a common set of narratives for discussing it. It

sets the public agenda. Hold on: do we really want news reporters to set the public agenda? I believe that agenda setting by the media is just bad democracy.

No 13 – News makes us passive

News stories are overwhelmingly about things you cannot influence. This sets readers up to have a fatalistic outlook on the world.

Compare this with our ancestral past, where you could act upon practically every bit of news. Our evolutionary past prepared us to act on information, but the daily repetition of news about things we can't act upon makes us passive. It saps our energy. It grinds us down until we adopt a worldview that is pessimistic, desensitized, sarcastic and fatalistic.

If the human brain encounters a barrage of ambiguous information without being able to act upon that information, it can react with passivity and a sense of victimhood. The scientific term is *learned helplessness*. It's a bit of a stretch, but I would not be surprised if news consumption at least partially contributes to the widespread disease of depression. Viewed on a timeline, the spread of depression coincides almost perfectly with the growth and maturity of the mass media. Maybe it's a coincidence, or maybe the constant onslaught of fire, famine, flood and failure adds to depression, even if these sad reports come from far away.

14 – News gives us the illusion of caring

Kathleen Norris (even if I don't share most of her ideas) said it best: "We may want to believe that

we are still concerned, as our eyes drift from a news anchor announcing the latest atrocity to the NBA scores and stock market quotes streaming across the bottom of the screen. But the ceaseless bombardment of image and verbiage makes us impervious to caring."

News wraps us in a warm global feeling. We are all world citizens. We are all connected. The planet is just one global village. We sing "We Are the World" and wave the little flame of our lighters in perfect harmony with thousands of others. This gives us a glowing, fuzzy feeling that delivers the illusion of caring but doesn't get us anywhere. This allure of anything bespeaking global brotherhood smells like a gigantic chimera. The fact is, consuming news does not make us more connected to each other. We are connected because we interact and trade.

No 15 – News kills creativity

Things we already know limit our creativity. This is one reason that mathematicians, novelists, composers and entrepreneurs often produce their most creative works at a young age. They are oblivious to much that has been tried before. Their brains enjoy a wide, uninhabited space that emboldens them to come up with and pursue novel ideas.

I don't know a single truly creative mind who is a news junkie – not a writer, not a composer, mathematician, physician, scientist, musician, designer, architect or painter. On the other hand, I know a whole bunch of viciously uncreative minds who consume news like drugs.

The creativity-killing effect of news might also be due to something simpler we've discussed before: distraction. I just can't imagine producing novel ideas with the distraction that news always delivers. *If you want to come up with old solutions,*

read news. If you are looking for new solutions, don't read news.

What to do instead

Go without news. Cut it out completely. Go cold turkey.

Make news as inaccessible as possible. Delete the news apps from your iPhone. Sell your TV. Cancel your newspaper subscriptions. Do not pick up newspapers and magazines that lie around in airports and train stations. Do not set your browser default to a news site. Pick a site that never changes. The more stale the better. Delete all news sites from your browser's favorites list. Delete the news widgets from your desktop.

If you want to keep the illusion of "not missing anything important", I suggest you glance through the summary page of the *Economist* once a week. Don't spend more than five minutes on it.

Read magazines and books which explain the world – *Science*, *Nature*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*. Go for magazines that connect the dots and don't shy away from presenting the complexities of life – or from purely entertaining you. The world is complicated, and we can do nothing about it. So, you must read longish and deep articles and books that represent its complexity. Try reading a book a week. Better two or three. History is good. Biology. Psychology. That way you'll learn to understand the underlying mechanisms of the world. Go deep instead of broad. Enjoy material that truly interests you. Have fun reading.

The first week will be the hardest. Deciding not to check the news while you are thinking, writing or reading takes discipline. You are fighting your brain's built-in tendency. Initially, you will feel out of touch or even socially isolated. Every day you will be tempted to check your favorite news Web

site. Don't do it. Stick to the cold-turkey plan. Go 30 days without news. After 30 days, you will have a more relaxed attitude toward the news. You will find that you have more time, more concentration and a better understanding of the world.

After a while, you will realize that despite your personal news blackout, you have not missed – and you're not going to miss – any important facts. If some bit of information is truly important to your profession, your company, your family or your community, you will hear it in time – from your friends, your mother-in-law or whomever you talk to or see. When you are with your friends, ask them if anything important is happening in the world. The question is a great conversation starter. Most of the time, the answer will be: "not really."

Are you afraid that living a news-free existence will make you an outcast at parties? Well, you might not know that Lindsay Lohan went to jail, but you will have more intelligent facts to share – about the cultural meaning of the food you are eating or the discovery of exosolar planets. Never be shy about discussing your news diet. People will be fascinated.

Good News

Society needs journalism – but in a different way.

Investigative journalism is relevant in any society. We need more hard-core journalists digging into meaningful stories. We need reporting that polices our society and uncovers the truth. The best example is Watergate. But important findings don't have to arrive in the form of news. Often, reporting is not time sensitive. Long journal articles and in-depth books are fine forums for investigative journalism – and now that you've gone cold turkey on the news, you'll have time to read them. ■



Disclaimer

The above statements reflect the most truthful viewpoint I can achieve at the time of this writing. I reserve the right to revise my views at any time. I might even indulge in the freedom of contradicting myself. I have done so in the past and will most certainly do so in the future. The only reason I would change my views (a switch which would undoubtedly be noticed by the “consistency police” (usually journalists with good high-school degrees) is because the new version is closer to the truth, not ever because I would gain any personal advantage. ▪