Comments on

Michel Croce and Tommaso Piazza

'Epistemic Responsibility in Fake news Consumption'

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Section I. Brice

A. Two sets of broad comments.

1. I question the relevance of the paper for the goal of limiting the proliferation of fake news.

2. I criticize the terminology adopted in the paper.

1. The authors focus on educational approaches and, if they argue for the view that many of those who believe in fake news are blameworthy, it is because they think that what they call "educational approaches" "can only be legitimate if the individuals that constitute their target can be criticized for the way they manage their beliefs".

Doubts about the relevance of the paper:

a) First, one might think that structural approaches are what is most important.

b) Second, the authors write to motivate their endeavor: "educational approaches" "can only be legitimate if the individuals that constitute their target can be criticized for the way they manage their beliefs". But this strikes me as false.

As far I can see, they don't have much wiggle room: a dilemma is in the offing.

2. On the terminology of the paper.

a) The word "epistemic" is sprinkled everywhere without care.

 "epistemic legitimacy", "the epistemic wellbeing of a community", "epistemically harmful" applied to epistemically bad beliefs.

b) The authors distinguish between benign environments and malign environment. They define the later as "social structures of exclusion" . We are left wondering what this means.

Likewise, we are not told what fake news are.

B. A closer look at the author's account of epistemic blameworthiness.

    1. We would need a few words on why Alston's should be the work on which they build their ideas (especially given that the claim that the *indirect influence* one exerts on one's beliefs is what grounds epistemic blameworthiness is all but common in this literature.)

    2. Second, the account is not carefully laid out. According to (iii), a condition on blameworthiness is that the subject was required to 'manipulate' their belief influencing factor X. We are told that this condition (iii) won't do because it doesn't say when someone is epistemically required to manipulate X in way Y. The authors say that Peels is wrong in thinking that it is when one *believes* that X is epistemically harmful, that a more objective criterion should be preferred, but they do not argue for this claim.

Section II. Corine

    S is epistemically blameworthy for believing p

<div align="center">iff</div>

 (i) the belief-influencing factor X is involved in the causal explanation of why S believes that P;

(ii) there is a way Y of manipulating X which is such that S' belief that P wouldn't have normally existed if S had manipulated X in way Y;

(iii) S was required to manipulate X in way Y;

(iv) S is blameworthy for not having manipulated X in way Y.

1. Condition (iii) in the definition of blameworthy belief is understood as:

    (a) S has undefeated reason to believe that X is epistemically harmful.

Contrast with Peel's view:

    (b) S believes that X is harmful.

More needs to be said about defeat: (a) states too strong a requirement, especially in a fake news environments where it is likely that there will be, for a given p, some kind of evidence against p – even if it is trashy evidence.

2. Condition (iii) says that S is epistemically blameworthy in believing a proposition only if S is required to manipulate their belief-influencing factor X in terms of Y.

(iii) can be waived when other reasons than epistemic ones are overriding – e.g. prudential reasons.

Many fake news contexts are overriding contexts. The heyday of fake news is also the heyday of emotional politics. The worry here is that condition (iii) would be too easy to override in fake news contexts because non-epistemic reasons might be prevalent in the holding of beliefs in fake news.

Section III. Brice

Broad criticisms of the authors' argument for the thesis that beliefs in fake news are blameworthy both in benign and malign information environment such as epistemic bubbles and even if fake news producers tap on their cognitive biases.

1. It is not entirely clear what the arguments are.

> **a)** We are given an account of blameworthiness in section 2 but then in the reminder of the paper, either it is unclear what the condition whose satisfaction is being examined are (it is the case in the section on beliefs in fake news in benign environment), or it is left implicit (it is the case in the section on malign environment). Only once is this explicit (in the last section, on biases).

> **b)** More importantly, thought the discussion turns mostly on condition (iv), the two excuses of force and ignorance are not spelled out carefully, and they barely appear explicitly in the remainder of the paper. In the end, it sounds as if, as long as the authors take it that they can assert the sentence "she/he could have done otherwise" the believers of fake news have no excuses.

2. The vignettes are underspecified: who is Boris? The authors don't say whether Boris is spending his days selling stocks on his computer or having two very taxing jobs which barely cover rent and food for him and his two children (we don't know where his partner is). Apparently, this doesn't seem relevant to the authors… Boris should practice his mental yoga.

> **NB:** This neglect of reality is also in full display when they authors write "we conceive of benign epistemic environments or ordinary information environments as contexts in which information flows according to the standard of a democratic community".

Section IV. Corine

> [BORIS] Boris is a British citizen who supports Brexit because he is afraid that remaining in the EU will increase the number of immigrants in the UK. While surfing the web, he bumps into a shady pro-leave webpage reporting the following piece of FN: 'The money saved from leaving the EU will result in the NHS getting £350m a week' [P]. Boris immediately forms the belief that P. When Boris stumbles upon a piece of counterevidence (e.g., statements by the UK Statistics Authority) he neglects it and keeps believing that P.

Much fake news comes from the establishment: it comes from sources that (in normal circumstances) would have some degree of legitimacy (heads of states, politicians in office, political parties, sections of the mainstream press, etc.).

Thus, in many fake news contexts, while Condition (ii) obtains, it is not obvious that (iii) and (iv) also do. Epistemologically speaking, the situation is somewhat messier than comparing (manifestly) illegitimate sources with (manifestly) legitimate ones.