

A Philosophy of Fake News. Genealogy, Forms, and the Use of Falsity in Mass Media

Krzysztof Gajewski
Institute of Literary Research
Polish Academy of Science

Miercurea Ciuc, 4 December 2020

Table of Contents

Ontology of falsehood

Epistemology of falsehood

Axiology of falsehood

Ontology of falsehood

Forms

1. visual, textual
2. acoustic
3. flavor?
4. olfactory?
5. tactile?

Textual fake news and its history

- Edgar Allan Poe: The Balloon Hoax (1844)
- economical profit
- inspired Jules Verne's „Around the World in Eighty Days”, „Five Weeks in a Balloon”
- actual first balloon Atlantic crossing: Double Eagle II, 1978

Acoustic forms of falsity

- Orson Welles, „The War of the Worlds” radio drama
- based on the novel of Herbert George Wells
- falshood „in the eye of beholder”

Visual forms of falsity: "Women in burkas"



- Comments: "This looks really scary", "Should be banned. You can't tell who's underneath. Could be terrorists", "Ghastly. This should never happen", "Islam is and always will be a curse", "Get them out of our country – frightening times we are living in", "I thought it would be like this in the year 2050, but it is happening NOW"
- falshood „in the eye of beholder"

Falsity: modes of existence

- Objective falshood: Balloon Hoax
- Subjective falshood: "Women in burkas" (?)
- Intersubjectivity: can falshood exist privately or does it demand an act of communication?
- Post-humanism: falsehood among animals

Epistemology of falsehood

Francis Bacon

- Idols of the Tribe,
- Idols of the Cave,
- Idols of the Market,
- Idols of the Theatre

Biases of Wikipedia

- 80% of Wikipedia contributors are males (gender bias)
- mostly from Global North (racial bias)
- Polish Wikipedia — conservative bias
- Wikipedia influences science

"We find that Wikipedia seems to act as a collection of review articles, helping to shape how scientists contextualize their own research and pointing them to the most important scientific articles that relate to their question."¹

¹Neil Thompson, Douglas Hanley, Science Is Shaped by Wikipedia: Evidence From a Randomized Control Trial, MIT Sloan Research Paper No. 5238-17, p.

Flat Earthers community

- Scottish common sense realism,
- Aristotelian, pre-Newtonian physics,
- pre-Copernican astronomy²

²Christine Garwood, Flat Earth. The History of an Infamous Idea, Londyn 2007.

Axiology of falsehood

Ethical questions related to fake news

- defamation (Procopius of Caesarea, “Secret History”; Pietro Aretino, a creator of modern pasquinade; Larry Flynt, “Hustler” case),
- political fight (Jonathan Swift, “The Art of Political Lying”, fake news campaign of Donald Trump),
- economic profit (“troll farms”)
- Kant on lying
- a right to lie³

³David O. Klein, Joshua R. Wueller, Fake News: A Legal Perspective, "Journal of Internet Law", Vol. 20, No. 10, April 2017, p. 10

- Plato aesthetics: truth = beauty
- Aristotelian: rather fictional but plausible plots than true, unbelievable⁴
- Jean Baudrillard's simulacra conceal reality

⁴Alexander Christov, Economic Effects Of The Fake News On Companies And The Need Of New PR Strategies, "Journal of Sustainable Development"2018, Vol. 8 (20), p. 44

Works Cited

1. Joanna M. Burkhardt, Combating Fake News in the Digital Age. Expert Guides to Library Systems and Services, Library Technology Reports Nov/Dec 2017, vol. 53 / No 8.
2. Alexander Christov, Economic Effects Of The Fake News On Companies And The Need Of New PR Strategies, "Journal of Sustainable Development"2018, Vol. 8 (20).
3. Christine Garwood, Flat Earth. The History of an Infamous Idea, Londyn 2007
4. Jon Henley, Bus seats mistaken for burqas by members of anti-immigrant group, "The Guardian", 2 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/02/bus-seats-mistaken-burqas-anti-immigrant-group-norwegian>
5. David O. Klein, Joshua R. Wueller, Fake News: A Legal Perspective, "Journal of Internet Law", Vol. 20, No. 10, April 2017.
6. Jackie Koerner, Wikipedia Has a Bias Problem. Wikipedia @ 20. 2019 <https://wikipedia20.pubpub.org/pub/u5vsaip5>
7. Neil Thompson, Douglas Hanley, Science Is Shaped by Wikipedia: Evidence From a Randomized Control Trial, MIT Sloan Research Paper No. 5238-17