

5. Rini 2020: Rationality and Fake News

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PHIL 1460
February 2, 2021

I. Tragedies of the Commons

Whenever we face a collective problem, there are two sorts of explanations we can give: *individual* or *structural*.

- 1) People getting out of shape.
- 2) Zoom and cameras.

		Anne	
		On	Off
Bill	On	(1, 1)	(-1, 2)
	Off	(2, -1)	(0, 0)

Two-person: "prisoner's dilemma". Many people: "tragedy of commons".

Upshot: Sometimes individually optimal/rational choices can lead to collectively suboptimal/irrational outcomes.

How to solve? Structural change.

This is *practical* rationality. Could there be *epistemic* versions of it?

O'Connor & Weatherall, Singer et al., and Rini are all asking that question.

Rini: yes; the spread of fake news is an example.

II. Fake News and Social Media

Conceptual question: What is fake news?

Must involve *intentional* deceptions.

Harris on abortion.

Fox and the inauguration.

Errors in reporting. Deception needn't be only goal.

Not *any* intentional deception. (Laundry.) Must be intended for larger audience.

Rini's analysis: Fake news = Story that purports to describe real events, typically by mimicking media reporting conventions, and get is known by creators to be significantly false, is transmitted with the goal of being widely shared and of deceiving at least some of its audience.

Our first encounter with conceptual analysis!

Q: Does this seem right? Can you think of counterexamples?

How does it spread? "Bent" testimony of social media.

Normally, trusting testimony is individually reasonable and collectively beneficial.

Think of O&W on Jane Hightower and the sociology of science.

But that depends on us coordinating on the *norms* of testimony. These norms are fine-grained!

Scout the trial lawyer.

Rini claims these norms are *contested* or *uncertain* in sharing on social media. Asserting "Harris wants post-pregnancy 'abortions'" vs. retweeting an article which claims that. "It was just a retweet!"

"Retweets aren't endorsements"

Q: Does this specially have to do with sharing? Assertions on Twitter are weird.

III. Partisanship is (individually) reasonable

Testimonial partisanship: giving more credence to the claims (/shares) of those who share your political affiliation *because* they do so.

Think of O&W!

Rini claims this is individually reasonable for both normative and descriptive claims

Normative. Easy, she says. You think the people who share your normative commitments are *getting it right*; while those who don't are not.

Q: Often this inference doesn't work. (Coin flip.) What's the difference in the moral case?

Descriptive. Deciding what to share involves normative decisions about *political importance*. Especially when it comes to evidence about character.

Is that the full story? Imagine Clueless Chris, who's heart is in the right place, but is easily taken in. → *General* trust of co-partisans.

Upshot: the credibility boost we give to our co-partisans overcomes the ambiguity of their shares, hence we are reasonable to get taken in by fake news.

Do people buy this? Two claims:

C1 Testimonial partisanship is reasonable.

C2 Because of this, falling for fake news is often reasonable.

Discuss!

IV. Solution?

Need *structural* change, not individual change, to solve tragedy of commons.

Reputation scores? Change incentives of sharing on social media.