

7-23-2018

Fake News: Is Truth Really Under Attack?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Other Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (2018) "Fake News: Is Truth Really Under Attack?," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 18 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol18/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

Title: Fake News: Is Truth Really Under Attack?

Global discourse bemoaning the subversion of truth may be reinforcing falsity on what the truth is. The history of Western philosophy's approaches to *epistemology* can illustrate this.

Epistemology is often defined as the study of how we know what we know. It usually subsumes arriving at what we know through a belief we believe is true and we can justify as true. Those who develop and implement disinformation and deception operations against us target how and what we justify as true—justification being something we perform both consciously and out of awareness.

Global discourse bemoaning the subversion of truth is founded on the presumption that there are agreed-upon justifications for what we should know. Not 'should' in the sense of morally right or wrong but of being the case or not. However, the history of Western *epistemology* suggests otherwise.

In *correspondence* approaches to knowledge, we assume we can come up with something inside us—usually called the 'mind'—that is exactly the case for something outside of us. We then believe we know this. Illusions, delusions, and hallucinations suggest that we may not know what we think we know inside or out.

In *coherence* approaches to knowledge, we believe we know something when it fits into what else we know. But anomalies violating scientific theories and information supporting everyday theories that are later violated—e. g., a loyal spouse becoming disloyal—suggest *coherence* might be incoherent.

In *pragmatic* approaches to knowledge, we believe we know something when our world changes in a manner we believe must follow from some characteristic of that something. But some days the snack dispenser doesn't work and after many confirmations of food and safety the turkey becomes Thanksgiving dinner.

Epistemology contains further complexities. Sometimes we believe we know what things mean even if they don't seem to refer to anything at all in the world. As Sir Bertrand Russell has shown us, we know what 'the present King of France is bald' means, even if there isn't one. Moreover, we seem to live within *epistemological* hierarchies—a combination of criteria we use to come to believe we know something. These hierarchies usually include belief in knowledge through just believing in it (faith), through some higher authority (secular or sacred), through intuition, through our senses, and through systematic sensing via experiments that seem to replicate or falsify what we believe we know. In addition, our approaches to knowledge seem to change in different situations, different stages of our lives, and for humanity different historical eras.

Western *epistemology* doesn't demand skepticism, i. e., that we can't know anything—even if it has been attributed to Gorgias the Skeptic that nothing exists; if it does, we can't know it; and if we can know it, it can't be communicated. It does strongly suggest we should not believe that we know that some incontrovertible truth is under attack. Instead, the truth is up for grabs, always has been, always will. Yes, some truths are easier to arrive at, and we may choose to believe what we don't know or can't justify knowing. In fact, being a free and decent person may denote standing up not fore [sic] what works, but for what's right. Fake news is just rhetoric linked to the *epistemological* challenge of the human condition.

References: (1) Anderson, R. (2004). Intuitive Inquiry: An epistemology of the heart for scientific inquiry. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 32(4), 307-341. (2) Dowdle, M. W. (2003). Deconstructing Graeme: Observations on "pragmatic psychology," forensics and the institutional epistemology of the courts. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 9(3-4), 301-333. (3) Eagly, A. H., & Riger, S. (2014). Feminism and psychology: Critiques of methods and epistemology. *American Psychologist*, 69(7), 685-702. (4) Kral, M. J. (2007). Psychology and anthropology: Intersubjectivity and epistemology in an interpretive cultural science. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 27-28(2-1), 257-275. (5) Yanchar, S. C., & Kristensen, K. B. (1996). Notes on a naturalized epistemology. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 16(2), 93-102. (6) Zuriff, G. E. (1980). Radical behaviorist epistemology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 87(2), 337-350.

Keywords: Deception; Disinformation; Epistemology; Fake News; Information Warfare, Propaganda, Truth.

Abstract/Description: Attacking fake news may be as fake as fake news. Or so suggests Western epistemology.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

To comment on this article, please go online to
<https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol18/iss1/7>