

Media Corruption in the Age of Information

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This paper will examine and explore the presence of *corruption* in the media including both online and offline media (media henceforth) by reference to the Myth of Gyges in Plato's *Republic*, as this has contemporary significance and relevance in explaining corruption in the media at present, including digital media. Using the Myth of Gyges I will show that the characterising features of other types of corruption (e.g. police, political, financial, sport among others) are on closer examination also discernible in what I refer to in this paper as *media corruption*.

The primary objective of this paper is to identify and critically analyse and evaluate the different types of media corruption and the different ways in which these are caused and the contexts in which they are manifested in current media environments and practices including the internet platforms by which such media corruption is enabled not by accident but by design. Whereas a lot has been written on other forms of corruption, including corporate, political, police, sports and financial corruption, to name but a few types of corruption, media corruption has been largely overlooked. Although identified as unethical within the general corpus of media ethics, practices such as, for example, cash-for-comment, media release journalism, including video news releases (VNRs), fake news, staged news, advertorials, infomercials and infotainment, and most recently fake news and information corruption more generally through the web-enabled invasive unauthorised practices of Google and Facebook among others, such practices have not been identified and defined as corrupt practices. Insofar as they have been labelled as instances of corruption, there has been no systematic theoretical study of why and how such practices constitute corruption. The reason for this oversight is partly because the concept of corruption itself is not well understood or clearly defined or when defined, it is too narrowly defined in terms of corporate financial misfeasance as in the case of Enron, for example, or abuse of political and public office for private gain, as in the case of Watergate.

Starting with a conceptual and philosophical analysis of corruption in general, this paper will provide an applied philosophical model of corruption that will be utilized to first identify major types of corruption that arise in the media, including types of digital media that involve the corruption of information. Some key case studies will provide a practical

illustration and contextualisation of some of the major types of media and information corruption.

Due to time constraints this paper will focus primarily on exploring in more detail the widely reported phenomenon of information corruption through fake news, as well as the widely reported ethical and legal breaches by Google and Facebook, by scholars such as Shoshana Zuboff in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019) and Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society* (2015) including other relevant journal and media publications. My aim is to show that on closer inspection, such ethical and legal breaches might also be construed as a form of information corruption, and to the extent that these undermine the democratic process and the institutions on which it is founded, institutional corruption as well.

References:

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