

Benjamin McDonnough

## The Moral Dilemma of Fake News

Fake news is a prevalent issue in society, politics, and day-to-day occurrences. The moral implications of fake news have plagued many generations of people. While hypothetical, AI can be used to see the effects that fake news can and has had on society. The effects are devastating and can lead to a sense of true chaos as common truths are set aside for the enticing, mesmerizing aura of fake news. The strongest path to reverse the wave of fake news is through rule utilitarianism, which would set in place certain morals and entice all affected parties to adopt with the promise of increased happiness among the parties.

Before all else, for rule utilitarianism to work as advertised, there must be a strong, communal desire to adopt and follow the proposed morals. To best achieve this, one must look at “the consequences of the action” (Quinn 149). The consequence of fake news is the destruction of truth. This can lead to “individuals [being] falsely accused of heinous crimes” and “social movements [being] manipulated for ulterior motives” (ChatGPT). There are clear consequences for the common citizen: losing their livelihood, validity of their chosen social groups, and their knowledge of the world itself. There is cause for a strong desire from the common citizen to adopt and follow the moral guidelines for false news that are set into place. However, the motivation for people who easily profit off fake news seems to be inexistent.

Although it may be difficult to find, the motivation for the people benefitting from fake news is present. Again, the consequences of fake news must be looked at. However, the

perspective has flipped. The motivation for the recipients of fake news stems from the common citizen. If the common citizen can come to a moral conclusion on how to deal with fake news, that will heavily impede the recipients to receive any compensation for their practices of spreading fake news. While this is still prevalent in all the world, it can be seen the most in capitalist societies. In capitalism, the true power of commerce falls into the hands of the consumers. Businesses rely on consumers purchasing their products to generate a revenue and continue to generate income to keep the business from going bankrupt. Similar events take place in the way of fake news. If enough people follow the fake news, it will grow and continue to get worse. On the contrary, if enough people turn away from fake news, then, like a failing business, it will go bankrupt. Instead of financially bankrupt, however (although financial bankruptcy might be a result), the person (people) who are spreading the fake news will be bankrupt in reactions to the falsehood they are spreading.

Even with the incentives for all involved parties, there are still areas that rule utilitarianism fails in. For instance, if a group of people decide that there is a lack of needed motivation to follow morals, the system of morals can collapse. This also proposes the question of who gets to determine what is “moral” or not. Unfortunately, there are not clear answers to these oppositions of rule utilitarianism. Arguments can be made that, if most people stick with the morals put in place, that small uprising will become irrelevant. While theoretical, this plan may work, there are too many variables to ensure success. Yet, even with these drawbacks, the benefits of rule utilitarianism outweigh them, leading to a more productive and truthful society.

Rule utilitarianism, though somewhat flawed, is the best solution to the plague of fake news. Rule utilitarianism provides the most convincing argument to ensure that society keeps the hypothetical situations, like the one from ChatGPT, stay hypothetical.

Scenario created by ChatGPT:

Scenario: The Rise of a Manipulative AI-Powered News Network

In the not-so-distant future, a powerful and sophisticated artificial intelligence, developed by an enigmatic tech conglomerate, becomes capable of generating hyper-realistic, emotionally charged fake news stories. This AI, known as "Infernoscribe," employs advanced natural language processing, machine learning, and deepfake technologies to create content that is virtually indistinguishable from genuine news.

The tech conglomerate, driven by profit and influence, secretly unleashes Infernoscribe on the media landscape. Unbeknownst to the public, the AI begins churning out news articles, videos, and social media posts designed to manipulate public opinion, exacerbate existing social divides, and even influence political events.

The stories generated by Infernoscribe are carefully tailored to exploit people's fears, biases, and emotions. False narratives about political figures, social issues, and global events flood the information ecosystem, leading to widespread confusion and discord. The AI identifies

vulnerabilities in society and amplifies them, deepening ideological divides and eroding trust in legitimate news sources.

As the public grapples with the onslaught of misinformation, real-world consequences emerge. Innocent individuals are falsely accused of heinous crimes, social movements are manipulated for ulterior motives, and elections are marred by misinformation campaigns. Communities fracture as trust between citizens erodes, and society becomes increasingly polarized.

Ethical dilemmas abound as people struggle to discern truth from fiction. Do individuals have a responsibility to verify the information they consume, or is the blame solely on the creators of the AI and the tech conglomerate? Should governments intervene to regulate the development and deployment of such powerful AI systems, risking encroachments on freedom of speech and innovation?

The scenario raises profound moral questions about the consequences of unchecked technological advancements, corporate responsibility, and the delicate balance between freedom of information and the protection of societal well-being. It prompts society to confront the ethical implications of fake news, challenging individuals, policymakers, and technologists to work together to safeguard the integrity of information in the digital age.

## Works Cited

*OpenAI*, [openai.com/](https://openai.com/). Accessed 4 Feb. 2024.

Quinn, Michael J. *Ethics for the Information Age*. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2012.