

With the Fourth Estate in collision with the Fifth Estate of citizens on social media, how can we teach truthful reporting?

Abstract

What is fake news and how can we teach our students not to be taken in by it, not to spread it and not to write it? I suggest going back to first principles of critical thinking: first by identifying how false information is created and spread, then by understanding why this happens, and finally by grasping how the public is deceived. News literacy is as important as proficiency in news gathering. To counter this: diligent digital knowledge coupled with age-old yet evergreen principles of research, critical questioning, unblinkered listening and civil response.

“What is truth? said jesting Pilate and did not stay for an answer,” wrote Francis Bacon in the 17th century.

He continued: “But it is not only the difficulty and labour which men take in finding out of truth, nor again that when it is found it imposeth upon men’s thoughts, that doth bring lies in favour; but a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself.” (Bacon, 1601). Everyone loves a lie – or, let’s qualify that, everyone loves using a lie now and then. We’ve all done it, maybe for the best of motives, to soothe a relative or get out of a difficult engagement. But very few of us like being lied to – and yet, we constantly are lied to and what is more, we go along with it for a variety of reasons which this paper will touch on.

We go along with it because we don’t know any better, because the lie is something we want or need to believe in line with our view of the world (cognitive bias, as Kahneman and Tversky have repeatedly explored, for example, in 1995) because it fits in with something we just heard or saw on social media, because we are scared not to, or just because we are lazy. And we also go along with it because it is hard to know when someone is lying.

Yet as journalists and as people who educate journalists, we proclaim the need for truthful reporting. How can we pursue this ideal in a world of evasions, falsehoods, propaganda and, of course, fake news? This

paper will examine the different kinds of falsehoods with which we contend as journalism educators and suggest an age-old strategy. It will also, in line with an earlier paper of mine, brush aside the teaching of news values as central to journalism education. In brief, we need to apply old methods to a Hydra-head of new situations.

There are two sides to this: finding out the truth, and telling the truth.

It is indeed difficult to tell if people are lying, as Saner reports (2019) and yet that is a key skill for journalists. Perhaps, as her article suggests, society is more relaxed about fibbing, since we have had now several US presidents exposed as liars, the two most recent of whom got away with it scot-free. Yet as journalists, if we do not suspect that our interviewees may at times be “economical with the truth” as a senior British civil servant once put it (Robert Armstrong in 1986, quoting himself 2004), and do not grill them accordingly, we will be as Chomsky and Amy Goodman have suggested, little more than stenographers to power (Barsamian 1992).

Is that all truthful reporting can be? – a variant on the tired old clichés of whether the Lady Mayor wore a flowered hat at the village fete or publishing the latest glossy report from a corporation? Do we as journalists not feel a higher calling, to hold power to account? We certainly often say so. As the old saw, variously attributed to William Hearst, Lord Northcliffe, and pundit Malcolm Muggeridge has it, “News is anything anybody wants to suppress; everything else is public relations.” Are we teaching public relations?

We tell our students that the fearless reporter must learn to ask searching questions and take nothing on trust, must have done enough research to call out evasion or misrepresentation. Truthful reporting, in short, will require an inbuilt “Bullshit detector”, to use the colourful language of Harry Frankfurt in his seminal essay (2005). And the best bases for this are a canny understanding of how other human beings respond to question coupled with in-depth research on the subject.

But while it is not so difficult to instil these basics about interview techniques in our budding journalists, following such doyennes as Jessica Mitford (2000) it is harder to develop their powers of critical thinking under the deluge of social media information. And yet it is learning to flex those powers, I submit, which offer the best training for journalists’ “truth muscles”.

However, Bacon’s aphorism does suggest one way to unpick the raucous conflicts between the Fourth Estate of traditional news media (routinely referred to by social media critics as “mainstream media” or MSM) and the Fifth Estate of social media. Finding out what is true and reporting it has at one and the same time never seemed more desirable or less attainable. We have to face the facts that social media is one of the main go-to sources for journalists, and that the MSM is itself a major target of social media trolls shrilling out that it purveys fake news. So telling the truth and calling out lies are inextricably linked, not only in real-life interviewing, but also in our consumption of news media. This is what the Cairncross Review (2019) calls for as “digital literacy” and what other colleagues are calling “news literacy” – what was always the backbone of media studies: the unpicking of the impacts of ownership, bias, crowd-pleasing, technology -- and the desire to run with accepted narratives rather than the difficulties of accurate reporting.

In the political era of Trump, Brexit, Facebook and Twitter, such unpicking is even harder than before. Journalists are being wrong-footed by a flood of digital information from sources often demonstrated unreliable or mendacious (see, for example, Cadwalladr 2017). Societal attitudes to truth are seen as ever more flexible – in Bacon’s terms, we are all Pilate now. Several journalists (among them, d’Ancona 2017, Ball 2017, Davis 2017) have written indignant books about fake news and flexible attitudes to truth, often nominating post-modernism as the root of the societal evil of “post-truth”. Perhaps it is true that greater understanding of how, for example, oppressed and oppressing people have different versions of history (let’s look here at the conflicts over the statues of Robert E Lee in the southern states of the US) or that embracing a more nuanced view of debates can preclude easy definitions of right and wrong – and even how these might contribute to a societal belief that truth is not an absolute – but most people will still agree that everyone dies, that the Sun rises in the East, and so on. Post-modernism is real in the academy but a ghostly presence IRL. So that, I submit, is a red herring.

We might suggest that the success of so much misleading information is rather more prosaic. Technology has always changed communication – no Laws of Hammurabi without clay tablets, no illustrated Books of Hours with the quill pen, no protestant reform without the printed Bible, no serialised novels of Dickens without the mechanized printing press – no Playboy without cheap colour printing. But now we have the mobile phone and fast internet access.

Technology has enabled propaganda to flow out in never-before-seen quantities, while anyone in a bad mood can pick up their phone and have a go at anyone else, with little fear of legal or practical consequences. Despite the recommendations of the Cairncross review (2019) to place legally enforced restrictions on digital giants in the UK or transnationally, it is hard to see this changing any time soon. Facebook gets apparently one million complaints a day globally, according to a DCMS spokesperson (NUJ event 18 March

So, means, motive, opportunity. Means and opportunity have been laid out – and as for motive, well!... So here is my first and most important prescription for our students. Whatever we read or hear in the news or from a public figure, let us ask, “cui bono?” Who wants you to know, believe, act on this? And why? I am not claiming anything new here, but I am drawing on a very old tradition.

There is, they say, a sucker born every minute. A deadly cocktail of gullibility, malevolence, greed, self-interest and sheer mischief has produced the current situation where President Trump’s cry of “fake news” is most often aimed at those exposing his own falsehoods. Let us not obediently open our mouths to swallow this concoction. “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me,” as the old proverb has it. And I don’t exempt myself or any of us from that. I am just as likely to believe a news item from a source whose views are broadly in line with mine as anyone.

One process whereby fake news is swallowed is a development of Bourdieu’s (1998) notion of “show and hide”. An entertaining article by Gopnik in the *New Yorker* (2018) talks about how conjurers work. “Dariel Fitzkee’s “Magic by Misdirection”, a classic in the magical arts written decades ago by a once famous American performer tries to lay out all the varieties of misdirection,” writes Gopnik, pointing out how Brett Kavanaugh’s defence before his Senate hearing into his appointment on to the US Supreme Court was all about misdirection, rather than a defence based on testimony or one that answered the charges made against him.

As Marche writes (2018) “Fake news” has quickly come to mean nothing more than “other people’s news”—the news made by the other team. Trump versus Clinton, or Arron Banks versus the UK Remain campaign.

As educators, then, asking “cui bono?” we want to train our students to understand how lying and misdirection work, both emotionally and technologically. For we are working in a new matrix, the interface between the Fifth Estate of social media and its interface with our Fourth Estate. This has skewed our previous delimitations of the private and public spheres - - we must recalculate our understandings of Habermas (1992). It is no longer just politicians who dominate the public sphere. All kinds of spooks and goblins, wraiths and will o’ the wisps are there, from Kylie Jenner’s billions acquired through flogging lip cosmetics to Alex Jones of Infowars, who mixes cruel attacks on the parents of children killed in the Sandy Hook school shooting (while in a state of “psychosis” he told a court REF) (see Beauchamp 2017) with advertisements for herbal supplements, or from “influencers” who make fortunes by filming themselves and their children unboxing their shopping, to jihadi filming gruesome beheadings. But so too are our most private communications – sex tapes, family pictures, last night’s dinner are all freely available. We are in an age dominated by a commercial version of the Assassin’s Creed: “Nothing is true, everything is permitted” – and don’t forget to buy *Crusader Kings II* -- now! This matrix in which commercial and political ends merge with private communication is a new arena – not a private sphere nor a public sphere but a Venn diagram.

As Waterson (2019) for example shows, the penetration of propaganda, misinformation and tendentious misdirection, masked as friendly “sharing”, into citizens’ private sources of information, is well advanced. There is nothing really private online –not only is nothing true, but also nothing can be deleted and everything is data to be monetised. That is, the deliberate structuring of social media to maximise “stickiness” and “rabbit holes” down which users endlessly fall has facilitated the activities of those with political or commercial aims, devious or otherwise.

As educators, it is crucial that we alert our students to these mechanisms and to the role which the algorithms of online advertising and retail have played in the development of social and digital media. Moore (2018) has unpicked the dangers this poses to democracy, by skewing information received by citizens to their personal preferences. No, it is not an accident that after buying slippers you get emails selling your pyjamas, that at the doctor’s surgery you get messages about cough mixture and that you get confirmation that the Prime Minister is a lizard after you have visited David Icke’s website. And that is just the ones you see. Your data is still being sold on even as you click. Hard to answer the question “cui bono?” When the beneficiaries might range from the sellers of mobile phones to patio lighting to political movements.

The 2019 Cairncross review surveyed this and highlighted the need for all educators to teach what they call “digital literacy”. I am suggesting a couple of ways in which this might proceed for journalism educators, while conscious of course that many others are ploughing this same furrow.

As well as laying out how our students actually get their “hot takes” on information, then, and the motives behind that, we also need to explain to them how that “news” is constructed. It is a complex operation, since social media operators remain parasitic on older news structures: they still follow the Five Ws, still purport to have the authority of fearless truth-telling – but their driver differs. No longer the fearless green-shaded reporter bashing the phones, but the social media entrepreneur – Breitbart or Novara or the Canary – hashtagging their feed at the merest sniff of a story, verified or not. And then gobbling up and aggregating the stories on other feeds.

How it can be to unpick news sourcing is exemplified by the story of mass rapes by immigrants in Sweden in 2017, eagerly picked up by Trump but discounted by careful analysis (Rodén 2018). Or take 9/11. Here is Alex Jones of Infowars, quoted in Walters 2017: “9/11 was an inside job,” Jones said. “That means criminal elements in our own government, working with Saudi Arabia and others, wanted to frame Iraq for it. Just a fact.” Interestingly, Walters also notes that Jones uses his site to promote a line of organic toiletries, sales of which help fund his operations. And here we swing back to Moore’s contention – that advertising is the engine which drives much less than truthful journalism. The internet went wild for a story that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are literally demons from hell who organised a paedophile ring from the basement of a pizza parlour in Washington, DC (Beauchamp 2016)? The original author of that tale, Mike Czernovich, is entirely unrepentant about it and its consequences – the shooting up of the Pizza parlour, despite its not having a basement (Marantz 2016).

He got the clicks – and that is all that matters. Simple bombardment with repetition can solidify misinformation into “known facts” as Robson (2019) says “the most potent way of spreading misinformation is simple repetition; the more you hear an idea, the more likely you are to believe it to be true.”

Scandals like the uncovering of deceitful use of data like that of Cambridge Analytica in the UK referendum barely register with most users. In fact, we all forget where we get information from – when did you first hear that the Earth went round the Sun?

So here is my second prescription for students: so, where did you hear that? From whom? And why just then?

We must face up to the fact of malicious disinformation – as Robson (2019) writes “...misinformation can be engineered to bypass logical thinking and critical questioning”. And it often is. And although my examples are mostly from right-wing politicians, I don’t claim any exemptions from bad faith for any other group.

I come back to – people are lying to us. As Marche (2018) writes: “Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after,” quoting Jonathan Swift, in 1710. He cites examples: “On Twitter, a cardiologist claimed that a video of Syrian children dying from poison gas was fake because the ECG pads were misplaced. His initial post received more than twelve thousand retweets; his subsequent admission of error received fewer than fifty. In the aftermath of the 2016 election, the Pew Research Center revealed what may be the most disturbing number of the whole sordid election: fourteen per cent of Americans admitted that “they shared a story they knew was fake at the time.” It was for the lulz, maybe.

None the less, a straw poll of any students still reflects “we get our news from social media”. For example, a torrent of revelations about Russian influence via social media on US, European and UK elections (Cadwalladr 2018, Mostrous et al 2017, Prokop 2018) has hardly registered on the indiscriminate public take-up of digital information. Compare Cadwalladr’s followers on Twitter – 280,000 – and those of Piers Morgan – 6.64 million. Not exactly an equal division of the public sphere – or Venn diagram.

In this Venn diagram of communication, smears and falsehoods, however unfounded, are never fully retracted, as Cadwalladr (2019) has complained about Nigel Farage and the Brexit party. Fact checkers flounder and withdraw from the fray, as Levin (2019) details in his account of how Snopes parted ways with Facebook.

How can journalism educators counter this? Journalism educators in the UK have often taken a more industry-focused approach to teaching truthful reporting, leading off with the notion of news values. This well-trodden path is largely driven by content analysis, beginning with Galtung and Ruge (1965) and revisions by Harcup and O’Neill (2001), O’Neill and Harcup (2009), O’Neill (2012) Harcup (2015), Harcup and O’Neill (2016) and Neumark Jones (2018), among many others. Such discussions explore the challenges fake news on social media poses for a hierarchy of “news values” (and the way in which the media can subsequently be understood) as professionalism challenged by amateurs. A kind of priesthood of reporters is assumed, untainted by the profanities of ownerships, bias, crowd-pleasing and the limitations imposed by traditions of what news is and where it is to be found.

I suggest we move away from this concept entirely. News values are an overly restricted, trade-oriented concept. Counting the content of stories -- even supposing that we can all agree on whether, for example, a story about a new Royal baby, is good news, bad news, news about the elite, news about the future, news which affects all of us, part of an ongoing series, entertainment, celebrity, sex, health and goodness knows what else – will still tell us nothing about how these stories are shaped, at whom they are aimed and how they get spun on, on social media. A brilliant spoof by BuzzFeed tracing the stages of a Twitterstorm is particularly good on this. (Phillips 2018)

For most of those who have written about news values as an essential element in reporting, the lesson for the academy is straightforward: Journalists must report objectively whilst also responding to cultural and commercial imperatives. Journalism educators must equip their students to enter this arena. The Fifth Estate

is merely a subset of the public sphere, a locus for unruly sources.

Unfortunately for this prescription, the Fifth Estate will not stay in its box. The Wild West of social media has blurred older distinctions between, for example, investigative reporting, gossip and state propaganda. Under the blanket rejection of “MSM” and the embrace of social media, trust in classic journalism is withering daily. Users may understand that stories about Kim Kardashian learning law are clickbait – but they still click (BBC 2019). And when they click, someone, somewhere, makes money.

The Cairncross Review suggested various government remedies for controlling the corporations which profit from such algorithms and their addictive properties. Responses by those like Briant (2018), included in the final report, strengthen the case for demanding that companies clean up their act and be made responsible for real-life consequences of how they do business. Yet companies have been slow to change. Profits are at stake. Respected fact checkers Snopes have withdrawn from a partnership with Facebook (Levin 2019) and meantime the circus merrily grinds on. For it is a kind of showbiz, sleight of hand, pantomime.

Casalicchio (2018), among others, reveals the brazenness of those who are cooking the social media books. Being exposed as liars did no harm to “Brexit Bad Boys” Messrs Banks and Wigmore before the DCMS inquiry in 2018; it has done no harm to Brett Kavanaugh; it has done no harm to the 45th president of the United States (10,000 lies according to the Washington Post ticker -- and still counting according to Kessler et al 2019). Meantime, investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr has been sneered at as a “mad cat lady” by senior broadcast journalist Andrew Neil (Mayhew 2018); rape threats to females in public life are so common that UK election candidates flourish them; statistics and made-up quotations clutter the internet – try tracking down that “all else is public relations” quote.

But I want to stress that this is not new. The use of lies, smears, abuse and disinformation goes back at least as far as the Roman republic, according to the scathing pamphlet supposedly by Roman orator Cicero’s brother (Wills 2012). It flourished in the pamphlet wars of England and France in the 17th century (Peacey 2013), and in the savage cartoons of the 18th and 19th centuries in England, as repression fought reform. And no doubt it will continue to flourish.

Cui bono? requires us to look at motives. Other critics have exposed the motives of those exploiting the Fifth Estate as a new area of the political sphere. Whether by analysing the mischievous lies of such as ex-UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson (Henkel 2018) or by highlighting the bias in many media outlets (O’Neil 2018), this analysis seems to find the distinction between traditional news and social media “fake news” rapidly eroding. Instead, media both MSM and social, are entirely up for grabs.

This is ignoring an important distinction. Not all areas of the public sphere are policed equally. There are extensive sets of laws governing the MSM and aimed at making it to some extent accountable. These vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but generally protect citizens from false accusations, hate speech and persecution, theft of intellectual property and perversions of the processes of the judicial system.

But what consequences are there for people who misbehave online? Doxxing, pile-ons, threats of violence, shamings and loss of employment are frequent and destructive—notably documented in Jon Ronson’s brilliant 2015 expose, *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed*. Victims may be blameless in IRL – but that won’t save them. A few feeble police actions on one hand – the murder of a UK MP on the other.

And as for flat-out lying: it is Teflon time for the fabulists. Johnson, of course, has admitted untruths for which he was sacked as a journalist (Ball 2018) – but it has done his career and his earning power no harm at all. For others, like internet troll Mike Cernovich, and promulgator of the infamous Pizzagate conspiracy myth, there are no sackings, but rather rewards in terms of clickbait and advertising revenue (Kolbert 2019). Internet trolls like Cernovich or indeed, dare I say, Trump, have real-life impacts – pizza parlours get shot up, tiny children get separated from their parents at the US border. This must concern us as educators, of journalists or merely citizens – what happens next is also what needs to be held to account.

Our final difficulty is frivolity. Everything opposing such damaging lies can be shrugged off through parody or “bantz”. It was for the lulz. As Lamerichs, Nguyen et al point out in their incisive 2018 article, so-called satirical memes can actually solidify racist and sexist discourse into a powerful tool of ridicule, opposing which is cast as joyless and archaic. Arron Banks won’t engage with debate – he just sneers “lame”; Pepe the frog jeers at “feminazis” who want women to control their own reproductive rights.

In the classroom, it is noticeable how many would-be journalists do not consume classic journalism. They find it “boring” and “long”. Here is a poser for the educator. Increasingly short attention spans (Greenfield 2015, Levitin 2017) compound a psychological fact: inconvenient information is uncomfortable to process. Clickbait is quick. We have to encourage our students to read long and slow – and not to give up because something is difficult. There are a few signs that some media is moving in this direction—James Harding, ex-editor of the London Times, has set up Tortoise Media: tagline “We’re building a different type of newsroom. For a slower, wiser news.” And there is *The Conversation*, promising “academic rigour, journalistic flair”.

As Robson shows, in his account of how a pair of academics inoculated students against misleading climate change misinformation (2019), including fake experts and petitions, serious research and historical analysis can help students get involved in the longer view. By looking at how the tobacco industry had bamboozled the public for years, participants in the study by Cook and Lewandowsky became more sceptical of climate change deniers' tactics.

And here it seems sadly true that even the best research does not get traction in the MSM. Conway (2019) writing in the niche *Byline* (formed by disenchanted journalism educators) goes to lengths to explain how the May 2019 claims of mass funding by Farage's Brexit party do not stand up. Cadwalladr and Channel 4 News (2019) expose Arron Banks as having spent nearly £500,000 supporting Farage in 2016, contrary to the code of conduct for MEPs, but support for this party continues to grow in the polls.

We come now to the other side of the coin – how and why the public chooses to believe what is often demonstrably false. This aspect, perceptively noticed by Bacon, (Walters 2017) – has received less attention, although Kahn-Harris (2018) has attacked “denialism” in *The Guardian* and in a book, from a moralistic perspective. Another voice from the European past remarks: “...he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived.” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1513). Analysts of human cognition like Kahneman (2012) have shown the perils of “thinking too fast”. Marxist-based critiques of media practice based on the work of such as Habermas (1992) and Bourdieu (1996), offer conceptual tools. Pollitt (2002) among others suggests how deep are the social currents that underpin the preference for the Fifth over the Fourth Estate. Traditional journalism is battling against the tide. We can make a difference, I believe, but we must not underestimate the strength of the desire for the reassuring lie.

How prescient was Stephen Colbert in his brilliant comedy bit about the word “truthiness” (Colbert 2005) which culminates with “Other folk promise to read the news to you. I promise to feel the news AT you.”

A fascinating study by the Cambridge Centre For Research In The Arts, Social Sciences And Humanities (CRASSH 2019) led by John Naughton, revealed, said researcher Dr Hugo Leal, a confluence of conspiracy theories. “Originally formulated in French far-right circles, the widespread belief in a supposedly outlandish nativist conspiracy theory known as the ‘great replacement’ is an important marker and predictor of the Trump and Brexit votes,” said Leal. Some 41% of Trump voters and 31% of Brexit voters described as true the statement that “Muslim immigration to this country is part of a bigger plan to make Muslims a majority”, compared with 3% of Clinton voters and 6% of Remain voters.)

This links to work by Sunstein, pioneer of the idea that the internet allows people to consume news within “filters” or “bubbles” (2009, 2017), who points the finger at the neurological effects of modern technology and social media. Sunstein argues that “cyberpolarisation” -- when “certain tendencies of the human mind interact badly with certain features of modern technology, much as certain prescription drugs interact badly with alcohol” (Kolbert 2009) -- accounts for the acrimony between Fourth and Fifth Estates, between the sober and the drunk.

O’Hara and Stevens (2015) dispute this by suggesting a different framing of the bubbles described by Sunstein. Using the sociology of religion, O’Hara suggests that rational analysis may suggest that such bubbles are neither entirely new nor necessarily destructive. „First, we examine the Internet directly to measure it against the Habermasian ideal of a public forum of free debate. Second, we consider what echo chambers can contribute to debate. Third, we see whether some examples of apparent polarization have been properly diagnosed. Fourth, we consider the related question of what structures will enable the Internet to support political action and other collaboration.“

So – have we always been suckers and must we always be so? And does it really matter?

Must teachers of journalism accept this dystopian future in which no one can believe anyone -- unless they already do? This paper denies the necessity. Human beings have been down such mazes of deception before, many times. And truth and objectivity have been upheld, if sorely tested.

Sociology and history, then, do offer us some tools to counter the “natural though corrupt love of the lie itself”, as do social psychology and journalistic satire -- for example, from Kolbert (2009) or Swift (1709, 2015). Last, but not least, educators need to ground their practice in the tried and tested principles of teaching critical thinking (for example, McPeck 1990).

I want to urge here that we return to first principles. The Greeks had a method – Socratic dialogue. The Romans had a tag; *cui bono*? Journalism schools had a basic principle – two unconnected sources for every fact. We will scarcely go wrong if we apply these methods to such egregious howlers as reports from the likes of Infowars.

We don’t want to be stenographers to power – who ever actually did come up with the phrase. Its origins appear to be lost in the mists of the internet.

We want to train our students to listen to voices, not always the ones who shout loudest, but those whom

society needs to hear. It is not as if our traditional journalism has always been covered with glory. In the UK, the shameful episode of the 2018 Grenfell Tower fire, where 71 people burned to death in one of the richest cities in the world, although they had bombarded the authorities and the news media for years with their fears about fire safety, highlighted how “news” was only the province of journalists and not the conduit for the public sphere that it surely ought to be. If we want to train youthful, truthful reporters, we also need – my final prescription – to train them to listen, not just to those in the bubble. Younge (2018) writes movingly about the deficiencies of the MSM on the tragic Grenfell fire.

And listening, of course, means learning to debate with civility, against a current grain, but back to a Socratic ideal. This has been tried before, with partial success

According to Marche (2018) Michael Hunter wrote in “Establishing the New Science,” his 1989 history of the Royal Society. “Its organizers seem to have sincerely believed that the enterprise to which the early Royal Society was dedicated *was* healing, that it would in some sense escape from politics by bringing together reasonable men from a wide range of ideological positions who could collaborate in gathering information which they hope that all would be able to accept.” The motto of the Royal Society was (and still is) *Nullius in verba*: “take nobody’s word for it.”

Truthful reporting is a global cause. The European Commission announced in 2018 that it would support “an independent European network of factcheckers” who would “establish common working methods, exchange best practices, and work to achieve the broadest possible coverage of factual corrections across the EU”. Eight factchecking organisations in six EU countries have been approved as members of this Brussels-backed collaborative platform, known as the Social Observatory for Disinformation and Social Media Analysis (Soma). In turn, this has been attacked by anti-EU campaigners asking if this commission will examine the EU itself (Worstall 2019).

There are other moves afoot to assert the value of truthful reporting, among them Denmark’s TjekDet (as reported by Boffey 2019), not unlike the BBC’s More or Less. It is one of a group of 19 factcheckers operating across 13 EU member states as part of an independent platform Factcheck.EU, established by the International Fact-Checking Network at the Poynter Institute. Poynter itself, along with the UK FullFact, offers valuable resources for us journalism educators.

And lastly, but not least, as Rusel 2017 wrote, in we need to bring civility back to our discourse. Don’t we?

I should like to conclude, along with Bourdieu (1990) that “Enlightenment is on the side of those who turn their spotlight on our blinkers.” We will do our best to help young journalists be truthful reporters if we teach them how to be critical thinkers, who examine their own motives, listen to others, are civil even when they disagree and take no bullshit from anyone, on social media or off it.

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