

Review of: "Categories of Wrong Beliefs—A Preliminary Proposal"

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This brief communication deals with an important topic and pursues an interesting approach; the typology created is, at first glance, applicable and useful. Further application examples to test the types would be wise, though.

In addition to a few more specific comments (see below), I wondered whether agnotology might not have developed comparable typologies. After all, agnotology is precisely concerned with identifying practices and techniques that (deliberately) promote ignorance about certain, usually politically or ethically controversial topics. It would at least be worth checking whether similar attempts at classification already exist, and if so, what distinguishes the author's attempt (I'm not sure if the reference to stigmergy would be sufficient, see comment below).

p. 1 (PDF), "However, since beliefs are regulated by their truth conditions—a function of reality tested evidence for or against them—once there is probative evidence that a belief is false": What exactly is meant by "regulated" here? Who or what "regulates" beliefs, and how? The epistemic actor itself? The recognition/non-recognition within a specific epistemic community? A critical, non-ending discourse in society?

I am also missing the connection with values here. People who adamantly hold "wrong beliefs" will very likely also hold other epistemic, ethical, or pragmatic-instrumental values. To think that in reality beliefs are accepted or rejected solely on the basis of evidence is somewhat under-complex (one can of course demand this normatively, but it does not accurately describe the world).

p. 1 (PDF), "[...] There is now a robust endorsement of believing false beliefs [...]": What is the empirical evidence for this claim? And is it really a matter of "endorsing" the believing of (known?) false beliefs? Are these beliefs not actually being considered correct beliefs by most of their proponents?

p. 1 (as PDF), "Wrong beliefs, often termed 'alternative facts' by ardent proponents, [...]": Again: Empirical evidence for this assertion? Apart from that, my impression is that the term is mainly used by critics (such as the author), not by those who hold those wrong beliefs. Are there any reliable social science studies that show that "ardent proponents" often/regularly use this particular term in a justifying way?

p. 2 (PDF), "Stigmergy – Social, Media, Social-Media": It is not without danger to take a scientific term from one field, where it is also empirically confirmed, and apply it to another field where it is not (yet) sufficiently so. This often happens with terms from the natural sciences or medicine that are transferred to the social sciences or humanities (but then have a

different context of justification than the original one). Although the concept of stigmergy is already applied to human behaviour, it still seems to me to be more of an analogy/metaphor or a heuristic [in the latest version, the status of an analogy is now at least mentioned by the author in the abstract, but not in the text itself]. It is not something that should be taken “at face value” in the same way as its application to e.g. certain behaviors of ants or termites. So perhaps be a little more critical of the term (acknowledging possible limitations) when applying it to social media, etc.

p. 3 (PDF), “Epistemological Mapping”: To what extent does this typology really depend on the stigmergic genesis of the information/beliefs? Basically, this typology could also be formed and defined without reference to the analogy/metaphor/heuristic of stigmergy – it would also be possible to arrive at “no information”, “misinformation,” or “disinformation” in other, non-stigmergic ways, and these types can definitely be applied to the beliefs of groups or persons irrespective of the way the respective information was generated. Therefore, it would be important to clarify what role stigmergy plays in the formation or definition of this typology. At the moment, it seems to me that two different ideas are being discussed in the brief communication (stigmergy, epistemological typology), which are only coincidentally related to each other here, not necessarily. (If this was the intention, i.e., if no necessary relationship was claimed at all, this should perhaps be made clearer – at the moment, the impression is rather that the one, stigmergy, necessarily has something to do with the second, typology).