

Corruption: Abuse of Fuzziness of Human Understanding

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Abstract

Being a source of the richness of human interpretations of the social world, fuzziness of human understanding is, at the same time, vulnerable to abuses which exploit it in practices of corruption, and in so doing tend to corrupt vital processes in human understanding. This article draws on social fuzziology to argue that 'delusive' fuzziness is an essential contributor to corruption, by means of de-fuzzification or re-fuzzification in the interests of manipulation, and not of understanding.

Key words: *corruption, social fuzziology, delusive fuzziness*

1. Introduction

'Corruption' is often seen as a simple object conceptually, even though its roots may be hard to find and remove. Corruption, in this view, is a clear departure from what ought to be clear rules, legal and ethical, driven by interests and purposes that are outside the clear framework of the system at issue. Clarity (well defined and policed) is a high value, in this system, and lack of clarity is likely to be a contributing cause or condition of corruption. From the point of view of *Social fuzziology* (Dimitrov and Hodge, 2002) the case is not so simple. 'Corruption' like all terms describing the complexity of social reality needs to be seen as fuzzy, so that what is labelled as corrupt in terms of a certain social agent's framework may not be seen as such in terms of another agent's framework: and conversely, what is seen as legitimate practice in one framework can be seen as a major source of corruption from another point of view. This situation happens very commonly when one of those frameworks is the dominant

perspective in a given society, supported by its rulers, who are in a position to call what they do 'the law', and therefore by definition not 'corrupt'.

There is a second problem with the common view of 'corruption', from the viewpoint of social fuzziology. The supposed cause of or contributing factor to corruption, lack of clarity (or 'fuzziness') is in fact an essential resource for the health of every society, so that fuzziness can be a casualty, not a cause, of corrupt practices.

2. Exploring Fuzziness

Social Fuzziology explores the inherent fuzziness in our understanding of society and ourselves as its creators and products at the same time. 'Society' is not simply an object out there, to be understood well or poorly through theories and categories, and 'corruption' is not a raw fact, but always socially constructed, as a value and a set of practices. Society and corruption are co-constructed objects, a collective but not necessarily consensual set of meanings, expectations, roles and duties constraining the actions of self and others, as agents and affected participants, on-goingly created by interactions over time that are mediated through kinds of communication, which always appears to some extent fuzzy to the human mind. 'Society' in this sense exists as a network of fuzzy images, sustained by human thought and action. Society itself does not exist outside these processes. A group of human bodies is not a society, and without reference to these processes we cannot understand what any society does, as an entity or as an effect on actions and behaviours of individuals who compose it.

The constant interplay of human dynamics at the three major scales of their manifestation: individual (intrapersonal dynamics), social (interpersonal dynamics) and existential (universal dynamics), results in the emergence of spinning webs and 'whirlpools' of social interactions, which constantly reproduce forces and energies in order to strengthen or weaken the self-propelling capacity of these dynamics. There are so many intricately interwoven factors and conditions engaged in the realisation of this capacity of self-propulsion, that it is nonsensical to look for or to apply precise descriptions and definitions when explaining or dealing with their embodiments, infinite in their number and diversity.

Fuzziness has a crucial presence in our knowledge about ourselves and society. It is present or denied to different degrees in different theories of society (sociology, politics, history etc.) so the recognition of the role of fuzziness in any theory becomes a part of the evaluation of its adequacy. It is also present in the minds of social agents - politicians, prophets, advertisers, heads of media organisations, managers of companies and corporations, heads of academic departments, and also in members of the public, concerned citizens and activists, parents, children, lovers, friends: those who work together or against each other in everyday life, as the prime victims and targets of corrupt practices.

Social fuzziology is a scientific study of fuzziness of human knowing, experiencing and understanding. It is also a form of art - the art of coping with fuzziness inherent in our thinking, the art of searching for meaning while stuck to apparently irrational life trajectories - trajectories that inevitably approach death and physical disintegration. This fact makes it especially vulnerable to manipulation, at the hands of those who use its freedoms for their own purposes, and in the process damage the precious human resource of fuzziness.

The fuzziness in our understanding of society has roots in the self-referential nature of our awareness of human dynamics. It is an awareness of what happens inside and outside us as a *living movement in which we are also included*, without fixing it or standing apart from it. It is an awareness of life as it

unfolds through each of us, through our society and through the universe, a profound awareness of human dynamics working within us. Such awareness implies an approach which is different from simply observing, fixing and comprehending social processes as if they are 'over there' (outside of the observers' mind). In becoming aware about the social dynamics, our experience and understanding of them remain inseparably connected with the innermost nature of each of us, and this experience and understanding gradually (or suddenly) transform one's individuality while taking hold of it.

Therefore, to grasp the fuzziness of our social experience, of what we know and understand about society, means to grasp the fuzziness of one's unique individual experience, of one's own knowledge about oneself. This kind of fuzziness changes (moves, evolves, transforms) together with the changes (movement, evolution and transformation) of each of us.

When fuzziness moves, transforms and evolves, we have a greater chance to see an increased number of its limitless embodiments and sharpen our awareness of:

- the dynamics of our inner nature
- the webs and 'whirlpools' of our social interactions
- the evolving dynamics of the natural environment and our vital inseparability from these dynamics
- the ways in which life-supporting rhythm manifests through us and the environment
- the creative power of our inspiration and intuition
- the enigma of the spiritual continuity of existence.

Social fuzziology digs into the fuzziness of our understanding of all these phenomena as they cross our inner being, while responding to the turbulent dynamics of social life. It also traces the deformations of these capacities in normal social functions, in what is recognized widely as 'corruption' and in practices which attack the environment which social fuzziness needs in order to act with justice and health.

3. Delusive Fuzziness and Corruption in Tandem

There is a paradox in the role of fuzziness in social life, especially in dealing with such complexities as arise in various sectors of public life, in nations and corporations, large and small, and in every social agent or group at every level. On the one hand, fuzziness of thinking is indispensable for anyone seeking to understand this world better. Fuzzy knowing will not give certain truths for uncertain situations, but it will be a creative kind of response. This fuzziness can be called *reflexive*, since it reflects and resonates with the uncertainty of knowing and the known. However, often the level of fuzziness generated seems unmanageable to people, a hindrance to understanding and action. In this situation they become vulnerable to a widespread quality in modern life we called *delusive* fuzziness.

It is the delusive fuzziness that accompanies almost any act of corruption in society.

Delusive fuzziness differs from reflexive fuzziness in two respects. It always involves *re-fuzzification* from a prior act of *de-fuzzification*. What does this mean? Let assume that the person X has some fuzzy knowledge about a complex real-life situation (process, state of affairs, event). If X plans to undertake actions of corruption, X tends to *de-fuzzify* the fuzziness of his or her knowledge about this situation, that is, to formulate as crisp as possible for himself (herself) certain goals and algorithms how to achieve them (for example, to (mis)appropriate a certain amount of money, to tarnish somebody's name, to

deceive or discredit another person or a group of people, etc.). As far as, the goals and algorithms must be kept in secrecy, X re-fuzzify them, that is, prepares delusive versions of them which can be shared with those who may be interested in what X is thinking or doing in relation to the situation under consideration. The re-fuzzification is always motivated to deceive and manipulate the receivers, driven by strong interests and crisp analyses of power in the relationship. The tactic of de-fuzzification and re-fuzzification makes use of the fuzziness imbedded in human understanding of social reality in attempts to misuse or abuse it, and thus to accomplish certain pre-planned acts of corruption.

Most speeches and promises of charismatic leaders in business and politics are full of delusive fuzziness and thus impregnated with seeds of virtual or actual corruption, designed to evoke a high degree of fuzziness of people's understanding and hide motives and ideas very different from what the speakers imply or suggest. Delusive fuzziness not only obscures a complex picture of reality, it distorts our self- understanding and makes corruption blossom.

Examples

(1) The Enron scandal is now one of the emblems of corruption in modern big business. We will look first at an instance which is not in itself corrupt, yet illustrates the mind set that bred corruption, which emerged in the press after the company had collapsed.

The energy giant Enron used the most modern technology to decide when to exert pressure on politicians of USA, according to a report today by *The Washington Post*. The Texan corporation used a computer program with the code name of *Matrix* to observe the economic consequences for Enron's business of various modifications foreshadowed in the legislation. The pressure groups entered into the program all the details of the proposed law. If the costs were very high for Enron, the lobbyists would begin to exercise pressure on the politicians. (*La Jornada* 11 February, 2002, p. 22, our translation)

In this case, the executives of this corporation used 'the most modern technology' driven by crisp programming to ask and answer the questions they wanted answers on, and this alone provided the framework for the case their lobbyists tried to turn into a program of action, thus turning, as far as they could, a bill designed for the nation as a whole into a bill to serve the profit motives of one giant corporation. To exert pressure in this way is not illegal in USA, so it is not classified as 'corrupt', yet its tendency is manifestly to corrupt the democratic processes. Some of the measures used – pressure beyond a certain level, means of persuasion close to blackmail or bribes – may have been on the edge of what the system would have accepted, if it had known. But equally important to note is the reliance on the crisp thinking of the computer program, which allowed these executives to hand over to a machine a series of decisions that were properly their province as executives, employed (on high salaries) to weigh many factors into complex decisions which should have included ethical dimensions. The crisp logic, dividing decisions into ethical and financial and ignoring the former, was the logic that ran throughout Enron, and allowed the culture of corruption to flourish as it did.

(2) Delusive fuzziness also operates in the political environment, often not recognized as 'corruption' To illustrate we will take a speech made by President Bush on 22 September 2001, announcing to Congress and the nation the actions he intended to take in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Buildings and the Pentagon. This was a highly successful speech for its immediate constituency, the US people, generating a 91% approval rating for the President who not long before was languishing in the low 50s. Yet this speech, we will argue, was a

corruption of the political process, as serious as the fraud in Enron, yet entirely 'normal' and legal. How did it work, and what can social fuzziology say about it?

The speech began: "Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done".

This speech pivots around a classic form of delusive fuzziness: the use of abstract concepts separated from contexts of application, so that they wait to be filled by speakers and hearers alike, in a creative act that is also wide open to manipulation. The two terms repeated in the speech were 'freedom' (9 times) and 'justice' (3 times). In delusive fuzziness, not only is the scope of the term extended arbitrarily so that it is not clear what it refers to (who is free? US citizens? Their politicians? Others in the world oppressed by American policies?). Nor is it clear how 'freedom' applies in this case. For instance, Bush claims the motive for the terrorists is their hatred of 'freedom'; Americans are asking "Why do they hate us?" and he answers: "They hate our freedoms" (Sydney Morning Herald, September 22-23, p. 11). But Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir, a Muslim leader, offered a different answer: 'the anger among the oppressed.' The point is not that this is a true and exact description of the motives of the terrorists, but that this is what they say is their motive, and Bush's statement is only successful with his American audience – as it undoubtedly was – because 'freedom' had first been emptied almost entirely of specific content, so that the extremely fuzzy residue could be more easily applied to the motives of 'the enemy'.

The second tactic used in the speech is to use statements that initially seem crisp, clear and definite but which have an unmanageably large and unclear scope: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists".

Its terms seem absolute and black-and-white, with no fuzzy hedges. It constructs the image of the President as resolute, decisive, making statements that are reassuringly crisp (reassuring for those who see the situation as too unclear). But the apparent crispness comes into conflict with other parts of the text. "Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them". That is, the target itself is complex and diffused – the kind of fuzzy object thrown up by globalisation. He gives some figures: "thousands of these terrorists in more than 60 countries" – a large figure and highly unspecific. Is USA for instance among these countries? Is he declaring war on a third of the globe? If so, there is danger indeed, as he said at the beginning, but much of that is created by the interaction between the crispness of his choice, and the fuzziness of the world as he constructs it.

This speech, and the US policy it announces, is delusive, in that the President will have been advised by many experts how complex the situation really is when viewed on a global level. The terms he uses are both apparently 'simple', pairs of binary opposites, but as the public tries to make sense of them they are filled both with the fuzziness of different people's knowledge, desires and fears. It is also very successful, and typical of the rhetoric of many other leaders, in other administrations, in other countries.

4. Activators and Inhibitors of Corruption

In these as in other comparable instances, the mass media plays a crucial role. They facilitate the spread of corruption at the highest echelons of the governing bodies, injecting fuzziness into human brains to go with an ever-accelerating tempo. Here is what one former chief of staff of the "New York Times," called by his peers "the dean of his profession", used to say to his colleagues: "I am paid weekly for keeping my honest opinions out of the paper I

am connected with. Others of you are paid similar salaries for similar things, and any of you who would be so foolish as to write honest opinions would be out on the streets looking for another job. If I allowed my honest opinions to appear in one issue of my paper, before twenty-four hours my occupation would be gone. The business of the journalist is to destroy truth; To lie outright; To pervert; To vilify; To fawn at the feet of mammon, and to sell his country and his race for his daily bread. You know it and I know it ... We are the tools and vassals for rich men behind the scenes. We are the jumping jacks, they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities and or lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes" (this quotation is based on a material distributed through Internet at <http://www.teamlaw.org/>).

This statement may sound over dramatic. Noam Chomsky, the distinguished linguist and critic of American imperialism, describes the process more dispassionately. His book "Manufacturing Consent: 'The Political Economy of the Mass Media'" 'traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow corrupted rulers and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public... The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print.' (Herman & Chomsky, 2002)

What Chomsky describes is a massive simplification – removing alternative voices and facts – which de-fuzzifies the news before adding the specious re-fuzzification of 'sensationalism'. He claims that these filters are not neutral attempts to adjust the complexity of the world to the simple capacities of the mass reader. Their negative role of filter is designed to allow the voice of government and powerful interests full sway. In the case of the 'war on terrorism', newspapers throughout USA as in Australia and other countries devoted massive coverage to the viewpoints of government spokespersons, and almost none to those who had a deeper knowledge of Islam in all its forms in a complex world.

Hardt and Negri (Hardt and Negri, 2000) deal with the crucial topic, of how 'global citizenship' can become a reality, with a majority able to participate with understanding in the debates facing the globe. (p. 398). We suggest that one part of the answer to resist corruption is to make available some of the basic insights and strategies of social fuzziology. The authors have in mind what they call 'the multitude'. We have in mind also all educated citizens, who are typically kept entrapped by the information they derive from the media and other sources, and whose training does not alert them to the need to react differently.

This is because acquisition and making sense of social information crucially differs from the analogous processes in science or engineering. In the latter we collect information in order to reduce the fuzziness imbedded in our knowledge of nature (reflected in various branches of the natural science) or human-made environment (reflected in the engineering science and technology). The approach of reducing fuzziness does not work with social information because society is not separated from us. We are society - it consists of us, and we also constantly create, destroy and accumulate an infinite amount of social information by sharing our experiences, our thoughts and views, feelings and emotions, beliefs and dreams.

At the same time, society crucially affects us in the process of exchange of social information encapsulated in its numerous multimedia incarnations. What we hear, watch, read and write influence our experience, the ways we think, feel, believe, dream, aspire, and thus create or destroy our capacity to be global citizens, may help us disclose or, on the contrary, may prevent us from seeing the multifaceted acts of corruption in society.

As shown in (Dimitrov, 2003) the self-organization of human dynamics, their evolution and transformation work only with *authentic* dynamics. Unfortunately, the social dynamics are not authentic: the unequal distribution of power in society, together with the suppression and fear it causes, impede the

authentic expression of human dynamics. People are forced to play games, pretend, exhibit vanity and pride, reputation and fame, ambition and honour; all these qualities inevitably require the social arena to express and gratify themselves while strengthening the roots of corruption in society. At the level of an individual, these qualities can be harnessed - it is not too hard for an individual to behave authentically. When communing with ourselves, we *are* able to genuinely express our thoughts and feelings, honestly reflect upon our experiences, and see ourselves as we are - with no masks to carry and roles to play.

One needs to be aware of the obstructions which society tries to create on one's understanding of social reality. All kinds of manipulation, propaganda and brainwashing act as powerful catalysts for the emergence and development of corruption in society; they bombard our minds, obscure our consciousness, and weaken our ability to navigate into social complexity. When aware of this, we can sharpen our vigilance and create tools for disclosing the acts of corruption and minimizing their effects on our lives. The more advanced we are on the way to wisdom, the more clearly we recognize any act of corruption. And the higher and purer our moral, ethical and spiritual attitudes, the more strongly we resist social forces trying to involve us into a corruption-oriented behaviour.

Notes

This article draws on some materials previously published in *Social Fuzziology* (Dimitrov, V and Hodge, B, Heidelberg and New York: Springer Verlag, 2002).

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