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Overcoming the objectivity of the senses: Enhancing journalism practice through Eastern philosophies.

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This article attempts to broaden the theoretical boundaries of journalism studies by re-examining journalism practices in the context of divisions between Western and Eastern philosophies. It looks at journalistic techniques of truth-seeking with particular emphasis on i) *the ability to pick up a 'scoop'*, that is an original story; ii) interviewing as an art of inquiry, and iii) the use of statistics in supporting evidence. By so doing, the authors want not only to problematise the debates between epistemology and ontology within the boundaries of journalism studies, but also see how Eastern philosophies can help to allocate this debate in a more globalised context that can overcome the limitations set by the Enlightenment as a political project.

Key words: Enlightenment, Epistemology, Hinduism, Journalism, Objectivity, Senses

Introduction

Journalism in the West is historically interlinked with the Enlightenment project (Pettegree, 2014). As such, embraces the idea that science can be used to understand individuals and society by separating rational facts from 'irrational' beliefs. In so doing, journalism sees itself as seeker of factual and objective 'truth', which therefore is committed to freedom for rational reasoning. In fact, as Immanuel Kant said, "if anything, the enlightenment requires nothing but freedom [...] freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters" (1784). However, not all matters are the same and, in journalism it is important to distinguish between the concrete, intuitive, perceptual knowledge of objects and the abstract, discursive, conceptual knowledge of thoughts as journalists deal mostly with socially constructed realities.

To overcome these limitations inherited from the Enlightenment, we have explored the potential of developing the principles of Eastern epistemology within the realm of journalism theory and practice, in particular those principles associated with the Nyaya School as a possible way of enhancing the methods of journalism inquiry. To do so, we use the terms 'globalising' and 'globalisation' under the interpretation given by Shelton Gunaratne (2005, 2015) who sees in them the intention to expand the field of communication studies as a humanocentric enterprise.

However, we must clarify that we set the present work at the crossroad between West and East¹ not as a certainty but instead as attempt to provoke irritation, which as Niklas Luhmann (1995) said, can be precious to opening new understandings. The aim of this provocation is therefore to challenge preconceptions of journalism practice conceived historically within the Enlightenment project. In so doing, we want to take the debate in a different direction. In other words, we want to question the

normative claim that journalism is or should be somehow scientific or ‘pragmatically objective’ (Ward, 2004) in its quest for ‘truth’.

Consequently, we discuss the limitations of scientific paradigm for journalism as a social practice. We want to explore how the overreliance on the ‘objectivity of the senses’, predicated by Kantian philosophy and expressed in the different journalistic techniques, affects truth-seeking as it confines journalism inquiry to a Enlightenment rationale that erects barriers between the ‘truth’ as product of a political convention (such as international law or ethical behaviour) and that ‘truth’ which emanates from individual experiences and beliefs.

To illustrate our argument, we will examine approaches commonly used by journalists to produce knowledge. These are: firstly the way they recognise what news is; secondly, the way journalists interview the subject of their stories, which we believe is a technique framed by utilitarian logics; and thirdly, the usage of statistics in supporting the journalistic investigation, validation and contextualisation of news.

In this sense, Indian epistemology can help us re-position the debate in a different and more globalised perspective. Under this umbrella-term we have considered the Nyaya School (literally “rules or method of reasoning”), precisely because it has studied the nature of reasoning in the attempt to map pathways which can lead to veridical inferential cognition. According to Stephen Phillips (2012), Nyaya centres on the notion of “knowledge-sources” (pramana), and a conception of epistemic responsibility that allows for default, unreflective justification accorded to a presumably veridical cognition. By so doing, we believe that journalists would be able to both realise and problematise the sensate ‘truth’ lying between the conventional and the absolute.

West and East

It is important to remember that while science focuses on verifying the conventional ‘truth’ concerning observable phenomena, Eastern phenomenology instead focuses on verifying the absolute ‘truth’ (beyond the conventional) that, according to Gunaratne (2015), is “experientially discovered” and which concerns mental phenomena and their internal or external extensions. These two main approaches to ‘truth’ are valid for their respective practitioners in their own public spheres and therefore useful in understanding ‘truth’ in the context of globalisation.

Historically, no strong division between science and rationalist/empiricist philosophy existed in the period between the scientific revolution and the end of the 18th century (Gunaratne, 2015). Neither was there a distinction between the categories of ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ (Fitzgerald, 2000; 2010). The key turning point was marked by the publication of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1784) in which he distinguished between the world as we know it (phenomena) and the world as it is in itself (noumena). Since then, science was allocated empirical investigation of phenomena, while questions involving noumena were deemed as metaphysics.

What came then to be called ‘science’, Gunaratne (2015) says, was an integral part of (natural) philosophy. In fact, the incorporation of the term ‘scientist’ in the 19th century by William Whewell was a reflection of a historical development that claimed superior knowledge as it detached itself from religion and belief. It was a process of detachment that was closely linked to the emergence of the European colonial powers and the need to understand better the subjugated colonies without empathy (Anderson, 2001). Therefore, in adopting the classical Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm, the Western

world set its investigation of reality based on gathering a body of objective 'truths' that could be demonstrated by reliability and measurability. According to Ronkin (2005), given the success of science, other approaches to knowledge were relegated to the status of metaphysics.

The success of Western science cannot be, however, disassociated from the rise of European empires and its liberal project, which created the human slavery across the globe necessary to fuel the emerging Industrial Revolution (Losurdo, 2014) and capitalism as a new system (Blackburn, 2011). It is important also to remember that modern science was established at the same time in which the land enclosures and the destruction of collective property in England was taking place both in its colonies and at home. This was a process that demanded a worldview that put the individual at the centre of the universe rather than as a part of a wider collective society. Consequently, while Eastern thinking emphasised systems (the interconnection, interdependence and interactions of all elements), Western science emphasised instead division of wholes into parts and presumed that each had individuality (self/soul) of its own.

Not surprisingly, journalism as a historical entity ended up separating facts from beliefs as a way of seeking 'truth'. For journalists the only 'experience' is that of an interpretation of the facts based on 'science'. Because of this unidimensional understanding of what 'experience' means, journalism practice tries to replicate science, which aims at establishing the laws of nature (conventional or rational truth) through 'objectively' observing the movement of energy and matter over the lapse of time-space. However, what journalism failed to understand is that 'science' is in many cases a set of pre-conceptualised worldviews that are already accepted as conventions even before the facts are gathered, something that Thomas S. Khun (1962) pointed out when explaining the paradigms that dominate science.

Another departure point between West and East in relation to journalism is its dependence on the senses to know the 'truth'. News editors, for example, require journalists to check their facts with 'eye witnesses' or 'authoritative voices' such as experts to verify the stories prior to releasing them to the public. The journalist himself/herself depends on what s/he sees and hears. In contraposition, in Indian philosophy (Raman, 2011) the Vedic thinkers already distinguished between what we come to know through our senses (*pratyaksha*) and the knowledge that is remote from the senses (*proksha*). Indeed, Eastern tradition takes a more holistic view wherein epistemology is inseparable from ontology (Rošker, 2014), as in its view of the world every object of cognition is also cognition itself.

For Vedic thinkers, there are two kinds of knowledge: first, there is knowledge about matters of everyday interest, empirical knowledge, knowledge of history, literature and philosophy. Everything we learn from books and teachers, constitute this kind of knowledge, which tells us about our past, about the world, even about arts and culture. The other kind of knowledge relates to that which never perishes; it tells us about the essence of things. The Upanishads often refer to this kind of knowledge (Keith, 2007). This is the type of knowledge that, one could argue, should inform journalism in its quest for social justice as a universal value.

However, journalists cannot see 'justice' as 'truth', because they tend to regard it as value rather than a fact, which goes to underline the profound dilemma that modern journalism faces because of its subservience to the Enlightenment project. Something that is illustrated by The Independent newspaper correspondent for the Middle East, Robert Fisk, when responding to accusations of bias against Israel in his coverage of the Palestine occupation,

The Middle East is not a football match. [...] It's a bloody tragedy and I believe that journalists who work in the Middle East should be neutral and objective on the side of those who suffer (Nolan, 2013).

From an Eastern perspective, the problem for journalism is that it often obfuscates 'rational truth' with 'conventions'. These conventions then become instrumental in determining the 'truth' about concepts such as 'famines', 'democracy,' 'progress,' 'secularism' and 'equality.' Nonetheless, such categories become deeply problematised once journalists step out of these conventions (i.e., the very distinctive news coverage that Malcolm X and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. received respectively by the U.S. and European mainstream media during the U.S. civil rights movement).

Moreover, what we can learn from the very flawed coverage of conflicts such as the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the new millennium is the need to revisit the presumed polarities of binary such as object/subject, truth/falsehood, reality/fiction and phenomena/noumena. We can see this in action every time journalism tries to make clear-cut scientific distinctions of things and people when covering very complex events.

Contrary to the view that journalism can explain and rationalise human behaviour through science (Meyer, 2002, p. 4), human behaviour and society dynamics tend to define in many occasions scientific rationale. In relation to this, Ralph Gun Hoy Siu highlighted how the rational/scientific knowledge was in tune with the rational man, but it excluded the intuitive/sensate knowledge associated with the human mind (1964 [1957]). For Western journalists their methods of inquiry allow them to aspire to be scientific, therefore able to present to the public demonstrable and experimentally sound 'truth'.

However, they forget that the gathering and dissemination of facts does not necessarily translate into 'truth'. In fact and contrary to romanticised narratives of journalists speaking 'truth' to power, for the great majority of people in the planet, journalism has been a very accommodating friend of power. The silence of the European and U.S. media in the face of systematic repression of Argelians during the colonial times and, more recently in Egypt and Bahrain in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the blunt manipulation of U.S. media when covering the illegal occupation of Palestine, the hypocrisy of broadcasters when dealing with bankers who stole the wealth of two generations and who continue to pass as honourable men while single mothers who claim benefits are reduced to a caricature of villains in the press, are all stories that confirm the need to re-examine the practices and methodologies of journalism.

Overall, journalism is unable to expose these 'truths' because of its emphasis on the individual rather than on the system. Most reporters produce their stories under the *ceteris paribus* assumption in order to extract 'objective truth', which can help explain why they fail to foresee the 2008 financial crisis or question the monetary assumptions of then Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, that led to the crisis.

It is in relation to this that Eastern philosophies could be valuable to journalism inquiry as they emphasise systems thinking (Gunaratne, 2015). While Eastern thinking sees the virtues of humility, with Buddhism asserting that no 'being' in the world has a self or a soul, Western thinking promotes individualism by clinging to the notion of a self/soul (part of Alan Greenspan's assumptions). To make matters worse, journalists operate within news cultures that promote the exaltation of the Ego

(Slattery, 2013), therefore their stories are about heroes and villains, goodies and baddies and only in very few cases about collectives and society as a whole.

Consequently, if journalism aspires to achieve ‘truth’, it ought to approach the world in a different manner, one that incorporates an epistemology that goes beyond the senses. To provoke the thinking about how this can be achieved, we have examined some of the methods of inquiry used by journalists. In so doing, we want to look at these strategies in the light of Eastern philosophies to explore alternative paths to ‘truth’ and at the same time the endless possibilities offered by the re-conceptualisation of journalism practices.

A Scoop for News

In the film *The Paper* (1994), the main character Henry Hackett, a news editor of a New York City tabloid, goes for a job interview in another newspaper and notices in the office of his prospective boss a series of elements that allow him to guess and then produce an important scoop for that day. This particular scene highlights very well the ability of journalists to see a potential news story where few others can.

This is a phenomenon often referred to as having a ‘nose for the news’; an ‘inherent quality’ of journalists that derives from a cognitive process, well described by Kahneman (2012) as the interaction between System 1 and System 2 of intelligence. Overall, this metaphor of a body part to indicate an ability to access ‘truth’ has occupied a central place in journalists’ discourses as “it appears to express something essential about their identity, profession, practice, and how they see and experience the world” (Chrystall, 2012, p. 22). Within prevalent news cultures, this ‘nose for the news’ can only be acquired once s/he is in the job and only after immersing him/herself in the rituals that characterise the work carried out in the newsrooms. This method of inquiry is crucial in establishing what is newsworthy and in defining the news agenda.

This ‘nose for the news’ has been explained as an ability to spot both ‘weak signals’ (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990) and ‘feeling signals’ (Uskali, 2002). That is the reporter’s own feeling that there is something happening out there; almost impossible to articulate in words. In his own research about the Finnish press, Maki Uskali found several cases in which the reporter was able to forecast the future of a story without a single source, nor strong arguments. He concluded that weak signals were identified in almost every third journalistic story, which was far more than expected (Uskali, 2005, p. 33) for a professional practice that claims to set ‘feelings aside’. Weak signals are picked by the receptiveness of the ‘expert intuition’ built upon past experiences. Daniel Kahneman points out that “expert intuition strikes us as magical, but it is not. Indeed, each of us performs feats of intuitive expertise many times each day” (2012, p. 11).

However, Kahneman’s explanation does not resolve –at least in the case of journalism- why reporters attribute to this signs any credibility at all. In relation to the allocation of ‘legitimacy’ and ‘credibility’ to these weak signals, the Nyaya School would invoke the idea of ‘experts’, which coincides with that of ‘authority’ or ‘credible person’ (apta) and therefore more precisely that of ‘testimony’ (sabda) (Dasti, 2001); something that in English could be translated into ‘expertise’, ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘reliability’. In other words, journalists trust their own expertise to recognise, in these particular cases, their own feelings towards the weak signals. As the Nyaya-Sutra points out, the mere absence of doubt in the asserter’s ability to speak authoritatively about the issue at hand is enough (Dasti, 2001). In other words, as in the case of the fictional character Henry Hackett, journalists who stick to their

guts in reading weak signals not only will believe in themselves but also will be followed by the rest of the newsroom.

On such premises is worth bringing into this discussion Uddyotakara, the 6th century CE philosopher, who noted that testimonial utterances may be divided into those whose contents are originally generated by perception or by inference. The 9th century CE philosopher Jayanta Bhatta likewise claims that the veridicality or non-veridicality of a testimonial cognition is dependent on the speaker's knowledge of the content of her/his statement and his/her honesty in relating it. Uddyotakara recognises that testimony has the widest range of any source of knowledge, far outstripping what one may know from personal perception, inference or analogy.

Media scholars such as S. H. Stocking and P. H. Gross (1989) have already warned journalists against committing themselves to 'the eyewitness fallacy' that is overestimating the reliability of eyewitness reports as compared with other sources of information. Journalistic practice, meanwhile, has come to accept that the information processing factors such as prejudices, prior expectations, values, poor insight, visual conditions and emotional stress, affect the naturalness and authenticity of reasoning.

As a matter of clarity, along with the Western distinctions of types of reasoning such as induction, deduction and abduction, we also like to take into consideration the concept of analogy as an essential part of the journalistic practice that could fit the discipline of verification. Nyaya-Sutra 1.1.6 points out that "analogy makes an object known by similarity with something already known" (Dasti, 2001). In spotting weak signals, what journalists really do is to associate these with past experiences to give them veridical cognition. There is, however, a hitch in this analogical thinking, as explained by Akhandadhi Das (2015) in the BBC Radio 4 programme Thought for the Day when commenting on the case of NBC anchor-man, Brian Williams, who had falsely claimed to have been on a helicopter hit by a rocket in Iraq.

The issue is that a lot of what journalism does to inquiry 'truth' is based on memory, and memory is neither a rational construction or scientifically auditable. In this context, it is worth citing Das (2015) who says that the Hindu texts offer warning that in general humans are prone to four mental foibles: we have imperfect and limited senses that often do not give us a true or complete picture; we make mistakes; we confuse one thing for another; and we have a tendency to cheat. The case of Brian Williams is emblematic of all three. In fact, as Professor Christopher French (Das, 2015) says, also commenting on William's case, when we re-tell an incident we tend to embellish the details and the new account may become a false memory, however one that many journalists -in all honesty- may believe is true.

Re-thinking interviewing

Another very important possibility to potentially change journalistic practices can take place by re-examining the interviewing techniques used by mainstream journalists. In so doing, it is possible to modify the outcome of the story and help create regimes of empathy (a component of *daya*, the virtue of compassion) and engagement that could make news far more appealing to the members of the public in the current age. Indeed, Lillie Chouliaraki (2006) argues that the transformation in the aesthetics and ethics of solidarity in the West reflects a wider mutation in the communicative structure of humanitarianism. She points out that the spectators and the victims of tragedy and suffering meet in a mirror structure where this encounter is reduced to an often narcissist self-reflection that involve people like 'us' feeling good about mediated performances of compassion (*daya*). Furthermore, and

contrary to the blunt notion of objectivity, Romaine Smith Fullerton, a professor of information and media studies at the University of Western Ontario, points out,

I don't think that having a compassionate outlook is in any way at odds with doing one's job as serving the public interest [...] I think not to have compassion might, in fact, undermine your ability to do your job as a servant of the public interest (Harland, 2008)

Generally speaking, to have compassion or to 'suffer with' another (from the Latin *cum-patior*) implies a quality of imagination and an identifying with the other's pain as something we can vicariously feel along with them, even if tangentially. Dynamic compassion (*atisha*), also called *metta* in the wisdom (*panna*) dimension of the Buddhist middle path (Gunaratne et al 2015), is an active choice to want with others and to want for others the alleviation of their suffering. In acting compassionately, we acknowledge that we all share the same conditions. Buddhist compassion (also known as *karuna*) is seen as the appropriate human response to understanding the interdependence and mutual welfare of all beings.

Similarly, Luc Boltanski (1999) points out that the legitimacy of current humanitarian communication is not simply a problem of appeal but also a problem in the very relationship between humanitarianism and politics. This might be true, but appeal is still crucial if journalists want public engagement with serious issues. The question is: how can this appeal be achieved in the current times? One possible answer is that journalism needs to revise its approaches and practices as to how it gathers information and presents 'truth' to the public. Moreover, Gunaratne et al (2015) suggest a new approach called 'mindful journalism' based on the crux of Buddhism to reduce the level of mental distress (*dukkha*) or pollution engendered by commoditised journalism.

It is here that is worth re-examining one of the key methods that mainstream journalists used to inquiry 'truth'. Over the past hundred years, the journalistic interview has become the tool par excellence in the profession and the most legitimate manner to validate the news (Schlesinger, 1987; Tuchman, 1972). Journalists do this by triangulating multiple and sometimes conflicting views, as well as the recurrent use of voices that can claim or be perceived as having authority.

These methods are important not only because they allow gathering information and versions of the events, but also because they have become a ritual to validate and protect the journalists' own version of events (Tuchman, 1972). Journalistic interviews are defined by utilitarian market logic to attract audiences. Consequently, most interviews are structured not as a method of listening but rather to create and highlight conflict. According to mainstream practice, 'good' journalists are those who can deliver a high level of tension and confrontation in their interviews.

However, as successful as these techniques might have been in the past, journalism as a profession and traditional news media as a working environment face new challenges. This in such a way, that traditional interviewing seems now inadequate to create the type of civic engagement that journalism requires in order to fulfil its commitment towards social justice and that it needs to create more ample and permanent links with the society. Furthermore, traditional interviewing techniques hinder the ability of journalists to engage with the deeper issue of emotions as it deliberately tries to avoid moral engagement.

In fact, journalistic interviews as they stand are far from a dialogic process, because listening, in terms of understanding the 'truth' of whoever speaks, is not part of the equation of the current format of inquiry. One reason for this is journalism's subservience to the Enlightenment's individualistic

approach. Consequently, it does not consider the interviewer and the interviewee as part of the same process nor does it treat those who take part as equals. On the contrary, journalistic interviews advance detachment from the interviewee to present an objectivised narrative that assigns power to the interviewer, who makes the question and seeks the answers s/he wants to hear.

What traditional interview techniques do instead, is reinforcing the detachment as emotion that becomes the only background of the facts provided by the witnesses of tragedies and sufferings. Hence, the victims and those who suffer are allowed to show their emotional discharged to the pain and stress caused by the event and tragedy being reported; they are expected to offer facts. The women whose family have been killed in Syria by a gas attack is paraded crying in front the cameras and then immediately asked how many members of her family have been killed, how where they killed and who does she think killed them. As a rape victim in a police precinct, she is required to recount the events of her own tragedy in a way that suits the journalistic formats of fact-based reporting.

The process of interviewing then takes place under the false assumption of emotional detachment, which leads to a subsequent type of intervention in which journalists have to set aside any possible emotional connection with the interviewees. The end result is an emotionless by-product that offers facts but no emotional context to the events. The pain and suffering is often presented but in term of the 'other' as victims rather than as equals. This has been until now the predominant format of journalistic interviewing. In so doing, it decontextualises news event from its collective emotional meaning and therefore deprives journalism from one of its most useful tools; the ability to create relationships between fellow citizens of the world.

The lack of awareness about the interdependence of all beings and mutual causality, we argue, not only de-humanises the victims while offering a type of narrative that further detach the audiences from the people in the story, but also further detach us from 'truth' as a human value. Moreover as traditional journalistic interviewing techniques are closely associated with the process of 'othering'.

If instead journalism wants to seek 'truth', it should set itself to fulfil the ethical requirement of fostering common knowledge and developing a communicative relationship between journalists, the victims of tragedy and the news source. To achieve this, journalism needs to undertake a reappraisal of journalistic interviewing techniques in the coverage of news to eliminate the false dichotomies between 'them' and 'us'. This could encourage a type of journalism that is far more humanitarian and engaging for the modern types of audiences and which is overall more humanocentric.

This is where Eastern philosophies play an important role as it sees the observer and observed as part of the same process. What Ravi Ravindra (2011) suggests, for example, is that being simultaneously a scientist and a yogi is what makes him a sage. In the same way, journalists could be better positioned to seek 'truth' if they saw themselves as both reporters and part of the communities they cover.

Furthermore, by re-defining the art of listening in the terms of Eastern philosophies, journalism could become more receptive to globalised issues in terms of dependent co-arising (*paticca samuppada*). It could also help to transform the ultimate outcome, offering a type of content that is far more appealing and engaging for the readers. This while fulfilling the moral duty of journalism to encourage social awareness and deliver justice by overcoming the objectivity of the senses or, better say, overcoming mental formations (*sankhara*) conditioned by the interaction of a dozen or so causal links, which account for our perpetual discontent (*dukkha*). This is the path toward what has been called 'mindful journalism' (Gunaratne, et al., 2015).

To problematise this point further toward a more circumstantiated analysis, we need to draw the attention to the fact that Eastern epistemology is inseparable from ontology and sees every object of cognition as cognition itself. The manner of its existence is thus linked to our understanding of it. Because this connection goes both ways, their relation is not a relation of single sided dependence and determination, but an interaction that includes co-dependence; we cannot state this is a solipsistic conceptualisation of the world. Something that is very relevant to those who want to overcome current power relations in the journalistic practice of interviewing.

The question arises as to why journalism should revisit this technique in the first place. The answer can be found perhaps in John Rawls (1999) when he suggested that individuals are willing to share their wealth with the rest of society when they perceived that there is a possibility that tragedy and suffering can happen to them too. Under this assumption, the role of journalism is therefore to create an empathic connection that can foster not only social responsibility but a deep sense of equality in the opportunities and risks in society regardless of the background of the audiences and of those who face suffering. In this way, journalism can help create a framework of solidarity in which journalists and their audience feel that interdependence with those on the other side of the stick because they are all 'part of the whole'. Joanna Macy explained this by saying,

In dependent co-arising, self, society, and world are reciprocally modified by their interaction, as they form relationships and are in turn conditioned by them. The Western idea contrasts with such a view to the extent that it presumes a free association between individuals who remain basically distinct and unaltered by such association. (Macy, 1991)

We are not calling for a total dismissal of the traditional interviewing techniques, but for a revised approach in which journalists learn to listen to their sources and to the general public in different ways by increasing their awareness of interdependence and co-arising. We argue that journalists should empathically connect to their interviewees and hear what they say by being aware of *paticca samuppada* that is the principle of interdependent causation.

However, to do so journalists will need to accept these accounts as 'legitimate' and as 'valid' as those offered by power in the larger scheme of news gathering and production. In other words, journalists will need to place the views and feelings of a war widow or the civilians in enemy territory at the same level as that of a general explaining a military operation; all this with a clear understanding of the nature of the causal relation which is the key to understanding the nature of reality itself and of our relation to it.

Statistics and 'truth'

The popular adage 'there is safety in numbers' has indeed a strong theoretical basis. One important feature of any scientific description is that it attempts to be quantitative. According to the fathers of modern science, quantity is the fundamental feature of things, prior to other categories; in the realm of knowledge, quantity is the sole feature of reality. "Just as the eye was made to see colours and the ear to hear sounds" wrote Johannes Kepler "so the human mind was made to understand, not whatever you please, but quantity" (Hiebert, 2008, p. 192).

Adapting scientific methods to human affairs, including journalism, was the central point for those advancing the idea of Enlightenment as a political project. Since then onwards, many journalists enthusiastically have embraced the 'scientific' notion of journalism. Lawrence Cranberg has claimed that "journalism itself is a science and a properly qualified, responsible journalist is a practising scientist". Both scientists and journalists, he adds, "march to the same orders and serve the common need of mankind for shared knowledge and understanding" (Meyer, 2002, p. 4). As a corollary to this view, Philip Meyer has argued that,

A better solution is to push journalism toward science, incorporating both the powerful data-gathering and -analysis tools of science and its disciplined search for verifiable truth [because nowadays] journalism depends on the availability of the objectifiable objects (Meyer, 2002, p. 73).

In saying this, Meyer presupposes that by adopting these tools, journalism can deliver factual reality. Moreover, Robert W. Pearson, at the University of Pennsylvania, points out that cognitive psychology and decision theory research has repeatedly showed how 'our guts, hearts, and heads play tricks', against which 'good data and statistics can protect us from'. He goes to cite the US statistician, Fred Mosteller, who once said that: "It's easy to lie with statistics, but it's easier to lie without them" (Pearson, 2010, p. 13). For many journalists in the field, statistics are perceived as factual representation of reality as they are unbiased and accurate.

However, on a closer look, the use of statistics as method of journalism inquiry is also one of the most important legitimising elements in the construction of social reality; they confer power to shape the understanding of the world by those who manage them (Boyle, 2000; Devlin, 1998; Fioramonti, 2014; Karabell, 2014; Porter, 1997). To be sure, the notion that one must 'travel mathematical roads in order to arrive at objectivity in the real world' (Davis & Hersh, 1986, p. 276) is essential in understanding the important role statistics play in the production of news. Overall, one can argue, this journalistic presumption that somehow statistics are by themselves 'truth' is part of what Wei-ming Tu (2010) calls the 'rational arrogance' of the Enlightenment, where "philosophy clashes with rhetoric in its quest for truth" (Brooks, 2006).

In fact, the use of statistics in politics –including journalism-, is a Western/Modern inception (Desrosières, 2002; Pearson, 1978 [1921]) that also derived from the Enlightenment project. They were incorporated originally to help society deal with uncertainty by reducing the unknown into mathematical possibilities. While the ancient world accepted that it had to live under uncertainty, the modern world set to conquer it by rationalising it into probabilistic logic (Bernstein, 1996). Areas such as politics, economics, sociology and journalism attempted to borrow mathematical rationalisation to interpret human society in the same way in which astronomy, biology, chemistry and physics had interpreted nature.

In the ancient times philosophers, such as Aristotle, acknowledged the role of chance in life and attributed it to something that violates order and remains beyond one's scope of comprehension. They did not recognise the possibility of studying chance or measuring uncertainty in human matters, while the Indian philosophers found no need to think about chance as they believed in Karma, a rigid system of cause and effect explaining man's fate through actions in previous lives².

The modern world, however, has fought with all its strengths against uncertainty; not to tame the beast but to be able to predict where and when it will attack. According to Radakrishna Rao (1989),

All human activity is based on forecasting: entering a college, taking a job or marrying, investing money. We are constantly forecasting under uncertainty and any decision we take does not carry its full implication unless the amount of uncertainty is specified in a meaningful way. Quantifying uncertainty began only [at the start of the 20th century] using calculus of probability, a subject which had its origin in understanding games of chance about 300 years ago and which is now a highly technical and full-fledged discipline. (Rao, 1989, p. 3)

Journalism, particularly in countries such as the U.S., makes use of statistics as an inquiry technique. It helps reporters present their stories in ways that they become legitimate accounts of ‘truth’, backed by numbers. They help reporters portray stories by generalising and contextualising events, while reducing uncertainty, even when they create moral panics, as is the case with statistics on crime and health issues. However, one must not forget that the history of these numbers is deeply problematic (Zuberi, 2001) and politically controversial as many scholars have shown for the cases of education (Dorling, 1999), crime (Coleman, 1996) and health (Maier & Imazeki, 2012), to mention some.

Looking it in this way, numbers can and should be used, but not assuming that they themselves provide ‘truth’ or somehow have meaning other than in relation to a ‘truth’ that has already been conceived by someone else. Crime statistics, for example, only mean that certain activities have been categorised as crime, which itself has been conceptualised, defined and measured in a particular manner by those in power, who happen also to control wealth. Therefore, what these numbers offer is not necessarily ‘truth’ but a reflection of a given convention.

In relation to this last, Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee³ (2009) argues that we urgently need a holistic approach to statistics in our mission of understanding and quantifying human development. We need a journalistic approach that looks at statistics not only as a process of verification for news stories but also as a tool to think in abstract about interdependent causation; this because *paticca samuppada* is at the heart of our appreciation of objects, of our ordering, of our experience of the world and, of our understanding of our own agency in the world. Without a clear view of interdependent causation, we cannot have a clear view of anything. Moreover as Swami Vivekananda⁴ himself urged in his own time, “Society is the greatest, when the highest truths become practical. If society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; the sooner, the better” (2012 [1899]).

Conclusions

Journalism developed historically alongside the new epistemology provided by the Enlightenment and tried persistently to replicate its methods, emulate its practices and therefore make similar claims of legitimacy for the ‘truths’ it provided. However, in so doing journalism also replicated the flaws and shortcomings of the Enlightenment as a political project (as also did anthropology, economics, politics and sociology). This project cannot be historically disassociated from the Liberal project that saw three major revolutions in the 18th century in the U.S., France and the Netherlands, which paved the way for the massive expansion of slavery and which used ‘reason’ to advance the ideologies and power of the European and north American empires at the time (Blackburn, 2011; Losurdo, 2014).

This history does not invalidate the Enlightenment as a scientific project, but does make us question it as a political one. Journalism has been for too long an uncritical partner of that construct. One that

refuses to acknowledge that 'truth' does not mean 'scientific certainty'. In this context, journalism can learn from Eastern philosophies that the alleviation of human suffering is in fact a 'truth'.

Journalistic inquiry cannot be reduced simply to empirical tests or external verifications and validations. Otherwise it will keep falling into the intellectual trap that proclaims that only that which can be measured can be real. We never knew of the exact numbers of Arabs and Congolese killed by the European empires or the exact amount of gold stolen from the Indoamericans during the Spanish conquest. We still do not know how many Iraqis have died as a consequence of the illegal invasion of 2003. We still do not know why a young bright student in London decides to go to Syria and join ISIS. For the modern and enlightened world, that 'truth' does not exist because it cannot be spotted, interviewed or counted. In these cases, the ability of traditional journalism inquiry to seek 'truth' is at an end road.

Moreover, any type of journalism that loses sight of the three major human concerns –namely of being, knowing and doing– is bound to be partial and self-defeating. By ignoring any one of these, we achieve action without compassion, or compassionate action without knowledge, or else wisdom without action. This is even more the case when scientific commitment in journalism and sensibility of wholeness are inexorably opposed to each other as it is presently the case.

The challenge therefore is to reconcile science and spirituality as a means of seeking 'truth'. Nevertheless, for this reconciliation to happen, the parts need to find its place in the whole, and to understand the reason for its place in being. Indeed, we forget that the historical strength of journalism and its biggest triumphs have not been when it had tried to provide an objective account for reality, but when it has subjectively and subversively created and contested it. It is precisely in those occasions in which reporters have been able to fuse reasoning and belief, while pushing the boundaries of objectivity into the realm of fiction, that they have produced great journalism that has been able to presents 'truth' as social justice. That is what society needs at this crossroad.

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¹ We use East and West as generalisations to designate a series of philosophical approaches. We understand that the overlap and interrelation of these approaches makes this distinction somehow 'artificial', but we use it in order to make the argumentative provocation possible.

² It is worth remembering that statistical knowledge and probabilistic reasoning also played an important role in the process of decision-making by kings and rulers mentioned in the great Indian epic the Mahabarata (Gosh et al. 1999).

³ Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee (1934) is a famous Indian statistician. He taught Statistics at the Presidency College, Calcutta University, from 1960 to 1997.

⁴ Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) was an Indian Hindu monk. He was a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world.