

Elucidating Post-Truth

For some time, talk of post-truth has regularly appeared in the leading media of the Atlantic world and beyond. Although the origins of the term can be traced back to the past century, the discourse of post-truth in the present day has been revitalized by the growing power of information technologies, the massive spread of right-wing populism, and the dissolution of Enlightenment dreams envisaged in liberal projects depicting the path of reason through dialogue towards understanding and consensus.

The initial impulse behind the recent increase of attention to the notion of post-truth and related phenomena was motivated by the plain fact that a result-oriented approach to political action is remarkably efficient. It is reasonable, when concerned solely with the consequences, to confine the discourse to pragmatic interests, bracketing questions of truth, right, and goodness. The amount of data that is continuously produced on social networks on a daily basis turns out to be more than sufficient for manipulative instrumentalizations of citizens' electoral rights. Emotionally comforting labels turn out to be more than sufficient for disguising potentially destructive political agendas. The unprecedented advancement of Artificial Intelligence, combined with Big Data and

bioengineering studies, is more than sufficient to question the tenability and truthfulness of our deeply rooted basic assumptions about the nature of contemporary polities, social units and even individual human beings. Furthermore, well-designed orchestration of public emotions and collective memories turns out to be more than sufficient to make us wholeheartedly hate each other, while condemning those who don't share our hatred. Meanwhile, effective use of the attitudes of false neutrality in the hybrid wars of the new millennium turns out to be more than sufficient to achieve a *status quo* of ignoring radical evil and tolerating deliberate assaults on human rights in the name of non-interventionism, compromise, and peace-building.

The array of post-truth manifestations is as multidimensional as it is equivocal: plenty of themes emerge, beset by multifarious ambiguities. One of the reasons for this is that post-truth imitates truth, which in the words of Oscar Wilde, is "rarely pure and never simple". In this vein, both the enormous complexity and controversial nature of post-truth discourse eventually moves that discourse from social, political, economic, and broadly cultural realities reflected in media headlines to academic conferences and scientific papers. This volume is an instance of one such relocation.

The urgency of academic reflection on post-truth is not only justified in descriptive terms of comprehending permanently fluid external reality. As a matter of fact, the condition of post-truth offers a unique opportunity to test the governing imaginaries concerning the relevance of diverse manifestations of truth for supra-individual dimensions of human life. The principal purpose of this volume is, therefore, not to reach a consensus on ideals, but instead to look at the stock of post-truth phenomena from multiple analytical and evaluative standpoints. In different ways, the contributors offer critical reflections on the origins, nature, revela-

tions, and implications of such phenomena with a clearly present ethical angle.

The volume is divided into three distinct albeit largely inter-related parts, each consisting of several independent essays. While the first part provides a preliminary synopsis of the mainstream issues of post-truth, the second and third ones focus on two specific themes. The essays of the second part embark on an evaluation of the fundamental anthropological problems brought by post-truth phenomena. The third part picks up the discussion and takes it to applied matters: it overviews the manifestations of post-truth and, conversely, deals with the question of the relevance of different kinds of truth in social and political realms.

The impetus for this volume arose from the international seminar "Responding to the challenges of the post-truth" that was jointly organized by the International Institute for Ethics and Contemporary Issues of the Ukrainian Catholic University and Collège des Bernardins in Paris in November 2017. Although most of the essays included in the volume have been presented at academic events, part of the concept of this volume is to attempt to articulate the complex matters in an intelligible manner. For that reason, the contributions have been adapted to be accessible for readers from outside of academia.

The theme of post-truth has been revived recently. It has not yet been sufficiently studied. Its nature, scope, and dimensions are still very vague and highly dubitable issues. One of a few certainties about it is that it has to do to the quality of communication patterns. The dangers of a post-truth world are increasingly put forward precisely because of a widespread and growing problem concerning the values of openness, mutual understanding, and trust in the public spaces. There is, however, an even more fundamental though often unnoticed problem involved here. It is the problem

VIKTOR POLETKO

of living by the demands of the ethics of belief such as the duties of undertaking a responsible reflection and being entitled to one's judgements. The temptations to defend one's strategic interests from the pressure of higher-order values, to mask the shortcomings of one's reasoning with the beauty of rhetoric, or to justify one's standpoint by the reluctance to engage with the alternative standpoints are great. The temptations are to be resisted. This is the point of departure of the present volume, an invitation to take off post-truth attitudes when elucidating post-truth.

Viktor Poletko

Part I

**POST-TRUTH:
FROM THE PUBLIC TO THE ACADEMY**