

# Truth and Politics in the Age of Digital Media

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## Studies

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### Truth and Politics in the Age of Digital Media

#### **Abstract**

*With the widespread omnipresence of digital social media, the truth has lost some of its reliability and objectivity, several authors warn nowadays. In fact, when an age brings to the foreground the tensions of truthfulness and falsehood, correct information and fake news, reality and fiction, genuineness and delusion, this testifies to the unpredictability and inscrutable nature of the confusion into which public communication has been entrained. The rapid development of new media and digital technologies is causing a far-reaching process of change, especially in the field of politics. In his book on "the post-truth era", Ralph J. Keyes announced the advent of a "fib-friendly times", in which "more lies than ever are being told" (Keyes 2004, 4). However, the considerations in this paper rest on a more cautious and critical approach. They support a viewpoint of pluriperspectivism. The new media have surely raised a challenge to contemporary communications. Political affairs are always about certain perspectives and contributions in the constant agon or contest of truth. There is no completely neutral and non-partisan claim to truth, as some philosophers and scientists aspired to represent. Because of its particular nature, the truth can be revealed only with controversy and effort, never without participation and beyond any perspectives. Nevertheless, neither does the truth decline nor do we enter an age of post-truth. Moreover, we can argue about the question which age tends more towards the lie and fake news. Politics is not in a more difficult state today than it has ever been, nor is it in a much simpler position in terms of truth. The truth remains for politics a supporting ground and a permanent benchmark for assessment. It can be discovered only in its pluri-perspective appearance.*

#### **Keywords**

truth, truthfulness, lie, fake news, politics, democracy, digital media, post-truth era, pluriperspectivism

This paper is about the ancient philosophical question on the inner relationship between truth and politics.<sup>1</sup> In the age of social media and the upswing of technical-digital mediated communication, the age-old antagonisms have

<sup>1</sup>

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been rekindled in a new light. Some researches and considerations point to an unleashing of media and a striking multiplication of communication. At the same time, however, certain observers pay great attention to a conspicuous decline in sincerity and the blossoming of the spread of untruths in interpersonal relationships.

As a result, more and more cautionary accounts and worrying analyses emerge bearing witness to a post-truth era, a post-factual age, an intoxication with untrue information, deceptions, and lies. In his in-depth investigation of the situation in the media and communication in social networks, the communication scientist Stephan Russ-Mohl warned of the consequences of the digital media revolution and the challenges for democracy of untruths, false reports and propagandistic techniques in public relations work.<sup>2</sup> The threat to public space, the concern of politics with the truth fading is often portrayed in dystopian images, and not without justified reason.

In light of the digital transformation of media reality, the following consideration addresses the challenges that have now been raised in the generally accepted ideologically neutral viewpoint of modern science and the prevailing liberal democracy. The fundamental philosophical question is whether a rational construction of society can be postulated without a claim on the truth. Through new media and social networks, the democratic agon of truth and untruth, proper judgment, and deceptive delusion is significantly intensified.

Based on an examination of the state of the media and communications, the investigation focuses on the claim of philosophy and in particular of modern science on objectivity and neutrality, a claim honoured since ancient times. The question is what the new media have to say about the ivory tower perspective. What about a location remote from political conflicts, from which science can impartially view the truth and judge the political competitions?

## 1. Decline of Truthfulness as a Nightmare of the Present

After the latest Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal, in which companies were selling and politicians were buying and using the collected personal information, more and more voices are signalling that public communication, with the dominance of social media, has lost some of its reliability and objectivity. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, who was heard in two days' testimony on 10 and 11 April, 2018, in the US Congress admitted abusing the data and advocated a greater "regulation" in the future. He acknowledged the following:

"The internet is growing in importance around the world in people's lives and I think that it is inevitable that there will need to be some regulation. So my position is not that there should be no regulation but I also think that you have to be careful about regulation you put in place."<sup>3</sup>

Since the end of the twentieth century, a change brought about by ubiquitous digitization has captured various areas of life. In particular, the changes in communication behaviour have come to light. The effects of the new media are becoming visible not only in public life but also in the private sphere. The misuse of digital power has also caused more scepticism about the truthfulness of information to individuals and political space alike. When an age brings to the foreground the tensions of truthfulness and falsehood, correct information and fake news, reality and fiction, genuineness and delusion, this testifies to the unpredictability and inscrutable nature of the confusion into which public communication has been brought.

More and more, the disputes deal with the question how to distinguish between the objective truths and distorted news in this time of post-truth. It is

not entirely clear what impact the current dominant form of democracy will have on a certain darkening and eclipsing of the truth in public communication. Are the high expectations for a profound change in the policy that should spring from this about-turn justified? On the other hand, is it actually a further formation in the history of the truth, which in its multi-perspective nature is now revealing new appearance forms?

In 2004, the author of general expertise books, Ralph J. Keyes, to whom the authorship of the now very popular term “post-truth era” is attributed, proclaimed the dawn of “fib-friendly times”, in which “more lies than ever are being told”.<sup>4</sup> Allegedly, a “decline of truthfulness” occurred at the turn of the millennium. Among various causes of this flood of untruth and lies in contemporary communication, he points out, on the one hand, the postmodernist questioning of literal truth and, on the other hand, the facilitation of the dissemination of unchecked news online.

It is precisely this second focus that three scientists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have analytically substantiated with their findings in a particular study, which was published in the journal *Science* in March 2018 on the subject of “The Spread of True and False News Online”. The research findings of Sinan Aral, Deb Roy and Soroush Vosoughi strongly suggest that much more false content as opposed to correct news is being disseminated nowadays on social media. Their investigation of 126,000 Twitter tweets over the 11-year period between 2006 and 2017 has led them to conclude that untrue content is “70% more likely to be redistributed” than the correct message.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the speed of spreading of the false reports is three times greater than that of the correct information. For our consideration, it is of crucial importance that, among the different areas examined, the political issues are most affected by the untrue information.

In this context, it is probably not surprising that the controversial, but at the same time quite meaningful, term post-truth was proclaimed the international word of the year 2016. The editors of the Oxford University Dictionary, by selecting this peculiar word composition, have drawn attention to the increasing evasion of audited and impartial facts in the contemporary design of public opinion. An ever-growing propensity for the unreliable and arbitrary interpretation of the news, fuelled and disseminated through social networks and related media, borders on an illusionist image. The meaning of the term post-truth is based on the fact that objective facts appeal to public opinion less than the attractive power of emotions and personal beliefs:

2

See: Stephan Russ-Mohl, *Die informierte Gesellschaft und ihre Feinde. Warum die Digitalisierung unsere Demokratie gefährdet*, Halem, Köln 2017. The book (en. *The Informed Society and Its Enemies*) has a distinctive questioning subtitle (en. *Why Digitization Threatens our Democracy*).

3

In his second day on Capitol Hill, Zuckerberg said that his own data was handed to Cambridge Analytica. See: David Smith, “Zuckerberg put on back foot as House grills Facebook CEO over user tracking”, *The Guardian* (April 11, 2018). Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/11/](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/11/zuckerberg-hearing-facebook-tracking-questions-house-back-foot)

[zuckerberg-hearing-facebook-tracking-questions-house-back-foot](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/11/zuckerberg-hearing-facebook-tracking-questions-house-back-foot) (accessed on August 9, 2018).

4

Ralph J. Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, St. Martin's Press, New York 2004, p. 4.

5

Peter Dizikes, “On Twitter, false news travels faster than true stories”, *MIT News* (March 8, 2018). Available at: <http://news.mit.edu/2018/study-twitter-false-news-travels-faster-true-stories-0308> (accessed on August 9, 2018).

“Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”<sup>6</sup>

Behind it, according to many, is the allusion to a dubious, nowadays heightened, tendency to judge public affairs, not so much on the basis of reason and judgment, but because of personal views, exciting feelings or – not infrequently – widespread prejudices.

In the same year, the German-language society, which has been regularly honouring the formative and prevalent phrases for more than four decades, has chosen a German-language equivalent of “post-truth” as the word of the year. It is the adjective “postfaktisch” (post-factual), which marks the confused situation with the factual and non-factual truth and is full of substantial allusions. Chancellor Angela Merkel documented, *inter alia*, the phrase “post-faktische Zeiten” in one of her speeches.<sup>7</sup> In the loan-word of post-truth from American English, the jury of the German Society for German Language sought to draw attention to the generally dominant view that “not the claim to truth, but the pronouncement of the ‘perceived truth’ is trend-setting”.<sup>8</sup> The rapid rise of social media as a source of news has thus led in the public discourse to increased mistrust of the truth of the factual. This has led to an impression of greater ignorance of facts and to acceptance of even obvious lies.

That something dramatic has recently been happening in the public discourse of the media with the venerable, objective truthfulness, which usually comes first among the principles of the press codes,<sup>9</sup> has also testified to the boom of related and adjoining phrases. For the same year 2016, the Australian editors of Macquarie Dictionary disclosed the now infamous *fake news* as the most popular word structure.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the proliferation of news through digital networks has tangibly multiplied distorted facts, fake news, false suspicions, and fictitious messages.

In particular, American presidential elections and the suspenseful behaviour towards the media of President Donald Trump have accentuated the distinctive nature of the *fake news*. The American Dialect Society has chosen “fake news” as the Word of the Year for 2017 as a yield of its raging popularity vortex. This significant and ever more popular “catchphrase” most impressively symbolises the focus of public and political disputes of the present. It points to two basic meanings. On the one hand, it is about “disinformation and falsehoods presented as real news”. On the other hand, the term refers to “actual news” that is broadcast in a “false and distorted”<sup>11</sup> way.

However, this phenomenon is by no means something new in history. The fact that people are more inclined to a deceptive opinion than true knowledge has been diagnosed and warned against by many ancient philosophers from Heraclitus and Parmenides to Plato and Aristotle. Therefore, they dealt with the beneficial revealing strategies of the “real lie” and misleading opinion, which “would not only be hated by gods, but also by men”.<sup>12</sup> People lie, make mistakes, deceive themselves and others out of ignorance – this was one of the central theses of Plato’s *Politeia*. Whether the untruth spreads around only out of ignorance, or the people do this consciously and deliberately, we cannot examine minutely here. However, if one had measured in Plato’s Athens or Parmenides’ Elea how much more and faster false messages were relayed as opposed to true communications, I am not quite sure if the Twitter research would differ materially. Genuine truth has never had a light contest with the real or seeming lie. It is all about establishing a just constitution of society in which, despite this deception, one can live in freedom and enjoy well-being and peace.

## 2. Tension Between Truth and Lie

The access to this question is therefore more cautious and more critical in this analysis. The new media have admittedly raised a challenge to today's communication. Nevertheless, it is all about the control mechanisms of social media. The total amount of human sins, meanwhile, apart from the increased technical possibilities for distributing lies, false reports and fake messages, does not change so easily. In any case, we can hardly measure this and judge it objectively.

The descriptions and analyses of social theorists have registered and listed some strange phenomena.<sup>13</sup> However, to infer from the individual manifestations of experience to the generality would be to expose oneself to the danger of the induction problem and to error. Many examples in history show that people are more and more dedicated to relaying lies and rumours than true news. In addition, the fascination with the deity Fame may provide some allegorical evidence. Apart from this, however, human endeavour for truthfulness remains, as always, one of the guiding behavioural orientations of his moral activity and political life.

The question of the truth and veracity of community steering as well as the delusion of the citizens to discuss in public, to talk about freely and without restraint in the assemblies, in the agora and forum, has always been and still is a special privilege of democracy. Most forms of rule that have hitherto been tried and tested have mostly been hostile to the public use of reason and conjoint deliberative counselling. Some of them have often repressed or expelled the freethinkers, forbidding their thinking, supervising the books, putting their thoughts on the indices and removing their works from general access. However, the truth in its resistance to lie and deception remains the focal point of philosophical considerations.

The tension between truth and lie, fact and falsehood is ineradicable. These pairs of opposites have their source in the depths of human moral nature. How can this profound contest over the truth ensure the stability of the moral order? Is democracy indeed an outstanding form of society that can be condu-

6  
Neil Midgley, "Word of the Year 2016 – Post-Truth", *Oxford Living Dictionaries*. Available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016> (accessed on August 9, 2018).

7  
Jochen A. Bär, "GfdS wählt 'postfaktisch' zum Wort des Jahres 2016", *Die Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache* (December 9, 2016). Available at: <https://gfds.de/wort-des-jahres-2016/#postfaktisch> (accessed on August 9, 2018).

8  
Ibid.

9  
The Press Code of German Publishers and Journalists, published by the German Press Service in 1973, defines in the first paragraph the "supreme commandments of the press respect for the truth, respect for human dignity and true public information". See: "Der Pressekodex", *Deutscher Presserat*. Available at: <http://www.presserat.de/pressekodex/pressekodex/> (accessed on August 9, 2018).

10  
Elle Hunt, "'Fake news' named word of the year by Macquarie Dictionary", *The Guardian* (January 24, 2017). Available at: [https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/25/fake-news-named-word-of-the-year-by-macquarie-dictionary?CMP=soc\\_568](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/25/fake-news-named-word-of-the-year-by-macquarie-dictionary?CMP=soc_568) (accessed on August 9, 2018).

11  
Alan Metcalf, "'Fake News' is 2017 American Dialect Society word of the year", *American Dialect Society* (January 5, 2018). Available at: <https://www.americandialect.org/fake-news-is-2017-american-dialect-society-word-of-the-year> (accessed on August 9, 2018).

12  
Arno Baruzzi, *Philosophie der Lüge*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1996, p. 151.

13  
Cf. Simone Dietz, "Lügen in Privatleben, Politik und Massenmedien", in: Maria-Sybilla Lotter (ed.), *Die Lüge. Texte von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, pp. 349–402, Reclam, Stuttgart 2017.

cive to the appearance of truth in its dialectical form? These questions are not easy to answer. In the political rabble-rousing propaganda and stirring-up of people, many untruths and errors become known.

In the medium of public opinion, truth is mixed with lying, the real with appearance, the real being with nonbeing. As a rule, many can hardly judge this ongoing *agon*. Therefore, philosophers, who have devoted themselves in particular to the search for truth and the real knowledge, have often been critical of democracy. It is too dependent on the wavering organ of popular opinion, from which the stewardship of the demos gets its legitimacy.

Philosophers sometimes offer resistance and campaign against distortions of this rule by the people. The fate of that just, wise and truthful Athenian, Socrates, is still today considered as a burden and shame on the original and admirable Attic model of democracy. In spite of his fascinating speeches and apologies, he could not ensure the victory of the real facts and the truth against the biased blindness of the crowd. Since he was unfairly condemned to death in a public trial in front of 500 judges, his personal tragedy has been associated with the direct and radical form of popular rule.

In his well-known comedy *The Clouds*, in which Socrates, while still alive and in his truth-seeking acme, was unjustly derided, Aristophanes has proved why the unjust *logos* can defeat the just *logos*. It is about truth and appearance. The public, the citizens who are called to the judgment, are not always ready to endure the truth in their essence. The demagogues understand it very well to seduce the crowd with the bogus facts and false promises. This behaviour of the crowd has led to the widespread view that lying, deception and delusion belong to the statesman's craft. To what extent does this finding affect the activities of democratic state rulers?

### 3. Pluriperspectivism and the Search for Truth in Politics

With regard to the pre-conducted accounts of the current state of affairs, the question now arises as to where the truth seekers actually stand with this competition. How do the scientists and the philosophers react to the democratic contest for truth? In what role are they invited to public consultations and disputes? Do they, with their perspectives, essentially belong to the democratic debate of the arguments? Are they the opponents, the referees or the audience? Can they extricate themselves from the conflict of the one-sided *pro et contra* and withdraw to a neutral position away from everyday politics? Do they observe the political disputes about the common good as shadows in the human cave? Is there a scientific, world-untouched and secluded place, a raised ivory tower, from which one could dispassionately contemplate the political rivalry of lies and truth?

When Hannah Arendt described the field of politics, she took a critical look at the view that scientists should adopt a neutral and prominently secluded viewpoint. Throughout the two-thousand-year history of philosophy, there are such models of scientific impartial seclusion from politics. Famous are anecdotal stories about Heraclitus' rejection of the offered political authority and his retreat to the temple of Artemis or Plato's parable of the truth-seeker's liberating ascension from the cave to the sunlight of eternal ideas. As far as Heidegger's remote wooden hut in the Black Forest, or the positivist scientist's contemporary quest for expert neutrality, we perennially encounter attempts to judge the *agon* of truth from above, from a distance, from a meta-perspective.

Whether this meta-perspective – where the truth reveals itself in pure form and independently of various opinions and interests – exists is a really profound

question. In her essay on the truth and politics, Hannah Arendt has referred to several philosophers to bear witness to a positive justification. In Plato's case, the distinction between  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , the truth-hearing reason, and the knowledge of changeable opinions are corroborated by evidence-demonstrating persuasiveness.<sup>14</sup> Hugo Grotius even denied divine omnipotence the power to dispose of the compelling truths, such as the fact that two times two make up four.<sup>15</sup> This seclusion of mathematical principles and rational truths to an impervious height pursued the purpose of restricting the despotic rule of absolute rulers by absolute truth. In the background stood the effort to block tyrannical princes from manipulating the truth by solidifying it on a meta-partisan level.

The perception that in the political the truth is subjected to certain partisan distortions seems to be undoubtedly convincing. As a rule, the victor writes his truth anew, reversing its former shape. The mightier tries to impose his views through raw compulsion. This often happens through violation of factual truth. Correct opinions can be established through a free persuasion and agreement of all. Totalitarian rulers have proven how it is possible to overturn the truth overnight. The question now is whether these dangers could be avoided if the observers withdrew to a neutral ground. It is a tempting idea, however, which is difficult to reconcile with the nature of truth in the world of experience.

The basic problem in attempting to absolutise the truth is that it is inherently many-perspectival in its particular nature. This characterisation in no way denies that there is objective truth, factual truth, or rational truth as such. In the finite world, however, factual truth rarely appears in its pure form, in its essence. It manifests itself rather decomposed into multifarious perspectives. In the perspective of refraction of the truth, deception and lies interfere more or less with their appearance forms. Different perspectives are opened up through diverse lights and different standpoints from which the truth is viewed. The truth is unique in its nature, but its perspectives are innumerable.

This perspectival tension in the relationship between truth and its manifold manifestations has been particularly addressed in the Renaissance. Just as Renaissance painters incorporated perspectivism into their magnificent paintings, Michel Montaigne's metaphorical expression in his famous essay on the liar also expressed the versatility of lie in the lifeworld. As a sagacious observer of human affairs, who has pitted himself vigorously in the field of political competitions, he pointed to the diversity of lie's faces. In contrast to its antagonist, the truth, which has only one face, the untruth conceals itself through its manifold transformations in an unlimited field.

"If falsehood had, like truth, but one face only, we should be upon better terms; for we should then take for certain the contrary to what the liar says: but the reverse of truth has a hundred thousand forms, and a field indefinite, without bound or limit."<sup>16</sup>

This enigmatic variety of the lie is probably the source from which the manifold exposures, the perspectives of truth actually flow. In public space, these rays are often multiplied and propagated by subjective screens.

14

Hannah Arendt, *Wahrheit und Lüge in der Politik. Zwei Essays*, Piper, München – Zürich 1987 [1972], p. 60.

15

Ibid. Cf. Henning Ottmann, "Die 'edle Lüge' und ihre Rolle in der Politik", *Synthesis philosophica* 19 (2004) 2, pp. 329–336.

16

Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, vol. 1 (1580), 9, 128, translated by Charles Cotton, Edwin C. Hill, New York 1910. Originally: "Si, comme la verité, le mensonge n'avait qu'un visage, nous serions en meilleurs termes. Car nous prendrions pour certain l'opposé de ce que droit le menteur. Mais le revers de la verité a cent mille figures et un champ indéfini." See: Michel de Montaigne, *Essais I*, 9, 56, Gallimard, Paris 1950.



The paradox of knowing the truth now comes from the fact that the way to the truth cannot circumvent or evade the lies. Rather, to approach the real truth, the confrontation with the lies is to be carried out. In his dialectics, Hegel saw this paradox and tried to save the absolute truth through an incessant play of contradictions by linking it back to the metaphysical logos doctrine. Nietzsche, however, with his nihilistic hammer laid this metaphysical construction in ruins and opened the way to general perspectivism. The positivist sciences have been proclaiming since the 19th century that it would be possible to fathom and understand the truth without value.

Finally, Husserl has seen the crisis of the modern European sciences just in their methodological efforts to mathematise the life-world. By separating themselves from the life-world, they then got lost in an egocentric construction of the worldview. Therefore, he has demanded a return to the origin. In this regard, we should agree with Husserl's insight. Our problem with the truth nowadays lies just in the fact that science has set itself even more apart from the lifeworld. Moreover, the truth, therefore, remains more and more out of reach of scientific observation. That is why we get the impression that we are increasingly falling prey to the predominance of untruth.

#### 4. Neutrality of Science in the Search for Truth

At the conclusion of her masterful reflections on truth in politics, however, Hannah Arendt surprisingly states that her consideration of truth in politics has been carried out beyond any perspective. She explained that she had “dealt here with politics from the perspective of truth, and hence from a viewpoint outside the political realm”.<sup>17</sup> Her approach to the political field thus solidifies the old-fashioned rift between politics and the truth, which must be grasped by facts or by reason. Moreover, she does so after the shortcomings of the demonisation of politics have been brought to light.

Although the sphere of politics has its dignity and meaning in itself, from this point of view, politics is ostensibly attributed to the “interest and power” struggles. However, Nietzsche, Marx or the doctrines of positivist political scientists criticise the “fateful reduction of the political to sheer administration”:

“In positivism, which today dominates large parts of the political sciences, this originally open contempt for the public and the political has lost its philosophical base and is flattened.”<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, the passionate advocate of *vita activa* adequately judges the devastating sides of the flattening of politics. On the other hand, politics' turn to a separation of the philosophical standpoint from political reality and public disputation of opinions seems to be contradictory. Therefore, the question arises as to whether the truth, which it seeks to solidify as isolated, can escape all political delusions. When something happens in the shadow play of human affairs, it can hardly fade out this reality and appearance truth. It is a question whether a scientist can issue political judgments from his ivory tower without applying the same perspicacity to his own opinion.

Philosophers, as well as the greatest scientists, are not immune to deception when faced with the perspectives of truth. This comes clearly to light in one of Arendt's admired teachers, the mystical wizard of Being from the Black Forest. It shows how a deep thinker, when he strives for truth and believes he can find it, can also “err”. Arno Baruzzi has explained this concern by referring to the “matter of philosophy”, to the nature of the search for truth:

“Thinking that is true can, must, may err. Heidegger has claimed this for himself, in which one sees his great excuse, which one can finally call a lie, his philosophical lie in life.”<sup>19</sup>

The explanation for this error by Heidegger is based on his statement that the one, who thinks big, could also make a big mistake. For Baruzzi, it is not just a creed and life guiding principle of the lonely brooder from the Black Forest, he assumes this rather “as a difficult and painful matter of philosophy at all”.<sup>20</sup> Philosophers who are truthful from their inner vocation find it difficult to acknowledge that they may equally be subject to deceptions. However, this is part of the nature of the truth itself and the freedom of its search.

Baruzzi thoroughly examined the opus of the philosopher from Messkirch, and with this, he did not want to justify or excuse the fallacies of the philosopher. The wrongdoing cannot be legitimised.

“Who lies, must still be called a liar. However, the lunacy of the truth is and remains that it shows and does not show, that it may not show more in revealing than it shows.”<sup>21</sup>

In demonstrating and revealing the truth, in its perspectivisation, there is the danger of contagion with the lie, the deception.

When questioning the self-contained standpoint of the lone philosopher from the Black Forest and his relation to truth and politics, it seems revealing to look more closely at the correspondence between Jaspers and Arendt about their colleague. Notably, Arendt’s assessment of the misleading teachings of her philosophy professor can be enlightening. The two wonder to what extent their former philosophical friend, of whom the two were, just as irritated, as they were fascinated, had twisted “the essential and the real thing of philosophy”.<sup>22</sup> In his letter of September 1, 1949, Jaspers shares his hope that Heidegger, who was completely involved in his “speculation”, would not “turn over again”, this time on the right track. However, Jaspers’ judgment is critical and sceptical:

“But I doubt. Can one be an impure soul – this means as a soul who does not feel its impurity and does not constantly press out of it, but lives on thoughtlessly in the dirt – can one in insincerity see the purest?”<sup>23</sup>

The response of Hannah Arendt, for whom this “twisting” of her teacher is “unbearable” deserves attention.

17

Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics”, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin Books, New York 1977, pp. 227–264, p. 263. On this track, John Rawls originally sought to design his theory of justice on an ideologically neutral ground beyond political struggles. However, after his “Dewey Lectures”, he has transformed the metaphysical and epistemological interpretation of justice into a “political one”. The transformation of the questions of “truth” into the conceptuality of “reason” undertaken by Jürgen Habermas was thereby subjected to criticism as inconsistent. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, “Reconciliation through public use of reason”, *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1999, 83f.

18

H. Arendt, *Wahrheit und Lüge in der Politik*, p. 91.

19

A. Baruzzi, *Philosophie der Lüge*, p. 168.

20

Ibid.

21

Ibid.

22

Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1926–1969*, Lotte Köhler, Hans Saner (ed.), Piper Taschenbuch, München 1985, p. 177.

23

Ibid.

“Yet he lives in a depth and with a passion that one cannot easily forget; twisting is unbearable, and the very fact that he draws everything up as if it were an interpretation of being and time, suggests that everything will turn out twisted again.”<sup>24</sup>

In their criticism of the way of life and the distortions of truth, there is no hint on the exclusive standpoint of the truth seeker. Instead of granting him the right to an external ivory tower, she blames his retreat on his ostracised “mouse hole”.

“This life in Todtnauberg, cursing at civilization and writing being (*das Seyn*) with a *y*, is in fact only a mouse hole into which he has withdrawn, because he rightly assumes that he only needs to see people there, full of admiration on pilgrimages. It will not be so easy to climb 1200 meters to make a scene. Moreover, if it were so, he would lie that the sky is not blue, and rely on not being called a liar in the face. He probably believed that he could cheaply get rid of the world in this way, get rid of everything unpleasant, and only created philosophy. And then, of course, all this tricky, childish dishonesty promptly struck him into philosophizing.”<sup>25</sup>

Following Hannah Arendt, the philosopher has no exclusive position outside the world infected with lies and deceptions. If the philosopher breaks down too far and “places himself in the place where God stands in the metaphysical tradition”,<sup>26</sup> he runs the risk of neglecting, “falling off” and thus erring in living together with others in the world. The road to superstition is then paved.

Maria Robaszkiewicz tried to prove how strongly Arendt was disappointed with the contradiction between the philosophical pursuit of the search for truth and the “personal mendacity” of her master. The thinker of being and time had betrayed the legacy inherited from the beginning of philosophy – the search for truth of Socrates, which Arendt points out as a model. According to this thinker heritage, it would be better

“... to have my lyre, or some chorus that I might provide for the public, out of tune and discordant, or to have any number of people disagreeing with me and contradicting me, than that I should have internal discord and contradiction in my own single self.”<sup>27</sup>

It happens often to the truth-seeker that most people would not agree with them. Whether they continue to contradict each other or become silent is not a predicament easy to master, it depends not only on the person but also on the historical circumstances.

Apart from the transcendental idealism of this position, which Plato places in the mouth of Socrates, Robaszkiewicz notes in it a contradiction in the criteria of Arendt:

“One does not escape the impression that Arendt applies to Heidegger special benchmarks that do not meet her standard. Her appraisal of his person and his actions is thus affected by feelings – whether those of respect, be it those of love – and remains controversial in this respect.”<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of the causes of this discrepancy, it is clear that the proponent of the diversity of perspectives in politics does not apply these principles in all cases equally. A special question is what happens when the private gets confused with the public. This was obviously the case with Heidegger.

If we reach today to Hannah Arendt’s reflections on truth in politics, it is precisely because she was able to illuminate it masterfully from her perspective. In spite of her demand for a place of observation that would be set outside the political field, she also was by no means capable of escaping the perspectives of truth. For in political affairs, there is apparently no absolute truth. She advocates a more open perspective, arguably more open-minded and fairer to that of her teacher, who was lured into the lunacy of the devastating ideology, of the historical and political lie.

After all, however, it is only a certain perspective, which is by no means outside the political world. The perspective from which Hannah Arendt looks at the political events is outstanding. She was able thus to deliver a powerful contribution to the truth in *agón*.

## 5. Conclusion

From the preceding considerations, it can be concluded that the truth has remained today, as it was in the past, a decisive standard of evaluation of politics. In the face of the dramatic digital acceleration of the flow of information and the expansion of the radius of communication, the truth has neither blossomed nor perished in public. Adulterations and deceptions spread more and faster than true news. As George Orwell impressively described in his 1984 novel, the dystopian “Ministry of Truth” has received resources that are ever more powerful. His prediction was derived from his experience of working in the BBC as a part of the Ministry of Information.

Because of its very nature, the truth in the present, as it has done in the past, only reveals itself with the greatest effort and endeavour. It never occurs without the participation of the observers and beyond any perspectives. Thus, it is exposed to a constant “concoction”. However, with the impact of the new media and in the digital age, the truth has not perished. To talk of an age of post-truth seems to be an exaggerated dystopian adjustment of truth. Moreover, we can argue about the question, which age demonstrates more friendliness of falsehood and fake news.

I would like to conclude the article with two summary statements. The first shows that the multiple perspectives of the search for truth in politics have not eclipsed this field; it became even clearer with the digital media. Observational tasks have only shifted more and more from the collective to the individualistic level and responsibility. And secondly, Arendt’s critique of her teacher’s philosophical “mouse hole of lies” has strongly confirmed that there is actually no completely neutral and nonpartisan truth claim in the assessment of the factuality with which many philosophers sought to disguise their aberrations. The distance from an imaginary ivory tower perspective of science can only lead to the authentic nature of the truth.

In its fullness and splendour, the truth is revealed only with a laborious search and questioning, as well as with an open attitude and never without participation and beyond any perspectivism. Politics is not in a more difficult state today than it has ever been, nor is it in a much simpler position in terms of truth. The truth remains for politics a supporting ground and a permanent benchmark for assessment. It can be discovered only in its pluri-perspective appearance.

<sup>24</sup>  
Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>25</sup>  
Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>  
Hannah Arendt, *Was ist Existenz-Philosophie?*, Anton-Hain, Frankfurt 1990, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup>  
Plat. *Gorg.* 482b–c. Translation from: Plato, “Gorgias”, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol.

3, translated by Walter Rangeley Maitland Lamb, Harvard University Press – William Heinemann, Cambridge, MA – London 1967.

<sup>28</sup>  
Maria Robaszkiewicz, *Übungen im politischen Denken. Hannah Arendts Schriften als Einleitung der politischen Praxis*, Springer Verlag, Wiesbaden 2017, p. 96.

**Pavo Barišić**

## **Istina i politika u doba digitalnih medija**

### **Sažetak**

*Sve snažnijim širenjem sveprisutnih digitaliziranih društvenih medija, istina je u određenom stupnju izgubila na svojoj pouzdanosti i objektivnosti, upozoravaju danas pojedini autori. Kada neko razdoblje ističe u prvi plan napete odnose između istinitosti i laži, ispravnih informacija i lažnih vijesti, stvarnosti i fikcije, onoga što doista jest i zablude, to svjedoči o neprozirnosti i nesagledivosti zamršene igre u koju je zapletena javna komunikacija. Strelovit razvoj novih medija i digitalnih tehnologija uzrokuje dalekosežan proces promjena, osobito u području politike. U svojoj knjizi o »post-istinitoj epohi« Ralph J. Keyes najavio je nastupanje »vremenâ sklonih obmanama« (fib-friendly times) u kojima se »izriče više laži nego ikada do sada« (Keyes 2004, 4). Međutim, razmatranja u ovom članku počivaju na nešto opreznijem i kritičnijem pristupu. Ona govore u prilog razumijevanju pluriperspektivizma. Novi mediji zacijelo su donijeli izazove suvremenim komunikacijama. U političkim zbivanjima riječ je svagda o određenim perspektivama i prinosima u stalnom agonu ili nadmetanju za istinom. Pri tome ne postoji posve neutralnih niti nadstranački uzdignutih zahtjeva za istinom, kao što su tvrdili neki filozofi i znanstvenici. Poradi svoje osebuje naravi, istina se može otkriti samo s prijemom i trudom, a nikada bez sudjelovanja i izvan svake perspektive. Ipak, niti istina propada, niti ulazimo u razdoblje post-istine. Štoviše, možemo se i dalje prepirati o pitanju koja je epoha sklonija lažima i lažnim vijestima (fake news). Politika danas nije u težem položaju nego što je bila ranije, niti je u mnogo jednostavnijem položaju u pogledu na istinu. Za politiku istina ostaje potporno tlo i trajno mjerilo za prosuđivanje. Može se raskrivati samo u svojoj pluriperspektivnoj pojavnosti.*

### **Ključne riječi**

istina, istinitost, laž, lažne vijesti, politika, demokracija, digitalni mediji, post-istinita epoha, pluriperspektivizam

**Pavo Barišić**

## **Wahrheit und Politik im Zeitalter digitaler Medien**

### **Zusammenfassung**

*Mit der Ausbreitung der Allgegenwart digitalisierter sozialer Medien hat die Wahrheit zu einem gewissen Grad an ihrer Zuverlässigkeit und Objektivität eingeüßt, warnen einige Autoren heutzutage. Wenn ein Zeitalter die Spannungsverhältnisse von Wahrhaftigkeit und Lüge, Tatsache und Falschnachricht, Wirklichem und Fiktionalem, Echtem und Täuschung in den Vordergrund rückt, zeugt dies allerdings von einer Unabsehbarkeit und Undurchschaubarkeit des Verwirrspiels, in das die öffentliche Kommunikation hineingerissen wurde. Die schwindelerregende Entwicklung der Neuen Medien und Technologien verursacht einen weitreichenden Wandlungsprozess vor allem im Bereich der Politik. In seinem Buch zum „Zeitalter der Nach-Wahrheit“ verkündete Ralph J. Keyes den Anbruch einer „Schwindel-freundlichen Zeit“ (fib-friendly times), in der „mehr Lügen als jemals zuvor erzählt werden“. Die Überlegungen zu dieser Fragestellung in der vorliegenden Untersuchung sind jedoch vorsichtiger und eher kritischer. Sie gehen von einem pluriperspektivistischen Standpunkt aus. Die neuen Medien haben allerdings eine Herausforderung an die heutige Kommunikation erhoben. In den politischen Angelegenheiten handelt es sich immer um bestimmte Perspektiven und Beiträge im ständigen Agon oder Wettstreit um Wahrheit. Es gibt dabei keinen völlig neutralen und überparteilich erhobenen Wahrheitsanspruch, wie ihn manche Philosophen und Wissenschaftler anstrebten. Infolge ihrer besonderen Natur entbirgt sich die Wahrheit nur mit Auseinandersetzung und Anstrengung und nie ohne Teilnahme und außerhalb jeglicher Perspektivität. Aber weder geht die Wahrheit zugrunde noch treten wir in ein Zeitalter der Post-Wahrheit. Und über die Frage, welches Zeitalter der Lüge und den Falschmeldungen (Fake News) mehr Freundlichkeit entgegenbringt, kann man wohl streiten. Die Politik ist heutzutage nicht in einem schwierigeren Zustand als je zuvor, aber auch nicht in einer viel einfacheren Stellung im Hinblick auf die Wahrheit. Diese bleibt für die Politik weiter ein tragender Grund und ein dauerhafter Beurteilungsmaßstab. Die Wahrheit kann nur in ihrer pluriperspektivistischen Erscheinungsweise entborgen werden.*

### **Schlüsselwörter**

Wahrheit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Lüge, falsche Nachrichten, Politik, Demokratie, digitale Medien, Zeitalter der Post-Wahrheit, Pluriperspektivismus

**Pavo Barišić**

## **Vérité et politique à l'ère des médias numériques**

### **Résumé**

*Avec l'omniprésence généralisée des médias sociaux numérisés, la vérité a perdu de sa fiabilité et de son objectivité, ont averti certains auteurs de nos jours. En fait, quand un âge met au premier plan les tensions entre vérité et mensonge, informations correctes et fausses nouvelles, réalité et fiction, authenticité et illusion, cela témoigne de l'imprévisibilité et du caractère impénétrable de la confusion dans laquelle la communication publique s'est entraînée. Le développement rapide des nouveaux médias et des technologies numériques est en train de provoquer un profond processus de changement, en particulier dans le domaine de la politique. Dans son livre sur « l'âge de post-vérité », Ralph J. Keyes a annoncé l'avènement d'une « époque favorable au vertige » (fib-friendly times), dans laquelle « plus de mensonges que jamais sont racontés » (Keyes 2004, 4). Cependant, les considérations dans cet article reposent sur une approche plus prudente et critique. Ils soutiennent un point de vue du pluriperspectivisme. Les nouveaux médias ont sûrement lancé un défi aux communications contemporaines. Les affaires politiques concernent toujours certaines perspectives et contributions dans l'agon ou la contestation permanente de la vérité. Il n'existe aucune prétention à la vérité totalement neutre et non partisane, comme le souhaitaient certains philosophes et scientifiques. En raison de sa nature particulière, la vérité ne peut être révélée que par des controverses et des efforts, jamais sans participation et au-delà de toute perspective. Néanmoins, la vérité ne périt pas non plus, et nous n'entrons pas dans une ère de post-vérité. De plus, nous pouvons discuter de la question de savoir quel âge tend davantage au mensonge et à la fausse nouvelle (fake news). La politique n'est pas dans un état plus difficile qu'avant, ni dans une position beaucoup plus simple en termes de vérité. La vérité reste pour la politique un terrain d'appui et une référence permanente pour le jugement. Il ne peut être découvert que dans son apparence pluriperspectiviste.*

### **Mots-clés**

Vérité, véracité, mensonge, fausses nouvelles, politique, démocratie, médias numériques, ère post-vérité, pluriperspectivisme