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A POST-TRUTH THEORY OF TRUTH

*A statement is true when hearing it is a source of pleasure, joy, satisfaction, and so on; and it is false when it causes opposite emotions. We may then summarize the post-truth theory of truth in a maxim: Truth is *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*. The term “*meorum*” is crucial here, for it is my emotions that provide a criterion for indicating whether a given statement should be accepted as true. I like a statement and I know that I like it. I cannot be mistaken about my liking or disliking it. Therefore, I do not need anything else as the ultimate criterion of truth.*

Post-truth is a well-known phenomenon, yet there is no agreement as to what it is. In the paper, I argue that different views on that phenomenon presuppose a novel understanding of Truth. I will develop an argument for my claim in four steps. First, I will summarize some thinkers’ views on what post-truth is and indicate intuitions on which the views in question are based. Second, I will show that the views on post-truth may be interpreted as the conception of Truth, where Truth is defined as *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*. In this conception, emotions are both the defining element and the criterion of Truth. Third, I will draw some consequences of accepting such an understanding of Truth, and fourth, I will explain why it is a *post*-theory rather than simply a theory of Truth.

ATTEMPTS AT UNDERSTANDING POST-TRUTH

It is generally agreed that the term “post-truth” was first used by Steve Tesich in the 1992 article “A Government of Lies.”¹ In his paper, Tesich lamented that the response of American people to lies told by politicians was not what it used to be: “We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.”² The post-truth world is one in which we do not care about truth, for “we came to equate truth with bad news and we didn’t want bad news anymore, no matter how true or vital

¹ See Steve Tesich, “A Government of Lies,” *Nation* 254, no. 1 (1992): 12–14, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/A+government+of+lies.-a011665982>.

² *Ibidem*: 13.

to our health as a nation.”³ If truths are bad news, then post-truths are neutral or good news. Tesich grasps here a certain important fact: truths are claims that can make us feel perplexed. Such adjectives as “bad,” “good” or “neutral,” when applied to claims, have an irremovable subjective dimension, for they mark the recipient’s reaction to a piece of information.

Since Tesich’s article, the term “post-truth” has gained currency. In 2016, “post-truth” was declared by the Oxford Dictionaries to be the “Word of the Year.” It was then defined as an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”⁴ This definition seems to grasp the reasons making one accept a claim. Thus, the fact that a person has been made to experience the “right” emotions, coupled with her being in agreement with her personal beliefs, is tantamount to “good reasons” for her to accept the given claim as her own. These are post-truth reasons, and when they prevail, we find ourselves in a post-truth condition. The Oxford definition grasps the relation between the claim-maker and their recipient: the claim-maker provides post-truth reasons to accept the claim and the recipient sees the post-truth reasons as sufficiently good ones to accept the claim in question.

Kathleen Higgins states that “post-truth refers to blatant lies being routine across society, and it means that politicians can lie without condemnation. This is different from the cliché that all politicians lie and make promises they have no intention of keeping—this still expects honesty to be the default position. In a post-truth world, this expectation no longer holds.”⁵ Yet considering post-truths as lies requires an understanding of what a lie is. Without going deeply into the problem, let us observe three things: first, lying is a human act that requires activity of the intellect and the will. The intellect is necessary, for one must lie about *something* that one *has recognized* and then *decides* to report one’s own cognitive result in a way that is contrary to what one has accepted as recognized. Therefore, the intention of the lying subject is the decisive factor that makes it possible for us to distinguish lying from making a cognitive mistake. Second, three relations should be distinguished: (1) the one between the statement and the fact to which it relates, (2) the one between the statement-maker and the statement itself, and (3) the one between the statement and the other statements held by the person in question. The first relation might be seen in terms of truth in the classical sense: i.e., as *adaequatio* between the statement and reality; and since any statement is a product of the intellect, we can

³ Ibidem: 12.

⁴ “Word of the Year 2016,” OxfordLanguages, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

⁵ Kathleen Higgins, “Post-truth: A Guide for the Perplexed,” *Nature* 540, 9 (2016), <https://www.nature.com/articles/540009a>.

say that truth is *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. The second relation is the stance towards a given statement: I may accept, reject, or withhold a judgment for various reasons—the latter requirement is a basic condition for being rational. And since the two relations are different, I may accept a false statement or reject a true one. Since it is a piece of reality that makes my statement true or false, a cognitive error may also occur. Yet we do not classify a cognitive error as a lie. The third relation is that of consistency or inconsistency. This relation is independent of my recognition of it: I may consider my views as consistent but in fact they might be inconsistent (or vice versa). When are we dealing with a lie? Wojciech Chudy defines a lie as: (1) making claims that one believes are false and (2) deliberately misleading someone.⁶ The first definition is narrower, for it concerns making false statements in order to mislead the recipient of the message, and therefore cases such as telling legends, fairy tales, and the like are excluded from the definition. Yet, as practical logic shows, one may mislead others by making true statements or even by asking questions. To give an example: John is very late for an important meeting, and Mary, quite angry, asks: Why did you come so late? John answers: There are terrible traffic jams in the city today. The claim is true—there are traffic jams today—but it is not a true answer to Mary's question, for John simply forgot about the meeting. Thus John deceives Mary by making a true statement, for he allows her to think that the traffic jam was the real cause of his being late. One may use also questions to mislead others, as questions include presuppositions that, in an ordinary conversation, can be taken as true. Once I ask, "How much would X take for granting me a permission to build a house here?" I suggest that X takes bribes. If post-truth were just a lie in the above sense, it would be as old as humankind, and we would not need a new word for it. While the diagnosis that we are less sensitive to lies and not ready to expose them might still hold, we do not need to invent a new word to describe the situation.

Ralph Keyes claims that what is new is not lying as such, but the fact that we are ready to lie without seeing ourselves as dishonest: "Even though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth. We live in a post-truth era. Post-truthfulness exists in an ethical twilight zone. It allows us to dissemble without considering ourselves dishonest."⁷ Yet there were always cases when

⁶ See Wojciech Chudy, *Filozofia kłamstwa* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen 2003), 110.

⁷ Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press 2004), 12.

people lied without thinking they were dishonest, for instance to protect someone from danger or when they thought someone did not have a right to the truth, because they knew what the person was going to do with the knowledge she would have gained (as, e.g., in the case of a Gestapo officer asking whether there is a resistance member hiding in my basement). Whatever stance one takes in such cases, the lying person does not deserve to be described with the adjective “dishonest.” However, should a man lie to a girl saying that he is unmarried and do so in order to seduce her, no one would probably hesitate to call him dishonest. According to Keyes, post-truth means that the two described cases are in fact of the same kind. Lying is just an effective means to achieve the desired goal: in the first case it would be protecting the resistance member, in the second—seducing a girl. If we follow Keyes, post-truth is intrinsically connected to the subject’s individual will. Even Tesich’s original observation may be interpreted as reflecting precisely such an idea: It is my wish not to receive any disturbing news, and if any truth perplexes me, I do not want to hear it.

Jarosław Kucharski suggests that the sense of post-truth is better grasped in Harry G. Frankfurt’s concept of “bullshitting” than in the concept of lying.⁸ According to Frankfurt, the claim-maker wants to achieve a certain goal and attempts to do so without regard for the claim’s truthfulness or falsity. In the case of bullshitting—Kucharski claims—the concern for truth is replaced by one for efficiency: getting the recipient of the message to believe or do what the lying one wishes. Thus, the central issue is credibility. Kucharski contrasts a liar and a bullshitter with a truth-communicator. Liars care about credibility, for it helps them deceive others and make them accept a false statement as true; truth-communicators care about credibility as it helps them achieve their goals: make others find out what the truth is; bullshitter care about credibility because they want to achieve their own goals, and they become liars when they intentionally deceive others. Yet, the contrast is not as sharp as Kucharski assumes. Any communicative act is directed at a person, and its goal (or, usually, goals) is to inform, to frighten, to educate, to express feelings, and so on. By performing a communicative act its author wants to achieve such a goal. Also, any communicative act has a content which may be, at least in part, classified as true or false.⁹ Thus the concept of bullshitting does not grasp what post-truth is any better than the concept of lying does. Having analyzed

⁸ See Jarosław Kucharski, “Postprawda—próba dookreślenia znaczenia,” in *Postprawda: Spojrzenie krytyczne*, eds. Tomasz W. Grabowski, Mirosław Lakomy, Konrad Oświecimski, and Aleksandra Pohl. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum, 2018), 99–113; Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁹ I say: “at least partially,” for whether or not one can predicate truth/falsity of norms depends on their broader philosophical views.

many definitions of post-truth, Tadeusz Borkowski goes as far as to claim that post-truth is a useless concept as it does not denote a new phenomenon, while misleadingly suggesting a relation to truth which it does not possess: the opposite of truth is falsity, not post-truth.¹⁰ The popularity of the concept of post-truth—he states—is a matter of fashion. Maciej Żulpo argues in turn that the concept of post-truth has already lost its original meaning. Instead, he proposes the concept of “post’s truth” referring to messages contained in the Internet’s posts being potentially true. He does not define what he means by “true” but from the context one may infer that he understands truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. In his view, “someone’s truth” expressed in a post on the Internet, if considered as “potentially true,” encourages others to verify and to change its potentiality of being true into it being actually true, i.e., make someone’s truth my own.¹¹ Such an understanding—Żulpo insists—allows truth as *adaequatio* to regain its importance lost in Tesich’s “post-truth world.” Yet the description “potentially true” refers to any statement, if “true” denotes correspondence to reality, i.e., states how things are and does not state how they are not; thus accepting a claim as “my truth” is, in a sense, independent of the claims’s being true—I may commit a cognitive error and sincerely and with good reasons accept a false statement. However, Żulpo is right in saying that post-truth as such—in the sense of justifying claims by appealing to emotions instead of facts—as well as the world in which lying is always morally permissible, valued negatively. This indirectly shows that truth is a value.

Yet to argue that the term “post-truth” denotes a novel understanding of truth and not merely our attitude of considering truth as unimportant, I need to contrast post-truth with Truth.

POST-TRUTH AS “ADAEQUATIO INTELLECTUS ET AFFECTUUM MEORUM”

Post-truth expresses a post-theory of Truth. I will explain what I mean by “post-theory” in the concluding section of the paper. Here, let us compare Truth and post-truth. There are various theories that explain what Truth is. Yet, once we look closer at debates on post-truth (as I did in the section above), we

¹⁰ See Tadeusz B o r k o w s k i, “Brzytwa Ochkama przeciw postprawdzie,” in *Postprawda: Spojrzanie krytyczne*, eds. Tomasz W. Grabowski, Mirosław Lakomy, Konrad Oświecimski, and Aleksandra Pohl (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie 2018), 25–39.

¹¹ See Maciej Ż u l p o, “Post-prawda jako największe zagrożenie i szansa współczesności. Próba dalszej redefinicji i zmiany percepcji pojęcia,” in *Media Business Culture*, vol. 2, *Sila medialnych przekazów*, eds. Małgorzata Łosiewicz and Anna Ryłko-Kurpiewska, (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2020), 179–93.

discover that the allegation of dishonesty does not refer to a person making a statement different from someone else's statement but to the person lying. Moreover, a lie does not consist simply in the fact of one statement about a particular state of affairs differing from another statement about it; a lie is a statement intended to make another person think about *things* as they are not; and claims can be disturbing not because they are somebody's opinion but because they say something about reality. Thus, it is the classical theory of Truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* that is in fact presupposed in the way we understand lying, and not the coherence or pragmatic theory. The term *adaequatio* grasps the epistemic sense of the term "truth." Truth is a property of propositions that state how things are and do not state how they are not. We also need to distinguish Truth as the relation between a statement and a piece of reality that makes it true, and truths as statements having the property of being in that relation. The term *intellectus* suggests that what we mean is statements intentionally formulated by intelligent beings, even if a monkey playing with a computer might accidentally produce a string of words which resembles a true statement. We should also recognize that truths (i.e., statements) are aspectual because, as contingent beings, we are able to grasp only aspects of reality. There is a disagreement as to of what "true" can be predicated, but solving this issue is not relevant to our discussion on post-truth; it is sufficient to take propositions expressed by means of statements as bearers of truth. What is important, however, is the criterion (or criteria) of predicating "true" of propositions.

The metaphysical sense of the term "truth" needs to be distinguished from the epistemic one. Truth is a transcendental property of a being that (in the case of the natural world) itself accomplishes the plan of the Creator or (in the case of the world of culture) the one of a creator. In this sense truth is *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. Truth may also be an idea created by a mind (truth in the ontic sense).¹² Certainly not all philosophical traditions would accept the three senses of the term "truth." Here I refer to the tradition of the Lublin school of philosophy: the ideas worked out there will help contrast Truth and post-truth.

In the epistemic concept of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, five elements need to be distinguished: a statement of which we predicate truth, a piece of reality that makes the statement true, the relation between the two, and a subject who predicates and accepts or rejects the statement. The relation between the statement and reality is independent of the subject's act of predication of truth or untruth and the subject's acceptance (or rejection) of the statement, i.e., the subject may predicate "true" of a statement that is

¹² See *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, vol. 8, s.v. "Prawda" (by Andrzej Maryniarczyk), eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk et al. (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu 2007), 458–66.

not in the relation of *adaequatio* to reality, and “false” when the statement is in fact in such a relation. Yet, the proposition “p is true” implies an obligation to accept p, and “p is false”—to reject p. Stanisław Majdański grasps this fact in the adage “Vérité oblige.”¹³ Jan Łukasiewicz adopts a similar approach when he introduces two super-principles: I acknowledge truth and I reject falsehood. I wish to acknowledge truth and only truth, and I wish to reject falsehood and only falsehood.¹⁴ “I wish” should not be interpreted psychologically in this case but as the recognition of “the truth about truth,” or (to use Tadeusz Styczeń’s terminology) of the binding power of truth. Post-truth has the same structure: there is a statement, there is a subject who predicates and who accepts or rejects the statement, and there is “reality” to which the statement is supposed to correspond. I put the term “reality” in inverted commas to mark a substantial difference between the classical conception of truth and a post-theory of truth. In the former, it is my *intellect* that must subject itself to *res*, things as they are; and when I discover that there is no *adaequatio*, I must make a correction in the contents of my intellect. The new statement I am dealing with must correspond to the already existing contents of my intellect, and when I discover that there is no *adaequatio*, I must correct the statement in question. Thus, according to the post-theory of truth discussed here, truth is the relation of *adaequatio* between a statement and my already held opinion. Yet a theory of truth should indicate also a criterion of recognizing the truth value of a statement. The classical conception of truth indicates evidence as the ultimate—although not infallible—criterion of truth: *evidentia obiectiva* that belongs to the act of cognition itself.¹⁵ At first glance, the post-theory of truth seems to be taking consistency (or even stronger: non-contradiction) between a statement and my opinion as the criterion of truth. Yet, in order to accept this criterion, we need to refer to reality. Why do we look out to contradictions? Why, for example, science insists on non-contradictoriness of its theories? The reason is the metaphysical thesis that since reality, i.e., the entities about which science develops theories, are non-contradictory, a contradictory theory cannot be true (cannot correspond) to reality. Once we ignore reality as a term of the relation of *adaequatio*, the criterion of non-contradiction loses its usefulness,

¹³ See Stanisław Majdański, “Postawy i logiczne wartości (szkic w nawiązaniu do pewnych idei Jana Łukasiewicza),” in: *Wartość i sens: Aksjologiczne aspekty teorii interpretacji*, eds. Andrzej Tyszczyk, Edward Fiała, and Ryszard Zajączkowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2003), 93–125.

¹⁴ See Jan Łukasiewicz, “Logika dwuwartościowa,” in Jan Łukasiewicz, *Logika i metafizyka*, ed. Jacek Jadacki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wydziału Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1998), 112.

¹⁵ For further analysis, see Antoni B. Stępień, “Wartości poznawcze w ujęciu współczesnej filozofii tomistycznej,” in Antoni B. Stępień, *Studia i szkice filozoficzne*, vol. 1, ed. Arkadiusz Gut (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1999), 197–237.

as consistency may obtain between false claims. So, if not consistency, what criterion may the post-theory of truth offer?

An analysis of the existing attempts at defining post-truth suggest an answer: the criterion for recognizing the truth of a statement is emotions. A statement is true when hearing it is a source of pleasure, joy, satisfaction, and so on; and it is false when it causes opposite emotions. We may then summarize the post-truth theory of truth in a maxim: Truth is *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*. The term *meorum* is crucial here, for it is my emotions that provide a criterion for indicating whether a given statement should be accepted as true. I like a statement and I know that I like it. I cannot be mistaken about my liking or disliking it. Therefore, I do not need anything else as the ultimate criterion of truth.¹⁶ By liking it, I *establish* a statement as true *for myself*. Thus emotions become both the defining element of Truth and the criterion for accepting a statement as true. Emotions play a role here analogous to the role of coherence in the coherence theory of Truth. The latter states that the truth of a proposition consists in its coherence with some specified set of propositions, i.e., assertions conceived as statements formulated by a subject. Coherence is then the defining element of what Truth is and the criterion to predicate the truth value of a given statement. In the post-truth theory of Truth emotions work in an analogous way. A statement is true if it corresponds to my previous views and causes positive emotions in me. Classical philosophy also recognizes the role of emotions in cognition, including their function as “indicators” of the importance of an object, or even of a statement, but not as the criterion of truth.¹⁷ This constitutes the crucial difference between the classical theory of truth and the post-theory of truth. Moreover, there is no reason why, in an act of predicating truth of a statement, one person’s emotions should be more important than other’s. There might be “my truth” and “your truth.” Claiming that a certain statement is true *per se* would be an attempt at imposing a universal acceptance of that statement—an act of cognitive violence. Epistemology would then turn into ethics. The post-theory of Truth explains why we find ourselves in cognitive bubbles. We then tend to look for claims that which appeal to our emotions and on this basis we accept them as true, which reinforces our opinions and practically excludes other sources of information.

On the grounds of post-truth theory of truth also the metaphysical sense of truth gains a different meaning: truth becomes *adaequatio affectuum meorum et rei*. *Res* should correspond to my emotions, for otherwise it is not as it should be (it is not true in the metaphysical sense). And if it is not true, it should be

¹⁶ This is what philosophy knows as *conscientia concomitans*—a self-awareness accompanying the lived experience of acting.

¹⁷ See Antoni B. S t ę p i e ń, “Zagadnienie poznawczej roli sfery emocjonalnej,” in S t ę p i e ń, *Studia i szkice filozoficzne*, vol. 1, 171–77.

changed. The world becomes then raw material for the practice of adjusting entities to feelings. Cognitive acts turn into acts of construction. Again, there is no reason why one person's emotions are more important than other's, so the world created by me is not less important than the one created by you. There is "my world" and there is "your world."

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF ACCEPTING THE POST-TRUTH THEORY OF TRUTH

Ideas have consequences, so the post-truth theory of Truth has them as well. If we take seriously the definition of truth as the correspondence of a statement to the person's already existing opinions verified by her emotions, consequences for our individual and social life will follow. The first is that any dialogue, will turn into persuasion. What is debated is various views of what *is* true, for any person can *establish* the truth value of a given statement based on her emotional response to it. So, what clashes in a debate are various *truths* rather than various *views considered as true* by the debating parties respectively. If there is no independent reality that functions as an "external arbiter" for all involved, the only way to solve the debate is to persuade one of the parties to change their relevant emotions. "Argumentation" in a debate would then consist in provoking in one's interlocutor an emotion that agrees with one's emotional reaction to a given statement (or recommendation). In this way, reason and logic disappear from communication. In the post-truth world, what was hitherto seen as manipulation—such as using persuasive definitions or eristic tricks—is elevated to the level of good reasons. Also lying becomes something different. It will consist in causing—by whatever way that works—in the recipient of a message an emotion which is opposite to that experienced by the one who communicates the message.

In the post-truth theory of truth, truth retains its binding power but changes its form. When Truth is defined as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, its binding power is expressed by means of the norm: Whatever I have recognized as true, I must not deny.¹⁸ According to Styczeń and other representatives of the Lublin school of philosophy, for instance Karol Wojtyła and Stanisław Kamiński, the norm in question expresses genuine human experience: I grasp a certain fact, express my recognition with a statement, and grasp myself as the author of this statement. I adjust my intellect to reality that is independent

¹⁸ See Tadeusz Styczeń, "Etyka jako antropologia normatywna," in: Tadeusz Styczeń, *Dzieła zebrane*, vol. 4, *Wolność w prawdzie*, ed. Kazimierz Krajewski (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL and Instytut Jana Pawła II KUL, 2013), 313–49.

of my intellect, will, and emotions, and this is an act of *my* recognition. I must not deny it because I would then cause an ontic fracture in myself, for instance, as a cognitive subject, I recognize that the cat in front of me is black, and as a subject endowed with volition, I deny this fact.¹⁹ I may wish the cat was of a different color, I may expect the cat would be of a different color, or I may imagine the cat is of a different color—but the cat is as it is. I *recognize* the color of the cat when I adjust my intellect to its blackness. Moreover, Truth retains its binding power even if I am mistaken. For to reject my own claim about the cat's color, I need reasons stemming from reality. For example, someone changes the light, and the cat turns out to be dark brown; or a doctor informs me that my eyes do not work properly when it comes to seeing colors. Only then do I have a rational answer to the question why I have changed my mind about the color of the cat. Yet, as a being endowed with freedom, I *can* reject my own statement and behave contrary to what I accepted earlier. Once emotions are chosen as the criterion of the truth value of a statement, their binding power becomes absolute. For I cannot reject the truth I have established, unless I change my emotion. If I like the claim “this cat is black,” I am bound by my liking. I cannot ask myself, with regard to that claim: Is this a correct emotion? For assuming the correctness or incorrectness of emotions with regard to a certain claim would presuppose that there is an independent indicator of the correctness of a given emotion. However, we cannot provide such an indicator, once we dispose of reality as the truthmaker. We may of course change our emotional attitude towards a claim under the influence of others. Thus, accepting the post-theory of truth does not liberate us from the influence of others. On the contrary, since there is no external arbiter to which we can appeal when claiming “I am right,” we are more prone to yield to power, be it that of money, military force or political prominence. This at least partially explains why the phenomena of filter bubbles²⁰ and echo chambers²¹ work so effectively, causing social and political polarization.

There is one more consequence of the post-truth theory of Truth: the intellect becomes self-contained. If I like the claim “this cat is black,” the claim becomes true. However, emotions may also be cognitive objects. So, in order to establish the truth value of my own emotion, I need another, i.e., a meta-emotion, and to

¹⁹ This explains well why Chudy sees lying as something against the human nature. See Chudy, *Filozofia kłamstwa*, 315.

²⁰ A filter bubble is a situation when the content one sees on the Internet is based on one's previous activity, while the contrasting views or opinions are filtered out. Thus the information one encounters usually reinforces one's beliefs. See Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012).

²¹ An echo chamber is an environment in which persons find only opinions that are consistent with their own. So, their existing views are reinforced, while alternative ideas are not considered, which results in a confirmation bias. See, e.g., Cass R. Sunstein, *Republic.com 2.0* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

establish the truth value of my meta-emotion, I need a meta-meta-emotion, and a *regressus at infinitum* begins. In order to break it, one needs to decide, arbitrarily, which or whose emotion will be the ultimate criterion of the truth value of the claim “this cat is black.” Should I decide it is my emotion, I will be unable to explain why I have made such a decision, for to answer the question “why?” I need to refer to reality, not to my emotions. In this case, I lose my rationality. If the decision is made by someone else, I lose my autonomy. Thus accepting the post-theory of truth does not liberate us, but rather deprives us of our essential personal traits.

Ralph Keyes captures another consequence of accepting the post-theory of truth. It is our common experience that our actions follow from our view of reality, and the view in question consists of claims we take to be true. Thus, our view of reality comprises statements we like. Suppose we report our view to someone, and she says: “You are lying.” “When our behavior conflicts with our values—Keyes observes—what we are most likely to do is reconceive our values. Few of us want to think of ourselves as being unethical, let alone admit that to others, so we devise alternative approaches to morality. Think of them as *alt.ethics*. This term refers to ethical systems in which dissembling is considered okay, not necessarily wrong, therefore not really ‘dishonest’ in the negative sense of the word.”²² We now tend to eliminate such evaluative words as “lying,” “dishonest” or “dissembling,” and replace them with “reporting my truth,” “having a right to my own truth” or “sharing my truth.” In this way we relativize our knowledge in a peculiar manner. For what makes a statement true is *my emotion* towards that statement and this is why it is accepted as true *by me*. Since this holds for anyone, the post-truth theory of Truth brings a radical democratization of knowledge: all views are equally true. However, since decisions and actions pertaining to entire society cannot be based on contradictory views, what is accepted as true in such cases is subjected to political processes; politicization of truth is a natural consequence of the post-truth theory of truth. It provides also a basis for political and social acts: if one wishes to change the worldview of a group of individuals or of a nation, one should work to provoke the “right” emotions in them. The power of arguments referring to reality is then replaced with the power of the argument appealing to emotions. The road to barbarism has been opened.

THE POST-TRUTH THEORY OF TRUTH AS A POST-THEORY

The post-truth theory of Truth is in fact a *post*-theory of Truth. The term “theory” usually denotes (among other things) a basic component of science.

²² Ralph Keyes, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press 2004), 12.

From a methodological point of view, the theory is a set of substantively and logically ordered general principles, definitions, laws, and hypotheses that describes and explains a piece of the universe. The theory is testable by comparing it to reality (by observation and experimentation), it enables formulating predictions, new hypotheses (it is then theoretically fruitful), and new definitions of objects.²³ We do not need to go deeply into philosophical and methodological controversies on what constitutes a good theory. What has been said so far is sufficient to state that the conception of post-truth, as any theory, pretends to describe what Truth is (*adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*). Emotions assume in it the role of the truthmaker. My claim “this is true” acquires performative power: Whatever I say, having used my emotions as the criterion of its truth value, is true, and, consequently, whatever I say is false becomes false, for I can recognize my likings and dislikings, and there exists nothing to falsify my judgment on the truth value (or falsity) of a statement. Thus I *establish* the truth (or falsity) of a statement rather than recognize it. Truth is subjected to my freedom and to my will. The claim “this is *my* truth” is thereby justified as truthful, however, it no longer belongs in the domain of cognition, but in that of creation (as art does). Truth becomes a question of taste—and *de gustibus non disputandum est*. This explains why lying is no longer perceived as condemnable. Suppose I attempt to persuade someone to like a claim I dislike. Why, if truth is a matter of taste, should it be morally wrong? Am I *lying* when I am trying to persuade someone to like impressionism which I dislike? This explains also why science is criticized for being an exercise of power—scientific theses make the claim to universal validity and apparently require to be accepted by everyone unless scientific reasons to question them are presented. If so, they are seen as *imposed* on us.

The post-theory of Truth is self-referential in the following sense: it is accepted as the correct theory of Truth on the basis of liking it as ethically adequate. The theory of Truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* divides us into those who know and those who do not know reality; and knowing might become a source of power over those who do not know. Only the post-truth understanding of what Truth is makes us equal as creators of truths and this is why we *should* like the theory of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*. It is, however, a *post*-theory, for it explains—as any *bona fide* theory does in relation to its subject-matter—what Truth is; it does not, however, fulfill a basic requirement set for any theory (maybe except theories in formal sciences, such as mathematics or cybernetics), namely the possibility to be confronted with reality. For it *establishes* what Truth is, instead of discovering it. This fact justifies the term

²³ See Stanisław Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda: Pojęcie nauki i klasyfikacja nauk*, ed. Andrzej Bronk (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1992), 214–15

“*post-theory*”: an “ordinary” theory is a result of inquiries into reality and plays various functions; a *post-theory* plays similar functions, but it results from acts of the will following emotions. Therefore, whoever controls our emotions, controls also truths for us. And since there are people who still like the correspondence theory of truth or the coherence theory, or any other theory formulated throughout the history of philosophy, the creators of the post-theory of Truth should work to change such likings. Yet, to make one like or dislike a theory, it is not necessary to use philosophical argumentation; what one needs are rhetorical and psychological means to influence emotions. Logic becomes useless and classes in philosophy should turn into courses on persuasion. And it seems that only advocates of the post-theory of Truth should teach such courses.

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We do not need to enlarge on the consequences of accepting the post-theory of Truth further to see that subjecting truth to freedom neither liberates us from being controlled by external powers or empowers us. On the contrary, by claiming that the truth value of a statement is established and by ignoring the fact that truth needs to be recognized, we lose the ability to protect ourselves from being presented certain claims as true. For any protest makes sense only when there is a reason for it. The fact that I dislike a claim someone else likes is not a reason to protest—I may only say: “I protest against your liking this claim because I dislike it.” However, it is not a real protest but rather an expression of non-understanding or astonishment. It seems then that we should take seriously the warning of Joseph Ratzinger: “In a world without truth, however, one cannot keep on living; even if we suppose that we can do without truth, we still feed on the quiet hope that it has not yet really disappeared, just as the light of the sun could remain for a while after the sun came to an end, momentarily disguising the worldwide night that had started.”²⁴

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²⁴ Joseph R a t z i n g e r, “Why I Am Still in the Church.” *Comunitatea monastica Preasfanta Treime*. April 19, 2012, <https://www.preasfantatreime.ro/en/blog/2021/04/19/why-i-am-still-in-the-church/>.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Agnieszka LEKKA-KOWALIK, A Post-truth Theory of Truth

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Against the background of various attempts to understand post-truth, the paper argues that an effort to make an overall intellectual grasp of the concept produces a post-theory of truth. Truth is defined in it as *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*, and emotions are both the criterion of the truth-value of a given claim and its truthmaker. This in turn gives the claim “this is true” a performative potential, which has various consequences, such as politicization of truth and invalidation of logic and argumentation, turning dialogue into persuasion, epistemology into ethics, and cognition into construction. What we are dealing here with is a post-theory, because, while it still fulfills the main functions ascribed to “ordinary” theories based on inquiries into reality, it springs, unlike them, from acts of volition which follow emotions.

Keywords: truth, post-truth, lie, cognition, emotion, post-theory

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Agnieszka LEKKA-KOWALIK, Postprawdziwa teoria prawdy

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Na tle różnych prób zrozumienia postprawdy w artykule wykazano, że ujęcie tego, czym jest postprawda, należy interpretować jako postteorię prawdy. W teorii tej prawdę definiuje się jako *adaequatio intellectus et affectuum meorum*. Moja emocja stanowi zatem zarówno kryterium prawdziwości danego twierdzenia, jak i jego uprawdziwiacz. To z kolei nadaje twierdzeniu „to prawda” moc performatywną. Fakt ten ma rozmaite konsekwencje, takie jak upolitycznienie prawdy, nieważność logiki i argumentacji, zamiana dialogu na perswazję, epistemologii na etykę i poznania na konstrukcję. Jest to postteoria, spełnia ona bowiem główne funkcje przypisywane „zwykłym” teoriom, jednakże w odróżnieniu od tych ostatnich, które są rezultatem badania rzeczywistości, jest ona rezultatem decyzji woli podążającej za emocjami.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda, postprawda, kłamstwo, poznanie, emocja, postteoria

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