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## POST-TRUTH, AS SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF SOCIOLOGY, LOGIC, AND METAPHYSICS Introductory Remarks

*Post-truth affirmed in the process of social communication is universal not so much because of its quantitative predominance in the world, but due to the universal model of the modern subject, easily recognizable in post-truth statements and shared by individual members of communities and participants in the communication processes. Thus the essence of post-truth must be sought in anthropology, while the principles of subjective functioning of post-truth can be found in ontology.*

### POST-TRUTH AN AMBIGUOUS AND MULTI-INTERPRETABLE PHENOMENON

Post-truth is an attribute of contemporary culture in two senses: as its specific characteristic, but also as a way of understanding it. It is certainly a multifaceted category and has multiple interpretations. In linguistic terms, this multiplicity is manifested in a homonymic ambiguity, whereas in the discussion undertaken here, it will be understood also as multi-interpretability. Multi-interpretability in science refers to grasping a subject from multiple research perspectives (i.e., using multiple disciplinary systems).

### THREE LEVELS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE PHENOMENON

Post-truth is manifested primarily in statements made in everyday life, in social communications, in linguistic (speech) acts, and in decision-making processes, in various resolutions, opinions, proclamations, also in the polemical discourse, it informs decrees, reviews, introductions, afterwords, messages, and announcements of all kinds, and it is not absent from vows and oaths, or even from acts of consecration and sacramental rites. Although post-truth attitudes are clearly present in the communication processes involving the enumerated acts, they do not themselves affirm its presence, and the word “post-truth” does not necessarily appear in them. However, the situation is different in the case of statements which describe the first-level ones. Such metastatements

(referred to as statements of the second level) contain the term “post-truth.” They appear most often in the mass media and in academic articles intended for general audience, but also in scholarly texts. Post-truth is conceived there in terms of disturbing social phenomena which prove that those responsible for them either disregard facts or are not in touch with actual reality. There are also third-level statements in which the insight into the nature of post-truth is much deeper than it is in the case of the social sciences: those who make third-level statements seek to unveil the essence of post-truth by making use of the conceptual categories worked out within logic, ontology and metaphysics, and philosophical anthropology.

### POST-TRUTH AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF POSTMODERNISM

Post-truth in the shape I am discussing here emerged together with postmodernism, postmodernity, or better said, late modernity.<sup>1</sup> Thus, one of the factors that opened the way to post-truth was modern continental philosophy developed since Descartes. Within this paradigm, the foundation of knowing the truth about the world is provided by reflection rather than by natural cognition (a cognitive grasp of things). The truth-value of an idea is grounded in the subject rather than in the idea’s reference to reality. However, modern philosophy and the so-called modernism in general acknowledged the reality of being, although they emphasized the role of the mediation of ideas in its recognition. It was only in late modernity, precisely in the radical Nietzschean paradigm, that the value of truth as the ultimate goal of any statement was abandoned. As a result, today, post-truth is perceived as the permanent condition of culture on the one hand, and as the prevailing attitude towards truth on the other. Therefore, the disregard for truth in the world of post-truth must be approached differently than occasional odd lies with which we deal on daily

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<sup>1</sup> The expression *modernité tardive* (late modernity), used by Chantal Delsol describes the totalist nature and global scope of the currents prevailing in today’s culture. See Chantal Delsol, *Éloge de la singularité: Essai sur la modernité tardive* (Paris: La Table ronde, 2000); see also Chantal Delsol, *The Unlearned Lessons of the Twentieth Century: An Essay on Late Modernity*, trans. Robin Dick (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006). “Globality” does not denote merely the extent or omnipresence of cultural elements, but also certain regularities manifested in the cultural space. Thus, globality consists in the presence of common and, as it were, obligatory regularities (rules) governing the world today. Globalization must be understood in the same way—again, this observation is not limited to a process of simple unification, but includes adoption of principles governing the world and man in the world. Globalization involves the removal of earlier principles (ontological, ethical, and social principles which promoted individualism and communality); hence it creates a completely new picture of the world. See Marguerite A. Peters, *The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution: Key Concepts, Operational Mechanisms* (St. Louis: En Route Books and Media, 2023),

basis, regardless of the historical time. Unlike them, it signifies a permanent departure from truth-based social life. As such, post-truth has an increasing impact on the functioning of the society and is responsible for the generally accepted ways of institutional diverging from truth in particular domains of life. Moreover, while individual instances of refusal to acknowledge truth may be considered in psychological or moral terms, post-truth provides the entire foundation of the functioning of the information society with all its structures and units.

### PRELIMINARY DIAGNOSES

As a decisive factor in the functioning of individuals and entire societies, post-truth needs to be considered primarily from the vantage point of its implications for truth in social life. A view of culture from such a perspective involves second-level statements critical of the instances of disregard for truth. Such statements are expressed not only in *ad hoc* press communications or in general-interest articles, but also—and above all—in scholarly studies in fields such as the social sciences, media studies, cultural and historical anthropology, and religious studies. Thus, at the second level, manifestations of post-truth are confronted with the idea of truth valid in the disciplines in question. However, the analysis of post-truth cannot stop here, but needs to probe deeper into the ontological, i.e., metaphysical and existential, level of human reality. Yet, before taking this step, we need to focus on the second-level statements critical of post-truth in particular scholarly disciplines and providing cognitive tools which make it possible to recognize post-truth on the grounds specific to each of the disciplines. As each of them uses its own category of truth, it is necessary, in order to recognize and diagnose the peculiarities of post-truth in a particular discipline, to refer to its own understanding of truth. This is true about all the disciplines within social, cultural or media studies.

However, the research conducted in these disciplines, unlike that characteristic of the third-level reflection, does not scrutinize post-truth in an analytical or principled manner. Moreover, it is by no means easy to draw demarcation lines between them or specify their theoretical peculiarities. Yet, it remains true that although the disciplines in question differ in their choice of perspective and research approach, they do refer to post-truth as it is manifested in the same social and everyday life. In each case, disciplinary research concerns widespread and interpenetrating discourses and verbal behavior. Hence, in the paper, I cite works that address the field of post-truth in various ways and accurately portray variants of post-truth present in the social world. However,

I will not focus on the deviations from truth analyzed in various disciplines; I believe it more important to give, based to some extent on those analyses, an assessment of the situation of truth in the world and in global cognitive and communication processes.<sup>2</sup>

In a study of post-truth, it is essential to adopt a method that unites rather than separates dispersed disciplinary practices. Without doubt, such a universalizing approach is provided by disciplines important for the third-level considerations. It should be added that, albeit without in-depth philosophical reflection, the consolidation of disciplinary approaches can be provided to some extent by the cognitive science approach and research in the field of linguistic worldview.

One can easily observe that post-truth does not consist in the incompatibility of a claim with the state of the world (such a claim would belong in the category of falsity), but in contesting or undermining the valid ways of recognizing the truthfulness of claims. A post-truth statement cannot be considered in terms of simple correspondence between a proposition and the state of things. This is because things are not given in isolation, but usually against a background, and variously conditioned. A claim-maker can “bring out” certain elements of such a background, select and juxtapose them, and thus modify the image of things. In approaching things, a claim-maker is guided by his or her own vision of the world or even by an ideology superimposed on the expressed

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<sup>2</sup> Truth requires human beings, who are at the same time social subjects, to recognize state of affairs *in statu nascendi*, in other words, the states of affairs whose objectivity has been demonstrated on the basis of realist philosophy. It is only when we reach objectivity prior to different contexts and cognitive situations that we can speak of one truth, which, by virtue of the objectivity of what it refers to, manifests itself in the same way to each cognitive subject. Therefore, opinions about the same objects expressed by different subjects are variants of the same judgment (proposition); this applies to both true and false claims about these objects. In both cases the main issue is that of assertion (i.e., recognizing, in a true proposition, that something is the case), or a lack thereof (i.e., claiming, in a false proposition, that something is the case when it is not). In both cases, the question about assertion independent of the subjects’ cognitive disposition and point of view arises. We refer here to the concept of objective truth whose interpretation was offered by Thomas Aquinas: *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei*. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 16, a. 1, co., Corpus Thomisticum, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1015.html>. The cited phrase speaks of the *adaequatio* between the intellect or, rather, the intellect’s judgment (thought) and the thing. A proposition is true when it corresponds to the order of things. The understanding of truth as *adaequatio* cited here is called the classical, or correspondence definition of truth. A later non-classical theory of truth, called a coherence theory, reduces truth to a relation between propositions, or a set of propositions. “An internal consistency and a consistency with the data of experience are to be the truth-making criteria here.” *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk et al., vol. 8, s.v. “Prawda” (by Andrzej Maryniarczyk), (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2007), 461. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own. In the non-classical approaches, the relation to being as an object of a proposition is not taken into account.

proposition. Such a perspective prevents the claim-maker from seeing things in their anthropological, social or historical factuality modifies the situational context in which he or she comes up with a specific proposition. As a result, the categories of truth and falsity are no longer applicable to propositions. A complex of ideas (an ideology) in which post-truth is grounded makes it possible to confirm any proposition stating any state of affairs. The categories of truth and post-truth belong in different orders of apprehending reality and thus post-truth statements cannot be effectively overcome by the true ones. Post-truth results from an ideological rearrangement of the order of reality, whereas truth is a confirmation of this order (and falsity is, respectively, its denial). Only on rare occasions can an individual assert something and contrast his or her post-truth claim with a true one, and if such a situation is possible, the comparison in question is made in the individual's personal cognitive space. Post-truth statements, although each of them is individual, presuppose a universal state of reality encompassing the entire social sphere. Such statements are grounded in an ideology that is widely accepted and socially well-established. Their post-truth status can be revealed only as a result of an advanced analysis and critique of the ideology in question, carried out from the position of realism.

#### POST-TRUTH VERSUS FICTION

Not only is post-truth different from falsehood (e.g., of propositions), but it also cannot be identified with fiction. This is because post-truth statements do not concern an imaginary, illusory, or "as if" world, nor do they refer to components of the world that were produced entirely and exclusively by the mind and do not exist outside it. On the contrary, post-truth is about components of the factual world (events, opinions, interpersonal relations, and institutions), which, however, is formed following principles different from those applied to the world of ordinary human relationships. Post-truth propositions are modelled on certain "projects" of reality, born of imagination and confirmed by a consent of participants in social life who comprehend and "cultivate" the world "in their own way."

One may ask how big the scope of the arbitrariness that creates post-truth is. Where are, and, in general, are there any limits to the excesses of post-truth? In the first place, those who implement (ideological or political) projects with the purpose of transforming reality adopt an indifferent attitude towards its objective shape which cannot be captured except through the categories of truth and falsehood. But can one go still further? What else can fall victim to post-truth?

## POST-TRUTH VERSUS THE LOGIC OF LANGUAGE

As disciplinary analyses show, post-truth authors, in order to achieve some of their goals, generally respect the logical consistency of propositions. But do they always do so? Do they not sacrifice the coherence of an argument to achieve some goals of theirs? If so, this would indicate that post-truth distances itself not only from the inherent logical rules, but also from the logical order of its own claims in favor of a deliberate pluralism or intentional ambivalence of opinion. Is there any “liberal” logic in which post-truth practices could be justified?<sup>3</sup>

THE “FALSITY” OF POST-TRUTH  
AN INVERSION OF THE ORDER OF VALUES

The nature of post-truth consists in that the real world (the world of human life) is arbitrarily modified and, as a result, departs from the “truth” of that real world as the ultimate reference of (truthful) propositions. This is the case not only when the creators of post-truth aim to produce an alternative conception of the world in a spontaneous (so to speak, “disinterested”) manner, but also when they intentionally oppose the truth about reality, i.e., propagate untruth, or deliberately lie. As a result, the post-truth project is reintroduced, as it were, into the context of truth and falsehood, and must inevitably be evaluated by its

<sup>3</sup> The question could be addressed to Saul Kripke. I refer to his idea to “liberalize” logic and his concept of possible worlds. The conditions of systemic correctness should be preserved in possible worlds. Can post-truth abrogate these conditions, or, colloquially speaking, the principles of rational thinking? Kripke considers the identity: the Evening Star is the Morning Star. In the world where the planet Venus is absent, there would be neither the Evening Star nor the Morning Star. The question arises whether the proposition stating the identity is true, false, or neither true nor false. If the latter is the case, the question of the truth of the proposition remains unresolved (which reminds us of post-truth and its location beyond truth and falsity). However, the vagueness of the identity proposition, related to the truth of its reference, points to its second essential property: the proposition is necessary because it is never false. On the basis of this finding, Kripke asks: “Should we require that a necessary truth be true in all possible worlds?” Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 110. In fact, Kripke’s questions are whether necessary truths should obtain in any arbitrary worlds and whether such truths are prior to and entirely independent of the vicissitudes of these worlds. Kripke prefers not to address them: “I am leaving such problems outside my considerations altogether.” Ibidem. Does he think that the primacy of necessity over possible truthfulness is not unconditionally certain? Does he suspect that there are possible worlds that do not guarantee such primacy? If that were the case, one might think that the post-truth world with its inherent contradictions is nevertheless not outside the scope of possible worlds, even if the contradictions were intentionally produced. This issue, as in Kripke’s considerations, must remain open.

audience as either true or false. An ideological construct created for the benefit of interest groups is presented to a certain audience as a faithful testimony to reality, which is supposed to furnish them with grounds for making judgements about the world. Such an attitude is possible on condition that references to “truthful” statements, and therefore also references to the original state of being, or reality as such, were excluded. Thus, all ideas, all claims, be they social, cultural, religious or scientific, retain their post-truth quality unless they correlate, or are identical with certain actually true or false utterances. If such a correlation, or identification, occurs, post-truth claims also enter the domain of “truthfulness.”

The creation and propagation of post-truth often involves a practice of inverting the hierarchy of values shared in daily life. Ideologies shape not only the world, but also the subject, his or her behavior and acts of judgment. Post-truth undergoes transformation in the processes of communication. Participants in cultural communication use multiple codes (sender codes and receiver codes) in which meanings and statuses of what they say change. However, the dependence of statements on their communicative situation cannot be used as an argument for adopting cognitive relativism and abandoning efforts to discover objective states of affairs.

#### THE REINFORCEMENT OF POST-TRUTH IN THE MASS MEDIA

In the following considerations, I will focus on the second-level statements, mainly those which express post-truth in the domain of specific disciplines: sociology, media studies, social communication, political science, education, economics, and others. Despite an abundance of available publications, it is still difficult to capture the general features of the phenomenon of post-truth, because, as I pointed out earlier, each discipline operates from its own, and thus relatively narrow, cognitive perspective. Therefore, I shall limit the scope of my analysis to political science and media studies. In the field outlined in this way, I will scrutinize works focused on social and communication issues.

A noteworthy attempt to identify the phenomenon of post-truth on the ground of social science and media studies was made by Marek Sokołowski,<sup>4</sup> who makes numerous references to the accomplishments also of other re-

<sup>4</sup> See Marek Sokołowski, “Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm: siła czy słabość? Pytania o wartości,” In *Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm. Definiowanie (nie)oczywistych pojęć. Post-politics, Post-truth, Populism. Defining (Non)Obvious Concepts*, ed. Marek Sokołowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego and Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2023): 7–26.



searchers.<sup>5</sup> In his opinion, the source of the dissemination of post-truth is the collapse of the politics of modernist liberalism and, in his view, the process in question encompasses all spheres of life: knowledge, economics, religion, and even gender relations,<sup>6</sup> as they are all, to some extent, immersed in politics. Due to the collapse of liberalism, values and truth could no longer be expressed in these spheres, and the respect for truth itself ceased to be the basis of human life. Steve Tesich, cited by Sokołowski, even speaks of a traumatization of society as a whole, which seems to have played a key role in the advent of postmodernism he describes as a state of the frustrated universal mind.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of post-truth is also addressed by Adam Zamojski, who believes that due to the oligarchization of the electoral procedure, democracy is moving towards post-democracy: "The instruments and procedures of the democratic system are sometimes used to introduce identity changes, going in the direction of transforming the traditional identity of our civilization, built on the Judeo-Christian foundation. This applies to the process of dechristianization of Europe, its secularization, atheization, religious indifferentism, and the consumerist attitude characterized by hedonism."<sup>8</sup> The current upheaval of civilization uses democracy for the purpose of a destruction of democracy itself. Through post-truth, democratic procedures go against the principles of the European heritage and work against it.

This view is confirmed by Anna Ślósarz who holds that post-democracy consists in depriving citizens of real and effective decision-making through an electoral procedure by cutting them off from true information about themselves and social reality. Lies are spread by centers that control the awareness and beliefs of citizens through total media coverage. Such centers obtain dictatorial power as a result of, as Ślósarz writes, performing a spectacle of democracy without democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Norbert Tomaszewski's article also discusses political post-truth in the media. Tomaszewski notes that despite widespread criticism of media abuse, deception is still being practiced. This is because the benefits of lying prevail over the damage caused by openly challenging truth or deliberately mislead-

<sup>5</sup> See Wojciech D o h n a l, *Od polityki pierwotnej do postpolityki: Z dziejów anglosaskiej antropologii politycznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2013); Stephen H o l m e s, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> See S o k o ł o w s k i, "Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm: siła czy słabość? Pytania o wartości," 8.

<sup>7</sup> See Steve T e s i c h, "A Government of Lies," *The Nation*, January 6, 1992: 12–14.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Z a m o j s k i, "Demokracja czy demolatria: Brzydsze oblicze systemu," in *Populizm jako narzędzie marketingu politycznego*, eds. Maria Nowina Konopka, Kamila Glinka, and Rafał Miernik (Kielce: Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego, 2017), 50.

<sup>9</sup> See Anna Ś l ó s a r z, "Kulturowe źródła postdemokracji: Cultural Sources of Post-democracy," in *Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm*, 96–98.



ing the public. As a form of lying, fake news, in Tomaszewski's view, is part, of the manipulative machine called post-truth<sup>10</sup> and involves blurring or ignoring the difference between truth and lies. The dictatorship of post-truth opposes truth by exploiting the truthfulness mentality and the public respect for truth.

The latter view is developed by Katarzyna Bąkowska, who believes that post-truth, a phenomenon closely related to our time, can be best described as a commonly accepted way of doing things; hence such a multitude of its different forms and sectors. In her opinion, it is difficult to agree with the Oxford Dictionary that post-truth can be recognized only after the actual truth has been revealed.<sup>11</sup> Only falsehood or motivation to make false claims can be revealed in this way. In the case of post-truth, a "reality" is created in which differentiation between truth and falsehood becomes meaningless. Bąkowska's view suggests that post-truth statements themselves legitimize the reality they create and are performative in it (i.e., what they establish is binding). So, since everyone is navigating the thicket of post-truth claims, they are unable to see the fact that these claims lack reference to the factual state of the world and take them to be testimony to actual reality. Any opposition or differentiation that might emerge in a world constructed in such a way would not defy global post-truth,<sup>12</sup> nor would they problematize it for the sake of something else (something more); instead, they would take the form of opposite post-truth claims, as if micro-truths and micro-falsehoods were established in the domain of post-truth. Such post-truth claims seem close to John L. Austin's constatives.<sup>13</sup> There are also researchers who demand a higher status for post-truth than that of performatives. In their view, post-truth constitutes the third

<sup>10</sup> See Norbert Tomaszewski, "Post-prawda oraz fake news jako machina napędzająca kampanię prezydencką Donalda Trumpa w 2016 r.," in *Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm*, 215.

<sup>11</sup> See "Word of the Year 2016," OxfordLanguages, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

<sup>12</sup> The term "global post-truth" is opposed to "local post-truth." In the realm of global post-truth the meanings of "truth," "falsehood," "truthfulness," "lying," and "deception" are redefined. One can even say that a world created in such a way is characterized by some kind of post-truth ontology (for it is assigned an ontological status).

<sup>13</sup> Neither are constatives a category subordinate to performatives, nor can they be attributed logical values. Thus it can be assumed, after Agnieszka Kułacka, that their lower status finds a certain interpretation in the theory of possible worlds. Truth (here: constative truth) is limited, "attributed" to a specific possible world. See Agnieszka Kułacka, "Wypowiedzenia performatywne i konstatywne: Teoria aktów mowy," *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis: Kształcenie językowe*, no. 9(19) (2011): 81–90. Although post-truth statements do not respect even a weak opposition between truth and falsity, and may not respect the basic principles of logic (e.g., the principle of non-contradiction and identity; see also footnote 3), the theory of constatives, derived from John L. Austin's work, at least to some extent suggests a way of understanding some logically opposed values within a post-truth statement. See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).

logical value, alongside truth and falsity. However, by recognizing post-truth as a logical value, one shifts the problem from the logic of being to the logic of thought and cognitive models.<sup>14</sup>

Post-truth statements are factors in the global process of information exchange. Thus, post-truth has become possible only today, in the era of electronic communication and constant transmission of information among numerous media outlets. Bąkiewicz points to an increasing amount of information, its accumulation, congestion, and the social pressure it produces. Correlations and interactions of messages make all claims ambiguous, which leads to blurring the boundary between fact and opinion.<sup>15</sup> Opinions prevail over statements of fact, and as a result it is difficult to break through the build-up of communications, while the truth becomes less and less accessible. Such is the nature of the modern world.

Jan Kłós states: “I understand the lack of foundation also, or perhaps primarily, as a lack of deeper understanding of the concepts by which society lives.... In this context, understanding consists in relating them to the reality of human nature.”<sup>16</sup> The latter approach, which is close to a metaphysical one, considers truth as reference to the order of being, in full awareness of the fact that being—in this case not only nature, but above all the human person—is characterized by an internal order, which means that—to the researcher—it is an intelligible object (in the metaphysical sense), one whose order can be recognized, reconstructed, and researched in a cognitive process. In this case, post-truth would be a mere divergence from the order in question, i.e., ignorance of the truth or its rejection. It is still worthwhile to point out, after Irving Babbitt cited

<sup>14</sup> Some researchers allow themselves to be manipulated by the idea of post-truth, one might say that they succumb to the power of post-truth since they begin to treat it as a category that can be placed in the context of truth or falsity; as a result, post-truth becomes a third logical value alongside truth and falsity, of in some sense equal status. This is pointed out by Mirosław Lakomy in an article where he discusses the concept of trivalent logic (as conceived of by Jan Lukasiewicz and interpreted by Ludwik Borkowski), side by side with the traditional standpoint (rooted in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition) and fuzzy logic, which is closer to the category of post-truth. See Mirosław L a k o m y, “Postprawda w dyskursie publicznym w kontekście logiki klasycznej i logiki rozmytej,” *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis: Studia de Cultura* 11, no. 1 (2019): 5–14. There are also other systems of logic more favorable for legitimizing post-truth; such systems (i.e., modal logics, temporal logics, logics of change with a history functor, causal logics, and numerous others) have been created for their formal qualities and sometimes to overcome certain difficulties in scientific research. One can accept the value and usefulness of such systems of logic, but without considering them as interpretations of the “inherent” order of the real world.

<sup>15</sup> See Katarzyna B ą k o w i c z, “Fake News”: *Produkt medialny czasów postprawdy* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2020), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Jan K ł ó s, “Dyktatura jako rezultat braku fundamentów,” in *Postpolityka, postprawda, populizm*, 79.

by Kłos,<sup>17</sup> to humility as a condition for recognizing a higher source of the order of human existence, since that order cannot come from the human being, but from a transcendent source<sup>18</sup>. A rejection of this key-principle stems from hubris, from constituting oneself in opposition to truth. In this sense, hubris is not merely a delusion and illusion, or affirmation of appearances, but it is a transformation of reality resulting from the processes initiated by post-truth, namely the processes of ludification and globalization, and from widespread hypocrisy, which I will discuss in the conclusion of the article.

As can be seen, some studies place post-truth at an ever-deeper level of research. It is possible to follow such investigations as long as the category of post-truth is correlated with an appropriate conception of truth that makes it possible to understand the former. There are, for instance, media post-truth and media truth, social post-truth and social truth. However, as I have already pointed out, the essence of post-truth cannot be adequately grasped in terms of social truth, media truth, or even in the reflection undertaken within individual scholarly disciplines. A proper grasp of post-truth requires a reference to truth in ontological, logical or anthropological-philosophical sense. Only in such a context can one acquire a deeper understanding of the post-truth fabric of today's reality. In addition to the views of Anna Ślósarz and Jan Kłos, it is worth referring to the ideas of Michał Głowala. In reflecting on truth and post-truth, Głowala reaches back to the realist philosophy of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, which refers to natural cognition. Realist philosophy proclaims the obviousness of truth (one can "enter" it, as it were, as one enters a house<sup>19</sup>); at the same time, the obviousness in question makes it possible to effectively recognize the signs of a deformation of truth.

## TWO ONTOLOGIES

Thus, it seems that there are two separate ontologies: one is related to truth-based categories, the other is formed beyond truth and falsity, grounded in the relations of power, knowledge, and status, and essentially constructivist

<sup>17</sup> See *ibidem*, s. 83.

<sup>18</sup> See Irving B a b i t t, *Democracy and Leadership* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> See Michał G ł o w a ł a, "Łatwość i trudność poznania prawdy," in *Prawda i metoda*, vol. 2, *O prawdzie*, ed. Janusz Jaskóła and Anna Olejarczyk (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2006): 49–65. The author cites the saying: "Who would miss the door?" which, according to the scholastics, points to certain similarities between knowing the truth and knowing a house. The metaphor emphasizes the ease of finding an entrance (*introitus, aditus*) to the house, even if finding one's way in its interior (*interiora domus*) is difficult (see *ibidem*, s. 52).

(statements do not reflect the pre-existing order of things, but create an order of their own). Accordingly, a reality created in this way affirms itself, determines its own existential “virtue,” according to its own principles. Such general properties, considered on their own, without taking into account personal subjects, constitute a basic form of the latter ontology. It may seem that, as such, it should be considered as an object of a theory or scholarly discipline.

Presuppositions present in such a discipline can also provide content for intellectual activities and aspirations of individuals. It can even be said that individuals themselves profess and possess their own ontologies which become their personal imperatives. Therefore, such ontologies, in addition to “closed” theoretical forms, have also “open” forms which, through individuals, give shape to cultures. The correlation of “closed” and cultural (“open”) ontologies does not cause concern only if they are all based on the same categories of truth and falsity.

### POST-TRUTH, TRUTH, AND METAPHYSICS

Ontological comparisons help explain the opposition between the concept of being developed on the grounds of realist philosophy and the problematic concepts of being which disregard the criteria of truth and falsity, i.e., post-truth ontologies. I insist on using the term “ontology,” although its usage in this article has no precedence in any other available studies. In fact, I operate with two radically opposing notions of ontology. One is related to realist philosophy, the other is introduced here *ad hoc* to denote the realm of being referred to in post-truth discourses. In our considerations, only these two extreme forms of ontology are relevant. In the terminology coined in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the ontology of realist philosophy, is called metaphysics. This is important because a proper diagnosis of post-truth requires the strongest possible context, that of metaphysics, i.e., the realist theory of being. The philosophies situated between these extreme poles, such as numerous philosophies (ontologies) rooted in Cartesian thought, are less significant. I mention them because against their background both the classical (Aristotelian-Thomistic) perspective and the ontological peculiarity of post-realist thought become clearer. The advantage of metaphysics over any ontology consists in that ontologies are concerned with “the content of a spontaneous recognition of the existing reality, while metaphysics is concerned with the content of a recognition of a rationally conceived concept of being as worked out throughout the process of philosophical analysis.”<sup>20</sup> According to the standpoint of Thomistic

<sup>20</sup> See *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk et al., vol. 7, s.v. “Ontologia” (by Mieczysław A. Krąpiec) (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2006), 816.

metaphysics, the philosophical system originates from the data derived from a spontaneous perception of reality, and the explanation of the data is made on the grounds of philosophical realism. All other ontologies, which grasp reality through ready-made and even arbitrarily adopted, and thus subjective, schemes and conceptualizations, grasp being on the basis of reflection alone. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec writes: "Philosophers since Descartes have found it superfluous to distinguish between subjective and objective concepts in view of the identity of their content. They enclosed all reality in the consciousness of a subjective concept."<sup>21</sup> As a result, in the European tradition, reflection-based and idealistic ontologies emerged, imposing ready-made cognitive concepts on reality. The ontologies I have in mind include theories proposed by Descartes, Malebranche, Kant, Hegel, phenomenologists (such as Husserl, Scheler, and Ingarden), Heidegger, and Sartre. In the idealist phase of Husserl's thought, the subjective approach played a particularly important role: the subject does not turn towards the transcendent (objective) reality but gives "reality" to the components of its pure consciousness (*reine Bewusstsein*) and noetic-noematic acts.<sup>22</sup>

#### TRUTH AND POST-TRUTH COEXIST IN MAN

Although post-truth falls outside the scope of serious reflection, it nevertheless plays an important role in the vicissitudes of modern thought, primarily because of its cognitive peculiarity, universality, and potential to transform human lives. Post-truth does not occur in isolation, it is present in publicly and privately made statements and deeply penetrates the space of real life. The powerful influence (admittedly different, but comparable to that of truth) it exerts on the human being makes it an important category and an alternative ontology: it is related to the essence of being, but completely "obscures" it. Therefore, the very importance of post-truth, namely the fact that it replaces truth in culture, forces us to recognize it as an ontology (in action). Still, it is necessary to demonstrate its theoretical nature.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> "Husserl was convinced that by unveiling the transcendental aspect of human consciousness he reached 'the thing itself,' all 'the rest,' among others the real world, is only an intentional stream of possible experiences, where reality is just one of the constitutive objectivities." *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk et al., vol. 3, s.v. "Fenomenologia" (by Henryk Kiereś) (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, Lublin 2002), 402. Thus, the emphasis on the sphere of pure consciousness diminishes the cognitive importance of the "external," objective world, which, in realist philosophy, is called "actual."

The question of ontology is situated at the third level of considerations, that of metaphysics, logic, and philosophical anthropology. What does such a positioning of post-truth mean? The term “post-truth” refers to states of affairs established by post-truth statements, alleged situations, worlds, and images of the world. This means that post truth excludes propositions regarding the states of affairs prior to those established by post-truth statements. If post-truth is called “ontological,” but does not come under the order of logic, it is necessary to ask what other theoretical criteria are met by post-truth to justify, at least to some extent, the use of the term “ontological”?

### AN ONTOLOGY OF THE “POST-TRUTH” SUBJECT

To characterize the all-encompassing phenomenon of post-truth, it is first necessary, in accordance with the rigor of ontological thinking, to focus attention on the cognitive and social peculiarities of the “post-truth” subject. One may ask whether, to reconstruct it properly, one should start from individual post-truth claims which, by replicating and self-confirming, encompass entire culture, or, on the contrary, one should focus on the properties of the subject itself shaped under the influence of the spirit of postmodernity. Most studies follow an “inductive” method based on exemplification and describe post-truth by analyzing post-truth texts, while I direct attention to the subject and its socio-cultural context.<sup>23</sup>

Post-truth affirmed in the process of social communication is universal not so much because of its quantitative predominance in the world, but due to the universal model of the modern subject, easily recognizable in post-truth statements and shared by individual members of communities and participants in the communication processes. Thus the essence of post-truth must be sought in anthropology, while the principles of subjective functioning of post-truth can be found in ontology.

The act of the conscious subject in the post-truth world is transcendent, i.e., goes beyond his or her consciousness and shapes the world outside it.

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<sup>23</sup> An inclination of the subject towards post-truth is strengthened by an increase in ambivalent attitudes, present in culture, towards the fundamental realities of everyday life. Such attitudes result from “saturating” life with the effects of post-truth practices (post-truth generates post-truth, and so on). The problem, however, is not just an excess of data about reality but, as Kenneth J. Gergen points out, resentment and reserve towards truth-related aspirations (see Kenneth J. G e r g e n, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). The appeal of negation, the need for egotistic self-realization on the part of individuals, their sense of subjective omnipotence, insensitivity to truth-related and ethical commitment to the world and to other human beings are among the factors that contribute to this vicious circle.



However, the structure of such a world does not respect the logical order of the “truthful” one, i.e., the domain of science and everyday knowledge, and subject to true or false judgements. The way in which the post-truth subject apprehends being is neither subjective, nor objective-transcendent; it is not an ordinary human act of cognition of objective reality, but an act performed from a specific postmodern perspective, which transforms reality without logical justification, and therefore in a performative manner. However, it should be noted that it is not only post-truth that shapes the world of the modern subject; the subject also participates in the domain of truth. Despite the influence of the (often hidden) mechanisms of post-truth (e.g., fake news), the subject uses also truth-related criteria. By applying both logical and extra-logical tools, the subject reinforces post-truth claims with other post-truth claims until an ideological universe is created. The contemporary, post-modern subject is defined by its context, namely that of “weakened” reality, and must be described in terms of a post-truth ontology. What defines the universal subject (the subjectivity of our time) applies also to individual subjects, participants in culture.<sup>24</sup>

#### POST-TRUTH FACTOR IN CULTURAL PROCESSES

It is hence necessary to identify factors that have shaped contemporary culture and its subject in terms of post-truth. Above all, post-truth plays a role in the development of the ideology of globalism, as the principles of globalism transcend (or bypass) the truth-related “regulations.” As it originates from the tendencies diagnosed by Jean Baudrillard in his theory of simulacrum,<sup>25</sup> post-truth also contributes to the processes that undermine the reality of the world and man. Such a global transformation of the world in which the criteria of truth are eliminated through ludification, i.e., reducing aspirations and endeavors of individuals to unrestrained creation and promoting pleasure (and play), leads to diminishing the meaning of a full-scale human existence.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, post-

<sup>24</sup> The post-truth ontology is related to defining the individual through his or her post-modern cultural rootedness. The totality of cultural processes can be interpreted neither by classical ontology (metaphysics), nor by other modern ontologies. Hence the duality of the ontology of culture and the human being functioning in it.

<sup>25</sup> See Jean B a u d r i l l a r d, “The Precession of Simulacra,” in Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–42; Jean B a u d r i l l a r d, *The Intelligence of Evil: Or, The Lucidity Pact*, trans. Chris Turner (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> See Ryszard S t r z e l e c k i, *Homo ludens kultury współczesnej*, Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2019; Ryszard S t r z e l e c k i, *Ku antropologii zabawy: Teoria statusowo-transformacyjna*, Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2020.



truth is a factor in the virtual world which pervades our reality but over which the order of being has no hold. The virtual world transforms our world by selecting and de-hierarchizing the existing orders of things and values.<sup>27</sup> Thus reality is perceived through arbitrary rules that shape post-humans against the actual and spiritual realities of the human person.<sup>28</sup> The phenomenon of post-truth is also grounded in widespread hypocrisy, in a sphere which is founded on a hidden lie and which does not permit any verification.<sup>29</sup> Post-truth is present in all these universal processes and operates in numerous texts of the info-sphere. Therefore, in this paper, I have emphasized an in-depth identification of post-truth as a global cultural phenomenon. Some other studies, including those cited here, also go beyond the usually studied local aspect, where post-truth is seen mainly as undermining the social, cultural or media-related truth. In my research, I follow the indications included in such further-reaching studies, but also develop the reflection initiated there. I do so with the idea that the very essence of post-truth, captured in its textual representations, consists in abandoning the concept of truth accepted on the grounds of two-valued logic, ontology (metaphysics), and philosophical (in this case, personalist) anthropology. The foundation for such an opinion is provided by the principles of classical metaphysics in the Thomistic interpretation (specifically, in existential neo-Thomism). I strongly emphasize that post-truth is an important factor in the post-modern processes that transform the world and, in a sense, degrade the human being.

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<sup>27</sup> See *Wirtual czy nowy wspaniały świat?*, ed. Kazimierz Korab (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> See Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> See Wojciech Chudy, *Spółeczeństwo zakłamanie: Esej o społeczeństwie i kłamstwie*, vol. 1, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2007.

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#### ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Ryszard STRZELECKI, Post-truth, as Seen from the Perspectives of Sociology, Logic, and Metaphysics: Introductory Remarks

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In the article, the phenomenon of post-truth is addressed from several perspectives (social, cultural, media, political, logical, anthropological, and metaphysical) and at the three levels of cultural presence, namely, in texts containing post-truth, in studies in which post-truth is analyzed and criticized, and in studies devoted to investigating the essence of post-truth in terms of personalism, classical logic, and metaphysics. The purpose of the article is to analyze post-

truth at the third level, aiming to show the peculiarities of the phenomenon in the context of truth, fiction, classical logic and non-classical logics, ontology, metaphysics, the social subject, and its acts. Post-truth is a constitutive element of the culture of postmodernism and contributes to a diminished existential status of both societies and individuals, being a causal factor of globalization, simulacration, virtualization, ludification, and widespread hypocrisy. As such, post-truth is identified as a factor in the degradation of human beings and of the values inherent in the European tradition.

Keywords: truth, post-truth, fake news, logic, media studies, ontology, metaphysics, communication, postmodernism, subject

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Ryszard STRZELECKI, Postprawda w perspektywie społecznej, logicznej i metafizycznej. Uwagi wstępne

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Zjawisko postprawdy zostało ujęte w artykule w perspektywach: społecznej, kulturowej, medialnej, politycznej, logicznej, antropologicznej i metafizycznej, oraz na trzech poziomach obecności kulturowej: w tekstach zawierających postprawdę, w opracowaniach poddających postprawdę analizie i krytyce oraz w studiach poświęconych badaniu istoty zjawiska w zakresie personalizmu, logiki klasycznej i metafizyki. Celem artykułu była analiza postprawdy na poziomie trzecim, zmierzająca do ukazania osobliwości zjawiska w kontekście: prawdy, fikcji, logiki klasycznej i logik nieklasycznych, ontologii, metafizyki, społecznego podmiotu i jego działania. Postprawda jest konstytutywnym elementem kultury postmodernizmu i przyczynia się do obniżenia bytowego statusu zarówno społeczeństw, jak i jednostek. Jest czynnikiem sprawczym globalizacji, symulakryzacji, wirtualizacji, ludologizacji (uzabawienia) oraz powszechnego zakłamania. Jako taka wskazywana jest jako źródło degradacji człowieka i wartości obecnych w tradycji europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: prawda, postprawda, fake news, logika, medioznawstwo, ontologia, metafizyka, komunikacja, postmodernizm, podmiot

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