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Authors	Bufacchi, Vittorio
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TRUTH, LIES AND TWEETS:

A CONSENSUS THEORY OF POST-TRUTH

ABSTRACT (108 words): This article rejects the received view that Post-Truth is a new, unprecedented political phenomenon. By showing that Truth and Post-Truth share the same genesis, this article will submit the idea of a Consensus Theory of Post-Truth. Part 1 looks at the difference between Post-Truth, lies, and bullshit. Part 2 suggests reasons behind the current preoccupation with Post-Truth. Part 3 focuses on Habermas's influential consensus theory of truth to suggest that truth and Post-Truth have more in common than is generally assumed. Part 4 puts forward the Consensus Theory of Post-Truth. Part 5 suggests three ways to emasculate the potentially destructive effect of Post-Truth on democratic society.

Key words: Hannah Arendt; Post-Truth; Donald Trump; Jürgen Habermas; Consensus; Lies and Bullshit.

This is the age of Post-Truth. This concept, and its blood relative Fake-News, has become intensely popular in media and academic circles, which in part explains the disproportionate number of books and articles published on this phenomenon in recent years.[1] And for good reasons: it is impossible to escape the incessant appeal to Post-Truth or dismissive accusations of Fake-News by those who live their lives in the public eye, from politicians[2] to sport personalities.[3] Given the elevated prominence of Post-Truth and Fake-News in today's political discourse, one could be forgiven for thinking that these are new, original concepts, symptoms of an unprecedented, hazardous, current political pandemic. This article will focus exclusively on the idea of Post-Truth, with only passing references to Fake-News.[4] While critical of Post-Truth, and especially its political instrumentalization, I will reject the claim that we are facing a new phenomenon. Perhaps more controversially this article also rejects the binary dichotomy, popular in contemporary political discourse, between Truth and Post-

Truth. By showing that Truth and Post-Truth share the same genesis, this article will submit the idea of a Consensus Theory of Post-Truth. Finally, while Post-Truth cannot be eradicated, ways to minimize the impact of Post-Truth will be suggested.

The first part of this article will give an overview of the concept of Post-Truth, in particular the difference between Post-Truth, lies, and bullshit, starting from the correct reading of the prefix 'post' in Post-Truth. Part Two will suggest an answer to the question: Why the present preoccupation with Post-Truth? Why *now*? Part Three will focus on Habermas's influential theory of ideal speech theory, and his consensus theory of truth in particular, to suggest that truth and Post-Truth have more in common than is generally assumed. Part Four will put forward the Consensus Theory of Post-Truth, which is grounded on a curious paradox whereby consensus (for Post-Truth) emulates the consensus (for truth) in order to undermine truth; this will be referred to as the Consensus on No-Consensus Paradox. Part Five will suggest ways to emasculate the potentially destructive effect of Post-Truth on democratic society.

1. POST-TRUTH, LIES AND BULLSHIT.

Post-Truth is a murky concept. In an effort to bring some clarity, and avoid possible misunderstandings, we will start by explaining the prefix 'post' in Post-Truth, followed by an analysis of the distinctiveness of Post-Truth in comparison to two other closely related concepts: lies and bullshit.

In 2016 'post-truth' was declared the 'Word of the Year' by the Oxford Dictionaries.[5] There is a fundamental difference between concepts like 'post-natal' or 'post-surgery', and other concepts like 'post-sexualism'[6] and 'Post-Truth'. The 'post' in the former group indicates a chronological sequence, a moment after a specified situation or event. The

concepts in the latter group, including Post-Truth, are different; the prefix ‘post’ refers to a time in which the specified idea (in our case ‘truth’) has become redundant and therefore can safely be discarded. As the Oxford Dictionaries explains, rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event – as in post-war or post-match – the prefix in Post-Truth has a meaning more like ‘belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant’. This nuance seems to have originated in the mid-twentieth century, in formulations such as post-national (1945) and post-racial (1971).[7] Similarly the prefix ‘post’ in Post-Truth is not a chronological reference to something that occurs ‘after’ truth, instead it is a statement about the fact that Truth is no longer essential, that Truth has become obsolete, and that Truth has been superseded by a new reality.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following definition of Post-Truth: “an adjective defined as relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. This definition is not incorrect, and it is a useful starting point for a conceptual analysis of Post-Truth, but there is more to Post-Truth than suggested by this definition. The OED definition centres on the subjective nature of Post-Truth in contrast to the objective nature of truth, which is potentially misleading. While subjectivism is an important feature of Post-Truth, this is not necessarily its primary or distinctive characteristic. In order to see what makes Post-Truth a disturbing political concept, it is necessary to distinguish Post-Truth from two other concepts that can easily be confused for it: a lie, and bullshit.

We can see the difference between Post-Truth and a mere lie by comparing two statements by two recent American presidents. The first is Donald Trump’s tweet, on November 6, 2012: “The concept of global warning was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive”. The second is Bill Clinton’s testimony,

on Jan. 26, 1998: “I want to say one thing to the American people, I want you to listen to me, I’m going to say again, I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky”.

Clinton’s statement, given the subsequent revelations, is alarming. It is possible that by appealing to a technicality Clinton did not consider his intimate interactions with Monica Lewinsky as a ‘sexual relation’, but that is unlikely; it would require a phenomenal effort of self-deception, or ingenuity, to defend that position with honesty and integrity. Trump’s tweet is also disquieting, but for different reasons. While both Trump and Clinton are, to use a modern slang, ‘messing with the truth’, there is a fundamental difference between these two presidential proclamations.

In Clinton’s case, he told a lie, while Trump’s statement is a paradigmatic example of Post-Truth. The point about telling a lie is that the liar accepts that there is a truth, knows what the truth is, but decides to tell a different story. A lie refers to specific facts that have precise spatio-temporal coordinates, therefore, as Sam Leith (2017) rightly points out, the liar honours the truth by denying it.[8] Trump’s case is different. He is not referring to a fact, but to a concept. This is what Post-Truth does: it doesn’t simply deny or question certain facts, but it aims to undermine the theoretical infrastructure that makes it possible to have a conversation about the truth.[9] In this sense Post-Truth is akin to what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls ‘hermeneutical injustice’, which refers to those cases when someone is not able to make sense of an experience due to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation, or in other words, when someone is harmed by a sort of gap in collective understanding which makes one’s own experiences unintelligible.

Post-Truth should also not be confused with the concept of bullshit. In his influential essay *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt highlights the instrumental nature of bullshit, suggesting that bullshit is the art of persuasion. Unlike a liar, a bull-shitter personifies an indifference to how things really are, since they are not concerned with the truth. In this sense bullshit is

closer to Post-Truth than a lie, but there is still an important difference. While bull-shitters choose to ignore the truth, advocates of Post-Truth (henceforth, post-truthers) are more devious: they are in the business of subverting truth.[10] Also, while bull-shitters are disrespectful towards the truth, post-truthers feel threatened by truth therefore they want to undermine or emasculate truth. Bull-shitters find truth inconvenient, so they circumvent it, although they would have no problem with embracing truth again, the moment truth serves them well. Post-truthers are different: their aim is to delegitimize truth, since this is the best way to disarm the threat truth poses to them. I will return to the fear instilled by truth on some politicians in Part 4 below, in relation to Hannah Arendt's unparalleled work on the subject.

When Trump writes in a tweet (28 January, 2014): "give me clean, beautiful and healthy air – not the same old climate change (global warming) bullshit! I am tired of hearing this nonsense", he is saying that what has been established on scientific grounds is merely 'bullshit'. This tweet is not about bullshit, it is about Post-Truth. It isn't a meta-bullshit on Trump's part, but a deliberate attempt to delegitimize scientific findings and research. Trump is threatened by the truth of climate change, therefore he dismisses climate change by denying its truth.

On the basis of the conceptual distinction between Post-Truth, Lies, and Bullshit, I suggest the following working definition of Post-Truth:

Post-truth is a deliberate strategy aimed at creating an environment where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, where theoretical frameworks are undermined in order to make it impossible for someone to make sense of a certain event, phenomenon, or experience, and where scientific truth is delegitimized.

Compared to what we read in the OED, this definition has two advantages. First, it includes a dimension of epistemic injustice, whereby Post-Truth is used with the intent of subverting one's relationship with the truth. Secondly, Post-Truth is at the forefront of a

novel legitimization crisis, to the extent that Post-Truth delegitimizes science's claims on truth. On the basis of this definition, we can now address the issue of why Post-Truth is such a big issue today, its origin, and what to do about it.

2. WHY POST-TRUTH TODAY?

Notwithstanding its present-day popularity, there is in fact nothing new about the concept of Post-Truth. Donald Trump did not invent Post-Truth, he is merely the boldest, loudest present-day embodiment of this phenomenon. In its earlier incarnations it took the form of scepticism, nihilism, or simply rhetoric, which suggests that the idea of Post-Truth is as old as philosophy itself. In her essay 'Truth and Politics', originally published in *The New Yorker* on February 25th 1967, Hannah Arendt was already lamenting the fact that politics and truth don't mix. Arendt (2000, 565) distinguishes between political 'lies' in the pre-modern and modern world. The pre-modern traditional lie had two distinguishing qualities: first, it "was never meant to deceive literally everybody; it was directed at the enemy and was meant to deceive only him". Secondly, the traditional lie "concerned only particulars … [and] a falsehood that makes no attempt to change the whole context – tears, as it were, a hole in the fabric of factuality. As every historian knows, one can spot a lie by noticing incongruities, holes, or the junctures of patched-up places" (ibid). The modern lie, in contrast, allowed no last refuge for the truth, since the liar deceived himself as well. Moreover, the modern lie was no longer a tear in the fabric of reality. "Modern political lies are so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture," Arendt (2000, 566) wrote, "the making of another reality, as it were, into which they will fit without seam, crack, or fissure." When referring to modern political lies, Arendt had in mind twentieth century totalitarian ideologies, what she referred to as seamless reconstructions of reality.

Although Arendt writes about ‘modern political lies’, what she is saying is a better description of Post-Truth than a lie, but of course Arendt didn’t have that terminology at her disposal in the 1960s. One aspect that makes Post-Truth today different from the modern political lies of totalitarian regimes is the fact that Post-Truth is a political phenomenon occurring today also within *liberal* democracies, and not an exclusive resource of totalitarian regimes. Liberal democracies might *reduce* the risk of Post-Truth, which is why we may be surprised when Post-Truth surfaces within liberal democracies, but it would be naïve to assume that liberal democracies *eliminate* the risks of Post-Truth: the notion of ‘truth’ has not always enjoyed uncontested approval and universal endorsement, not even within liberal democracies.[11]

Instead of assuming that we are faced with a new, unprecedented concept, the focus of attention should be instead on explaining the timing of the present preoccupation with Post-Truth. To put it simply: why *now*? There is an obvious explanation for the timing of the present preoccupation with Post-Truth, which I will however refute: it has everything to do with one person, since never before has Post-Truth enjoyed the support of the President of the United States. For the first time, the legitimization of Post-Truth is coming from the top, to be precise, from the White House. We are accustomed to political leaders establishing ‘the truth’, to the extent that they are in a position to define or influence what passes for the truth, while Post-Truth is seen as the weapon of the powerless against the dominant hegemony. The old adage that history is written by the victors goes a long way towards explaining this phenomenon, and also why, rightly or wrongly, postmodernism is sometimes blamed for the advent of post-truth.[12] But today things seem to be different. We are faced with the scenario, at times surreal, of someone holding the highest political position in one of the most powerful nations in the world showing contempt for the truth. When Donald Trump accuses media outlets of propelling Fake-News, or appeals to Post-Truth the way he has done since his

appointment to the White House in 2016, the world is not just shocked, it struggles to make sense of it. According to this explanation, although he did not cause post-truth, Donald Trump is one of the reasons Post-Truth has become common currency in the 21st century.[13]

While Trump undoubtedly has a lot to do with the current obsession with Post-Truth, to suggest that Trump created an entirely new political phenomenon is to give him too much credit. It is unhelpful, and misleading, to focus exclusively on Trump, as some people may be lead to believe that Trump has more power or influence than he does. At least since the time of Cicero and the Roman Republic, we know that politicians and people in power have resorted to lies, bullshit, and when convenient they have even appealed to Post-Truth.[14] So while Donald Trump may have taken this to a new level, this isn't a new phenomenon, and we need to look elsewhere to explain the timing of this modern obsession with Post-Truth.

Recent academic and journalistic efforts dedicated at explaining the pre-eminence of Post-Truth in political discourse today are potentially misleading. No doubt the advent of populism in part explains why today Post-Truth has become an effective political strategy, but to blame Post-Truth on populism is too easy, and potentially question-begging. Instead of focussing on specific political events or singular political personalities, perhaps we should be looking elsewhere, at developments within the discipline of philosophy. Contemporary political philosophers working within the tradition of liberal democracy tend to gravitate towards a specific idea of truth: namely, the 'consensus' theory of truth. The fact that consensus has become the dominant approach to truth may also explain, *mutatis mutandis*, the resurgence and popularity of Post-Truth.

3. TRUTH, POST-TRUTH AND CONSENSUS.

In the literature on Truth there is a longstanding view that, over the last few decades, one theory has emerged and gained wide recognition in philosophical circles: the consent theory of truth. The notion that truth can be understood in terms of a particular type of consensus has a long history, and over many centuries has been vindicated by the likes of Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, and C.S. Peirce. More recently Rawls flirted with something like this in *Political Liberalism*. In this book John Rawls takes distance from traditional, correspondence views about truth, at least in terms of what truth can contribute to our understanding of social justice. Rawls suggests that the nature of truth is too controversial for political justification to take a stand on, instead political liberalism must try to proceed without so much as the concept of truth, since the work we expect from a theory of truth can be usefully performed by the far less controversial concept of reasonableness. Rawls goes on to praise the relevance, for a liberal criterion of legitimacy, of 'reasonable consensus'.

But it is Jürgen Habermas who, more than any other contemporary philosopher, made the idea of consensus the bedrock of Truth. The influence of C.S.Peirce on Habermas's influential Theory of Communicative Action is undeniable, and well-documented. Peirce argued that truth is nothing more than the ideal limit of inquiry, or what scientific belief would hold under conditions of 'endless investigation'. Habermas endorses this view, but feels that Peirce does not go far enough to overcome the correspondence theory of truth completely. Thus Habermas advances a theory where consensus is the final quest of human communication, human communication is grounded on a commitment to an ideal speech situation, and ideal speech theory is the constitutive condition of rational speech.

Habermas's ontology, his theory of language, and the communicative action theory are the philosophical foundations of his consensus theory of truth. These aspects of Habermas's social theory are as complex as they are exceptional, in both wisdom and originality, but a comprehensive account is beyond the scope of this article. However, to fully

appreciate Habermas's consensus theory of truth, it is important at least to highlight Habermas's concept of validity claim. In his *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas (1984) distinguishes between three validity claims: Truth; Normative Rightness; Sincerity. Each of these three claims are associated with the three functions of language: Cognitive Use; Interactive Use; Expressive Use. These three modes are rooted in Habermas ontology, according to which reality is divided into three worlds: the objective world; the social world; and the subjective world. Habermas also explains that all three claims are inherent in all speech acts, thus we relate to all these worlds at the same time when speaking or engaging in rational communication.

Habermas tells us that truth is a validity claim, but truth is also the endeavour of an agreement amongst all existing and potential interlocutors, where no participant can be excluded: rational speakers presuppose that the realization of consensus, and therefore truth, is the ultimate goal of communication. In other words, agreement is the purpose of the communicative enterprise. Of course Habermas is not recommending *de facto* consensus (*faktisch erzielte Konsensus*), which could arise from a fortuitous concurrence, but *rational* consensus (*vernünftige Konsensus*). The latter is the product of the norms of reason being properly implemented, or in other words where the consensus is formed under the conditions which define the ideal speech situation. As Nicholas Rescher (1993, 25-6) explains, in an ideal speech situation all the parties involved are committed to a search for a normative consensus produced by rationally cogent reasons and the legitimacy of a better argument: "Habermas accordingly views the commitment to a search for consensus as an integral, constitutive component of the communicative impetus inherent in human rationality…. Habermas sees the impetus of consensus as the constitutive core of rationality itself".

Habermas's ambitious project to combine a theory of communicative action with a theory of truth is innovative and ground-breaking, nevertheless there are a number of

potential objections to Habermas's consensus theory of truth, which have been highlighted in the extensive literature on the topic, even by those who are generally sympathetic to Habermas's project. Perhaps the two most recurring and serious objections are: (1) the Circularity Objection: there is a circularity and potential inconsistency in Habermas's theory, which may even lead to the theory being dismissed as trivial; (2) the Context-Transcending Objection: that context-transcending validity in the domain of practical reason, especially relating to matters of the good life and good society, cannot be defined in terms of an idealized rational consensus.

The Circularity Objection is raised by Nicholas Rescher, amongst others. Rescher's main objection with Habermas's consensus theory of truth is that consensus does not constitute a conceptually inherent part of the *definition* of truth, nor does it provide a workable *test-criterion* of truth, instead the most that can be hoped for is for consent to provide some modest degree of *evidential support* for truth. More specifically Rescher (1993, 13) suggests that the logic behind Habermas's theory is at best circular, and at worst trivial: "We cannot now clarify rationality in consensual terms without vitiating circularity, seeing that we need to have recourse to rationality in explicating the sort of consensus that is to be at issue". Habermas is seeking consensuality reached through an adherence to rational principles, but the norms of reason are stacked in favour of consensus, thus Rescher (ibid.) concludes: "We can get rationality out of Habermas's idealized consensus because we have been instructed to pack rationality into it".[15]

The Context-Transcending Objection is raised most recently, and forcefully, by Maeve Cooke. In a number of articles over a period of many years, Cooke (1993, 263) argues that it makes sense to distinguish between moral and ethical questions, where "the former are primarily concerned with intersubjective relationships, and the latter primarily with questions of the good life for individuals of groups". She then explores the issue of validity in the

domain of practical reason. While according to Habermas moral validity is entirely discursive, being an agreement reached under idealized communicative conditions, Cooke does not think that context-transcending validity in the domain of practical reason can be defined in terms of an idealized rational consensus. The problem here is not Habermas's principle of universalization, or his attempt to demonstrate the universal validity of his moral principle, but rather whether his discourse theory of morality can break free from implicit biases. That is to say, to what extent is it possible to claim validity for a moral principle on the basis of the ability to transcend context, given the proclivity towards ethnocentric, cultural, gender, and other biases.[16]

To these two significant, recurring objections, it is worth highlighting a further ambiguity inherent in the ideal speech situation, which was first raised by Alessandro Ferrara more than 30 years ago. We can call this the Lack of Assurance Objection: the risk that the ideal-speech situation does not guarantee that the best argument, and only the best argument, will prevail. This is how Ferrara (1987, 54) explains the conundrum: "we could have two contexts of scientific debate in which consensus was eventually reached, but in the first situation the participants were motivated solely by a cooperative search for truth although their relations were largely asymmetrical, whereas in the second case the participants had almost equal chances to use the various kinds of speech acts, yet were also more strategically minded".

Here Ferrara is making the important point that rational consensus does not always, or necessarily, lead to one answer, instead there can be multiple consensuses generated from an ideal-speech situation. I think Ferrara is right, and this is a potential worry for Habermas. But there is more. What Ferrara is suggesting is not only of interest to scholars of Habermas's philosophy of modernity, but can also prove to be useful in a very different context. In fact, if we follow Ferrara's line of thought to its logical conclusion, we find that consensus can

potentially explain not only the ontology of truth but also its opposite, Post-Truth, since both truth and Post-Truth enjoy the legitimacy bestowed upon them by consensus. What I'm suggesting here is that thinking of truth in terms of consensus opens the door to an alternative, original explanation of Post-Truth, since it makes it possible for the antithesis of truth, i.e. Post-Truth, also to be based on rational consensus.

4. A CONSENSUS THEORY OF POST-TRUTH.

In the last section I suggested that one critical observation by Ferrara on Habermas's consensus theory of truth, apart from raising important questions regarding the internal logic of Habermas's general theory, can also shed some light on the phenomenon of Post-Truth. I will now analyse in more detail this proposition, which I will refer to as the Consensus on No-Consensus Paradox.

We have seen that Post-Truth is an invention of the powerful, not the powerless. It comes from the top, specifically with the intent to undermine the Truth, which as Hannah Arendt says is coercive, and may be uncomfortable to those in power. The distinctive feature of the phenomenon of Post-Truth is that it uses the arsenals of truth against truth itself, in other words Post-Truth ironically finds validation in theories of truth. Post-Truth appeals to the notion of consensus in order to weaken consensus around truth. This is where the paradox lies: Post-Truth borrows the same theoretical foundations of Truth to undermine the foundations of Truth. Post-Truth appropriates the notion of consensus, central to the literature on Truth, in order to undermine the consensus around Truth and legitimize the idea of Post-Truth.

Post-Truth's reliance on consensus is not as radical as it may seem. The idea that consensus can be manufactured has a long history. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,*

J.A.Schumpeter offers an analysis of this phenomenon that is as true today as it was in the 1940s when he was writing. Starting from the assumption that the democratic method boils down to a competitive struggle for the people's vote, and political parties operate in the context of the competitive struggle for political power, Schumpeter ([1943] 2003, 263) argues that in politics consent is always manufactured, never authentic: "Human Nature in Politics being what it is, they [professional politicians] are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even to create the will of the people. What we are confronted with in the analysis of political processes is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will .... The way in which issues and the popular will on any issue are being manufactured is exactly analogous to the way of commercial advertising".

Schumpeter's view on consensus, which could be described as either bleak or realist, resonates with Hannah Arendt's warning that it is the nature of the political realm to be at war with truth, in all its forms. That is because, as Arendt (2000, 555) says: "truth carries within itself an element of coercion". This is a powerful statement, worth reflecting on. What Arendt (2000, 555-556) is telling us here is that anyone in power will do everything to resist truth: "Seen from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character. It is therefore hated by tyrants, who rightly fear the competition of a coercive force they cannot monopolize, and it enjoys a rather precarious status in the eyes of governments that rest on consent and abhor coercion".

The abhorrence of truth, and in particular its coercive nature, goes some way towards explaining President Trump attorney Rudolph W. Giuliani's remarkable claim that 'truth is relative'.[17] This was said in the context of special counsel Robert Mueller's request for an interview with President Trump regarding the Russia investigation. Giuliani, who is part of President Donald Trump's legal team, raised concerns that President Trump could perjure himself because "truth isn't truth." He then went on to explain that "They may have a

different version of the truth than we do". This is further confirmation, if any was needed, that Post-Truth today is a phenomenon that starts from the very top, that consensus on Post-Truth can be manufactured, and therefore that consensus cannot always be trusted to produce the best argument.

To understand the phenomenon of Post-Truth we must start with understanding truth, and in particular the philosophical foundations of truth. One influential conception of truth, endorsed by Habermas, is in terms of a hypothetical, rational consensus. Habermas's consensus theory of truth, and the closely related ideal speech situation, has been the subject of much praise and some critical debate in the last few decades.[18] What has passed unnoticed, and perhaps needs to be highlighted, is that the same consensus-based approach can also be applied to Post-Truth. In other words, some theories of truth and Post-Truth share the same genesis: consensus. This, in part, may help to explain the present resurgence of Post-Truth.

The idea of Post-Truth is not as philosophically complex and refined as any theory of truth, nor its advocates as sophisticated, nevertheless it also appeals to consensus for its justification and validation. Strange as it may seem, Post-Truth represents a type of consensus, one built on a paradox: it appeals to consensus (for Post-truth) as a way of undermining another consensus (for truth). Post-Truth is not just the antithesis of truth, it is also it's enemy, as Hannah Arendt explains. Going beyond Arendt, in this article I argue that those who feel threatened by truth respond by delegitimizing truth itself, and replace the consensus for truth with an alternative consensus, one for Post-truth.

5. SOME RECOMMENDATIONS.

Post-Truth will never go away. It is wishful thinking to hope that it will spontaneously retreat and disappear, never to be seen again. If there is room for truth in our scientific and social

discourse, there will always be someone prepared to promote Post-Truth. It is also pointless to waste energy in more-or-less sophisticated blame-games: there has always been, and there will always be, advocates of Post-Truth. Arendt said that truth is hated by tyrants because they fear the competition of a coercive force they cannot monopolize. She is right, but only in part. It is more accurate to say that truth is hated by (almost) all politicians, not just tyrants. Liberal democracies thrive on disagreement, and conflict. Where there is no disagreement there lies dictatorship, but where there is disagreement there is the potential for multiple consensuses, and as we have seen multiple consensuses are fertile ground for Post-Truth to grow. Given that Post-Truth is here to stay, the issue is to be ready for it when it raises its head, as inevitably it will, and have mechanisms in place to combat it.

Post-Truth can be fought on three different fronts: the institutional, the moral, and the philosophical. At the institutional level the threat of Post-Truth can be alleviated in two separate ways. First, via the consolidation of the checks-and-balances in a mixed constitution between the three main branches of government: executive, legislative, judiciary. In recent years we have witnessed an increasing attack on the separation of the different branches of government from unscrupulous politicians who mistakenly believe that those who hold the reins of executive power have the right to exercise control over the judiciary. Recent developments in Hungary, for example, suggest that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is trying to limit judicial independence by restricting the freedom of judges to interpret the law, posing a serious threat to the rule of law in Hungary.[19]

Secondly, the threat of Post-Truth can be alleviated at the institutional level by reinforcing the fourth branch of government: media. It is imperative that newspapers and other channels of information remain independent from the executive branch of government, and their impartiality fully protected. Measures need to be put in place that will not allow any one person or syndicate from having control over the distribution of information by having a

monopoly or disproportionate influence over mass media outlets. But that's not all. The concept of 'mediatisation' captures the phenomenon whereby the media increasingly influences and penetrates various social spheres, including the political sphere. Perception and knowledge of politics become increasingly mediatized, and their distinctive boundaries increasingly blurred. The problem is not only that technological innovation, and smartphones in particular, have made it possible for media consumption to be immediate and ubiquitous, but that media content has become highly personalized.[20] What is different and unique about politics today, compared to the past, is the fact that today we live in a world where there is total deregulation on both the formation of, and access to, information. The internet has made consensus on Post-Truth much easier to manufacture. As Ignas Kalpokas (2019, 54) points out, when political knowledge and entertainment mix, Post-Truth flourishes: "Politics, communication, and entertainment easily become hardly distinguishable, all subsumed under the internal logic of the media, and extremely conducive to the experience-based post-truth environment".

At the moral level, work can be done on that area where epistemology overlaps with ethics. Here it is necessary to accept our own responsibility regarding the proliferation of Post-Truth. Media outlets are not the only culpable parties in the explosion of Post-Truth: consumers of information also have a moral responsibility. Maria Paola Ferretti (2018) has recently drawn our attention to a tradition in the history of Western political thought, originating in the work of John Locke, according to which citizens in a liberal society have a duty to do their best to hold beliefs that are true or very likely to be true. This duty has sometimes been called the "alethic obligation", from the Greek term for truth, Aletheia (ἀλήθεια). Ferretti argues that if we accept our alethic obligation, then our responsibilities as believers increase, rather than diminish. This is in stark contrast to the prophets of Post-Truth, who want to release us from our alethic obligations.

Finally, philosophy can play its role in the fight against Post-Truth. This article argues that Post-Truth is essentially a philosophical concept, which paradoxically finds legitimacy in the philosophical (not sociological) idea of consensus it shares with theories of truth. It follows that Post-Truth can be countered on philosophical grounds, starting with the way we think about truth. To be precise, one way to combat Post-Truth is to move beyond the binary distinction of Truth Vs. Post-Truth. The received view is that the debate between 'Truth' and 'Post-Truth' can be approached within the logic of binary opposition. Although this logic has been the object of accusations of Western essentialist thinking[21] there are times when binary opposition makes perfect logical sense, therefore it is not something that can be avoided, nor should it be avoided: planet earth is either flat or it is spherical, the holocaust either took place, or it didn't. These are scientific and historical facts, which is precisely the reason why the idea of scientific or historical Post-Truth is a dangerous, obnoxious oxymoron. However, the binary distinction between Truth Vs. Post-Truth can be problematic, and may even be unhelpful in the struggle against Post-Truth.[22]

One of the central claims of this article has been to argue that theories of truth and Post-Truth share a common genesis. In Parts III and IV above I argued that Post-Truth is legitimized by the philosophical idea of consensus, something that originates from philosophical theories of truth. In other words, Post-Truth appropriates the philosophical language of truth in order to undermine truth itself. If this hypothesis is correct, then perhaps one way to combat Post-Truth is to revise our conception of truth by abandoning the consensus approach; this would have the effect of pulling the rug from under the feet of Post-Truth and undermine its terms of validation.

There are two ways of cutting the umbilical cord of consensus that ties theories of truth and Post-Truth. The first is to give up on consensus and revert back to a correspondence theory of truth. The logic behind this move is to make truth a much stronger notion, grounded

on objective criteria that cannot be refuted. This solution is attractive, in part because of the ontological difference between a fact and an opinion, as Hannah Arendt (2000, 556) rightly reminds us: "facts are beyond agreement and consent, and all talk about them …. Will contribute nothing to their establishment. Unwelcome opinion can be argued with, rejected, or compromised upon, but unwelcome facts possess an infuriating stubbornness that nothing can move except plain lies". Although Arendt is right, corresponding facts to truth is marred with pitfalls, since the notions of 'correspondence' and 'facts' can pose serious problems for the Correspondence Theory of Truth,[23] which is precisely why Habermas was keen to find an alternative to the correspondence approach when he embarked on the project of validating truth on the basis of a (hypothetical, ideal, rational) consensus.

An alternative approach is to rethink the way we use the concept of truth. We should certainly not give up on the concept of 'Truth', at least for two reasons. First of all because it would go against our human nature; as Marcus Tullius Cicero (2000, 7) said more than 2000 years ago in his *De Officiis*, "Especially unique to man is the search and scrutiny into truth". Secondly, because giving up on truth would be to accept defeat to the champions of Post-truth. Yet we must also recognize the fact that the concept of truth is often abused, inappropriately utilized, being called upon in contexts where truth is not the issue. We must refrain from appealing to 'Truth' where it is not necessary. Truth is a concept that we increasingly apply to many other contexts apart from science and history, which raises the question of whether 'Truth' is the correct term to use. While in the context of scientific and historical discourse it is right to stand up for truth and oppose Post-Truth, in politics and ethics to think in terms of this binary dichotomy isn't helpful. Truth needs to be deflated, and deflating truth will also deflate Post-Truth.

Deflationism stands for the general propensity to reverse the tendency whereby a concept becomes over-inflated, in the sense that it is required to do more than it can

reasonably be expected. According to Mark Richard (2008), we are all guilty of making inappropriate references to 'truth' when it is not required or necessary, being the wrong dimension of evaluation for our claims, arguments, or evidence.[24] We deflate truth simply by acknowledging that it is not the only meter we should use to measure things, which does not take away from the importance of truth in any way. Our over-reliance on the concept of truth, and the way this term has been used when it is not necessary, and especially the way we associate the truth with consensus, has contributed to creating a fertile ground for Post-Truth to take roots.

Perhaps we need to talk less about truth, and more about truthfulness, especially the virtues of truthfulness. The opposite of truthfulness is deceptiveness, which is the defining characteristic of post-truthers. As Bernard Williams (2002) points out, truthfulness has two dominant virtues: accuracy and sincerity. It is these virtues that should be upheld rather than truth itself. The best way to defeat the ideology of Post-Truth is therefore not by appealing to 'the truth', since that plays in the hands of post-truthers, but to insist on the virtues, both political and moral, of greater accuracy and absolute sincerity.

6. CONCLUSION.

This article wants to accomplish three things. First, it suggests that for the sake of conceptual clarity, the idea of Post-Truth must be distinguished from two other concepts: the mere lie, and bullshit. Secondly, we need to ask ourselves why Post-Truth has become such a big issue: why today? My answer to this question is that Post-Truth is not a new phenomenon, but has a long history. Third, this article defends the view that sees both truth and Post-Truth sharing the same genesis, seeking validation in consensus. Furthermore, it also argues that Post-Truth is characterized by a fundamental paradox: it appeals to consensus (for Post-truth)

as a way of undermining another consensus (for truth). Fourthly, there are institutional, moral, and philosophical ways of opposing Post-Truth. In particular, an argument is made that it is not helpful to think of truth and Post-Truth in terms of a binary opposition. There is an alternative, which is to deflate truth. The best way to disarm Post-Truth is not to talk about truth unless it is absolutely necessary, and appropriate. Post-Truth is, in part, a consequence of the growing tendency to appeal to truth when, in fact, truth is not the issue.

While Post-Truth poses a serious threat to liberal democracies throughout the world, we ought to take strength from the fact that truth is not easily defeated, and any perceived gains by the priests of Post-Truth are merely temporary. It is perhaps only fitting to give Hannah Arendt (2000, 570) the last word on this theme: "Truth, though powerless and always defeated in a head-on clash with the powers that be, possesses a strength of its own: whatever those in power may contrive, they are unable to discover or invent a viable substitute for it. Persuasion and violence can destroy truth, but they cannot replace it".[25]

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[1] The tip of the iceberg includes Ball (2017); D'Ancona (2017); Davis (2017); Graves (2016), Mcintyre (2018).

[2] On 29 August, 2018, Donald Trump tweeted: "Google search results for 'Trump news' shows only the viewing/reporting of Fake News Media…Fake CNN is prominent…."

[3] "Cristiano Ronaldo denies rape claim as 'fake news'", BBC News, 30 September 2018.

[4] For a philosophical account of Fake-News, see Quinn (2017).

[5] Other words that were in the running for word of the year in 2016 include: Adulting; Alt-right; Brexiteer; Chatbot; Coulrophobia; Glass cliff; Hygge; Latinx; Woke.

[6] This term was coined by Foucault (1979) to refer to efforts to break free of the arbitrary dichotomy designated by "sexual" vs. "non-sexual" categories, either in theoretical considerations or in social practices.

[7] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016

[8] Sam Leith (2017): "Whereas the liar has a direct relationship with the truth value of what he or she is saying, and implicitly honours the truth by denying it, the bullshitter simply doesn't care about whether his or her statement is true, half-true or outright false: he or she cares only about what it achieves. Here we are in the territory not of logic but of rhetoric".

[9] I will return to the concept of political lies in Part 2 below, in relation to Hannah Arendt's perceptive and timeless observations on "Truth and Politics", originally published in 1967.

[10] This is different from a lie. While a lie subverts a specific truth, post-truth tries to subvert truth itself. Clinton may have denied that he had a sexual relation with a White House intern, but he would not deny the truth of forensic evidence based on a semen-stained blue dress. A post-truther would refute the DNA evidence.

[11] See the essays in Elkin and Norris (2012).

[12] See for example the interview to Daniel Dennett in *The Guardian*, 12 February 2017: https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/feb/12/daniel-dennett-politics-bacteria-bach-back-dawkins-trump-interview

[13] See Wilber (2017), Kakutani (2018).

[14] Marcus Tullius Cicero's brother, Quinton Tullius, was his political advisor, and even wrote a short book in 64BC on *How to Win an Election*, which recommends the use of truth, half-truths and direct lies, if and when necessary.

[15] Concerns of circularity in Habermas's consensus theory of truth were also raised by Ferrara (1987, 47) a few years earlier: "If the truth of a statement rests on rational consensus, and rational consensus is defined as agreement in the ideal speech situation, what grounds the validity of the claim that rational consensus is consensus achieved in the ideal speech situation?"

[16] See Cooke (2018).

[17] "'Truth isn't truth': Giuliani weighs risks of possible Trump interview in Russia probe", *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2018.

[18] For a detailed and clear account of Habermas on consensus, see Cooke (1993).

[19] See Bozóki and Hegedűs (2018).

[20] On this latter point, see Sunstein (2001).

[21] For a refutation of these accusations, see Barry (2001).

[22] Of course taking a Hegelian, dialectical approach to this problem, seeking a synthesis that supersedes both truth and Post-Truth, is never going to work. Where truth is concerned, there can't be a further synthesis. Truth is the end of the line, it's where one has to get off since there are no more stops after truth. In this case it is best to leave Hegelian dialectics aside, and look for a different solution.

[23] See Engel (2002); Blackburn and Simmons (1999).

[24] Richard (2008, 1): "while (of course) the truth is important, truth is often the wrong dimension for our claims, arguments, or evidence. There is such a thing as getting something

completely right – stating the facts in the most stringent sense of ‘stating the facts’ – which does not involve thinking or saying anything true”.

[25] See also Enaudeau and Bonnigal-Katz (2007).