



## The Post-Truth Era ?

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It was the word of the year. Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is *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”. The concept itself has been existing for more than a decade, but there seems to have been a higher frequency in the context of the Brexit and the presidential election in the United States.

In fact, the post-truth era has emerged because of several long-cycle trends that affect how we make sense of the world around us. This phenomenon has a name - *agnotology*, the study of culturally induced ignorance or doubt. We used to have truth *versus* lies. Nowadays we have truth, lies, and some sort of statements that might be false, but are considered too benign to be really discarded. We’d rather use euphemisms, or tell “the truth improved.” The political correctness lead us to a ridiculous molieresque mimicry. For instance, we no longer call a liar a liar, but an “ethically challenged” person, someone for whom “the truth is temporarily unavailable.” This is the so-called post-truth. In the post-truth era, frontiers are blurred between truth and lie, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction. Deceiving others became a habit, a challenge, even a game. Researchers argue that we presently tell lies on a daily basis.

Globalization and the World Wide Web determined an important raise in the volume of strangers and acquaintances in our lives rises, on of the results being a widespread sense that much of what we’re told can’t be

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trusted. We are no longer sure whom exactly we're dealing with. Technology has certainly exacerbated the problem, but what are the reasons of this pandemic dishonesty? Why do we all need to embellish our personal history? And of course, this question is even more pertinent with the "professional" fabulists: businessmen, politicians, journalists, judges, police officers, beauty queens, tabloid reporters, etc.

We can try to understand the motives of this phenomenon by studying the trends ranging from the postmodern contempt for "truth" to therapeutic non-judgment and improvement of one's life story. The increasing influence of public figures with a flexible code of ethics decisively contributes to the post-truth era, as well as relativism, the decline of community, or Facebook narcissism. Post-truthfulness and cultural carelessness build a fragile social edifice based on suspicion, eroding the foundation of trust that underlies any healthy civilization. As individuals, we struggle to understand the present, but, due to the exponentially growth of human knowledge, we find out it is getting harder to predict the future. The result is a form of cognitive dissonance. We cannot be in control anymore. So how do we resolve this dissonance? We fall back on belief - on our own intuition.

What is certain is that salvation comes from within while we wait for it to come from outside. "The kingdom of heaven is within you" and "seek first the kingdom of heaven and all will be added unto you", is written in the gospels we so often avoid. We can free ourselves from our blunders and relume that spark of divinity between order and chaos within us. We then go back to our predecessors' urges to get to know ourselves, because what we seek is within us. As Rabbi Bunam asserted, in the stories of Heinrich Zimmer and Mircea Eliade: "There is something that cannot be found anywhere in the world, not even right next to the Just and Holy (Zaddik) but still there is a place where this thing can be found"... In us, of course. But once found, the treasure, the priceless pearl, must not be kept only for the self, but must be given to others, to the one that is close and indispensable. He himself has got his treasure, but maybe he needs help to find it. We all have it and it is one in One. But why did we have to submit to such a great and long obliteration from ourselves, an alienation so we could return to the non-place from where we went astray, in the rediscovered Self? Maybe it's a ritualistic journey. As Andrei Pleșu asserts,

"the fellow-creature/neighbor" is valued only after a laborious experience with the "distant" (*Parables of Jesus. Truth as Story*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2013, p. 15).

Consciousness is pure awareness, governed by Truth. From the consciousness the mind is born and from the mind thoughts arise. And together with these, problems occur. To succeed to maintain an unaltered consciousness, the mind must be silent. When the mind is silent, beingness commences and "I am" begins. Only in the silence of the mind can we glimpse the truth. And true knowledge must be based on and generate Justice thus being a normative knowledge.

The world, however, will remain plural; there is not a single truth about human beings, so there cannot be a dominator project. But there are common traits that can become linking elements, through change, with fewer geographic and knowledge limitations. The force lies in ethics and truth, not in the arrogance of those who think they possess the power and the answers because they have a bigger weapon. With this understanding each one of us should begin to clean up inside, for problems do not come from the other, but from ourselves, or they would not exist if they had not found similarities in us. We probably need a new humanism to take us beyond the "post-truth" era.

### **Biographical note**

Simona Modreanu is a PhD professor of French and Francophone literature at the Faculty of Letters of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi. She is also an essayist and a translator, an active member of the CIRET (Centre International de Recherches et Etudes Transdisciplinaire), Paris and co-director of the Transdisciplinary Studies Center of the University of Iasi. She directed the Romanian Cultural Center in Paris (1991-2001) and the Junimea Publishing House in Iasi (2008-2014). Main publications : *Eugène Ionesco ou l'agonie de la signification* (ed. Axis, Iasi, Roumanie, 2002), *Le Dieu paradoxal de Cioran* (Paris, Ed. du Rocher, 2003), *Cioran* (Paris, Oxus, 2004), *Lecturi nomade* (Iasi, Junimea, 2006), *Lecturi sedentare* (Iasi, Junimea, 2010), *Lecturi infidele* (Iasi, Junimea, 2014), *L'Espace identitaire dans la littérature francophone contemporaine* (Iasi, Ed. Univ. "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2016).