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THE STRUGGLE FOR TRUTH IN POLITICS: OVERCOMING RELATIVISM AND LIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between truth and politics, discussing the philosophical and ethical implications of their interplay within democratic societies. The rise of post-truth politics, where emotional resonance overshadows truth in general, poses significant challenges to democratic values and institutions. The study examines the philosophical debates around political relativism, highlighting its impact on democratic principles, which can undermine rational discourse and informed citizenship. It draws on the insights of Hannah Arendt and Steven Lukes into the vulnerability of facts in political discourse, underscoring the tension between truth and political power. Through a synthesis of theoretical perspectives, this paper argues that the vitality of democratic systems crucially relies on the safeguarding of truth. It emphasizes the role of intellectuals, truth-tracking institutions, and optimistic standpoints toward people's rational abilities in navigating through the complexities of maintaining the integrity of today's public discourse.

Keywords: truth, politics, post-truth, relativism, lies.

Introduction

Upon initial examination, the question about the relationship between truth and politics may appear simplistic or naive to people who, based on their perspectives informed by everyday experiences and some historical insights, often harbor the belief that the main, if not sole, motivation driving politicians and political parties is the pursuit and maintenance of power, with conflicting interests being subjugated to this overarching objective. This concept of politics is not merely grounded in intuition but has been extensively deliberated upon within the philosophical tradition. In “The Prince”, Niccolò Machiavelli urges readers to dispense with “fantasies” about politicians and politics and instead focus on realities. “Everyone will appreciate how admirable it is for a ruler to keep his word and be honest rather than deceitful. However, in our own times, we’ve had examples of leaders who’ve done great things without worrying too much about keeping their word. Outwitting opponents with their cunning, these men achieved more than leaders who behaved

honestly” (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 69). Machiavelli argues that the primary concern of rulers should be the acquisition and maintenance of power, suggesting that rulers should be willing to employ any means necessary, including deceit, manipulation, and even violence, to achieve their goals and maintain their rule. In this context, power and politics are fundamentally about winning at all costs. Politics becomes akin to warfare, with parties vying for control and seeking to prolong their reign. In his 1976 lecture series, “Society Must Be Defended”, Michel Foucault explores how the logic of warfare permeates modern politics. He contends that “Civil war takes place on the stage of power. There is civil war only in the element of constituted political power; it takes place to keep or conquer power, to confiscate or transform it” (Foucault, 2015, p. 29).

While intuitively true, this description of politics presents challenges in providing a comprehensive, rational account of why the populace continues engaging with political processes in principle. One aspect to consider is the role of ideology and values in shaping political behavior. While power may indeed be a motivating factor for some politicians, it is obviously intertwined with broader ideological principles and policy goals. Political parties and leaders frequently espouse specific ideologies or platforms that reflect their vision for society, which goes beyond mere power acquisition. Therefore, the notion that politics is solely about power does not suffice to answer inquiries regarding the enduring interest of people in political programs, the ongoing attention to political figures and political news, and the participation in elections. Such a portrayal, reducing politics to a mere quest for power by a select group, overlooks the multifaceted motivations and expectations that make politics meaningful and drive civic engagement. Moreover, it also overlooks the diverse motivations and aspirations of ordinary citizens who engage in political processes. Individuals participate in politics not solely to gain power but to express their values, advocate for their interests, and contribute to shaping the direction of society. Political engagement can be driven by a desire for social change, a sense of civic duty, or a commitment to democratic principles, all of which transcend narrow conceptions of power politics. Additionally, the focus on power as the primary motivation for politicians ignores the complex dynamics of governance and decision-making. Political leaders must navigate competing interests, negotiate compromises, and respond to public opinion and societal demands, all of which shape the policymaking process. Simply reducing politics to a quest for power fails to capture the intricacies of governance and the myriad factors that influence political outcomes. Furthermore, the idea that politicians are solely driven by power overlooks the importance of accountability and public scrutiny in democratic systems. In functioning democracies, politicians are accountable to the electorate through regular elections, oversight mechanisms, and media scrutiny.

However, while considering the role of ideology, citizen engagement, governance dynamics, and accountability mechanisms, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of politics that goes beyond reductive portrayals of power-seeking behavior. It is true that the relationship between truth and politics is fraught with complexities that cannot be ignored. As German American philosopher Hannah Arendt states in the opening paragraph of her famous essay: “No one has ever

doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one, as far as I know, has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues. Lies have always been regarded as necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician's or the demagogue's but also of the statesman's trade" (Arendt, 1968, 227). Lies have long been ingrained in the fabric of political life, serving as a tool to gain advantage. Conversely, expecting sincerity or truthfulness from politicians has historically proven futile. Throughout history, truth has frequently been in opposition to politics. Despite this, why does pursuing truth in politics matter now? The significance of truth has heightened in contemporary times and escalated into a pressing concern due to a multitude of setbacks, including problems with the polarization of opinions and overly complex communications, the decline in the authority and trust in experts, science, and traditional institutions, the loss of trust in human rationality and faith in democracy. Proponents of so-called post-truth politics argue that we currently live in a world where people judge, and act based on their feelings rather than facts and expertise. In this regard, post-truth politics is deeply rooted in postmodernist ideas that challenge traditional notions of truth and knowledge, creating fertile ground for manipulations. In his book "The Logic of Practice", French sociologist and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu (1990) critiqued the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, considering it the 'most ruinous' division within social science. The rejection of objective truth by postmodernists led to a reliance on individual emotions and subjectivity as alternatives. Postmodernism fostered a cultural climate characterized by skepticism towards truth and knowledge, leading to a disregard for epistemic authority and a rejection of moral absolutes. This shift played into the hands of destructive forces, particularly evident in contemporary politics. Indeed, the prevalent post-truth political narrative relies on some implicit, questionable empirical and normative assumptions and allies with totalitarian and authoritarian ideas. Arendt argues that "the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction ... true and false ... no longer exist" (Arendt, 1951, p. 474). Likewise, some of the recent public philosophers are also concerned with the possibility of post-truth politics being a "pre-fascist" or "pre-authoritarian" condition. In this regard, Lee McIntyre notes in his book: "One might imagine a no less chilling exchange in the basement of the Ministry of Love in the pages of George Orwell's dystopian novel 1984. Indeed, some now worry that we are well on our way to fulfilling that dark vision, where truth is the first casualty in the establishment of the authoritarian state" (McIntyre, 2018, p. 4).

The idea that people are no longer interested in truth seems counter-intuitive and absurd. As long as we know ourselves and our past, we have always been involved in the quest for truth. Truth-telling plays a fundamental role in shaping our collective understanding of human existence, our interactions with the world, and our relationships with one another. Commencing with the Platonic victory over Sophists and later at the beginning of the 17th Century with the Cartesian achievement over the consequences of Reformation, such as sprawling uncertainty and skepticism, the Western history of thought has asserted truth as the world's cornerstone, thereby delineating a philosophical tradition that underlines human inherent inclination

toward the pursuit of truth. Truth shapes the common fabric of reality, providing the foundation for orienting ourselves in the world. The emergence of the post-truth concept directly contradicts this longstanding tradition, which endures as a foundational principle in contemporary philosophical discourse.

Regarding politics, it is a noble activity involved in getting and using power in public life, where people collaborate and compete to quest for the common good. The relationship between the common good and truth is foundational in the context of politics. For politics to be just, it may rely on certain norms like respect for justice, human rights, freedom, and truth — objective principles that govern its practices. Truth matters in every field, including politics, because it is essential for fostering trust and accountability, as well as ensuring justice and fairness, promoting social cohesion and harmony, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of political systems. Therefore, for politics to serve the common good effectively, decisions must be based on accurate information and evidence.

Politics and Relativism

The relationship between truth and politics dominated in the mid-twentieth century totalitarian regimes, underscored the threat associated with purportedly objective or absolute truths. Given the deleterious consequences associated with political dogmatism, there arises a necessity for a form of political relativism.

Relativism is a philosophical doctrine that dates back to ancient Greece and stands as one of philosophical inquiry's most intricate and controversial constructs. It suggests that concepts such as truth, falsehood, morality, and reasoning are contingent upon differing cultural frameworks and perspectives. Its influence extends across various domains of human knowledge, including science, religion, ethics, and political theory. Over the past decades, relativism has gained traction as a principle shaping political ideologies and practices. This shift is partly attributed to the recent demise of Marxist ideology, resulting in a loss of confidence in enduring political truths. Within this paradigm, the conception emerges that the future engenders opinions rather than absolute truths, decisions are contingent upon deliberation rather than scientific certainty, and their validation lies in the numerical support they garner rather than their intrinsic merit. This perspective echoes the doctrine espoused by the Sophists, wherein truth is reduced to a decree of the majority.

Some critics of relativism assert that political anarchy inevitably follows from its adoption. The accusation that relativism leads to political chaos stems from its rejection of absolute or universal standards and the acceptance of the complete contingency of opinions, merely seeking acquiescence. Given that all opinions are considered equally valid and contingent, there is a risk of breaking down commonly accepted norms and principles necessary for political stability and a degree of irresponsibility among political actors. Critics contend that societies descend into chaos without shared norms, which can fragment society along ideological lines. Rather than fostering a sense of common purpose and collective identity, the relativistic approach encourages the spread of competing interest groups and identity politics, sharpening social divisions and undermining solidarity. On the other hand, concerning political irresponsibility, this approach can create fertile ground for

political leaders to exploit relativism to consolidate power and portray themselves as the sole arbiters of truth and morality in a fragmented and polarized society.

Political anarchy can arise when relativistic acceptance of contingency leads to a loss of confidence in democratic institutions and processes. Suppose individuals perceive their opinions equally valid regardless of their adherence to democratic norms and principles. In that case, they may become disillusioned with representative democracy and turn to alternative forms of political expression or activism, potentially destabilizing democratic governance. Populist movements, social media activism, civil disobedience, and acts of extremist groups represent forms of political expression and activism that could undermine democratic institutions and processes. Indeed, populist rhetoric can exploit societal divisions and undermine democratic norms by promoting simplistic solutions and fostering distrust in established political processes. At the same time, social media can facilitate the spread of misinformation, create echo chambers, and propagate polarizing narratives that undermine trust in democratic institutions and exacerbate social divisions. Finally, direct actions like civil disobedience can disrupt democratic processes, undermine the rule of law, and escalate tensions between activists and authorities.

However, proponents counter that relativism fosters tolerance and pluralism, which are essential for democratic coexistence. As a broad framework, relativism is associated with democratic ideologies due to its aim of establishing theoretical or dispositional bases for promoting less dogmatic, more inclusive, tolerant, and open-minded individuals and societies. These qualities are undeniably vital interests for any democratic society. As well, to be a defender of democratic values means to be against stances and values arising from political dogmatism, absolutism, and universalism, and their attendants, such as authoritarianism, despotism, and autocracy, which are associated with rejecting pluralism, egalitarian ideas, and individual freedom.

Indeed, it is commonly acknowledged that democratic principles are inherently aligned with a relativistic perspective, while authoritarian ideologies often derive validation from absolutist or dogmatic stances regarding knowledge and morality. However, the connection between relativism and political ideologies, along with their implications, is more complex than expected. The complications arise from the fact that, while a relativistic perspective doesn't always align with democratic values, it's also possible for non-democratic political ideologies to be rooted in relativistic principles. In other words, relativism has been invoked to rationalize both democratic and totalitarian ideologies and policies.

A renowned Austrian philosopher, Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994), asserts that all political traditions possess equal value and merit mutual tolerance. According to him, all cultural and political traditions (of Western civilizations, Third World countries, etc.) may not be compared and ranked; they are just what they are. Any meta-criteria that aim at allowing tradition to be considered legitimate or accepted must be rejected. Feyerabend claims the impossibility of a universal political standard and contextualizes the political units, claiming that all customs, religions, and legal norms are valid within their local domains. Meanwhile, Feyerabend is convinced that traditions can benefit from studying each other, a position known as opportunism. He

calls for all traditions to be granted the same rights and opportunities, requiring a fair dialog process and equal exchange. No culture can be superior to others due to any universal truth or objective knowledge. Feyerabend develops his theory of democratic relativism, drawing from Protagoras's assertion that "Man is the measure of all things" (Feyerabend, 1988, p. 44), arguing that traditions are human constructs imbued with anthropomorphic qualities: "The laws, customs, facts that are being put before the citizens ultimately rest on the pronouncements, beliefs, and perceptions of human beings" (Feyerabend, 1988, p. 48). Feyerabend's democratic relativism posits that diverse societies may have different perceptions of the world and truths (about what is acceptable and unacceptable). At the same time, fundamental assumptions are subject to debate and determination by all citizens, in principle. In this context, Feyerabend's advocacy for direct democracy and the empowerment of the common people appears straightforward and politically simplistic, a stance he seeks to challenge in his provocatively titled book, "Farewell to Reason": "Modern dogmatics, living in democracies where pluralistic and libertarian rhetoric prevails, seek power in a more underhanded way. Distinguishing between 'mere beliefs' and 'objective information', the defenders of scientific rationalism tolerate the former but use laws, money, education, and PR to put the latter in a privileged position" (Feyerabend, 1988, 84). In democratic states, group interests and power relations are at high stakes, and, as Feyerabend acknowledges, mere calls for equal participation and deliberation of all citizens will not easily dissolve them. Feyerabend's theory of political relativism involves normative judgments without detailing practical implementations, giving it the semblance of a utopian vision rather than a robust political theory. Political relativism, notably in Feyerabend's framework, often neglects the development of tangible strategies for integrating relativistic principles into daily political practices. This neglect encompasses the resolution of conflicts among different groups, the establishment of flexible standards relevant to different contexts, and the crafting of pragmatic approaches.

However, critics claim that tolerance (including inclusivity and flexibility) is not solely confined to being a "relativistic virtue" at its core. Embracing a relativistic doctrine may not be essential for cultivating social and political tolerance. "The confluence of tolerance and relativism has created the unfortunate impression that to be a tolerant liberal one must also accept relativism. The conceptual connection between relativism and tolerance is far from clear. For one thing, the true mark of tolerance is to accept a point of view that one considers wrong, but the relativist is not, or at least not obviously, in a position to judge any point of view as wrong. Moreover, if all values are culture-relative, then tolerance could be a value only for those cultures that judge it in that light. Hence, relativism would lead to tolerance only for those who already recognize the value of tolerance" (Baghramian, 2020, p.20). Given the inherent diversity, subjectivity, and arbitrariness within personal experiences, recognizing, and valuing political tolerance may suffice. On the other hand, our fundamental convictions, particularly democratic convictions such as tolerance, equal rights, and opportunities, may not inherently rely on an epistemological theory for justification despite the potential contribution of relativism to reinforcing them.

The denial of universal values positions relativism as an intellectual backing for autocratic and populist political regimes as well. Autocracies utilize relativism to validate their “alternative” models of democracy, based on their different cultural and historical contexts. Unrestricted by any constraints and empowered by the total freedom afforded by relativism, these regimes adapt their traditions to democratic principles, selectively incorporating Western democratic values while rejecting others and integrating local traditions as they see fit. Populism, which political theorists argue is primarily a political style or strategy rather than an ideology, also dismisses the notion of truth as a general normative structure. Within populist discourse, “we” and “they” or “the people” and “the elites” each assert their distinct versions of truth, thereby undermining the premise of a unified truth accessible to all. While embracing a relativistic concept of pluralism concerning truth, populists maintain the stance that tolerance should not extend across differing truths since they assert the supremacy of “our” or “the people’s” truth over that of “others”.

Hence, relativism arises as an intellectual asset utilized by both democratic and non-democratic politics, serving as both an ally and adversary to various conflicting and aligning political ideologies. This implies that merely adopting a relativistic perspective falls short of embracing moral and political values, including tolerance, openness, and equality, which are indispensable for the welfare and advancement of any democratic society.

Another inevitable outcome attributed to relativism is regarded as intellectual (theoretical) and dispositional uncertainty. Rejecting any overarching narratives or objective truths, relativism can leave individuals feeling disoriented and adrift. Indeed, critics argue the relativistic position lines up with intellectual indifference or a casual attitude towards intellectual pursuits, where one may not take the time or effort to critically examine concepts, explore complex arguments, or seek more profound understanding. This can result in a state of wavering belief in one’s principles, values, or opinions, a reluctance to commit to a course of action, and superficial engagement with ideas. Instead, relativism contrasts with a strong sense of conviction and firm confidence. It can lead to intellectual or moral apathy, where individuals lack strong convictions because they see all beliefs and values as equally valid or invalid.

Intellectual or dispositional uncertainty poses significant challenges for individuals to engage effectively as citizens in the formulation of decisions pertinent to political tolerance, equal rights, and opportunities. In essence, it obstructs the realization of the Protagorean project, wherein the capacity for individuals to serve as the measure of all things remains elusive in practical application.

Politics and Lies

Trying to rescue politics from being irreversibly relativized, Hannah Arendt claims that even if we “admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don’t admit the right to touch the factual matter itself” (Arendt, 1967, p. 7).

Hannah Arendt, a preeminent political philosopher of the 20th century, dedicated her intellectual pursuits to exploring the connection between truth and politics. This exploration is encapsulated in two of her influential essays, "Truth and Politics" and "Lying in Politics". "Truth and Politics" was written in response to the criticism she faced after publishing "Eichmann in Jerusalem" in 1963 as a series of articles in *The New Yorker*. "Lying in Politics" was penned as a response to the public disclosure of the Pentagon Papers. In her writings, Arendt argues that politicians have always been interested in the denial of facts by making facts.

According to her, facts and events emerge from collective living and interaction because they are shaped by individuals' experiences, perspectives, and interactions within a society. As such, they become intertwined with the fabric of shared memory and historical narrative, influencing how people perceive and understand the world around them. Due to this, she argues, factual truths often clash with political interests. Indeed, political power usually seeks to control collective memory by shaping historical narratives and controlling the dissemination of information. This control allows political authorities to maintain their authority, legitimacy, and control over public discourse. When facts challenge or contradict the narratives propagated by political authorities, they threaten to disrupt collective memory by introducing alternative perspectives or interpretations of historical events. This can involve erecting or, conversely, tearing down monuments or memorials that celebrate a particular narrative of history, engaging in revisionist history by reinterpreting past events, or whitewashing individuals and the actions of past leaders. It may also involve engaging in symbolic actions to influence collective memory, such as renaming landmarks or streets, changing national symbols or emblems, or carrying out public ceremonies or rituals that reinforce a specific narrative of history. Furthermore, political actors manipulate collective memory to serve their interests, promoting narratives that align with their agendas or ideologies. In doing so, they may suppress or distort facts that challenge their version of history, reinforcing their authority and control over collective memory.

Moreover, facts play a crucial role in maintaining a free and democratic society and ensuring our freedom. They enable informed decision-making, ensure accountability, promote transparency, underpin freedom of speech and expression, and help protect rights. Without facts, these pillars of democracy and freedom would be significantly weakened or lost. The ability of individuals to make informed decisions, exercise their rights, hold their leaders accountable, and participate effectively in the political process is contingent on the availability and understanding of information. Misinformation or lack of information can lead to manipulation, oppression, and the erosion of democratic processes. Arendt argues that because facts possess a compelling authority, they demand nothing more than acknowledgment or recognition and do not serve as vehicles for propaganda or persuasion. As factual truth stands diametrically opposed to opinion, persuasion, or propaganda, it resides beyond the purview of political discourse, operating outside the confines of power-conflict dynamics. Consequently, facts widely become subject to interpretation; politicians manipulate facts to align entirely with their agenda or political ideology.

They seek to alter established truths and rewrite historical narratives through such actions.

Arendt contends that truth and politics intersect most profoundly within the domain of factual truths, asserting the necessity of separating them from other forms of truth. She outlines various categories of truth, including mathematical, scientific, philosophical, and factual truths, with the latter focused on human events and things that happen in the world. Unlike other forms of truth, factual truths are characterized by fragility and less durability. Particularly, facts about past events pose significant challenges for recovery without documented records. In other words, once lost or destroyed, facts remain irrecoverable. Arendt underscores the substantial political ramifications of this reality, suggesting that the primary concern lies not with media influence but rather with political authority, as facts present inconveniences to those in power. Indeed, politics consistently demonstrates a vested interest in either concealing or eradicating certain facts.

Arendt writes “The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim; indeed, it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever. Facts and events are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, and theories—even the most wildly speculative ones—produced by the human mind; they occur in the field of the ever-changing affairs of men, in whose flux there is nothing more permanent than the admittedly relative permanence of the human mind’s structure. Once they are lost, no rational effort will ever bring them back” (Arendt, 1977, p. 231).

Arendt believes that the real threat to facts is something she calls “organized lying”, which she describes as coordinated and concerted efforts to undermine the factual character of human events. In her work, she illustrates the fragility of our collective reality and explains how the reality we all share and rely on can be disrupted by organized lying. This results in a surreal realm where evidence is manipulated, and documents are falsified, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Politics is a dynamic field that requires individuals to take various actions. Engaging in politics requires acknowledging the constantly changing nature of reality. This means one must be resourceful and creative to navigate through the challenges that arise. Lying is one of the actions that individuals in politics may engage in, referring to the act of deliberately misleading others. In contrast to lying, accepting something as true involves a theoretical process that requires, for instance, evaluating evidence and concluding based on logical reasoning. Lying can have significant consequences, particularly in politics. It can make the past as malleable as the future, allowing it to be reshaped to suit the present agenda or needs. As Arendt affirms, “Since everything that has actually happened in the realm of human affairs could just as well have been otherwise, the possibilities for lying are boundless, and this boundlessness makes for self-defeat” (Arendt, 1967, p. 15). Politicians can change the narrative of history by altering the facts to suit their needs. Consequently, lying constitutes a rejection of the existence of factual truths, which can have severe implications not just for the fabric of societies but for the very destiny of nations.

There is a widely held belief that the purpose of lying in politics is to make it difficult for people to trust themselves and form informed opinions based on facts.

Political lies can erode individuals' confidence in their judgment and mental faculties by sowing doubt and uncertainty. This can increase political influence and control over public discourse because people may need to rely more heavily on the judgments and narratives put forth by politicians and other authority figures. However, it is also true that lying in politics can destabilize political institutions by eroding trust in politicians and undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process. When citizens lose faith in their elected representatives and institutions, it can lead to disillusionment, apathy, and even political unrest. This erosion of trust can weaken the social contract between citizens and the state, making it more difficult to govern effectively and maintain social cohesion.

While undermining trust in politicians may serve the short-term interests of certain political actors seeking to maintain power or advance their agenda, it ultimately undermines the strength and effectiveness of political institutions in the long run. Given that some political actors may prioritize their interests over the long-term stability and integrity of political institutions, this can compromise the ability to address pressing societal issues. Without trust in political leaders and institutions, democratic governance becomes more challenging, and the ability to address pressing societal issues is compromised.

Arendt cautions that we cannot allow politics to dispute the existence of facts. It serves an enormous importance for public institutions, such as libraries, newspapers, museums, archives, and universities, that maintain the factual account of reality. Arendt argues that the purpose of organized lying is not to replace some facts with others, which means to replace the truth with the lie but to undermine the character of factuality itself. The agenda of politics is to make facts seem like opinions. When facts turn into opinions, there is no agreed-upon basis for human action. Political decisions become meaningless because reality becomes malleable; it can be shaped and reshaped according to who is in power. Totalitarian leaders treat facts like enemies because they want to claim everything without evidence. If politicians are not required to respect facts, they become radically free. They say things and then claim never have said them; they rewrite history to serve their interests.

She emphasizes the crucial importance of acknowledging the constant threat to democracy posed by lies. For Arendt, the solution to combat relativism and lying in politics is the pursuit of factual truth, which she believes can only be attained and preserved outside the realm of politics. She argues that it should be the job of the true impartial scientist or philosopher. These individuals, unencumbered by partisan interests, are ideally positioned to pursue truth-seeking endeavors, and contribute to the public discourse with rigor and integrity.

Steven Lukes, a British political and social theorist, shares the same concerns as Hannah Arendt when it comes to politics and truth. He believes that politics should not be about imposing big or metaphysical truths upon whole societies, as this could lead to totalitarian regimes. Instead, he argues that empirical or factual truths should be considered and given more weight for politics to be effective in the long run. Lukes proposes several domains of life, including science, journalism, law, and public administration, as spheres of collective reasoning that should serve as guardians of truth. In these spheres, participants should ideally reach conclusions that

they collectively agree are justified as true based on evidence. Within these spheres, participants ideally reach conclusions based on evidence and shared norms, thus upholding the integrity of truth-seeking endeavors. In his essay “Power, Truth and Politics”, Lukes argues “The norms in these various fields (e.g., replication in science, fact-checking in journalism, the adversary system in Anglo-American criminal law, bureaucratic rules, and public consultation in administration) are filters designed to help to ensure this by ruling out arbitrariness, idiosyncrasy, incompetence, favoritism, nepotism, negligence, subterfuge, skulduggery, malpractice, fraud, and corruption. They function to restrict the power of interest-driven parties to render truth impotent” (Lukes, 2019, p. 567).

Lukes advocates for greater transparency, accountability, and democratic participation as the solution to the problem of truth in politics. He calls for mechanisms to hold political actors accountable and for increased public scrutiny of government processes and decision-making. In this context, he asserts that liberal democracy provides the most conducive framework for conducting politics, where a win-at-all-costs strategy is entirely self-defeating. Liberal democracy involves organizing political life to maintain impartiality, avoid imposing truths on everyone, and keep the question of truth open. He emphasizes the importance of defending institutions such as science, journalism, the judiciary, and public administration—entities that track and uphold truth—for advancing decent politics.

Conclusion

The intricate relationship between truth and politics, as explored throughout this paper, reveals both perennial tensions and profound implications for democratic governance. Politics and truth being conflicting has been a topic of discussion for a long time. Throughout history, politics has often been seen as being more about power than the truth. Nowadays, in the age of “post-truth”, many believe that politics is more about lies, misinformation, and other manipulative tactics than truth. It begs the question: why do we think that politics has anything to do with truth?

As outlined in this paper, one perspective perceives politics through a narrow lens akin to warfare, where the sole objective is victory. This approach turns politics into a power struggle that centers on defeating the enemy, leading to polarization of society where manipulation of both people and truth becomes commonplace.

The quote, “You have your own way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist”, is often attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche, and quite precisely describes the position of relativism. Not only does it carry a profound message about the subjectivity of human perspectives in general, but at its core, it emphasizes the idea that there is not universally applicable or definitive path that can be labeled as the absolute “right way”. Instead, it encourages us to recognize and respect the diversity of opinions, choices, and approaches, irrespective of the ethical implications. In the context of political discourse, the concept of “my way” has historically, and particularly in contemporary times, been interpreted to signify a willingness to undertake any necessary measures to achieve a particular objective or secure a victory (winning at all costs). Indeed, in the absence of right, correct, or the only way, the justification for “my way” lies solely with me

or my group, and it is based on the effectiveness of “my way” in facilitating our understanding and supporting us in achieving our objectives or desires. This is the distinct embodiment of post-truth politics’ “my way” that we find ourselves immersed in today. Post-truth politics justifies its approach by arguing that there is no objective truth or reality to follow, allowing politicians to shape alternative narratives and interpretations according to their agendas. To achieve their objectives and suit their own needs, post-truth politicians take advantage of media dynamics, especially the proliferation of social media platforms, exploit societal polarization, capitalize on the public distrust in institutions, and, last but not least, prioritize winning more than anything else.

Another perspective on politics acknowledges the existence of a “right way” of conducting politics and arises from its commitment to liberal democratic frameworks. Liberalism, known for its advocacy of tolerance and pluralism, firmly rejects all forms of dogmatism, including totalitarian and authoritarian meta-narratives. This stance suggests that liberalism inherently aligns with a relativistic standpoint. As one can see, truth becomes something that can be entirely negotiated in both contexts, giving rise to political relativism.

However, amidst these complexities lies a pressing concern: the erosion of truth in contemporary political discourse. The rise of post-truth politics further complicates the landscape. In a world where facts are increasingly viewed through emotional and subjective interpretation, the very essence of informed citizenship and rational discourse is threatened. This shift towards a post-truth environment, where empirical evidence and factual accuracy are subordinated to emotional appeal and personal belief, poses a significant risk to the principles of transparency and accountability that underpin democratic institutions.

Relativism emerges as a significant philosophical and political doctrine that influences modern interpretations of truth and understanding in the political domain. Although relativism offers a critique of absolute or universal truths and promotes tolerance and pluralism, it also raises concerns regarding political anarchy, moral uncertainty, and intellectual apathy. Critics argue that relativism can lead to political chaos and undermine democratic institutions by eroding shared norms and principles necessary for political stability. Besides, the rejection of universal values also provides intellectual backing for autocratic and populist regimes, which selectively incorporate democratic principles while maintaining their own cultural and historical traditions. While cultural and historical traditions undoubtedly shape democratic systems, there are underlying universal principles and values that transcend specific cultural or historical contexts and are essential for the functioning of democracy. Without a shared understanding of these fundamental truths, such as human rights, sovereignty, rule of law, transparency, and accountability, it can be challenging, if not impossible, to establish and maintain a democratic society. Hence, rejecting the idea of universal or objective truths from a relativistic standpoint undermines fundamental principles, values, and norms rather than serving as a liberating force.

Those who defend relativism argue that it helps foster tolerance, openness, and equality, which are indispensable for democratic coexistence. Relativism challenges dogmatic and authoritarian ideologies, advocating for a more inclusive and open-

minded political approach. However, the link between relativism and democratic values is not straightforward, and adopting a relativistic perspective does not necessarily ensure the promotion of democratic principles. Additionally, while fostering intellectual uncertainty and apathy, relativism hinders individuals' capacity to engage effectively in political discourse and decision-making, which is so vital in a functioning democracy. Therefore, in navigating the complexities of contemporary political landscapes, it is essential for political actors and citizens to critically examine the implications of relativism and its role in shaping political ideologies and practices.

The exploration of politics and truth, as examined by prominent thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Steven Lukes, emphasizes the complex relationship between factual accuracy and politics. Arendt's insights into the manipulation of facts and collective memory aim to prevent facts or evidence from being irreversibly relativized. She cautions against the dangers of organized lying, which seeks to undermine the very concept of factuality. While emphasizing the fragile nature of facts in the face of political power, Arendt vividly illustrates that political manipulation of facts is not merely about misinformation but a deeper, more strategic effort to reshape reality to fit the needs of those in power. Moreover, the political utility of lies, as a tool for manipulating public opinion and masking the true nature of policy decisions, has been a consistent theme from historical analyses to contemporary critiques. The deliberate distortion of facts serves not only the immediate goals of specific political actors but also reflects a broader strategic intent to control the political narrative and influence the policy-making process.

Arendt contends that the search for factual truth lies outside the realm of politics and should be entrusted to impartial scientists or philosophers. Lukes echoes this sentiment, advocating for protecting truth-tracking institutions such as science, journalism, law, and public administration. These spheres of collective reasoning serve as guardians of truth, upholding rigorous standards of evidence and integrity in pursuing knowledge. As for political figures, according to Lukes, while they claim commitment to a liberal democratic framework, it will be counterproductive for them not to cultivate openness to truth and willingness to engage in reasoned discourse.

In grappling with these issues, it becomes clear that the preservation of a democratic society depends crucially on the safeguarding of truth and the realm of factuality. Institutions such as journalism, academia, and the legal system, and intellectuals play an indispensable role in this process by scrutinizing political statements and actions, fostering public debate, and ensuring that principles and facts remain the cornerstone of public discourse.

Considering the solutions proposed by Arendt and Lukes, it's essential to reflect on the inherent optimism in their perspectives. Despite the challenges posed by organized lying and the manipulation of facts, both thinkers maintain a belief in the capacity of individuals to uphold truth and integrity in political discourse. They advocate for mechanisms that empower citizens to hold political actors accountable and participate actively in the democratic process. Indeed, by fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and democratic participation, we can cultivate a political environment where factual accuracy and reasoned discourse prevail.

In this regard, we can be cautiously optimistic about people's rational abilities to navigate the complexities of politics and truth. The challenge for contemporary politics is not merely to address the symptoms of lies and relativism but to reinforce the foundations of democratic governance through a renewed commitment to truth. This involves not only the commitment to truth-seeking endeavors and the defense of truth-tracking institutions that ensure transparency and accountability but also cultivating a public discourse that values and upholds the truth. As we move forward, the role of education in fostering critical thinking and discernment becomes ever more critical.

The journey towards reconciling truth and politics is fraught with challenges, but it remains an essential endeavor for those committed to the ideals of democracy and justice. The integrity of our political systems and the health of our civic life depend fundamentally on our capacity to engage with truth—both as a concept and as a practice—in the public sphere. To create a more informed, tolerant, and equitable society, we must strive to foster a nuanced understanding of truth and politics. As we confront the challenges of politics and truth, let us remain steadfast in our dedication to upholding truth and integrity in political discourse, thereby safeguarding the foundations of democracy for future generations.

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