

University and Post-truth

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The article demonstrates the conflict between university and post-truth, namely the inability of university to fight post-truth due to the underestimation of objective truth in society. The facts that university is losing the opportunity to develop students' critical thinking as a result of the deprivation of its independence in obtaining objective truth are given as arguments. The attention is focused on the historical context of this conflict. In conclusion, the need for university to defend its independence due to the terrible consequences of post-truth for society is proved.

Keywords: university, post-truth, objective truth, university autonomy, academic freedom, philosophy, critical thinking

INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this research is rather controversial. University has always been a harbour of objective truth and a guide for society on the way to it. The idea of university has been to serve objective truth as the highest spiritual value. In particular, K. Twardowski connected the idea of university with such a concept as 'dignity'. He believed that university is worthy of its fundamental purpose only when it upholds the universal importance of objective truth in human life and society. Twardowski emphasised the dignity of university because he witnessed how society gradually began to deny the university's exclusivity due to underestimation of objective truth as the highest spiritual value. He was afraid because of that the university would turn into a comprehensive and vocational school. Twardowski urged the university to protect itself from any explicit or implicit encroachments on its independence in the pursuit of objective truth and to distance itself from everything unrelated to objective truth. He compared the university with a lighthouse at the sea, which shows ships the way through the turbulent waves, but never immerses its own light in the waves. If the university immersed itself in something that does not serve the purpose of obtaining scientific truth, the society would be left without a guiding star, the only one which can point out the way to it. Since objective truth is the subject matter of philosophy, according to Twardowsky, namely philosophy should occupy the central place among the sciences at the university. Philosophy develops critical thinking, teaches clarity and precision in reflection, helps in overcoming sophistry (Twardowski 1997).

However, there are two opposing trends in modern culture. According to B. Williams, on the one hand, it is a desire for truth, and on the other hand, it is a suspicion of truth. He

considered these tendencies to be interrelated: the desire for truth causes the process of criticism, which weakens confidence in truth. This provokes a number of questions. Is there such a thing as truth? Can truth not be relative or subjective? Can truth be proven? These questions arise in politics and understanding of history, social sciences, and the precise interpretations of the research in natural sciences. Everywhere, behind the visible structure of truth, is there a desire to be convinced of whether it is really real? (Williams 2002).

Moreover, a modern human becomes indifferent to such a spiritual value as truth. According to V. Petrushenko, modern society is increasingly filled with functional, pragmatically and cynically oriented people. He calls this society the 'inside-out society', or 'upside-down society' because it refuses not only a serious and intense educational process, but also fundamental science, which alone among other directions and varieties of scientific knowledge still works on 'truth itself'. This truth is supplanted by the so-called 'technoscience', which no longer wants 'pure knowledge', but seeks to obtain and exploit technical inventions immediately together with knowledge (Petrushenko 2015: 88).

Today, post-truth is displacing the truth. According to the definition of the Oxford dictionary, post-truth 'relates to or denotes circumstances in which objective facts are viewed as irrelevant, or less important than personal beliefs and opinions, and emotional appeals are used to influence public opinion' (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). 'Post-truth is a social condition that threatens the trust in science and people's critical thinking' (Valladares 2022: 1311). The prefix *post-* does not mean that we are in a situation 'after' truth in the time dimension (as, for example, when we talk about a 'post-colonial society'), or towards truth itself (believing that post-truth follows truth). The prefix *post-* means that for us the truth is not important: 'In today's context, we are talking about the falsity of "truth" and the relevance of "post-truth", the visibility of truth, accordingly we are talking about "post-truth" as a general feature of our time' (Laktionova 2017: 91). The prefix *post-* also 'expresses the concern of those who care about the concept of truth and who feel that it is in danger' (Mcintyre 2021: 23), as the post-truth era challenges 'not only the very idea of knowledge of reality, but also the existence of reality as such' (Mcintyre 2021: 26). Of course, this problem primarily concerns scientists (Meyer, Quattrone 2021; Rimkus 2023).

But how did it happen? What does this mean for the university dignity and the actualisation of post-truth? And why is it important not to ignore this contradiction? Searching for answers to these questions is the aim of the research. The origins of post-truth will be specified in the first part based on the analysis of problematisation by M. Foucault of Parrhesia, the peculiarities of the relationship between university and post-truth will be revealed in the second part based on the inductive method, and the consequences of post-truth will be described in the third part based on the deductive method and interpretation method.

THE POST-TRUTH ORIGINS

Today, university is considered to be one of the sources of post-truth. According to modern philosophers, postmodernists are usually responsible for this, since they are the ones who introduced an intellectual fashion, which has made skepticism about truth and facts acceptable (Dennett 2017), affirmed the thesis that there is no such thing as objective truth (Mcintyre 2021: 121), equated science with poetry in rights for truth (in all seriousness) (Wilber 2019: 13), etc. As a result, everything is questioned and little can be trusted. There is no correct answer to the question. There is only a narrative. Objective truth is only a social construct. There is no difference between facts and fiction, empirical data and fantasy.

However, from the studies of the postmodernists, we can also learn that this problem goes back to a very old conflict between philosophers and sophists. Michel Foucault's study of truth as a concrete activity is the clear evidence of this.

Foucault found out that the ancient Greeks and Romans placed great importance on the practice of telling the truth. They called this practice 'parrhesia'. Etymologically *parrhesia*, according to Foucault, means the activity that consists in saying everything. A paretisist is the person who says everything. The philosopher distinguished two meanings of parrhesia: pejorative and positive.

Used in a pejorative sense, parrhesia does indeed consist in saying 'anything', but in the sense of saying anything: anything that comes to mind; anything that serves the cause one is defending; everything that serves the passion or interest driving the person who is speaking. The paretisist then looks like an impenitent chatterbox, someone who cannot control themselves, or someone who cannot index-link their discourse to the principles of rationality and truth. Foucault finds an example of a parrhesia used in the pejorative sense by Plato in his description of democracy. Foucault has noticed that Plato considers parrhesia not only as freedom to say everything but as linked with the freedom to do everything: 'It is a kind of anarchy involving the freedom to choose one's own style of life without limit' (Foucault 1983: 6, lecture 5).

In the positive sense, parrhesia consists in telling the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornamentation, that might encode or conceal it. 'Telling all' is then telling the truth without concealing any part of it, without hiding anything. Foucault finds an example of using a parrhesia in the positive sense in Demosthenes' Philippics. Unlike bad parrhesiasts, who say anything and do not index their discourse with common sense, Demosthenes does not want to do this, he wants to tell the truth without hiding anything, and he wants to practice parrhesia.

Foucault distinguished courage as an essential feature of parrhesia. Firstly, parrhesia is the courage of the truth in the person who speaks, and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth. Secondly, parrhesia is the interlocutor's courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears.

For Foucault, parrhesia is not something like a technique or a skill. Parrhesia is an attitude, a way of being, similar to virtue. Parrhesia is a mode of action. Parrhesia is a modality of truth-telling, rather than a rhetorical technique. Accordingly, the paretisist, for Foucault, is not a person who possesses a technique or a skill which he can teach others to possess. A parrhesiast risks his life for the truth which he tells: 'In the case of the technician's truth-telling, teaching ensures the survival of knowledge, the person who practices parrhesia risks death' (Foucault 1984).

Therefore, Foucault contrasted a paretisist to a teacher. The teacher does not need courage to teach. The teacher tries to set the connection between common knowledge, heritage and tradition. For the teacher, personal recognition and friendship of those to whom he speaks are important. On the contrary, the paretisist risks the relationship that he has with those he speaks to. When a parrhesiast tells the truth, he does not set the connection of common knowledge, heritage and tradition, but provokes anger, antagonism and hostility. And he may go so far that this truth will cost him his life. Foucault compared the teacher with the sophist, because the sophist was the kind of teacher who claimed to have a certain technique and could pass it on to another.

Foucault links parrhesia with good education, intellectual and moral formation, *paideia*. Parrhesia is about helping a person to discover the truth about themselves and the world.

Parrhesia requires some sort of personal development, teaches to confront other's opinion in a critical manner. Parrhesia lays the foundations of the 'critical' tradition in Western philosophy and opposes the authoritarian teaching of the sophists.

Foucault believed that in modern society the technical modality of truth-telling is organised much more around science than teaching, or at any rate around a complex formed by scientific and research institutions and teaching institutions, but the Parrhesierist model of truth has precisely disappeared as such, and we can no longer find it.

Does this not mean that the sophists were involved in the disappearance of parrhesia? After all, the sophists did not care about the truth. They only pretended that they cared about it (Plato 1969: 10.595). Sophists did not focus on teaching that knowledge which is true, but which is effective in certain practices of life. They considered education as the transfer of ready-made knowledge in the form of teacher's answers to students' questions. The sophists believed that knowledge could be acquired through learning by heart and imitation. Philosophers were concerned with the truth. Their views were based on the awareness of the lack of knowledge and the desire to achieve it by their own efforts. Philosophers associated reaching the truth with asking questions to students, since no one possesses ready-made knowledge (Plato 1967). In order to know the truth and themselves, young people must conduct a conversation with each other by their own efforts (Plato 1999). While communication of the sophists was aimed at the transmission of knowledge, the truth of which could be questionable, the philosophers' communication was aimed at the search for objective truth. Under the communication of the philosophers, a person had freedom for personal development, and under the communication of the sophists, they lost it. Probably, the answer to the above question lies precisely in the confrontation between philosophers and sophists regarding the truth.

This confrontation has lasted for centuries in the philosophical tradition. It can be traced in Aristotle's distinction between true and pretended wisdom, and in Aurelius Augustine's distinction between true and false learning. Aristotle considered true wisdom to be philosophers' business, because philosophers seek the truth and know how to detect lies, and also know how to express their own thoughts and know how to hear the thoughts of others. Instead, he considered pretended wisdom to be sophists' business, because sophists seek the benefit of pretended, false wisdom, and it is important for them to reason for the sake of argument and the desire to win (Aristotle). A. Augustine defined true learning as the contemplation of inner truth according to one's own abilities, and false learning as the presentation of sciences through words (Augustine 1938). The conflict between true and false learning is also discussed in the works of Senecae (Senecae), M. Montaigne (Montaigne 1899), R. Descartes (Descartes 1995), F. Nietzsche (Nietzsche 1909), etc.

Therefore, the prerequisite of post-truth should not be considered exclusively postmodern thinking. Post-truth arose during the time of the sophists. Not the truth itself, but only its utility was important for them. For the sophists, truth was not a virtue, but only a competence that could help in social life. Sophists are the godfathers of post-truth (see Arendt 1967).

UNIVERSITY VS POST-TRUTH

In my opinion, a kind of atmosphere, which is 'favourable' for post-truth, has emerged in university. This has happened because of the underestimation of objective truth in society. Its manifestations are the following: the expectation of utilitarian benefit from university, university's deprivation of autonomy and teachers of the academic freedom and the levelling of the uniqueness of philosophical knowledge in university education.

The utilitarian understanding of the role of university in society determines its reorientation from a scientific institution into an enterprise which meets the changing needs of the market. P. Sloterdijk considers the utilitarian approach to the university to be the defeat of the intelligentsia, since it caused the replacement of the old doctrine about wisdom with fake intelligence and science (Sloterdijk 2002: 99), and also the emergence of a number of cynical phenomena in the field of knowledge and sciences, which overshadowed 'false attitudes' towards truth and cognition and turned these 'higher goods' into simple consumer goods. The cynicism of such an approach to the university is, according to the philosopher, in setting a connection between study and profession by regulation of the amount of salary. At the same time, educational reforms ensure that education is as dull as the prospects that students should receive after education (Sloterdijk 2002: 299).

The implementation of utilitarian didactics in the university limits or completely ignores development of scientific thinking, which alone can lead to knowledge and truth. According to M. Peters, when education is equated almost solely with job training rather than a broader critical citizenship agenda for participatory democracy, we can expect the further decline in social democracy and the rise of populist demagogue politicians and alt-right racist parties (Peters 2017: 3). Such education deprives young people of the possibility of understanding the importance of objective truth in solving any problems: social, economic, political, etc. Under such circumstances, they will not be able to go beyond their own likes or dislikes and will choose one of the antagonistic points of view.

The constant reformation of the university deprives university teachers of freedom in obtaining objective truth and its dissemination. L. Donskis believes that 'constant changes become an excellent form of social control' (Bauman, Donskis 2014: 169). According to the scientist, today young people lose the opportunity to learn what a non-vulgarised, non-pragmatic and non-instrumentalised university is. A free professor who does not humiliate himself in front of anyone, or a scientist who adheres to the principle of *pauca paucis* is a great rarity. Young people have nobody to teach them to respect freedom of thought and intellectual integrity (Bauman, Donskis 2014: 169).

Commercialisation of the university turns it into a limited liability company. Instead of caring about the objective truth and the methods of obtaining it, university teachers are forced to follow the rules of the market: to create such educational services that will be in demand; to investigate the kinds of scientific problems that will bring profit or at least guarantee the greatest number of citations. T. Eagleton writes: 'As university professors turn into managers, students turn into consumers' (Eagleton 2015). In this deformation he notices the slow death of the university as a centre for humane criticism (Eagleton 2015). Mintz adds that this 'death' is accompanied by the distraction of teachers from teaching quality as a commercially unprofitable matter (Mintz 2020).

Society's contempt for philosophy seems to accelerate the university's death. In society, philosophy is no longer considered a driving force for the development of critical thinking. 'Philosophy does not provide obvious benefit to society', and 'it is always difficult for a philosopher to achieve the status of a specialist' (Lyotard 2003). This state of affairs actually flows from the confrontation between philosophers and sophists. Philosophy is replaced by various workshops and trainings for personal growth or development of criticality. But this is not higher education in the classical sense of the word. This is a kind of fraud. Changing one's own life or learning to think critically is not something one can do quickly. One cannot learn this for money. It takes much time and hard work. But this is exactly what the university lacks

today. If philosophy does not give as much benefit as the natural sciences, then it cannot claim to be unique in university education.

If a university is not able to protect its independence in obtaining objective truth from invasions and cannot distance itself from those trends in society that are not related to objective truth, then it inevitably makes society vulnerable to post-truth.

THE POST-TRUTH OUTCOMES

The denial of truth leads to the denial of universal values and ideals. Post-truth causes the spread of moral relativism and nihilism. V. Wilber believes that universal moral and ethical frameworks do not exist today: your truth is true for you and mine is true for me, to deny someone else's assertion is to oppress the other. According to Wilber, the same applies to values: some values are not superior to others, and the assertion that some value has a universal status, acceptable to all, is a disguised claim to power, since it means imposing your ideas of good and evil on other people (Wilber 2019: 13–14).

Post-truth distorts communication because it tries to mislead. Post-truth is aimed not at understanding in communication, but at achieving a certain result in it. Its purpose is to convince of something regardless of whether there are enough arguments for it. The worst thing is that post-truth does this in a hidden way. The most effective way of this is propaganda. It is possible to spread a certain worldview, a specific theory, a particular statement, etc. via propaganda: 'The key word here is "influence", and it does not matter whether the information is true or not' (Yermolenko 2018: 24). Due to this, the truth becomes a practice, a practical action. Truth in politics is shaped by people who generate actions and achieve results, not by those who define, formulate and consider these actions and results from the perspective of morality. The truth is success for such people, and vice versa, success is truth for them. These people do not care how they achieve success; the main thing for them is to achieve it. The end justifies the means (Bauman, Donskis 2017: 121).

Nowadays, the existence of truth and objective facts is questioned, and therefore, the existence of science itself is questioned. Post-truth appeals to emotions or personal opinions. What is true is what feels right, not what is really true. Therefore, the priority for post-truth, according to Ph. de Lara, is not so much emotional as selfish (de Lara 2018: 37). History is being rewritten 'selfishly' today. History is used to justify territorial claims, annexations and wars. History is used as an argument for intentional violence and murder. Such a rewriting of history in society is possible due to the decline of critical thinking and the spread of the culture of forgetting. In a society where people's knowledge is limited by social networks, and where they learn history only from films, it is easy for a tyrant to achieve his goal. Not without reason, T. Snyder warns that post-truth is pre-fascism (Snyder 2017: 10 lesson).

Actually, students demonstrate that the truth is no longer important to them. In discussions on philosophy, I noticed that only their own truth is essential for them and they think that 'I have my truth, and they have theirs'.

For students, Google and knowledge have become identical concepts. For them, to prepare for a seminar means to simply 'google' questions for discussion. However, Google does not consider the criterion of truth and does not include it in the search engine. Wilber writes that Google search engine considers only the popularity of sites and the number of links to them. There is no way to verify the truthfulness of the search results, their compliance with the ideals of goodness, beauty and solidarity. They reflect only the madness which is based on the fact that 'one truth is not better than another' (Wilber 2019: 36).

Due to equating Google with knowledge, students lose interest in books. Studying philosophy requires hard work on philosophical writings. However, students find this task too difficult. They can analyse only simple extracts, articles and essays. And even with such a simplification, there are some students who will complain about their complexity. It seems that students no longer search in philosophical texts for the answers to the 'great questions'. For example, they are not concerned with what makes things morally right or wrong. In such a matter, they tend to rely on their own sensuality, which can change the perspective of their view on things depending on desires or fears. History of philosophy could teach students to avoid the emotional approach to the world and to strive for a definitive worldview. After all, it is nothing else but history of worldviews, which provides the critical description of philosophers' answers to the 'great questions'.

The students' lack of need in searching for answers to 'great questions' is caused by their utilitarian approach to knowledge. They divide knowledge into important and unimportant for their future profession. Philosophical knowledge is not important for students any longer. Probably, because there is no benefit in it. Although it is the philosophical sciences, especially logic, that make a person vulnerable to truth and falseness, to the correctness of thought and logical error. Logic protects us from hasty generalisations and mechanical simplifications.

Therefore, post-truth challenges morality, communication and even science. The post-truth effect can be rather significant. Post-truth does not just change reality. It deprives people of their lives. Sadly, objective truth is losing its importance for students.

CONCLUSIONS

The only defense against post-truth is critical thinking. We hope that university is working hard to promote critical thinking. After all, university is meant to lay solid foundations of scientific criticism as rejection of any distortion of the logical course of thought under the influence of feelings, prejudices, polemical tricks, sophisms and insinuations. But this is only our hope. The headlines of numerous books and articles scream to us that university is dying because thinking is being killed in it (Readings 1996; Evans 2004; Eagleton 2010).

University is deprived of the opportunity to realise its purpose due to the underestimation of objective truth in society. The development of scientific thinking is being cynically substituted with the acquisition of competencies necessary for future job. Teachers lose the prerequisites for the development of university science – academic freedom. Thus, they are deprived of the prerequisite for caring about the future of science. The transformation of university into a business organisation deprives all mankind of the right to the benefits of pure science. And philosophy is the first in line that does not fit this commercial model, since its value is pure knowledge.

In order to curb post-truth, university must defend its dignity. It must be courageous to warn the society about all the consequences of the post-truth. Indeed, post-truth creates for everyone their own reality and version of history. Post-truth deprives people of a chance for reconciliation and understanding the difference between truth and lies, war and peace. But does the society have courage to accept this truth? Is it able to preserve the dignity of university to fight against post-truth? If not, then the policy of Orwell's Ministry of Truth will become our reality.

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Universitetas ir posttiesa

Santrauka

Straipsnyje parodomas universiteto ir posttiesos konfliktas, būtent universiteto negeba kovoti su posttiesa dėl objektyvios tiesos nuvertinimo visuomenėje. Kaip argumentai pateikiami faktai, kad universitetas praranda galimybę ugdyti studentų kritinį mąstymą dėl to, kad iš jų atimama galimybė savarankiškai gauti objektyvią tiesą. Dėmesys sutelkiamas į istorinį šio konflikto kontekstą. Apibendrinant parodoma, kad universitetas turi ginti savo nepriklausomybę, kad būtų išvengta baisių posttiesos pasekmių visuomenei.

Raktažodžiai: universitetas, posttiesa, objektyvi tiesa, universiteto autonomija, akademinė laisvė, filosofija, kritinis mąstymas