

# Are We Living in a 'Post-Truth' World?

Among all the contentious outcomes of the US Presidential election saga – starting with the election of Donald Trump himself – one uncontroversial good has emerged: the global village has been awakened to the great importance of truth. This was highlighted yesterday when Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” [the word of the year](#). (Or, to tell the absolute truth, the two words of the year.)

The term, which has become a favorite of liberal columnists in recent years, achieved critical mass during 2016 when its usage rose 2000 percent over 2015, according to editors of the famous dictionary brand. They define it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs.” And this, of course, is a Bad Thing.

A more truthful definition, however, is: “relating to the delusional world in which people who do not agree with us live”. That is what the intelligentsia really mean when they drop the term “[post-truth politics](#)” in an article about Trump and his followers, or about the benighted constituencies of Europe’s populist/authoritarian/right-wing leaders. And, while it is good to see writers for The Guardian and the New York Times concerned about the truth, we cannot be as sure as they are that their version of it is untainted by emotion and personal beliefs.

The deplorables, for their part, are quite open about preferring beliefs to objective facts. Once they have found someone they can believe in, nothing will change their minds. Even after Barack Obama produced a verified Hawaiian birth

certificate in 2011 a solid core of “birthers”, encouraged by their hero Trump, refused to accept that Obama was a genuine US citizen. During the recent campaign, Trump’s wild statements and even outright lies did not matter, so long as some “higher truth” – like the untrustworthiness of the Washington elite – was being affirmed.

Last year Politifact made the Donald its “lie of the year” anti-hero, [calculating](#) that 76 percent of his statements were “mostly false”, “false”, or “pants on fire false”. Just how the Great Politifact Collider produced such a figure is, of course, open to question. In any case, his people didn’t bat an eyelid; they couldn’t care less.

The fact is that all the fact-checkers in the world – and Hillary Clinton discovered this to her chagrin – will not persuade people who do not trust these latter-day Gradgrinds and their “facts, facts, facts”. They know that however big a pile of facts you have it does not amount to the truth. Truth is something bigger; it is what you expect from people you trust, people you believe have your welfare at heart. In that sense, this is not a post-truth era but a post-fact era.

In a world drowning in data, facts have become devalued. If they can be used to demonstrate that there is “no difference” that matters between growing up with a mom and dad, and growing up with mom and her wife, or with two strange men, common sense tells the ordinary bloke there is something off about those facts. Especially when another bunch of facts confirms what seems obvious – that there *is* a difference and it matters a lot.

In any case, the champions of truth can be quite arbitrary about facts. The same ones who defend objectivity today, may defend subjectivity tomorrow. They insist that the hoi polloi

are deluded about the nature of today's globalized world – but they indulge the sad delusions of girls who think they are boys, and boys who want to be girls. And they ban, yes ban, any attempts to persuade these young people otherwise. They are happy to call the coupling of two men or two women “marriage” when it is clearly nothing like the union of a man and a woman that constitutes the true meaning of the word. They regularly deny that a newly conceived child is a human being.

And when others rebel against such blatant denials of the truth, the self-appointed custodians of objective facts resort to tortured data and the power of the courts.

Well, it turns out that there is a remedy for this kind of arrogance. Unfortunately, right now, it is the demagogue, whose own ideas about truth are warped and confused. He or she is something like a rock fall caused by an earthquake: it will take a while to shift it. In the meantime it forces everyone who is stuck behind it to relate to one another in a new way, and understand the other's truth while they work together on the obstinate facts of their situation.

One thing is certain: in the end, it's what you believe that counts, and belief is ultimately a matter of trust, of the heart. The victory will go to whoever can reach the heart with their truth.

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