

TRUTH AND POST-TRUTH IN COMMUNICATION, MEDIA, AND SOCIETY

Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

September 13-14, 2021

Casina Pio IV, Vatican City





In his Letter to Cangrande della Scala, Dante Alighieri states that the purpose of his Comedy is “to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and to lead them to the state of bliss”. This is also the work of both religious and civil authorities, in their various sectors and responsibilities. The crisis in human relationships and, consequently, the other crises I have mentioned, cannot be overcome, unless we safeguard the transcendent dignity of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis
to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See*

Benediction Hall, Monday, 8 February 2021

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Organizer: Justin Farrell, Yale University

Problem and Need

We live in a post-truth era where misinformation abounds, and scientific evidence is often supplanted by alternative facts, pseudoscience, fake news, and conspiracy theories. Oxford Dictionaries recently named “Post-Truth” as their Word of the Year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” While intentional lying, especially by political leaders, is likely as old as civilization itself, we have entered a new era where truth, objective facts, and science are increasingly under assault.

The growing disregard for facts by the public and political leaders has serious consequences for policymaking, inhibiting evidenced based decision-making to protect our planet, address social problems, and alleviate human suffering around the globe. We must develop a better understanding of the *causes* and *consequences* of post-truth dynamics. To that end, we propose a small PASS workshop to bring together an international set of scholars studying various dimensions of the problem, as well as political and NGO leaders who face the day-to-day reality of decision-making within this context of widespread distrust of evidence and disputes over basic facts. The workshop will include four panels with four presenters each.

Speakers will have 40 minutes (20 minutes for each speech and 20 minutes for Q&A), followed by a solutions-oriented group discussion at the end of each panel.

I. Post-Truth Society

This panel will address definitional questions about “Post-Truth” society and how we might understand it in philosophical and historical perspective. What are the different manifestations of post-truth thought? How widespread is it? Which institutions perpetuate it?

II. Media and Politics

What are the evolving roles of the Internet, news media, and echo-chambers in a post-truth society? This panel will turn to scholars, journalists, and politicians to discuss the impacts on political and civil systems.

III. Health and Environment

Here panelists will focus specifically on human health and the environment, with particular emphasis on climate change.

IV. Societal Response: Science, Faith, Politics

The final panel will present integrative solutions, drawing on the overlapping efforts of scientists, faith communities, and advocacy groups.





Monday 13 September

08:30-09:00 Arrival & Welcome

Panel I Post Truth Society

09:00-09:05 **Introduction**

Stefano Zamagni, Università di Bologna

09:05-09:45 **What is Post-Truth?**

Lee McIntyre, Boston University

09:45-10:25 **Truth, Beyond Technocracy and Populism**

Ana Marta González, Universidad de Navarra

10:25-11:05 **Things that Matter: Descending into Deceit and the Impact of the Post-Truth Era**

Marty Meehan, University of Massachusetts

11:05-11:15 *Break*

11:15-11:55 **Philosophical and Historical Consequences of the Destruction of the Belief in the Attainability of Truth**

Vittorio Hösle, University of Notre Dame

11:55-12:35 **Quid Est Veritas**

Chancellor Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

12:35-13:15 **General Discussion**

Stefano Zamagni, Università di Bologna

13:15-14:30 *Lunch*

Panel II Media and Politics

14:30-14:35 **Introduction**

Marina Jirotko, University of Oxford

14:35-15:15 **The Role of Deliberation in Improving the Information Environment and in Combating the Pathogen of Post-Truth**

Jane Suiter, Dublin City University

15:15-15:55 **Truth Decay as Systemic Threat**

Jennifer Kavanagh, RAND Corporation

15:55-16:05 *Break*

16:05-16:45 **Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make our Platforms Less Polarizing**

Christopher Bail, Duke University

16:45-17:25 **The Logical Structure of Co-creation: Truth-Models for Spaces of Exchange**

Riccardo Pozzo, Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata"

17:25-18:05 **General Discussion**

Marina Jirotko, University of Oxford

18:05-18:30 Close Out & Departure

Tuesday 14 September

08:30-09:00 Arrival & Recap

Panel III Health and Environment

09:00-09:05 **Introduction**

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, University of Massachusetts Boston

09:05-09:45 **Health Information Inequity: How News Deserts Increase Vulnerability to False Information**

Seema Yasmin, Stanford University

09:45-10:25 **Combating Knowledge Dementors: Expelliarmus or Expecto Patronum?**

Stephan Lewandowsky, University of Bristol

10:25-10:35 *Break*

10:35-11:15 **Creating Civic Media: Regulation, Design, and Empowerment**

Eileen Culloty, Dublin City University

11:15-11:55 **Building Public Resilience to Misinformation through Critical Thinking**

John Cook, Monash University

11:55-12:35 **General Discussion**

Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, University of Massachusetts Boston

12:35-13:50 *Lunch*

Panel IV Societal Response: Science, Faith, Politics

13:50-13:55 **Introduction**

Marta Cartabia, Italian Minister of Justice

13:55-14:35 **Climate Change and Religious Narratives**

Lina Yassin, Climate Tracker

14:35-15:15 **Can Science be Saved?**

Naomi Oreskes, Harvard University

15:15-15:25 *Break*

15:25-16:05 **Creative (Climate) Communications: Productive Pathways for Science, Policy and Society**

Maxwell Boykoff, University of Colorado Boulder

16:05-16:45 **TBA**

Jeffrey Sachs, Columbia University

16:45-17:25 **General Discussion**

Marta Cartabia, Italian Minister of Justice

17:25-18:00 Final Statement & Departure



Front cover:

The School of Athens, Raphael, fresco, 1509-1511, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City
 Photo of Pope Francis on page 2 and back cover image of the Ninfeum at the Casina Pio IV,
 Vatican Gardens by Gabriella Clare Marino / PASS

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