

## INTRODUCTION

The first philosophers, the investigators of the world, wanted to find out how things were, and so, in the words of Pythagoras, quoted by Cicero, they “earnestly inquired into the essence of things, (...) nobly beholding the world and gaining nothing for themselves.”<sup>1</sup> They wanted to know the truth. First about the external world and then about God, man, values, social relations, etc. The pursuit of truth characterized the first philosophers and one of them, Aristotle, even claimed that truth is more important than friendship (*amicus Plato sed magis amica est veritas*).

The classic definition of truth is found in Aristotle, who says in the *Metaphysics*: “To assert of Being that it does not exist, or of Non-Being that it exists, is false; but to assert that Being exists and Non-Being does not exist is true.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Middle Ages, thanks to Albert the Great and St. Thomas, truth was understood as the correspondence or compatibility of thoughts and things (*veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*). This definition, called the correspondence definition of truth, said that thought A is true if there is a corresponding fact in reality that corresponds to that thought. The thought “it is snowing” is true if it is actually snowing.

These definitions presupposed a kind of correlation between language and the world and were dominant in philosophy and, in the modern science that emerged from it. Both Aristotle and St. Thomas as well as Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton believed that they were discovering truth, whether that truth was metaphysical or physical. This belief was based on

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle. 1988. *Zachęta do filozofii* (trans. Leśniak K.), Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, pp. XIV–XV. All English translations by Monika Banaś and Dariusz Juruś.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle. 1983. *Metafizyka* (trans. Leśniak K.), Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, p. 1011b.

the conviction that the world was written in some language that humans could read (this fact may cause surprise, which was expressed by Albert Einstein when he said: “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible”<sup>3</sup>). Medieval philosophers and modern scientists implicitly assumed that since there exists a language that adequately describes something objective, (i.e. something that is not a product of our mind), there must exist something or Someone who recorded this knowledge. Such a statement led to realism, which is the conviction that the world exists in reality and is not a product of human consciousness.

With the emergence of the so-called coherent and pragmatic conception of truth at the end of the 19th century, the previous vision of the world was questioned. The coherentist definition of truth, associated with Francis H. Bradley, lacked Hegelian metaphysical aura, proclaims that:

“a) no judgment is independent and cannot be evaluated in terms of truth and falsity if considered outside the system,

b) every judgment belonging to the system follows logically from the conjunction of the other judgments of that system.”<sup>4</sup>

Truth here ceases to consist in correspondence but becomes a certain formal feature; what matters is the coherence of beliefs, not their content. The real existence of the world in this case is redundant.

William James, the founder of pragmatism, defined truth in terms of utility. According to him, a judgment is true if and only if practical consequences follow from it. Truth, then, is not again a correspondence between thought and objective reality, but becomes a utility function. Truth is the correlate of action and not of thought. This view of truth consequently leads to the relativisation and subjectivisation of knowledge.

At the end of the twentieth century, a deflationary theory emerged, whose proponents maintained that the predicate of truthfulness does not express any general feature that all true propositions possess. There is no “nature” or “essence” of truth, that can be investigated. Therefore, the concept of truth cannot be the object of any analysis.

The neo-pragmatists, on the other hand, led by Richard Rorty, have stated that truth is a useless tool that should for the good of society be

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<sup>3</sup> Quote after: J. C. Lennox. 2018. *Czy nauka pogrzebała Boga?* (trans. Gomola G. & A.), Poznań: Wydawnictwo Polskiej Prowincji Dominikanów „W drodze”, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Hempoliński M. 1989. *Filozofia współczesna. Wprowadzenie do zagadnień i kierunków*, Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, p. 547.

disposed of as soon as possible. They also questioned the idea of the correspondence between language and the world. As Rorty stated the world does not speak to us in any particular language, it is we who speak. "To say that truth is not outside is simply as much as to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and languages are creations of man."<sup>5</sup>

For the postmodernists who, according to Ernest Gellner, are, in the matter of truth, the heirs of the Marxists, truth as a claim to objectivity and thus to universality is an element of enslavement and as such a threat to freedom.<sup>6</sup>

In such a situation, the emergence of post-truth was natural. For since truth is founded neither in God, for as Nietzsche declared: "God is dead," nor in objective reality ("truth is a mobile army of metaphors," also Nietzsche) there is nothing left to do but to assume that truth no longer exists, and that all disputes are merely emotive in nature. After all, appealing to emotion is more pragmatic than appealing to reason.

The rejection of the notion of objective truth is particularly evident in the humanities (Einstein and Gödel had no doubts about its existence), especially where cultural relativism is the yardstick of truth.

It seems that in such a situation every reflection on, and in defence of, the objective truth, especially on the ground of the humanities, is valuable.

For this reason we offer our readers a collection of articles focused on the tension growing between truth and post-truth for at least several decades. This troubled relationship has been presented from several perspectives of humanities, social- and natural sciences. This allows us to emphasize the multitude of areas in which man, in his individual and collective existence, tries to name and recognize the objects and phenomena that shape him. The examples analysed in the particular papers of this journal show how difficult it is.

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<sup>5</sup> Rorty R. 2009. *Przygodność, ironia i solidarność* (trans. Popowski W.J.), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Gellner E. 1997. *Postmodernizm, rozum i religia*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, pp. 45–51.