

Post-Truth: *I lie, therefore I exist*

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Abstract:

Mythos and Logos always come into contact sharing a common opinion, which tends to be stronger than that which is supposed and admitted. Indeed, everything indicates that the perennial battle of antagonism, that is Mythos ↔ Logos, is to establish and to impose the *truth*, and he who in the end is *invincible* is the *common sense* that remains immune to faith and *reason*; he who only shows himself to be *vulnerable*, thus *succumbs* to *passion*. In the same way, Mythos and Logos also begin to *wilt* and to *give in*, just as is proven by the *unrestrained subjectivism* of *postmodernity* and its hegemonic *post-truth*, in which one's *own opinion* has become *sacred* and the art of lying is based on *words* that '*feel*' like the *truth*, but *have no 'real' basis*.

Keywords: Post-truth, Mythos, Logos, information, reality, lies, pretence, veracity, digital, Homo Deus.

'Twas but my tongue, twas not my soul that swore'
Euripedes (480 – 406 BC)

Introduction: The ascent to digital waste

With each day that passes the exponential growth in the power possessed by computers and networks leaves human faculties behind. As the capacity for having access to information increases, we become closer to the point in which this access exceeds our ability to process it. The abundance and availability of digital information, on the whole free to all, both dazzles and illuminates. Technology does not make a distinction between *value* and *waste*. The internet, explains Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), says practically everything, except how to filter, choose, accept or reject irrelevant opinions and false information that dominate and clog up the network (Eco 2016, 41, 91, 492).

The history of culture and civilization, Eco continues, is made up of masses of *information* that has been buried. A culture, understood as a system of knowledge, opinions, beliefs, customs and historical inheritance shared by a defined human group, is not only an accumulation of data; it is also the result of its filtering. As a result, culture also means the capacity to part with that which is unnecessary or of no use (Eco 2016, 98).

Thus, before fretting over the distinction between fiction and reality, we need concern ourselves in differentiating the diverse forms of fiction that make up the galaxy of the imaginary of what it entails to be human. Furthermore, even before differentiating such fictions, we must distinguish between waste, data, information and digital knowledge.

1. The Homo Deus Prophecy: Mythos with a scientific mask

A prophecy is a supernatural gift that consists of knowing, via divine inspiration, distant or future things. In this way, the successful, best-selling book *Homo Deus*, written in intelligent and enjoyable prose by the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, and translated into more than thirty languages, cannot be strictly classified as prophecy. In fact, the author himself defines his work as a ‘historical prediction’.

Nevertheless, a careful reading of the book brings to light a Mythos with embellishments of Logos that cannot observe its prophetic imprint. Instead of giving basis to its myth in divine inspiration, Harari grounds his work on a wide scientific armory that comes from the most diverse of disciplines, such as history, statistics, economics and biology to name a few. They are disciplines that, as sciences, do not aim to give support to myths of the highest metaphysical profundity, such as those which man has risen to thus far (or, in the near future when he will be elevated to God). Harari, in no way, considers this proposition in metaphorical terms.

Harari, with a PhD from Oxford, maintains that when technology is allowed to ‘remodel’ the human mind, Homo Sapiens will disappear and human history will meet its end. He states his ‘*historical opinion*’ with the confusing explanation that, although it is ‘impossible’ to remodel the human mind, it is ‘probable’ that people ‘similar’ to ourselves will utilize biotechnology in order to remodel their ‘own’ minds. However, Harari is emphatic in his idea that the great project for ‘humanity’ in the 21st century will be to acquire ‘*divine*’ powers, and to promote Homo Sapiens to Homo Deus. Harari is convinced that, in the ‘not too distant’ future, we will be able to create ‘superhumans’ who will move ahead of the ancient gods in their physical and mental faculties, and when we arrive at this point, ‘divinity’ will be something so ‘commonplace’ as *cyberspace* is to us today (Harari 2017, 59, 60, 61).

The Israeli historian also argues that man will not be satisfied with attaining any immortality, for which reason the second great project for humanity in the 21st century will be to find the key to eternal happiness and to guarantee it globally; who would want to live eternally in *misfortune*? Many scientists believe that people are happy owing to one, and only one, cause: the pleasant sensations that are intrinsically ephemeral and rapidly disappear due to the ‘*sin*’ of *evolution*. Our biochemical system has not been adapted to increase happiness but rather as a recompense with pleasant sensations that stem from actions that ultimately lead to *survival* and reproduction. Yet these sensations are merely an *ephemeral ‘trick’ to ‘sell’* us an ultimate end (Harari 2017, 42, 48, 49, 55).

If science is in the right, the only way to assure a lasting contentment is to ‘rig’ the biochemical system of man. Let us forget, says Harari, economic growth, social reforms and political revolutions.

In order to globally increase levels of happiness, that is necessary to ‘manipulate’ human biochemistry, and this is precisely what 21st century man has begun to do. The use of psychiatric medicine to deal with attention disorders, mild depression and occasional episodes of despondency is now more commonplace in schools. Pills to aid sleeping and to get through the depression, fear, anguish and trauma of war make soldiers happier and *armies* more efficient. Such medicine is just the beginning, as research laboratories work on more refined ways to manipulate human biochemistry, exemplified by genetic modifications and direct electrical stimulus aimed at specific points of the brain (Harari 2017, 51,52, 53, 54).

Evolution did not adapt for Homo Sapiens Sapiens in order to experience constant pleasure, and besides, if that is what humanity wants, there will never be enough new flavours of ice cream or more addictive games for smart phones that will go beyond tedium. Our biochemistry will need to be changed and our mind remodelled. While there is debate on the good or bad in this, we are already working on it. The exact method is of no importance: to obtain happiness via biological manipulation will not be easy because it requires the altering of the fundamental patterns of life. Yet, concludes the Israeli historian, neither was it *easy* to overcome hunger, plagues and war (Harari 2017, 54, 55).

Whilst sustaining ourselves with the help of biotechnology and information algorithms, the 21st century will also see us create virtual worlds, in which differentiating between fiction and reality will be more difficult, yet more necessary than ever. Harari predicts that science will eliminate the concept of the ‘*soul*’ and the majority of factual affirmations in religion, while museums and digital libraries will take the place of churches and temples. It will be a world in which the subjectivity and superstitious spirit will be eradicated, in which the emerging Homo Deus will be a web of biochemical and electrical algorithms, without obstacles, borders or dogmatic atavisms. Humanism will die in order to give way to the ‘dataism’ in which the barrier between animals and machines will collapse, the difference between fiction and reality will disappear and social networks will become insatiable monsters whose supreme databases will even store the alcove of individual conscience (Harari 2017, 201, 203, 400).

Finally, the Israeli historian warns that there is no need to get frightened; at least not immediately, as the ‘bettering’ of sapiens will be a gradual historical process. It is likely that Homo Sapiens Sapiens will improve themselves, and align themselves with robots and computers step by step, and then when our descendants look back, they will realise that they are no longer the class of ‘*animal*’ that wrote the bible, built the Great Wall of China and laughed at the wit of Charlie Chaplin; they will then notice that they are no longer ‘humans’ (Harari 2017, 62).

2. Homo ↔ Deus: conclusive antilogy

Man took eight centuries to make divine quality *descend* from the virtuality of the enigmatic metaphysical universe, where Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) had placed it, to arrive at the intelligible and simple human technological world in which *part* of this virtuality is rapidly becoming an intuitive *game*, even for the babies of Sapiens Sapiens.

With the ‘*descent*’ from the virtuality of the divine and human metaphysical world, *Homo Virtualis* of the 21st century longs for and aims to reconstruct the stairway that allows him to ascend again to heaven in order to establish himself as *Homo Deus*. Faced with his inherent precariousness apparent in his inferiority, weakness, dependency, fallibility and finite nature, in his reconstruction of this stairway, man has not stopped for even one instant in his never-ending objective to acquire for himself divine attributes, that he himself attributes to the gods: immortality, superiority, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, infallibility and infinite nature, all divine powers that merge into one: virtuality.

Yuval Noah Harari distinctly qualifies his meaning of ‘divinity’. He states that it is related to neither omnipotence nor any other ‘vague metaphysical’ quality, and that when he refers to ‘transforming’ humans into gods, he thinks primarily of Greek gods or in Hindu divas before the omnipotent biblical father who is in ‘heaven’. He specifies that, as Zeus and Indra had their descendants, our divine descendants will conserve their obsessions, weaknesses and limitations, but they will be able to love, hate, create and destroy at a scale vastly superior to ourselves (Harari 2017, 60).

The Israeli historian explains that throughout history it has been the belief that the majority of gods did not delight in their omnipotence but rather in their ‘super capacities’, such as to design and to create living beings, to transform their own bodies, to control the environment and the weather, to read minds, to communicate from afar, to travel at elevated velocities, and of course, to free themselves from death. Humans, Harari affirms, are decided in obtaining all such capabilities, and even more (Harari 2017, 60).

In this regard, it is pertinent to point out that in man’s battle against old age and death, the 20th century saw him practically double his life expectancy, from forty to seventy years of age. Furthermore, it is projected that this will double again in the 21st century to one hundred and fifty years of age, and it is foreseen that new and successful treatments for ‘renovation’ as we approach the years 2050, 2100 or 2200 will make it possible to live for five hundred years, and even ‘better’, ‘beating’ or ‘cheating’ death, decade by decade, via the use of genetic cloning and regenerative nanotechnology. In no way does this verify that man will certainly reach immortality, and even less that he has obtained or will obtain the status of God.

It is also convenient to highlight the fact that human beings have finally realized that hunger, and the epidemics and the violence that starvation provokes, the plague and war are their exclusive responsibility and they are not inevitable demonic forces that are out of control, and neither are they an integral part of their gods’ cosmic plan. Instead of praying, man has invented innumerable tools, institutions and social systems to control the aforementioned problems that have beset him over the ages, to the point where they become manageable challenges. In no way does this verify that *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* has certainly ascended to, or is going to be elevated to *Homo Deus*, as is argued by Harari.

These achievements of man, so fought over and important, do not constitute any of the two classic and today debilitated modes through which medieval man managed to participate in the

divine attributes. Clearly, these successes do not make up man's ascension or ascendancy to the heavenly spheres, and they do not even manage to be catalogued as anointment, or rather as the descent from divine attributes to the worldly human universe.

Such achievements are repeatedly the unveiling of Mythos by Logos, an unveiling which to man, at first, seems to always be surprising, astonishing, supernatural, magical, miraculous and even divine or demonical, but with the passing of time then become plain and expiring scientific axioms. This is exemplified in the great law of universal gravitation 'discovered' by Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727), that in the cosmic scale of history was immediately disproven by Einstein's theory of special relativity (1879 – 1955).

Einstein's contributions, with those of other great thinkers, have permitted man to 'fly' at unimaginable speeds, and to far-off universes of which not even Zeus, Newton or Einstein himself were aware of. His popular and passive contemporaries did not 'turn' from men into gods, a mutation that did not even take place in the field of medicine, when Hippocrates (460 – 370 BC) 'discovered' that the cause of sickness is material and resides in the *imbalance* of humours and fluids that make up the organism, an imbalance that has nothing to do with the *irritation* of the gods.

Thus, man's attributes may be considered as wonderful. His powers or 'super capacities' have allowed him to create, destroy and re-programme nature, life and human beings in body, mind and feelings, shaping himself as a virtual being. Yet, ancient, contemporary and modern man has not been able to, nor will he be able to, become the virtual being. His metaphysics, philosophy, science, history, semiotics, logic and, above all, his antilogy, all prove it.

The term virtual expresses the distinctive quality that defines positivity, and it expresses something more than mere possibility and simple potentiality; it is something that lacks nothing in order to be, to possess plain reality. That which is virtual is real with being veritable, and is complete without being definitive. Virtual is a relational concept in which the movement to 'otherness', from the possible to the real, from the potential to the veritable, was already carried out. Virtual is a concept that belongs to the dimension of the infinite, in which exist the capacity to project oneself in a non-place and of being another. That which is virtual is that which lies apart, the indeterminable, yet which can function as determination (Parra 2016, 6, 7).

In Thomas Aquinas' (1225 – 1274) metaphysical designation, the quantity that is virtual or of virtue, belongs to the genus of quality, or more precisely to the order of forms, in such that not only does it apply in the accidental sphere, but it also operates in the transcendental sphere in reference to a magnitude of perfection. It does not allude to extension but rather to that which is *intensive*. Thus, virtual quantity is a spiritual magnitude that measures the *intensity of perfection* (Echavarría 2013, 236, 237, 238).

God is the being, according to all the virtue of being, and as such can be the cause of being for all things. He does not exist in a certain form, or rather, according to some finite or limited form. In God, affirms Thomas Aquinas, his essence is identified with being and therefore it is being of unlimited form, and infinite by essence. The total of all entities created themselves form a *community*

and an *order* that, with respect to common *entities* and *beings*, *imitate* in their wealth the infinite plenitude of God's being (Echavarría 2013, 239, 243, 244, 245).

Hence, despite his magnificent achievements, Homo Virtualis is not Homo Deus, and neither is he close to being so, and even further does he find himself from being Zeus, Nut, Ra, Odin, Shangdi, Indra, Allah, Yahweh, Jesus or any other god, for biology, history and philosophy all declare that man is only an animal who imagined and dared to be man. Man imagined himself as God, an illusion after which at the beginning of the 21st century, he has not managed to construct himself into the Virtual Being, but rather into just one, among the many, virtual beings that have existed, exist and will continue to exist, a condition from which he keeps playing at imitating the plenitude of perfection that is attributed to his gods. Fundamentally, according to the categorical maxims of Epicurus (341 – 270 BC) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 – 1872), it is we humans who create gods in our own image and likeness, and as such, the secret of theology is anthropology.

Effectively, just as that which happened with their polar-opposite sisters Reality ↔ Appearance and Mythos ↔ Logos, and for behaving in a similar fashion to the two faces of the god Janus, despite being so *intimate*, the extreme opposites of the antagony Homo ↔ Deus never meet face to face, and much less do they touch. They remain at such a distance, as they have been and will be, just as Aquilles and the tortoise on the transcendent plane in Zeno of Elea's paradox. In fact, if we permit this metaphor, given that they march in opposite directions, Homo and Deus gradually double their distance apart, as man runs in his attempt to catch up with his gods. This further confirms the old adage *extrema non se tangent*, two extremes do not touch each other, but also the unfinished, calming essence of human beings, given that because of fortune, perfection continues to be one of the boring privileges of the gods.

3. 'Homo Deus', confused

We previously explained how a close reading of the successful book *Homo Deus*, written in 2015 by the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, brings to light a Mythos with embellishments of Logos that cannot observe a prophetic imprint that states that very soon man will be elevated towards God, as Homo Deus who will move ahead of ancient gods in his corporal and mental faculties.

In his 'historical prediction', Harari predicted that digital museums and libraries will take the place of churches and temples, and that a world will surge up, eradicating subjectivity and the *superstitious* spirit. It will be a new world in which the emerging Homo Deus will be a mesh of biochemical and electronic algorithms, without obstacles, borders or dogmatic atavisms, a new world in which the barrier between animals and machines will collapse and the difference between fiction and reality will disperse (Harari 2017, 201, 203, 400).

Although he explicitly claimed that he is convinced that in a 'not too distant' future we will be able to create such 'superhumans', three years after bringing to light the great achievements and magnificent potentialities of Homo Sapiens Sapiens that drive him in his ascent to Homo Deus,

Harrari's most recent book titled *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, shows him to have become quickly disillusioned with 21st century man's abilities to differentiate between *fiction* and *reality*. For the man of future years, despite his quantum-computerized powers, the world will 'become' even more 'complex' than it is today.

In his third text, the Israeli historian seems to have realized that his prospects for Homo Deus now turn out to be ignorant, that he *knows less than that which he believes he does*. Although he recognizes that trusting in the knowledge of others has worked out well, he denounces the 'immense' confidence that free thought has developed in the rational individual. He affirms that rationality is a myth and that knowledge is an illusion. He declares that causal relationships are more ramified and more complex, and that our sense of justice could be *antiquated*, and that, although we do indeed desire the truth, the majority of us are not capable of understanding the principle moral problems of the world (Harari 2018, 241, 242, 243, 248, 249, 253).

The Israeli historian's thus announced and promoted Homo Deus now turns out to be less than a perplexed chimpanzee, confused and disorientated, who for having lived 'always' in the *era of post-truth*, lacks the capacity to realize that some false news lasts 'forever'. Homo Sapiens Sapiens, suggests Harari, are the species of post-truth whose power depends on creating fictions and believing in them. Man literally conquered planet Earth thanks to his definitive human capacity to create and spread fictions (Harari 2018, 256, 258, 259, 267).

As a consequence, affirms the Israeli historian, we cannot 'blame' Facebook, Trump or Putin for inaugurating a 'new' and frightening era of post-truth. Truth and power can travel together only for a stretch. Sooner or later, they will divert for different paths. Human cooperation depends on a delicate equilibrium between truth and fiction. As a species, humans prefer power over truth, as we invest more time in controlling the world than understanding it. If we want power, at some point we will have to spread fictions. If we encircle ourselves by sincere reality, few people will follow us. As such, states Harari, if the reader dreams of a society in which the truth reigns supreme, and myths are ignored, he or she will have 'little' to hope for from Homo Sapiens Sapiens. It will be '*better*' that he or she try their luck with the chimpanzees (Harari 2018, 258, 264, 267).

With this diminished diagnosis, Harari moves quickly on to provide a grain of hope, and he announces a formula in order to distinguish reality from fiction. He specifies that, in no way, does this regrettable situation mean that there exists license to lie with malice, and that it would be a mistake to arrive at the conclusion that everything is false news, that any intent to discover the truth is doomed to failure, and that there is no difference between propaganda and serious journalism. Following that, after recognizing that some newspapers make the honest effort to find the truth, he recommends that, instead of accepting false news as the norm, we must recognize it as a problem, and further make the effort to distinguish between reality and fiction (Harari 2018, 268).

The Israeli historian transmits this hoped for and encouraging formula so that the publicized, but now denigrated, Homo Deus avoids being brain washed and distinguishes between reality and fiction. Such a recipe is integrated by two simple general rules: 1) to pay, that is, to pay with 'good

money' for reliable information; 2) to read relevant scientific literature when a question appears to be of exceptional importance; literature formed of peer reviewed articles, books published by well-respected academic publishers and by professors from respectable institutions. As a 'plus' in the 21st century, given that science fiction can be seen as the most important literary genre for all, in reality it is not a 'bad idea' that scientists begin to write *science fiction* (Harari 2018, 269, 270)¹.

4. Boundaries between lies and pretence

In order to effectively combat the denounced problem of post-truth's contemporary hegemony, Harari should also make an 'honest effort' and decidedly recognize that his writing is in no way 'historical prediction' but rather science fiction. It is an abiding recommendation to go over certain formal protocols such as classic signs of fiction that are characteristic to the fictional narrative that, as stated by Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), always help to establish the boundaries between *lies* and *pretence*.

Continuing with the idea of establishing whether a novel is a lie, Umberto Eco responded that, at first sight the 'facts' related in a fictional narrative would be a lie, for the author knows perfectly well that he has invented them. Naturally, the author does not wish to lie, only to pretend, and so relates the story as though it were truth, and asks the reader to suspend his disbelief, and to participate in the fiction, just as we accept it when a child brandishes a stick as if it were a sword. Of course, although at times narrative fiction begins with a sign of *false veracity*, it necessitates the emittance of the signs of fiction that range from the word '*novel*' on the front cover to the incipits such as '*once upon a time...*'. A prime example is the frontispiece of the first edition of the satire *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where the name of the author, Jonathan Swift, does not appear as the author of the fiction, but as Gulliver giving his *true autobiographical* account (Eco 2016, 382, 383).

Readers tend to not allow themselves to be thus *deceived* because since the true story of Luciano de Samosata (120 – 192), considered the first work of science fiction, the exaggerated affirmations of veracity come across as signs of fiction. However, as fantasies and references to the real world become intertwined in a novel, there is no lack of readers who become disorientated, take novels seriously as though they spoke of facts that really have happened, and they read novels like a sequence of true affirmations. The situation for such readers has no *esthetic valence*, for instead of searching for reading material about life in general and about themselves, they are so concerned with taking a story seriously that they do not ask themselves if the story is told well, or not. This incurs and manifests that which Eco defined as fictional deficit due to the incapacity to *suspend belief* (Eco 2016, 383, 386).

Yet even before losing sight of the classic *signs of fiction*, it would be recommendable for the Israeli historian to distinguish between myth, religion, science, human conventions (economics, legalities and the regulation of movement, seen in money, companies and even traffic lights), ideology, narrative fiction, political and commercial propaganda, and *post-truth*.

As a historian, or a novelist, Harari would also be well reminded to be conscious of the risk and danger inherent in stating that all is fiction, for history and literature demonstrate that when tyrannical figures and their willing assistants take this maxim seriously, just as was denounced by

Arthur Koestler (1905 – 1983), and the I in human being becomes at the same time so unreal and indecent that it mockingly takes on the name of ‘grammatical fiction’, the body of *I* is quickly subjected to the rule of the dictator in charge and then darkness falls over the light of the day.

In affirming that everything is fiction, really it is saying that little or practically nothing is. Before indicting that all such examples are fiction, aside from establishing their specific differences, Harari should realize that fictions are ‘real’ and not mere ‘weak duplicates’, ‘replicas’ or ‘imitations’ of reality; that depth, color, shape, line, movement, outline and physiognomy are just some of the many ramifications of the being; that the illusion of accessing the universal and all-embracing ‘*reality*’ is lacking in sense; and that the vacuum and weight that the being generates (which is never complete for man) is the deception of false imagining, that claims a positivity that precisely fulfills its vacuum (Merleau Ponty 1986, 67, 70).

Perhaps then, Harari might rethink his explicit objective in likening, for example, religion to false news, a comparison that the Israeli historian stops himself from extending to ‘civil religion’. Possibly deep down he shares the conception ‘*virtus dormitiva*’ from the Romans, a conception from which, as put by Umberto Eco, it is simple to arrive at the idea of religion as an *instrumentum regni*, a resource that a political power uses, inclusively represented by both sceptics and non-believers, in order to *control* its subjects or the people (Eco 2016, 283, 284)².

Were Harari to consider the specific differences that exist among myth, civil religion, science, human conventions, ideology, novels and propaganda, to name a few, it might aid him in noticing that false news born of bad intention is significantly distant from a reprehensible religious dogma, from an enigmatic indigenous myth, from a perishable scientific axiom, or from a *utopia* or an *explicit lie* born of *good intention*.

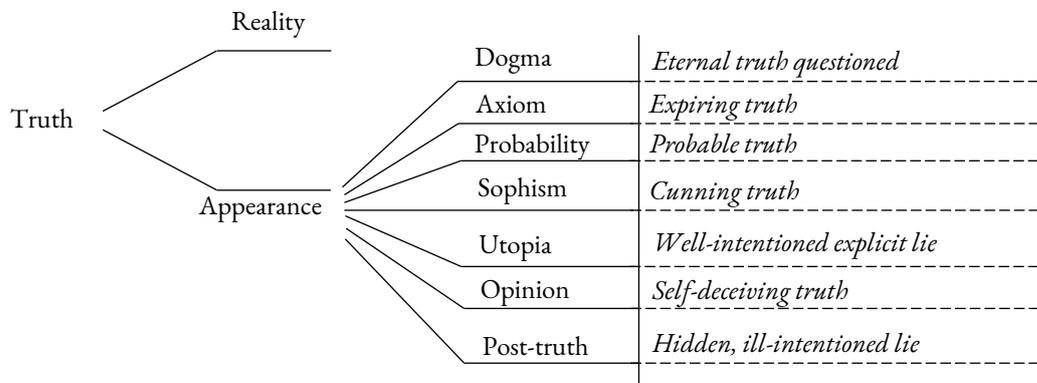
5. Gnosiological value of appearance: the difference between appearance and things in themselves

For this purpose, the Israeli historian might wish to take into account that concepts of appearance and reality run throughout the history of western thought, and vary according to the different conceptions that diverse thinkers have, and how they take on the challenge of understanding man and the world. This process shows a demand of the senses and a reevaluation of the gnosiological weight of appearance, which after being conceived in a deprecatory manner as a devalued expression of truth and reality, is then considered as the only way which man has to know the world and to access his being and that which is true.

In effect, two distinctive and opposing meanings have been attributed to the notion of appearance. On the one side, it implies the contrary to the real, in such that it designates the fictitious, the false. On the other side, it implies the appearance of the truth, being present to everything, that which is the condition of the possibility of the truth and reality. In accordance with the first meaning, to know consists of ending that which is apparent in order to arrive at that which is real; regarding the second meaning, to know is to utilize appearance in order to see how the object under study is.

Each way of understanding the apparent corresponds to philosophical periods, of which we can extract the following scheme of epistemological fictions, perhaps offering us elements that contribute towards clarifying what post-truth is. With this objective in mind, Emanuel Kant's (1724 – 1804) distinction between appearance and things in themselves has particular pertinence. Kant called that which is apparent the appearance of being, the form of being from that which exists, distinguishing the sensed from real. That an object seems to be something other, is distinct from the appearance of this object. This is to say that that which lies within the subject's conscious is the only thing to which the subject, or the observer, is disposed, and to which the subject has access in order to know and construct reality.

Modalities of epistemological fiction



If Harari acknowledged the distinction existing between appearance and things in themselves, and did not underestimate the specific differences between appearance, representation and fiction (only one of which today is considered post-truth), he would understand that not everything is the same in the galaxy of the human imagination, and that in no way is Homo Sapiens Sapiens the species of post-truth. Perhaps then, the Israeli historian would endorse the well-known differentiation of the French anthropologist Gilbert Durand (1921 – 2012) who advised that the mythical frenzy that gives rise to a dictator cannot be learnt in the same way as that which would be the mythical enthusiasm that manifests itself around a saintly creator of order, and warned that this is not only a difference in degree, but also in nature (Durand 2003, 14).

With this essential and fundamental distinction in mind, it seems relevant to point out that, quite differently to the field of literature in which this distinction is a defect, the aforementioned fictional deficit due to the inability to suspend belief is a virtue in scientific and political spheres. In fact, given the growing populism in the media that through a negative semantic faith sells false hopes, fictional deficit is a virtue that is progressively scarcer, particularly regarding the urge to stimulate the capacity for maintaining continual disbelief that allows the distinguishing between fiction and lie that is constantly radiated across social networks and impulsively replicated by the mass media.

6. Post-truth: a hidden and ill-intentioned lie

In light of the increase in its use, up by 2000% in relation to the previous year, 2016 saw the Oxford Dictionary declare the term post-truth as the word of the year. The dictionary's definition states that post-truth denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in forming the public opinion than appealing to emotions and personal beliefs (Rubio 2016, 1).

The term was first used in an article titled 'A Government of Lies', written by Steve Teisch and published in 1992 in the magazine, *The Nation*. In his article, Teisch makes reference to the first Gulf War. He regrettably states that, despite the categorical warnings of Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677), when a falsehood is permitted, and then infinitely more follow, we have freely decided that we want to live in a world of post-truth, and therefore in a world in which dictators no longer have to work hard in order to suppress the truth because it no longer has importance or relevance (Rubio 2016, 1; García 2017, 1, 2).

After Teisch, the US sociologist Ralph Keyes published his book *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty, and Deception in Contemporary Life* in 2004. The book puts forward the idea that, in addition to truths and lies, we now have statements that are possibly untrue, yet are considered too 'benign' as to be called false. Subjects stop being referred to by their names, euphemisms abound and, under the shelter of a slogan, all ideas and positions are equally valid, while the harmful effects of the false tolerance and diplomacy of the politically 'correct' widen (García 2017, 2, 3).

In the era of post-truth, the line between truth and lies, between honesty and immorality, becomes blurred to the point that deceiving others becomes a challenge, a game, and in the ultimate instance, a habit that feeds itself from the viral propagation offered up by social networks and practiced by, in particular, new aspirants of persuasive 'principles' of the politics that determine who has power, not who possesses the truth (García 2017, 2).

Following Keyes' book, many more articles have been published. In particular those in the *Independent*, which, after the US elections in 2016, indicated that we have now begun to live in the society of post-truth, where the truth has been devalued to such an extent that, from being an ideal in political debate, it has now become a monetary unit without value. *The Economist*, under the title of 'The Art of Lying', highlights that the politics of post-truth are based on phrases that feel true, but do not have any 'real' basis (Rubio 2016, 1).

Post-truth, affirms Ruben Amon, can be a lie taken as the truth, or, even a lie assumed as a lie but reinforced as belief or 'alternative fact' shared amongst society. Words and images, says Alexi Ortega, create a reality and appearance of truth. The predisposition of the human mind to repeat an idea, even when the idea is erroneous or simply false is quite brilliant. It only needs a recognizable image, a phrase with 'spirit', to cut reality up and turn it into convenience, and into a convoluted simple idea that will generate a viral phenomenon (García 2017, 2; Ortega 2015, 1).

The appearance of the truth as a lie produces errors in the vision of reality. However, the appearance of truth can become more harmful than a plain lie that, per se, is relatively 'discoverable'. Lies need the truth in order to survive and the appearance of the truth provides a semblance of

verisimilitude that makes the lie more difficult to detect. In order to subsist, a lie needs the support of its creator and the accomplices in the deception. It is here that the real victims stand out, who, with their mental lethargy and intentional blindness, set themselves up as the chief accessory that feed the cunning argument, under the conviction that fiction saves, reality kills (Ortega 2015, 2).

Under the title of Post-truth, or the decorated lie, and having asserted that we should be ashamed for using this deformed word, or '*palobro*', Alfonso Bolado indicates that post-truth is that sociopolitical situation that, above all, is the fruit of emotional incitement and not of a sensible pondering of information in reality. It is what has always been known as manipulation. It is about the aforementioned '*palobro*', a word that is poorly constructed, at least it is in Spanish, for none of the connotations inherent in the prefix 'post', connect to the noun, 'truth'. A lie, with its distinct meanings (fallacy, fraud, story...) do not come after the truth; perhaps at the side or in opposition, but they never make up part of it (Bolado 2017, 1).

Hence, the success and popularity of the 'word' post-truth does not owe itself to how well it is constructed. Does it respond to an urgency in defining something new? According to Bolado, no. Does it respond to any necessity? Bolado claims that it does: it responds to the necessity to hide, under the prestigious layer of the word truth, and behind the old, obscene and forever present demagogic manipulation that today favorably counts on the complicity or the negligence of the proprietors, administrators and operators of the sounding board that are the mass media and social networks. In constructing this hegemony, post-truth appears to have just one obstacle: the presence and long history in the political culture of populism that so efficiently serves the unruliest of both the right and the left (Bolado 2017, 1).

Conclusion: A pact of threatened veracity

The observance of the pact of veracity that underlies human communication is today threatened by the exalted maxim of the Nazi propaganda machine's mentor, Joseph Goebbles, and it even appears to be arriving at its climax: a lie told once continues to be a lie, but told a thousand times becomes a truth. Faced with this hegemony of semblance, everything indicates that Peter Sloterdijk is right when he affirms that it seems that now not only the gods, but also the wise have *retired* (Sibilia 2010, 191).

Undoubtedly, the establishment of the postmodern *Mentior, ergo sum* (I lie, therefore I exist), upon which the hegemony of the contemporary post-truth positions itself, and that fluctuates between the two extremes of the dominant antilogy Pain ↔ Pleasure, constitutes a severe simultaneous defeat of Mythos and Logos.

Nevertheless, this failure and capitulation will also be *transitory*, for history teaches that, from its divergent viewpoints, the antagonism of Mythos ↔ Logos has always fought not only for freeing itself from the rustic doxa and the precarious appearance, but also for defining and establishing that which is real, true, good, just and correct, all of which are fundamental questions that do not diminish. They continue to be relevant though remain unresolved, and augur a continuous and great

epistemic, axiological and political war developed by man, the virtual being of the 21st century, who although is imbued in his digital culture, virtual reality, space of telematics, real time, artificial intelligence, binary language, algorithms of informatics, big data, predictive method, and probable truth, will continue, as human beings do, to dream and love, for as Auguste Comte aptly put it (1798 – 1857), we become tired of thinking and even of acting, but never of loving.

In the meantime, perhaps it is worth remembering that which Pythagoras of Samos (569 – 475 BC) taught, that if error prevails over the truth, the wise distance themselves and wait until the truth reigns again. But, let's consider that it might be better to welcome the advice of Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995): that it is not about fearing or hoping, but rather searching for new arms, and thus we come to that which we learnt from Zarathustra, who, despite being tired of man, wanted to become man again, believing that the love of man will kill us.

Endnotes:

1. Regarding these two '*lessons*' and Harari's *plus*, it is worth keeping in mind Umberto Eco's *advice* in confronting post-truth in the 21st century. In spite of ending up like Jorge Luis Borges' *Funes el memorioso* (1899 – 1986), who despite *remembering everything*, is a complete idiot *blinded* by his *inability* to *choose* and to *reject*, it is important to *distinguish* between disconnected and well-articulated ideas, and between a false and reliable position. It is to define and to establish criteria and techniques to *choose* information; to form a critical capacity and ability to *compare* different *sources*; to analyze and report on virtuous positions and positions that spread imprecision, necessary challenges principally for schools, teachers, newspapers and journalists, those who report news that actually exists, but do not invent it (Eco 2016, 81, 84, 85, 98, 190, 492, 493). In the same vein, the recommendation is to promote policies in education and the self-regulation of platforms, as well as evaluating and adjusting diverse legislative initiatives in order to regulate and to sanction the circulation of false news in social networks. As an example, despite a fine of fifty million euros, the German law NetzDG insists that xenophobic content, or content against democracy, must be removed within twenty-four hours after the denunciation. This initiative has enabled the possibility of creating a mechanism for censorship in the hands of new, private '*ministeries of truth*', who are delegated with the power of *deciding* what *false news* is.
2. Although in his *Theological – Political Treatise*, Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) denounced that the great secret of the monarchical regimen and its maximum interest consist in keeping men deceived and disguising, under the specious name of religion, the fear of being controlled. He did not reach the extremity of likening religion, and much less '*civil religion*', to *false news* (Eco 2016, 283, 284).

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