

Maurizio Ferraris, *Postverità e altri enigma* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2017).

Although there is a strong temptation to say that hoaxes have always existed, that lies are an inescapable ingredient of politics and life, and that there is therefore nothing new under the sun about what is called 'post-truth'; although one might want to cut a long story short by saying that - at most - it is a matter of paying attention to what one reads just as one pays attention to what one eats and drinks, I am convinced, on the other hand, that post-truth is a concept distinct from those of hoax or lie, and that its emergence (because no one has decided in some room "today we launch post-truth") highlights issues that concern us all, and that can teach us at least three things.

The first concerns the responsibility of intellectuals in relation to the world. We are used to thinking that they are an irrelevant and ornamental fringe, yet in some way, sometimes perversely, ideas can come to fruition in the world, often in unexpected and undesirable ways, but they do come to fruition, in other forms and contexts, and perhaps with catastrophic outcomes. Political post-truth as the fulfilment of philosophical postmodernism is a shining example of this principle.

The second illumination of post-truth concerns the importance of technique in the emergence of ideas and behavior. We are used to thinking of technique as the realisation of a project with a deliberate and circumscribed purpose (I need to open a cork, I invent the corkscrew) but this is not the case. Technique is not goal-oriented, like other human knowledge. On the contrary, it is autonomous and creative: whoever invented the steam engine did not think that it would give rise to an entire social order that has regulated the lives of human beings for almost three centuries: capitalism. And whoever invented the web did not imagine that it would give rise to an apparatus even more powerful than the one that preceded it, a complex apparatus that I propose to call "documediality," a compound term designating the fusion between the binding and constitutive form of documents in the social world, and the mobilizing force of the media. Documediality has laid (along with many other things, good and bad) the material premises of post-truth just as postmodernism had elaborated its ideal premises.

The third revelation of post-truth, which is the result of the first two, concerns the idea of democracy that emerges from the encounter between post-truth and documediality. It can be summarized in a very simple consideration: post-truth constitutes a moment of mass mobilization with few precedents. Every web user expresses his or her own truth, with a freedom that is technically sovereign compared to any other instance - one is worth one, in politics as in knowledge, and if I claim that the moon is made of cheese, it is undemocratic to object that perhaps it is not so. But the question, at this point, is very simple: can there be a democracy without shared truth? And, conversely, what can be the characteristics of democracy in the age of post-truth.

What to do? The best corrective to post-truth is truth, i.e. culture. Awareness of the fact that truth does not lie at the beginning, but at the end, when it exists, and when it arrives, perhaps out of spite

towards post-truth: suffice it to say that it was the unmasking of a fashionable nonsense like the Donation of Constantine - the forgery that sanctioned the temporal power of the Popes - that led to the birth of humanistic philology. In short, although the truth sooner or later surfaces, the search for truth can hardly be carried out with bare hands and without cultural training. Augustine says this in the Confessions: I want to do the truth, not only in my heart, but also in writing and before many witnesses. What does he mean by this? That one makes the truth as one makes coffee? No. I would propose to interpret this sentence as follows: truth is nothing self-evident, and requires technical training, as well as a good dose of good will and sometimes even personal courage. Ideas are as cheap as apples, said Hegel, and the documedial explosion of the web demonstrates this as best we can. How to distinguish good ideas? Not by subjecting them to asphyxiating fact-checking, but - with a philosophical and political eye - to the demanding test proposed by William James: "True are those ideas which we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. Ideas to which it is not possible to do all this are false."