



EDITORIAL

GOD RUMOR IN THE AGE OF POST-TRUTH

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In the Presentation of the last edition it was realized, through the exposition of some passages of Gadamer and Orwell, of a preoccupation by the great power that has the word in itself and of the relation between power and word in the field of research in social sciences. In the quoted text of Gadamer, the German philosopher inquires about the word “authentic”, whose being-telling is a constituent of truth, not as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, but as creator and founder of meaning. As Cadavid (2018) points out, the question of the authentic word “does not inquire about the problem of truth but about the possibility that the word has to be itself” (p. 7). Consecutively, the allusion to Orwell aimed to highlight the need to return to the facts, since words can be used to hide reality. This return to the facts is not a positivist call, but a means to highlight the phenomenon of post-truth through rigorous academic research.

Precisely, Detienne (1990) reminds us in a brief essay that the rumor (*pheme*) is present in those traditional oral societies subjugated by the prestige of mouth and ear; societies that have no control over information, its purposes and everything that can captivate by the ear. According to Detienne, this is a reason why the ethnologist historian should be attentive and suspicious of testimonies, confirm the facts, recover the real importance of the events of the past and imagine the reasons why the witnesses are prone to falsify their stories or testimonies. In other words, the historian must have a critical spirit and resort to methods similar to those used in police investigation such as those used by the Athenians in 413 B.C. At that time, tells Plutarch in his work *Moralia*, a barber of Piraeus finds out, thanks to a surviving slave, the disaster that resulted in the expedition to Sicily. No one else in Athens knew that the entire fleet was destroyed and that many generals and soldiers were killed, while others managed to survive, but they did not escape to chains and imprisonment.

Before such tragic news and with the intention of being the first to spread the news so he could be filled with glory, the barber goes out into the streets to shout at others what happened. This attitude of the barber generated confusion and panic, and later in an assembly, the citizens met to know the origin of that rumor. That barber could not give account to the assemblymen of the name or explain the origin of the author of the news, which generated the wrath and the rejection of the citizens who demanded torture for the charlatan, despicable depravity that is usually present, according to Plutarch, in the barbers:

The breed of barbers is sufficiently talkative because the most charlatans come and occupy their seats, in such a way that they are full of this practice. With a funny response, King Archelais, when a charlatan barber puts the towel around him and ask «How am I going to groom you?», He replied: «In silence» (Plut. *Moralia*, 509).

The charlatanism is a vice difficult to cure for philosophy since its remedy is listening, something that is precisely unable to do who has decided to lead a life of voluntary deafness to prefer the constant chatter.

By the way, in the *Characters*, Theophrastus described the bad habits of the Athenian men of the 4th century B.C., there was emphasized his disapproval for charlatans (*adolésjes*). He defined novelty as the tropes of the invention of false sayings and facts. The chatter or gossip (*logopoiós*) wants to be given credit of what he says without taking any advantage of it. He lies because he does and his excess has no limits, because he is capable of saying things like: “that the fact is a clamor in the city; that the rumor is spreading and that all of them coincide because they relate the same details about the battle and that a great carnage has taken place” (*Char.* VIII 6-7).

I would say that this personality is typical of Internet users who systematically replicate or share in their social networks memes, fake news or aspects about their private life, because like the chatter described by Theophrastus; he is constantly corrupting with his lies those who fall for it in his circle. The chatter seems to have been fostered thanks to the new information technologies that have created a powerful rumor society. In a recent study, the behavior on the Internet of 272 Americans was analyzed; basically their behavior was studied in social networks, online dating sites, chat rooms and pornography sites. The average age of the people analyzed was 32.22 years and only a few, 16%, confirmed that they have not lied nor will lie on these websites. In contrast to this data, most people, 90%, said that it is the others who would sometimes be deceitful about their physical appearance, activities or interests. The curious thing about the study is that it shows that people who lie, not only do it because they want to protect their privacy or seem more attractive, but assume that others also lie (Drouin, Miller, Wehle and Hernandez, 2016).

The digital *logopoius* would be constantly lying because he believes that others do it too, which is explained by the fact that reciprocity is the main motivator of human behavior (as cited in Drouin, Miller, Wehle and Hernandez, 2016, p. 136). In the same way as Plutarco said that barbers are talkative because other charlatans come to him. Given this, one might have to

question Aristotle's statement in which he pointed out that men tend by nature to the truth and most of the times reach it (Ret 1355-15). If honesty is not reciprocal and everyone is assumed to lie, other affirmations such as truth and justice are stronger than their opposites (Aristotle, Ret 1355-22) or that political oratory is less deceptive than judicial because it is more typical of the community, since the issues that are discussed in political discourses are not alien to the citizens who deliberate (Ret 1354 b 30) should be interpreted with some caution.

In September 2016, *The Economist* published an article in which it depicts the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, as the greatest exponent of post-truth politics. In addition, it points out that the practice of deliberately saying things without any support in reality is generalized and made without shame by many politicians from other countries such as Poland, Turkey and Great Britain (Post-truth politics, *Art of the lie*, 2016).

The triumph of Trump in the November's elections, the triumph of Brexit in October and even the triumph of "No" in the peace agreements in Colombia plebiscite on October 2nd, 2016, quickly made the word or the neologism "Post-truth" to be "viralized" to the point of being taken into account by journalists from all over the world. Even the Oxford Dictionary defines 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." (Oxford University Press, 2016). The term entered the Dictionary of the Spanish language at the end of 2017 defined as "deliberate distortion of a reality, which manipulates beliefs and emotions in order to influence public opinion and social attitudes" (RAE, 2018). The two definitions agree that they start from the fact that emotions influence opinions, something that Aristotle had already warned in the second book of *Rhetoric* (1378 to 20 and ss), and that became clear when Juan Carlos Vélez, Campaign manager for the "No" in Colombian plebiscite, focused its strategy on leaving aside the explanation of the agreements with FARC to give way to the exploitation of the indignation in the constituents (Ramírez Prado, 2016).

As it seems already evident, from post-truth you get to the discussion about Fake News (hereinafter, FN). Although the term is widely used in the media, I believe that Gelfert (2018) presents an interesting proposal of definition that can be analyzed and taken into account by social researchers. Gelfert defines fake news as "deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design" (2018, p. 108). This means that FN are intentionally designed by their creators to deceive or manipulate public opinion and to generate misinformation. The creators of FN intend to expose a deceptive or fallacious argument by virtue of a specific content disguised as news. However, he warns that the term Fake News is also used strategically for political purposes to question legitimate information. In this way, when a president like Donald Trump states in his Twitter account that a piece of news published in an opposition media such as CNN is FN, this label uses it -and in fact has been used it in capital letters about 73 times between December 10, 2016 and July 24, 2017-, as a rhetorical device

to crush opposition (Gelfert, 2018, p. 91). There is no doubt that FN have become a problem, especially at times when citizens are ready to make political decisions. Following Gelfert, FN are directed by their creators to specific audiences through social networks. Designers know the power that FN have to activate our cognitive biases, and thus manipulate our reason, inhibiting critical reasoning (2018, p. 111).

It could also be said that people, apparently, vote more in terms of their values and their identity than for their own economic interest and, therefore, there would be no rational argument capable of moving citizens effectively (Lakoff, 2017, p. 117). As Lakoff affirms, there are discursive strategies with which one tries to preserve, extend or impose a moral system (like the moral of the strict father) and govern others according to that system. Through what he calls “cultural civil war”, controversial discussions are fomented such as abortion, homosexual marriage, taxes, subsidies, environmental problems, among others. What characterizes this cultural civil war is the fact that argumentative strategies are involved (and the deliberate design of FN can be part of those strategies) that aim to evoke and activate cognitive frames and specific emotions such as fear (for example, the “War on terror”, after the attack of 9/11) or outrage (as in the case of Welfare Queen in the 1980s) (Lakoff, 2017, p. 104).

After this brief presentation, I think that in conclusion it is worth restating the call of the previous Presentation: we have in the social sciences and humanistic studies an opportunity to broaden our horizon of understanding on these issues. On the other hand, already in the plane of our role as citizens is not that we should torture the chatters to give them a lesson, as happened to the barber in the anecdote told by Plutarch, not to censure and appeal to muteness, but to understand that the lie, the strategic use of rumor or fake news are aimed at creating controversial debates with which individuals and political groups can differentiate and impose themselves. Before this, the rhetoric, the persuasive speech, are the means, not only more effective, but the most civilized to face it.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares the inexistence of a conflict of interest with an institution or commercial association of any kind.

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