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## ANTICIPATION OF THE «POST-TRUTH» ERA IN HANNAH ARENDT'S ESSAY «TRUTH AND POLITICS»

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The article deals with the well-known essay of the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt «Truth and Politics». An attempt was made to actualize the main themes of the essay and stressed that the authoress managed to predict the main threats to the truth in the context of the «post-truth» era and «fake news».

*Key words:* truth, lie, politics, post-truth, fake news, opinion, Hannah Arendt.

The problem of «post-truth» which is particularly actively discussed in recent times is not so much epistemology as politics. In general, the concepts of «post-truth» or «fake news» are unlikely to add any conceptual arguments to the theory of truth [4]. These words are rather symptoms of the ancient problem of spreading lies, which in the 20th and 21st centuries gained new incarnations through communication technologies.

Indeed, thanks to technologies, social networks, we can see the confirmation of the long-standing observation that the lie is spreading faster than the truth. Jonathan Swift once wrote that «falsehood flies, and the truth comes limping after it». In the novel by the famous fantasy writer Terry Pratchett «Truth» we can find the phrase «A lie can run around the world before the truth has got its boots on». (By the way, the story of this phrase and its attribution to Mark Twain can be a very illustrative example of the spread of unverified information [1].) In 2018, a group of scientists from MIT conducted a study of the differential diffusion of all of the verified true and false news stories distributed on Twitter from 2006 to 2017. The data comprise approximately 126,000 cascades of news stories spreading on Twitter, tweeted by about 3 million people over 4.5 million times. The findings are impressive, although they cannot be called unexpected: «False news reached more people than the truth; the top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1000 people. (...) Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information. Analysis found that it took the truth approximately six times as long as falsehood to reach 1,500 people and 20 times as long as falsehood to reach a cascade depth of ten. (...) Controlling for many factors, false

news 70% more likely to be retweeted than the truth» [10]. One of the key factors of this is novelty: «False news was perceived as more novel than true news, which suggests that people are more likely to share novel information» [10]. Of course, it should be remembered that this novelty, like the news itself, is completely fictional.

The consumption of news is not only a search for information, but also a social act. That's why it's not about truth or authenticity here. According to scientists Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, «when we try to understand why people are sharing misleading, manipulated and fabricated information, we need to appreciate that those shares and retweets are playing an incredibly important function, which is less about their veracity or truth. The act of sharing is often about signalling to others that we agree with the sentiment of the message, or that even if we don't agree, we recognize it as important and worth paying attention to. We want to feel connected to others, and these mini-performances allow us to do that» [11]. They quoted media scholar James Carey who said that «we should actually view communication through the lens of ritual if we want to understand why people seek out, consume and make sense of information. From this vantage point, Carey argued: «News is not information, it is drama». A ritual view of communication views «reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass», where «a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed» [11]. Did communication in social networks really trigger the emergence of «fake news», as the authors of the article claim? If so, then obviously only as a concept, but not as a phenomenon. According to the British historian Niall Ferguson, «social networks, then, are the structures that human beings naturally form, beginning with knowledge itself and the various forms of representation we use to communicate it, as well of course as the family trees to which we all necessarily belong, even if only some of us possess detailed genealogical knowledge» [5; 15]. That is why it is worth remembering that «new technologies have facilitated our natural, ancient urge to network» [5; 17]. So, the distribution of news took place in social networks before the invention of Facebook and Twitter. Although, of course, on a much smaller scale.

In discussions about «post-truth» and «fake news» and their genuine or intrinsic self-sufficiency and novelty, it's hard not to lose the truly important and complicated problem of the relationship between truth and politics. And do not limit this topic to the discussion of Orwell's famous novel. This problem is really old, but with the advent of the «post-truth» era, it has not disappeared anywhere. One of the best attempts at this subject is Hannah Arendt's essay «Truth and Politics», published for the first time in 1967 in the «New Yorker». The reason for writing the essay was the debate around the Arendt's resonance book «Eichmann in Jerusalem», which still doesn't quench [6]. Written for a specific occasion and at the height of the Cold War this text has a universal meaning, especially in the era of «post-truth» and «fake news». Arendt explains her motivation as follows: «Its aim is to clarify two different, though interconnected, issues of which I had not been aware before and whose importance seemed to transcend the occasion. The first concerns the questions of whether it is always legitimate to tell the truth – did I believe without qualification in «Fiat veritas, et pereat mundus»? The second arose through the amazing amount of lies used in the «controversy» – lies about what I had written, on one hand, and about the facts I had reported, on the other. The following reflections try to come to grips with both issues» [2; 227]. The authoress begins to argue that the problem of confronting truth and politics is rather trivial, since even everyday consciousness suggests that veracity does not belong to political virtues. But though a person is a political being, the truth is decisive for its

existence. As Arendt says, «what is at stake is survival, the perseverance in existence (in suo esse perseverare), and no human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously – namely, λέγειν τα ἔοντα, to say what is. No permanence, no perseverance in existence, can even be conceived of without men willing to testify to what is and appears to them because it is» [2; 229]. However, in the political sphere, the truth-teller faces the danger. Arendt reminds that in the last sentence of his allegory about the cave Plato proclaims: «If they (those in the cave – A. M.) could lay hands on [such a] man . . . they would kill him». And Thomas Hobbes finished his «Leviathan» with the thought that only «such truth, as opposeth no man's profit, nor pleasure, is to all men welcome». However, Arendt does not stop at these general pessimistic statements. She proposes to distinguish between two types of truth – rational (mathematical, scientific, and philosophical) and factual. If the knowledge of rational truth depends on the intellectual capacity of the person himself, then the factual truth is largely random and unique. And the latter is the most vulnerable in the political sphere. To illustrate this, Arendt gives an example from the history of the Russian revolution: «...if we now think of factual truths – of such modest verities as the role during the Russian Revolution of a man by the name of Trotsky, who appears in none of the Soviet Russian history books – we at once become aware of how much more vulnerable they are than all the kinds of rational truth taken together» [2; 231]. The authoress then makes a rather pessimistic generalization on the fate of the facts: «The chances of factual truth surviving the onslaught of power are very slim indeed; it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever. Facts and events are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, theories – even the most wildly speculative ones – produced by the human mind; they occur in the field of the ever-changing affairs of men, in whose flux there is nothing more permanent than the admittedly relative permanence of the human mind's structure. Once they are lost, no rational effort will ever bring them back. Perhaps the chances that Euclidean mathematics or Einstein's theory of relativity – let alone Plato's philosophy – would have been reproduced in time if their authors had been prevented from handing them down to posterity are not very good either, yet they are infinitely better than the chances that a fact of importance, forgotten or, more likely, lied away, will one day be rediscovered» [2; 231-232]. The fate of factual truth in political discourse is so gloomy because, according to Arendt, «opinion, and not truth, is among the indispensable prerequisites of all power» [2; 233]. The confrontation of truth and opinion is a long-standing theme, which Plato described in his dialogue «Gorgias». If, according to Arendt, in the age of Antiquity, the main struggle was between opinion and rational, in particular philosophical truth, then in the New Time the lie turns to the political arena as the opposite of the factual truth. This is due both to technological and philosophical changes, although Arendt focuses on the latter. «While probably no former time tolerated so many diverse opinions on religious or philosophical matters, factual truth, if it happens to oppose a given group's profit or pleasure, is greeted today with greater hostility than ever before», Arendt notes, illustrating this thesis by mentioning that even in totalitarian states, such as Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia it was more dangerous to talk about facts, for example about concentration and extermination camps, whose existence was no secret, than to hold and to utter «heretical» views on anti-Semitism, racism, and Communism. But suppression of the factual truth occurs not only in totalitarian countries. Even in free states, factual truths «are often, consciously or

unconsciously, transformed into opinions – as though the fact of Germany's support of Hitler or of France's collapse before the German armies in 1940 or of Vatican policies during the Second World War were not a matter of historical record but a matter of opinion» [2; 236]. Here, Arendt approaches one of the key, in our opinion, aspects of the trend outlined by the concept of «post-truth», namely that facts have to withstand no lies and falsifications, but opinions. The ease with which the obvious facts are now neglected really reminds of the attitude to an opinion that everyone has the right to ignore. The examples provided by Arendt can be replaced by the well-known facts about the downfall of the MH17 flight or Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which Russian propaganda actively denies. And the style of this denial reminds Arendt's observation: the indisputable facts are considered and rejected as opinions. Rejection of the factual truth has far-reaching political implications: if simple factual statements are not accepted the suspicion arises that it may be in the nature of the political realm to deny or pervert truth of every kind, as though men were unable to come to terms with its unyielding, blatant, unpersuasive stubbornness. The importance of factual truth for the political sphere cannot be overemphasized, because it «is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about, even if it occurs in the domain of privacy. It is political by nature» [2; 238]. The neglecting of the facts is also devastating for such democratic values as freedom of thought and speech, because «freedom of opinion is a farce, unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute» [2; 238]. The absence of a common ground, that is, the departure from incontrovertible facts, destroys any discussion not only of contemporary affairs, but also makes it impossible to discuss history. In this context, Arendt notes: «Even if we admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don't admit the right to touch the factual matter itself» [2; 238-239]. That is, the so-called «rewriting of history» does not mean denying the obvious facts. The authoress talks about how the former French Prime Minister, Georges Clemenceau, was asked about who was guilty for the outbreak of the First World War. «What, in your opinion,» he was asked, «will future historians think of this troublesome and controversial issue?» He replied «This I don't know. But I know for certain that they will not say Belgium invaded Germany».

Factual information is vital, but at the same time extremely dangerous for political activity. «Statements such as «The three angles of a triangle are equal to two angles of a square», «The earth moves around the sun», «It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong», «In August 1914 Germany invaded Belgium» are very different in the way they are arrived at, but, once perceived as true and pronounced to be so, they have in common that they are beyond agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent. For those who accept them, they are not changed by the numbers or lack of numbers who entertain the same proposition; persuasion or dissuasion is useless, for the content of the statement is not of a persuasive nature but of a coercive one» [2; 240], Arendt notes, adding that from a political point of view, the truth has a despotic character. The authoress further explains why the actual truth is so often contrary to political will, why it causes hatred on the part of tyrants who regard it as their competitor, if not an outright enemy: «Facts are beyond agreement and consent, and all talk about them – all exchanges of opinion based on correct information – will contribute nothing to their establishment. Unwelcome opinion can be argued with,

rejected, or compromised upon, but unwelcome facts possess an infuriating stubbornness that nothing can move except plain lies. The trouble is that factual truth, like all other truth, peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life. The modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from the political perspective, are necessarily domineering; they don't take into account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of all strictly political thinking» [2; 241]. These considerations sound rather paradoxical, because the confrontation between facts and opinions may not have place if we consider facts as an argumentative resource for thoughts. But here we are not talking about the theory of rhetoric. Obviously, the sharpness of the debate around the book «Eichmann in Jerusalem» has affected the categoricalness with which Arendt opposes truth and politics. However, in the text of the essay we will not find obvious references to this discussion. For the authoress, the principles are important, not the state of affairs. In addition to the factual truth, many places in the essay are devoted to philosophical truth, which, like the factual one, does not feel very well in the political sphere. «Since philosophical truth concerns man in his singularity, it is unpolitical by nature» [2; 246]. For the philosopher, Arendt writes, it is unacceptable that his truth should be supported by an unpretentious audience, because then it will acquire the status of opinion. And today's support may change for tomorrow's denial. The genuine truth cannot depend on such changeable factors as public support. Therefore, one of the most effective methods of persuasion in the truthfulness of a philosophical principle is a personal example; the history of Socrates is a vivid testimony to this. But to make such a «procedure» with the facts is practically impossible. That's why they are more vulnerable in the political realm than rational truths. Arendt explains this view as follows: «A teller of factual truth, in the unlikely event that he wished to stake his life on a particular fact, would achieve a kind of miscarriage. What would become manifest in his act would be his courage or, perhaps, his stubbornness but neither the truth of what he had to say nor even his own truthfulness. For why shouldn't a liar stick to his lies with great courage, especially in politics, where he might be motivated by patriotism or some other kind of legitimate group partiality?» [2; 249]

The opposition of factual truth and opinion is, as we understand, a manipulative strategy, because the opposite of facts is not thought, illusion or error, but deliberate deception or lie. The clash of facts and thoughts, as well as the presentation of facts as thoughts, is a strategy used by a liar to mask his falsehood. The main danger of lies is that it is a form of action. The liar «says what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are – that is he wants to change the world» [2; 250]. According to Arendt, the reporting of the truth is not an action, because the truth-teller just states what is, but in the context of an organized total lie, the message of truth becomes a deed. A simple fact message becomes of political significance. Of course, a lie is not an exclusive political feature. Arendt somewhat exaggerates, inextricably linking the lie with politics, not mentioning the obvious positive and vital aspects of the latter. However, it's hard not to agree with her that «truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little indeed to contribute to that change of the world and of circumstances which is among the most legitimate political activities» [2; 251]. Lying is a profitable instrument in political activity, and therefore there is a great temptation to use it. Its advantage over the truth is obvious: «Since the liar is free to fashion his «facts» to fit the profit and pleasure, or even the mere expectations, of his audience, the chances are that he will be more persuasive than the truth-teller. Indeed, he

will usually have plausibility on his side; his exposition will sound more logical, as it were, since the element of unexpectedness – one of the outstanding characteristics of all events – has mercifully disappeared» [2; 251]. The last statement is rather contradictory, because, as we have already stated in the beginning of the article, liars today successfully use the effect of novelty and the element of unpredictability in order to make «fake news».

The potential of lie to change the world can be truly destructive. According to the authoress, the traditional lie, as part of diplomacy and state policy, was based on concealment and real secrets that were trying to protect from the public's attention. At the same time, the liar knew the hidden truth very well. «In contrast, the modern political lies», Arendt writes, «deal efficiently with things that are not secrets at all but are known to practically everybody. This is obvious in the case of rewriting contemporary history under the eyes of those who witnessed it, but it is equally true in image-making of all sorts, in which, again, every known and established fact can be denied or neglected if it is likely to hurt the image; for an image, unlike an old-fashioned portrait, is supposed not to flatter reality but to offer a full-fledged substitute for it. And this substitute, because of modern techniques and the mass media, is, of course, much more in the public eye than the original ever was» [2; 252]. Modern lie with political violence and means of communication seeks to destroy everything that it wants to deny. «The difference between the traditional lie and the modern lie will more often than not amount to the difference between hiding and destroying» [2; 253]. That is, lies are not only a form of action, but also a form of violence. And this applies not only to totalitarian states, which do it most effectively. A total organized lying is more dangerous than mere concealment by the fact that it leads to self-deception of the liar himself: «The more successful the liar is, the more likely it is that he will fall prey to his own fabrications» [2; 254]. Written in the 1960s, these words sound today as a sinister prophecy, since the recent discoveries of neuroscience, behavioral psychology have shown how our brain is vulnerable to cognitive illusions, self-suggestion, false reminiscences, «knowledge illusion» [12], belief in the theory of conspiracy and other nonsense [9]. The constant recurrence of «fake news» and «post-truth» reminds us of a self-suggesting liar who seeks to convince himself that truth is not really needed. Cognitive psychologist and neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin in his book «Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era» notes that «the phrase «fake news» sounds too playful, too much like a schoolchild faking illness to get out of a test» [7; xiv]. In addition, he calls: «Truth matters. A post-truth era is an era of willful irrationality, reversing all the great advances humankind has made. Maybe journalists don't want to call «fake news» what it is, a lie, because they don't want to offend the liars. But I say offend them! Call them on the carpet» [7; xiv-xv].

Describing the consequences of using a lie as a political weapon by totalitarian regimes, Arendt notes: «It has frequently been noticed that the surest long-term result of brainwashing is a peculiar kind of cynicism – an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established. In other words, the result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world – and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is being destroyed» [2; 257]. We still have to add to this that the same feeling of disorientation, the loss of ground under the feet accompanies modern citizens

of so-called «old democracies» who vote for the populists, who promise them to quickly overcome this unbearable feeling of chaos.

At the end of the essay, Arendt adds some optimistic accents to her portrait of confronting truth and politics. Although, in our opinion, they sound optimistic rather to supporters of the philosophical view of things. In particular, she writes: «Since everything that has actually happened in the realm of human affairs could just as well have been otherwise, the possibilities for lying are boundless, and this boundlessness makes for self-defeat» [2; 257]. The weakness of lies, and with it – «post-truth», «fake news», «alternative facts» – is that they will never be able to become an adequate substitute for reality. «The erection of Potemkin's villages, so dear to the politicians and propagandists of underdeveloped countries, never lead to the establishment of the real thing but only to a proliferation and perfection of make-believe» [2; 258]. Politicians, if they do not want to lose a sense of reality, must take care of the independent functioning of the institutions where truths are cherished, that is, courts, universities and mass media. Politicians must also remember that although they can easily defeat the truth, they will never be able to replace it with something worthy of.

Arendt's essay, written from the standpoint of a philosopher, may look a bit old-fashioned today, and her opposition of truth and politics may look too categorical. For example, contemporary author Hector Macdonald in his book «Truth: How the Many Sides to Every Story Shape Our Reality» demonstrates how with quite truthful facts, reality can be distorted: «Truth comes in many forms, and experienced communicators can exploit its variability to shape our impression of reality» [8; 4]. That is, sometimes, in order to lie, it does not even need to lie in its pure form, but it is enough to tear out facts from the context or to report only one of the «competing truths». Indeed, in the context of such an approach, Arendt's clear opposition of truth and lies lacks a practical dimension. However, Arendt's power of thought lies in the fact that she is not afraid to actualize the old themes and use «archaic» words to show its inevitable timeliness in this way.

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## ПЕРЕДБАЧЕННЯ ЕПОХИ «ПОСТПРАВДИ» В ЕСЕЇ ХАННИ АРЕНДТ «ІСТИНА І ПОЛІТИКА»

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У статті зроблено спробу проаналізувати есеї Ханни Арендт «Істина і політика» і актуалізувати його ідеї в контексті епохи «постправди» та «фейкових новин». Арендт вперше опублікувала текст 1967 року в журналі «New Yorker» як відповідь на бурхливу дискусію навколо її книги «Айхман у Єрусалимі. Репортаж про банальність зла».

Арендт категорично протиставляє істину і політику. Авторка веде мову про раціональну (філософську, математичну) та фактичну істину. Якщо першу людина пізнає за допомогою власного розуму як філософ чи науковець, то друга – це насамперед події і вчинки, які мають випадковий і непередбачуваний характер. Політика становить найбільшу загрозу саме для фактичної істини, адже її найважче передбачити чи контролювати. У тоталітарних державах із найбільшою нетерпимістю ставились до згадки заборонених фактів, тоді як шкідливі ідеї у певних дозах і під «правильним» ракурсом толерувались. І раціональна, і фактична істини, на думку Арендт, аполітичні за своєю природою, адже незалежні від громадської думки, яка є суттю політики. Тому один із найефективніших методів боротьби із ними – стирання розмежувальної лінії між фактом та опінією.

Ця тактика, на наш погляд, є однією із основних в епоху «постправди». Ясна річ, протилежністю факту є не опінія, а зумисна брехня. Політично вмотивована неправда небезпечна тим, що стосується багатьох. Традиційна брехня була пов'язана із приховуванням, тоді як модерна – не лише втаємничує, але й руйнує, зокрема й фізично. Брехня є формою насильства, її мета – зміна світу. Результатом її систематичного застосування є особливий цинізм, відмова від категорій «істина – брехня», що призводить до втрати відчуття реальності. Утім, навіть найбільш ефективна брехня ніколи не зможе адекватно замінити істини, з її допомогою не вдасться збудувати чогось реального, а лише примножити штучне та ілюзорне. Тому політики мають змиритись із тим, що їхня перемога над істиною може бути лише тимчасовою, і натомість – всіляко культивувати інституції, де плекають істину – суди, університети та мас-медіа.

У статті також зроблено акцент на тому, що поняття «постправда» та «фейкові новини» не варто вважати релевантними категоріями для опису інформаційної реальності, бо від них немає жодної епістемологічної користі, а лише політичний ефект. Натомість, варто повернутись до традиційних понять, які Арендт використовує у своєму есеї, – істина, брехня, факти.

*Ключові слова:* істина, брехня, політика, постправда, фейкові новини, опінія, Ханна Арендт.