

Democratic Political Judgment in the Age of Post-Truth: An Analysis of Arendt, Habermas, and Foucault

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by Signe Wilkinson / Philly.com (WPWG 2016)



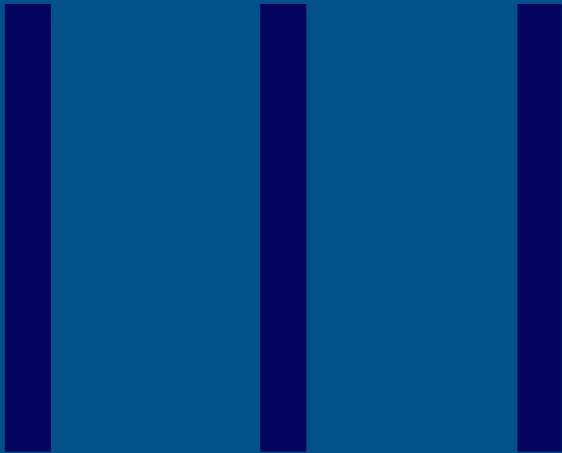
by Stuart A. Thompson, David Yaffe-Bellany, and Mike Isaac.
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Background and Motivating Questions

- Lack of universal truths
 - “if truth is understood to be hazy, intersubjective, and inaccessible, then anyone could make the claim that something might be the case despite evidence to the contrary”
- Judgment and democratic ideals
 - human equality grounded in the capacity for judgment
 - judgment is a democratic process
 - ideas that judgment should be reserved for experts has led to democratic dissatisfaction

Arendt and the Role of Truth

Coercive truth vs. persuasive opinion



But does this make sense?

- public-opinion sharing often involves the pursuit of truth
- stark divide between truth and opinion (and subjectivity/objectivity) does not exist

Habermas' Deliberative Model

Communicative Action and Deliberation

- Truth emerges through rational argumentation
- deliberation among equals with consensus as the goal

Mouffe's Agonistic Model

- Habermas incorrectly identifies polarization as a problem
- Competing viewpoints, disagreement, and perpetual struggle are unavoidable in a democracy if political
- pluralism is understood to be a source of legitimacy

A Foucauldian Approach to Political Judgment

Knowledge and Power

“For every society, for every historical age, there is a regime of truth, unplanned but functional, generated somehow out of the network of power relations, out of the multiple forms of constraint, and enforced along with them. There are certain types of discourse that the society accepts ‘and makes... true’, and there are mechanisms that enable us to distinguish true and false statements – and sanction, so that we won’t make mistakes. Foucault believes that truth is relative to its sanctions and knowledge to the constraints that produce it”

Parrhesia

- Challenging the regime of truth despite personal danger

Implications and Conclusions

Main takeaways

- Determination of truth cannot be reduced to a process of ideal human reason
- If truth is situated within systems of power, an over-reliance on facticity and so-called undeniable truths is inadequate

My proposed solution

- A conception of democracy that balances the tensions that arise from the omnipresence of disciplinary power through a strong commitment to democratic ideals, which are generated by welcoming conditions of pluralism and creating institutions and procedures that foster democratic values