

INSTEAD OF POST-TRUTH: MAN-MADE TRUTHLIKENESS-BEARERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Politics, many political commentators and political scientists are claiming has entered a new era: post-truth politics. Where such politics reigns, the question whether in political discussions, seemingly factual assertions, explanations and narratives are true or false is no longer regarded as interesting. Neither among the politicians who speak nor among the public addressed. Mostly, the dawning of the era is proclaimed to be 2016, and I see no reason to contest this. The purpose of this paper, however, is not to discuss post-truth politics as such and its emergence and consequences, but to highlight some of the background factors. Normally, when a new era is in place, much has gone on before and created a basis for it; therefore, in retrospect one may find structures and views that very much look like necessary conditions for it.

II. EPISTEMIC ATMOSPHERES

Being a philosopher, I will zoom in on academic philosophy. Here is my agenda. First, from a sociological point of view I think it is possible to identify *epistemic atmospheres* in a society. Second, in my opinion, there has for some decades now in many regions of the world been an atmosphere that is conducive to post-truth politics; it prevails among both academic and non-academic people, and it exists among both the winners and the losers of the last phase of globalization. Third, epistemic atmospheres can be in harmony or in conflict with simultaneously existing views within academic philosophy, and, unfortunately, there is harmony between the epistemic atmosphere of the last decades and much academic philosophy. Fourth, I

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will show the wrongness of some of the positions in academic philosophy that live in *cognitively peaceful* coexistence with post-truth politics; even though some of the philosophers behind the views are emotionally upset by post-truth politics. Fifth, I will say a few words about what I think can be done in relation to post-truth politics.

What, then, is an epistemic atmosphere? Abstractly put, it is a common dominating way of thinking and talking about truth and knowledge; be it dominating in a group, a region, a nation, or worldwide. Of course, it can change. In such an atmosphere it may be taken for granted that there are literal truths that certainly are true, and at the other extreme such an atmosphere may be epistemologically nihilistic; there are many positions in-between.

I intend the notion to be analogous to that of political-ideological atmospheres. Here are two well-known examples of the latter kind. In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, there was a leftist atmosphere around much of the globe, but in the 1980s there arose a neo-liberal atmosphere. An atmosphere affects almost everyone. The leftist atmosphere modified the views also of many liberal and right-wing people, and the neo-liberal atmosphere modified the views of many socialists and conservatives, too.

When exemplifying epistemic atmospheres, I will at first be parochial. I have lived and worked almost the whole of my life in Sweden. When I was a teenager in the late 1950s, the epistemic atmosphere was *scientific* in the sense that it was taken for granted that it was science, and primarily science, that could find out what nature and social reality truly are like. This atmosphere persisted throughout the 1960s, but then it slowly changed towards more epistemologically relativistic views. Working as a university teacher, I did sometime in the 1990s realize that since some time almost every new philosophy student left high school and entered the university as an outspoken epistemological relativist. At the end of the decade, even PhD students in the empirical sciences could confidently reply to criticism by simply saying “*But this is my interpretation!*” At present, in the late 2010s, being a formally retired professor who attends various public political and theoretical discussions, watches analogous TV-programs, reads several newspapers and some journals, and even takes a little look at social media, my impression is that the *hardcore* epistemological relativism around the turn of the millennium has changed into what might be called a *soft-core* epistemological relativism.

Today, in contradistinction to the 1950s, science permeates not only universities, but ordinary life, too. In debates in TV, scientific researchers are almost always called upon to comment on what laymen and politicians say. And in this kind of *scientistic* choreography, no relativist raises the hand and says that it is ridiculous to respect what the researchers say. Nonetheless, there is a kind of surrounding atmosphere that is in a weak sense relativistic. I think the common saying “*research is perishable*” is an expression of this atmosphere. The fact that *soft-core* but not *hardcore* relativism is correlated with post-truth politics shows only that the epistemic atmosphere is not the only causal factor behind post-truth politics.

From what I have read and heard, my Swedish experience has counterparts in many countries. Readers who doubt my extrapolation can, for instance, take a look at Wikipedia’s entries ‘Sokal affair’, ‘Postmodernism’, and ‘Post-truth politics’, and then follow some of the references, further readings, and external links mentioned.

III. ACADEMIC TRUTH-AND-KNOWLEDGE TALK AND EPISTEMIC ATMOSPHERES

The epistemic atmosphere of both *hardcore* and *soft-core* epistemological relativism is in harmony with a number of views about truth and knowledge held by very many academic philosophers. In this paper, I have isolated what I take to be the four most important philosophical mistakes that sustain the relativistic atmosphere of our time; *within* the atmosphere they are closely intertwined. All of them must be regarded as mistakes if one wants to challenge the present atmosphere, since each of the four mistakes can function as a sufficient condition for finding the atmosphere acceptable.

Three of the four mistakes are fallacies of which I regard the premise as true (a, c, d below), but am confident that the conclusion does not follow, and one is an ontological-semantic blunder (b). What I call the linguistic, the epistemological-semantic, and the sociological fallacy (a, c, d), respectively, are widespread among academics in general. The blunder (b) is mainly a mistake within academic analytic philosophy. My ordering does not reflect an order of importance; it is made only for pedagogical reasons. Below comes a list of the mistakes; the expression ‘truth-and-knowledge talk’ is shorthand for talk that positively believes in truth and knowledge, these terms taken in a wide sense:

- (a) *The linguistic fallacy*: to talk, to listen, to write, and to read are actions; consequently, since actions are not true or false, one should dismiss all serious truth-and-knowledge talk.
- (b) *The ontological-semantic blunder*: the notion of truth as correspondence is not a philosophically coherent notion; consequently, ordinary truth-and-knowledge talk should not be taken seriously.
- (c) *The epistemological-semantic fallacy*: there can be no certain empirical knowledge and all over-arching empirical theories are probably false; consequently, one should dismiss serious truth-and-knowledge talk.
- (d) *The sociological fallacy*: all empirical knowledge-claims seem to be socially affected; consequently, one should dismiss serious truth-and-knowledge talk.

A) THE LINGUISTIC FALLACY

Philosophical traditions and “isms” can overlap. That is, some specific view may be abstracted out of some or many of them, even though the abstracted part comes with quite different overtones in the different traditions. In particular, this is true of the first view to be discussed: to talk/listen and to write/read are kinds of action, and are as all actions created by someone.

This modern view, with which I agree, can be found in as different philosophical traditions as pragmatism, speech act philosophy, late-Wittgensteinian philosophy, hermeneutics, Derrida’s philosophy, and post-modernist philosophies of other kinds. All oppose the classical view that to assert and to hear/read an assertion is to become related to a pre-existing entity. This entity is often called a proposition, but I will use the term in a wide sense according to which propositions are allowed to be man-made constructions, too.

The classical view contains a gap between assertions and actions; the former are said to be able to be true or false, the latter not. Unfortunately, most philosophers who defend the modern view also seem to believe in such a gap. Consequently, they claim that since actions are not true or false, and speech/writing acts are actions, we should no longer take truth-and-knowledge talk literally. My view, on the other hand, is that one should realize that the gap in question does not exist. As a matter of fact, a specific kind of actions, assertive speech/writing acts, can be both actions and be true or false. In other words, from the fact that all assertions with their propositions are man-made social constructions, it does not follow that assertions are self-enclosed linguistic units that cannot be about anything but themselves. Let me explain.

Competent language users can create new social phenomena. If you tell someone who lends you money “*I promise to pay back tomorrow*”, then by your very utterance you create a social entity, a promise. And the promise exists and is part of social reality even if you *silently* say to yourself “*but I am not going to do it*”. Similarly, given a certain social context, a meeting is created if the chairman says “*Hereby, I declare the meeting open*”. Promises and declarations are typical social constructions. But also linguistic emotional expressions (e.g., the exclamation “*Oh, disgusting!*”) and orders are social constructions (be the latter soft as in “*Please, put on some music*” or extremely hard as in military commands). The primary function of utterances such as promises, declarations, exclamations, and orders is *to perform an action by means of words*. Therefore, the utterances (or the corresponding writing acts) are by many philosophers called *performatives*.

Even when we utter or write down an assertion, we perform an action by means of words. By asserting something, we perform the action of showing in public (honestly or dishonestly) that we are prone to believe that what is asserted is the case. To lie is to publicly assert one thing but silently believe another. Assertive speech/writing acts have, despite being actions, what variously has been called *aboutness*, *intentionality*, and *directedness*. Obviously, in ordinary speech acts, listening acts, writing acts, and reading acts where descriptive sentences are used, the speaker, the listener, the writer, and the reader become directed at something else than a purely linguistic non-directed sentence meaning. A *used* sentence is normally not about the sentence itself. Ordinary assertions are not like material things enclosed within themselves; they are about and have intentionality/directedness towards something that is distinct from them.

All assertions, explanations and narratives have two aspects, which, using technical, philosophical terms can be preferably called the *performative* aspect and the *intentional* aspect, respectively. The classical view of assertions neglect the *performative* aspect, and among many who supports the modern view, the intentional aspect is lost.

(It should be noted that there is intentionality even in promises, declarations, exclamations, and orders. All of them are about something, but not in such a way that it makes sense to regard them as true or false. Some of them have, though, an analogous intentionality-based feature. As assertions can be true or false, promises can be held or broken, orders can be obeyed or refused, and declarations can succeed or fail.)

Note that the two utterances “‘He’ *promises*” and “‘I’ *promised*”, in contradistinction to the utterance “‘I’ *promise*”, are ordinary assertions; therefore, they can be true of false. If someone tells you “‘Yesterday P *promised me to invite me for dinner*”, then this assertion and social construction is *about* the social construction that is P’s very promise. Here, one social construction, an assertion, is about another social construction, a promise.

This simple observation has an interesting consequence. It implies that even if (contrary to my conviction) there is no mind-independent reality, but only mind-dependent constructions then nonetheless, descriptions of social reality made by historians and social scientists should be regarded as being true or false. Strong social constructivism (= there are only social constructions) and linguistic idealism (= there is nothing outside of language) cannot by themselves imply a rejection of serious truth-and-knowledge talk. Unfortunately, many academics seem to falsely think they can and do.

B) THE ONTOLOGICAL-SEMANTIC BLUNDER

There are philosophers (especially within the tradition of analytic philosophy) who accept the main claim of the preceding section – that the creative *performativity* of language does not preclude assertions from being true or false – but which nonetheless dismiss serious truth-and-knowledge talk. They reject for other reasons the everyday conception of truth, in philosophy called the correspondence theory of truth. Let me briefly present the theory, and tell what I think is needed to point out in order to save it from philosophical attempts at deletion.

Assume the following series of events: (i) you and some friends are standing in a room waiting for a certain person to come, (ii) you hear one of your friends assert “‘*She has come; she stands in the doorway*”, (iii) you turn around and look in the direction of the door, (iv) in the doorway you see the expected person, and (v) you say to yourself “‘*True, there she is!*”. Often, as in this example, the hearing of an everyday assertion and its confirmation are two temporally distinct events. First comes an apprehension of a speech act (ii), and later comes a confirming perceptual act (iv). In some sense of the term ‘correspondence’, what is perceived in the perceptual act corresponds to what is spoken about in the speech act. Something in the perceptual act – the *truthmaker* – makes for you the assertion– the *truthbearer* – true. There is an immediate veridical-perception to true-assertion transition. Situations like the one presented above, and they constitute the

basis of the correspondence theory of truth for *empirical* assertions; I am not defending a correspondence theory for all kinds of assertions.

Chocking as it may seem to laymen, modern philosophy is replete with denials of the correspondence theory of truth for empirical assertions. Here is a list of names of proposed alternatives: the coherence theory of truth, the pragmatic theory of truth, the warranted *assertability* theory of truth, the identity theory of truth, and the deflationary (or *disquotational*) view of truth. In all these alternatives, it is claimed that the introduced distinction between *truthbearers* and *truthmakers* is fishy. How come? Here are three quick answers of mine.

First, many philosophers simply deny or neglect the obvious fact that assertions and perceptions contain *aboutness/intentionality/directedness*. There are, they claim or take it for granted, only objects, properties, and attitudes; be these entities material or purely subjective. The man who is often regarded as the greatest analytic philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century, Willard Van Orman Quine, explicitly claims that even though ordinary language contains expressions for *aboutness/intentionality/directedness*, a language true to the world (in his *disquotational* sense) cannot possibly contain such expressions.

Second, many philosophers have too conservative a view of (so-called internal) relations. According to the view I am defending, as soon as there is both a *truthbearer* and a *truthmaker*, there comes into being, simultaneously, a relation of correspondence between them. This fact is in one way similar to facts such as the following: (i) when there is one large and one small three-dimensional object, then there is necessarily also a volume-relation between them; (ii) when there is one heavy and one light object, then there is necessarily also a weight-relation between them. In another way, though, the correspondence case is different from the last two. In these the entities that are related (the *relata*) are of the same kind, i.e., having a volume and having a weight, respectively. But in the correspondence case the *relata* are of different kinds. The *truthbearer* is about the *truthmaker*, but the latter is not about the former, and does often lack *aboutness* altogether. In order to accept the correspondence theory of truth, one has to accept that correspondence relations have the (for internal relations) unusual feature of having heterogeneous *relata*.

Third, for various reasons, many philosophers falsely take it for granted that if there are truths, then they must be mind-independent, i.e., must be *completely* speaker/writer- and hearer/reader-independent. On my

view, to the contrary, truths cannot possibly be completely mind-independent, since I am confident that propositions cannot exist independently of speech/writing acts and beliefs of human beings. That is, one of the *relata* for a possible correspondence relation, the *truthbearer*, is always mind-dependent. But the other *relatum*, the *truthmaker*, may well be mind-independent. Therefore, no correspondence relation can hold where there are no minds at all, but the creator of the *truthbearer* does not create the correspondence relation. It is an effect of the existence of both the truthbearer and a truthmaker for it. And the relation exists even if no one cognizes it. To summarize: when both a *truthbearer* and one of its *truthmakers* exist, then there is a correspondence relation independently of whether or not it is cognized by anyone. The relation can be discovered, but not directly created.

On this account, a *fact that has not yet been described or thought of* is – so far – only a *possible truthmaker*; there has to be a corresponding *truthbearer* before the fact can become an *actual truthmaker*. In my opinion, the widespread false belief that truth must be completely mind-independent is what blocks many analytic philosophers from accepting the correspondence theory of truth.

“*Language shapes our view of the world*” it is nowadays often said. But the saying is ambiguous. It is true in so far as all *truthbearers* are man-made spatiotemporally and socially situated entities, be they simple assertions, complex explanations, or extended narratives. The saying becomes a falsehood only when it is taken to mean that language independently of our perceptual contact with the world says what the world is like.

C) THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL-SEMANTIC FALLACY

Some contemporary philosophers accept my claims in sections (A) and (B), but do nonetheless reject serious truth-and-knowledge talk. Some of them commit what I call the epistemological-semantic fallacy. Let’s first go back in time. The early skeptics in ancient Greece (Pyrrhonism) and India (the Carvakaschool) did never question that assertions are truth-claims in the sense of the correspondence theory presented in the last section. Their criticism was purely epistemological. They straightforwardly claimed that what is called knowledge is not infallible. To most of them, their view did not imply that all empirical hypotheses are equally uncertain. Therefore, the modern term ‘fallibilism’ (= all empirically based knowledge, even scientific such, is fallible) is as applicable to their view as the traditional label ‘skepticism’ is.

One of the points they made was later in philosophy to be called the problem of induction. To take the modern classic example: if you have seen swan number one to be white, number two to be white, and so on a number of times, you can nonetheless never be certain that *all* swans are white, or that the *next* swan you will meet will be white. And the skeptics were right; induction cannot give rise to infallible knowledge.

Nonetheless, in modern times, the success of science made many philosophers believe that there must be a method that resembles induction; otherwise the success cannot be explained. Procedures such as the hypothetical-deductive method and abduction were proposed, but even they turned out to be as subject to *fallibilism* as induction since long had been regarded to be. As far as I can judge, happily, *fallibilism* has at last become the dominating epistemology among empirical scientists.

In itself, *fallibilism* does not lead to any condemnation of serious truth-and-knowledge talk, even if many people falsely think so. It implies only a rejection of a belief in the *certainty* of empirical knowledge. The quest for certainty should, if possible, be exterminated. That is, the old truth-and-knowledge talk, which more precisely is truth-and-*knowledge certainty* talk, should be exchanged for truth-and-*fallibilism* talk.

Nowadays, however, induction is itself by philosophers of science used to undermine epistemological realism. The argument runs (in relation to physics) as follows: theory₁(Galilean physics) turned out to be false, theory₂(Newtonian mechanics) turned out to be false, theory₃(the special theory of relativity) turned out to be false, hence, in all probability, *all future(physical) theories will turn out to be false*. It is called pessimistic meta-induction; ‘meta’ since the premises are about theories, not, as in traditional induction, about observations that support a theory.

This all-theories-are-false conclusion differs from the old skeptic one that there is no certain empirical knowledge. However, just as I am a *fallibilist*, I do also believe that, probably, all over-arching empirical-scientific theories are, *literally speaking*, false. But then, most importantly, it must be noted that this belief does not imply a rejection of truth-and-*fallibilism* talk; something those who propound the pessimistic meta-induction seem to think.

What they neglect is that what is of interest, when we look at the history of science, is not the presumed literal truth of theories; of interest is instead the *degree of truthlikeness* of theories. Therefore, the conclusion

to draw is not that *truthliteralness-and-fallibilism* talk should be simply deleted, but that it should be exchanged for *truthlikeness-and-fallibilism* talk. Let me now explain the suddenly introduced notion ‘degree of *truthlikeness*’.

That an empirical assertion has a high degree of *truthlikeness* does *not* mean that there is much empirical support for it. *Truthlikeness* is *not* a relation between an assertion or belief (a proposition) and the empirical evidence for its truth. As the correspondence relation discussed in section (B) is a relation between a *truthbearer* (a proposition) and a *truthmaker*, degree of *truthlikeness* is a relation between a *truthlikeness-bearer* (a proposition) and a fact that functions as a *truthlikeness-maker*. It is a case of *partial* correspondence.

With respect to pictures of a real person, it is often easy to distinguish between a complete and a partial resemblance/correspondence between a picture and a veridical perception of the person. Verbal statements do not allow the same kind of literal talk of resemblance and correspondence, but I think the examples in the next paragraph make it clear that talk of partial correspondence makes equally good sense in relation to assertions.

Compare the following three statements: (1) “*The sun is shining from a blue sky*”, (2) “*It is somewhat cloudy*”, and (3) “*It is raining*”. And then compare these: (1’) “*The bus leaves at 18.30*”, (2’) “*The bus leaves at 18.40*”, and (3’) “*The bus leaves at 19.00*”. In both the triplets, it seems natural to say that the content of the second statement is more like the content of the first than that of the third is. This implies that *if* the first statement is true, *then* the second statement approximates truth better than the third. Therefore, it can also be said that the second statement has a higher degree of *truthlikeness* than the third. Examples can easily be multiplied, and they can be about theories just as well as about events and states of affairs.

The notion of degree of *truthlikeness* is meant to be a *complement* to the binary opposition between truth and falsity. To start to use it is a bit – but only a bit – like switching from talking only about long and short distances to talking about the relative lengths of various distances. The difference is that, unlike length, *truthlikeness* cannot, it seems, be given a strict proper metric or ordinal measure. The notion of *truthlikeness* has been regarded in two different ways. Either as a notion that is meaningful only if some formal measure of degree of *truthlikeness* can be constructed, or as a merely non-formal primitive comparative notion that nonetheless has important functions to fulfill. The attempts to create a formal measure have seemingly for good reasons failed and come to a halt. But the fact that there is no formal measure does not make the

non-formal notions of *truthlikeness* and partial correspondence meaningless. To the contrary, in order to understand the history of science it is important to keep them.

D) THE SOCIOLOGICAL FALLACY

Some thinkers accept the modern action-analysis of assertions (see above, *linguistic fallacy*), the correspondence theory of truth (see above, *ontological-semantic blunder*), and the notion of *truthlikeness* (see above, *epistemological-semantic fallacy*), but do nonetheless reject all serious truth-and-knowledge talk. They succumb only to what I call the sociological fallacy, which, as I will show, is a flagrantly unsophisticated fallacy.

A large number of studies in the history and sociology of science show that there are significant correlations between what are regarded as scientific truths and the social positions of those who embrace the presumed truths. Correlations do not imply causality, and one should be cautious here. However, I find it reasonable to believe that all empirical knowledge-claims are to some extent socially affected. In particular, I do not think that it is possible for researchers to distance themselves completely from their social position, and in this sense enter a place from social nowhere where truths and high degrees of *truthlikeness* can easily be found.

But this belief cannot on pain of contradiction imply that one should dismiss *all* serious truth-and-knowledge talk. Why? Because the very belief contains a belief in the existence of some truths. If the history and sociology of science contains knowledge about science, which it normally claims it does, then it cannot possibly be used to undermine truth-seeking *in general*. And if it gives up its claim to contain knowledge about science, it no longer contains a reason for anyone to dismiss truth-seeking; because then the statement that research is always affected by social factors is neither true nor false.

From a purely logical point of view, the problematic feature highlighted can be removed by simply saying: the history and sociology of science can produce true or *truthlike* statements, but *no other* scientific discipline can. I have, however, never heard or read anyone who has defended this peculiar position. The reason is simple. Some odd views can exist thanks only to the relative darkness of their merely implicit existence; they disappear automatically when exposed to light which make them explicitly held views.

Now, it may be claimed that my own position is contaminated by a similar kind of self-referential problem. How can I speak of *truthlikeness*, when I think there is no point of social nowhere from where truth-claims can be made and defended? My answer is as follows.

Even though I believe that there is no non-social position from which truths or high degrees of *truthlikeness* can automatically be found, I think that one need not always be completely immersed in and pre-determined by one's social position. I think that when two (or more) truth-claims, or even whole theoretical paradigms, collide in one's mind (or in a discussion), one can partly distance oneself from both. In this special sense one would be in no particular place. That is, be in a non-localizable area outside of the positions and paradigms involved— a relative nowhere, so to speak. But this is not a place that guarantees that truths or *truthlikenesses* can be found. It is only a nowhere where the personal outcome of interpretations and discussions are not pre-determined by any of the pre-existing colliding positions and paradigms, or by the collision in itself.

IV. TRUTH-AND-KNOWLEDGE TALK SPECIFIED AS *TRUTHLIKENESS-AND-FALLIBILISM* TALK

I have in sections (B) to (D) defended serious truth-and-knowledge talk against the relativistic epistemic atmosphere that surrounds it, and which also sustains post-truth politics. I have done this by rebutting four positions in academic philosophy that live in cognitively peaceful coexistence with the atmosphere. Now, approaching the final section of the paper, I would like to repeat some of the more specific views put forward.

Truth-and-knowledge talk can exist indifferent varieties. An old kind of such talk looks upon presumed empirical truths as *literal* truths and upon knowledge as being *certain* knowledge. This is *truthliteralness*-and-knowledge certainty talk. In the contrary opposite kind of truth-and-knowledge talk, one looks upon presumed empirical truths as containing only *truthlikeness* and upon knowledge as being not certain but *fallible*. Here we find *truthlikeness*-and-*fallibilism* talk.

I have not only renounced epistemological relativism, but also old-fashioned *truthliteralness*-and-knowledge certainty talk. Epistemological relativism ought simply to be rejected, but *truthliteralness*-and-knowledge

certainty talk ought to be exchanged for *truthlikeness*-and-*fallibilism* talk. The epistemological relativists have not been wrong in everything they have said about literal truths and certain knowledge.

All *truthbearers* and *truthlikeness*-bearers are man-made and socially situated, and no empirical *truthbearer* or *truthlikeness*-bearer supplies us with certain knowledge. Nonetheless, in all probability, there are assertions and beliefs that have some degree of *truthlikeness* to facts that exist independently of the assertions made and beliefs held; such assertions and beliefs are *truthlikeness*-bearers.

V. POST-TRUTH POLITICS AND THE END OF IT

I have argued that, looking backwards, academic philosophy is not wholly innocent when it comes to the rise of post-truth politics. Since it interacts with epistemic atmospheres, and the latter interacts with politics, there is for sure an indirect connection, and I think it has been operative. What, then, to say when looking forwards?

According to the view I have presented, the relativistic epistemic atmosphere of the last decades did not in and of itself give rise to post-truth politics. Because of this, I also think that, conversely, post-truth politics may decline for quite commonsensical non-epistemic reasons. However, in order to stabilize a move away from the era of post-truth politics, not to speak about a final ending of it, I am convinced that a change in epistemic atmosphere is needed, too. As should be clear from the former section, I think both philosophers and laymen should start to talk and think in terms of *fallibilism* and *truthlikeness*.

The Open Society and Its Enemies (1945) is probably the most famous defense of tolerant and democratic societies permeated by serious political discussions hitherto written. Its author, Karl Popper, was, it should be noted, not only interested in political philosophy. In particular, he also explicitly argued for *fallibilism* in epistemology and the notion of *truthlikeness* in semantics. In fact, he re-invented the former notion and coined the latter. Both conceptions are advocated in an “addenda” that in 1961 he added to his political-philosophical book.

My reflections on post-truth politics show, I hope, the need to make a defense of *truthlikeness*-and-*fallibilism* talk a central part of future rock-bottom philosophical defenses of open societies.

References

This paper sums up and condenses several earlier writings of mine. In the next paragraph I mention the most important ones written in English; they can be downloaded from my home page <http://www.ingvarjohansson.se>. All of them are of course in various ways indebted to other epistemological realists; in each of the writings to be mentioned, these philosophers are duly referred to. Not referred to, however, is the philosopher who has created the expression “epistemic atmosphere”, Sharon Rider (Uppsala University, Sweden).

One of my writings is a book (available open access), *Medicine & Philosophy. A Twenty-First Century Introduction* (2008); it has a co-author, Niels Lynøe (GP and professor in medical ethics). The following papers are relevant for specific parts of the present paper: “Against Fantology Again” (2016), “In Defense of the Notion of Truthlikeness” (2016), “Review of A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*” (2013), “Bioinformatics and Biological Reality” (2006), “Truthmaking: A Cognition-Independent Internal Relation with Heterogenous Relata” (2004), “Performatives and Antiperformatives” (2003), “Pluralism and Rationality in the Social Sciences” (1991), and “Beyond Objectivism and Relativism” (1987).

(I thank Christer Svennerlind and Swagat Baruah for important comments on earlier versions of the paper.)