**“Is truth dead– and should we be in mourning?”**

***Marilyn Mason, Kingston Philosophy Café. 13/6/2017***

Does this “post-truth” age mean that intuitionism, relativism, subjectivism and “truthiness” (the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true to concepts or facts known to be true) have triumphed? Should we be worrying about “alternative facts” and “fake news”, or are do we actually have quite robust defences against them?

*Bertrand Russell:* “ In every writer on philosophy there is a concealed metaphysic, usually unconscious; even if his subject is metaphysics, he is almost certain to have an uncritically believed system which underlies his specific arguments.” (*The Philosophy of John Dewey*)

“We have had enough of experts” *Michael Gove, former education minister during the Leave campaign, and now the new enviroment minister!*

**Questions**

Are we actually in a post-truth age - or is it just that Trump and his entourage are more blatant liars, easier to catch out, than most politicians, so that we’re more aware of the lies and spin?

“It depends what we mean by ….”: Truth = fact? Knowledge = true, justiified belief? (so how do we test a belief’s truth and justify it?). Other definitions?

Do all political and philosophical beliefs start as intuitions, which we then spent a lot of time rationalising and finding evidence for (e g, that there is something wrong with Rawls Theory of Justice or Utilitarianism)?

What about science - where do the hypotheses that scientific enquiries begin with come from?

Is some kind of subjectivism - personal preferences, prejudices, beliefs inherited or acquired - inevitable, even in the realm of facts, let alone values? (Of course some things - matters of taste -are subjective.)

If intuitions are is the foundation of all our arguments and beliefs, on what basis can we judge between them? Are your intuitions better than mine? Where do these intuitions come from? Instinct? Upbringing? God? Experience, perhaps - but if so how do we decide whose experiences more representative, closer to the truth? Or are they all “true for me” or true for a different culture or belief system, as my sixthformers used to claim, a kind of relativism?

Is relativism the start of a slippery slope, at the end of which we find we can know or trust nothing, because some one else or another culture “knows” something different?

**Some books on the subect reviewed**- by John Gray (who, typically, blames relativism and “post-truth” on the Enlightenment and liberals) in *The* *Guardian,* 19/5/17: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/19/post-truth-matthew-dancona-evan-davis-reiews>: “Post Truth by Matthew D’Ancona and Post-Truth by Evan Davis review – is this really a new era of politics? Lying as the norm has been with us for a while. Is the idea of post-truth another example of liberals understanding people wrongly?”

- by Nick Cohen (with a different take on where the blame lies) in *The Observer*, 21/5/17:   
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/may/21/post-truth-evan-davis-matthew-dancona-james-ball-fake-news-nick-cohen-review> “Post-truth review… three timely books by

Matthew d’Ancona, James Ball and Evan Davis examine fake news and its corrosive impact on western democracy” “…D’Ancona … finds hope even in the universities, where Trump’s intellectual ancestors in the postmodern movement have been replaced by philosophers who understand that the relativist doctrine ‘There are no facts, only interpretations’ inevitably leads to the conclusion: ‘The reason of the strongest is always the best.’ …Every generation must refight the battles of the Enlightenment…” “…The American climate change denier Marc Morano explained with relish: ‘You go up against a scientist, most of them are going to be in their own policy wonk world or area of expertise: very arcane, hard to understand, hard to explain and very boorring.’

+ ***Guardian* discussion on Post-Truth, 12/7/17** <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/surviving-the-post-truth-era-tickets-34826634401>