

Being a Believer:

Social Identity in Post-truth Political Discourse

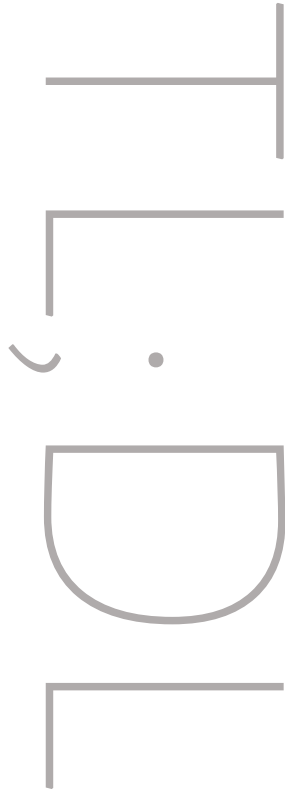
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3rd Annual PEN Conference, Amsterdam, 08 December 2022

Funded by

DFG Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft - 430621735
German Research Foundation



It's **interesting** to think to think about how 'post-truth' discourse could be analysed in terms of its relation to social identity.

Doing so promises some **benefits** over more conventional analyses.

Yet it's really not *one* proposal either, as there are **multiple ways** in which such a relation could obtain.

Three puzzling features of 'post-truth' discourse:

Empirical claims without regard for **countervailing evidence**

Sense of **personal investment** in empirical (rather than normative) claims

'**Politicisation**' of beliefs frames factual contestation in terms of us / them
fault lines instead of a mutually accessible intersubjective standpoint



“[The political enemy] is simply the other, the stranger, and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, such that in the extreme case there can be conflicts with him that can neither be settled by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of an ‘uninvolved’ and thus ‘impartial’ third party.”

Schmitt ([1932] 1963, 27; own translation)

*Some
proposals:*

Post-truth
speakers are...

- 1) ...liars.
- 2) ...bullshitters.
- 3) ...deliberating in epistemically unfortunate circumstances.
- 4) ...acting on an alternative picture of the epistemic norms governing a certain domain of discourse.

Verdict: **Meh.**

Some problems: Lying

Post-truth speakers **do not disbelieve** P.

Post-truth speakers **do not intend to deceive** H about P.

Post-truth speakers **do not adopt** H's epistemic standards.

Some problems: Bullshit

Post-truth speakers are **not indifferent** about P.

Post-truth speakers do not see themselves as **hampering inquiry** into P.

Some problems: Epistemic constraints

Given **widespread counterevidence**, one needs to postulate quite formidable constraints in order to render post-truth speakers subjectively justified in believing P.

Empirical support for such constraints (e.g. echo chambers) is sketchy at best. (Bruns 2019,)

Some problems: Alternative epistemic norms

Post-truth speakers seemingly *want to be right* in the conventional, intersubjectively binding sense.

(Setting aside questions of internal coherence.)

A recent proposal (e.g. Anderson 2021):

S's prima facie assertion of an empirical belief P
really is some form of statement concerning S's **social identity**.

(Roughly: practically salient features of an agent
establishing membership in a social kind or group.)

“Much populist rhetoric should therefore be understood as **identity-expressive symbolic positioning**, rather than demands made on the basis of empirical findings.

“Build the wall” is not a practical way to stop illegal immigration, but rather an affirmation of who the (real) people are and recognition of who they must be protected from. “Lock her up!” is not based on a legal argument, but a delegitimizing move. “Voter fraud” is not evidence-based, but a grievance against fellow citizens whom populists think do not deserve to vote.”

(Anderson 2021, 24)

Interesting – but **in what way** exactly would uttering “P” relate to S’s identity?

1) Signalling

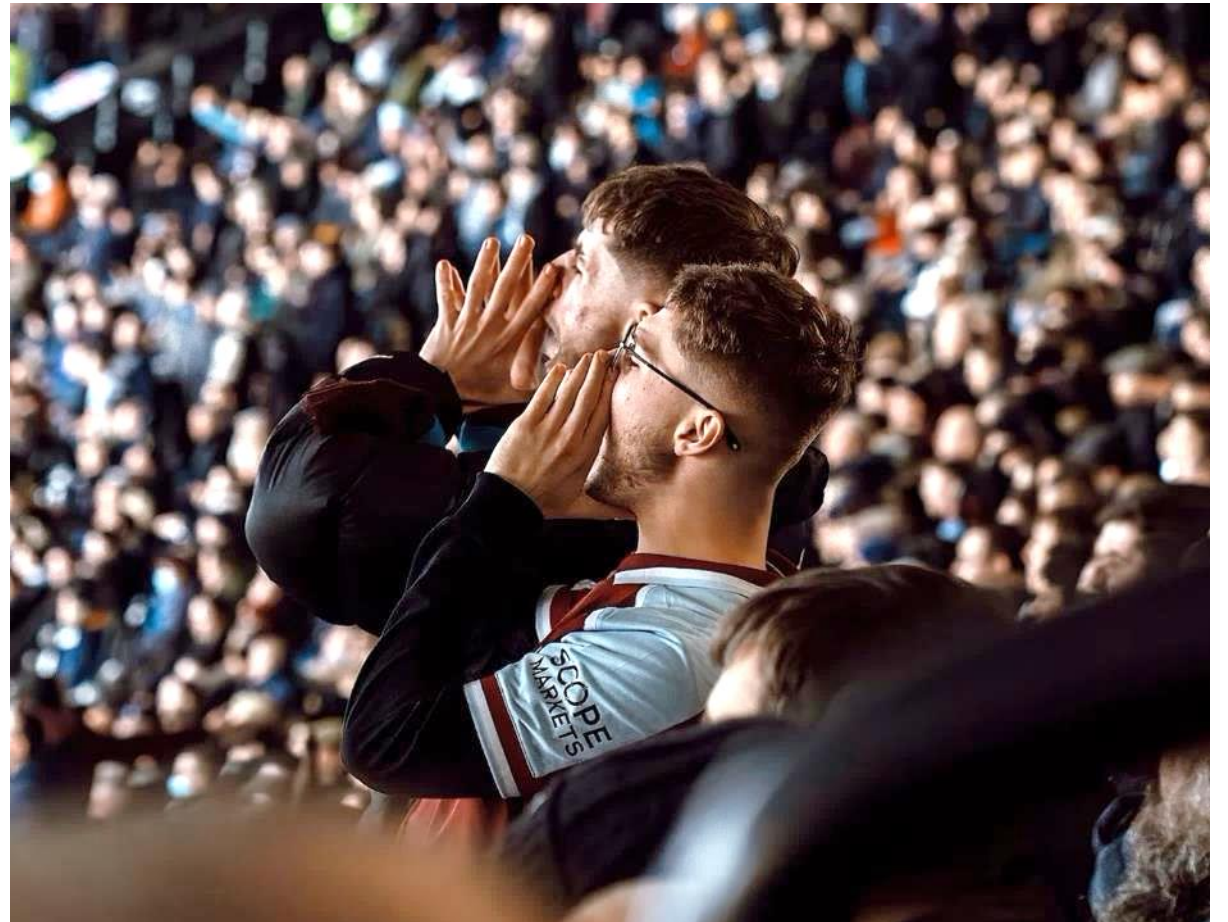


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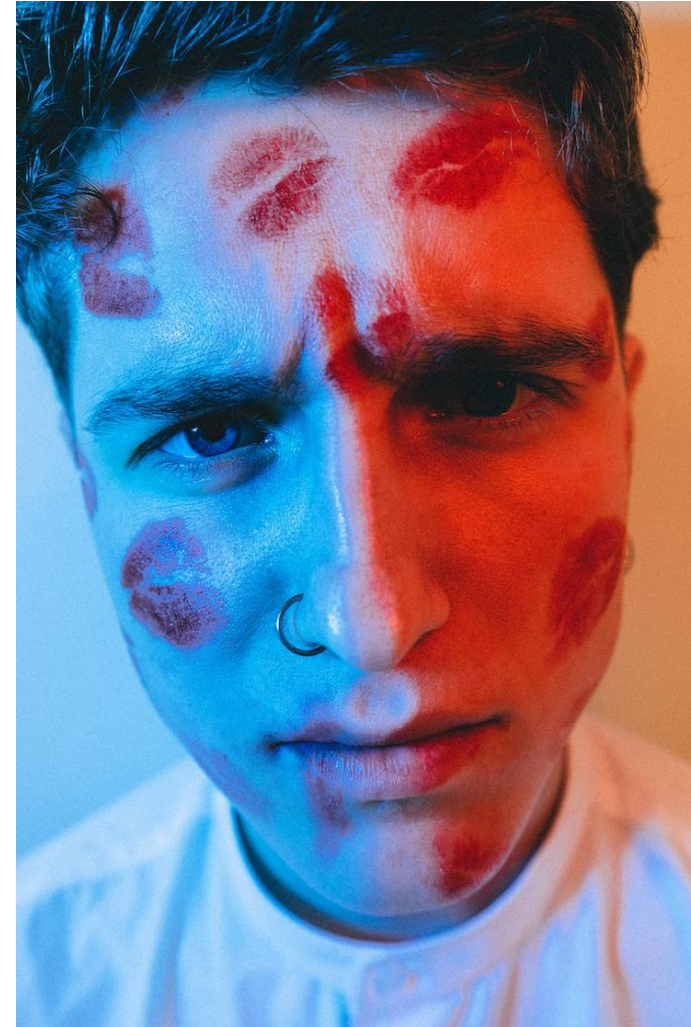
Vice Dean, Faculty of Education
Philosophy w/Children. Co-Presi

2) Expressive affirmation



3) Cognitive dissonance reduction

*¬P contradicts
X-commitments*





4) Identity grounding

Explanatory benefits:

- ✓ Personal investment and defiance towards factual contestation
 - ✓ ‘Immunisation’ against countervailing evidence
- ✓ Sense of a non-standard phenomenon that warrants labelling

Implications: Explaining post-truth

What exactly are they doing? Pick an option!

Are they asserting P? Or are they doing something else entirely?

Implications: Criticising post-truth

What is so bad about this?

Is it that identity commitments play a role in the agent's deliberations that they shouldn't play?

Or is it just that speakers choose problematic means for unproblematic ends?

Implications: Intervening in post-truth

How would we stop someone doing [*this*] from doing it?

For instance, does fact-checking simply miss the point?

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