

Between Post-Critical Pedagogy and Critical Theory: An Educational Response to the Post-Truth Phenomenon

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Abstract:

This article examines cogently what educational strategy is the most appropriate in the climate of truth crisis with rising polarization encountered in the post-truth world. Scholars invoke the affirmative conception of critique to constructively engage with the challenge of the post-truth phenomenon, particularly the us-them dichotomy characteristic of the post-truth narrative. This theory anchors on the notion that while education is incapable of eliminating post-truth phenomena or politics, education can help in the production of an affirmative critique of post-truth, viz. an approach that goes beyond the simple identification of the prevalence or effects of post-truths in educational settings to an approach that foregrounds affirmative discourses that embody present realities. However, this theory risks reinforcing the structural injustice and alienation that characterise post-truth ideology since it overlooks the salience of traditional critique. The preference for affirmation cannot be done at the expense of critically reviewing the current relations of power. The cultivation of critical spirit endorsed by Catholic educational philosophy for which critical theory provides a solid theoretical foundation aids in the contestation of the relativisation and naturalization of facts that underlie the post-truth ideology. Hence we argue that both critique and affirmation are needed to counter the post-truth phenomenon.

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At the close of 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary declared post-truth as the word of the year, and ever since the notion has been used across the universe to speak of the rising anxieties around the present crisis of truth we encounter, in which emotion seems to have displaced fact in moulding public opinion.¹ Present academic currents show that post-truth assumes the form of politically disempowering language which generally is equivalent to lies, the antithesis of truth, fake news, etc. that rob faith in social, cultural, and educational institutions. This emphasis gives priority to the political messages being given by the political demagogues to the remaining populace they rule.² A dichotomous vision of the world which consists of incompatible groups and politics seems to be a constant convention of post-truth.³

Scholars caution that in the post-truth universe, leaders and movements use narratives that intend to pervert history with the intention of excluding those people perceived as essentially unlike.⁴ In the post-truth era, it is not hard to be selective with data and arrive at the conclusion one likes, overlooking empirical evidence to emphasize a specific idea of the world. The political demagogues treat the existing conception of the past as being characterized by a perverted conception of the past that prevents the journey to a still better future. Nevertheless, that which they

1 Jennifer Logue, "Engaging the Post-Truth Crisis in Education Affectively: Elements for a Psychoanalytically Informed Pedagogy," *Philosophical Studies in Education* (2020): 23.

2 David Nally, "Post-Truth, Education and Dissent," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2021): 6.

3 Ibid., 9.

4 Andrea Gallardo Ocampo & Miguel A. Hajar-Chiapa, "Museums as Critical Spaces for Alterity in a Post-Truth World," in *History in a Post-Truth World: Theory & Praxis*, ed. Marius Gudonis & Benjamin T. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2021), 251.

generally treat as a better future fails to concur with the idea of a better future for the entire society but merely for particular groups for which they try to further specific interests. Many leaders and movements with vested interests have employed divisive narratives that explicitly appeal to the emotions of particular persons leading them to feel part of a group with common features and directing them to target resistant groups.⁵ Disinformation drive has successfully worsened the prevailing ideological divides, obstructing collaborative critical reflection across differences.⁶ The aim of mis/disinformation is to worsen current divides and polarization. If mass public viewpoints are moulded by the spread of disinformation that annihilates faith in our cherished institutions, fear and anger are exploited and transformed into misdirected aggression.⁷ The political demagogues are seen to be generating a division between "us" and "them" and induce hatred and resentment against them to enlarge their power base.⁸

The Indian scenario of post-truth illustrates what critical studies on the post-truth phenomenon have clearly underscored. Scholars have spotlighted how the post-truth phenomenon has perniciously impacted the political arena and the educational environment in India, asseverating the phenomenon as a fixation on dishonesty and lying and the resultant disharmony, suspicion, uncertainty, polarized opinions, ill-informed beliefs, the disintegration of trust, etc. Maya Ranganathan contends that fundamental to communication in post-truth India is the spread of fake news and alternative facts, which are accepted as unquestionable truths. Alarming, such communication has

⁵ Ibid., 252.

⁶ Logue, "Engaging the Post-Truth Crisis in Education Affectively," 24.

⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸ Kathrin Braun, "Unpacking Post-Truth," *Critical Policy Studies* 13 (2019): 432.

questioned the existence of a single factual or historical account that is accepted by most people and has permitted multiple narratives believed by various fractions. One is confronted with a surplus of information and powerful persuasions. She illustrates her contentions with the BJP government's studied effort to normalize Hindu nationalism, according to which the markers of one's nationality are culture and ancestry, and re-write national history based on the ideology of Hindu nationalism. Bemoaning the perversion of history by European and secular historians, the Hindutva ideologists seek to create a new India by reverting to a remote past when India and its people enjoyed supreme power contrary to the current state when India is striving hard to find its legitimate place in the contingent of nations. This past draws discriminatorily from myths and history often overlooking the lines that distinguish them in order to provide a singular narrative. She characterizes their attempt to conceptualize a new history for India as imprecise history which involves perceived attempts to distort and obscure historical facts.⁹

Basabi Khan Banerjee and Georg Stöber illustrate how the governments have employed manipulative post-truth strategies in the sphere of education. With the intention of favouring a particular section of the society and targeting some others, NCERT textbooks prepared by the central and state governments have utilized pernicious strategies like half-truths, reinterpretation, forging evidence, lies, distortion, conjectures, omission of data, severing it from historical truth. Memory politics utilizes education through techniques like revising, correcting, and rewriting history. This maneuver is alarmingly distressful because textbooks are "weapons of mass

⁹ Maya Ranganathan, "Re-Scripting the Nation in 'Post Truth' Era: The Indian Story," *Asian Ethnicity* (2019): 1-5.

instruction.”¹⁰ Thus we see an unparalleled increase in the proliferation of fake news, alternative facts, etc. which have hatred on the increase, augmenting the divides between sections of people.

What pedagogical strategy can be employed in this climate of truth crisis, with a constantly rising polarization? In what follows we attempt a critical response to this fundamental question.

1. Post-Critical Pedagogy: Hopeful Pedagogy in a Climate of Hatred

Scholars have shown that post-critical insight can be helpful in the creation of new pedagogies that enable us to better navigate the climate of hatred.¹¹ The advocates of this theory invoke the notion of affirmation of the post-critical pedagogy to defend their argument. Advocates of post-critical pedagogy treat education as an act of love or an affirmative act, transmitting whatever is worth transmitting so that pupils “can study and renew their meanings”¹² rather than an exposition and rectification of whatever is evil in the world.¹³ A pedagogy based on the exposition of what is wrong with the current world focuses on the revelation of the inherent evils in the world “in view of an ever postponed ideal future.”¹⁴ It considers schools as a free space that is never devoid of the possibility for fresh beginnings and fresh categories of relationship between individuals and the

10 Basabi Khan Banerjee and Georg Stöber, "The Post-Truth Environment: Indian Politics and History of Education," in *History in a Post-Truth World Theory and Praxis*, ed. Marius Gudonis and Benjamin T. Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2021), 166-74.

11 Logue, "Engaging the Post-Truth Crisis in Education Affectively," 23.

12 JorisVlieghe& Piotr Zamojski, "After Post-Modernism: Asking the Right Question," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2018): 2.

13 Marina Schwimmer, "Rorty, Post-Critical Pedagogy and Hope: A Response," *Ethics and Education* 14 (2019): 499.

14 JorisVlieghe& Piotr Zamojski, "After Post-Modernism: Asking the Right Question," 1.

world.¹⁵ The advocates of this pedagogy stress celebrating the present, viewing acts of education as emancipatory goals in themselves instead of aiming for an unachievable utopian ideal of socio-economic and structural transformation.¹⁶ Hence the aim of post-critical pedagogy is a redirection of critique from something that manifests a concealed truth to something that reveals those elements of the present conditions that are neglected both by dominant discourses and practices and by negative critiques that reveal to us how individuals are suppressed by these.¹⁷

Foucault's notion of critique as not being governed in a specific manner,¹⁸ though is a repudiation of the present, is also seen to serve as an affirmation because the choice not to be governed in a particular manner opens the path to other types of thought and action which requires experimentation and reworking. Therefore, educating out of love for the world is relevant and may fetch effective fresh beginnings because it is performed because of an unwillingness for compliance. In the absence of such refusal, education may merely become a blind reproduction.¹⁹

The focus of critique in this approach is not the creation of a new universe or lamentation of its impossibility.²⁰ The focus is on the disregarded power of affirmative critique and its educational implications. Significantly there has of late been an increasing interest in affirmation in the scholarly circle. This

15 Schwimmer, "Rorty, Post-Critical Pedagogy and Hope," 502.

16 Mike Seal, "Introduction: Are Hopeful Pedagogies Possible in Higher Education?" in *Hopeful Pedagogies in Higher Education*, ed. Mike Seal (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 1.

17 Naomi Hodgson et al., "Introduction," in *Post-critical Perspectives on Higher Education Reclaiming the Educational in the University*, ed. Naomi Hodgson et al. (Cham: Springer, 2020), 2.

18 Michel Foucault, *The politics of truth* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), 29.

19 Schwimmer, "Rorty, Post-Critical Pedagogy and Hope," 503.

20 Pol Bargañés-Pedreny, "From Critique to Affirmation in International Relations," *Global Society* (2018): 3.

transition has been termed as the “current affirmative turn”²¹ underscoring the necessity to focus on something other or more than critique,²² which is exhibited as nihilism or opposition. From this perspective, affirmative critique is more focused on the pursuit of an alternative to such a fact that demands an ability to visualize and project the new. Whereas the stress on negation aims to show why critique can result in a liberative reality, the stress on affirmation tries to show how the intricacy and incalculability of reality use imagination to provide fresh solutions to general needs. Hence critique concerns the creation of innovative actions and embodied actions in order to show what it could be.²³

Dutch gender scholar Kathrin Thiele notes that affirmative critique launches change at the present time without the radical promise of a different world presumably avoiding the mess everybody is in. Accordingly, critique is believed to be a matter of virtue, not judgment.²⁴ This idea is drawn upon Foucault's conceptualisation of critique. Foucault would consider such critique to be a critical attitude, a type of association and action that problematizes the ways power and knowledge try to dominate persons. More specifically, engagement in critique implies the consideration of how present structures and conditions build and control individuals' possible ways of practice and remaining in the world.²⁵ For instance, critiquing post-truths in the classroom means the construction of possible practices of being in the world that transcends the us/them

21 Suvi Alt, “Conclusion: Critique and the Politics of Affirmation in International Relations,” *Global Society* 33 (2019): 140.

22 Ibid., 137.

23 DortheStaunæs, “Notes on Inventive Methodologies and Affirmative Critiques of an Affective Edu-Future,” *Research Foundation* 96 (2016): 66f (62-70).

24 Kathrin Thiele, “Affirmation,” in *Symptoms of the Planetary Condition: A Critical Vocabulary*, ed. Mercedes Bunz et al. (Lüneburg: Meson Press), 27.

25 Stephen J Ball, *Foucault as Educator* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017), 56.

polarity that post-truth claims to invoke rather than mere identification of the wrongness of post-truths. Central to Foucault's conception of critique, thus, is the skillfulness of not being controlled,²⁶ viz. the possibilities of opposition and innovation in association with self. Significantly, as London University's Stephen J Ball argues, Foucault's conception of critique does not imply a set of specific practices somebody should do to avoid or resist the phenomenon of being dominated, but instead a stable attitude of skepticism.²⁷ Eventually, critique for Foucault is the movement wherewith the subject provides oneself "the right to question truth" on its force of power and power about "its discourses of truth."²⁸

Foucault views critique as an action of freedom wherein persons practice self-reflection without being directed by others, thereby making an ethical and political position of not being dominated in specific ways.²⁹ To expound on this concept, Foucault speaks more loosely about 'counter-conduct' which means the tussles and types of opposition against the processes used for controlling subjectivities in "the every day". By this description of critique, Foucault tries to understand the various angles and inter-relationships of both action of resistance and action of governance. Foucault's review concentrates on the practices instead of the ideologies wherewith counter-conduct is enacted. According to him the procedures of counter-conduct entail specific enactments that equip "a critical alternative to become new form of power."³⁰

Significantly, Foucault views critique as genealogy which

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The politics of truth* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), 29.

²⁷ Ball, *Foucault as Educator*, 66f.

²⁸ Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 32.

²⁹ Ibid., 29.

³⁰ Lars Thorup Larsen, "Turning Critique Inside Out: Foucault, Boltanski and Chiapello on The Tactical Displacement of Critique and Power," *Distinktion Journal of Social Theory* 12 (2011): 43.

focuses on becoming or how something has originated and how it can become different. Thus he reformulates critique as thinking critically within a system that does not function via transition from falsehood to truth but embracing an experimental approach.³¹ The focus here is not on the separation of the true from the false but on the identification of what is significant for true and false in a specific situation at a specific time. Liberation, therefore, entails not the removal of the ideological mask thrust on individuals in order to let them understand the trickery that makes their dominion possible but the contestation of the manifest portrayal of what they consider true while admitting the possibility of other representations.³² Hence critique means critical thinking based on an experimental attitude rather than moving from falsehood to truth.³³

Central to the conceptualisation of critique here is that critique needs virtue, not judgment. Virtue here entails the practice wherewith the self fashions itself in "desubjugation" or the abandonment of the practices of judgment "in favour of a riskier practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint."³⁴ This notion of critique is a moral practice since its focus is on the "aesthetics of existence" or the way to conduct one's life specifically in accordance with the technique of not being governed in a particular manner.³⁵ Critique as virtue is not a manner of submitting to pre-determined norms, but a critical correlation with those norms.³⁶ Engagement in critique hence is

31 Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1984), 46.

32 Didier Fassin, "The Endurance of Critique," *Anthropological Theory* (2017): 14.

33 Michalinos Zembylas, "Affirmative Critique as a Practice of Responding to the Impasse Between Post-Truth and Negative Critique: Pedagogical Implications for Schools," *Critical Studies in Education* (2020): 6.

34 Judith Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 321.

35 Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 29.

36 Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, 305.

trying to make oneself a different subject.³⁷ Hence, critique is associated with the formation of self as being critical of an authority which postures as categorical needs a criticality with self-transformation at the center.³⁸ From this perspective, critical attitude in the social spheres like education is viewed as a continuous process of desubjectivation.³⁹

Responding to post-truth based on the above conception of critique as practice entails the affirmation of the caring of the present situations like democracy, secularism, equality, etc. through one's practices. Thus this approach provides a viable escape from the difficult edifices and results of negative critique of post-truths.⁴⁰

An educational theory of affirmative critique as a pedagogical approach as a viable response to post-truths in educational settings would entail not merely the combating of the "government by lying"⁴¹ but a defense of what is deemed valuable, but is threatened⁴² like social justice, citizenship, wellbeing, democracy, and the focus of education is on such valuable matters.⁴³ This means the endorsement of the significance of our current practices and hence what is considered

37 Frieder Vogelmann, "Critique as a Practice of Prefigurative Emancipation," *Distinktion* 18 (2017): 198.

38 Butler, *The Judith Butler Reader*, 311.

39 Deborah Youdell, "Subjectivation and Performative Politics—Butler Thinking Althusser and Foucault: Intelligibility, Agency and the Raced-Nationed-Religioned Subjects of Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (2006): 525f.

40 Zembylas, "Affirmative Critique," 10.

41 Michael A Peters, "Education in a Post-Truth World," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 6 (2017): 565.

42 Naomi Hodgson, et al., "Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy," in *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy*, ed. Naomi Hodgson et al. (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2017), 15.

43 Naomi Hodgson et al., "Education and the Love of the World: Articulating a Post-Critical Educational Philosophy," *Foro De Educación*, 16, n3: 13.

worth preserving and transmitting to the future.⁴⁴ This affirmation has to be practiced while not being unaware of all probable perils and imperfections of that universe.⁴⁵ What is treated as valuable or as norms are attitudes which serve as the foundation for pupils to form one's own life. These principles are not merely beliefs one upholds but are manifested in behaviour.⁴⁶ In other words, affirmative critique to challenge post-truth is the judicious composition of alternative counter-practices towards post-truth that replace the uncritically accepted postulations about the present and future. For instance, if teachers want to cultivate the value of secularism in the students, its force has to be approached historically since the truth of something is obtainable only within one regime of thought. To overcome disdain among different persons and sections, teachers will have to survey the power-impacts of truth regimes and the emotional tactics employed for the acceptance or rejection of secularism. This approach will help the teachers to detect the correlation between emotions and truth (or post-truth) regimes and identify little practices in the educational setting which could overcome the us/them divide.⁴⁷

The problem with the affirmative critique or pedagogy is that it eliminates critique. The way the theorists of affirmative critique understand the world seems vague, hazy, turbulent, embroiled and submerged in continual and grave injustice and inequality. More significantly these theorists risk depoliticizing critique or the possibility of evaluating and comprehending prevalent power relations and the social and historical circumstances which have enabled the prevalence of affirmation.⁴⁸ In other words, affirmative pedagogy undermines

44 Hodgson, *et al.*, "Manifesto," 18.

45 Hodgson *et al.*, "Education and the Love of the World," 15f.

46 *Ibid.*, 14, 16.

47 Michalinos Zembylas, "The Affective Grounding of Post-Truth: Pedagogical Risks and Transformative Possibilities in Countering Post-Truth Claims," *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* (2019): 10f.

48 Bargués-Pedreny, "From Critique to Affirmation in International Relations," 11.

the importance of producing a critical grasp of the reasons for the discourse on inequality and religious and cultural polarization that underlie post-truth politics thereby failing to focus persistently on the alienation of the persons viewed as different and their sufferings and allowing the disappearance of the historical types of suffering from sight.⁴⁹ Therefore in what follows we shall investigate the significance of a critical spirit in its traditional sense of deciphering truth in contesting the post-truth phenomenon.

2. The Pedagogy of Practicing Critique and Attending to Truth

In the Post-Vatican Catholic philosophy, there is an augmented emphasis on the promotion of a critical spirit. Obstructing someone's capacity to criticize and review beliefs and norms is seen to be causing her or him a sort of harm.⁵⁰ Since the II Vatican Council, it has been held that knowledge and learning need to result in questions and critical involvement to help students think for themselves since knowledge and learning are communitarian in character, with broader social implications.⁵¹ Although the person's ultimate goal, that is, union with God guides the Catholic school, it possesses its own immediate and practical goals, all serving the prime end of education, which is the personal and spiritual liberty of the student. The intellectual goal of education concerns the acquisition of knowledge, truth, understanding, and personal judgments.⁵²

⁴⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 216.

⁵⁰ Sean Whittle, "Towards a Contemporary Philosophy of Catholic Education: Moving the Debate Forward," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 6 (2014): 51.

⁵¹ Mario O D'Souza, "Further Reflections on a Catholic Philosophy of Education," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 10 (2019): 9.

⁵² Ibid.

Teachers' responsibility is to liberate the mind to help the student with the thinking and expressing of themselves. Discernment is integral to teaching and since education is an act of emancipation, the teacher her/himself needs to be liberated from enslaved lives. Emancipation occurs when the teacher or student views the world as more than an amalgamation of things and material realities. It comes into existence via the subjects judging, deciding, and acting.⁵³ In the post-truth context, it would involve the transformation of knowledge and transformation of pedagogy. The focal point of critical pedagogy is the correlation between knowledge and power. By showing that knowledge is inherently entwined with power, critical pedagogy resolutely and relentlessly rejects the dominant conception of knowledge as objective and unbiased. Founded on this assumption that knowledge is power, ideology critique and discourse evaluation are used as strong conceptual means in explaining the interconnection between knowledge and power. Chief power dynamics in the society like religion are emphasised in this attempt to critically evaluate relations between power and knowledge. From this process, critical pedagogy tries to build counter-hegemonic types of knowledge and hence power. Here the focus is on the ideological role of school knowledge rather than organizing and providing school knowledge in the best way to students. It asks the following questions: "Whose knowledge? For whose benefit? At whose expense?"⁵⁴

Scholars have shown that similar thoughts have been echoed by Bernard Lonergan in his philosophy of education.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁴ Seehwa Cho, "Politics of Critical Pedagogy and Newer Social Movements," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 42 (2010): 311.

⁵⁵ Education was not the chosen area for Lonergan. In 1959 he gave a series of 20 lectures to a group of 55 Catholic educators. These lectures would form the foundations of a philosophy of education where the philosopher deals with subjects of concern to educators. cf. Paddy Walsh, "From Philosophy to Theology of Catholic Education, with Bernard Lonergan Karl Rahner," *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 10 (2018): 133.

Lonergan's contribution is the investigation of the nature of knowledge and its consequences for knowledge and learning. Knowing something entails proceeding to right judgments. It is not reducible to sensory experience and empirical data.⁵⁶ The students' questioning and critical spirit is important in proceeding from data to commitment since consciousness is experience-based, intelligent, reflective, and rational. The role of the teacher is not to provide understanding, but their systematic search for truth is what produces understanding.⁵⁷

Lonergan focuses on self-awareness or one's levels of experience. He terms this self-awareness conversion, as a way of self-transcendence or moving beyond self. It makes up part of humans' challenge as children to differentiate self from the immediate universe surrounding them and ultimately leads them to where they stand on their own feet. Such self-affirmation signifies the differentiation of truth from myth.⁵⁸ He asserts that judgments are the sole way to the journey and approximation of the truth. A judgment whether true or erroneous specifically is the ascertainment of the independence of the significant situation from itself. Otherwise, it is nothing absolutely.⁵⁹

Carmody understands clearly how Lonergan's focus on the subject transforms the way education is understood. It is acquired in two ways: the ascending movement starting with experience, understanding, evaluation, and decision making. The downward movement generated in the family starts with values, taking to a reflection on values and judgments. Both these movements are seen to be essential to integral education.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ D'Souza, "Further Reflections," 10.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁸ Brendan Carmody, "Towards a Contemporary Catholic Philosophy of Education," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 3 (2011): 109.

⁵⁹ Walsh, "From Philosophy to Theology," 139.

⁶⁰ D'Souza, "Further Reflections," 3.

Although the Catholic philosophy of education has aptly upheld the cultivation of critical spirit which is central to wiping out post-truth claims and cultivation of truth, its theoretical repository does not provide an easy solution to the post-truth challenge. Hence we now turn to a concise discussion on Critical Theory which shares a strong affinity with the Catholic philosophy of education. Like the Catholic philosophy of education, the end of Critical Theory is to be found in the quest for truth because the quest for truth is intended to live a life independent of domination. Hence he views critical theory as emancipatory.⁶¹

The critical theory views dominant ideology as essentially manipulative and deceitful. From the viewpoint of critical theory, the critical individual is one who is capable of recognizing this manipulation and determining the way the ethic of totalitarianism coerces persons into modes of living that sustains religious and cultural oppression. Educating critical thinking hence includes educating individuals to detect the seemingly normal pretension of daily life and understand the way ideological exploitation succeeds in keeping persons silent and under control. The critical theory tradition also clearly demonstrates a definite enemy to critical thinking – the prevalence of dominant ideologies that make sure that the majority receive these ideologies undisputedly.⁶²

Scholars on critical pedagogy provide a similar line of thought when they argue that it provides alternatives that uphold cultural or religious distinction and emphasise the just treatment

61 Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge: MIT, 1978), vii.

62 Stephen Brookfield, "Speaking Truth to Power: Teaching Critical Thinking in the Critical Theory Tradition," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Thinking in Higher Education*, ed. Martin Davies & Ronald Barnett (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 531.

of the people marginalised as different.⁶³ It elucidates the manner wherewith individual masters the skill of recognizing the way unjust dominant ideologies, which form behavior and maintain an unjust system intact by making it look normal, are implanted in everyday situations and practices. It tries to grasp this situation as a proclulsion to changing it.⁶⁴

This pedagogical approach, however, has been criticized for being ill-equipped to challenge the us-them dichotomy generated by post-truth politics.⁶⁵ A dominant criticism of the critical theory is that it too easily identifies who is good (e.g. critical theorists) and who is bad (e.g. religious fanatics). This argument is certainly true partly. Critical theorists do draw critical attention to what they perceive as manipulation of power, and they do consider some ideologies as detrimental and some executors of those ideologies as agents of distress and damage.⁶⁶ This is because critical reflection revolves around a notion of ideology. It revolves around a difference between right and wrong. There is invariably a particular kind of knowledge (non-totalitarian, non-fanatic, etc.) that is upheld and another sort of knowledge (dominant, essentializing, etc.) that is critiqued.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the critical theory model possesses an inherent self-critical strain in it.⁶⁸

It has also been criticised for denying the power of humans to function in their own rational interests. The attribution of erroneous knowledge to some would amount to dealing with

⁶³ Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "Beyond Postmodern Feminist Critical Pedagogy," in *Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy*, ed. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 189.

⁶⁴ Brookfield, "Speaking Truth to Power," 530.

⁶⁵ Michalinos Zembylas, "The Affective Grounding of Post-Truth," 9.

⁶⁶ Brookfield, "Speaking Truth to Power," 531.

⁶⁷ Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 88-95.

⁶⁸ Brookfield, "Speaking Truth to Power," 532.

them in an epistemologically authoritarian manner as it considers knowledge of what is significant as a rational motive to the epistemically advantaged theorist.⁶⁹ It holds true when theorists claim to have greater knowledge than the objects of their evaluation viz. contemporary persons or members of totalitarian or fanatical movements – the latter's rational preferences and the errors in their thoughts.⁷⁰ It has been shown that critical theory engenders a new rupture between the people who champion truth, rationality, evidence, and the concrete reality and the people that endanger it.⁷¹ The post-truth narrative positions science, intellectuals, academics, and the educated in the truth camp, making a fortress against the further proliferation of post-truth.⁷² Critics of critical theory argue that owing to this fact, this phenomenon has escalated the resistance of two groups that wrangle to make their version dominate the public discourse: the expert elites and the political rabble-rousers.⁷³ This is a reversion into the dichotomies and the politics of hatred and resentment.⁷⁴

However, these contentions should not stop one from taking a clear stand on the increasingly clear crisis of the post-truth time. Taking a clear stand demands that we make a distinct and perceivable differentiation between truth and falsehood. Such a differentiation does not compulsorily show disrespect for the adherents of the criticised beliefs or deal with them in an

69 Maeve Cooke, "Resurrecting the Rationality of Ideology Critique: Reflections on Laclau on Ideology", *Constellations* 13 (2006): 4.

70 Sebastian Schindler, "The Task of Critique in Times of Post-Truth Politics," *Review of International Studies* 46 (2020): 390.

71 Rafat Pwet Wierzchostawski, "The Post-Truth Condition and Social Distribution of Knowledge: On Some Dilemmas with Post-Truth Uses," in *History in a Post-Truth World: Theory & Praxis*, ed. Marius Gudonis & Benjamin T. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2021), 66.

72 Kathrin Braun, "Unpacking Post-Truth," *Critical Policy Studies* 13 (2019): 436.

73 Andrea Gallardo Ocampo & Miguel A. Hajar-Chiapa, "Museums as Critical Spaces for Alterity in a Post-Truth World," 252.

74 Kathrin Braun, "Unpacking Post-Truth," 436.

authoritarian way. If one is convinced that somebody's beliefs are erroneous and misleading, the best manner of showing one's respect for that individual is to express explicitly and directly what one thinks is problematic with such beliefs. This exactly is the function of critique with regard to post-truth. The reluctance to indicate what is erroneous about the beliefs of others is because, in a moment of relativizing critique, the very notion of a criterion that enables to differentiate right from erroneous knowledge is devalued.⁷⁵

Reputed thinkers like Bruno Latour understood quite early on that there exists a problem with the presently dominant approaches to critique. In an influential article published in 2004 French philosopher Latour laments that critique perceived to be a definite set of methods showing skepticism and questioning tacit beliefs has ultimately recoiled. Questioning scientifically proven truths had exceeded the limits of what is reasonable, particularly by scholars who attempted to find out the actual biases underlying the appearance of objective assertions, gradually concluding that natural unmediated or unbiased access to truth is impossible. In his review, Latour shows that such assertions are based on a controverting critical spirit and their media are distrust and doubt. Therefore he concludes that critique has lost its impetus because of its complicity in the relativization of facts and the consequent inability to challenge the politically malignant skepticism of facts.⁷⁶ Robert Mejia et al. shows that this observation is apt in the prevailing scenario of the post-truth age wherein pessimism and deconstruction reign supreme, specifically by those who propagate negativity and detestation of the other.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Schindler, "The Task of Critique," 390.

⁷⁶ Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225-48.

⁷⁷ Robert Mejia et al., "White Lies: A Racial History of the (Post)Truth," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15 (2018); 118f.

Nevertheless, Latour is right only in so far as the dominant conception of ideology is just focused on the issue of naturalisation. Critique cannot be blamed for this crisis. Like the previous ideologies, the post-truth discourse blends relativisation and naturalisation. Rather than merely relativising truth, it also naturalises the trust in particular facts. The role of critique is the confrontation and challenging of this ideology, thus giving direction and orientation in the pursuit of liberation.⁷⁸

Canadian political scholar Robert W. Cox provides a significant key to explaining how critical theory achieves its goal of contesting post-truth ideology. The critical theory according to Cox stands free from the dominant order of the concrete world and investigates the origin of such order. It does not unquestionably accept the dominant world order; it investigates the historicity or origins of this order and its changes or contingency. He holds that critical theory is characterised by transcendence of simple relativism. Hence he holds that the more advanced a theory is, the greater is its reflection on and transcendence of its own standpoint.⁷⁹ Transcendence is a pivotal value of critical theory according to Cox. Critical theory realises the standpoint which engenders theorising and its association with other standpoints. It attains a "perspective on perspectives."⁸⁰

However, while it achieves a transcendence on its own perspective, the critical theory remains confined to a specific standpoint, in the sense that its first sense is still contained in it and that remains a perspective on perspectives. Hence the critical theory is at the same time a specific perspective and a perspective

78 Schindler, "The Task of Critique," 378.

79 Robert Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium* 10 (1981): 129.

80 Ibid., 128.

that moves beyond perspectives, a standpoint which cannot be narrowly understood as simply the perspective of others, but a perspective that moves beyond the others specifically by having understood them and still having retained its own perspective. Here thus is seen the limit point of the binary of ideology as naturalisation and theory as relativisation. Rather than merely revealing perspectivity, the critical theory itself tries to gain a perspective that is greater than a simple temporally and spatially conditioned perspective. Hence critical theory displays the relativity of all perspectives and at the same time works towards objectivity, in the sense of transcending the relativity of its own perspective to attain a standpoint on standpoints. The characteristic of critical theory hence is not merely the admittance of the historicity of knowledge, but also a transcendence of historicity in favour of objectivity.⁸¹

The ideological challenge posed by the post-truth phenomenon to the critical theory is an enormous one; veritably more enormous than what is perceivable from the preceding discussion. As shown above, this ideological challenge has a dual nature. The relativisation of all truth coexists with naturalised trust in particular facts. This ideology spotlights a particular figure of reflection that mixes cynicism with naivety, which amounts to a submission of the human power for free and critical reflection. Naivety and cynicism indicate a uniquely unliberated state of human consciousness. They indicate domination or absolute domination. This critical evaluation of post-truth ideology shows that critical theory has lost its enthusiasm, but these cynical approaches indicate that critical evaluation requires reinvigoration.⁸²

This reinvigoration presupposes a type of knowledge that is not simply subjective and relative to one's own standpoint. It

⁸¹ Schindler, "The Task of Critique," 380.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 389.

presupposes a transcendent perspective from which one can associate the standpoint of one's own with that of another. A perspective on perspectives can be attained specifically by engaging seriously and critically with other standpoints. This perspective is not separated from any perspective nor wholly contained in one. It is neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective. Rather than merely overcoming the criticized perspective via intersubjective dialogue,⁸³ critique of ideology makes one's conceptualisation more objective. It is the case because the ideology's errors possess an element of truth, the element one can spotlight and unveil through critique. The truth of the ideology is not true in the sense of delivering an accurate picture of the reality of society; but it is a fact about a society that requires to be understood and unveiled in assertions that are explicitly erroneous, assertions like the post-truth claims we have discussed.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The foregoing was a critical investigation of the pedagogical lenses of the contestation of the post-truth ideology. Current educational theorists uphold an affirmative conception of critique to constructively tackle the challenge of the post-truth phenomenon, most prominently addressing the us-them dichotomy characteristic of the post-truth narrative or discourse or narrative. This theory has been shown to enable students and teachers to go beyond the us/them or true/erroneous polarities. Critique as affirmation would fundamentally entail the ability to contest an authority that imposes itself as truth. This attitude aids one to affirm the caring of the current reality like tolerance, mutual co-existence, secularism, etc. through one's ethical

83 Ibid., 390.

84 Ibid., 391.

practices. That which is esteemed as valuable or normative like tolerance or democracy forms the bases for students to mould their life. What is upheld here is the current reality and human commonalities rather than an education to fight the present situation. Therefore, this pedagogical ethics is founded on the affirmation that despite the post-truths we encounter in the world, there is something valuable we wish to conserve and transmit.⁸⁵ The proponents of this theory hold that education cannot eliminate post-truth phenomena or politics; nevertheless, it can contribute towards the cultivation of an affirmative critique of post-truths, viz. a critique that transcends the mere identification of the existence or results of post-truths in educational settings to the one that foregrounds hopeful and positive narratives that embody current realities.⁸⁶

Nonetheless, these theorists risk buttressing structural injustice, inequality, and alienation that underlie post-truth politics and ideology. The scholars who uphold the affirmative pedagogy in dealing with the post-truth phenomenon are that they have totally undermined the value of traditional critique. Affirmative critique is also a project of critique understood in terms of actual epistemological structures of domination. Hence the prioritisation of affirmation should not be done at the cost of evaluating prevalent relations of domination. More specifically both critique and affirmation are required.⁸⁷

Catholic Philosophy has rightly endorsed the necessity of the cultivation of critical spirit in its educational theory. However, its reflections are insufficient to respond adequately to the

⁸⁵ Hodgson *et al.*, "Education and the Love of the World," 16, 18.

⁸⁶ Michalinos Zembylas "Affect, Biopower, and 'The Fascist Inside You': The (Un-)making of Microfascism in Schools and Classrooms," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* (2020): 10.

⁸⁷ Suvi Alt, "Conclusion," 140.

challenge of the post-truth ideology probably because the Catholic educational philosophy is still considerably in its early stage of transition from its catechetical focus. Critical theory with which the Catholic educational philosophy shares close ideological propinquity shows that post-truth ideology essentially is a combination of the relativisation and naturalisation of facts. The role of critique is the confrontation and contestation of this ideology thus giving direction and orientation in the striving for emancipation from the grips of post-truth ideology.