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## EMOTIVE SOURCES OF POST-TRUTH

### Abstract

The first part of this paper briefly presents the phenomenon of post-truth, which is then confronted with emotivism, a position of 20th-century ethics or meta-ethics that ascribes an emotive and evocative meaning to ethical judgements, rather than a descriptive one. The second part shows briefly the theories of two main representatives of this view, namely A.J. Ayer and Charles Stevenson. The third part focuses on the objections to emotivism, primarily presented by Alasdair MacIntyre. Finally, the influence of emotivism on post-truth is discussed.

Keywords: post-truth, emotivism, Ayer, Stevenson, MacIntyre

### INTRODUCTION

Those who have investigated the phenomenon of post-truth point to its numerous sources, placing them all in the second half of the 20th century. However, it seems that the origin of post-truth should be sought in the 1930s and 1940s. That is when emotivism appeared: the view claiming that there is no objective truth in ethics. This text will be devoted to the characteristics and criticism of emotivism, as well as its relationship to post-truth.

### 1. POST-TRUTH

Post-truth as a phenomenon has been defined relatively recently. It is generally accepted that the term first appeared in the text of Steve Tesich, an American dramatist of Serbian background, who wrote:

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We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.<sup>2</sup>

Post-truth is defined as a phenomenon in which objective facts have a lesser influence on public opinion and personal convictions. Post-truth, according to Mathew d’Ancona, is “the triumph of the visceral over the rational, the deceptively simple over the honestly complex” (d’Ancona 2017, 20).<sup>3</sup> Post-truth is first of all an emotional phenomenon. It concerns – as d’Ancona stresses – our attitude to truth, rather than truth itself (d’Ancona 2017, 130). Contemporary man has made himself immune to truth – non-truth speaks to him increasingly more frequently and more strongly. Objective facts have less impact on people than emotions since facts require analysis and reflection, and then their interpretation. Emotions take possession of us and somehow decide for us. We control facts, while emotions control us. Facts have ceased to depend on reality. A fact is what is recognised as a fact by the media or opinion-forming centres.

Ralph Keyes shows lies as a constitutive element of post-truth. He claims that in the post-truth era, the borders between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction have been blurred. Deceiving others becomes something of “leisure activity” (Keyes 2004, 12). As he further notes, there is a great temptation and a slight penalty for “fictionalized stories” about one’s life. Keyes talks about the routinization of dishonesty, “Most of us lie and are lied to on the regular basis” (Keyes 2004, 11)<sup>4</sup>: “What concerns me is the loss of a stigma attached to telling lies, and a widespread acceptance of the fact that lies can be told with impunity.” (Keyes 2004, 13). As he emphasizes, “Circumstances that condone

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kreitner. 2016, November 30. Post-Truth and Its Consequences: What a 25-Year-Old Essay Tells Us About the Current Moment, *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/post-truth-and-its-consequences-what-a-25-year-old-essay-tells-us-about-the-current-moment/>.

<sup>3</sup> Post-truth is “priority accorded to emotion over evidence” and “to trigger emotions, not to win an evidence-based debate”. (d’Ancona, 2017, 66, 121).

<sup>4</sup> In some research, it has been, proved that on average we lie 13 times a week (Keyes 2004, p. 12).

dishonesty have risen while those that nurture honesty are in decline” (Keyes 2004, 19).

People lie for various reasons: to beautify their lives, not wanting to hurt someone, to get a better job or win voters’ support. People accept lies, among other things, for fear that if we condemn them, someone will also accuse us of lying once. People are not without guilt, and feeling guilty does not allow them to stand up for the truth. However, people do not see the absurdity of this way of thinking. In reducing it to absurdity, people would have to say that, for example, a judge issuing a verdict has no right to do so because he lies in his/her private life, and many a time also in public. In such a situation, no one would have the right to condemn anyone (“let him who is without sin, cast the first stone”).

In wanting to hide their helplessness against lies, while still having a sense of discomfort, people try to tame and trivialise them by employing euphemisms. Therefore, a lie is a “pulled truth,” “indulgence in honesty,” “passing away from the truth,” “colouring reality,” etc.; a liar is someone who “has no access to the truth at the moment” (Keyes 2004, 18,19, 162).

Some scholars claim that the source of post-truth is postmodernism and its criticism of getting to know objective truth,<sup>5</sup> pop culture or development of new technologies, especially the Internet. Keyes says that the reason why post-truth is being spread is:

the growing influence of lie-tolerant mentors such as therapists, lawyers, and politicians; postmodern intellectual trends in higher education; the increased emphasis on “storytelling” throughout society; the impact of electronic media, with their indifference to veracity; baby-boomer alt.ethics; and the growing amount of time we spend interacting anonymously online (Keyes 2004, 83).

Keyes also includes the weakening of interpersonal relationships as factors affecting the spread of post-truth: “The ideal is to combine a strong sense of connectedness with a robust sense of right and wrong. We have the worst of both worlds: a declining sense of community and eroding ethics” (Keyes 2004, 37). As d’Ancona notes, “all succesful societies rely upon

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<sup>5</sup> d’Ancona portrays postmodernism as a source of post-truth, writing that the era of post-truth has “a basis in the postmodern philosophy of the late twentieth century...” (d’Ancona, 2017, 91).

a relatively high degree of honesty to preserve order, uphold the law, hold the powerful to account and generate prosperity” (d’Ancona 2017, 36).

Let us add that post-truth is also associated with the philosophy of activism. The contemporary world is a world of activists, people who are active, not contemplating.<sup>6</sup> The life of a philosopher compared with the life of a traveller, leader or celebrity is considered boring and uninteresting. (How many people have read a biography of Kant and how many have read biographies of David Beckham or John F. Kennedy?).<sup>7</sup> Contemporary man must be active and stimulated. While truth is the object of contemplation, post-truth is meant to be an incentive for action.<sup>8</sup> To do this, it must be attractive – so it must appeal to one’s emotions, not to one’s intellect.

Post-truth also feeds on man’s natural drive towards novelty. Man always wants something new and abandons what is known and familiar. When truth is not enough, post-truth appears. Post-truth makes life more attractive. Since one of the threats to contemporary man is boredom, he does everything to get rid of boredom. Post-truth makes it easy for him. How many times do we lie without being forced to do so? “It’s no longer assumed” – Keyes observes – “that truth telling is even our default setting” (Keyes 2004, 10).

In addition to the above-mentioned factors underlying post-truth, one more element not discussed in the publications concerning this phenomenon should be mentioned. It seems that the origin of the phenomenon of post-truth can be traced back to the 1930s and 1940s. It was then that emotivism appeared as a meta-ethical theory, whose supporters believed

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<sup>6</sup> Pragmatism also had a significant impact on the concept of truth resp. post-truth. According to pragmatists, a theory is true if it works, is useful or socially practical. Truth is action; any judgment that is to be considered true must have practical consequences. These consequences must be useful. Truth must be useful. Thus, if utility is the ultimate criterion of truth and if truth itself ceases to be useful, according to neopragmatic assumptions, then post-truth can try to satisfy this utilitarian criterion. Truth is no longer an end in itself, or even epistemic. According to pragmatists, thinking is for action, not cognition. Acquiring knowledge thus becomes a practical and not a theoretical activity; it ceases to be contemplative and gains an active character. The subject is no longer an observer, but becomes a participant in the knowledge-forming process.

<sup>7</sup> “The most insistent self-embellishment occurs among those who combine a shaky self-image with great powers of imagination. They use their creativity to feed a hungry ego” (Keyes 2004, 64).

<sup>8</sup> Let us note that the tendency to marginalize contemplation also occurs in contemporary art where contemplation has been replaced by interaction.

that ethical judgments did not describe anything, did not refer to any reality external to the subject involved, but merely expressed or evoked emotions. In my view, therefore, it is emotivism that should be seen as one of the main sources of post-truth.

## 2. EMOTIVISM

It seems that contemporary Western societies have been prepared for post-truth. Not only has it not surprised them, but they have accepted it as something natural and necessary. The ground for contemporary post-truth has been prepared, among others, by emotivism with its concept of the emotive meaning of moral judgments. Thus, ethical decline as a result of accepting dishonesty<sup>9</sup> is a consequence of the re-evaluation of ethical judgments by emotivists.

### 2.1. ALFRED J. AYER'S CONCEPTION

The essence of emotivism was captured by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, writing in 1923:

But another use of the word is often asserted to occur, of which some at least of those which we have cited are supposed to be degenerations, where "good" is alleged to stand for a unique, unanalysable concept. This concept, it is said, is the subject-matter of Ethics. 1 This peculiar ethical use of "good" is, we suggest, a purely emotive use. When so used the word stands for nothing whatever, and has no symbolic function. Thus, when we so use it in the sentence, "This is good," we merely refer to tins, and the addition of "is good" makes no difference whatever to our reference. When on the other hand, we say "This is red," the addition of "is red" to "this" does symbolize an extension of our reference, namely, to some other red thing. But "is good" has no comparable symbolic function; it serves only as an emotive sign expressing our attitude to this, and perhaps evoking similar attitudes in other persons, or inciting them to actions of one kind or another (Ogden, Richards 1923, 125).

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<sup>9</sup> As Keyes notes, "Few of us want to think of ourselves as being unethical, let alone admit that to others, so we devise alternative approaches to morality. Think of them as alt.ethics. This term refers to ethical systems in which dissembling is considered okay, not necessarily wrong, therefore not really 'dishonest' in the negative sense of the word" (Keyes 2004, 16).

The fundamental intuitions lying at the basis of emotivism were shown by A.J. Ayer in 1936, in his work entitled *Language, Truth and Logic*, that he published at the age of 26.<sup>10</sup> In this work, especially in its sixth chapter entitled “Critique of Ethics and Theology,” Ayer criticised the contemporary theories of the meaning of ethical judgements.

Indeed, he maintains that basic ethical concepts are not analysed and that moral judgments do not matter in the literal sense; they are merely expressions of emotion and as such they cannot be true or false. They are therefore not subject to argument (Ayer 1978, 136).

Ayer rejects subjectivism claiming that a thing is good and an act is right when they are widely approved. Thus, it is not contradictory to maintain that, that some act is not right although is universally approved; thus, the act is good (Ayer 1978, 138).

He also rejects utilitarianism, arguing that “good” cannot mean “pleasant” or “desirable” (Ayer 1978, 139). Ayer concludes that sentences that contain normative ethical symbols cannot be translated into sentences expressing psychological states or any empirical statements. He emphasises that only normative, not descriptive ethical symbols are indefinable.

For example, when we say “X is bad” it could mean a judgement concerning a certain conduct or a judgement saying some kind of behaviour is unacceptable to a given community. In the latter case, the term “bad” would have a descriptive character (Ayer 1978, 140).

Ayer also rejects intuitionism, believing that the truth of intuition cannot be verified in any way (Ayer 1978, 141). Agreeing with intuitionists that ethical terms are non-analysable he explains this fact by claiming that these are mere pseudo-concepts:

The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, “You acted wrongly in stealing that money,” I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, “You stole that money.” In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, “You stole that money,” in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. (...) If now I generalize my previous statement and say, “Stealing money is wrong,” I produce a sentence that has

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<sup>10</sup> Later, Ayer admitted that Ogden and Richards had paid attention to the emotive use of ethical terms before him and that he owed his conception to them (Ayer 1987, 26).

no factual meaning – that is, expresses no proposition that can be either true or false” (Ayer 1978, 142). (...) “I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments, like the collocations “Go!” – “Is this true?” And “Uff!” “You lie” – does not make sense (quoted in Hudson 1970, 111).

Therefore, if we say that a certain behaviour is right or wrong, we do not present any factual sentence, or even statement, about our state of mind. We only express our moral sentiments (Ayer 1978, 142). Ethical judgments, however, are not a description of the subjective states of the subject, but an expression of these states. Thus, it makes no sense to ask, in Ayer’s opinion, who is right if there is a difference of opinion as “right” can only refer to judgements stating something about certain objects, and not to express emotions about these objects.

The fact that moral judgments are the subject of consideration does not mean that they are disputes about values, but are, according to Ayer, about facts. When we criticise someone’s moral opinion, we refer to facts that in our opinion someone has had to overlook (motives, effects, circumstances) (Ayer 1978, 147). It is assumed here, as Ayer writes, that both our opponent and ourselves share the same moral views, resulting from similar living conditions or moral education. If there is an insurmountable difference in moral views, despite agreeing on the facts, Ayer believes that the discussion should be stopped.

As ethical judgments are not only used to express emotions, but also to arouse emotions, they have both expressive and evocative functions. Ayer emphasises that they also stimulate actions. They are certain orders, as “It is your duty to tell the truth” (Ayer 1978, 147). Moral judgments, thus influencing actions, are not only, or mainly, of a descriptive character. They have a dynamic character. For example, a statement “X is wrong” cannot involve (logically) the question: “Should I do it?” By stating that something is right or wrong, we commit ourselves to taking certain actions, doing what is right and refraining from what is wrong (Hudson 1970, 112).

## 2.2. CHARLES STEVENSON’S CONCEPTION

The American philosopher Charles Stevenson can be considered the founder of emotivism. He aims to explore what people actually do with language in everyday life. Stevenson believes that there are three issues to be clarified in ethics. Firstly, the fact that there is disagreement in ethics; secondly,

the magnetic force of ethical terms and thirdly, the insufficiency of scientific and empirical methods in ethics.

According to Stevenson disagreement has two meanings. The first one concerns disagreement in belief and the other disagreement in attitude (Stevenson 1963, 70–71).<sup>11</sup> Thus disagreement concerns beliefs or attitudes. In disagreement with respect to beliefs there is a dispute in which contrary beliefs cannot be all true, while including attitudes concerning interests that cannot all be jointly satisfied (Stevenson 1963, 70–71). Disagreement with respect to attitudes plays a decisive role in ethical arguments.

Beliefs concern facts, while attitudes refer to the evaluation of these facts. According to Stevenson, ethical judgments express attitudes, but do not describe them. To define this distinction, Stevenson refers to two patterns of analysis of the sentence “This is good.” In the first pattern it means “I approve of this; do so as well;” in the second pattern, the sentence conveys the meaning, “I approve of this and wish you would do so.” Stevenson opts for the first pattern, rejecting the second one as being descriptive (Hudson 1970, 117), since only the first pattern can explain moral conflicts.<sup>12</sup> As Stevenson stresses, conflicts between beliefs and attitudes have an empirical, and not a logical character. This means that agreement in beliefs and attitudes is empirical, not logical. Attitudes, according to Stevenson, are often dependent on resources of knowledge. Changing attitudes can therefore be a consequence of changing beliefs. However, the ethical dispute is not about changing beliefs, but about changing attitudes.

Beliefs are treated instrumentally here; they are useful insofar as they can change attitudes. To influence a change of attitude, one must provide the other side with reasons that would convince them to change their attitude. The dispute in ethics ends when disagreement in attitudes disappears, even if there is disagreement in beliefs. “Since attitudes” – Stevenson writes – “are often functions of beliefs, an agreement in belief may lead people, as a matter of psychological fact, to agree in attitude” (Stevenson 1963, 74). From a logical point of view, disagreement in respect to attitudes can exist even if there is complete agreement in beliefs. Thus, in

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<sup>11</sup> Examples of attitudes, according to Stevenson, can be love and hatred, praise and reprimand (Stevenson 1963, 71).

<sup>12</sup> If someone says that he wants someone else to do A, and this other person says that he does not want to do so, then there is no dispute. The first person describes his “want,” whereas the other describes his “want.”



placing attitudes at the centre of ethics, Stevenson seems to replace logic with psychology.

Stevenson thinks that ethical terms are “magnetic.” This means that in saying “X is good” I do not only express my attitude (approval in this case), but I evoke a similar attitude in others. Therefore, it is not just about expressing attitudes, but about influencing others. This influence is possible thanks to the “dispositional tendency” of ethical terms. According to Stevenson, this tendency can be called the meaning of an ethical term.

Stevenson defines emotive meaning as “a meaning in which the response (from the hearer’s point of view) or the stimulus (from the speaker’s point of view) is a range of emotions”, while “The emotive meaning of a word is the power that the word acquires on account of its history in emotional situations, to evoke or directly express attitudes, as distinct from describing or designating them” (Stevenson 1944, 59).

In Stevenson’s view, moral judgements have both a descriptive and emotive meaning. For example, although “democracy” has now an unambiguously positive emotive meaning, its descriptive meaning was different some time ago (socialist democracies versus Western democracies).

The two kinds of meaning can differ in three ways. First, emotive meaning may depend on descriptive meaning; secondly, these meanings can be independent of each other; thirdly, emotive meaning may be quasi-dependent on descriptive meaning (for example, the emotive meaning of the word “pig” in the sentence, “This man is a pig” is not directly dependent on the definition of the word “pig” but on what it suggests when applied metaphorically to a man).

Stevenson introduces the so-called persuasive definition:

Persuasive definitions are possible only where the emotive meaning of a word is strong and its descriptive, in a measure, vague. The former condition must be fulfilled, if the persuasive definition is to result in any significant redirection of attitude; the latter must be fulfilled to allow room for the maneuver of persuasive definition to take place at all (quoted in Hudson 1970, 128).

Stevenson’s example is as follows: two people, A and B, argue whether C is a person of culture. A regards C as not a person of culture, stressing that C is not well educated, uses grammatically incorrect sentences and obvious literary references. B, concedes that C has all these defects, claims that C is a person of culture since he possesses an imagination that is richer than educated people and is original (Hudson 1970, 211). This

definition, according to Stevenson, is only possible if the emotive meaning of the term is strong and the descriptive one is blurred (as is the case with the term “culture”). In such cases, as Stevenson emphasises that we speak of the “true” or “real” meaning of the term (“real democracy”, “real culture”), where these words have persuasive force.

Stevenson believes that the distinction between truth and falsehood does not apply to emotive meaning. According to him, the original purpose of the language of ethics is to influence others. That is why in ethics we are not dealing with real argumentation and the presentation of reasons to defend some thesis. The reasons themselves are persuasive. This means that persuading others to accept your reasons is to influence them, the purpose being to change attitudes. These reasons appeal to emotions because they have the greatest impact on changing attitudes. Therefore, the reasons are not rational or logical, but psychological.

Regarding the third issue raised by Stevenson, he notes that scientific methods of are insufficient in ethics. Science is about facts while ethics is about attitudes. The dispute in science ends when facts are agreed upon, in ethics when attitudes are agreed upon: “Hence scientific methods are conclusive in ending arguments about values only to the extent that their success in obtaining agreement in belief will in turn lead to agreement in attitude” (Stevenson 1963, 74). Stevenson claims that while scientific methods and rational argumentation may be useful in ethics, they may turn out to be insufficient to resolve disputes in this field. Moreover, normative ethics, Stevenson states, is not a branch of any science (Stevenson 1963, 75).<sup>13</sup>

### 3. OBJECTIONS TO EMOTIVISM<sup>14</sup>

Emotivism was subsequently thoroughly criticised, the main objection being the theory of meaning. It was pointed out that moral terms could be used unintentionally to exert any influence on others, when, for example, we want to agree on our attitudes or clarify them. On the other hand, as emphasised, one can also influence or express your emotions without using

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<sup>13</sup> In this respect, ethics is reminiscent of sophism whose followers used various types of knowledge in order to convince others of their position.

<sup>14</sup> M. Rembierz, an expert in Polish philosophy, remarks that none of the eminent Polish philosophers were seduced by emotivism.

moral terms. For example, one can evoke emotions by saying, “There’s a bomb on the plane.” Attention was also paid to the fact that in sentences containing ethical terms referring to the past, it is the descriptive rather than the emotive meaning that prevails.

Objections to emotivism were formulated, among others, by Richard Brandt in the 1950s (Brandt 1950, 305–318). In his view, emotivism is unable to explain why people, in changing their ethical views, consider their previous views as wrong, and not simply different (Brandt 1950, 386). Changing views is not a matter of taste – “I used to like chocolate ice creams and today I don’t like them anymore” – but it concerns their truthfulness. Brandt also questions Stevenson’s thesis about the “magnetic” influence of ethical terms. Their evocative impact seems doubtful in the case of statements about the past or those in which ethical terms are used in a natural way, e.g. such sentences as “If this situation is morally bad, it solves the matter” or “It must be right or wrong, so let’s think about it and decide what it is.” According to Brandt, ethical terms are not used as such to express attitudes. Sometimes it happens that although one says a certain action is wrong, one is still willing to do it. Then our attitude does not correspond to our belief, as an attitude does not express a belief.

Alasdair MacIntyre formulated other objections to emotivism. Firstly, he believed that emotivists would refrain from describing emotions as expressed in moral judgments, limiting themselves to stating that these feelings were of an approving character. This should be considered as moral approval, i.e. one that is expressed by means of moral judgment. We are, therefore, dealing with a vicious circle. A moral judgment is defined as one that expresses approval, which in turn is referred to as moral, i.e. expressed in moral judgement (MacIntyre 2007, 13). This objection is related to Ayer’s conception,<sup>15</sup> which – according to MacIntyre – cannot show what the difference between moral and nonmoral sentiments concerns:

To say that moral judgments express a sentiment or feeling is vacuous and unhelpful. Of course they do. But what sentiment or feeling? We can find no useful definition of moral sentiment, except as that sentiment which is bound

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<sup>15</sup> MacIntyre also accuses Ayer of incorrectly including moral and theological judgments in the same category. “(...) statements about the intentions and deeds of an omnipotent being and judgments about duty or about what is good do not obviously belong together (MacIntyre 2000).

up with moral judgment. What it is that makes moral judgment and sentiment distinctive, what entitles them to the appellation 'moral,' what their relation is to other kinds of judgment and sentiment — to none of these questions do such theories return an answer (MacIntyre 1965, 15–16).

The second objection relates to the fact that emotivists identify terms concerning personal preferences with evaluative terms. MacIntyre argues that this identification is incorrect since the persuasive force of terms concerning preferences depends on who says them and to whom they are addressed, while this is not the case in the case of evaluative terms it is not as they do not depend on the context (MacIntyre 2007, 13).

Thirdly, MacIntyre points out that expressing feelings and emotions is not a function of the meaning of ethical judgments, but a matter of their use. He criticises emotivists for mixing up the meaning and usage of ethical terms, and that they do not “attend sufficiently to the distinction between the meaning of a statement which remains constant between different uses, and the variety of uses to which one and the same statement can be put” (MacIntyre 2000). Moreover, he states that: “The expression of feeling or attitude is characteristically a function not of the meaning of sentences, but of their use on particular occasions” (MacIntyre 2007, 13). The meaning of the sentence shouted by an upset teacher, “Seven times seven equals forty-nine!” is not the emotion behind it for, as MacIntyre notes, “(...) the use of this sentence to express feelings or attitudes has nothing whatsoever to do with its meaning” (MacIntyre 2007, 13). This also concerns the statement “This is bad,” as it does not mean “I don’t like it; you shouldn’t accept it either!” The former, which Stevenson himself pointed out, has a kind of prestige that the latter does not have. According to MacIntyre, this prestige derives from a reference to an objective and impersonal standard (MacIntyre 2007, 19). Indeed, as MacIntyre concludes “What makes certain statements guides to, or directives of, action is not that they have any meaning over and above a factual or descriptive one” (MacIntyre 2000).

The fourth objection to emotivism formulated by MacIntyre relates to the impossibility of rational resolution of disputes in ethics. Thus, he writes:

For presumably we can use emotive words to commend any class of actions whatsoever. Moreover, if Stevenson is right, evaluative disagreement may always be interminable. There is no limit to the possibilities of disagreement, and there is and can be no set of procedures for the resolution of disagreements.

It is not surprising that this should be a consequence of Stevenson's position, since he himself initially laid it down as one of the prerequisites for a successful theory that it should provide for disagreement to be interminable (MacIntyre 2000).

The above objections to emotivism, along with others, have resulted in it no longer counting as a significant position in meta-ethics. However, it has exerted a significant influence on the psyche of contemporary man.

## CONCLUSION

In criticizing emotivism, MacIntyre also points to its great impact on contemporary man, whose attitude he describes as an emotive self. Such a self "finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgment for such limits could only derive from rational criteria for evaluation and as we have seen the emotivist self lacks any such criteria" (MacIntyre 2007, 31). He stresses that "The unrecognized philosophical power of emotivism is one clue to its cultural power" (MacIntyre 2007, 20). He also notes that "people now think, talk and act as if emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture" (MacIntyre 2007, 22). Since emotivism has not been completely refuted (MacIntyre 2007, 21), MacIntyre has suggested:

that we live in a specifically emotivist culture, and if this is so we ought presumably to discover that a wide variety of our concepts and modes of behavior – and not only our explicitly moral debates and judgments – presuppose the truth of emotivism, if not at the level of self-conscious theorizing, at least in everyday practice (MacIntyre 2007, 22).

One could therefore say that although emotivism has failed as a theory of meaning, it has survived as a theory of usage, one which echoes in the contemporary emotive attitude, as well as the phenomenon of post-truth. Emotivism, despite its declaration of neutrality, has clearly influenced attitudes in ethics. It seems that although there is no logical connection between the emotive theory of meaning and ethical relativism, there is an empirical relationship between them. Undoubtedly, an attitude that accepts relativism and post-truth has emotive roots.

Emotivism declared that demands for objectivity and impersonality cannot be met and that there were no rational justifications for “any claims that objective and impersonal moral standards exist and hence that there are no such standards” (MacIntyre 2007, 19).

In the context of post-truth MacIntyre’s remark is correct as the key to the social content of emotivism is “that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations” (MacIntyre 2007, 23). In his view, the blurring of this difference is a work of emotivism. The manipulation lies in treating other people instrumentally. “(...) to treat someone else as a means is to seek to make him or her an instrument of my purposes by adducing whatever influences or considerations will in fact be effective on this or that occasion. (...)” (MacIntyre 2007, 24). Then rationality and logic are replaced by irrational persuasion. We are exactly dealing with the same mechanism in the case of post-truth as its “users” treat its recipients as means to achieve their goals.

Furthermore, at the root of post-truth lies Stevenson’s assumption concerning the magnetic force of ethical terms thanks to which one can influence emotions. Emotivism has attributed causative power to ethical judgements. Judgements were meant to express emotions that in turn were meant to stimulate actions. Post-truth seems to act in a similar way: by appealing to emotions and falsifying reality, it is aimed at making reality more attractive and thus draw the listener or reader into it. Thus, truth no longer depends on facts but on feelings.

What also connects emotivism with post-truth is the replacement of truth as a value by psychological effectiveness (MacIntyre 2007, 30). “There is a risk” – as d’Ancona writes – “that an ever-greater proportion of judgements and decisions will be banished to the realm of feeling, that the quest for truth will become a branch of emotional psychology, without moorings or foundations” (d’Ancona 2017, 34). In turn, Keyes notes that “Ethical issues become ones of emotional health” (Keyes 2004, 85). Emotivistic persuasive reasons are similar to manipulative post-truth for which facts are considered good if they are useful. Emotivism makes us insensitive to truth, denying its existence as a correlate of rationality in the sphere of ethics.

What emotivism has made us realise in the context of post-truth is the fact that truth based only on rationality is no longer attractive. In this regard, some argue that today truth requires a more emotional system of

transmission. “Today’s truth-teller must speak” – d’Ancona writes – “to head and heart alike” (d’Ancona 2017, 131). This can be interpreted as a kind of victory of emotivism.

To conclude, it seems that one of the elements that can reduce the influence of post-truth on the life contemporary man and, at the same time, make him sensitive to truth is the rejection of not only the emotive theory (which has already been achieved), but also the emotive attitude. Can this be done by appealing only to reason? As long as nobody wants to be considered a liar, there is hope of regaining the truth, including the truth proclaiming that the assertion that post-truth supposedly exists must be considered false.

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