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**Book review of *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy: Mapping the Politics of Falsehood* (second edition),
by Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou,
Routledge, 2024, 219 pages**

In the past decade, public discourses on *post-truth* have become ubiquitous across the global public sphere, rapidly normalized as a convenient explanation for declining trust, the rise of populism, and the erosion of democratic institutions (Ferretti, 2023; Flood, 2016; Harjunemi, 2022; McIntyre, 2018). In *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy* (second edition), Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou intervene critically in this narrative by challenging the common place assumption that the contemporary crisis of democracy stems primarily from the erosion of truth, and by reframing post-truth discourse as a politically charged imaginary that narrows democratic possibility rather than expanding it. The volume does not set out to explain the persistence of fake news as a technical or moral problem; instead, it examines the politics of post-truth discourse and its structural effects. The book challenges the assumption, often presented as axiomatic, that democracy is synonymous with truth, and that returning to a stable factual order would automatically resolve contemporary democratic crises.

A major contribution of the volume lies in its historiographical contextualization of the term *post-truth* within broader, recurring moral panics surrounding the public, rationality, and mediation. The authors argue that the term does not simply denote an epistemic rupture but operates as a hegemonic political imaginary structuring institutional responses: anti-fake news legislation, digital-security policies, and the recentralization of authority in the hands of technocrats and “experts”. In a key passage, Farkas and Schou reject the foundational premise of this imaginary: “We will argue that this current way of thinking about democracy - which has become almost completely hegemonic in contemporary political debates - is both politically charged and normatively risky. What it essentially does is to equate the idea of democracy with those of reason, rationality, and truth tout court” (p. 7). The authors thus expose what they describe as the “capture” of democracy within a restrictive epistemological frame.

The volume is structured into three parts. The first part, *Preparing for the post-truth journey*, lays the conceptual groundwork by dismantling the theoretical assumptions that underpin contemporary post-truth alarmism. Rather than reproducing normative accounts that attribute democratic decay to cognitive failures, misinformation vulnerability, or a supposedly irrational public, accounts exemplified in the work of authors such as Lewandowsky et

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al. (2017) and van der Linden et al. (2020), the authors situate their inquiry within a critical discourse-analytic tradition. This shift in orientation reframes the central question from *what is true?* to *who is empowered to decide what truth is, by which institutional and discursive mechanisms, and with what implications for democratic participation?* In this formulation, post-truth does not describe an empirically verifiable condition of society but instead constitutes a contested discursive field in which struggles over authority, legitimacy, and political power unfold.

The second part entitled *Into post-truth worlds* offers the book's core empirical intervention, charting how post-truth discourse has been mobilized across diverse institutional contexts. Through case studies that range from Germany's NetzDG law to crisis-driven governance strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic and broader anti-populist messaging in Europe, Farkas and Schou show how anxieties about fake news are translated into concrete regulatory and communicative practices. Across these examples, post-truth operates not merely as a description of informational disorder but as a discursive frame through which authorities legitimize measures that constrain political plurality and delimit who counts as a credible political actor. The authors identify a recurring assumption running through such deployments: "this fundamental idea, claiming that truth is democracy and democracy is truth, has continued to be one of the most ubiquitous assumptions in post-truth worlds" (p. 135). This pattern underscores the symbolic power of post-truth rhetoric, its capacity to reshape political horizons, irrespective of whether its underlying epistemic claims are empirically substantiated.

The final part of the book, *Out of post-truth worlds*, moves beyond diagnosis and offers a constructive reframing. Here, Farkas and Schou deliberately step outside the logic of post-truth panic to articulate an alternative vision of democracy, one rooted not in epistemic certainty but in political contestation. Democracy, they argue, must be understood as an ongoing agonistic struggle among competing and legitimate positions, rather than as a harmonious order secured through reason, factual agreement, or expert authority. This conceptual gesture situates the book near the work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, explicitly countering Habermasian accounts that anchor democratic legitimacy in rational deliberative consensus. Central to this reorientation is the insistence that democracy cannot be saved by reasserting a "truth regime", but only by expanding space for political agency and disagreement. As the authors write, "this book should be seen as a staunch defense of democracy, not as the sole rule of reason, but as the rule of the people" (p. 10). The formulation crystallizes the volume's normative commitment: democracy as *dēmokratía*, enacted through popular participation and conflict, rather than as an epistemic order policed by those empowered to determine truth.

At its core, the book's strength lies in its reframing of the much-invoked "crisis of truth", not as a factual rupture but as a political narrative. Rather than treating fake news as a glitch in the informational system, Farkas and Schou convincingly show that post-truth discourse displaces attention away from democratic erosion, inequality, and institutional exclusion. By restoring the political stakes behind appeals to facticity, reason, and expertise, the authors expose how the rhetoric of truth can narrow, rather than expand, democratic participation. This intervention recalibrates a field often dominated by cognitive and technological explanations. Also, the authors move seamlessly between theoretical argument and empirical illustration, demonstrating how post-truth imaginary structures legislation, crisis governance, and public communication. In doing so, they furnish scholars with a set of conceptual tools for interrogating rhetorical formations alongside regulatory structures. Most significantly, the text opens new avenues for imagining democratic renewal. By framing democracy as agonistic strug-

gle, with disagreement and conflict viewed as constitutive rather than pathological, the authors directly challenge dominant calls for consensus and epistemic restoration.

That said, the book's strong focus on discourse may understate the material impact of post-truth interventions, especially in electoral and geopolitical contexts. While acknowledging that lies and propaganda techniques do real harm, the analysis offers limited engagement with how such harms unfold institutionally. Likewise, the call for renewed radical-democratic politics is persuasive but less explicit about potential mechanisms for realizing agonistic principles in practice. These points do not diminish the book's contribution; they highlight fertile ground for further exploration. *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy* ultimately urges scholars and policymakers to move beyond truth regimes and grapple with the more demanding work of sustaining democratic life amid conflict and plurality.

In sum, *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy* offers a sharp and timely intervention into contemporary debates on the politics of post-truth and democratic decline. In a landscape dominated by technical fixes and expert-led correction, Farkas and Schou challenge the assumption that post-truth discourse reveals a crisis of truth requiring epistemic intervention. By interrogating the premises behind fact-checking, media literacy, and algorithmic oversight, they demonstrate that democracy cannot be safeguarded through truth policing alone. Instead, the book reframes democracy as a political project rooted in conflict, plurality, and contestation, redirecting attention from stabilizing factual regimes to revitalizing participation, representation, and power. Through its discourse-analytic method and engagement with radical democratic theory, the volume not only critiques dominant narratives but shifts the conceptual ground on which they rest. Ultimately, the distinction it draws between crises of truth and crises of democracy underscores a vital insight: informational disorder is inseparable from questions of power and exclusion. *Post-Truth, Fake News and Democracy* thus serves not merely as critique, but as an invitation to reimagine democracy as a lived and open-ended practice.

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