A POST-TRUTH CULTURISM AND ITS DELUSIONS

UN CULTURALISMO DESDE LA POSVERDAD Y SUS CONTRADICCIONES

Christian Paúl Naranjo Navas[1]
Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo (Ecuador)
Bryan Josué Naranjo Navas [2]
Universidad San Francisco de Quito (Ecuador)

Abstract: In a postmodern conceptualization of the cultures, everything is shown as relative statements, within which all is accepted. Nothing can be affirmed as absolute truth. Taking into account that culturism is the belief that some cultures are superior than others, this essay proposes the idea that a post truth culturism is the belief that all cultures are to be revered. The essay proposes the analysis of three common arguments through a specific epistemological perspective, rationalism: empirical data and the primacy of reason. The analyzed arguments are: first, all cultures ought to be equally revered; second, western logic is different to the ancestral logic; third, all ancestral cultures have wisdom. The article concludes that these arguments do not withstand the rational analysis.

Key words: POST-TRUTH; POSTMODERNISM; CULTURISM; ANCESTRAL WISDOM

Resumen: En una conceptualización posmoderna de las culturas, todo se muestra como afirmaciones relativas, dentro de las cuales todo es aceptado. Nada puede afirmarse como verdad absoluta. Teniendo en cuenta que el culturalismo es la creencia de que algunas culturas son superiores a otras, este ensayo propone la idea de que un culturalismo posterior a la verdad es la creencia de que todas las culturas deben ser veneradas. El ensayo propone el análisis de tres argumentos comunes a través de una perspectiva epistemológica específica, el racionalismo: los datos empíricos y la pri-

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[1] (cnaranjo@unach.edu.ec) Es actualmente profesor de ciencias políticas en la especialidad de microeconomía en la Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, Ecuador. Realizó sus estudios en la Universidad de San Francisco de Quito, Pichincha (Ecuador), el MBA en la Universidad Tecnológica Israel, también en Quito y se doctoró en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (España) en Análisis Económico. Es autor de varios artículos entre los que se encuentran «De la post verdad a la verdad» en *Cuadernos de Teología* y de «The impact of the Great Depression in Ecuador» en *Multidisciplinary Journal for Education, Social and Technological Sciences*.

[2] (eldestinobryan@hotmail.com) Ha publicado en CIDE (Centro de investigación y Desarrollo de Ecuador) su capítulo del libro *Reflexiones en Ciencias Sociales y otros Tópicos* «Biblical interpretation of the philosophy of nonviolence». También ha publicado en varias revistas de ciencias económicas y sociales acerca de la situación económica de Ecuador.

macía de la razón. Los argumentos analizados son: primero, todas las culturas deben ser igualmente veneradas; segundo, la lógica occidental es diferente a la lógica ancestral; tercero, todas las culturas ancestrales tienen sabiduría. El artículo concluye que estos argumentos no resisten el análisis racional.

Palabras clave: POSTVERDAD; POSTMODERNISMO; CULTURALISMO; SABER ANCESTRAL

1. Introduction

In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries decided to choose the word «post truth» as the word of the year, that is, the word of greatest use and popularity (Oxford University Press, 2017). The news did not take the academy by surprise, it was to be expected, since its use has increased exponentially. The post truth does not necessarily refer to an event after another, the composition of words does not have a perception of later events, but of relevance, that is, the truth has lost relevance over time.

Oxford Dictionaries (2017) believes that the composition of words could have been used for the first time in an essay by Steve Tesich, published by The Nation in 1992. However, Ralph Keyes (2004), in his book «The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life», popularized the term by referring to it as the quality that something seemed true, or could be perceived as true, even if it is not. To this definition, he adds that one investigator after another has confirmed that lying has become as common as scratching the stitches of a suture (2004, p. 4). The post truth is configured as affirmations, arguments or events that may or may not be real, it does not matter, what is relevant is that these arguments or events feel true, even if the evidence shows otherwise.

The postmodern era presents us a diversity of cultures with a diversity of historical developments that are considered as a nest interwoven between customs and myths, interwoven between perceptions and beliefs that are mutually adaptable, and mutually valuable. The era of the post truth has built a conceptual framework that is ready to justify all uses and beliefs that comes from every expression of cultures. People's «ancestral wisdom». It is easy to see how the western culture has taken post-truth, as part of the postmodernity, as a basis for adaptation, trying to accommodate itself between cultural backgrounds according to what suits its purposes. The post-truth era presents us with an adaptable, changing Western culture, which is willing to justify all usages and beliefs.

The post-truth era has created a wide space of tolerance of everything, with civil organizations that have formed a political, social and intellectual platform that tries to give significance to all cultures: everything is justifiable, everything is adaptable, everything is useful to justify. The post-truth era gives us a contradictory vision of acceptance: the conception of culture is relative and, at the same time, it builds itself as a higher framework of reverence, which is dressed in an environment of tolerance. This framework is what we call in this paper a post-truth culturism.

In this essay, cultural relativism differs from a post-truth culturism in one specific point: while cultural relativism is the idea that people's beliefs should be assumed within their own culture, without falling into the temptation of judgment, a post-truth culturism states the conception that all cultures are to be revered, with the exception of the dominant cultures that come from the west. In a post-truth culturism, everything is relative, in this way, nothing can be affirmed as an absolute truth although, the acceptability of all cultural usages is posted as an absolute truth. In this way, this essay seeks to visualize the illogicalities of the post-truth era, it tries to relativize the relative, so that it can be clear that the «logic» of this era finds no rational foundation, although it is posted as a movement of veneration of ancestral or cultural wisdom. Taking into account that culturism is the belief that some cultures are to be revered, this essay proposes the idea that a post-truth culturism is the belief that all cultures are to be revered.

All cultures ought to be equally revered

The first postulate of a post truth culturism proposes that all cultures ought to be equally revered. This postulate has a special focus on cultures different to the western culture: since culturism has placed the west as the head of development, a post-truth culturism places all cultures, different to the west, as the focus of attention. To be able to analyze the first postulate, there are two propositions that ought to be considered: first, nonwestern cultures are different, but these differences do not matter; second, all these cultures ought to be revered. Therefore, nonwestern cultures, in spite of their differences, ought to be honored.

The first proposition recognizes the differences among cultures, and, at the same time, it declared these differences do not matter. To analyze this, it is important to consider the post truth as a concept that is made and remade according to need, as long as the need requires its use to justify cultural uses, individual reasons or even state impositions. Thus, it is not hard to find examples that clearly represent these cultural and

individual uses, state or ethnic impositions: it is not hard to visualize the differences among cultures. Verbigracia, female genital mutilation, death penalty for adultery, fellatio performed by children, state authoritarianism, etc.

On female genital mutilation, the World Health Organization (2013) shows important data on this issue: between 100 and 140 million girls and women around the world have suffered from female genital mutilation; in 27 countries in Africa, and Yemen; More than 101 million girls over the age of 10 live with the consequences of mutilation; immigrants from Africa and Yemen continue with these practices in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, Europe and New Zealand (2013, p. 2).

Female genital mutilation is performed for several cultural reasons: initiation of adulthood; enter the public life of the community, expecting discrimination for those women who do not do it; in various populations, this practice has been linked to pre-Islamic local traditions; for reasons that involve sanitary beliefs and beauty; control of sexuality, to curb the alleged intrinsically exacerbated sexual desire of women considering that there is a belief that if the clitoris is not removed it will grow too much, resembling a penis (Asociación Mujeres entre Mundos, 2016, p. 21,22).

Another example of cultural uses is built around the death penalty, one of the most visible cases, death by adultery, is common to find in certain cultures of the Middle East. Discussions on this use are very common in the different human rights commissions, in fact, during the debate on the death penalty in 1994, in the forum of the United Nations, the countries that opposed any resolution on the subject were Malaysia, Bangladesh, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Egypt, Iran and Jordan. Sudan described capital punishment as a divine right according to some religions, particularly Islam (Shabas, 2000, p. 229). Any attempt to debate such practices receives a fierce denunciation, alluding to respect for cultural values.

On the other hand, in Strickland-Bosav, located in the north of Papau Nueva Guinea, there are several indigenous groups, among them, the Kaluli perform various rituals, one of them recreates neighboring environments with songs and dances. These rituals try to remember memories of lost beings, for this, there are two types of people, the dancers and the hosts, who, distressed by the pain, begin to cry and cry violently, until some of them vent their pain by holding torches of burning resin and submerging them furiously on the shoulders of the singer dancer (Knauft,

1985, p. 324). The ritual is considered successful when the hosts have been lost between crying despair and the dancers have ended up burned severely.

In Strickland-Bosav itself, all indigenous groups in the area believe that children should be «inseminated» to reach adulthood, but the mode of transmission of semen is different in each community (Knauft, 1985, p. 328). Among the Kaluli communities, anal sex is practiced, in the Etoro community fellatio is practiced, and in the Onabasulu community the semen is spread among the novices. At the same time, the Etoro find the customs of the Kaluli and Onabasulu repulsive.

Finally, the most visible example of state authoritarianism is that of North Korea, the dictatorships of the Kim family and the Workers' Party of Korea have created a state of systematic repression. The Kim Jong-Un regime has been characterized by public executions, arbitrary arrests and forced labor; tighten travel restrictions to prevent North Koreans from escaping and seeking refuge abroad; and systematically persecuting those with religious contacts inside and outside the country (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In the same report, the systematic use of murders, slavery, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortion and acts of sexual violence are mentioned.

Many people advocate the origin of cultures as a valuable principle of self-determination, and, therefore, cultures are free to make decisions and lead their ways of living as desired. With the idea of self-determination, post-truth opens the door to establish anything as permissible. The contradiction seems obvious: although, post-truth opens the door for self-determination, at the same time, it criticizes western trends, portraying them as the arms of evil. This criticism falls into the same post-truth trap: to postulate western culture as a malign trend or the personification of evil as an absolute truth is contradictory to the idea of self-determination.

Cultural differences move and frighten many, however, these reactions open the door to relevant questions: Why should these cultural uses scare people, if the post truth defends cultural tolerance? If nonwestern cultures ought to be honored, there is no space to judgement, there is no space to any critique. These facts expose the biggest problem of argumentation in a post-truth culturism: there are no standers of what makes a culture honorable, therefore, there are no reprehensible or honorific principles, then, there is no justification to reprehend or to honor any culture: everything is honorable and reprehensible at the same time.

Western logic is different from ancestral logic

The Second postulate of post truth culturism proposes that western logic is different to the ancestral logic. This postulate falls into two problems: first, the problem of defining logic; second, even if logic is defined, the post truth culturism's proposition does not withstand the coherence analysis. If by logic, the post-truh position means that all cultures think different, that is obvious, even people within a same culture think different. Thus, in this sense, to say that western cultures think different than ancestral cultures, drives the argument to propose that people within a same culture think different, therefore, to say that the logic of western cultures is different from the logic of ancestral ones is incoherent if we consider that not all westerners think alike, as not all ancestral cultures think alike.

Nonetheless, if we consider that the logic of a culture is settled by the majority, meaning that the logic of a culture is measured by what the majority think on certain issues, then, we are applying a democratic stander, which is, in its core, a western stander. This stander comes out of a bigger philosophical theory, utilitarianism, stated by John Stuart Mill (2001 [1863]) as the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct. The greatest number would also into the decisions and opinions made and thought out of a majority, which in philosophy is called the majority rule: «the option that gets the most votes should be the group decision» (Saunders, 2010, p. 149). Then, if the logic of a culture is what the majority of that culture thinks on certain issues, the foundation of that logic is found in a western principle, the majority rule. This shows the contradiction of the second postulate of a post-truth culturism.

If the second postulate of a post-truth culturism means that cultures have a different way of arriving to knowledge, defining logic as the reason that drives cultures to prove, infer and valid knowledge, then, the postulate would crash with the abundant evidence that show how western logic is the same to ancestral logic. The evidence about the development of different ancestral cultures will present identical mathematical concepts and identical laws of thought. The findings display identical mathematical concepts such as parallelism, perpendicularity, geometric solids, etc.; and identical laws of thought such as the law of contradiction, the law of excluded middle, and the principle of identity.

The Incas had a very developed way of establishing a calendar based on the sun: the solar observing methods and Inca's calendar were used for the correct maintenance of the agricultural and festive calendar,

but also as a tool of power of the Incas over their subjects (Ortiz García, 2012). Inca observations of the solar year have been studied thoroughly (Fink, 2008), like the pillars raised on mountains in Cuzco that allowed the marking of points where sunrises and sunsets could be observed. Also, the Incas had very advance ideas in architecture, ceramics, agriculture, etc. In architecture, there were geometric concepts about parallelism, perpendicularity, and cross-linking. These ideas were used to model their palaces, temples, fortresses, and other buildings (doors, windows and walls). In urban planning, ideas like similarities, congruencies, proportionality were applied to design the city plan and plan its growth. In ceramics and goldsmith, concepts such as bodies of revolution, geometric solids and planes were used for the modeling of ceramics (glasses, ceremonials, plates, vessels). In agriculture, concepts such as proportionality, scales, design of models and projections (Huapaya & Salas, 2008). Image 1 shows the ancient calculating device used by the Incas called *La Yupana*. This device was used for arithmetic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

Image 1. La Yupana
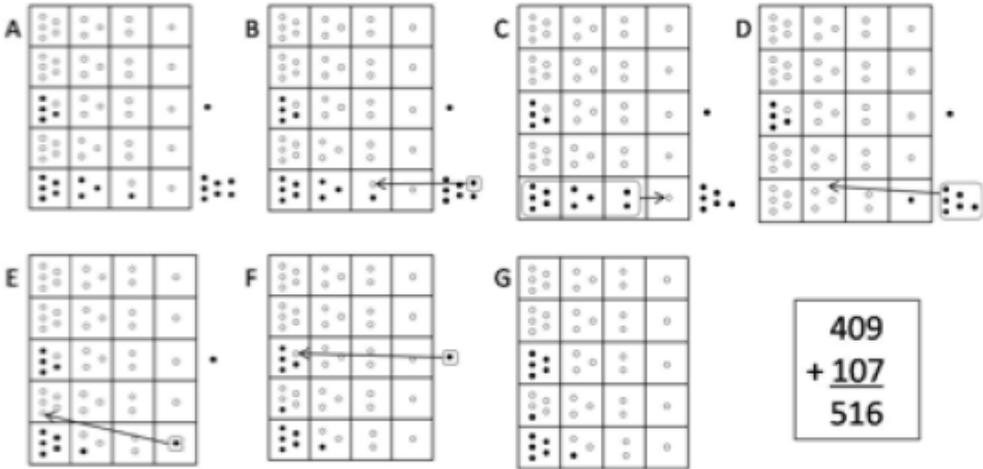
Source: (Shakiban & Hennessey, 2011, p. 5)

In India, an ancient Vedic society, the head of the family was required to have three fires, located in measured altars, the areas of the altars had to be related by a simple ratio. In India, the construction of altars was the foundation of mathematical principles (Restivo, 1992). The evidence found around 800 BCE show that some manuscripts made use of the «Pythagorean theorem». Geometry was known as *Sulva Sutras*, which could be translated as cord or rope. These texts include geometrical principles such as: the area of a square is equal to the double of the area of the triangle formed by the diagonal; square root of 2; the idea of zero as a needed number. In figure 2, it is visible how the Sulva Sutras tried to get an approximation to square roots.

Image 2. Square root of 2

$$1 + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{3 \times 4} - \frac{1}{3 \times 4 \times 34} = 1.414\ldots$$

Source: Cooke, 2012, p. 200

Source: (Arellano, 2003, p. 20)

The Maya civilization developed a very stylized numeral system based on two tens. It is impressive to acknowledge that they were the first ones who used a sign for zero. The numeric system developed by the Maya would be constructed using dots and bars. Figure 3 shows how numbers were represented: one by one dot, two by two dots... five by a bar and so on. Various bars would be aligned vertically, and dots would be aligned horizontally. Also, the Maya advanced brilliantly in astronomy, especially the invention of a calendar that consisted on three years known as Tzolkin (religious year), Haab (solar calendar year), and the official year (Long Count). (Ifrah, 1998, p. 315)

Image 3. Maya numerical system

The examples of ancestral cultures provided in this epigraph present the development of a same way of thinking about numerical logic, having in consideration that these cultures did not have any contact among each other. One plus one equals two in every culture, as two plus two equals one in no culture. These numerical logic drives the argument to consider the laws of thought such as the law of contradiction, the law of excluded middle, and the principle of identity (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018).

The law of contradiction could be represented as the following proposition: $\sim p$ [1] p. Thus, $\sim p$ cannot, at the same time, be p. Live cannot be the absence of live, as light cannot be the absence of light. Within this proposition, something truthful cannot be untruthful at the same time. Thus, this law of thought is evident in the logic presented above: one cannot be other number than one. The law of contradiction builds the way to understand the law of excluded middle, which means that either p or $\sim p$ must be real, without the space to consider a third or middle point. Within this proposition, something is truthful or untruthful, it cannot be half truthful and half untruthful. This proposition is clear within the ancestral logic: a number can be x or y, but it cannot be half x and y: x is either one or two, it cannot not be one and a half, since the latter is a new quantity, different than one and different than two. Finally, the principle of identity, which means that a thing is identical to itself, x equals x. One equals one, there is no other option. Thus, it is clear that the logic is the same in all cultures.

All ancestral cultures have wisdom

The third postulate of a post truth culturism proposes that all ancestral cultures have wisdom. This postulate is normally constructed using the advances some cultures had in sciences to postulate that these advances show how wise these cultures were. This postulate falls into two different types de problems: the first, a problem of confusion, a post-truth culturism intends to show intelligence as wisdom, making no distinction; second, wisdom implies different metaphysical realms, which differ from culture to culture, falling, therefore, into relativism.

Some ancestral cultures have been valued for the immense development in sciences, taking into consideration that these advances happened without any relation to the western scientific development. The value of the scientific advances of non-western cultures is undeniable, the examples presented above are just a few cases of the vast number of cases. In this sense, the intelligence presented in ancestral cultures is indubitable. Nonetheless, intelligence does not equal wisdom since the latter connotes a metaphysical realm. For the sake of this essay, ancestral wisdom will be defined as actions performed in order to foster what is considered good, and diminish or eliminate what is considered evil.

All cultures have a sense of what is good or evil, although there would always be voices opposing these concepts, saying that the idea of good or evil is relative. These voices fall into the same logic problem of the first postulate: to affirm that everything is relative is in itself an absolute statement and, therefore, incoherent in its own foundation. Therefore, this essay presumes the affirmation that there are the ideas of good and evil in every culture. Considering that metaphysics changes from culture to culture, wisdom would also change, therefore, if wisdom means something different in every culture, there is no wisdom to be revered.

In the case of the Incas, there were human sacrifices performed for many reasons such as to stop some diseases, to stop natural catastrophes or for the heirs of the Inca Emperor (Reinhard & Ceruti, 2005). The rituals were called Capacocha or Capac Hucha, translated as real obligations. They were offerings for petitions or thankfulness. From all the Inca state, villages sent one or more children to Cuzco to be sacrificed: the rituals would have their ecstasies when the priests cut open the children to remove their hearts (D' Altroy, 2003). Sacrifices were performed also in other ways such as strangulation, asphyxia, or buried alive. The ceremony included mountains, islands and other shrines or huacas that were located in the whole extension of the Tawantinsuyu and served to unite the sacred space with the ancestral time (Vitry, 2008).

In these Inca rituals, families were obliged to give annually children up to eight and nine years old to be sacrificed during religious ceremonies. There was a conception that death was the passage from this life to another: people did not die, they met with their ancestors and, together with them, took care of the relatives left on the earth and helped them to have health and prosperity (Martín Rubio, 2009). The Incas had an idea of good by believing that human sacrificial rites were a way of joining people with their divinities (Vitry, 2008), or by believing that these sacrifices could bring health and prosperity. Also, they had an idea of evil, by believing that illnesses, natural disasters or scarcity ought to be stopped. These sacrifices took place in June during the Inti Raymi, in the sowing of August, and in the festivities of the sun.

Metaphysical ideas of good or evil also implied the idea of beauty, as a principle to follow or foster within some ancestral cultures. To further beauty, some practices involved the manipulation of the shape of parts of the body or its mutilation. Thus, in China, the lotus feet were a common practice from the tenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. These practices were performed by women with a sense of eroticism, to please men, «foot-binding entailed intense, protracted physical pain […] foot-binding was the muted voice of women in contention with the dominant discourse of Neo-Confucian values and definitions of reality» (Blake, 1994, pp. 677-678).

Blake (1994) points out the sensual significance of the feminized foot, the golden lotus, *jinlian*, which symbolized the spiritual essence of the cosmic order and, at the same time, the irony of manipulation of this order, «songs about bound-footed women could point to the irony and hypocrisy of living in a world of appearances, deception, and manipulation that finally showed itself as a pitiful state of uselessness» (p. 192). This culture, governed by men, promoted certain the idea of beauty: food binding was essential for the embellishment of the female body. The most common problem found in women with lotus feet was infection since the ingrowing nails would produce infection in toes and feet. This problem could worsen considerably, producing death from septic shock. According to White (2014) ten per cent of the girls with lotus feet died from gangrene and other infections.

Image 4. Foot binding
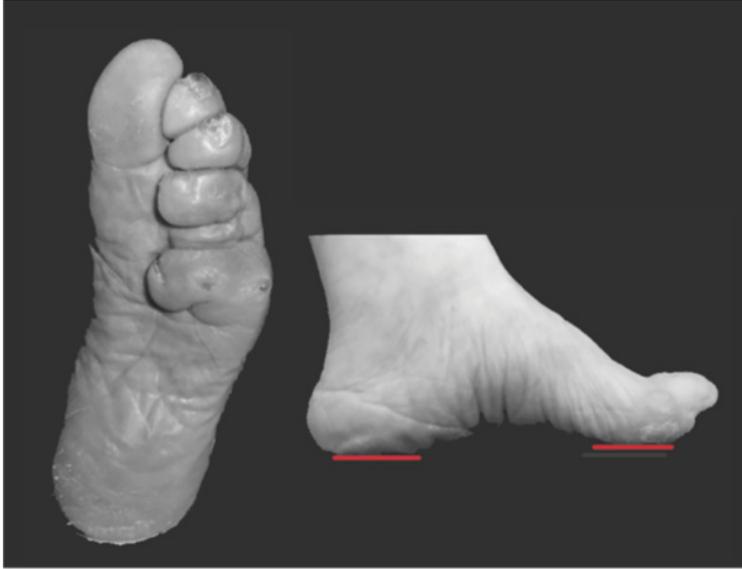
Source: (Gu, et al., 2015, p. 3)

Finally, it is important to consider one of the ancestral cultures that proposes that the idea of good and evil are part of an illusion created by the Christian, western culture. Some Buddhist cultures considered that the ideas of good and evil are perceptions of reality, they do not exist since they are part of a dualistic world view. From a Buddhist point of view, everything is part of a oneness, therefore, a dual perspective must be emptied to adopt the understanding of one reality. This world view spread from ancient India, in the 5th century BC, to southeast Asia, and then to the rest of the Asian continent, has influenced many cultures for centuries.

Buddhist cultures have followed this teaching of oneness and the inexistence of good and evil and, at the same time, they have proposed the teaching of avoiding desire since it is the source of pain and suffering. Also, the teaching of oneness comes along with the teaching of the noble eightfold path, which describes the way to end suffering and acquire mental development, an ethical conduct and wisdom (Knierim, 2007). These teachings, which have influenced the development of Asian cultures for centuries, fall into a logical contradiction: the idea of oneness establishes that good and evil are relative; nonetheless, if good and evil do not exist,

it is a contradiction to try to stop suffering, or to try to foster the noble eightfold path. Thus, it is clear that, even within the contradiction, the Buddhist cultures also have a sense of good and evil.

This epigraph has started affirming that wisdom is different from intelligence since the former implies a metaphysical realm. There is no doubt that ancestral cultures advanced in many areas, such a mathematics, architecture or agriculture: their intelligence is undeniable. Nonetheless, their wisdom, considered as the pursue of good and the avoidance of evil, is part of metaphysical realms that are different from each other: something good for one culture is evil for another one. In this sense, if a post-truth culturim affirms that all ancestral cultures have wisdom, there is no wisdom to be revered since wisdom is different from culture to culture. Therefore, if good and evil are relative, wisdom is also relative; then, everything and anything could be contemplated as wise at the same time: if p equals ~p, p does not exist. Thus, the statement that all ancestral cultures have wisdom is incoherent.

Concluding remarks

In a post-truth culturism, everything is acceptable and reprehensible at the same time, no principle or value can be affirmed as an absolute truth, and yet the statement that every cultural usage is relative is proposed as an absolute truth, which follows that this statement must also be considered as relative, driving us to conclude that relativism proves the existence of absolute values. In other words, the post-truth era has tried to relativize all principles, and has opened the space to justify every cultural usage with arguments that serve as a platform of reverence, but if we relativize the relative, the only conclusion is that reverence to all cultures is illogical. A post- truth culturim affirms that all ancestral cultures are be revered; nonetheless, this statement implies that p equals ~p, therefor p does not exist, which means that reverence of all cultures is incoherent.

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