

## DEFENDING THE TRUTH

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is about 'speaking truth to power'<sup>1</sup>. The nature of truth has been in contention for at least two and a half millennia but it can be agreed that it has reached a particular crisis point in the present, both within the academy and in the popular imagination – while the nature of power wielded by technology as it currently pervades society could never have been remotely imagined in previous centuries. The international importance of the defence of freedom of speech in these circumstances was acknowledged by the choice of activists for press freedom as the recipients of the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. The article therefore discusses power's influence on truth as understood historically and more recently. It discusses the limiting, 'naturalizing', conceptions of knowing currently prevailing in philosophies of science, along with the pragmatist (Rortyan) retreat from any fixed philosophical stance on truth, and counters these with conceptions of 'adaptive truth' as first conceived by Charles Sanders Pierce and developed further by Joseph Margolis, with some supporting arguments suggested by the author. The final section focusses on the investigative journalists who are prepared to defend both truth and democracy, in this increasingly dangerous environment.

**Key words:** post truth, social media algorithms, Joseph Margolis, adaptive truth, press freedom

### Introduction. The global context.

We live in an explosively divided world with communication instantly available but at the same time easily manipulable, and with communities increasingly separated into silos of sharply opposing opinion. Democracy appears to be losing traction as the experience of populations suggests that for several decades now, powerful business interests, and the influence of elites, rather than their own interests, have predominated in nominally democratic government decision making. At the same time, dictatorships are on the rise with 53 countries informally listed as being dictatorships, and right-wing parties with-

in democracies occupying powerful positions. Some very recent set-backs indicate that this is not an immutable trend (and this is important to consider for this thesis), but those at the 'coal-face' of investigating its root causes and its tools for entrenching power (the current 'networked 4<sup>th</sup> estate' of investigative journalists) warn that the dangers are real and increasing. 'Post truth' was voted the word of the year in 2016, suggesting the widespread currency of this strange phenomenon. A suspicion of elites, and thus of the scientific truth which they purvey, has helped to fuel this attack on empirical evidence as the foundation for establishing facts as Paul Thomson recently explored in some depth (Thompson, 2021) indicating that the complexity of the position occupied by post truth adherents is far greater than can be countered simply with a more 'scientific' stance.

### Philosophical Underpinnings

If philosophies have generally preceded social change, and either endorsed or threatened existing social order, it becomes pertinent to consider their role within the present context.

*Critical theory.* Joseph Margolis held that 'all philosophy is political' (Margolis, 2000) and thus that all initiating ideas are potentially involved in, or influential in shaping, or will be shaped by, structures of power within society. This idea was first captured as an incendiary concept by Karl Marx in the *German Ideology* when he wrote that 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas...the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force'(Marx, 1845). The uprisings against autocratic rule which took place throughout Europe three years later can be linked to this thinking, and, in the nearly two hundred years since, the idea has taken different forms but has never been entirely erased as a way of understanding the fault lines in society, and providing grounds for dissent. However, while the 'critical theory' of the

<sup>1</sup> This is attributed to Bayard Rustin in 1942, a Black Quaker in the Civil Rights Movement, advocating non-violent methods in his fight for social justice.

Frankfurt School of the 1930s and 40s saw the influence of power on perceptions of reality (Engels' 'false consciousness') as pervasive, they also saw it as inescapable: "It cannot be succeeded by a new theory, *but only by rational reality itself* [emphasis added]: The abyss between rational and present reality cannot be bridged by conceptual thought" (Marcuse, 1961). Herbert Marcuse thus believed that there was no conceptual bridge which could allow us to access rational reality – we are trapped in the power structures of the present. Later in the century Michel Foucault also held that "Power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure" (Foucault 1998: 63). These twentieth century theories therefore considered escape from the distortions created by power as in practice impossible, at the same time denying the potential efficacy of any practical action in the defence of a more rational, democratic society. This gives some traction to Richard Rorty's idea that his continental postmodern counterparts represented a 'spectator left' (Rorty, 1998:13). This postmodern scepticism also, it has been suggested, feeds into current acceptance of 'post truth' positions (McIntyre, 2018).

Occupying, until fairly recently, a central role in the social sciences, critical theory now appears to be largely in abeyance, and a brief internet search of 'critical thought' will bring up little that is political, while only Amhurst College, it seems, offers a course in 'critical theory'. On the other hand, contemporary educational discourse elevates 'critical thinking' (divorced from any acknowledged political connotations) to a key skill within 'student-centred', and 'life-long learning' discourses. Closer investigation will show however that its object is to assist students in acquiring those '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' seen as essential for economic success within our global, competitive society (Starkey, 2019) – in Marxian terms, indicating that 'the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time [still] its ruling intellectual force'.

But truth and knowledge, thus conceived as nar-

rowed down and shaped by power, now face a yet more existential threat in the emergence of 'false news' and 'post-truth' or the denial of established scientific, empirical means of establishing facts. Intelligent meaning making is not debatable here. There is no such starting point.

*Richard Rorty and theories of power.* As the leading pragmatist of his time, Rorty may have criticised his continental contemporaries for taking an ineffectual stance, but he himself explicitly rejected any belief in philosophy having a role to play in issues of power. "Without traditional concepts of metaphysics we cannot make sense of the appearance-reality distinction, and without this distinction one cannot make sense of the notion of 'what is really going on'. No more metaphysics, no more unmasking" (Rorty, quoted in Critchley, 1996:14). Rorty believed that we could leave that to "muckraking journalists" – an insight which is prescient for our present situation, but which removes the academy entirely from the scene.

*Other philosophies.* At the same time, 'mainstream' philosophy could be characterised as either focussed on language issues to the exclusion of the real world (analytic thinkers) – a further disengagement from politics – or focussed on 'cognitive science' where naturalizing accounts of knowing are limited to 'the causal closure of physics' and consciousness and the nature of mind are fiercely debated, but only within materialist ('naturalizing') conceptions where our popular ideas about minds may be understood as mere folk psychological myths (Plotkin, 1998: 98). Two philosophers from this school of thought (Don Ross and David Spurrett) for instance, explain the apparent success of human agents in their interventions in the world, as simply the outcome of programming within the brain. "We think it is overwhelmingly likely that agents are programmes and they are not anything else" (Ross and Spurrett, 2003: 52). With this analysis Rorty agrees, if in rather more poetic terms. "some atoms in the void account of micro-processes within individual human beings will...permit of every sound or inscription which will ever be uttered" (Rorty,

1980: 354). But if we are not ultimately responsible we cannot be ultimately held to account – and we can best be understood, in the vision of the novelist Yuval Noah Harari in his book *Homo Deus* (Harari, 2015) as a species within the control of algorithms.

Overall therefore humanity is denied individual access to intelligent meaning-making, or the means to effectively act upon it, by every dominant thought system. Philosophical thought is thereby effectively removed from democratic processes, and the academy is deeply complicit in its removal.

### Margolis and the counter-currents

While Rorty saw current materialism and ‘naturalizing’ as in accord with pragmatism, Joseph Margolis argued that the connection was true only in so far as both reject spiritual or religious positions, but so do many other disparate thought systems (Margolis, 2002). Classical pragmatists, he pointed out, would never have questioned the central significance of natural meaning-making or the efficacy of human intelligence. Thus Margolis supports a pragmatist position which he characterises as ‘natural but not naturalizable’. Indeed he sees that ‘this may yet prove to be the best short statement of pragmatism’s late discovery of itself’ (Margolis, 2002: 6). However, he also foresees that philosophers will still be ‘battling Cartesianism’ throughout most of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is therefore to a strategy of my own for defusing and re-focusing this mind-body problem that I digress here, before returning to my main thesis.

My position (which I see as essentially Margolian) is developed in an article published in 2006 involving a non-material alternative to the currently dominant materialist philosophical method. My argument focusses on the broader issue of the *nature* of life and of consciousness, on ‘what is the difference’ (between material matter, and living and conscious immaterial capacities) beyond ‘what *makes* the difference’ as the narrower

focus taken by the materialists. I argue that this has to involve completely undiscovered fields of enquiry, very far removed in the chain of evolution from the inert material world at its earliest origins which is the limitation set for themselves by the materialists: “To try to explain advanced consciousness in terms of the simplest physical and material mechanisms that pre-date life and the further development of a central nervous system, must be a severely inadequate strategy” (Author, 2006: 80). I suggest (very tentatively) that a search for such immaterial capacities will need some form of isomorphism as a starting point – and that this could possibly be found between aspects both of organic life and of consciousness (holistic, dynamic, inter-connected, and involved with potential over actual existence) and the outer limits of the natural world, discovered in the early twentieth century, paradoxically by the very analytic, reductionist, methods from which they differ radically (ibid: 88).

Less tentatively, the article points to the onset of consciousness as clearly a biological adaptation (as do both Dewey and Margolis) but, further than that, I argue for its acceptance as the most important evolutionary adaptation ever achieved “a cognitive capacity allowed to individuals by evolution itself”. “This evolutionary understanding *entails* that what we know is more truthful than false – otherwise the adaptation could not be logically defended as having survival value” (Author, 2006: 89). This approach also entails that “we are stuck with knowing the world and being required to deal with it” in contrast to the naturalizers who have no way to explain endogenous processes and their links to exogenous context of our existence. Cartesian dualisms may therefore take on a different appearance if consciousness and the material aspects of the body are understood as incomparable, although interdependent, realities. If conscious thought is seen as immaterial and of an order that we are currently only able very dimly to glimpse, a material method as the only means of accessing its nature must then be abandoned as inappropriate. This understand-

ing, while leaving the connection between physics and consciousness unresolved, necessarily shifts society from a passive to an active position, enabling (requiring) us to enter the political lists once again in the spirit of Dewey a hundred years ago, and for what Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa (Ressa, 2021) demands of all of us – that we ‘hold the line’ for democracy against the threat of fascism. But this discussion is only as a contribution to the wider arguments with which Margolis was most concerned, to which I now return.

I am a ‘Margolian’, or an adherent of the thought of Joseph Margolis (1924 - 2021). If no such term exists, I am coining it now! I will attempt to sketch some of Margolis’s principal contributions to philosophical thought, in so far as I believe they can be seen as significant for this paper. Margolis is hard to categorise philosophically. He admitted to being pleased to be described on one occasion as a ‘baroque analytic’ thinker – on the grounds that he appreciated the ‘genuine rigor’ of analytic thought (Margolis, 1991: x). However, at the same time, he dismisses the ability of analytic philosophy to establish ‘justified true belief’ as epistemically unfounded: “There is no way of giving conceptual priority to alethic questions over epistemic or ontic ones” (since the initiation of all concepts stems from human agency). Thus “neither logic nor epistemology is an autonomous discipline though modern analytic philosophy has always mistakenly supposed they were” (Margolis, 1991: 8). Thus, the core of analytic thought is neatly cut down to size!

Margolis’s unerring instinct for pinpointing the weaknesses in the arguments of all philosophers from Aristotle and Plato (‘those worthies’) to Emmanuel Kant (‘just another peevish rationalist *malgre lui*’) (Margolis, 2016: 104) to the ‘big names’ of his own day – and most especially Richard Rorty – did not always endear him to his colleagues, but that does not detract from the compelling power of his thought, although it may have sometimes marginalised and muted his influence.

Margolis is in fact more than a pragmatist, while

being understood as a key thinker within this genre. Rather he is perhaps a ‘pragmatist writ large’ as his later thoughts on the proper trajectory of pragmatism set it on a wider and more expansive path, one which he believed could capture the best hopes of not only pragmatism, but of philosophy more generally, at a time when he saw that: “the world is bent in the most determined way on deepening everywhere the influence of every benighted vision imaginable, at the same time the planet is being utterly used up. So the ‘best’ thinking is desperately needed”. (Margolis, 1991: x).

Beyond his unsettling of the core assumptions of analytic philosophy and challenging the naturalizing trends in cognitive science (along with the naturalizing element in Rortyan pragmatism) via a defence of the natural world as we find it – his principal contributions to thought have included a recovery of a ‘robust relativism’ from its status of rejection and obscurity suffered since the time of ancient Greece, and a development of Charles Sanders Pierce’s conception of abduction.

In *The Truth about Relativism* (1991) Margolis argues that it was on fairly flimsy grounds that Plato and Aristotle persuaded us that Protagoras was wrong in his belief that ‘man is the measure’ (of truth) a position that denies immutable, a priori, stances. On the contrary Margolis holds that, such a position is an enabling, indeed a necessary, condition for action in the world: “Vindicated, relativism has the force of deepening, in the most profound way, every incipient doubt regarding the presumptions of cognitive fixity, certainty, unconditional truth, irrelevance of context and history and personal and societal perspective in both theoretical and practical matters...once and for all”. With the deepening of doubt about immutable positions, their hold on our attention weakens and the possibilities they hold in check become available once again – that is “context and history and personal and societal perspective in both theoretical and practical matters” are reopened. Margolis also reminds us that “the prevailing philosophical winds...are blow-

ing more and more favourably in relativism's direction than was ever the case in ancient Greece". This brings us back to the discoveries of physics at sub-atomic level along with theories of relativity which allow that "there is certainly no consensus *now* that it is either incoherent or wildly unreasonable to suppose that the world has no fixed structure". But this does not entail that there is no truth. It can rather be seen that "order does not require or entail unconditional invariance, not at the level of the real structures of the world, and not at the level of the conditions of our understanding and intervening in the world". "Scientific explanation tends to become increasingly provisional, transient, imaginative and tolerant of adventurous models of 'what is'". Immovable, timeless solutions, which we have always sought, are endlessly question-begging, and thus up to now, Margolis argues "we have been pretending to draw our strength from an invariant order of norms and natures that we cannot confirm" (Margolis, 1991:105).

All of Margolis's approaches are in accord with his later support for the significance of Charles Sanders Pierce's 'abductive turn' as 'abductive Hope' which, he argues, enables us to "grasp the power of abduction to end doubt, without ensuring truth" (Margolis, 2016:100). The latter is the principal focus of this paper, and, I shall argue, of key significance in effectively defending the status of truth and democracy currently at risk. He discusses 'Charles Pierce's Abductive Turn' at some length in a chapter in his book *Toward a Metaphysics of Culture* (Margolis, 2016).

Pierce's idea of 'abduction' is as the genesis of reasonable, intelligent, common sense ideas. He explains it as "the process of forming explanatory hypotheses. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea" (Duven, 2021, CP 5.172). Elsewhere he says that abduction encompasses "all the operations by which theories and conceptions are engendered" (Duven, 2021, CP 5.590). Margolis's interpretation of such a logical hypothesis is one which occurs to the human mind as the one most

worthy of further investigation – and thus, if engendered by biological processes which are common to humanity, it will be equally available to everyone. (We are speaking here of reduction to the best available explanation – interestingly a position which is apparently currently adopted in many technology programmes). In a related idea Pierce points to the fact that we commonly debate with ourselves over an idea, leading to better critical answers – and this not in isolation but within the context of a wider society. Pierce believed, with Margolis, that there is an 'instinct' for rational order that "we cannot do without but whose characteristic claims cannot be confirmed" (Margolis, 2016: 100). As Margolis says there are strong similarities between these ideas and Dewey's concept of 'warrantable assertibility', which allow us to distinguish between 'absolute truth' and 'what you do not doubt'.

While Margolis quotes Peirce as saying: "if you carefully considered the question of pragmatism you will see that it is nothing else than the question of the logic of abduction" (Margolis, 2016: 98 -99), he is also at pains to admit that others may disagree that Peirce ever abandoned his earlier more mathematical ideas in favour of developing this approach to a central place in his philosophy: "if you insist that he never relented then I say he should have (ibid: 106)". Margolis's point is that this need not matter, since the abductive turn is of value to philosophy in general. We see throughout his discussion that Margolis is, in fact, only using the ideas he finds in the later writings of Pierce, as stepping stones to furthering his own philosophy. Overall he believes that the idea of 'abduction' is a "neglected, but very important resource in Pierce, in classic pragmatism and in philosophy in general (We cannot do without it)" (ibid: 100). He sees that it will provide "a better sense of direction for our time" and that it can be understood as embracing much wider streams of western philosophy, providing a benign way of 'Darwinizing Hegel' and 'Hegelianizing Darwin' (ibid:136), to which Pierce referred in another context. Thus overall:

We may find that we cannot be seriously deflect-

ed from our belief that there *is* an independent but thoroughly cognisable world to be investigated or that we human inquirers are made apt by biological evolution and the cultural invention of language...for effectively coming to know the way the world is (Margolis, 2016: 105)

This approach, whether categorised as essentially Piercean or Margolian, supports the role of rational common sense, within a common understanding, and generally accessible within a current way of life, in accessing truth. For the purposes of this paper, it is essential for defending democracy in our age of post-truth and false news.

#### Links back to our present predicament

A concern for the recovery of human agency and intelligent, responsible, meaning making, can of course equally be thought of as a means of recovering the essential tools for freedom of speech and democratic processes. There are shades here of George Orwell's key defence of the importance of just such individual access to truth in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell's insight was relevant to his time in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when both fascism and soviet communism threatened to engulf democracy and freedom:

The obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold onto that! The solid world exists...stones are hard, water is wet. Freedom is the freedom to say that two and two equal four. If that is granted all else follows (Orwell, 1990:84).

As I have noted elsewhere (author, 2021) amongst the most audacious of Rorty's reinterpretations of other thinkers' ideas in directions designed to accommodate his own, was his claim that this insight of Orwell's could be understood as meaning that "it does not matter whether 'two plus two is four' is true" – but he would defend your right to say so. Orwell's intention (although defeated in the narrative of the novel itself, indicating that we may get to a tipping point beyond which the re-

covery of democracy by this means becomes impossible) was clearly to see logic as innate, individual, and (perhaps the only) powerful antidote to the intellectual hegemony of totalitarian rulers and the influence of false ideas. It is clear that the initial grounding of accessible truth in consciousness and logic is Orwell's point, and not the secondary issue of that fight for the right to say it, which may be contingent upon its acceptance. Both appear to be facing us urgently once again.

Those most clearly in a position to know, warn us that we are currently being called upon once again to draw on our individual ability to say that 'two and two equal four' before our collective thought processes are irreversibly manipulated by false truth. If democracy is under threat, both from within and without its founding institutions, and thus in a weak position of defend itself, those on the front line in its defence are most evidently the international body of investigative journalists. Their weapons are none other than their ability, at great personal risk, to unearth the truth based on the best of available, logical evidence, of the kind that we cannot on that account doubt, although we can also not in any (what Margolis would call) 'knock down way' defend, beyond our biologized instinct for adaptive 'common sense'. They are ably represented by Nobel Laureates Maria Ressa from the Philippines and Dmitry Muratov from Russia, that is from two dictatorships, where the truth is being denied, and lives are being lost in its defence without any available international sanctions.

#### The nature of the challenge

*Post truth*. The precise origins of 'post truth', as the denial of established scientific, empirical means of establishing facts, may be hard to identify, but the means of its dissemination are clearly the social media platforms, shaped by the algorithms set by artificial intelligence, as designed for massive profit by the big tech companies. The algorithms are designed with a built-in emphasis

on those random pieces of disinformation and divisive, emotive messages that most effectively keep viewers engaged, and thus advertisers satisfied. According to Maria Ressa, this has created an 'information ecosystem' of 'surveillance capitalism' which is biased against facts (and against journalists) – a 'virus of fear, anger and hate'. It also entails that we have 'no shared reality' and there can be 'no election integrity without integrity of facts' (Ressa, 2021). In a more recent interview Ressa discusses the mechanisms involved at a deeper level (Ressa, 2022). She explains the machine learning that clones us through social media algorithms, predicting and micro-typing individuals. She argues that this reprogramming has the potential to take away free will and create an emerging new species behaviour – surely a twenty-first century version of the pervasive influence of Orwell's 'Big Brother' operating at a molecular level.

#### The involvement of the '4<sup>th</sup> Estate'

The right to freedom of speech and a free press is guaranteed in the First Amendment of the American Constitution as follows:

Congress shall make no law ...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press... or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

At a previous time of serious corruption and lawlessness at the beginning of the twentieth century then President Theodore Roosevelt famously depicted the journalist as 'The man with the muck rake'. In a speech delivered in 1906 he rallied the press to be vigilant and expose the evil doers – providing only that all that they said involved only the truth. The relevant part of the speech reads as follows:

There are in the body politic, economic and social, many and grave evils, and there is urgent necessity for the sternest war upon them. There should be relentless exposure of and attack upon every evil man, whether politician or business man, every evil practice, whether in politics, business, or

social life. I hail as a benefactor every writer or speaker, every man who, on the platform or in a book, magazine, or newspaper, with merciless severity makes such attack, provided always that he in his turn remembers that the attack is of use only if it is absolutely truthful.<sup>2</sup>

It can be agreed that more than one hundred years later it is still true to say that "there are in the body politic, economic and social, many and grave evils, and there is urgent necessity for the sternest war upon them". Such are the wars for freedom of speech being fought against dictators all over the world. Whether current, essentially democratic, governments, including the USA, can be shown to maintain Theodore Roosevelt's supportive approach for investigative journalists, if their target is the government itself, is however open to question.

Yochai Benkler discusses this issue in "a Free Irresponsible Press: Wikileaks and the Battle over the Soul of the Networked Fourth Estate". He explains that the "Networked Fourth Estate" differs from "the traditional press and the traditional fourth estate in that it has a diverse set of actors instead of a small number of major presses. These actors include small for-profit media organizations, non-profit media organizations, academic centers, and distributed networks of individuals participating in the media process with the larger traditional organizations." While the members of this informal press corps are themselves potentially irresponsible, through a discussion of the case of Julian Assange and his exposure of secret US government documents in Wikileaks, the article finds that the US government is also able to "circumvent normal constitutional protections to crack down on critics who use the networked public sphere", since private companies largely tried to cut out Assange from dealing with them, for fear of government reprisals. To

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, Address of President Roosevelt at the Laying of the Corner Stone of 'the Office Building of the House of Representatives: The Man with the Muck-Rake' (Apr. 14, 1906) – quoted in 'A Free Irresponsible Press: Wikileaks and the Battle over the Soul of the Networked Fourth Estate'. Yochai Benkler *Harvard Civil Liberties Law Review* May, 2011.

fast forward eleven years, we find Lassange still behind bars and a June 2022 decision of the British government to extradite him to the United States, knowing he could spend the rest of his life in jail for exposing US secret documents, being understood by the independent left-wing Guardian newspaper (17 June, 2022) as “turn[ing] investigative journalism into a criminal act”. The rights and wrongs of this case are however far from clear-cut, and it is not the focus of this article to debate them – but only to point to the possibility of (pragmatist) philosophy, as a co-guardian with the journalists of a reclaimed ‘adaptive truth’, to enter the fray – as did Dewey.

### Pragmatism in a Post-Truth Era

Paul Thompson’s article ‘Pragmatism in a Post-truth Era’ is significant for this paper. He discusses the complex nuances of establishing a pragmatist stance on issues of post-truth, and uses the example of A Breeze Harper’s collected testimony on food, health and identity taken from 24 black women vegans in the United States. He shows how “it creates a quandary when institutional reform calls for recognition of voices that also appear to reject the legitimacy of science on the grounds of alleged histories of oppression by scientific elites”. Grounds for seeing scientific truths as questionable in the past, and implicated in oppressive practices, allow the position of the Vegan Sistahs to be seen as consistent with scientific norms in some respects – but where they “actively resist controlled experiment and scientific peer review” (Thompson, 2021: 95) – they diverge radically from Dewey’s position on the establishment of truth by experiment, and also from an ‘adaptive truth’ or ‘robust relativism’ which must accept the best available conclusion, all common sense critical considerations being taken into account. Thompson remains concerned however that “if Dotson and Stanley are right, it is the dismissal of the Sistah Vegan’s voice that blocks the learning process, rather than the denial of science”. A Margolian position of adap-

tive truth would however be able to settle this issue, as this voice is now being included, its previous exclusion notwithstanding. In a footnote Thomson explains his own ambivalent stance in these terms: “As a pragmatist I remain committed to the possibility that the skeptics could be right”. As a Margolian however this possibility evaporates, and the quandary Thompson sets up at the start of the article disappears. Scepticism would not have parity of position in any debate on an issue of truth, and the ‘Vegan Sistahs’ post-truth stance, in denying the conceptual tools needed to access the best available position, would have to concede to the nutritionists.

### Conclusion

This article is intended as a celebration of the ideas of the late philosopher Joseph Margolis, of his contribution to pragmatism and to philosophy more widely. It is also intended as a recognition that the ‘best thinking’ that Margolis saw as so badly needed in our century, can in fact be recovered very effectively through a close reading of his own work.

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