Classe de PSI* 2016 - 2017

Epreuve d'anglais de type Centrale-Supélec

Anglais
MP, PC, PSI

4 heures

Vous rédigerez en anglais et en 500 mots environ une synthèse des documents proposés. Vous indiquerez avec précision à la fin de votre synthèse le nombre de mots qu'elle comporte. Un écart de 10% en plus ou en moins sera accepté. Votre travail comportera un titre comptabilisé dans le nombre de mots.

Ce sujet propose les 4 documents suivants :

- « Why We're Post-Fact», extrait d'un article paru le 20 juillet 2016 dans *Granta.*

- Un extrait de « How technology disrupted the truth », essai de Katherine Viner, redactrice-en-chef du *Guardian*, paru le 12 juillet 2016

- « 'Irritation and anger' may lead to Brexit, says influential psychologist », article paru le 6 juin 2016 dans *The Telegraph*

- Un dessin humoristique de Loren Fishman, retrouvé sur www.cartoonstock.com (sans date).

L'ordre dans lequel se présentent les documents est aléatoire.

DOCUMENT 1

WHY WE'RE POST-FACT

Peter Pomerantsev, *Granta: The magazine of new writing*, July 20th, 2016

As his army blatantly annexed Crimea, Vladimir Putin went on TV and, with a smirk, told the world there were no Russian soldiers in Ukraine. He wasn't lying so much as saying the truth doesn't matter. And when Donald Trump makes up facts on a whim, claims that he saw thousands of Muslims in New Jersey cheering the Twin Towers coming down, or that the Mexican government purposefully sends 'bad' immigrants to the US, when fact-checking agencies rate 78% of his statements untrue but he still becomes a US Presidential candidate – then it appears that facts no longer matter much in the land of the free. When the Brexit campaign announces 'Let's give our NHS the £350 million the EU takes every week' and, on winning the referendum, the claim is shrugged off as a 'mistake' by one Brexit leader while another explains it as 'an aspiration', then it's clear we are living in a 'post-fact' or 'post-truth' world. Not merely a world where politicians and media lie – they have always lied – but one where they don't care whether they tell the truth or not.

How did we get here? Is it due to technology? Economic globalisation? The culmination of the history of philosophy? There is some sort of teenage joy in throwing off the weight of facts – those heavy symbols of education and authority, reminders of our place and limitations – but why is this rebellion happening right now?

Many blame technology. Instead of ushering a new era of truth-telling, the information age allows lies to spread in what techies call 'digital wildfires'. By the time a fact-checker has caught a lie, thousands more have been created, and the sheer volume of 'disinformation cascades' make unreality unstoppable. All that matters is that the lie is clickable, and what determines that is how it feeds into people's existing prejudices. Algorithms developed by companies such as Google and Facebook are based around your previous searches and clicks, so with every search and every click you find your own biases confirmed. Social media, now the primary news source for most Americans, leads us into echo chambers of similar-minded people, feeding us only the things that make us feel better, whether they are true or not.

Technology might have more subtle influences on our relationship with the truth, too. The new media, with its myriad screens and streams, makes reality so fragmented it becomes ungraspable, pushing us towards, or allowing us to flee, into virtual realities and fantasies. Fragmentation, combined with the disorientations of globalization, leaves people yearning for a more secure past, breeding nostalgia. 'The twenty-first century is not characterized by the search for new-ness' wrote the late Russian-American philologist Svetlana Boym, 'but by the proliferation of nostalgias . . . nostalgic nationalists and nostalgic cosmopolitans, nostalgic environmentalists and nostalgic metrophiliacs (city lovers) exchange pixel fire in the blogosphere'. Thus Putin's internet-troll armies sell dreams of a restored Russian Empire and Soviet Union; Trump tweets to 'Make America Great Again'; Brexiteers yearn for a lost England on Facebook; while ISIS's viral snuff movies glorify a mythic Caliphate. 'Restorative nostalgia', argued Boym, strives to rebuild the lost homeland with 'paranoiac determination', thinks of itself as 'truth and tradition', obsesses over grand symbols and 'relinquish[es] critical thinking for emotional bonding . . . In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters'.

The flight into techno-fantasies is intertwined with economic and social uncertainty. If all the facts say you have no economic future then why would you want to hear facts? If you live in a world where a small event in China leads to livelihoods lost in Lyon, where your government seems to have no control over what is going on, then trust in the old institutions of authority – politicians, academics, the media – buckles. Which has led to Brexit leader Michael Gove's claim that British people 'have had enough of experts', Trump's rants at the 'lamestream' media and the online flowering of 'alternative news' sites. Paradoxically, people who don't trust 'the mainstream' media are, a study from Northeastern University showed, more likely to swallow disinformation. 'Surprisingly, consumers of alternative news, which are the users trying to avoid the

mainstream media "mass-manipulation", are the most responsive to the injection of false claims.'[1] Healthy scepticism ends in a search for wild conspiracies. Putin's Kremlin-controlled television finds US conspiracies behind everything, Trump speculates that 9/11 was an inside job, and parts of the Brexit campaign saw Britain under attack from a Germano-Franco-European plot.

'There is no such thing as objective reporting,' claim the heads of Putin's propaganda networks Dmitry Kiselev and Margarita Simonyan, when asked to explain the editorial principles which allow for conspiracy theories to be presented as being equally valid to evidence-based research. The Kremlin's international channel, RT, claims to be giving an 'alternative' point of view, but in practice this means making the editor of a fringe right-wing magazine as credible a talking head as a University academic, making a lie as worthy of broadcast as a fact. Donald Trump plays a similar game when he invokes wild rumors as reasonable, alternative opinions, couching stories that Obama is a Muslim, or that rival Ted Cruz carries a secret Canadian passport, with the caveat: 'A lot of people are saying . . .'[2]

This equaling out of truth and falsehood is both informed by and takes advantage of an all-permeating late post-modernism and relativism, which has trickled down over the past thirty years from academia to the media and then everywhere else. This school of thought has taken Nietzsche's maxim, there are no facts, only interpretations, to mean that every version of events is just another narrative, where lies can be excused as 'an alternative point of view' or 'an opinion', because 'it's all relative' and 'everyone has their own truth' (and on the internet they really do). [...]

DOCUMENT 2

[...]

Twenty-five years after the first website went online, it is clear that we are living through a period of dizzying transition. For 500 years after Gutenberg, the dominant form of information was the printed page: knowledge was primarily delivered in a fixed format, one that encouraged readers to believe in stable and settled truths.

Now, we are caught in a series of confusing battles between opposing forces: between truth and falsehood, fact and rumour, kindness and cruelty; between the few and the many, the connected and the alienated; between the open platform of the web as its architects envisioned it and the gated enclosures of Facebook and other social networks; between an informed public and a misguided mob.

What is common to these struggles – and what makes their resolution an urgent matter – is that they all involve the diminishing status of truth. This does not mean that there are no truths. It simply means, as this year has made very clear, that we cannot agree on what those truths are, and when there is no consensus about the truth and no way to achieve it, chaos soon follows.

Increasingly, what counts as a fact is merely a view that someone feels to be true – and technology has made it very easy for these "facts" to circulate with a speed and reach that was unimaginable in the Gutenberg era (or even a decade ago). A dubious story about Cameron and a pig appears in a tabloid one morning, and by noon, it has flown around the world on social media and turned up in trusted news sources everywhere. This may seem like a small matter, but its consequences are enormous.

In the digital age, it is easier than ever to publish false information, which is quickly shared and taken to be true

"The Truth", as Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie wrote in *Stick It Up Your Punter!*, their history of the *Sun* newspaper, is a "bald statement which every newspaper prints at its peril". There are usually several

conflicting truths on any given subject, but in the era of the printing press, words on a page nailed things down, whether they turned out to be true or not. The information felt like the truth, at least until the next day brought another update or a correction, and we all shared a common set of facts.

This settled "truth" was usually handed down from above: an established truth, often fixed in place by an establishment. This arrangement was not without flaws: too much of the press often exhibited a bias towards the status quo and a deference to authority, and it was prohibitively difficult for ordinary people to challenge the power of the press. Now, people distrust much of what is presented as fact – particularly if the facts in question are uncomfortable, or out of sync with their own views – and while some of that distrust is misplaced, some of it is not.

In the digital age, it is easier than ever to publish false information, which is quickly shared and taken to be true – as we often see in emergency situations, when news is breaking in real time. To pick one example among many, during the November 2015 Paris terror attacks, rumours quickly spread on social media that the Louvre and Pompidou Centre had been hit, and that François Hollande had suffered a stroke. Trusted news organisations are needed to debunk such tall tales.

Sometimes rumours like these spread out of panic, sometimes out of malice, and sometimes deliberate manipulation, in which a corporation or regime pays people to convey their message. Whatever the motive, falsehoods and facts now spread the same way, through what academics call an "information cascade". As the legal scholar and online-harassment expert Danielle Citron describes it, "people forward on what others think, even if the information is false, misleading or incomplete, because they think they have learned something valuable." This cycle repeats itself, and before you know it, the cascade has unstoppable momentum. You share a friend's post on Facebook, perhaps to show kinship or agreement or that you're "in the know", and thus you increase the visibility of their post to others.

Algorithms such as the one that powers Facebook's news feed are designed to give us more of what they think we want – which means that the version of the world we encounter every day in our own personal stream has been invisibly curated to reinforce our pre-existing beliefs. When Eli Pariser, the co-founder of Upworthy, coined the term "filter bubble" in 2011, he was talking about how the personalised web – and in particular Google's personalised search function, which means that no two people's Google searches are the same – means that we are less likely to be exposed to information that challenges us or broadens our worldview, and less likely to encounter facts that disprove false information that others have shared.

Pariser's plea, at the time, was that those running social media platforms should ensure that "their algorithms prioritise countervailing views and news that's important, not just the stuff that's most popular or most self-validating". But in less than five years, thanks to the incredible power of a few social platforms, the filter bubble that Pariser described has become much more extreme.

On the day after the EU referendum, in a Facebook post, the British internet activist and mySociety founder, Tom Steinberg, provided a vivid illustration of the power of the filter bubble – and the serious civic consequences for a world where information flows largely through social networks:

*I am actively searching through Facebook for people celebrating the Brexit leave victory, but the filter bubble is SO strong, and extends SO far into things like Facebook's custom search that I can't find anyone who is happy *despite the fact that over half the country is clearly jubilant today* and despite the fact that I'm *actively* looking to hear what they are saying.*

This echo-chamber problem is now SO severe and SO chronic that I can only beg any friends I have who actually work for Facebook and other major social media and technology to urgently tell their leaders that to

not act on this problem now is tantamount to actively supporting and funding the tearing apart of the fabric of our societies … We're getting countries where one half just doesn't know anything at all about the other.

But asking technology companies to "do something" about the filter bubble presumes that this is a problem that can be easily fixed – rather than one baked into the very idea of social networks that are designed to give you what you and your friends want to see.

[...]

Extracted from ***How technology disrupted the truth***, an essay by Katherine Viner, editor-in-chief of *The Guardian*, 12th July, 2016

DOCUMENT 3

'Irritation and anger' may lead to Brexit, says influential psychologist

Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, *The Telegraph,* 6th June, 2016 (adapted)

British voters are succumbing to impulsive gut feelings and irrational reflexes in the Brexit campaign with little regard for the enormous consequences down the road, the world's most influential psychologist has warned.

Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel laureate and father of behavioural economics, said the referendum debate is being driven by a destructive psychological process, one that could lead to a grave misjudgment and a downward spiral for British society.

"The major impression one gets observing the debate is that the reasons for exit are clearly emotional," he said. "The arguments look odd: they look short-term and based on irritation and anger. These seem to be powerful enough that they may lead to Brexit," he said, speaking to *The Telegraph* at the Amundi world investment forum in Paris.

The counter-critique is that the Remain campaign is equally degrading the debate, playing on visceral reactions and ephemeral issues of the day. In a sense the two sides are egging each other on. That is the sociological fascination of it.

Professor Kahneman, who survived the Nazi occupation of France as a Jewish child in the Second World War, said the risk is that the British people will be swept along by emotion and lash out later at scapegoats if EU withdrawal proves to be a disastrous strategic error.

"They won't regret it because regret is rare. They'll find a way to explain what happened and blame somebody. That is the general pattern when things go wrong and people are afraid," he said.

The refusal to face up to the implications of what is really at stake in the referendum comes as no surprise to a man imbued with deep sense of anthropological pessimism. His life's work is anchored in studies showing that people are irrational. They are prone to cognitive biases and "systematic errors in thinking", made worse by chronic over-confidence in their own judgment – and the less intelligent they are, the more militantly certain they tend to be.

People do not always act in their own economic self-interest. Nor do they strive to maximize "utility' and minimize risk, contrary to the assumptions of efficient market theory and the core premises of the economics profession.

"People are myopic. Our brain circuits respond to immediate consequences," he said. "We feel too much confidence in our beliefs but the results of psychological research are unequivocal: confidence has very little to do with the information on which it is based."

"Donald Trump is psychologically fascinating. He represents a sort of ideal in that he is very rich, and people want to be rich," he said.

"He's a masculine fantasy: lots of money and lots of women. He is not afraid of anything. In the context of politicians who seem to be doing nothing, it feels compelling. He looks strong. He is a bully, and people like bullies," he said.

Prof Kahneman compares the strange response of Americans to rape cases that he studied in the 1980s. Society has a proclivity to blame the victim – in the Trump saga: Mexicans, Muslims, and others – because people subtly conform to the idea that the rapist cannot act otherwise.

"It is a very interesting phenomenon and it has reached the point where Trump can get away with almost anything. 'The bully is immutable, it is in his nature, that is what he does', and once you convince people that it is normal for you to do that kind of thing, you can get away with things that nobody else could get away with," he said.
Corrosive economic stress seems to be the backdrop for why such a large slide of American society are willing to suspend its normal judgment. He says globalisation was badly managed in favour of winners, and has left tens of millions of losers.
"It destroyed American manufacturing and the American middle class. There are places where real incomes have dropped 30% over the last thirty years. There used to be a concept that if you do your job, and live your live properly, things will be fine. People don't think that any more," he said.
Prof Kahneman and his late colleague Amos Tversky have profoundly influenced a generation of psychologists. In the process they challenged the assumption of rationality in economics, which is why he won the Nobel Prize in 2002.
He loosely contrasts the quick, intuitive, emotional reactions in the right-side of the brain with the slower, logical responses of the left-side. The latter is lazy, apt to confirm emotions too easily, and does not always pull its weight in decisions. That is where mistakes are made.
His experiments are deeply disturbing for anybody with a touching faith in rationality. He discovered that parole judges rack up a 65% release rate for prisoners if the case comes up just after lunch. This collapses to almost zero by the end of the afternoon as the meal fades. The judges are of course unaware of their bias.
We are very bad at learning from mistakes because we fall into the trap of hindsight and "re-image" past events, conjuring false explications for what may have been a random shock. We have already created a false narrative about the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

DOCUMENT 4

"Hey, that line's moving a lot faster!"

Cartoon by Loren Fishman, from *www.cartoonstock.com*