

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

PPE – Politics, Philosophy & Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Why Truth Matters? Arendt and Foucault on Truth-telling in Post-truth Age
Author of the thesis:	Haolin Zhou
Referee:	Jakub Franěk

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings:

This is a very ambitious, interesting and in many ways original BA Thesis on an important topic: the importance and possibilities of truth telling in the “post-truth” age. The author, however, does not address this problem directly. Instead, he explores and compares the reflections on truth and politics in the works of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. Both of these authors have been accused of moral relativism or even nihilism and hence of contributing to the emergence of the current “post-truth” situation. The reviewed thesis aims to reject these claims by arguing that both Arendt and Foucault, in spite of their anti-foundationalist positions, in fact deeply care about truth (or truth-telling in the sense of *parrhesia*) and at the same time are aware of various forms of manipulation with public “truth” in late modernity. Moreover, the thesis explores certain parallels in the thought of the examined authors (specifically in their creative appropriation of Kant’s ideas and in their understanding of Socrates) and suggests that their ideas are in certain sense mutually complementary and that they could help us face the challenges of the current “post-truth” situation.

As the thesis supervisor I have to commend the author, Mr. Haolin Zhou, for the hard work and effort he has invested into this project. Just the sheer amount of not particularly trivial primary literature he has managed to read through and comprehend while working on his BA thesis is quite astonishing for an undergraduate student. The thesis also contains some interesting and truly original insights – especially in the concluding chapters, where the author argues that Foucault’s work implicitly contains an agonistic theory of democracy that can be fruitfully understood as complementary to Arendt’s understanding of democracy.

Nevertheless, as a whole, the thesis is not fully convincing. As I stated at the beginning of these reflections, it is very ambitious. At the same time, the author, who has managed to complete his coursework in just two years instead of the usual three, had to work under a lot of time-pressure. The submitted manuscript unfortunately reflects these time constraints. Especially the chapter on Foucault would deserve further work to become fully convincing. (Much of the argument contained in section 3.1 appears to be only loosely connected with the main argument of the thesis; I am also not sure why the author opted to draw his arguments in this section largely from the posthumously published lectures at College de France rather than from *The History of Sexuality* in this section.) The concluding sections which compare Arendt’s and Foucault’s ideas could also be better developed.

Despite these shortcomings, this is a very good BA thesis which deserves to pass the defence.

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	12
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	72
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	C

DATE OF EVALUATION: June 7, 2021

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honour)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honour)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant to this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts **omitted**? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently **incorporated with the topic** and hypotheses tested? Has the author demonstrated a genuine **understanding** of the theories addressed?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and the ability to draw **conclusions** based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the **policy implications** well founded?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further **verification and testing**? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or **irrelevant detours** off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 12 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates the author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author **quotes** relevant literature in a **proper way** and works with a **representative bibliography**. (Remarks: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**. If they dominate, you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give a much better impression. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate **language and style**, including the academic **format for quotations**, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**. The text is free from typos and easy to comprehend.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

Remarks for the referees:

- 1) Download the thesis from the SIS. If you have no access to SIS, please ask the secretary of IPS (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz, tel. 296 824 641) for sending you the thesis by e-mail.
- 2) Use the IEPS Thesis Report form only for your comments. **It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 400 words.** In case you assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.
- 3) Retain your critical stance. You cannot confer more than 80 points upon a thesis that does not satisfy research standards in top European universities.
- 4) Upload the Report as PDF/A file into the SIS. Instructions on how to convert .DOCx to PDF/A): „Save as“ – select „PDF“ – check-in „Options or Možnosti“ that „PDF options“ tick „ISO 19005-1 compliant /kompatibilní s/ (PDF/A)“ – „Save“. If you have no access to SIS, please send the unsigned PDF file to the secretary of IPS (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz).
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- 6) Your Report will be remunerated, so we need also your account information (separate from this form).