

Prof. Dr. Rae Langton (University of Cambridge): ‘Post-truth’ as post-democracy

Abstract

What is the point of free speech? Truth, said the philosopher J.S. Mill, and he was partly right. Free speech is not a fisticuff free-for-all. What matters is knowledge, especially the knowledge needed to govern ourselves in a democracy. ‘Post-truth’ was recently the Oxford English Dictionary word of the year, made manifest in speech that manipulates and deceives, in the media and in social media. But the abandonment of truth would be the death, not the vindication, of free speech. A living democracy needs and deserves better.