

# The Concept of Alternative Facts

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*Tässä artikkelissa tehdään selkoa vaihtoehdoisen totuuden käsitteestä. Tulokseksi saadaan vaihtoehdoisen totuuden 18 merkitystä, jotka eivät ole toisiaan poissulkevia vaan osittain päällekkäisiä. Tarkastelu perustuu uutisointeihin, jotka koskevat presidentti Donald Trumpin hallinnon synnyttämää mediakeskustelua vaihtoehdoisista totuuksista, totuuden jälkeisestä ajasta ja vale uutisista. Lisäksi hyödynnetään esimerkkejä kaunokirjallisuudesta (mm. George Orwellin kirja ”Vuonna 1984” sekä ”Sokeat ja norsu” -kertomus) ja filosofisesta keskustelusta (mm. klassinen tiedon määritelmä, tieto-opillinen relativismi sekä dekonstruktionistinen käsitys kielestä ja totuudesta). Johtopäätöksenä esitetään, että ongelmattomin tapa ymmärtää ”vaihtoehtoinen totuus” on liittää se inhimillisen tiedonkyvyn ja -hankinnan näkökulmasidonnaisuuteen. Sen mukaan perusteet jonkin väitteen esittämiseksi ovat usein valikoivia ja rajoittavia. Lisäksi sama ilmiö voi näyttäytyä erilaisena riippuen siitä, mikä on tarkastelun fokus ja mitkä ovat tarkastelun välineet. Erilaiset mutta yhteensopivat käsitykset voivat siksi olla toisiaan täydentäviä osatotuuksia pikemmin kuin vaihtoehtoisia totuuksia.*

**Keywords:** alternative facts, fake news, partial truths, point of view, post-truth

## 1 Introduction

This paper analyses, from a philosophical perspective, the concept of “alternative facts”. The related concepts of “post-truth” and “fake news” are also discussed, albeit with a lesser focus. The concept of alternative facts is philosophically interesting because it seems to call into question a set of widely accepted, folk-psychological standards of truth and knowledge. These standards include the following: there is only one truth about every single issue and the opposite of truth is not another truth, but falsehood.

The term “alternative facts” can be understood to have at least two principal meanings. First, it can refer to a statement known to be false but deliberately presented as being true, that is, a lie. Second, “alternative facts” can refer to an error or something mistakenly accepted as true. This can be a claim that is possibly true (and there may even be some evidence for its being true) or a claim that could be true, but is not (i.e. a claim that is true in some possible world).

In relation to the latter meaning, the concept of alternative facts could also be favourably interpreted as follows: If a claim and its negation are both equally justified (i.e. there are equally valid reasons or equally strong evidence in support of either claim), they can be understood to express alternative facts. This is, however, a conditional evaluation (i.e.,

the claim and its negation remain alternative possible facts). If new compelling evidence for one claim is found, that claim is said, in the language of epistemic probability, to be more probably true than the other claim. In view of this and other philosophical considerations, the concepts of alternative facts, post-truth and fake news are discussed in this paper.

## 2 Alternative Facts on Trump's Inauguration

I am a father of five children who loved to listen to fairy tales and stories. So, you are going to have to excuse me if I start with a reference to a fairy tale. Alternative facts are like the emperor's new clothes. In the so-named story by Hans Christian Andersen, a child expresses what adults also see but what they have declined to believe until then: "The Emperor hasn't got any clothes on!" More generally, the story teaches us to ask in what respect, and to what extent, we are inclined towards self-deception and self-assertion.

Another literary reference is also worth mentioning. In George Orwell's novel *1984*, self-deception and one's conflicting beliefs are called "doublethink". It is self-deception to see something, but believe against it. For example, it is self-deception to see a major natural disaster (such as climate change) approaching, but to believe that nothing has to be done. Moreover, it is contradictory to believe that something does and does not hold true. For example, it is inconsistent to believe that refugees, even though human beings, do not have human rights. It is said that after Donald Trump's rise to power the interest in Orwell's dystopia increased markedly (*The Guardian*, 24 January 2017). The reason is all too clear: the protagonist of the novel, Winston Smith, is an official of the Ministry of Truth who forges history so as to be pleasing to the powers. The Trump administration is also accused of being guilty of manipulation of the facts.

The term "alternative facts" has been a hot topic in the current presidency of the United States. The phrase was coined by Kellyanne Conway, an advisor to President Trump, during a *Meet the Press* interview in January 2017. In that interview, she defended the former White House press secretary Sean Spicer's statement about the attendance numbers at Trump's inauguration. When challenged during the interview about the statement, Conway said that Spicer was giving "alternative facts" (Fandos 2017). Conway later defended her choice of words, defining alternative facts as "additional facts and alternative information" (Seipel 2017).

In the era of Trump and Brexit, Oxford Dictionaries has declared "post-truth" to be its 2016 international word of the year. It is defined by the dictionary as an adjective "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". The editors said that use of the term "post-truth" had increased by around 2,000 % in 2016 compared to the previous year. The spike in usage, it said, is in the context of the referendum to leave the European Union in

the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States. Oxford Dictionaries' word of the year is intended to reflect the passing year in language. "Post-truth" has been included in oxforddictionaries.com, and the editors will monitor its future usage to see if it will be included in future editions of the Oxford English Dictionary (*The Guardian*, 15 November 2016).

"Fake news" has acquired a certain legitimacy after being named word of the year 2017 by Collins, following what the dictionary called its "ubiquitous presence" over the preceding 12 months. Collins Dictionary's lexicographers, who monitor the 4.5bn-word Collins corpus, said that usage of the term had increased by 365 % since 2016. The phrase, often capitalised, is frequently a feature of Trump's rhetoric; in the last few months alone, he has tweeted of how "the Fake News is working overtime" in relation to the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, and of how "Fake News [is] weak!" Trump has used the term frequently, and has claimed to have invented it – "the media is really, the word, one of the greatest of all [the] terms I've come up with, is 'fake' ... I guess other people have used it perhaps over the years, but I've never noticed it," he told an interviewer. This etymology was disputed by the dictionary. Collins said that "fake news" started being used in the noughties on US television to describe "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting". Its usage has climbed since 2015, according to the dictionary, and really took off in 2017, and its ubiquity was acknowledged with a place in the print edition of the *Collins English Dictionary* (*The Guardian*, 2 November 2017).

### **3 Philosophical Remarks on Alternative Facts**

You may tremble out of fear or disgust when you hear about alternative facts and the "post-truth era". You may be afraid that our mutual confidence is crumbling and that lying is becoming commonplace. You may also hate liars earning unmerited favour and society becoming morally debased. Despite this emotional unattractiveness, the concept of alternative facts also has some more tolerable uses. One of them is legal: "alternative facts" is a term used in law to describe inconsistent sets of facts put forth by the same party in court. What is presupposed in such cases is that there is plausible evidence to support different alternatives. The term "alternative facts" is also used to describe competing facts for the two sides of the case (*Dictionary of Law*).

Even if the term "alternative facts" is not an established philosophical concept, it has been used (right or wrong) to characterize certain epistemological tenets of deconstructionism, a 20th-century school of philosophy initiated by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. Deconstructionism is a theory in literary criticism that exposes contextual limitations of traditional concepts of certainty, identity and truth. Moreover, deconstructionism asserts that words can only refer to other words and not to a reality independent of our thinking about it (Jones & Fogelin 1997: 516-517, 519). Deconstructionism also attempts to demonstrate

how statements in any text subvert their own meanings. Especially in the context of deconstructionism and postmodernism, one can be afraid that the beast of relativism lurks behind the idea of alternative facts – or so it is assumed. However, a closer look reveals that the relativism charge against deconstructionism is unwarranted and distorts the nature of the project. Derrida (1999) argued against relativism, basically using the same argument as below. A less biased account of Derrida’s philosophy of language could possibly hold that exposing conceptual limitations is a way of introducing alternative facts. Radical relativists, for their part, are much more straightforward in their approach. They say that all values and beliefs are relative, except relativism itself which is unconditionally true. This claim reveals the inherent contradiction in radical relativism. The claim also reveals that there is value relativism and epistemic relativism, among other forms of relativism. Plato’s *Theaetetus* dialogue includes a well-known definition of knowledge: “Knowledge [is] true opinion accompanied by reason” (201c–d). This definition is better known in the form “knowledge is justified true belief”. It does not follow from the classical definition of knowledge as such that alternative facts would be conceptually impossible. However, that conclusion follows from these additional assumptions that were already mentioned in the introduction:

1. There is only one truth about every single issue.
2. The opposite of truth is not another truth, but falsehood.

According to the first assumption, no alternative facts or truths exist. According to the second assumption, there are various falsehoods: first, the contradictory opposite of a truth and, second, an inexhaustible set of contrary opposites of a truth. Contradictory opposites cannot be simultaneously true and cannot be simultaneously false, whereas contrary opposites cannot be simultaneously true. For example, white and non-white are contradictory opposites. Therefore, anything is either totally white or not totally white and nothing totally white can simultaneously be totally not-white. Examples of contrary opposites, in turn, are white, black, red, blue, yellow and all different colours. Accordingly, if something is totally white, it cannot simultaneously be totally black, but if totally repainted for example in blue, it is then both not-white and not-black. As stated, it follows from the above assumptions 1 and 2 that there are no alternative facts. Instead, there is an infinite set of truths or true sentences and an infinite set of falsehoods including both the contradictory and contrary opposites to truths.

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of alternative facts can also be understood to be about the probability of a claim and its opposite. A concrete example of this is a weather forecast that predicts a 50 % chance of rain. Thus, it is equally probable that there will be no rain. Raining and not raining are alternative possibilities in terms of equal probabilities. The future will show which prediction is more reliable.

It is said that Mr. Trump considers climate change as a Chinese hoax and sees his own view as an alternative fact. He let people understand that researchers of climate change

are wrong. He also seems to assume that a claim can possibly be paraded as true if there are at least a handful of persons (or self-proclaimed “experts”) who support it. Thus, Mr. Trump allows testimony to be a source of knowledge, and in this he is basically doing the right thing, or at least not automatically the wrong thing. This does not mean, however, that Mr. Trump (or anyone for that matter) is doing the right thing by soliciting inexpert authority or ideologically-bound advice. He should be more careful in the choice of experts to whom he listens. According to climate sceptics, researchers are wrong because they interpret their observations in a wrong way, exaggerating risks and gloomy prospects. Mr. Trump shares this view and underestimates the value and reliability of scientific research. However, in light of scientific knowledge, denying climate change is as far from the truth as the east is from the west. Mr. Trump shows opportunism because he also makes a clear-cut distinction between truth and falsity when it serves his own goals. This becomes clear in his criticism of fake news that is, in reality, facts that put his own words and politics in a questionable light.

#### **4 Different Points of View**

Based on what I have presented so far, the concept of alternative facts is at least dubious. If the “dung heap of alternative facts” is turned really hard, can something valuable be found? What comes up is the following. The most plausible way to understand alternative facts is to take it to refer to different points of view and different perspectival views. If perspectives yield alternative facts, these facts are objective correlates to the points of view. Thus, along these lines, alternative facts are not thought to be subjective.

Though the term “point of view” is used in everyday language and in science, its meaning remains ambiguous and unspecific. In its most concrete sense, “point of view” refers to the physical, spatial, and temporal position from which something is seen or viewed. Figuratively, it refers to the perspective from which a subject or event is perceived or a story narrated. This figurative meaning is closely related to another meaning, for a point of view can also refer to a person’s state of mind or opinion. It has been suggested that there is at least one common feature in the different uses of the expression “from x’s point of view”. The expression indicates that the grounds for stating the sentence that follows are somehow restrictive and limiting. Therefore, if a statement is made from a certain point of view, then the implication is that not everything has been taken into account or not all relevant possibilities have been considered, and that only some of the aspects of an object are selected, depending on interests, aims, values, background assumptions, and so on. Thus, a selective mechanism is associated with a point of view. For this reason, it can be said that “from x’s point of view” is, in a sense, an antonym for “absolutely” or “thoroughly” (except when x is a dogmatic authority addressing a believer) (Hautamäki 1986: 63, 65; Lehtonen 2011: 237).

One of the best-known demonstrations of different points of view is the story about the blind men and an elephant. The story is originally from *Udâna*, part of the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism, dated to about the mid-1st millennium BCE. The story illustrates how knowledge acquisition is dependent upon one's point of view. The story also teaches that the limitations of a point of view can easily lead to misunderstandings, mistakes of scale and excessive simplification. The story goes like this:

Once there was a certain king who said to a certain man, "Gather together all the people who have been blind from birth." "As you say, your majesty", the man replied and, rounding up all the people who had been blind from birth, he went to the king and said, "Your majesty, the people who have been blind from birth have been gathered together". "Very well then, show the blind people an elephant". To some of the blind people he showed the head of the elephant, saying, "This, blind people, is what an elephant is like". To some of them he showed an ear of the elephant, saying, "This, blind people, is what an elephant is like". To some of them he showed a tusk ... the trunk ... the body ... a foot ... the hindquarters ... the tail ... the tuft at the end of the tail, saying, "This, blind people, is what an elephant is like."

Then, the man went to the king and said, "Your majesty, the blind people have seen the elephant. May your majesty do what you think it is now time to do". Then the king went to the blind people and asked them, "Blind people, what the elephant is like."

The blind people who had been shown the head of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a water jar". Those who had been shown the ear of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing basket". Those who had been shown the tusk of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like an iron rod". Those who had been shown the trunk of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like the pole of a plow". Those who had been shown the body of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a granary". Those who had been shown the foot of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a post". Those who had been shown the hindquarters of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar". Those who had been shown the tail of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle". Those who had been shown the tuft at the end of the tail of the elephant replied, "The elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom." Saying, "The elephant is like this, it's not like that. The elephant's not like that, it's like this", they struck one another with their fists. That gratified the king. (*Udâna* VI.4).

What this story teaches us can be summarized as follows: Our point of view is always limited and the same phenomenon can appear differently depending on what the focus of examination is and what the tools of examination are. Different but compatible views can therefore be "partial truth-claims", complementing each other, rather than "alternative facts". Moreover, people who see only one side of things are apt to engage in quarrels and disputes.

## 5 Other Meanings of "Alternative Facts"

In another sense, "alternative facts" can refer to what are called "white lies". A much-used example of a "white lie" is related to the question of whether the truth should always be told (whatever the cost) to a terminally ill patient. Depending on the person and situation, we may have a strong desire and need to tell an "alternative fact" – for example, that "there is always hope" or that "miracles can happen". Such selected facts, "white lies",

cannot be condemned outright because they are intended for encouragement or consolation of the patient or are presented due to one's own anxiety or helplessness. Such "white lies" are human. However, it is very problematic if the president of a superpower advances alternative facts and goes against the scientific community. Such "alternative facts" deserve to be revealed to be what they really are which is evasive lies. Thus, Trump's "alternative facts" do not ultimately appear to be white lies – rather, they are deliberate deceptions designed to proselytize ideologically sympathetic voters.

In mathematics as well as in more inexact sciences, the correct result can be achieved in several ways like in the equations  $2 + 2 = 4$  and  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . In such cases, it is not question of giving alternative facts but different ways or methods to achieve the same results. In the social sciences and the humanities, scholars study entities and events that are, in a certain sense, created rather than found. Examples of such created systems are society, money and marriage. These entities can be conceptualized and defined in different ways. For example, different concepts of a society can be constructed based on the ideals of socialism and the ideals of neoliberalism. Another example is the Western view of society and the Islamic view of society. It is unclear to what extent these different views of society speak about the same thing, because the norms and assumptions behind these views are so different from each other. However, it is not necessary to think that different views of society are about alternative facts. Rather, it is more plausible and informative to say that different views of society represent and endorse different and even conflicting values and ideals, ideologies and political objectives.

Scholars of the humanities often consider truth as an intricate and complex attribute. Let us take the quality of social and healthcare services as an example. Even though experiencing such a quality is a very subjective issue, authorities in many countries have tried to define certain criteria for measuring the quality of social and healthcare services. Accordingly, the following question is often presented: based on whose criteria, or from whose point of view, should the quality of social and healthcare services be defined? One can maintain that the "experienced truth" of an individual (be he or she a sick child, an old man or the mother of a big family) is also a truth, even if it is strongly bound to person, time and place. At least part of these views that are different in terms of points of view seems to belong to the group that can be called "partial truths". For example, different individuals' personal experiences about the quality of social and healthcare services can be taken as partial truths. The story about the blind men and an elephant can also be understood to illustrate "partial truth-claims".

Opinions regarding the right amount of public debt are perhaps an even more complex example of "contingent truths". First, these opinions are related to decision-making in the face of uncertainty. We do not know all the factors that will affect the results of different public debt resolutions or, at least, we are not certain what values the different social, economic and political variables that influence the need for public debt will assume in

future. One can say that in this kind of situation, different prognoses are the best we can have. The issue becomes even more complex because people can become aware of the prognoses that concern their actions and under the influence of this awareness they can decide to act against the prognoses. One could say that in these cases “truth” is created and not found.

The social sciences are not fertile ground for producing truth if we think that truth is an easily findable entity. Social scientists produce views for which various assumptions form the bases. If the same assumptions are shared by different persons, nothing in principle prevents them from coming to the same result. However, assumptions are often not the same and so it is logical that, for example, the state debt is an issue for one person but not necessarily for another person. Both persons may be right, as far as their different assumptions are taken into consideration in evaluation. There is no one truth about the debt. Neither view is an “alternative fact” in the sense of a statement known to be false but deliberately presented as being true and so neither person is lying.

## **6 Alternative Facts and Different Theories of Truth**

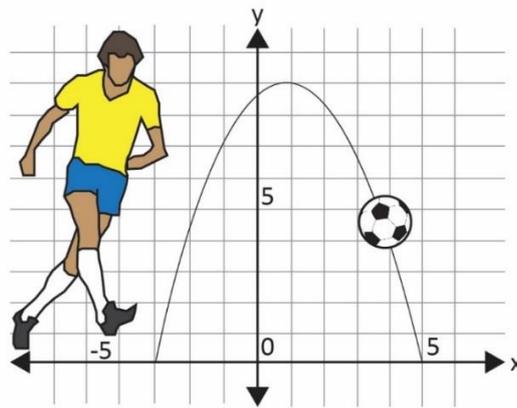
The above-presented cases and interpretations of alternative facts dovetail nicely with what is called the coherence theory of truth. According to that theory, if it is necessary to speak about truth at all, the term refers to the coherence or compatibility of a claim with other claims (that are considered to be true or assumed to be rational). Very different views about public debt can all be internally coherent. As desirable as it may seem, the coherence theory does have the disadvantage of requiring a concept of the whole which in the case of public debt, would need to be reached through both empirical evidence and consensus politics, before recommending a decision. Note also that the fairy tale of the emperor’s new clothes is also coherent, even if fictional.

However, outcomes other than consistency and compatibility are also longed for from scientific research. In science, empirical evidence as well as practical functionality and applicability play a central role as the criteria for truth. One can say that speaking about alternative facts matches better with the coherence theory of truth than the correspondence theory of truth. According to the latter, truth is about the correspondence of a claim (view, theory) with reality (Audi 1998: 246–250). The advocates of the correspondence theory should concentrate on evaluating their basic assumptions and especially whether there is empirical evidence in support of them. It can be the case that we have convincing evidence both for increasing the public debt and decreasing the debt. A further question is: What is the reason for this? Are there factors in the total context of debt such that they should be particularly taken into account before recommending increasing or decreasing the debt?

As has been seen, the concept of alternative facts was launched, in a way, by the Trump administration, relating to the blatant lie regarding the turnout for the presidential inauguration. In that case, alternative facts were relatively easy to be shown to be false. The difference is not necessarily so clear in more interesting and practically relevant cases. Politically delicate issues in the social sciences, as well as in the mass and social media, are inevitably value-bound and often there is also uncertainty regarding how empirical evidence available in such issues should be interpreted. As already noted, an example of a politically delicate issue is public-sector debt. Fully rational and convincing arguments can be presented both for and against the view that public debt should be increased, and the same is true of its opposite, namely, the view that public debt should be decreased. At issue here is from whose perspective the question of public debt is considered: from the point of view of creditors or debtors, the poor or the rich, the young or the old, or from the point of view of future generations?

However, if we would consider this issue from the vantage point of a hypothetical average consumer, the issue still would not be clear. Moreover, the matter depends, for sure, on the starting points – what the expected economic increase is or the starting level of debt is, and so on and so forth. If there is a true belief regarding the debt issue, there are also possible false beliefs regarding the same issue. However, I do not believe that we have a waterproof way to show – based on scientific argumentation – whether, for example, Finland should increase or decrease public-sector debt. Opinions regarding the debt issue that are more or less well-grounded can and should be presented. However, the real point is the fact that even if we can conceptually distinguish between this kind of relativism and alternative facts as a pure lie, the distinction is more difficult to be done in practice. One should almost be able to say in what sense a person thinks of something – whether it is a logical consequence based on his or her analysis and values or whether it is a kind of opportunistic promotion of one's own good. One can be quite pessimistic about the ability of outsiders to make this distinction.

In mathematics, it can be said that an alternative truth is the second solution of a quadratic equation (or similar polynomial function).



**Figure 1.** The path of a football as an example of a quadratic equation. The figure is published with permission from the author, Ilari Lehtonen.

As is evident in Figure 1, the question When does  $y$  equal zero? has two equally valid answers. Both are alternative facts. Of course, these answers are contextual. In the above two-dimensional example, these answers are dependent on the value of  $x$ . Hence, the two alternative facts can only be considered as such when the question is framed by a certain level of generality. There are two solutions to the question When does  $y$  equal zero?, but there is only one when the value of  $x$  is specified. This implies that alternative facts or pluralism of truth, for that matter, is an illusion created by the fact that there is an infinite number of ways to describe the same things, which are themselves produced by the human mind. Thus, ultimately, there are no alternative facts. Instead, there are various descriptions of truths and falsehoods made from different points of view (as the story about the blind men and an elephant illustrates). However, the fabrication and use of alternative facts to spread falsehoods remains a danger.

One can even say that if alternative facts existed there could be no common physical universe and solipsism, that is, the belief that one's own self is all that exists, would be confirmed. According to metaphysical realism, there is an extremely large but discrete number of real occurrences proceeding in a time-dependent fashion in the world outside our minds. If this were not true, descriptions such as "A cat is on a mat", "The cat is grey and furry" and "The walls of the room where the cat is are grey too" would not be communicable, since no similarities between them could exist. If no common, mind- and language-independent reality exists, isomorphism between language and reality would be necessarily impossible. However, since truth is context-dependent, as remarked above, and no two observers are able to occupy exactly the same context, our descriptions of truth must only use non-specific terminology that acknowledges our incapacity to perceive absolute solutions and points of view. We can also clarify this by paying attention to the difference between two-value logic and fuzzy logic. In two-value logic, a sentence can have only one or the other truth-value: true or false. In fuzzy logic, the truth-value is somewhere between zero ("certainly false") and one ("certainly true"). As an analogy,

there can be a situation in which it neither rains nor fails to rain, but is something in-between: thus misty. Hence, it seems that “alternative facts” fit better to fuzzy logic than two-value logic.

Finally, alternative facts can also be understood to refer to different paradigms or conceptual frameworks. The difference between two or more views, even in science, can be very small, but the difference may imply an entire shift in a belief system such as seems to be the case in the discussion between climate scientists and climate change sceptics. In that discussion, a crucial difference between parties may lie in what sort of evidence is taken into account, and how it is assimilated.

## **7 Conclusion**

I have tried to favourably examine the concept of alternative facts. As a result of the study, a rich catch has been taken. I have found 18 meanings of alternative facts. These meanings are partly overlapping and not exclusive. They are as follows:

1. A lie deliberately presented as being true
2. An error or something mistakenly accepted as true
3. A claim and its negation that are both supported by equally strong evidence or equally valid reasoning
4. The equal probability of a claim and its opposite
5. “Doublethink” or self-deception by conflicting beliefs (Orwell’s *1984*)
6. “Additional facts and alternative information” (Kellyanne Conway)
7. Inconsistent sets of facts put forth by the same party in court, or competing facts for the two sides of the case
8. An implication of a deconstructionist view of truth and language according to which words can only refer to other words and not to a reality independent of our thinking about it
9. Relativism claiming that everything is relative
10. Different points of view and different perspectival views
11. “Partial truths” that complement each other
12. The experienced truth of an individual
13. “White lies”
14. Different ways to achieve the same results (e.g.  $2 + 2 = 2 \times 2$ )
15. The fact that “truth” is created rather than found
16. The second solution of a quadratic equation or similar polynomial function
17. Fuzzy situations (e.g. neither rains nor fails to rain, but is something in between)
18. Different paradigms or conceptual frameworks

It seems to me that meanings 10, 11 and 12 that refer to the perspectiveness of human cognitive ability and knowledge acquisition are epistemically the most fruitful understandings of the concept of alternative facts. Those understandings highlight that the grounds for stating a claim are often selective and restrictive and that the same phenomenon can appear differently depending on what the focus of examination is and what the tools of examination are. Different but compatible views can therefore be “partial truths”, complementing each other.

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