

**TRUTH, MEONTOLOGY, AND DEMOCRACY.
A POLEMICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ARVYDAS GRIŠINAS'S
*The Western Crisis of Truth in the Early 21st Century***

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Abstract: *This review essay offers a critical engagement with Arvydas Grišinas' ambitious philosophical-anthropological inquiry into contemporary epistemic transformations. While affirming Grišinas' innovative conceptual vocabulary—particularly “memetic reality” and “meontological action”—this analysis challenges his attribution of post-truth politics primarily to Russian influence, arguing instead that Western democracies bear co-responsibility for their own epistemic erosion. The essay develops Grišinas' meontology concept through dialogue with Debord and Baudrillard, proposing a triadic ontology that distinguishes between ideas, empirical reality, and a productive sphere of non-being. Ultimately, the piece argues that post-truth undermines the very possibility of democratic legitimacy while suggesting that Grišinas' Eastern European perspective offers valuable resources for understanding our contemporary predicament.*

Keywords: *post-truth, meontology, democracy, Eastern Europe, epistemology, simulacra*

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Introduction

In an age when reality itself seems negotiable, Arvydas Grišinas arrives as both diagnostician and prophet, bearing news that the Enlightenment is dimming—not with the bang of revolutionary upheaval, but with the whimper of digital dissolution. His *The Western Crisis of Truth in the Early 21st Century: As the Enlightenment Dims* (2025) ventures into that peculiar territory where philosophy meets current events, where Foucault’s “regimes of truth” collide with Facebook’s algorithms, and where the ghosts of Soviet dissidents whisper warnings to bewildered Western democracies.

The book’s ambition is considerable: to diagnose nothing less than a civilizational crisis through the lens of what Grišinas terms the “dimming of the Enlightenment” (Grišinas 2025: ix). His central thesis holds that the Western regime of truth—that intricate constellation of rationalism, empiricism, and institutional authority that has long anchored liberal democracy—now faces unprecedented erosion. Under pressure from digital technology, mediatization, and geopolitical conflict, particularly Russia’s war against Ukraine, this regime finds itself displaced by what he calls “plural, symbolic, and performative cultures of truth-making” (Grišinas 2025: 2–6).

This fertile ground for intellectual exploration is cultivated by Grišinas with impressive breadth, blending political anthropology, philosophy of technology, media studies, and the hard-won wisdom of Eastern European experience. Yet, because the stakes are so high—the future of democratic discourse—my review must do more than just describe. I need to also question, challenge, and expand upon it. Therefore, my task here is threefold: first, to outline Arvydas Grišinas’s main idea and argument; second, to critically evaluate his claim that Russia is the primary architect of Europe’s post-truth condition; and third, to explore the metaphysical implications of his most intriguing concept, the idea of “meontological action.” What emerges from this engagement is a more complex picture than Grišinas initially presents—one in which the West bears greater responsibility for its own epistemic predicament, and in which the crisis of truth points toward fundamental questions about the nature of reality itself.

1. The Architecture of Disenlightenment

Arvydas Grišinas structures his diagnosis with the methodical precision of someone who has watched civilizations unravel before. Published in Routledge’s *Contemporary Liminality* series, the book positions itself within a tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship that employs liminality as a diagnostic tool for understanding late modernity (or its end?)—that peculiar condition of being neither here nor there, suspended between what was and what might yet be. It is precisely this liminal quality that makes our current moment so difficult to grasp and so dangerous to navigate.

The volume’s nine-chapter architecture unfolds in three movements, each posing the questions that any honest observer of our current predicament must confront: *What is this?*, *What is it like?*, and *Now what?* This tripartite structure mirrors the phenomenological method—first identifying the phenomenon, then describing its experiential qualities, and finally inquiring about its significance for human action. Yet

Grišinas' application of this method to the crisis of truth yields results that are both more unsettling and more hopeful than conventional analyses of "post-truth" politics.

Part I maps the epistemological terrain with the careful attention of a cartographer charting dangerous waters. Here we encounter the familiar symptoms of our epistemic malaise: populism's allergic reaction to expertise, conspiracy theories flowering in digital soil, and disinformation campaigns that treat facts as just another variety of opinion (Grišinas 2025: 9–39). Yet Grišinas resists the temptation to dismiss these phenomena as mere pathology or temporary aberration. Instead, he locates them within a broader transformation of how societies construct and maintain what Foucault called "regimes of truth"—those historically contingent but structurally decisive configurations of epistemic practice that determine what counts as knowledge in any given era.

The Western Enlightenment tradition, for all its limitations and internal critics—from Nietzsche's philosophical hammer-blows to the Frankfurt School's systematic skepticism—has long provided what Grišinas calls the "structural backbone of liberal democracy and Western political order" (Grišinas 2025: 18–20). This regime, rooted in scientific method, empirical verification, and institutionalized knowledge production, is not merely a set of ideas but a lived infrastructure of truth-making that penetrates education, journalism, law, and governance. Its weakening thus represents not merely an intellectual puzzle but a civilizational emergency—the potential collapse of the epistemic foundations upon which democratic legitimacy depends.

Part II ventures into more experimental territory, examining what Grišinas calls the experiential qualities of our new political culture (Grišinas 2025: 55–83). It is here that the book's most provocative concepts emerge like strange flowers from poisoned soil. "Memetic reality" describes a sphere where symbolic tropes, affective images, and viral narratives carry more weight than empirical verification—where the truth-value of a claim matters less than its capacity to generate engagement, emotion, and replication (Grišinas 2025: 55–71). In this realm, the prevalence of big data, deepfakes, algorithmic curation, and artificial intelligence has fundamentally altered the conditions of truth-making, replacing direct empirical confirmation with technologically mediated trust that can be gamed, manipulated, and weaponized.

More unsettling still is Grišinas' concept of "meontological action"—the creation of entities that "are not," yet nevertheless exert real power (Grišinas 2025: 71–83). Political actors, through rhetoric and digital performance, conjure into being phantasmic realities—conspiracy movements, fabricated historical narratives, hybrid geopolitical myths—that structure collective behavior despite lacking any empirical foundation. The unreality of these entities does not diminish their causal efficacy; indeed, their freedom from factual constraint may enhance their political utility. A conspiracy theory does not need to be true to mobilize voters; a fabricated scandal does not need to have occurred to destroy a reputation; a geopolitical myth does not need to correspond to reality to justify war.

These dynamics culminate in what Grišinas terms the thoroughgoing performativity of contemporary politics (Grišinas 2025: 83–95). Politics increasingly resembles theater, where representation, symbolism, and ritual displace substantive

deliberation about shared problems. This theatrical quality is not merely aesthetic but ontological—it reflects a fundamental shift in how political reality is constituted. Grišinas demonstrates how these logics operate across regime types: through populist mobilization and the ritualism of pandemic management in democratic contexts, and through systematic information warfare in authoritarian settings, such as Putin’s Russia.

The Eastern European dimension provides perhaps the book’s most distinctive and valuable contribution. With the authority of someone whose intellectual formation occurred in post-Soviet times, Grišinas argues that the Soviet “regime of untruth”—characterized by ideological ritualism and the systematic disjunction between official discourse and lived reality—prefigures many features of today’s digital political culture (Grišinas 2025: 39–41). This is not merely a historical analogy but prophetic insight: Eastern Europeans have already lived through the collapse of a truth regime and developed strategies for surviving its aftermath.

The Soviet dissident strategies tested in that earlier crucible—living in truth, insisting on empirical experience against propaganda, cultivating civic dignity—may therefore provide more than historical interest (Grišinas 2025: 138–140). Grišinas revisits movements in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Lithuania, along with more recent protests in Belarus and Ukraine, as exemplars of what he calls a “politics of truth.” These examples suggest that even under conditions of systematic epistemic corruption, authentic political action remains possible for those willing to pay its price.

This framework allows Grišinas to weave together his personal experiences—including humanitarian work during the early months of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine—with broader theoretical reflections (Grišinas 2025: vii–x). Such autobiographical passages serve not merely as testimony but as evidence of how truth and untruth are lived, embodied, and resisted in concrete historical circumstances. They remind us that epistemology is never merely academic but always existential—a matter of how we orient ourselves in a world where the distinction between truth and falsehood can mean the difference between life and death.

In his concluding vision, Grišinas confronts the normative question that haunts his entire analysis: can politics of truth still be imagined when Enlightenment epistemology is in decline? His answer is cautiously affirmative, proposing to broaden the notion of truth beyond narrow empiricist and positivist frames through categories such as “truth in presence,” “truth in utterance,” and “truth in adequacy” (Grišinas 2025: 123–127). These modes allow for recognizing symbolic, affective, and experiential truths without collapsing into relativism. Against the “politics of the void” that thrives on meontological fabrications, he advocates for political practices that affirm dignity, presence, and responsibility (Grišinas 2025: 127–132).

The result is a work of considerable ambition and genuine insight, one that contributes fresh vocabulary—memetic reality, meontological action, politics of the void—for analyzing the interplay between digital media, political power, and epistemology (Grišinas 2025: 55–83, 109–123). Its integration of Eastern European perspectives enriches a discourse too often dominated by Anglo-American voices, while its combination of scholarly analysis with personal reflection produces a text that is both

rigorous and accessible. Yet precisely because the diagnosis is so compelling, the prescriptions so urgent, it demands not mere appreciation but critical engagement.

2. Russia as the Source of Post-Truth? The Problem of Externalized Blame

Arvydas Grišinas argues that the contemporary crisis of truth in Europe is deeply tied to Russia's hybrid warfare and information operations. According to him, Russia's use of propaganda, disinformation, and memetic manipulation represents not merely a geopolitical challenge but also a cultural and epistemological one: it corrodes the Western "regime of truth" from within (Grišinas 2025: 2–4, 39–41). In his view, the Russian regime is paradigmatic of a "disenlightened" political culture that thrives on non-factual narratives, performative power, and meontological fabrications.

This claim has merit. Russia's systematic deployment of disinformation, its cultivation of conspiracy narratives, and its use of digital propaganda—whether through RT and Sputnik or troll farms and deep fakes—have indeed shaped European discourses. The experience of Ukraine since 2014 makes it clear that hybrid war includes not only military force but also epistemic subversion. To deny Russia's role in the post-truth condition would be to ignore a significant part of the story.

Nevertheless, claiming that Russia is *the main* source of post-truth in Europe risks limiting the scope of analysis. Post-truth is not something imported from Moscow; it also results from native Western political, technological, and cultural changes. The rise of conspiracy politics in the United States, the Brexit referendum in the UK, and the theatricalization of political spectacle in France or Italy—all show that Western democracies develop their own post-truth dynamics. Platform capitalism and global financial capitalism, with their focus on fleeting economies and algorithm-driven curation, enhance financial mystique and emotionally engaging content regardless of factual accuracy. Similarly, media markets profit from outrage; political figures leverage symbolic resonance over factual correctness.

The West, therefore, bears co-responsibility. To ascribe the crisis mainly to Russia risks adopting a defensive stance that obscures our own complicity. Post-truth is not only an external attack on liberal democracy but also an internal mutation of its communication structures. The danger is that by externalizing blame, we avoid confronting the uncomfortable reality that our institutions, media logics, and cultural practices have themselves fostered conditions in which truth loses authority.

Here lies a more profound problem: the post-truth condition undermines the very possibility of liberal democracy. Elections make sense only if citizens debate factual reality and choose between competing, reality-based programs for change. The institution of the vote assumes that truth provides a common ground for deliberation, allowing the "best" plan—measured by both empirical adequacy and normative appeal—to prevail.

In a post-truth world, however, electoral competition risks degenerating into a contest between rival power groups, each armed with memetic fabrications, emotional

appeals, and digital manipulations. The victory of one side no longer signifies a rational choice about reality but rather the successful deployment of symbolic spectacle. Legitimacy, in such a context, does not derive from truth but from the capacity to mobilize desire and fear. The result is a profound erosion of democratic legitimacy: citizens are no longer choosing between visions of the real but between spectacles of the unreal.

This is precisely the point where Grišinas' notion of "meontological action" intersects with political philosophy. Meontology describes the danger that democratic elections become contests of non-being. If the central event of liberal democracy loses its tether to reality, then liberal democracy itself risks collapse into a hollow ritual.

How, then, might societies respond? Berger and Luckmann's classic sociology of knowledge offers a useful lens. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, they argue that social orders require continuous "maintenance" in order to preserve the coherence between the social stock of knowledge and everyday reality (Berger & Luckmann 1991: 147–168). When discrepancies arise to an extreme level, institutions and actors engage in revolutionary processes of legitimation and realignment to reconcile reality with social meaning.

Applied to the post-truth condition, this suggests that societies, whether Eastern or Western, Southern or Northern, will eventually attempt to restore some reconciliation between truth and politics. Autocracies maintain this coherence by imposing official narratives through censorship and propaganda, thereby ensuring that the stock of knowledge aligns with the regime's preferred reality. Liberal democracies, by contrast, attempt maintenance through fact-checking, transparency initiatives, and institutional reforms. Both strategies aim to "stabilize" the crisis, though in radically different ways. If both maintenance recipes fail, revolutionary changes are inevitable.

From this perspective, post-truth is not simply a Russian weapon but a systemic challenge across different regimes. It reflects a disconnect between societal imagination and brute reality. Eventually, some form of maintenance will happen, modifying both autocratic and democratic systems. However, whether such maintenance restores democratic legitimacy or deepens authoritarian control is still an open question.

3. The Metaphysical Revolution: Toward a Triadic Ontology

Beyond these immediate political concerns, Grišinas' concept of meontological action opens unexplored metaphysical territories that extend far beyond his specific analysis of contemporary politics. The notion that politics can be structured by entities that "are not"—phantasms, memes, fabrications—captures with startling precision the surreal quality of contemporary public life while resonating with earlier critical theories of mediated reality.

Guy Debord's analysis in *The Society of the Spectacle* anticipated many of these dynamics, arguing that modern life increasingly occurs through images that become the primary medium of social relations:

Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Debord 1994: 12).

Jean Baudrillard extended this insight in *Simulacra and Simulation*, claiming that simulacra do not merely distort reality but actively replace it, producing a hyperreality where the distinction between true and false collapses entirely (Baudrillard 1994: 1–6). Grišinas' meontology continues and enriches this intellectual lineage, emphasizing the productive power of non-being in shaping not only perception but political outcomes.

The genuine originality of Grišinas' contribution lies in its metaphysical implications. Western philosophy has traditionally oscillated between two primary ontological spheres: the eternal realm of ideas, forms, and rational principles (following Plato's idealism), and the temporal realm of empirical becoming, material causation, and phenomenological experience (following Aristotelian and modern empiricist traditions). I interpret Grišinas' (as well as Debord's and Baudrillard's) analysis as suggesting the necessity of recognizing a third ontological sphere: a domain of images, simulations, and phantasms that are systematically disconnected from empirical reality yet exert a genuine causal force in human affairs.

This third sphere cannot be reduced to mere illusion, because illusions typically fade when exposed to evidence. Nor can it be assimilated to empirical fact, because its entities need not exist materially to shape perception, motivate behavior, and structure political outcomes. Instead, it constitutes a distinct ontological layer—what we might call the meontological or simulacral sphere—that mediates between ontologically primary but abstract ideas and ontologically secondary but concrete reality. This sphere is populated by viral memes, propaganda narratives, conspiracy theories, virtual avatars, algorithmic personalities, and political myths that motivate masses and influence their behavior. Though lacking empirical being in any conventional sense, these entities influence perception, motivate behavior, and structure political outcomes with effects that are entirely real.

We can thus distinguish three fundamental ontological domains:

Ideas: The eternal structures of meaning, rational principles, and normative ideals that provide frameworks for understanding and evaluation.

Empirical reality: The brute facts of material existence, causal processes, and lived experience that constitute the “given” world.

Meontological sphere: The productive non-being of images, simulations, and phantasms that lack empirical foundation yet exercise genuine causal power.

This triadic schema provides a more nuanced metaphysical framework for understanding contemporary phenomena. Consider electoral politics: while grounded in empirical institutions and guided by normative ideals, their actual dynamics are increasingly shaped by meontological entities—viral memes, fabricated scandals, misappropriated theories (as in the case of decolonial practices in Eastern Europe), algorithmically amplified narratives that may bear little relationship to either empirical facts or rational principles. Or consider military conflict: while fought with physical

weapons according to strategic doctrines, modern warfare is simultaneously waged in the sphere of myth, symbolism, and simulacra.

Acknowledging the meontological sphere allows us to analyze how politics is mediated by entities that lack being yet produce effects—how, in other words, the unreal shapes the real through mechanisms that remain invisible to traditional empiricist and idealist frameworks. This recognition also challenges philosophy to revise its fundamental categories once again: non-being emerges not as mere absence or negation but as a productive dimension of reality itself.

The metaphysical stakes of this analysis extend directly into questions of political theory and practice. Suppose politics or society increasingly operate through meontological mechanisms. In that case, traditional approaches to democratic reform—such as fact-checking, transparency, and institutional accountability—may prove insufficient to address the epistemic crisis. These approaches assume that truth and falsehood can be clearly distinguished and that citizens will prefer truth once it becomes available. But what if the problem lies not in the unavailability of truth but in the superior political efficacy of carefully constructed unrealities?

This possibility suggests the need for new forms of political thinking that can operate effectively within a triadic ontological framework. Rather than simply opposing truth to falsehood, we may need to develop practices that can navigate the complex interactions between empirical facts, normative ideals, and meontological fabrications. This might involve *ontologically informed* political action—practices that acknowledge the causal power of the meontological sphere while working to subordinate it to empirical and normative considerations.

Such an approach would neither deny the reality of memes, myths, and simulacra nor surrender to their dominance, but rather seek to engage them strategically in service of empirically grounded and normatively defensible political goals. This might involve, for example, the creation of “positive” meontological entities—inspiring narratives, unifying symbols, mobilizing myths—that serve the freedom of an individual rather than the purposes of ruling groups. The danger, of course, lies in the possibility that any systematic engagement with the meontological sphere may ultimately be captured by it, transforming would-be reformers into sophisticated manipulators.

Here, Grišinas’ emphasis on Eastern European experience proves particularly valuable. The dissident traditions he examines—the insistence on “living in truth” developed by Václav Havel and others—emerged from sustained engagement with political systems that had been thoroughly captured by meontological logics (Grišinas 2025: 138–140). Soviet citizens lived daily with the systematic disjunction between official reality and empirical experience, developing practices of resistance that operated simultaneously in all three ontological spheres: defending empirical truth against propaganda, articulating normative ideals against ideological corruption, and creating alternative symbolic frameworks against state- or power elites-sponsored myths.

The strategies developed in this context—bearing witness to empirical reality, cultivating personal integrity, creating spaces of authentic communication, practicing

civic dignity—may prove relevant to Western societies struggling with their own forms of epistemic corruption. These practices suggest that resistance to meontological capture requires not simply better fact-checking or institutional reform but existential commitment to truth-telling as a way of life.

Yet we should resist the temptation to romanticize Eastern European experience or to assume that strategies developed under totalitarian conditions will transfer seamlessly to liberal democratic or post-Soviet plutocratic contexts. The challenge facing Western societies may in some ways prove more difficult than that confronted by Soviet dissidents, precisely because it operates through formally free institutions that have been internally corrupted rather than through obviously oppressive structures that can be clearly opposed.

Conclusion: Crisis as Opportunity

This extended engagement with Grišinas' *The Western Crisis of Truth in the Early 21st Century* has pursued two primary lines of critique and development. First, while acknowledging Russia's significant role in contemporary information warfare, I have argued that the post-truth condition cannot be attributed primarily to external manipulation, but must be understood as emerging from internal contradictions within societies—both Western and non-Western—themselves. The crisis reflects not only foreign attack but domestic vulnerability: the systematic erosion of epistemic infrastructure through neoliberal market logics, accelerationist technological change, and cultural transformation at the end of modernity.

More fundamentally, the post-truth condition threatens to undermine the basic possibility of democratic legitimacy by transforming electoral competition into contests between meontological fabrications rather than reality-based alternatives. Citizens increasingly find themselves choosing not between genuine policy options but between competing spectacles of the unreal. This transformation suggests that traditional approaches to democratic reform may prove insufficient without deeper engagement with the ontological dimensions of contemporary politics.

Second, I have suggested that Grišinas' concept of meontology can be developed from a useful political diagnostic into a genuine metaphysical innovation with implications that extend far beyond his immediate concerns. In dialogue with the critical theories of Debord and Baudrillard, meontology points toward a triadic ontological framework that distinguishes between ideas, empirical reality, and a productive sphere of non-being. This framework provides new conceptual resources for understanding how the unreal shapes the real in contemporary social life.

The philosophical productivity of this approach lies not only in its explanatory power but in its capacity to reframe our understanding of the order of being itself. Rather than treating simulacra, memes, and political myths as mere distortions of truth, we begin to recognize them as constituting a distinct ontological sphere with its own forms of causation and its own forms of resistance. This recognition opens possibilities for more

sophisticated forms of political action that can operate effectively within the complex interplay between empirical facts, normative ideals, and meontological fabrications.

The stakes of this analysis extend beyond academic philosophy to the urgent practical question of how democratic societies might navigate their current epistemic crisis. Grišinas' book succeeds not only as a diagnosis but also as a provocation, challenging us to confront the unsettling possibility that the crisis of truth represents both our own making and our own opportunity for philosophical and political renewal. The dimming of the Enlightenment, in this reading, may herald not simply civilizational decline but the emergence of new forms of truth-telling adequate to our complex ontological situation.

Whether such renewal proves possible will depend partly on our willingness to engage seriously with insights from those who have already navigated the collapse of truth regimes—the Eastern European dissidents whose experience Grišinas so eloquently retrieves. Their insistence that truth remains possible even under totalitarian conditions of systematic epistemic corruption provides a crucial counterweight to both naive optimism and cynical despair. The crisis of truth, they remind us, is also always an opportunity for its renewal, provided we possess sufficient courage to pay the price that such renewal demands.

In this sense, Grišinas' contribution extends beyond analysis to inspiration, suggesting that the crisis of truth in the early twenty-first century may ultimately prove not fatal but generative—an occasion for developing new forms of truthfulness adequate to our unprecedented historical situation. The Enlightenment may indeed be dimming, but what emerges from its twilight remains to be determined by our responses to the challenges it has bequeathed.

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