Michael A. Peters
Sharon Rider
Mats Hyvönen
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Post-Truth, Fake News

Viral Modernity & Higher Education

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Editors
Michael A. Peters
WMIER
The University of Waikato
Hamilton, Waikato
New Zealand

Sharon Rider
Department of Philosophy
Uppsala University
Uppsala
Sweden

Mats Hyvönen
Uppsala University
Uppsala
Sweden

Tina Besley
WMIER
The University of Waikato
Hamilton, Waikato
New Zealand

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Contents

Contributors

Tina Besley University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Charles Bingham Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

Tracy Bowell University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Nesta Devine Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Derek R. Ford DePauw University, Indiana, USA

Steve Fuller Warwick University, Coventry, England, UK

Henry A. Giroux McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada; Toronto, Canada

Mats Hyvönen Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Liz Jackson University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong

Petar Jandrić Zagreb University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia

Douglas Kellner UCLA, Los Angeles, USA

Catherine Legg Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

George Lăzăroiu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania

Jeff Malpas University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia; Latrobe University, Melbourne, Australia

Jacoba Matapo The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

Carl Te Hira Mika University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Michael A. Peters University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Sharon Rider Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Part I
Philosophy in a Post-Truth World

Post-truth, Fake News: Viral Modernity and Higher Education

Sharon Rider and Michael A. Peters

Then verily, child I will tell you the truth.

Introduction: The Deep Cultural Roots of Truth in the Western Tradition

Outside of philosophy department seminar rooms, truth would seem to be an obvious and everyday affair. We do not need it explained to us; in our way of life, truth and its cognate concepts (right, correct, accurate, real) and truth-telling activities are central to our institutions of science, politics, law, and education. But more fundamentally, it is part of the cultural infrastructure within which we exist and make sense of the world. It is one of a handful of abstract concepts that serve as a kind of intellectual scaffolding in our civilization. But has the scaffolding been undermined by the movement of history? How we think and talk about truth has, after all, changed from, say, the oral tradition in Ancient Greece to the basis for digital logic in the twenty-first century. We still attach to it great significance and value, but "truth" has a time and a place, which is to say, a history: it has evolved both as a concept and cultural practice. To take an example from philosophy, while the notion of truth in the philosophical tradition up until the medieval period was associated with "saving the phenomena", that is, with evidence for what was known about natural world, it has since Galileo come to be understood in terms of underlying causes that have little or nothing to do with how the world appears to us.

In "Pre-Philosophical Conceptions of Truth in Ancient Greece", Corazzon (2016) tracks the Homeric use of *Aletheia*, noting that the formulaic ritual sentence "Then verily, child, I will tell you the truth" occurs five times in the *Odyssey*. He

S. Rider (✉)
Department of Philosophy, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden
e-mail: sharon.rider@filosofi.uu.se

M. A. Peters
Wilf Malcom Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

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maintains that Homer's use of this stylistic device "suggests that the sentence is one that has come down in the tradition as a ready-made formula which Homer inherited." The word *Aletheia* also often appears in the phrase "the whole truth", meaning, Corazzon says, to give an account or "to tell the whole story." He concludes with the remarkable statement:

> The Homeric notion of Aletheia which emerges from examining its uses is precisely the same, with the same force and flavour, as that enshrined in the traditional oath or solemn affirmation required of a witness in court proceedings: to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (Corazzon 2016)

Whether Homer is to be seen as a single poetic genius or as a tradition, the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* are thought to have been composed in the late eighth or early seventh centuries BCE. The poems, which were sung from memory, constituted a shared source of moral and practical understanding for the ancients. They also were a common reference point for the telling of what happened, of "giving an account".

Wolenski (2004, pp. 340–341) affirms that "*Aletheia* is the most important Greek counterpart of our 'truth'; *alethes* (true), *alethos* (truly) and *alethein* (to speak the truth) are related words. However, the Greek 'truth-family' is much more comprehensive and consists of 14 words, among others (adjectives): *atrekes, nemertes, adolos, ortos, apseudos, etymos and etetymos*." He maintains that "the philosophical usage of a term (in the present case, the counterpart of 'truth' in archaic and ancient Greek) was related to the archaic one". The "remarkable" element alluded to above is that a notion of *aletheia* as truth has an historical lineage in the oral tradition that represents almost 3000 years of use, and originates in the time before the poetry of Homer (or the Homeric tradition) in ordinary life. There is here a stability of use, a traceable passage from the pre-philosophical to the philosophical stage.

In contrast, "theories of truth", in the academic philosophical sense, are of a much later vintage, most of them first formulated in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. George Pitcher writes: "the great philosophers of history, although they had something to say about the concept of truth, said surprisingly little: they were far more interested in truths than in 'truth'" (Pitcher 1964, p. 1). Pitcher suggests that the interest in theories of truth was developed in response to German Idealism. Yet it seems odd that a concept so central to philosophy was not properly "theorized" earlier. One plausible explanation was that prior to the late nineteenth century, truth was not itself considered a problem to be solved, but rather where you arrived when you had solved your problem. That theories of truth have received so much attention in the last century suggests then that truth has itself become increasingly problematic. It cannot serve as a self-evident touchstone for the adjudication of disputes, since it has come to be commonly understood as a theoretical concept, a construction, and, as such open to negotiation and revision. Yet the need and desire to distinguish between true accounts and false ones remains. We do in fact rely on certain statements and not on others; calling a claim or an explanation true and another one false *does* something; it makes its mark on the world as a ground for our words and deeds.

The Organization of This Collection

The editorial starting point for work on the volume has been to follow Chesterton's admonition in his biography: "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid." The present volume consists of essays concerned with the truth as a real problem, not a purely theoretical one. While a number of the articles will refer to philosophical notions of adequacy, coherence, reference, and so forth, the emphasis throughout is on our present condition, that is, the state of affairs that the idea of truth has become not simply confused but in point of fact, like "art" or "justice", an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie 1956). At the same time, while the anthology is not intended as a contribution to theoretical philosophy (philosophy of language, metaphysics or epistemology), neither do we have the ambition to engage with methodological problems in political or moral philosophy. The problems addressed here have to do with how we are to understand the pragmatics of truth in education and higher learning, with special attention to the political dimension, since what would appear to be at the heart of the cultural convulsions we are undergoing is the sense that our modern institutions of truth-telling (the courts, the press, universities, and laboratories) no longer serve as a touchstone for a common understanding of the world, a universally acknowledged and hence binding store of reliable knowledge. In Western liberal societies, it is up to the individual to select, on the basis of interest and inclination, her own sources of information and interpretative frameworks. It is natural to think in terms of the World Wide Web (social media and alternative news sites, etc.) here, but we should also bear in mind that there are academic disciplines and departments, even colleges and universities, that have specific orientations (often, but not necessarily, stemming from religious or ideological affiliations). Because universities are our main institutions for the training and certification of professions, the consequences of an array of alternatives for what is considered the "knowledge" necessary to become a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or engineer have repercussions far beyond the academy. The consequences of the multiplication of truths, one for every taste, are vast.

Thus, our goal at the outset has been to put together an arena for the free exchange of very different perspectives. Moreover, the authors have been encouraged to speak their minds. That means that while the collection contains papers by a number of preeminent scholars, the volume is to be read as explicitly and quite intentionally normative, even if the norms in play in the individual essays are rather wide-ranging. The resulting book thus contains contributions from across a wide spectrum of disciplines and theoretical orientations; some of the pieces are polemical, while others are more meditative. Certain names crop up in several of the essays (George Orwell, naturally, but also Erich Fromm, Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty, and Michel Foucault), and a number of terms recur ("alternative facts", "democracy", "citizenship", "critical thinking, "objectivity", *parrhesia*, and so on), but there is no superstructure or basic unifying premise (aside perhaps from Donald Trump, who is either center-stage or a conspicuous offstage presence throughout).

In order to avoid chaos, the work has been organized thematically, according to broad characterizations, which, it has to be admitted, do not always do justice to the contributions. In numerous cases, the papers cover several aspects of the problem of the complex relationship between truth, politics, media, social and cultural life, scientific practice, professional norms and ethical values, and selecting which chapter heading is most appropriate has been no easy task.

If there is a clear trajectory to the different contributions, it is in the direction toward restoring our confidence in truth, not as a given, but as a viable social endeavor or achievement. Truth-seeking and truth-telling require a certain degree of skepticism to conventional accounts, but not cynicism toward the endeavor itself. Vulgar relativism is as much of a danger as self-satisfied dogmatism, since it means that there is no recourse to a mutually acknowledged point of reference. Many of the articles end on a self-critical note, with the challenge of recognizing that *we* have a problem, "we" here meaning not some vague notion of "society", nor "we, the enlightened" as opposed to "ordinary people", but rather specifically referring to those of us who take our professional tasks as having to do with formulating, establishing, or negotiating the grounds for distinguishing the true from the false (educators, philosophers, judges, journalists, etc.).

In the first section, *Philosophy in a Post-Truth World*, Steve Fuller wages a frontal attack against the presuppositions that undergird most mainstream academic philosophy in general, and its epistemic assumptions in particular. Describing "Truth" as a "brand name in need of a product that everyone is compelled to buy", Fuller points out that it was only very recently in human history that philosophers began to distinguish a purely fact-based conception of evidence from personal revelation and authoritative testimony. He ties the concept of evidence to the secularization of knowledge, and the modern conception of truth to the idea of being loyal or faithful to the object of inquiry. The history of the philosophers' Truth is a complex and heterogeneous one, which means that there is no one idea of "Truth" which we are now "post". Inspired by Hans Vaihinger's Kantian philosophy of the "as-if", he sees contemporary analytic epistemology as a genre of fiction, filled with brains-in-vats and Chinese rooms, and consisting of "spurious reasoning, fake philologies, eccentric histories, obscurantism and hyperbole". Following Vaihinger, he rejects the idea of a one-Truth-fits-all epistemology, and suggests that we understand truth as decided from case to case, as in a court of law. Reviewing contrasting takes on the role of the philosopher in deciding what is true, Fuller sees a conflict running through the history of Western thought from Plato to Wittgenstein, between the "democrats" (sophists, poets and other public intellectuals) and "authoritarians" (philosophers, priests and scientists). With regard to the status of "truth" in the post-truth era, Fuller reminds us that to deny that there is some justification for the truth of facts outside of or beyond the process of securing them is not to deny either the facts themselves nor their "objectivity" (which, as it turns out, is not so very far afield from Carnap's or Popper's respective positions). One can view consensus among scientists "rhetorically", Fuller proposes, that is, with an eye toward the mix of epistemic and material considerations involved in its formation. Taking his cue from that notorious whistle-blower on fake philosophy,

Richard Rorty, he embraces the label "post-truther" to the extent that it signifies someone who is engaged in the struggle to undo present power structures by knocking down the pulpit from which Truth is preached, that is, in a project of epistemic democratization.

Sharon Rider's piece, "On Knowing How to Tell the Truth", also concerns what one might call "epistemic politics", but she ties it to the observation that all politics, even of the epistemic kind, is local. Reflecting on the assumptions built into the reaction of scientists, journalists, and pundits to notions such as "alternative facts" and "post-truth", she attempts to capture the deep grammar of the central terms, noticing in particular how arguments tend to revolve around being "within" (the consensus of scientists, the expertise of professionals) or "without" (the position of the layman, the epistemic outcast from the community of experts, who lacks the "right" or "correct" understanding). Inspired by Arendt, Ortega y Gasset, and the turn-of-the-century Swedish philosopher Hans Larsson, Rider argues that genuinely "free" thinking, as opposed to the "bourgeois" or institutionalized form of thought that expresses itself in consensus, is actually a prerequisite for any relevant sense of the notion of truth. At the same time, to admit this is to sacrifice the status of being a member of the community of those "in the know" in moral, political, and social questions, and relegated to the position of engaged and informed citizens talking to each other about matters of mutual concern in the agora.

Taking a somewhat more epistemologically optimistic tone, Cathy Legg works out the implications of Charles Sanders Peirce's epistemology of inquiry, and its understanding of knowledge as a process of fixing belief. The virtue of Peirce's ideas, she thinks, is that they offer methods for making the process more efficient. Legg show that each part of the process, *tenacity*, *authority*, *a priori reasoning*, and *science*, which may exist simultaneously, has its own virtues as well as deficiencies, except the last which is a kind of culmination of the first three in the collective actions of the community of inquirers. She finds in Peirce helpful strategies for "weathering out epistemic storms" such as that of what we might baptize Hurricane Post-Truth. Borrowing Jayson Harsin's term "regime of post-truth" as a term of art to describe current trends in contemporary politics, Legg describes the way people's emotions and motivations are systematically cultivated to yield desired opinions. Arguing that the ivory tower has hitherto provided perhaps too much shelter from the storm, she suggests that academics are perhaps overreacting to the situation, and admonishes us to take a step back to better understand what is happening. This need for understanding, she maintains, cannot be met with the tools of mainstream epistemology. The benefit of a Peircean approach is that it addresses the *motivational* side of epistemology and the lived context of truth-seeking. Legg demonstrates that given a processual understanding of truth, it makes no sense to label a set of human behaviors as "post-truth", since truth is nothing but the endpoint of inquiry. She warns against the inclination of scientists and academics to consider themselves "knowers" with the institutional power to "fix belief" for the rest of the community of inquiry. Legg asks academics to be more self-critical, and rather than regarding our present condition as "post-truth", to see that in the process of fixing truth, the community of inquirers can move back and forth when set truths become

unsettled. At this point, we find ourselves in an epistemic "pre-truth" period, in which "the [only] solution to poor opinions is more opinions".

Jeff Malpas has the final say in this section, going for the conceptual jugular. In "Wisdom's Limit: Truth, Failure and the Contemporary University", Malpas addresses the central issue of cognitive fragility and epistemic failure. Taking as his point departure John Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he proposes that in considering the mission of the university today, we begin with the fact that human reason is limited, and our powers of comprehension, in the end, narrow. This insight, the recognition that we don't really "know" all that much, is central to the conception of wisdom from Socrates onward. Analyzing the current state of educational policy in advanced industrialized nations, characterized as they are by careful attention to utility, employability, marketability, and competition, Malpas asks where, if at all, the pursuit of wisdom has a place at the university. He then contrasts these goals with the idea of the university famously formulated by John Henry Newman, the notion that cultivation of the mind, knowledge and understanding institutionalized in the work of the university are ends in themselves, not merely means to practical ends. Malpas argues for the valuing of truth and knowledge for their own sake, as intrinsic goods in Newman's spirit, and draws a parallel to Michael Sandel's argument in *What Money Can't Buy* that value is separate from price. Importantly, for Malpas, the recognition of the limits of human understanding is not merely an epistemic question, but also an ethical one. It is here that the theme of failure comes in. To acknowledge the possibility, even inevitability, of failure in our projects and enterprises is to recognize the essentially limited character of human life and activity as such. The technocratic notion of "continuous improvement" through "quality management" is then a dangerous delusion. The emphasis on problem-solving tends to make us notice successes, while failures remain hidden. Yet seeing that there is no success without the failure that necessarily precedes it, the problem to be solved, means admitting the limits of human action. Wisdom consists in recognizing this constitutive role of limits and failure. Similarly, the idea of education as an accumulation of results (information, facts and competencies) conceals the intellectual activity, the actual work of thinking, of which they are products. In contrast, Malpas offers the idea of education as a striving toward wisdom, that is, knowledge that grasps its own boundaries. Malpas ties this notion of wisdom as mastery not only of the skills and knowledge within one's own area of expertise, but of the world in which that expertise is to function effectively, to the classical idea of *critique*, insofar as both are committed to the pursuit of truth. A key task for the university is thus to find ways to allow and even to encourage dissent, based on the idea of the fallibility of claims to know, or better, on a recognition of the limits within which knowledge is itself constituted.

The stage of the second section, *Politics, the Papers and the Public*, is set in Michael Peter's essay, "The History and Practice of Lying in Public Life". There Peters argues that in order to balance the emphasis on truth and truth-telling, we need also to consider the other side of the binary, that is lies and lying, more carefully. With his starting point in Foucault's lectures on truth-telling (*parrhesia*),

he goes on to analyze the relationship between a "culture of lying" and public life in light of the political thought of Hannah Arendt. He arrives at the unsettling conclusion that we may be witnessing the advent of a culture in which lying becomes the sole philosophical principle of culture, and true political action is impossible.

The suspicion that we have already arrived at the frightening dystopian picture that ends Peters' essay is the starting point for Doug Kellner's powerful polemic in his assessment of the political aftermath of the Trump campaign and early presidency in "Trump and the Politics of Lying". He argues that the view that the current President of the United States is, in the words of the former President, both "unqualified and unfit", rests on a misunderstanding. According to Kellner, Trump is both qualified and fit to take the office such as he and his supporters understand it, namely, as that of autocratic despot. Making use of Erich Fromm's diagnosis of the authoritarian personality, Kellner makes the case that deception and lying are not something added on to an agenda, but rather constitute it. He concludes that the only resistance that can succeed in undermining an agenda of deception is an educated citizenry, which is why the appointment of Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education is central to the Trump administration. The dismantling of public education is an essential element in the overall plan of government by mendacity.

In "Post-Truth and Critical Pedagogy of Trust", Petar Jandric turns the focus of attention from the question of the necessary political conditions for true statements to the ethical question of the necessary conditions for trust. He argues that the Internet introduces an entirely different set of problems than we are accustomed to addressing in the theory of knowledge, challenges connected to the anonymity and immediacy of online communication, but also stemming from the very infrastructure of digital information. He concludes with a reminder that our suspiciousness toward the accuracy of information, at the very heart of "post-truth", is rational. At the same time, an exaggerated mistrust undermines the very possibility of collective deliberation and action. What is required to combat the ill effects of post-truth is not clinging on to a dogmatic ideal of sovereign objectivity, but a fully developed critical pedagogy of trust.

The question of what the Internet does with our ideas about authentic sources and reliable practices is a central theme for George Lazariou's paper, "Post-Truth and the Journalist's Ethos". Stressing the effects of globalized reporting, he suggests that trustworthy news is not merely a matter of professional methods and standards, but first and foremost a matter of the ethos of the journalist. In the attempt to bring in all and only relevant and reliable information, there is a tendency to emphasize accuracy and fact-checking at the expense of a global perspective, in which balance and fairness are achieved not simply by presenting all sides, but by actively seeking out stories that are often disregarded by mainstream media and acknowledging that what constitutes "the news" is a matter of professional discretion that makes moral demands on the journalist.

Mats Hyvönen discusses the role of the press in public deliberation in his paper, "As a Matter of Fact: Journalism and Academic Scholarship in the Post-Truth Era", and points to similarities in the effects of marketization and meditization on journalism and on the academy. He argues that we should distinguish between the

activities of truth-seeking and the exercise of professional judgment, on the one hand, and the medium in which those activities are conducted, on the other. The newspaper and the traditional university are probably on their way to obsolescence, he cautions, but that does not mean that the values they have incarnated or the purposes that they have served no longer apply. To the contrary, the challenge for both journalism and academic scholarship is to find new forms of instantiation and public service. He concludes with concrete suggestions about how to get moving on the long hard road ahead.

The social and material mechanisms by which the truth (news, facts, knowledge) is produced and disseminated are the focus of Derek Ford's "Don't Bring Truth to a Gunfight: Pedagogy, Force and Decision". Borrowing the term "democratic communicative capitalism" from Jodi Dean to describe how the democratic ideals of access, participation, inclusion, diversity, and critique become actualized through capitalist technological infrastructure, Ford argues that Trump and the right wing have understood something about our contemporary networked society that the Left has yet failed to realize, namely, that critique and analyses with the aim of securing truth, accuracy and understanding miss the mark in the political sphere. He proposes that the Left adopt a stance that requires commitment, self-sacrifice, risk, and responsibility, that is, adherence to a program of action. Such a position, to be politically effective, requires organization; Ford sees in the Communist Party the potential to engage the whole personality in the movement, as means of mobilizing the forces of both intellect and desire so that political engagement doesn't degenerate into a reified, abstract system of rights and duties. Instead of continuing the debate ad infinitum about what the truth is or isn't, the aim of the Left should be "a truth that would do justice to our Earth and all its inhabitants".

The last section, *Pedagogy and Postmodernity*, contains essays which, in one way or another, embrace a pedagogy of epistemic indeterminacy, while at the same time trying to find ways of avoiding the potentially calamitous consequences, for science, school and society, of a post-truth culture. In his brief essay, "Education in a Post-Truth World", Michael Peters considers the power of the lie, especially as instanced in the election campaign and presidency of Donald Trump. He argues that in the era of post-truth, it is not enough to revisit standard notions or theories of truth, or rely on accounts of "evidence" and forms of epistemic justification to guide us. We need to understand the broader social and cultural implications of post-truth in politics, science, and education; but we also need an operational strategy to combat "government by lying," and its role in a global order that accepts and even encourages the subordination of truth to emotional appeals and irrational personal inclinations.

Inspired by Jacques Rancière's ideas about the implications of linguistic arbitrariness for political matters, Liz Jackson and Charles Bingham problematize the conception of truth that is commonly assumed to be the point and purpose of education, namely, that of a collective or shared understanding. In particular, they study how this ideal is tied up with notions of merit as an integral part of the idea of schooling. They examine how such basic academic notions as "work", "rigor", and "quality" are built into even critical pedagogical projects, at the same time as the

latter eschew the supposition that these terms are ideologically neutral. The authors suggest that educators, following Rancière, should see the poetic and constructive powers of language as a possibility rather than a threat to a genuinely democratic order, both in and out of school.

Arriving at a conclusion reminiscent of Ford's but with similar considerations as Jackson and Bingham's as her point of departure, Nesta Devine attempts to negotiate between post-structuralist skepticism toward meta-narratives about truth and objectivity, on the one hand, and the need to move forward and not remain stuck in perpetual, but politically ineffectual critique, on the other. She proposes an ecological and posthuman take on ideology critique, in which the claims of the environment be understood as claims made on human beings in the interests of the planet.

Tracy Bowell addresses the question of what, concretely, we as educators are to do with the problem of deeply held beliefs that seem to be immune to conceptual or factual modification or revision. In "Changing the World One Premise at a Time: Argument, Imagination and Post-Truth", drawing on the work of Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd and Iris Marion Young, she proposes a new way of teaching critical thinking, which focuses on establishing common grounds through real confrontation with a multiplicity of forms of life and the voices to which they give rise.

The question of different life forms and the conceptual frameworks belonging to them is central to the discussion in "The Complexity of Post-Truth in Research: An Indigenous Speculation". Mika and Matapo question humanist assumptions with regard to truth, in particular, those baked into most social and educational science research. They argue that assuming truth to be an epistemological term already undermines the possibility of another understanding of "truth", namely, as an ontological term. Their case in point is indigenous Pasifika cultures, in which knowledge is inherently collective, and where the past is present in the collective, and the collective is part of the world, not a spectator on it. From this perspective, objectivity as it is commonly construed in philosophical debates is not a contrast to post-truth, but an early form of it. The authors seek a path for educational and social science research that will, on the one hand, be based on a common frame of reference that is not merely local or personal, but which, on the other hand, acknowledges difference with regard to truth. The ideal they propose is to "put objectivity its place without entirely denying it".

Finally, bringing together the central themes of the book as a whole, Henry Giroux poses the fundamental question: "What is the Role of Higher Education in the Age of Fake News?" Using Trump's use of "fake news" as a prime example of a "weaponized policy for legitimating ignorance and civil illiteracy", he describes the current government in the US as a "powerful disimagination machine", and develops a plan of critical action for disassembling it. According to Giroux, education is central to politics because it is always implicated in the struggle over values and agency. In particular, he stresses that we are now witnessing a new form of illiteracy, one which is not simply an absence of learning or knowledge, nor merely a symptom of the digitalization of everything, but is the result of conscious

goals and willful practices of depoliticization and desocialization. Giroux proposes a strategy for counteracting this deliberate policy of manufactured illiteracy, under the rubric of "thinking dangerously" on the part of academic staff and students. Echoing Arendt, Giroux sees education as a fundamentally future-oriented moral and political practice, and pedagogy as a site-specific and self-reflective and self-critical project of education rather than as a set of methodological quick fixes to be applied willy-nilly to any and all classroom situations. In the current context, the method of "thinking dangerously" means, among other things, freeing faculty and students from harness of corporate demands or the needs of the welfare state. It also implies a more critical attitude toward the language of commodification, while at the same time opening itself to new venues for intellectual development in the public sphere, and requires that the professoriate engage in these rather than ensconce themselves within their chosen fields of specialization. Higher education must utilize common sense while at the same time subjecting it to scrutiny. It must connect "reading the word with reading the world", if it is to produce citizens capable of governing rather than being governed.

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What Can Philosophy Teach Us About the Post-truth Condition

Steve Fuller

A Post-truth History of Truth

Philosophers claim to be seekers of the truth but the matter is not quite so straightforward. Another way to see philosophers is as the ultimate experts in a post-truth world. They see 'truth' for what it is: the name of a brand ever in need of a product that everyone is compelled to buy. This helps to explain why philosophers are most confident appealing to 'The Truth' when they are trying to persuade non-philosophers, be they in courtrooms or classrooms. In more technical terms, 'truth'—and the concepts surrounding it—are 'essentially contested' (Gallie 1956). In other words, it is not simply that philosophers disagree on which propositions are 'true' or 'false', but more importantly they disagree on what it means to say that something is 'true' or 'false'.

If you find my judgement too harsh or cynical, consider the careers of the key philosophical terms in which knowledge claims are transacted, not least 'evidence' and 'truth' itself. 'Evidence' is a good place to start because it feeds directly into the popular image of our post-truth world as 'post-fact', understood as a willful denial of solid, if not incontrovertible, pieces of evidence, whose independent standing sets limits on what can be justifiably asserted about the world.

Yet it was only in the early modern period that philosophers even began to distinguish a purely fact-based conception of evidence from personal revelation and authoritative testimony. The break only became clean in the mid-nineteenth century when logic books regularly started to classify people-based claims to evidence among the 'informal fallacies', unless the people had direct acquaintance with the specific matter under dispute (Hamblin 1970). The concept of 'expert', a late nineteenth-century juridical innovation based on a contraction of the participle 'experienced', extended the idea of 'direct acquaintance' to include people with a

S. Fuller (✉)
Department of Sociology, Warwick University, Coventry, England, UK
e-mail: S.W.Fuller@warwick.ac.uk

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specific training by virtue of which they are licensed to inductively generalise from their past experience to the matter under dispute. In this way, the recently proscribed 'argument from authority' made its return through the backdoor (Turner 2003).

This slow crafting of the concept of evidence was part of the general secularisation of knowledge. At the same time, it would be a mistake to think that today's concept was purpose-made for scientific inquiry. Rather, it was an adaptation of the inquisition, the procedure used on the European continent to identify heretics and witches. Its English importer was Francis Bacon, King James I's lawyer, who believed that nature itself was a fugitive from the law, hiding its secrets from humanity for much too long. Special trials were thus required to force nature from its normally equivocal stance to decide between two mutually exclusive options (Fuller 2017).

Bacon called such trials 'crucial experiments', which Karl Popper turned into the gold standard of the scientific method three centuries later. To be sure, Bacon and Popper were under no illusions that the facts produced under such 'extraordinary rendition', as we would now say, were nature's deliverances in more relaxed settings. On the contrary, Popper went so far as to call facts 'conventions', by which he meant convenient waystations in a never-ending inquisition of nature. After all, what made experiments 'crucial' was that their outcomes hastened knowledge of a future that otherwise would only unfold—for good or ill—on nature's timetable, which would provide humanity little opportunity to plan a response, let alone steer nature's course to human advantage.

As for 'truth', it harks back to an older English word, 'troth', which harbours all of the concept's philosophical difficulties. 'Troth' means faithfulness—but to what exactly: the *source* or the *target*?

Originally 'truth' meant fidelity to the source. It was about loyalty to whoever empowers the truth-teller, be it the Christian deity or a Roman general. In this context, it was associated with executing a plan of action, be it in the cosmos or on the battlefield. One remained 'true' by following through on the power-giver's intention, regardless of manner or outcome. It is this sense of 'true' that enabled the Jesuits, a Counter-Reformation Catholic order founded by a soldier, Ignatius Loyola, to do God's work by operating on the principle that 'the end justifies the means'.

However, thanks to another Catholic, Thomas Aquinas, truth came to be seen in the modern period as loyalty to the target—specifically, the empirical objects already in the field of play. His own Latin turn of phrase was *adequatio ad rem*, whose crude English translation, 'adequacy to the thing', captures the disempowering character of the concept, which philosophers continue to dignify as the 'correspondence theory of truth'. Aquinas, writing at a time of considerable heresy in the late thirteenth century, was reasserting confidence that the world as it normally appears is close enough to God's plan that the faithful should stop trying to second-guess God's intentions and focus instead on getting the empirical details of Creation right. Today Aquinas is the official philosopher of the Church, a secure guide to the accommodation of science to faith.

These contrary pulls on the concept of truth—the source vis-à-vis the target—have persisted to this day. When Newton famously declared '*Hypotheses non fingo*' ('I feign no hypotheses') in the second edition of *Principia Mathematica*, he was diverting suspicious religious readers who feared that he might be trying to get into 'The Mind of God' rather than simply providing a perspicuous account of nature's order. Of course, there is no doubt—given his voluminous private theological writings—that Newton was indeed aiming to second-guess the deity in which he believed. He was going for the source, not merely the target of all knowing. Against this backdrop, it is ironic that an avowedly 'atheist' physicist such as Stephen Hawking, successor to Newton's Cambridge mathematics chair, managed to parlay 'The Mind of God' as the driving metaphor of that popular science classic, *A Brief History of Time*. Newton and Hawking differ not only in terms of details of execution but also degree of self-awareness. Newton was deliberately concealing what by Hawking's day had been formally disowned if not long forgotten.

One philosopher who offers guidance in navigating through the somewhat surreal post-truth intellectual environment is Hans Vaihinger, the person most responsible for turning Immanuel Kant into a fixture of scholarly interest, by founding *Kant Studien*. Vaihinger also developed an entire world view around Kant's repeated use of the phrase '*als ob*' ('as if'). Much of the normative force of Kant's philosophy comes from thinking or acting 'as if' certain things were true, even though you may never be able to prove them and they may even turn out to be false. Vaihinger (1924) called the resulting world-view 'fictionalism' and it epitomises the post-truth sensibility. And seen through Vaihinger's eyes, philosophy appears to be the most post-truth field of them all.

A good way to see Vaihinger's point is to consider contemporary philosophy's notorious schism between 'analytic' and 'continental' schools. The analytics accuse the continentals of having picked up all of Nietzsche's worst habits. The result is a trail of spurious reasoning, fake philologies, eccentric histories, obscurantism and hyperbole. This is quite a list of offenses to the truth, yet it is striking that analytic philosophy's most lasting contributions have been a series of thought experiments, which are no more than figments of the imagination—such as Putnam's 'brains in a vat' or Searle's 'Chinese room'—that are passed off as heroic abstractions from some hypothetical reality. The rest of analytic philosophy is basically just scholastic wrangling about the wording of these thought experiments and the conclusions one is licensed to draw from them, leavened by occasional moments of high dudgeon, as well as displays of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and bias vis-à-vis other, typically more 'continental' or 'postmodern' modes of reasoning.

Vaihinger could make sense of what is going on here. He divided our approach to the world into *fictions* and *hypotheses*. In a fiction, you don't know that you inhabit a false world, whereas in a hypothesis you know that you don't inhabit a false world. In either case, 'the true world' doesn't possess any determinate epistemic standing. On the contrary, you presume 'a false world' and argue from there. From this standpoint, continental philosophers are purveyors of fictions, and analytic philosophers of hypotheses. What we colloquially call 'reality' moves between these two poles, never really honing in on any robust sense of truth. Here, one needs

to think of 'fictions' on a sliding scale from novels to plays to laws ('legal fictions') and 'hypotheses' on a sliding scale from what Euclid was talking about to what scientists test in a lab to what people do when they plan for the future.

Does this mean that truth is a redundant concept altogether? That there is a 'redundancy theory of truth', proposed by the logician Frank Ramsey nearly a hundred years ago, suggests as much. Moreover, the theories of truth that have followed in its wake—alternatively called 'deflationary', 'disquotational', 'expressive' and even 'honorific' (to recall Richard Rorty's reappropriation of Dewey)—can be added to the post-truth repertoire of analytic philosophy. But 'in fact' (permitting the locution), Vaihinger would say—and I agree—that truth turns out to be whatever is decided by the empowered judge in the case at hand. In other words, Francis Bacon was right, after all, which perhaps explains why Kant dedicated the *Critique of Pure Reason* to him. And that's the post-truth of it.

Embodying Truth/Post-truth: Of Plato's Dialogues and Wittgenstein's Two Halves

Many accounts of Greek etymology observe that *theory* and *theatre* share a common ancestry in *theos*, the Greek word for God. Implied here is a conception of the deity whose supremacy rests on being able to see both inside and outside its own frame of reference, a double spectator, or *theoros*. In logic, this is called *second-order* awareness: One not only plays a language game but also knows that the game is only one of many that she might be playing. In what follows, I associate this awareness with the *post-truth* mentality. In Plato's dialogues, the sophists are clearly trying to cultivate just such a mentality in their clients, which in principle would give them a god-like discretion to decide which game they play in the open space of the agora. Socrates pushes back from this arch sense of self-awareness, arguing that there is ultimately only one game in town, *truth*, adherence to which would keep everyone playing by the same rules and thereby stick to what logicians would call a *first-order* awareness.

Perhaps the most straightforward example of Socrates' approach appears in chapter 20 of *Protagoras*, in which he manages to get his sophistic opponent to admit that all virtues are one because they all have the same contrary, *aphrosyne*, which is normally translated as 'lack of proportion or perspective'. In the process of persuading Protagoras of this thesis, Socrates gradually removes the sense of the virtues as something skill-like, each possessing its own gradient along which one may perform better or worse. This serves to neutralise the image of the citizen that the sophists presupposed, namely, one whose competence consists in playing the virtues off each other as the situation demands, very much in the spirit of a modern economic 'optimiser' who decides to act after having traded off her various interests. In its place, Socrates proposes that to think that there are separate virtues is to reflect one's ignorance of what virtue is. Thus, the just, the good, the beautiful, etc.,

are all simply aspects of virtue as such. 'Virtue' in this univocal sense is identified with the truth, in that everything is understood in its rightful place. From this standpoint, by proliferating virtues as skills, Protagoras is selling parts as if they were the whole. Socrates' argument, as filtered through Plotinus, would exert profound influence in the Middle Ages, as the Abrahamic deity came to stand for what Socrates had identified as the one truth behind all its virtuous appearances.

The ultimate difference between Socrates and the sophists is not the dialectical capacities of the two sides, which are basically the same. In this respect, Plato's coinage of 'philosophy' for Socrates' argumentative style and 'rhetoric' for the sophistic style is itself a rhetorical diversion. Rather, the difference lay in Socrates' objection to the free-wheeling—some might say 'democratic', others might say 'commercial'—way in which the sophists deployed these common capacities. To render the premises of arguments pure inventions of the arguer is potentially to turn any human into a deity if enough people are persuaded to regard his or her premises as the rules of the game by which they all subsequently play. And as Plato knew from first-hand experience, the sophists did succeed in persuading enough citizens of their 'dialectical divinity', so to speak, that Athenian democracy ended up reproducing the chaotic sociability of the gods of Greek mythology. Unfortunately, in the real world this led to the defeat of Athens at the hands of Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, the beginning of Athens' terminal decline.

In Plato's telling, Socrates stands for the need to play just one game, which explains why the sophists and the 'poets' are put in the same basket. I put 'poets' in scare quotes because the term should be understood in its original Greek sense of *poiesis*, the productive use of words to conjure up worlds. In Plato's day, playwrights were the poets of chief concern, but in our own day those adept at computer coding—'hackers'—might be the main source of comparable subversion (cf. Wark 2004). Whereas Plato believed that only philosopher-kings in training should cultivate a second-order imagination—shades of Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*—his enemies were keen to distribute this capacity as widely as possible. At stake was *modal power*. In other words, whatever the rules of the game happen to be—or seem to be—they could be otherwise. From the post-truth standpoint, truth looks like an extreme disciplining of the imagination, which accounts for the authoritarian—and even totalitarian—feel of Plato's positive proposals for governing the polity in the *Republic*.

At the same time, it is easy to see how Augustine and other early Christian thinkers found Plato attractive as a metaphysical backdrop for their own monotheistic views, since the dialogues brought into sharp relief the perils of humans trying to behave like gods in a polytheistic cosmos. However, Christianity is also a religion that claims that believers have some sort of direct contact with their one deity. Indeed, since humans are biblically created *in imago dei*, a phrase Augustine himself popularised, the prospect that each person might not merely imitate a god—as in the Greek case—but actually instantiate divinity proved to be an endless source of heresies. It culminated in the Protestant Reformation, which arguably has reproduced the sophistic situation that the early Christians were trying

to avoid by embracing Plato. Of course, Augustine's own original solution was to strengthen the authority the established church of his day, which over time has turned out to be inadequate, to say the least.

Let me now shift gears and tell the same story from the standpoint of the twentieth century by using the two phases of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophical career—in particular, his attempt to determine what is true in his early (e.g. *Tractatus*) and later (e.g. *Philosophical Investigations*) writings. The early writings were fixated on the idea of a truth-functional logic into which all meaningful statements might be translated and evaluated. If a statement was deemed 'meaningful', then one could determine straightforwardly—perhaps even mechanically—whether it was true or false. In contrast, the later writings were concerned with the fact that the same string of data, be they quantitative or qualitative, may be subsumed or interpreted under any number of rules that would render them meaningful. In that case, the form of inference required is closer to abduction than deduction.

The early Wittgenstein captures the 'truth' orientation, whereby the rules of the knowledge game are sufficiently well understood by all players that appeals to 'evidence' mean the same thing to everyone concerned. This is the world of Kuhnian paradigms, whose knowledge game is called 'normal science' (Kuhn 1970). To be sure, depending on the state of play, some evidence may count more than others and may even overturn previous evidence. However, the uniformity of epistemic standards means that everyone recognises these moves in the same way and hence there is a common understanding of one's position in the epistemic tournament, including which teams have made the most progress.

The later Wittgenstein captures the 'post-truth' orientation, whereby the knowledge game is not determined by the rules; rather determining the rules is what the knowledge game is about. Emblematic of this approach is the duck-rabbit Gestalt that appears not only in this period of Wittgenstein's work but also in Thomas Kuhn's account of the psychology of the 'paradigm shift' that characterises a scientific revolution. The idea is that the same evidence can be weighted differently depending on the frame of reference adopted, which may result in a radical shift in world view. Both Wittgenstein and Kuhn agreed that whichever frame prevails is not preordained but a contingent matter, one which tends to be covered up after the fact by the justificatory narrative that the community concerned tells itself in order to go forward collectively. Kuhn notoriously dubbed this narrative 'Orwellian', after the work done in 1984s Ministry of Information, whereby a regular rewriting of history to match the current direction of policy subtly erases any memory that policies had been otherwise—and might also be otherwise in the future.

Where the later Wittgenstein and Kuhn differed was that the former appeared to think that the rules of the game might change at a moment's notice, depending on who is in the room when a binding decision needs to be taken. Thus, in principle, the number series that begins 2, 4,… may continue with 6, 8 or 16, depending on whether the implied rule is agreed to be n + 2, n2 or n^2. Usually there is precedent for settling the matter, but that precedent amounts to no more than a 'convention'. The alternative rules for going forward on such an occasion are comparable to the

alternative dialectical framings of a situation that the sophist juggles at any given time until an opportunity presents itself (*Kairos*). Indeed, this interpretation served to make the later Wittgenstein the darling of ethnomethodologists in the 1970s and '80s, including within the nascent 'sociology of scientific knowledge', who launched STS. In contrast, Kuhn believed that the decisive moments require a specific prehistory, the logic of which effectively forces a decision that is then taken only with great reluctance and may involve a de facto rejection of those who had been previously part of the relevant community. This 'logic' is characterised by the accumulation of unsolved puzzles in the conduct of normal science, which then precipitates a 'crisis', resulting in the paradigm shift that imposes new rules on the science game. In this respect, Kuhn might be seen to strike a balance between the two Wittgensteins, or Socrates and the sophists.

How Truth Looks to Post-truth

It is worth stressing that a 'post-truther' does not deny the existence of facts, let alone 'objective facts'. She simply wishes to dispel the mystery in which the creation and maintenance of facts tend to be shrouded. For example, epistemologists have long tried to make sense of the idea that 'correspondence to reality' explains what makes a particular statement a 'fact'. On the most ordinary reading, this sounds a bit mysterious, since it suggests a strange turn of events. Take the case of scientific facts: (1) Scientists do whatever they do in a lab. (2) They publish something that convinces their learned colleagues that something happened there, which sets off a train of actions which starts by imprinting itself on the collective body of scientific knowledge and ultimately on the world at large as an 'expert' judgement. (3) Yet—so the 'truthers' tell us—in the end what confers legitimacy on the fact (i.e. makes it 'true') is something *outside* this process, a reality to which it 'corresponds'.

To someone not schooled to 'know better' (i.e. in the 'truth' mode), (3) seems to be quite an arbitrary conclusion to reach, just given (1) and (2). Unsurprisingly then, the twentieth century has been largely a story of philosophers gradually falling out of love with this scenario, which in turn has animated the post-truth sensibility. Indeed, there is a fairly direct line of intellectual descent from the logical positivists and the Popperians to contemporary social constructivism in the sociology of scientific knowledge, contrary to their textbook representation as mutual antagonists. I have gone so far as to call science and technology studies (STS) 'postmodern positivism'—in a non-pejorative sense (Fuller 2006)!

The tell-tale sign is that they all define 'truth' as something *inside*—not outside—the terms of a language game. Put another way, 'truth' shifts from being a substantive to a procedural notion. Specifically, for them 'truth' is a second-order concept that lacks any determinate meaning except relative to the language in terms of which knowledge claims can be expressed. (This is known as the 'Tarski convention of truth'.) It was in this spirit that Rudolf Carnap thought that Thomas

> *In short, universities function as knowledge trust-busters whose own corporate capacities of "creative destruction" prevent new knowledge from turning into intellectual property* (Fuller 2002, p. 47; italics in original).

By 'corporate capacities', I mean the various means at the university's disposal to ensure that the people in a position to take forward new knowledge are not simply part of the class of those who created it in the first place. Of course I had in mind ordinary teaching that aims to express even the most sophisticated concepts in terms ordinary students can understand and use, thereby deconstructing the rather historically specific—or 'path-dependent'—ways that innovations tend to become socially entrenched, which in turn create relationships of trust between 'experts' and 'lay people'. But also I meant to include 'affirmative action' policies that are specifically designed to incorporate a broader range of people than might otherwise attend the university. Taken together, these counteract the 'neo-feudalism' to which academic knowledge production is prone—'rent-seeking', if you will—and to which veritists are largely oblivious.

As for the veritists' core truth criterion, *reliability*, its meaning depends on specifying the conditions—say, in the design of an experiment—under which a pattern of behaviour is expected to occur. Outside of such tightly defined conditions, which is where most 'scientific controversies' happen, it is not clear how cases should be classified and counted, and hence what 'reliable' means. Indeed, STS has not only drawn attention to this fact but it has gone further—say, in the work of Harry Collins—to question whether even lab-based reliability is possible without some sort of collusion between researchers. In other words, the social accomplishment of 'reliable knowledge' is at least partly an expression of solidarity among members of the scientific community—a closing of the ranks, to put it less charitably. This is a less flattering characterisation of what veritists claim as the epistemically luminous process of 'consensus formation' in science.

An especially good example of the foregoing is what has been dubbed 'Climategate', which was triggered by the hacking of the computer server of the UK's main climate science research group in 2009, which was followed up with several Freedom of Information requests. While no wrongdoing was formally established, the e-mails did reveal the extent to which scientists from across the world effectively conspired to present the data for climate change in ways that obscured interpretive ambiguities, thereby pre-empting possible appropriations by so-called 'climate change sceptics'. The most natural way to interpret this situation is that it reveals the micro-processes by which a scientific consensus is normally and literally 'manufactured'. Nevertheless, veritists are unlikely to regard Climategate as their paradigm case of a 'scientific consensus'. But why not?

The reason lies in their refusal to acknowledge the labour and even struggle that are involved in securing collective assent over any significant knowledge claim. For veritists, informed people draw the same conclusions from the same evidence. The actual social interaction among inquirers carries little cognitive weight in its own right. Instead, it simply reinforces what any rational individual is capable of inferring for him- or herself in the same situation. Other people may provide

additional data points but they don't alter the rules of right reasoning. The contrasting post-truth view of consensus formation is more explicitly 'rhetorical' (Fuller and Collier 2004). It appeals to a mix of strategic and epistemic considerations in a setting where the actual interaction between the parties sets the parameters that define the scope of any possible consensus. Even Kuhn, who valorised consensus as the glue that holds together normal science puzzle-solving, clearly saw its rhetorical and even coercive character, ranging from pedagogy to peer review.

Finally, a word should be said about a 'politically correct' form of veritism that is popular among feminists and multiculturalists: *epistemic justice*—or rather, epistemic *in*justice (Fricker 2007). The nuance matters. One might think that 'epistemic justice' is about doing justice to knowledge, in response to which various theories of justice might be proposed that weigh the competing demands of equality, fairness, desert, cost, benefit and so forth in the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge. This captures the post-truth spirit of my own 'social epistemology' because it presumes that the norms governing knowledge and knowers need to be forged simultaneously: Who knows and what is known are always mutually implicated. Identities are not fixed in stone (or in the genetic or historical record, for that matter). In contrast, 'epistemic injustice' presupposes that the rules of the epistemic game are already set, and so the objective is to identify and correct violations of play. These typically relate to members from socially discriminated groups who are prevented from contributing their unique 'data points' to an agreed sense of inquiry. And without denying the historic neglect of women and minority voices, which has damaged both them and any greater sense of human inquiry, one wonders whether this strict sense of 'epistemic injustice' can survive the ongoing 'trans-' revolution (i.e. transgender, transrace, transhuman, etc.) which promises an unprecedented level of identity mobility and its attendant changes in the rules of the knowledge game.

Conclusion: Settling the Score Between Truth and Post-truth

Richard Rorty became such a hate figure among analytic philosophers in the last two decades of the twentieth century because he called out the veritists on their fakeness. Yes, philosophers can tell you what truth is, but just as long as you accept a lot of contentious assumptions—and hope those capable of contending those assumptions aren't in the room when you're speaking! Put another way, Rorty refused to adopt what might be called a 'double truth' doctrine for philosophy (comparable to the various 'double truth' doctrines promulgated in the Middle Ages to save religious faith from critical scholarship), whereby amongst themselves philosophers adopt a semi-detached attitude towards various conflicting

conceptions of truth while at the same time presenting a united front to non-philosophers, lest these masses start to believe some disreputable things.

As Rorty (1979) had explained, his own post-truth vision had been shaped by his encounter with Sellars' (1963) distinction between the 'manifest' and 'scientific' images of the world. Sellars' point was that the two images were 'incommensurable' in the sense that Kuhn would popularise. In other words, they cross-classify the same world for different purposes, in which case any straightforward 'reduction' or even evaluation of one image by the other is arguably question-begging. In other words, to say that a common-sense observation is contradicted by scientific findings is to tacitly assume that the observations should be held accountable to findings—or, more bluntly, that the ordinary person should be playing the scientist's language game. Thus, positivism—both in its original Comtean and later Carnapian forms—always carried a strong sense of trying to reform the world. My own social epistemology is also informed by this sensibility.

Sellars' distinction influenced a range of philosophers who otherwise stand on opposite sides of key issues in epistemology and philosophy of science, including Bas van Fraassen (scientific antirealist), Paul Churchland (scientific realist) and most relevant for our purposes, the self-styled 'anarchist' philosopher of science Feyerabend (1981). Feyerabend was an avowed enemy of 'methodolatrists', namely, those philosophers (and scientists, of course) who place great store by particular rituals—demonstrations of methodological probity—which are said to increase the likelihood that the resulting facts enjoy the desired state of 'correspondence to reality'. As in the days of the Pharisees and the Puritans, a rigorous demeanour is made a proxy for access to truth. But Feyerabend (1975) revealed the rhetorical strength and weakness of this 'truther' strategy by mobilising the case of Galileo, a sloppy and perhaps fraudulent wielder of the scientific method by modern standards. Here was someone who didn't understand the optics behind the 'telescope', a pimped up periscope to the naked eye, including the eyes of his Papal Inquisitors. Yet, we would say that Galileo's methodologically rigorous Inquisitors—perhaps by virtue of their own rigour—rendered themselves blind to the 'full truth' of his claims.

To be sure, Feyerabend leaves the moral of his story tantalisingly open. Nevertheless, the post-truther is clear that we know that Galileo was right because the rules of the science game had changed within a few decades of his death to allow his original knowledge claims to be re-established on new and improved grounds, courtesy of Isaac Newton and his followers. Galileo's interlocutors had overlooked that while failing to meet *their* standard of evidence, he was predicting something about the future of science itself that would make them obsolete and enable his knowledge claims to become facts. Galileo's sloppiness and duplicity was thus a risky epistemic investment that paid off in the long term but of course not in the short term. He was trying to play by the rules of a game other than the one to which he was being held to account. Galileo's trial displayed the difficulties of trying to change the rules of a game from within the game while the players think that the rules are fine. This last gloss helps to motivate Kuhn's claim that scientists will not shift to a new paradigm until the old one has accumulated enough unsolved problems.

As we have seen, the post-truther plays two games at once: Of course, s/he plays the knowledge game in which s/he is situated, in which s/he may have little prima face 'room for manoeuvre' (*Spielraum*). But s/he also plays—at least in his/her own mind—a second and more desirable game, into which s/he would like to convert the current game. This explains that the value that the sophists placed on *Kairos*, the opportunity to argue a specific case. It amounts to a search for the dialectical tipping point, a moment that the Gestalt might just switch from 'duck' to 'rabbit'. In that respect, the post-truther is an epistemic 'double agent' and hence open to charges of hypocrisy in a way that the truther is not. I have associated this sense of double agency with 'bullshit', as incensed veritists have applied the term to postmodernists for nearly four decades now (Fuller 2009: Chap. 4). However, a relatively neutral settling of the scores between truthers and post-truthers would conclude that post-truthers aim to weaken the fact/fiction distinction—and hence undermine the moral high ground of truthers—by making it easier to switch between knowledge games, while the truthers aim to strengthen the distinction by making it harder to switch between knowledge games. In short, the difference turns on the resolution of a struggle over what I earlier called 'modal power'.

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In the Know and on the Outs

What is required for a shared recognition of when and in what contexts we need words such as "fact" or "falsehood"? When a situation arises in which we cannot assume that we can trust that our use of such words as something belonging to all of us in the same measure and by and large in the same way, then it is as if the scaffolding upon which properly human things (culture, science, the rule of law) are built founders. Some political observers have expressed the pessimistic view that what we are witnessing are the first tremors of precisely this sort of social and political collapse.

It has been argued that the best means we have for the protection and preservation of a stable and flourishing society are our educational institutions. But there is a fundamental assumption at work in such hopes, which should not go unnoticed. It is quite simply this: "higher education" is as vulnerable to the situation described by "truthiness", "wikiality", and "alternative facts" as any other institution for assessing the validity of claims, including courts of law, laboratories, and the investigative journalism of the press with legally responsible publishers. My concern here will be with the connection between our use of this vocabulary, and the political and social conditions in which they have or make sense. I will argue that the problem is that a picture has gotten hold of us in which social, ethnic, economic, and other divisions encourage the thought that commonality in our way of life is a pernicious delusion, rather than a sine qua non for the choice to live and to continue living together. Important for this context is the division between what is often termed "educated elites" and "uneducated masses", which suggests somehow a straightforward divide between intelligent, open and informed opinion and dogmatic, narrow-minded prejudice. Were the matter so simple, then the answer to the question, "how are we to reconstitute and sustain the polity for the future good of man and the world?" would be relatively straightforward. But I would suggest that it is not.

If one believes in the autonomy of reason, as did Enlightenment thinkers, then "higher education" would be the training and cultivation of that capacity. Liberal-mindedness has been seen as both a means and an end of education, and it is likely this liberal ideal that inclines some to place such faith in it. The hope is that intellectual inquiry and the free exchange of beliefs and ideas manifest, perpetuate, and improve the exercise of human reason in the settling of disagreements as to what is, in fact, the case. A more contemporary version of this ideal formulates it in terms of a "widening the range of consensus about how things are", as opposed to an "appeal to reality, apart from any human need" (Rorty 1998, p. 35). A classical liberal theme is thus, on the one hand, institutionalized rights and constitutional checks on power that might inhibit the exercise of reasoned discourse; on the other, but closely related to this necessary condition of a liberal polity, is the confidence that every citizen will acknowledge that his right to think and speak freely is conditioned on the recognition of that right for others, and further, that he must, in a sense, actively will the possibility of disagreement as an absolutely necessary

component of the free exercise of his reason, that is, as a fundamental requirement for the kind of interchange that will increase the power of reason in all.

The expectation that the unimpeded use of reason will lead to the attainment of universally recognized truths is now considered by many, not just philosophers and intellectuals, to be naïve, and deeply problematic, at least with regard to matters concerning the political, social, and cultural sphere. The recurrent calls in certain quarters of the student body and faculty for No Platform-activism, safe zones, and trigger warnings attest to this mistrust. On the other hand, the very notion of academic freedom rests on the premise that thoughts are not dangerous, deeds are. The liberal confidence in education as a remedy for societal ills rests on the intuition that the most dangerous deeds are those performed without thought, i.e., that thoughtlessness in action is the same as stupidity, which is never a good thing and which, at worst, undermines the very capacity for intelligence. Since thinking requires communication for its vitality, rectification, and enhancement, the fear that certain thoughts about the nature of politics or the ethical are in themselves hurtful, insulting or intimidating, militates against their rectification through higher education, since what is at stake is exactly what truths are, and how truth claims are to be investigated, validated, valorized, or discredited. The political problem of how to maintain social cohesion, or, more dramatically, how to prevent the dissolution of the polity into an inchoate mass of belligerent particularism and conflicting interests, applies also to the university.

One thing that has become clear from the popularity of climate change denial, "birtherism" and other conspiracy theories and the like is that the more that "expertise" or "knowledge" is merged with the appropriation and dissemination of certain values, the less it will be associated with impartiality. The consequence of the turn to values, in turn, is that authority in the sense of "authoritative" evidence, for instance, is undermined and loses its democratic legitimacy; it is replaced with the perception that the institutions that evolved to ensure unbiased and balanced expert analyses have become authorities in another sense, that is, something like "state agencies with the authority to discipline, with or without basis in impartial scrutiny of facts or argumentation," which is to say dictatorial, authoritarian regimes. The sense that the search for truth has been replaced by the invention of truthiness is shared on both sides of the political spectrum.

Since the election in November, Richard Rorty's William E. Massey Lectures in American Civilization at Harvard in 1997 have been cited frequently. In particular, a seemingly prescient diagnosis of the state of the nation at the time concerning the effects of neoliberalism on American democracy received great attention after the election of Donald Trump:

> [M]embers of labor unions, and unorganized unskilled workers, will sooner or later realize that their government is not even trying to prevent wages from sinking or to prevent jobs from being exported. Around the same time, they will realize that suburban white-collar workers — themselves desperately afraid of being downsized — are not going to let themselves be taxed to provide social benefits for anyone else.