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TRUTH, THINKING, ETHICS

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POST-TRUTH

In 2016 the Oxford Languages named post-truth its word of the year. In doing so, it defined post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages 2016). Notice that truth is here equated with "objective facts," or perhaps a bit more sophisticatedly, the correspondence between "objective facts," a human subject, and their propositions. This is, to say the least, an extremely narrow, insipid, and one is tempted to say, not very human notion of truth. It is, however, quite a common definition of truth, and particularly so among philosophers of the analytic variety. Simon Critchley (2020a) recalls his former teacher once saying: "Truth isn't interesting. If you want truth, open a phonebook." Indeed. Critchley's teacher surely had the correspondence theory of truth in mind when he said this.[1]

One is inclined to ask: when was it that emotion and personal belief was not more influential on public opinion than objective facts? Here we need simply refer to such phenomena as religion and nationalism to call into question the apparent assumption behind this definition that at some point in the not very distant past public opinion was shaped predominantly (or entirely?) by clear and distinct truths understood as correspondence to objective facts. History suggests otherwise. Rather than post-truth as the new and disturbing feature of our time, perhaps instead, the very idea that truth should be merely equated with "objective facts" is most concerning.

It is understandable how this came about. In the last 150 years, for example, God died and secularism spread, two world wars crushed any good faith belief in Enlightenment ideals, and the capitalist machine transformed the Earth into a resource for profit-seeking individuals. Under such conditions, truth and those who traditionally were recognized to

[1] For an excellent introduction to the correspondence theory of truth, see Marian David (2020).

have the authority to uphold or spread it have increasingly been considered illegitimate. Except, that is, for science and scientists (and even they are increasingly coming into question in some corners). But because since at least the Second World War, science has increasingly become technology obsessed and instrumentarian focused; and because much of what counts today as scientific discovery has been redefined in terms of profit-driven innovation as a result of its unholy alliance with the capitalist machine (Scherz 2019); science today has become one of the foundations upholding the idea of truth as objective fact (Porter 1995; Daston and Galison 2010). This is, perhaps, most clearly seen in the increasing influence of so-called data science, which not only is very comfortably allied with finance capitalism, but also understands the "truth" revealed by data as little more than facts, and science as little more than the technologically efficient reproduction of those facts. When the "truth" of these facts, however, are regularly characterized by injustice and inequality, perhaps these "truths" ought not be reproduced.[2]

Still, Oxford Languages supports its choice by claiming that post-truth is not "an isolated quality of particular assertions," but rather "a general characteristic of our age" (2016). That is to say, we live in times *conditioned* by post-truth.[3] While that may be the case, here we might want to note, however, that considering this condition unique to our time necessitates a particularly Euro-American perspective on history; or perhaps even more specifically, an Anglo-American perspective. For we need not look very far or wide in time or geography to find other examples that might also be characterized as post-truth conditions. Indeed, a good deal of the 20th century could be precisely characterized as just this, and located right there in the center, as well as the periphery, of Europe. This is Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and its satellites.

Hannah Arendt remains today the most significant thinker of the relation between truth and totalitarian politics. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1973) writes that one of the primary characteristics of this form of politics is "that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts . . . and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition" (333). Importantly, Arendt makes the essential point that it is not the convinced Nazi, for example, who is the ideal subject of totalitarian politics, but rather ordinary "people for whom the distinction between fact

[2] For just a few examples of a growing literature on the reproduction of injustices and inequalities by algorithms and big data, see O'Neil (2016); Cheney-Lippold (2017); Noble (2018).

[3] Similar to Arendt, when I write of conditions I mean something like what we mean when we say "weather conditions" or "skiing conditions." That is, the conditions that enable or hinder or provide limits for possible ways of being, becoming, acting, doing, thinking, saying, and so on, in the worlds where we are. And like weather or skiing conditions, these ontological conditions emerge through the confluence of both human and nonhuman intertwining. Furthermore, because conditions emerge at this confluence they should be understood in terms of having the potential to become otherwise. For just as weather and skiing conditions change as the result of both human and nonhuman activity, so too can ontological conditions change in similar ways. Some questions arise: If it is possible for ontological conditions to change, is there a possibility that they do not? If so, how does this happen? Furthermore, if ontological conditions can change, what are the processes by which this change occurs and what is its temporality? This essay is not the place to take up these questions. However, I do take them up in my book *Disappointment: Toward a Critical Hermeneutics of Worldbuilding* (Zigon 2018).

and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist" (474). Ordinary people in their everyday lives become susceptible to this way of being, according to Arendt, when they are increasingly isolated from one another.

The atomized, isolated, lonely individual is most vulnerable to what is now called post-truth politics. Above all, it is the consequence of this vulnerability that is most concerning. In our contemporary condition characterized by such loneliness and the consequential increase of addiction, anxiety, and despair, where "social interaction" is most regularly done by means of fragmentary social media posts, all of which is supported by a neoliberalism that only recognizes persons as self-responsible and autonomous individuals, and which too often results in persons becoming selfish individuals, it is no wonder that the very possibility of a between that gives way to us is increasingly foreclosed by totalitarian-like—or at least for now more accurately put, authoritarian-like—politics (Zigon 2019a; 2021).

In such a condition, we must ask: what is to be done? Much of the concern today about post-truth revolves precisely around the potential rise of—if not totalitarian politics, then certainly—authoritarian politics. In order to begin to address the question of what is to be done, it will be helpful first to consider an historical example of a similar condition of "post-truth" and authoritarian/totalitarian politics, and query as to how those living in such a condition responded. How was it that in isolating conditions of post-truth some were still able to connect with others, and in so doing, slowly bring about an otherwise?

LIVE WITHIN TRUTH

In his famous essay "The Power of the Powerless," the playwright, dissident, and eventual first president of post-Communist Czechoslovakia Václav Havel (1992) articulates his political, ethical, and existential imperative "to live within the truth." Written in 1978, this essay was his response to life in the post-truth—or perhaps as Havel would say, the ideological—conditions of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime. At first glance, this imperative seems rather straightforward, particularly when contrasted with how Havel describes the opposite, that is, "living within a lie." Such a distinction surely conjures Arendt's (1973) claim that totalitarianism is a form of politics in which "the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition" (333). While this is as good a description as any for understanding how ideology is made the "truth" of everyday life under certain regimes of power, such a manner of putting it, nevertheless, too easily slips into an overly banal notion of truth as equivalent with objective fact, such that, for example, the number of persons attending a presidential inauguration becomes a primary battleground over the truthfulness of a regime.

It matters, of course, whether or not leaders can speak honestly about simple phenomena in the world like the number of people at an event, let alone more complex phenomena such as the economy or public health. Still, dishonesty by politicians alone cannot be the

standard by which we define the limits of totalitarianism, for surely, if it were, we would know no other form of politics. Rather, what Havel means by the distinction between living within truth or living within a lie is a matter of one's *comportment* within what he calls the panorama of everyday life. In other words, Havel is not writing about—or at least not primarily so—the veracity of this or that statement, but rather how one is with one's world. To live within the truth rather than living within a lie is a matter of being dispositionally attuned to the panorama of everyday life or its horizon of meaning or what I suggest in the final section of this essay is better considered in terms of the sense of the world.

Again, this is not a matter of the truth or falsity of one's propositional statements—whether or not the greengrocer, to use Havel's (1992) famous example, is attempting to articulate something objectively true about the world and his relation to it when he hangs the "Workers of the world, unite!" sign in his shop window. But rather, to live within truth is a matter of one's comportment with the world, how we "address the world," a matter of "responsibility to and for the world," and as such, has as its "proper point of departure . . . concern [and care] for others" (1992, 147, 194, 195). The articulation of such a moral disposition—or what I call in the next section, embodied morality—Havel attributes to the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka with the latter's saying that "the most interesting thing about responsibility is that we carry it with us everywhere" (Havel 1992, 195). By this, Patočka is indicating what we might call an embodied commitment to remain faithfully attuned to the world and those others there with us.

In his otherwise brilliant ethnographic and theoretical description of the performative shift of late socialism's authoritative discourse, Alexei Yurchak (2006) misses this complexity of Havel's argument. Taking up Austin's theory of performatives, Yurchak argues that Havel is too narrowly concerned with the constative dimension of language—the conveyance of meaning that is either a true or false description of facts. In contrast, Yurchak argues that the condition of late socialism is better described by what Austin calls the performative dimension—the felicitous or infelicitous force of language that is neither true nor false but rather does something in the world (19). Admittedly, it is rather easy to read Havel in this way considering his rhetorical contrast between living within truth and living within a lie, and this reading is made even more understandable considering that to some extent the genre of dissident writing taken up by Havel is perhaps most obviously read as articulating certain truths over and against the lies of a totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, Havel's essay is more sophisticated than your run of the mill political statement, and it is precisely the Heideggerian undercurrent of the essay that is missed by Yurchak that makes it so.

For Havel is not an analytic philosopher obsessed with the most logical argument to support, for example, that the statement "'Snow is white' is true iff it corresponds to the fact that snow is white" is more truthful than "'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white," or vice versa (David 2020). Far from it. Rather, Havel is an existentialist; and for this reason, he does not define truth in terms of, for example, a correspondence between a subject and objective facts, but rather in terms of a dispositional manner of being. Put another way, when Havel writes about living within the truth, he is primarily and for the most part writing about the human existential imperative to dwell openly in a world together with

others.[4] As Havel (1992) puts it, there is a "human predisposition to truth" or an "openness to truth" (148). Indeed, it is only because of this predisposition to truth, so claims Havel, that it becomes possible to live a lie.

This notion of truth and the human predisposition and openness to truth is above all a Heideggerian notion. For Heidegger (1996), the full existential and ontological meaning of the "fact" that "Dasein is in the truth" is that Dasein is also "in untruth" (204). (In Heidegger's way of putting the matter here, we can already see his influence first on Patočka and then on Havel). Importantly, then, to be human—to be Dasein—is *to be* the movement between truth and untruth. Again, this is not a philosophical claim about the capacity to utter correspondingly true or false propositions. Rather, to be the movement between truth and untruth is a matter of comportment. Or, as Heidegger (2011) goes on to describe it, it is a matter of being attuned, or the ecstatically relational exposure to a world such that one is temporarily in accord with the latter (75). Heidegger seeks to move beyond the notion of a subject that stands over and against objects and its world by looking to the ancient Greek conception of truth as *alētheia*, which he translates as unconcealment. In contrast to a subject agentively projecting knowledge onto objects and the world such that this projection corresponds "truthfully" with the latter, truth as *alētheia* or unconcealment is the result of having a certain disposition or attunement with a particular object or world such that the latter is let be to show itself as itself. Thus, truth in this sense is neither in the subject nor in the object nor in their correspondence. Rather, truth is the relational attunement—the between—that allows an existent to show itself as itself and allows other existents to let the unfolding of that showing happen.

It is for this reason, then, that Heidegger (2011) writes that the "essence of truth reveals itself as freedom" (75). This is so because freedom is not an agentive capacity for acting as projection; rather freedom "lets beings be the beings they are" to disclose themselves as such, and is thus an attuning (72, 75). This freedom as letting be, Heidegger is quick to tell us, is not a matter of "neglect or indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is

[4] To dwell "is being-in-the-world in such a way that as part of that world one is intimately intertwined with and concerned for it and its other existents, and as such participates in maintaining the openness of that world in its ongoing attunement with itself. Here it is important to emphasize that such dwelling is not about being located, emplaced, or even about the space that one occupies. Rather, dwelling is an existential modality for being-in-a-world, a modality that only becomes possible in an attuned world. Thus, to dwell . . . is to be in a world in such a way that one's being is never pre-limited within a pre-assumed totality, but rather possibilities for becoming otherwise remain open . . . To claim that dwelling is an ethical imperative for human existence . . . is simply to claim that to be human is to be intimately intertwined and attuned with a world for which one is concerned, and which becomes attuned, in turn, with itself. It should be noted that this concern makes no normative claim beyond maintaining the ability to dwell in that world. Because of this mutual attunement between oneself and a world, openness always remains such that both oneself and that world can become otherwise so as to maintain this attunement. To speak of dwelling as an ethical imperative, then, does not predefine how or what a human becomes, nor does it predefine what kind of world this human must become a part of. Rather it is simply to acknowledge that to be human is always to be concernedly intertwined in a world with others, and this being-together always manifests differently. Dwelling, then, is that existential imperative of humanness that allows for the very differences of ways of being-in-the-world, ethically acting and valuing, and socially and politically inter- and intra-acting that" critical phenomenologists tend to focus on (Zigon 2018, 120–22).

to engage oneself with beings" (72). Or as Havel (1992) put it, to live within truth is to be "concern[ed] [and care] for others" (195), and this intertwined concern and care is a matter of having a certain moral disposition and attunement with others and our worlds. Thus, both freedom and truth in this Heideggerian sense are not capacities of the subject to be agentively enacted, but rather are indicative of an attuned relation between existents of the world. Therefore, "'[t]ruth' is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an 'object' by a human 'subject' and then 'are valid' somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, *truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds*" (Heidegger 2011, 74, italics added).

Havel adopted his imperative to "live within truth" from this Heideggerian notion of truth, and Heidegger's argument in support of the claim that "Dasein is in the truth." But he did so through an interpretation of Heidegger by his mentor Patočka, the Czech phenomenologist for whom Havel's essay was dedicated.[5] For Patočka (1998), humans "are the only beings [that] can live in truth," by which he means "life in a relation to the world" rather than the anxiety of "roles and needs" (177). Not unlike Arendt's (1998) distinction between work and labor, Patočka articulates the difference between an existentially meaningful attunement with the world—what he and Havel call living within truth—and an existentially meaningless and unfree emplacement in a world as one with a "role" that is done simply to fulfill a "need." It is this latter condition that for both Patočka and Havel leads to living a lie; not because it is a false correspondence but because it is fundamentally antithetical to the kind of being humans are. For it is only by living in truth as a singularly "irreplaceable" being that one is "at home with" oneself and dwells with others in a world of sense and meaning (Patočka 1998, 177).

Havel (1992) writes: "Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system [his name for the Czechoslovakian Communist regime] and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, toward the fulfillment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline" (134-35). This is Havel's way of making Patočka's distinction between "life in a relation to the world" and the anxiety of "roles and needs." As in this quote, throughout the essay Havel continuously builds on Patočka in equating, or at least making an essential link between, truth and life. If truth is equated with life, or at least indicative thereof, then living within truth is precisely living freedom; living free *not* as an individualist bourgeois consumer and fulfiller of desire, but existentially as always open to the multifarious unfolding of existence as such and attuning as necessary.

Havel (1992) knows that the greengrocer "is indifferent to the semantic content" (132) of the sign he hangs, and only does it to show his ritualistic adherence to what must be done in order not to stir the pot, as it were. Indeed, for the most part, Havel is not advocating that the greengrocer stops hanging the sign. The real concern for Havel is what the greengrocer does now that he has hung the sign. Havel does not, of course, expect the greengrocer to become a dissident like himself and make speeches and organize strikes—

[5] For this intellectual history, see Gubser (2014).

though he may, and Havel would certainly support that. Rather, and ultimately, Havel urges the greengrocer to help build and participate in what he calls parallel structures, but we can call parallel worlds, of such seemingly minor activities as unsanctioned rock concerts or plays or informal organizations to address particular situational problems that may arise (1992, 192-94).

These parallel worlds are a “rudimentary prefiguration” of “open communities,” Havel tells us (1992, 213). Such “existential revolutions,” as he also calls them, provide an opportunity for a “new experience of being,” which gives way to the “rehabilitation of values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity, love,” and thus a “moral reconstitution of society” (209-10). I have called this elsewhere a politics of worldbuilding (Zigon 2018; 2019b). It was precisely the various forms this existential revolution and politics of worldbuilding took in the later years of the Czechoslovakian Communist regime that eventually gave way to the Velvet Revolution and the collapse of that regime. Importantly, then, those concerts, café groups, and other forms of sociality that Yurchak describes as possible because of what he calls a performative shift, and which ultimately allowed for the rather quick and easy collapse of the Soviet Union, now seem very similar to that which Havel describes as living within truth and the existential, moral, and political revolutions this attunement gives way to. Perhaps performativity, then, is indicative of the Heideggerian movement between truth and untruth as an attempt to become felicitously attuned to a world.[6]

THINKING

Following Heidegger, Patočka, and Havel, I understand human life as the movement between truth and untruth in just the way described in the previous section. Therefore, I am compelled to ask: if one’s disposition or comportment with the world is fundamental for how one is in this movement, then how can we account for the coming to be of a disposition that is adequate to truth? Put another way: what is the process by which one becomes capable of living within truth such that the possibility of untruth is not eliminated—for this is impossible in any aletheiological constellation of the movement between truth and untruth—but that one is capable of recognizing attunement with truth rather than untruth? One response might be, to think.

Recall that Hannah Arendt (2006) did not consider the evil deeds of the Nazi Eichmann in terms of the demonic, but rather in terms of banality. Eichmann, like so many other Nazis (e.g., Browning 1998), committed evil acts not because he was a monster, but because he was thoughtless.[7] Thoughtlessness, Arendt is quick to remind us, is not stupidity. For

[6] For example, Simon Critchley offers an interesting interpretation of Heidegger’s notions of repetition, anticipatory resoluteness, care, and selfhood in terms of performativity. See Critchley (2020b); Heidegger (1996, sections 62–64).

[7] See for example Christopher Browning’s (1998) book on the “ordinary men” who made up a Nazi battalion responsible for mass killings in Poland.

although Arendt is adamant that all humans are capable of thinking—indeed, at one point she defines humans as thinking beings—she is also clear that sometimes very intelligent people simply do not do so. Furthermore, Arendt insists that in our everyday lives of going about our daily activities with one another we do not think. This is a view of the human that she shares with perhaps the two most significant philosophers of the twentieth century—Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Braver 2014, chapter 4). In contrast to the brain-centric view of the human that considers all human activity in terms of cognitive thinking of some order or another, Arendt (1978) considers everyday life more in terms of habits than mind. Still, it is those moments of stepping-away from the habitual flow of the everyday, when we "stop and think," that is the essence of humanness (4). For it is precisely because of such moments, she contends, that we are able to judge such things as good and beauty. Indeed, it was her observations of Eichmann and her connection of thoughtlessness to evil that led her to ask an important question for ethical theory: "Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?" (1978, 5).

Her response is yes. But not because thinking offers us the "right" answer to our ethical dilemma. Arendt is clear: thinking does not produce anything. When we "stop and think" we do not discover a moral law or principle or criterion according to which we should act, thus guaranteeing us moral standing. Neither, it should be added, does thinking produce truth or knowledge. "Science does not think," as Heidegger once provocatively put it (1968, 8). In a quite literal way, nothing—no-thing—is produced by thought that is either universally or situationally applicable to our everyday lives. If this is so, then how is it—one might ask—that thinking is so central to ethics?

Phenomenologically, much of our everyday life is lived without thought, and embodied habit—or, what might better be called habitus or an active disposition—better describes how it is that we are in our worlds. Our habitus is at one and the same time "shared" with most others with whom we may interact—this is its "socio-cultural-historic" situatedness—and deeply personal, as our singular life trajectory significantly shapes the enactment and feel of an otherwise "shared" and publicly recognizable habitus. This duality of "sharedness" and singularity entails that unlike explanations of human action that posit sharedness as sameness or equivalency—for example, some cultural or Foucauldian disciplinarian approaches that understand culture or disciplinary institutions as the conditions for persons coming to share the more or less exact same beliefs or normative dispositions—human action is better understood in terms of "sharedness" in scare quotes, which is perhaps better described as shades of similarity (Zigon 2007).

This phenomenological understanding of habitus as the primary modality of being in everyday life does not mean, however, that "thoughts" do not run through our "mind." Of course, they do. But these "thoughts"—like our bodily actions—are better considered in terms of dispositions. Just as our bodies habitually move in certain ways in certain situations—offering a hand when first meeting someone—so too do our "thoughts." So too, it should be noted, does our speech—"nice to meet you" one might say while offering their hand. And just as our bodies move and speak in ways that are at once "shared" with

others but yet colored, as it were, by one's singularly specific life trajectory, so too are our "thoughts."

This dispositional modality of living our everyday lives in a mostly smooth and unquestioned manner—let's call it living in an existentially comfortable manner—is what I call embodied morality.[8] To live with existential comfort in our everyday dispositional mode does *not* mean, for example, to have a "comfortable confidence of being able routinely to do the right thing," or a psychologized, or even and especially a bourgeois, sense of feeling comfortable (Laidlaw 2014, 128). Rather, by existential comfort I intend an effortless absorption in a world as one's everyday way of being. Indeed, anxiety might be just as likely the mood of this effortless absorption as is "confidence." The etymological root of comfort helps us see it as a possible ethical concept. For the Latin root of comfort (*com-fortis*) would be something like strength together, or communal fortitude, or perseverance, revealing to us how existential comfort as the aim of ethics is not only something always achieved with others socially, but also a modality of being that is not necessarily anything like a "good" traditionally conceived but rather one of withness (Zigon 2018, chapter 5).

This dispositional way of being in the world—one's embodied morality—is enacted smoothly and unquestionably—comfortably—because one has become attuned to one's world and those other beings there—human and nonhuman alike.[9] If asked "how is it between us?" one might reply unthinkingly: "good." Such a response does not indicate that the between is in any "objective" sense "good"—however that may be determined—but rather that the attuned withness of our embodied moral way of being with one another is (more or less) smoothly—because unnoticeably—unfolding. Embodied morality is just one's average everyday way of being in the world with others, who or whatever those others may be.

Notice that this notion of embodied morality does not necessarily entail that there is anything particularly "good" about one's everyday way of being-with. Arendt is absolutely clear on this matter: while everyday lives may be lived mostly in the modality of an active disposition, this habitus (or what Arendt calls habit) can be more or less easily changed for better or worse (1978, 177). The example she uses to illustrate this is how quickly average Germans and Russians were able to change their habituated everyday way of being—their embodied morality—along with the newly imposed Nazi and Soviet regimes. If a German wished to respond to the question of "how is it between us?" with the answer "good," then this entailed the adoption of a different embodied morality with which to dispositionally keep going. This is something, so it seemed to Arendt, that Eichmann did easily and thoughtlessly. Indeed, for Arendt, the ease with which so many Germans and Russians quickly and, to all appearances, seamlessly, adjusted to the new regimes, makes clear that dispositions as such are no deterrent against evil. It was precisely the ease with which they could be adjusted that Arendt considered in terms of thoughtlessness.

Dispositional or embodied morality, then, is *not* ethics. Rather, ethics occurs when there is a moral breakdown, when a dissonance arises between a dispositional normativity

[8] On embodied morality, see Zigon 2007; 2009; 2011; 2018; 2019b.

[9] See especially Zigon 2007; 2009; 2018.

and its founding exclusion, thus forcing one to reflect on and alter one's already acquired way of being in the world in order to account for this discord (Zigon 2007; 2019b, 68). In other words, ethics occurs when one is compelled to think. As Arendt (1978) put is, thinking "interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a *stop*-and-think" (78). Referencing Heidegger, Arendt emphasizes that thinking indicates an "*out of order*" (78, italics in original). It is important to note, however, that when such a moral breakdown occurs and ethics begins, the "stop-and-think" of ethics does not entail a rupturing of the everyday, though there is an interruption of ordinary activity and a stepping-away from one's dispositional mode of being.

Being clear about this distinction between a rupture and an interruption of the everyday is important. For a moral breakdown does *not* force one to run into a secluded non-social space to be alone with one's thoughts, and *neither* does one become frozen, object-like, as the world continues on all around. It does, however, compel one to stop and think —is this really what I want to be doing or saying right now? —and to reflect upon our habitus (to notice that what I'm doing or saying right now could indeed be otherwise), and to *critically* assess how I could act, speak, and be differently. All of this can be done and is done right there in the continuing midst of everyday life. For the thinking that characterizes the ethical moment initiates a more intensely felt and considered relational intertwining, and this relationality is more intensely felt and considered in the moment of breakdown precisely because the demand of the situation has explicitly called "me" to think and, ultimately, to ethically attune. The moment of moral breakdown, then, is that ethical moment when one experiences most intensely the demand to care and attend to the constitutive relational intertwining that gives way to us, and this care and attending occurs as thinking.

What calls us to think? This is a question posed by Heidegger (1968) in his lecture course *Was Heißt Denken?* Although normally translated as *What is Called Thinking?*, the word-play of *heißen* allows the title to be alternatively translated as *What Calls Out to Thinking?* or *What Calls Upon Thinking?* Or, as I pose the question: what calls us to think? Heidegger's answer, in short, is that what calls us to think is that which is thought. This phenomenological conception of thinking contrasts with the dominant conception of thinking as cognitive: the view that thinking originates in the brain or mind and has as its material, as it were, mere images or representations of its object of thought in the world. Heidegger's phenomenological conception of thinking, on the other hand, understands thinking as originating in that which demands or calls out to be thought. That is, thinking originates in the thing, matter, or situation itself.

Some thing or matter or situation in the world calls out to us — it places a demand upon us—to which one must respond. One could, of course, ignore the call: that is, one could simply not think and continue on with one's dispositional mode of being. But as Bernhard Waldenfels (2011) puts it, even this non-response is a response. In other words, one may not heed the call to think, but the demand to respond to the call cannot be ignored. If one does respond in the modality of thought, however, then that which calls us to think pulls us beyond ourselves such that thinking is always an ec-static experience of thinking along *with* the thing, matter, or situation itself. Thinking, then, happens in the world. Rather than

indicating a distanced observation, thinking entails a more intense relational intertwining with that which calls us to it.

Similarly, a moral breakdown is initiated by an ethical demand placed upon one by another person, situation, or event. This ethical demand cannot be ignored: one must respond. But how one responds is vital for answering the question of how it is between us. One can, for example, ignore the ethical demand and continue on in their dispositional mode of being. This, however, is precisely that with which Arendt was so concerned, for this is the thoughtless response that always runs the risk of laying the foundation for evil: an evil which itself becomes dispositional. Alternatively, one can heed the call of the ethical demand, experience a moral breakdown, and step away from one's dispositional everydayness to stop and think. That is to say, one can respond to the ethical demand by becoming an ethical being. In doing so, one shifts from an everyday dispositional modality of withness and becomes even more ec-statically and intensely intertwined with that which has placed this demand upon one.[10] Put another way, one's habitus opens and is exposed to the worldly situation that has demanded one's care, attention, and thought. To become ethical is to become even more worldly.

Thinking, then—as that which one does in ethical moments of moral breakdown—pulls us ever more tightly out of ourselves and into the world. We are perhaps most intensely relational when we think. This is so not only as one goes beyond oneself to the thing or situation to be thought, but also, as Arendt insists, as one goes within oneself. For while Heidegger emphasizes the call of thinking—that pull that brings one ec-statically beyond oneself—Arendt emphasizes the internal dialogue of thinking—that pull that brings one ec-statically to oneself, and as such reveals our dividual nature. Thinking is, for Arendt (1978), the silent internal dialogue that manifests what she calls the two-in-one, or the duality of human-being (185).

In normal everyday life, Arendt claims, the human is One. We can perhaps think of this being One in terms of our everyday dispositional way of being. But when one is called to think, a split occurs such that One becomes two, and a silent internal dialogue ensues between me and myself. Put another way, one becomes relationally intertwined with oneself. Arendt linked her description of thinking with an experience of conscience, but perhaps we might better consider this ecstatic relationality of thinking that pulls one both into and beyond oneself simultaneously in terms of Heidegger's (1996) call of conscience, which he describes as a call coming "*from* me, and yet *over* me" (254, italics in original): a call, it should be noted, that demands that one step away from one's dispositional everydayness (what he calls the they-self) in response to a situation of moral breakdown (1996, sections 54-57).

Thinking is perhaps the most relational modality of being human in that it entails at one and the same time an ecstatic relationality with the thing, matter, or situation that calls for thought, *and* an ecstatic relationality with oneself as the two-in-one. Thinking, in this

[10] Here I have in mind Andrew J. Mitchell's (2010) description of Heidegger's Fourfold in terms of ecstatic relationality such that worldly entities are not "encapsulated things, but always these outpouring gestures of relationality" (215). See also Mitchell (2015).

sense, is for humans that capacity most indicative of ontological withness, and, therefore, that which is most necessary for allowing the between to emerge, where we may dwell together peacefully. This is so because thinking "is for us what is most free" (Nancy 1993, 172).

This link between thinking and freedom is essential to ethics, and helps us move beyond it. Or perhaps better, it helps to further develop the Heideggerian equivalence of truth and freedom that was so central to both Patočka and Havel. Arendt was clear about this link: thinking frees "an open space of moral or aesthetic discrimination and discernment" (Beiner 1982, 112). Such thinking in moments of moral breakdown, then, is critical thinking in that "we constantly raise the basic Socratic question: *What do you mean when you say . . .*?" (Arendt 1978, 185, italics in original). We could add the equally significant question: why is it that you do that? Importantly, such critical thinking does not produce the new moral law or principle that we can then apply to the particular situation that demands us to think, let alone think universally. Rather, this critical thinking "purges us of 'fixed habits of thought, ossified rules and standards,' and 'conventional, standardized codes of expression'" (Villa 1999, 89).[11] In other words, thinking as an essentially critical capacity frees one to respond to the singularity of the situation that has called one to think. As Arendt (1978) so pointedly put it, "thinking means that each time you are confronted with some difficulty in life you have to make up your mind anew" (177).

It is interesting to note that Michel Foucault (1997) articulated a very similar relation between thought, freedom, critique, and ethics. Thus, for example, Foucault distinguished thought from more habituated modes of conduct, and considered the former as a critical assessment of the latter. Thought, he said,

> is what allows one to step back from this [habituated] way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (117)

Thinking in moments of moral breakdown, then, clears a space, as it were, for responding to the singularity of the ethical demand free of habituated convention,[12] and, to link back with Heideggerian truth, lets the thing, other, or situation itself be to show itself in its unfolding.

It is necessary to emphasize once again that this is not a matter of thinking producing the law or principle or criterion to be applied; thinking produces nothing. Rather, as Arendt (1978) put it, thinking gives way to or becomes manifest as judgment (193). To be clear: one does not judge in the modality of thought or in the stepping away of moral breakdown. One is able to judge anew only after having *returned* to the existential comfort of one's habitus, that is, after having returned to the everyday modality of embodied morality. For thinking and judging are *not* two aspects of the same modality of being. Rather judgement is the manifestation of thought in the midst of the unthought of everydayness. As Arendt

[11] Cheryl Mattingly (2019) has recently made a similar argument.

[12] See Knud Ejler Løgstrup (1997).

put it: judgement as the "manifestation of the wind of thought . . . is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" (193). The capacity to judge anew after having thought, then, indicates a rebirth of sorts as one returns to the busyness and distractions of everyday life with a different—even if ever so slightly—embodied morality for being in the world comfortably and peacefully with oneself and others.

SENSE OF THE WORLD

Arendt (1978) describes this manifestation of thought not as truth but as meaning (61-62). But whether described as truth or meaning, we must certainly agree with Anne O'Byrne (2015) when she writes that there is "a worry that clings to [these terms], an anxiety that what really matters is not here but elsewhere" (193). For indeed the conceptual proclivity (Zigon 2018) of "truth" or "meaning" has become such that try as we might, just saying the words conjures the brain-centric view of being-human, along with all of its Cartesian baggage of correspondence, mental representations, and rational implications. Most certainly, then, "what really matters is not here but elsewhere." O'Byrne suggests instead that a carnal hermeneutics—a bodied hermeneutics as the ongoing interpretation of the intertwined and knotted materiality of the world, not unlike the embodied morality discussed earlier[13]—entails instead an indicative concept such as sense. Engaging with Nancy's conception of sense, O'Byrne (2015) writes that "sense cannot be given in advance but comes to be in the worldliest way, *between us*" (194, italics added). Indeed, as Nancy (1997) writes: "Truth punctuates, sense enchains" (14). Put another way: truth is that which individuates and separates—truth *or* falsity (objective fact); us *or* them (ideology)—and as such brings the flow, the rhythm, the potential for attunement of existence to a halt. Sense, on the other hand, connects us, who or whatever us are, in the ongoing intertwining of relationality. Sense "is the relation as such, and nothing else;" neither the "signified" nor the "message," "it is *that something like the transmission of a 'message' should be possible*" (Nancy 1997, 118 italics in original). Sense is the possibility for communication as communing. This relational enchaining of sense as possibility that gives way to "the matricial or transcendental form of a *world*" (Nancy 1997, 14, italics in original), then, is simply another way of describing the between (Zigon 2019a; 2021).

Ethics and thinking end with a return to the everydayness of a world, a return manifest as having the capacity to judge with sense. Perhaps another way of saying this is that ethics and thinking allow one to return to their world with a sense of orientation, where orientation is a kind of understanding. Again, understanding here is not meant as a cognitive grasping by the brain, but intended existentially and etymologically as "standing in the midst of" the between of a world (see: Zigon 2018, 161). Understanding one's world, standing in the midst of a world, one is able to orientate oneself in an attuned manner toward those others there with one, intertwined and knotted together in a world that makes sense for now. Understanding one's world, oneself, and those others there with one, "things" make sense,

[13] See Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (2015).

one has "good" sense, and the between us could be described in terms of a "common" sense.

Ethics and thinking can only end in this return to everydayness, understanding can only occur as standing with others in the midst of a between of "common" sense, when the between to which we return is enveloped in the mood of trust. Moods are neither subjective nor objective, but rather emerge "in the space of the between" and, thus, color, if you will, the atmosphere between us.[14] As such, moods potentiate a certain range of possibilities for being-with-together. Similarly, trust does not indicate a psychologized stance of one individual toward another distinct individual. Rather, onto-existentially, trust indicates faith or fidelity that the "common" sense of the between us will hold until thinking is once again called upon, at which time trust becomes a placing of reliance upon thought.

The intertwining relationality of trust is indicated etymologically. From the Old Norse *traust* meaning help, confidence, protection, or support, the relational nature of trust comes to the fore. Indeed, the significance of trust for the existential comfort of everyday embodied morality is perhaps clearest in its relation to the Old Frisian *trast* and the Dutch *troost* meaning comfort or consolation, whereby one receives such comfort from an other when one is most vulnerable, most exposed in one's being. That *troost* is best offered—so I have learned from a very reliable Dutch source—not with words but with an enveloping hug, indicates that trust is precisely the mood necessary for the carnal intertwining between us, where everydayness unfolds as the exposure of myself in/to you and you in/to me.

In light of this, perhaps, we can begin to consider that truth is not so much opposed to untruth as it is to despair. In contrast to the enveloping comfort of trust, despair is a mood indicative of a world "closed to meaningful possibilities that should otherwise be there," leaving one exposed and vulnerable to the abyss of senselessness (Steinbock 2014, 192). [15]Despair is indicative of the loss or lack of a sense of the world, the consequence of which is the impossibility of conversation, understanding, or any other relational connection between. Despair is the impossibility of us that gives way to isolation and loneliness. As such, despair as a social phenomenon oftentimes manifests in the person as addiction and in the political as hate. If anything, these are the consequences of a post-truth condition where all "common" sense has been lost and the only "truth" we are offered is the cold calculative instrumentarianism of objective facts.

All of this is to say that perhaps today truth is no longer (if it ever was) an appropriate concept for considering how it is between us. Rather, perhaps, our worlds more than ever call us to think, and in so doing place a demand upon us to become ethical beings striving for a sense of worlds that are increasingly complex. Such a realization pushes beyond ethics, or perhaps better put, it reveals that as an ethical being one is also a political being in that "the political is the place of the in-common as such . . . the place of being-*together*" (Nancy 1997, 88, italics in original). The question then becomes: in these increasingly complex worlds of ours, how must we attune such that it can be said that there is understanding

[14] Heidegger (1996); Throop (2012; 2014; 2018); Throop and Stephan (forthcoming).

[15] See also Throop and Stephan (forthcoming).

between us? That is, how can we come to dwell trustingly in worlds of "common" sense? How we respond will surely go a long way in determining the future of our worlds.

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