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Introduction: ‘Post-Truth’?

Much has been written about ‘post-truth’ in the last few years. But little by philosophers. Given that it is philosophy which has as an utterly central concern thinking (about) the notion of truth, this is possibly surprising.

Perhaps philosophers think that the matter is beneath them. That it is just too blindingly obvious that the idea of being post-truth is absurd, and indeed self-contradictory. We are not at all unsympathetic to such a thought; part of our motive for putting together this special issue has been precisely to show how philosophy in general and broadly Wittgensteinian thinking in particular can help undermine the discourse of post-truth and bring out absurdities latent or indeed patent in it. But we think it unwise simply not to bother to do this. We think it unwise to assume that this matter is beneath philosophical thinking. We think this primarily for a simple reason: the notion of post-truth and various associated terms and catch-phrases are now in widespread use, and influential. They demand attention, understanding, and criticism, of (inter alia) a philosophical kind.

Moreover, it is, we would surmise, precisely the neglect of such trends as are connoted by words such as ‘post-truth’ that have led to their influence. In other words: it is exactly a view among ‘experts’ that certain topics are beneath them that has fuelled an anti-elitist revolt against expertise.

If philosophers ‘magisterially’ ignore ideas such as ‘post-truth’, they (i.e. we all) risk being in turn ignored, or, indeed, undermined and silenced – and the legitimacy of philosophy removed – by the political

culture wherein these terms subsist and grow, perniciously. For a culture which even entertains the notion that truth is something that can be or has been left behind is palpably not a culture in which it will be possible for the love of wisdom to flourish. And: a culture that sees its philosophers as snooty is a culture well on the way to defunding those philosophers.

In the summer of 2017, a closed symposium was held at the University of East Anglia, to address these issues from a broadly Wittgensteinian perspective. The majority of the papers in this special issue began life in the vital atmosphere of that symposium. We are therefore grateful to all participants in the symposium. We further are grateful to Juliette Harkin, who, despite her regretted absence from the symposium, contributed to building the archive that was rendered available to the participants, and, thereby to render this special issue possible.

1. A central concern with a change of the attitude of people regarding truth

‘Word of the year’ in 2016, ‘post-truth’ has since come to be widely used as a notion allegedly necessary and adequate to label or characterize our epoch. This notion is often presented as means to help address contemporary concerns relative to our attitudes with respect to truth. Concerns which can be expressed as follows: did our attitudes with respect to truth come to radically change with the transformations of both our ways of obtaining and sharing information through emerging new medias and of their political uses? And if that is the case, then how shall we respond to such change?

The radical nature of the change of our attitudes with respect to truth suggested by such approaches raises deep concerns. Such change needs to be radical if anyone is to be justified in claiming the beginning of a new epoch. Or if it is to be argued that our epoch presents essential features that could be brought out and would indicate problems which would require replies of theoretical nature (see Ferraris 2019: 12). But, as we shall see, it can be argued that the practices allegedly captured under the heading of ‘post-truth’ are mostly qualitatively similar to earlier ones, and moreover it is also questionable whether quantitative augmentation of practices of lying and distraction could suffice to

explain the emergence of - or there being - ‘post-truth’ at all (see Ball 2017: 9). In short: talk of ‘post-truth’ looks perhaps like merely a new way of dressing up old relativisms, and like a way of illegitimately suggesting that something radically new has begun.

Nevertheless, even if that is right, it will be important to acknowledge the real difficulties generated by the recent technological and political augmentations of false or distorted news. And to acknowledge that less progress has perhaps been made in doing this to date than should have been. Especially, perhaps, by philosophers.

The papers in this special issue try between them to strike a right balance. To establish how new ‘post-truthism’ really is – or isn’t. To seek a point of reflection on whatever is new in our current socio-political straits. And to consider seriously how philosophy can help. Whether by wondering about the extent to which reason, or truth, may rightly, if one follows Wittgenstein, be viewed in certain respects as a constraint upon thought or opinion. Or indeed by wondering whether we still have a long way to go in approaching truth at all.

2. A reflection on the source of ‘post-truth’ and its characterization

The authors writing in this special issue differ with respect to the issues just outlined. But one thing that they mostly have in common is that, in their diagnoses of an alleged radical change of our attitudes regarding truth, they all tend explicitly or implicitly to critically target what might be termed *consumeristic* attitudes with respect to news specifically (and facts more generally) both on the side of their ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’. And more generally: to see a problem with relativistic and subjectivistic trends, in that those trends ape the prevailing norm of a market society whereby everything is for sale tailored to the desires of the potential purchaser, including, ultimately, opinions.

And this trend has of course a very real basis in the economics of the media. Reporters tend to make compromises they previously did not in order to maximize their audience (see Ball 2017: Part II). As an extreme example of similar practices, some journalists have yielded to the temptation of financing their genuine investigations by producing ‘fake news’ (see Allison 2017). And a tendency both to select and share

news corroborating their own beliefs irrespective of their truth and to avoid and dismiss news putting their own beliefs into question has been studied (see Ball 2017: 179–198). What eventuates is an extreme example of what Wittgenstein had in mind when he worried about the tendency of us all, including philosophers, to exhibit a weakness of the will when it comes to areas where resistances of the will need to be overcome but one does not *want* to overcome them (CV: 17e). D’Ancona puts it as follows:

This is the defining characteristic of the Post-Truth world. The point is not to determine the truth by a process of rational evaluation, assessment and conclusion. You choose your own reality, as if from a buffet. You also select your own falsehood, no less arbitrarily. (D’Ancona 2017: 56)

The questions raised by the assertion of ‘post-truth’ thus bear on responsibilities involved in practices of news reporting *and* sharing *and* reception, and of course by production of ‘fake news’; and furthermore they also bear on the structure of the means – both technological and ideological – by which problematic practices such as that of production of ‘fake news’ are rendered possible in the first place (see Viner 2016). Indeed, interfaces we use, notably that of social medias, enable individuals to receive only news that please them while avoiding news that could eventually lead an individual to reassess their own beliefs. To this extent, they arguably contribute to the spread of the fantasy of an arbitrary yet successful determination of reality by arbitrary selection of its constituents.

3. Appropriate responses that ‘post-truth’ would require

To which extent can the kinds of difficulties outlined above be the responsibility of individuals to rectify? Clearly, it is useful to recall or propose ways to adjust individuals’ online practices in order to address such concerns (see Ball 2017: 237–256; Brodnig 2017; D’Ancona 2017: 114). Nevertheless, whether isolated initiatives can suffice to address them is doubtful. For, as suggested by Ball, false news takes minutes to construct but hours to debunk (Ball 2017: 1). Such that, individual fact-checking being overall out of question, it can be argued, as D’Ancona does, that the implementation of automatized fact-checking provides some adequate response to the increase of ‘fake news’ (2017: 116–124).

However, concrete difficulties raised by the claim of ‘post-truth’ could be both under and overestimated.

Underestimating them would amount to neglecting the concrete character of the uncertainties and problems caused both by the increasing quantity of candidate-news available online and the novelty, the ease and the speed at which they can be distorted or produced from scratch.

Facing these, one could be tempted to see in the implementation of new laws the solely appropriate means in order to address the difficulties they raise. However, the correlative risk raised by a solely juridical approach to these difficulties is that of overestimating them (listen Mosna-Savoie 2018; 2019, on the need for a philosophical approach). For the counterpart risk is that of the implementation of superfluous and liberticidal laws which could be as problematic as that which they are meant to enable to address (listen 52 Insights 2017; see Riese 2017). Nevertheless, an initiative such as that of openMedia, launched in order to investigate and expose commercial interference in editorial decisions, could provide another model or approach (see Fitzgerald 2017). Indeed, if medias are to remain protected from commercial and political pressure in order to accomplish their finalities within our societies, then is not it up to journalists to be provided with some help in order to work under good conditions?

For one thing that is clear, from the developments over the last two years that have occurred in seeking to expose the manipulations of elections and uses of ‘fake news’ and targeted propaganda, is that, without serious resources devoted to investigative journalism, these anti-democratic practices will flourish. Such investigative journalism remains mainly the prerogative of ‘legacy media’ as notably, *The Guardian* in the UK (see Cadwalladr 2017), exactly the quality ‘MSM’ (mainstream media) which is most under-threat by the emergence of social media and of capitalist platforms such as Google and Facebook.

Though this goes beyond the scope of most of the papers in this special issue, it is clear that a full-spectrum response to the world we inhabit, a world which has, for understandable reasons, spawned the problematic idea of ‘post-truth’, needs to involve both media reform and support for media investigations of the structures that engender ‘post-truthism’.

Our contribution in this special issue includes setting out the background conditions – the intellectual backdrop – for understanding those needs.

4. Putting into question the need for the notion of ‘post-truth’

We suggested above that the notion of ‘post-truth’ is often used in order to refer to or express various concerns regarding the production and the reception of news, our attitude regarding them, their truth and the truthfulness of their authors, at the beginning of an epoch of mass on-line production. But taken literally, the notion raises under scrutiny significant – indeed, blatant – philosophical concerns. For, as underlined above, most uses of ‘post-truth’ suggest that our epoch would need to be understood by a fairly *radical* contrast with earlier ones, in a way that can be explained as follows: while truth would have necessarily belonged to the ingredients or internal composition of past epochs, this would not be the case anymore. Such that our epoch could need and would need to be understood as one from which truth could and would be necessarily or constitutively missing.

Our initial concern is thus the following: could we possibly need to grant that truth could somehow be left behind? Would not doing so necessarily lead to dire confusion, in the polity and in principle? Can we and do we need to reduce our notion of truth to that of an occurrence of an event (which thus could reach an end) rather than, say, acknowledging it (as Cavell has taught us) as a property of what we say when we mean what we say, that which we must?

5. Three distinct problematics raised by uses of ‘post-truth’

To contribute to common and critical reflexion on such a would-be transformed sense of reason and of politics is a central aim of this special edition. A common theme of the contributions to our special issue is that the very notion of post-truth could prove to be dangerous, absurd – but is, in any case, revealing. As we saw, the notion of ‘post-truth’ is generally meant to constitute a new term of criticism. But to which extent does it successfully do so? Can we and should we grant that ‘post-truth’ be enjoyed at all (as suggests Cervera-Marzal 2019)?

The defense of the *belief* that we may have entered an epoch of ‘post-truth’ (see Floyd forthcoming) raises at least three distinct problematics, which are each addressed and discussed by pairs of contributors in this special issue.

The first problematic, raised by O. Kuusela in “Domination by Reason?”, and to which M. Falomi replies in “A New Problem of Domination by Reason”, bears on the question of trust in reason, and thereby on the place of thought and speech in societies. Indeed, if doubting that there is anything such as logic and reason commits an individual to relativism (or subjectivism), then can the philosopher be legitimate in their attempts to dispel such relativism without thereby implying that individuals would somehow need to submit to or be dominated by reason? Can the asymmetry between the one who dominates and the one who is dominated implied by any relation of domination provide us with a model to reflect on the abstract relation between reason and individuals? In short: how to contribute to undermine the attraction of relativism?

The second problematic, raised by L. Finlayson in “What to Do with Post-truth” and to which R. Read responds in “What *Is* New in Our Time: The Truth in ‘Post-truth’”, bears on the usefulness of and the need for the notion of ‘post-truth’ to address political and ecological issues. Does the notion of ‘post-truth’ provide us with anything distinct that was not available in terms of criticism which were already available to us? If a consumerism with respect to truth, i.e. the notion that the truth of a truth could amount to nothing but the result of a decision, has rightly been identified with the label of ‘post-truth’, does this imply that the very notion of ‘post-truth’ is needed in order to make such criticism? Or does this notion instead simply *express* such a consumerism? And if that is not the case, then what does the alleged-belief of our having entered an epoch of ‘post-truth’ tend to eclipse? In short: what in ‘post-truth’ is really new?

The third problematic, raised by J. Backström in “Pre-truth Life in Post-truth Times” and to which H. Strandberg responds in “Life and Truth: A Response to Joel Backström”, concerns the truthfulness of the denigration of truth implicit in “post-truth”. Indeed if there never has been anything as such as an epoch of radical harmony between the thoughts of individuals and truths, then could not talking of “post-

truth” lead one in different respects both to underestimate and overestimate the difficulties of the spirit of our time? In short: would it not be more accurate to talk of our epoch being *pre*-truth than post-truth?

5.1. First problematic: on trust in reason

Kuusela seeks to raise and dissolve what he calls “the problem of conceptual domination”. He characterizes this problem as one which can sometimes legitimately be raised concerning the position of the philosopher. Indeed, in virtue of “her more advanced capacity to clarify [...] shared concepts or principles of reason”, the philosopher could in some contexts come to *seem* to coerce or force, by means of an argument, the interlocutor to accept some clarifications. Kuusela underlines that such a problem often arises when a philosopher argues or implies that he has “an access to universal or exceptionless theses of essence” or to “universally or exceptionlessly valid conceptual determinations”. Kuusela wants to establish that Wittgenstein establishes a way in which one can avoid falling the trap of seeking to dominate by reason, but without “the acceptance of relativism, and sacrificing the notions of knowledge and truth”. To establish this, he proposes an interpretation of Wittgenstein’s notion of agreement according to which “philosophical clarification is genuinely an attempt to clarify what the other says in her own terms” such that “philosophy involves no attempt to try to force anyone to accept anything”. Rather, clarifications would be intended to bring into focus specific aspects of our concepts with reference to specific philosophical problems in order to address them. And the criterion of clarification as a task would be its success. Correlatively, it would be inherently risky to assume in philosophy that reality will conform to philosophical theses or systems inasmuch as doing so would amount to forgetting and thereby neglecting what philosophical models of our (non-philosophical) concepts are: *means* for understanding how things are, nothing more. Assuming that the objects of our investigations would correspond to our models would risk falsifying reality by means of them. Kuusela thus argues that “the problem of conceptual domination” can be dissolved by taking into account the historical character of the contexts in which specific clarifications responding to specific philosophical problems are provided. In such situations, someone could always free themselves

from the misleading feeling of being illegitimately constrained by recognizing “the value of logic and reason”. Wittgenstein does so; he thereby offers us a way of not feeling, as some libertarians seem to do, *constrained* by truth and reason.

Kuusela’s argument can thus be seen as both helping to explain a widespread feeling (of ordinary people as being constrained by experts) that has fuelled the emergence of a ‘populist’ discourse of post-truth in recent years, and offering a resolution: if, following Wittgenstein, one succeeds in showing a way in which reason can be appositely employed without its seeking to dominate anyone, then one simultaneously removes the rationale for a reactive relativism.

Falomi replies by suggesting that there actually are two forms of domination by reason: domination may be a matter of claiming a superior entitlement to voice reasons, or a matter of excluding someone from the community of rational thinkers. Kuusela’s account of Wittgenstein, according to Falomi, successfully defuses domination by reason in the first sense. Falomi, in his response, asks however whether this account proves to be helpful when it comes to the second sense of domination by reason, and concludes that, while the aspects of Wittgenstein’s philosophy highlighted by Kuusela may not be illuminating here, other strands of Wittgenstein’s thinking may be mobilized against this other form of domination by reason. For a new problem of the domination of reason can occur if, in certain circumstances, someone who feels deprived of their voice is required to clarify themselves in such a way that they may feel as if they are being required to no longer be themselves. Falomi’s intends to provide means for defusing domination by reason in the second sense by studying Wittgenstein’s interest in the *limits* of clarification.

The crucial point of the exchange between Kuusela and Falomi is this: is there a way of avoiding giving the general public the impression that reason is a substantive constraint being imposed upon them from without. If there is (as Kuusela argues), then we are in better shape to avoid accusations of elitism, and to enable it to be shown how reason and truth are inherent in life and language, rather than being something which intellectual elites impose on ordinary people for the latter to labour under. Falomi’s doubts, if they turn out to be justified, might make it harder to show how being ‘post-truth’ or rejecting reason are

absurd self-defeating and *unnecessary* moves. For, according to him, a genuine commitment to rationality includes responsiveness to the possibility of rejecting reason as a whole (when it has become, as Cavell puts it, mere conformity). In that sense, what may be perceived as a ‘post-truth’ stance may actually be an instance of such wholesale rejection of rationality – hence, something internal to a commitment to reason. Critics of ‘post-truth’ risk not being alive to this possibility, and hence risk of giving a one-sided account of what a commitment to reason implies.

5.2. Second problematic: on what the assertion that we have entered an era of ‘post-truth’ is meant to enable us to deny

Finlayson seeks to raise a “sceptical challenge against the distinctiveness and utility of the notion of ‘post-truth’”. She raises the question whether the notion of ‘post-truth’ enables us to do anything other notions could not, and argues that both what it could do and the ways in which it could do it are unclear or yet to be shown. Her own view then is that proponents of ‘post-truth’ discourse, i.e. anyone who asserts “the post-truth thesis” or claim that “some kind of deep and significant shift has occurred [...] in people’s relationship to truth” risks irrationalizing political disaffection and signaling loyalty to “a ‘pre-post-truth’ political status quo”. For if, as she argues, the notion of ‘post-truth’ does not enable us to do anything new, then it risks getting in the way of our successfully addressing difficulties of our times (and of earlier times) with means we have, and in particular critical notions such as ‘media bias’, ‘sensationalism’, ‘propaganda’ or ‘ideology’.

Thus she opposes her approach to ones such as that of D’Ancona who employs ‘post-truth’ as a notion distinct from others like lying, propaganda or plain falsehood. In order to substantiate her critical diagnosis with respect to the need for and the use of such a notion as ‘post-truth’ she spells out and confronts three thoughts that could tacitly be involved in circumstances in which “the assertion of a ‘post-truth era’ is made” concerning (i) people’s political opinions, (ii) their concern with respect to the truthfulness of their beliefs and their bases, and (iii) the interpretation of their attitude with respect to truth more generally. Each of these thoughts raise difficulties that Finlayson spells

out and confronts in an attempt to show that they do not suffice to meet with the sceptical challenge she raises.

First she confronts the idea that (i) people's beliefs on politics would radically fail to track truth and would rather track something else like emotion or fashion. She argues that this idea is in danger of multiple self-contradiction and weakens the assumption of democracy by leaving unquestionable the decline of the epistemic competence of "the public". Second she confronts the idea that (ii) people could have stopped even caring whether their beliefs are true or based on evidence. This idea implies that people would have changed so as to become completely indifferent with respect both to truth and its bases. She suggests that attempting to infer from lived scepticism about 'experts' or 'expertise' to popular indifference among persons with respect to the truth-value of their own beliefs is misleading. (iii) Finlayson then confronts a third and last idea, according to which people would be relativists or would not believe in 'truth' itself. This idea implies that people's attitude with respect to truth could and would need to be equatable with a philosophical conception of relativism. She suggests that doing so is misleading in that it tends to conflate relativism with narrow-mindedness. However, affirming that truth may be said in some ways to be relative to something (e.g., the speaker's culture) does not amount to suggesting that there is no such thing as truth or that the truth of a truth could be meaningfully be equated with the result of a decision. Finlayson thus argues that neglecting this contrast amounts to confuse relativism with narrow-mindedness.

As a result, Finlayson suggests that the sceptical challenge she issues yet remains to be met with. For none of the identified difficulties which would substantiate the claim that we could have *shifted* to an epoch of post-truth suffice to distinguish our epoch from an antecedent one.

Finlayson thus claims that it can be shown that 'post-truth' is only a new label for old maladies. Though, drawing upon J.L. Austin, Finlayson concludes by sketching how the term post-truth, while lacking locutionary purport, has nevertheless been a word powerfully used to *do* certain things: she calls it a "slur word". A word used to cast a slur on the present in a way that makes the past appear better than it actually was. She finds it in that regard a dangerous word, that we should do without.

Rupert Read replies to Finlayson’s challenge by suggesting that what is relatively new (though of a vintage closer to perhaps 30 years than to 3) is a lack of *interest* in the claim of truth among many voters, and a *contempt* for truth among those who have, since the rise of neoliberalism, deliberately promoted a ‘consumeristic’ attitude toward truth. This lack of interest and this contempt are absurd: but we live in absurd times. (Does Read therefore commit himself to saying that we actually do live in post-truth times? No: he holds that it is *as if* we do. Much like we used to live in times in which it was as if there was a God.) Read illustrates his point with reference to the phenomenon of climate-change denial, which has been around for a generation now, and which has therefore in some quarters been termed “the original post-truth”. Read concludes by invoking Wittgenstein on how the real problems hereabouts are of the will more than of the intellect. Like Kuusela, Read thinks that it is demonstratively absurd for (e.g.) libertarians to see truth or reason as substantive constraints upon their thinking that may be sloughed off in the name of freedom; but Read emphasises that it takes effort and courage, and not just intellectual acuity, to demonstrate this in any way that actually matters.

5.3. Third problematic: on the truthfulness of the alleged concern with truth

J. Backström argues in “Pre-truth life in post-truth times” that one can and needs to consider how life was before contemporary concerns with ‘post-truth’, in order to reassess ‘the spirit of our times’ and to realize both the “absolutely crucial” and “inherently unstable” characters of the notion of truth. Indeed, while he grants that tracing changes with respect to truth in public discourse is necessary in order to understand the contemporary socio-political situation, he also argues that “rationality” and “truth” appear, collectively and publicly speaking, only against a background of pervasive untruth and confusion. In his approach, the philosophical task would thus not reside in understanding there being “one big lie” but in recognizing what the collective “world” constitutes itself *against*.

In his attempt to restore the availability or contribute to the birth of such discernment, Backström distinguishes between two sorts of threats corresponding to two kinds of resistance to truth. People can

feel *externally* threatened by truths affecting their material interests or social positions and thus avoid in such cases admitting some facts publicly in order to preserve them; but people can also feel in some cases *existentially* threatened by truths affecting their image of themselves and of their relation to others and thus avoid admitting how things stand in order to preserve it in such cases. Like Read, Backström emphasises that facing up to the truth can require great efforts of will; it can as a result be therefore, he says, pretty uncommon, rather than the norm. Backström suggests that acknowledging truths becomes difficult when it involves the feeling of *a moral-existential threat*. Such that moral philosophy needs (i) to take into account the possibility of self-deception and repression, to (ii) account for and provide clarifications or means to address the temptation of self-deception.

Backström argues that it is the very idea of the *respectable* which needs to be reassessed and explained as one of the “central modes of upholding collective fake-intelligibility” inasmuch as it would involve a undue focus on ‘appearances’ that would be constitutive of it. Less than calling into question the very coherence of the notion, Backström seeks to explicitate the way in which accounting for the fact-value distinction in terms of a dichotomy can lead an individual to misrepresent his relations with others. He indeed suggests that there is a confusion which is at the root of ‘post-truth’ and according to which “truth and meaning are, basically, something to be *determined* by someone, and then the question would be only *who* is ‘entitled’ to determine them”. According to the metaphysical picture that Backström confronts by drawing on Wittgenstein, each individual would first need to be ‘entitled’ to have one’s (their) own opinions or convictions in order to be allowed and right in claiming anything. However, attempting to meet such a pre-requisite of self-entitlement raises multiple difficulties among which is, centrally, the neglect of the concern with the truthful character of the ways in which an individual relates to others. Thus, Backström argues that defense of ‘partisan spirit’, resort to violence and appeals to ‘meta-perspectives’ are symptomatic of ways in which an individual can try without success to repress or hide from oneself the destructiveness of one’s own attitude. The difficulty such attitudes raises would thus prove to be that of relating to others truthfully.

Thus far from resolving such difficulty, appealing to the decisive character of communal consensus does not solve but states the problem. The opposition between ‘post-truth’ claims and ‘truth’ claims (whether conceived as resulting from correspondence or coherence) in fact reveals a common assumption, which is that of the primacy of a logic of representations, while the plausibility of there being anything along these lines is generated by the repression of interpersonal understanding, i.e., of the reciprocal understanding of you and I. Backström argues this is largely a timeless problem; somewhat like Finlayson, he thinks that the newness of ‘post-truth’ is exaggerated. But he goes further: he suggests that the true character of our situation is (and always was) one of ‘pre-truth’. Talk of ‘post-truth’ rashly implies that there was a time in which we were in harmony with ‘truth’. Whereas Backström suggests that actually, as we can see in Freud and Wittgenstein, there is a permanent pressure in us against facing reality. We still, now as before, live *before* truth.

Strandberg agrees with Finlayson that the problematic we find under the heading of ‘post-truth’ is far from new; he traces it back to Hobbes. He disagrees in a certain sense with Read about climate-denial; he thinks that the very vehemence of climate-change-deniers evinces their caring very much about the truth that they deny. In relation to Backström, Strandberg ties these strands together by taking up the political and necessarily inter-subjective nature of concern with truth and truthfulness. Strandberg agrees with Backström’s critique of ‘post-truth’ as too *complacent* an idea and with his thought that ‘pre-truth’ would be a more accurate label for our era (as for every era) than post-truth; but he suggests that it is essential to think *this* truth *in* the agora, *in* civil society. Strandberg can be read as suggesting that Wittgenstein’s suggestion that “Working in philosophy [...] is really more work on oneself. On one’s own interpretation. On one’s way of seeing things” (CV: 16e) needs expanding, in the following way: we need to understand that the kind of work needed to overcome the temptations of post-truthism *and* of the complacent assumption, among most critics of the ‘post-truth’ turn, that we *know* the truth is work that we need to do. There is a danger in Wittgenstein’s approach that the essentially inter-personal nature of this work is downplayed. A truthful life is a life

lived truly *in relation to others* in a socio-political setting, not only in private.

6. 'Fake-news'

In the essays in this special issue, we thus approach issues raised by 'post-truth' from three angles: that of (investigating) a distrust in reason and the philosophizing it involves, that of the usefulness (or otherwise) of the notion to address the issues it can be and has been used to refer to, and that of the relevance of the notion to address the issues it can be used to refer to (in contrast to alternative possible notions such as 'pre-truth').

Extending what is begun in Finlayson's essay, below, we wish to offer one short conclusive reflection on risks relative to uses of the term of 'fake-news'.

To say of a news that it is false can, according to circumstances, amount either to legitimately challenging its truth or illegitimately casting doubt upon the reliability of an information and its source. And when for example evidence or reliable credentials are lacking, it can be appropriate to acknowledge that we are unable to determine whether some news is false. However, to underline that does not amount to granting that one could always relevantly doubt the reliability of each of our certainties in every circumstance. By calling into question our very ability to distinguish reasons to trust in others such talk often leads to call into question what Austin called "the, or one main, point of talking", that is, believing persons, accepting testimony (1979: 82).

If such scepticism as to testimony were to become widespread, this would amount to a partial disintegration of society itself. We think that this shows the gravity of the present situation – and the need for a special issue such as this.

We hope that readers will enjoy the essays collected here. But more than that: we hope that these essays about widespread but highly-problematic notions provide a basis for taking our culture a little closer to the truth of the matter. For, obviously, enjoyment in matters of public political philosophy is not enough. As Wittgenstein remarks in *Culture and Value*: "You could attach prices to thoughts. Some cost a

lot, some a little. And how does one pay for thoughts? The answer, I think, is: with courage” (CV: 52e).

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