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THE GROUND TREMBLING UNDER OUR FEET[1]
Truth, politics and solitude

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Abstract

Fake news, Post-Truth are now entries into the ordinary language of contemporary politics to denote - with anxiety and concern - the definitive rupture of the relationship between truth and politics. A relationship that has never been idyllic and that cannot be, constitutively, idyllic, but which now seems to have reached a point of no return. Glossing the reflections of Hannah Arendt in *Truth and Politics* and pointing out two areas of "political licence" - that is, two areas where, inevitably, politics cannot be judged on parameters of truth - this contribution aims to treat the weakness of shared truths not as a cause of the crisis of democracies, but as a symptom of a more radical problem, an extreme subjectivism that leads to loneliness and intolerance towards any relationship based on trust.

Keywords

Hannah Arendt, Trust, Weltbild, philosophical truth, factual truth, Subjectivism.

Resumen

Fake news, Post-Truth son palabras que han entrado en el lenguaje ordinario de la política contemporánea para denotar -con ansiedad y preocupación- la ruptura definitiva de la relación entre verdad y política. Una relación que nunca ha sido idílica y que constitucionalmente no puede serlo, pero que ahora parece haber llegado a un punto sin retorno. Glosando las reflexiones de Hannah Arendt en *Verdad y Política* y señalando dos áreas de «licencia política» - es decir, en las que, inevitablemente, la política no puede juzgarse en función de los parámetros de verdad -, esta contribución pretende tratar la debilidad de las verdades compartidas no como la causa de la crisis de las democracias, sino como un síntoma de un problema más radical, un subjetivismo extremo que desemboca en soledad e intolerancia hacia cualquier relación de confianza.

Palabras clave

Hannah Arendt, Trust, Weltbild, verdad filosófica, verdad objetiva, subjetivismo.

The *liaison* between truth and politics –which has existed ever since politics came into being– is literally *dangereuse*, for various reasons. First, it describes a field of relations that is inevitably spurious, changing, porous, wherein all clarifying and Manichaean extremisms are impracticable (the effects of *too much* or *too little* truth are equally unpolitical). Second, it implies a preliminary definition of what is authentically political, and, therefore, what its tasks and legitimate tools are. Third, truth is a single signifier with different meanings, so much so that all definitions are usually accompanied by specifying adjectives or complements –truth *of reason*, *factual* truth, *scientific* truths, *vérité à faire*, etc–. Hence we get a whole host of particular relations between different *politics* and truths (plural). Then, further complicating a situation that is already intricate in itself is the diachronic perspective: that is, how to judge and account for the socially widespread sensation that we are at present seeing of a particular degeneration of the relationship between politics and truth? While it is certainly necessary to avoid abandoning oneself to apocalyptic catastrophism –*o tempora, o mores!*– or postulating the lack of any historical precedent to the contemporary *post-truth politics*, it is nevertheless equally important to take this sensation seriously. We need to register the growing difficulty to identify a common world (of meanings, facts and evidence) upon which to construct political subjectivations, alliances, conflicts, and question ourselves as to the democratic sustainability of this (growing) rate of political solipsism.

It certainly cannot be said that politicians, even in democratic systems, have begun to lie now; and yet the landscape painted in these times is uncanny, with new elements. The twentieth-century political conflict was deemed to be rooted in the different *evaluations* given to substantially agreed *facts* and *meanings* considered objective because they were to a certain extent unavailable to single people. But this subdivision no longer seems to hold. The world is now the theatre of the self, the stage on which alternative facts and subjective meanings proliferate. It has become impossible to group people around shared political values (freedom, justice and equality) because nothing about those values is shared anymore, not even their meanings, which these days are totally left up to individual preferences and idiosyncrasies. Therefore, the public discussion becomes a cacophonous babel of private languages, with the sole point of agreement possible summed up in the slogan of the new type of democracy: *we agree to disagree*, that is, we acknowledge the abyss between us, while undertaking not to fill it.

This paper is divided into three parts: the first section will take the form of a descriptive note on Hannah Arendt's *Truth and Politics*, a piece of writing which both maps out the controversy while ruling out Manichaean solutions, and introduces

expressions particularly useful for a diagnosis of the present day. In the second section, I will try to give a more detailed definition of two elements of political licence: two political spheres in which the true/false dichotomy is completely out of place. In the third section, I will concentrate more on our world: the idea is to treat the weakness of shared truths not as the cause of the crisis of democracies, but as a symptom of a more radical problem.

T-T-W: Truth - Trust - World

In 2017 the television series broadcast by CBS, *The Good Fight*, came out in the USA, telling the story of a medium-sized Afro-American law firm located in Chicago in the present-day America of Trump, the alt-right and reclaimed racism. In the second season, which came out in 2018, one of the protagonists, Diane Lockhart, partner in the firm with a history of civil rights activism, starts to feel a growing sense of unease and alienation. The stabilizing force of law seems to have vanished –this *was* a country of laws!– while she discovers that values, principles and procedures she believed shared by the majority to instead be minority and fiercely detested, as if Trump's election had let out a ferocious snarl that had been kept under wraps for decades (Alagna, 2018). On more than one occasion, when chatting with friends and colleagues, this sense of disorientation comes back to her: she no longer recognizes her city, her country or this world. In effect, she feels out of this world, incapable of even understanding what is going on. She starts to use mild hallucinogenic drugs, paradoxically with the aim of maintaining the minimal state of mental balance needed to live in society. However, this ends up expanding the blurred area between reality and fantasy, truth and dystopia. During long, sleepless nights she watches television documentaries on the pig that Trump is said to have adopted at the White House, or presidential tweets concerning goats to take to the G8 summit. Afraid of revealing her confusion, she does not talk to anyone about it, tearing herself up with doubt: is what she is seeing real or is it an effect of the drugs? In reality, we spectators also remain in doubt. Excepting some scenes, which are obviously just for entertainment value, many of Diane's "illusions" seem pretty real, giving the uncanny effect of sharing the character's sense of instability, uncertainty and weakness. As if there were no longer a stable and shared world to stand upon. In other words, "conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us" (Arendt, 2006, p. 264).

The previous quote is taken from an article that Hannah Arendt published in 1967 in *The New Yorker* entitled 'Truth and Politics', an essay of utmost importance, if only for the complexity that it manages to reconstruct. In the span of around 50 pages, not always following a linear movement, Arendt classifies different types of truth and their strength, each one of which developing a particular relationship with politics. By writing off all Manichaeisms and postulates of one sort's absolute domination over the other, Arendt draws a picture in which the truth appears both *fundamental* and *alien* to politics. Fundamental insofar as "no permanence, no perseverance in existence, can even be conceived of without men willing to testify to what is and appears to them because it is" (Arendt, 2006, p. 229). Without truth one cannot rely on or build a common world, all stability needed for shared action among people is lost, replaced by an unbearable trembling.[2] And yet, for at least two reasons at the same time it is constitutively alien. First, owing to a sort of *(mobile) ontology of truth*, insofar as all truths, of any kind, seem to transform into opinion the moment they are voiced in the political sphere. When the philosophical truth tries to impose itself in public, it entrusts itself to violence –and therefore barters its coercive strength for physical coercion– or becomes just one among several opinions: "for truth would then owe its prevalence (…) to the agreement of the many. Who might change their mind tomorrow and agree on something else" (p. 246).[3] The situation is similar for factual truth, constitutionally at the mercy of witnesses (who can be false), archives (which can be manipulated), or documents (which can be hidden or disputed) (pp. 242-244). Second, truth is alien to politics for reasons of the *ontology of politics*: politics is changing the world and non-truth –whether this be lies, illusion or imagination– at the same time testifies human freedom and its possibility of releasing itself from the existent to plan for something different and, strategically, constructs the preconditions to implement and create the new and different –lies are more revolutionary than truth– (pp. 250-251, pp. 258-259).

On leafing through Arendt's text, the situation looks grey for Diane (and for us): "The experience of a trembling wobbling motion of everything we rely on for our sense of direction and reality is among the most common and most vivid experiences of men under totalitarian rule" (Arendt, 2006, p. 258).[4] The feelings that Diane confides to her

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2 'Consistent lying, metaphorically speaking, pulls the ground from under our feet and provides no other ground on which to stay'. (Arendt, 2006, p. 264).

3 'Philosophical truth, when it enters the market place, changes its nature and becomes opinion.'(Arendt, 2006, See p. 238).

4 "If the past and present are treated as part of the future – that is, changed back into their former state of potentiality – the political realm is deprived not only of its main stabilizing force but of the starting point from which to change, to begin something new. What then begins is the constant shifting and shuffling in utter sterility which are characteristic of many new nations that had the bad luck to be born in an age of propaganda." (Arendt, 2006, p. 258).

friends are worryingly similar to those that Arendt describes as typical of a life under totalitarian rule. Of course, I do not want to suggest undue and even historically offensive comparisons, but to point out a strange likeness of sensations. Besides, "freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute" (p. 238). Anyway, it is not my purpose to go through all of Arendt's reasoning; instead, what I would like to do is try to concentrate on two issues, using Arendt to understand, and in part perhaps to help, Diane Lockhart. The two key words are: *(political) world* and *trust*.

While the relationship between truth and politics is somewhat paradoxical in its general appearance –since truth is both fundamental and alien to politics–, this paradoxicality is specifically found and reproduced in the relationship between truth and the (political) world. It is a particular type of hiatus, which needs to be accepted and used precisely to establish substantially *trusting* forms of contact between the two poles of truth and politics.

If observed through Arendt's filter, Diane Lockhart's sense of disorientation is two-fold, concerning two different spheres: *philosophical* truth and *factual* truth. The first arises from the discovery that not all people 'hold these truths to be self-evident', to paraphrase the incipit of the Declaration of Independence. This means that not all of us recognize ourselves in the values and principles that Diane considers absolutely unshakable and thought were shared: equality, freedom and democracy.[5] What counts most in this context is that Diane's disorientation tips totally towards the outside: it derives from the discovery that those values are not universally accepted, while she continues to foster no doubt as to their evident truth. It is the same disorientation as Socrates (and only in part as Plato): truths of this type, philosophical truths, are not of this world, or at least not of this cave. It was a (fortunate) historical coincidence that those truths, transformed into opinions, enjoyed widespread consent. Nevertheless, was Diane to remain the only one to believe in them, this fact would not undermine their certainty (for her) nor rid them of any of their potential activating force. This means that "the relatively transcendent qualities of such political principles as freedom, justice, honor and courage (…) may inspire, and then become manifest in, human action" (Arendt, 2006, p. 243). The alienation of philosophical truths from the world –their 'relative transcendence'– immunizes their practical strength against changes in current opinions; within them, they

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5 Welcome on board, Diane! – Arendt would say. Those truths were *thought* to be evident, and this already means that "the statement 'All men are created equal' is not self-evident, but stands in need of agreement and consent – (…) equality, if it is to be politically relevant, is a matter of opinion, and not 'the truth'" (Arendt, 2006, p. 246).

contain "principles upon which men might act and which thus could become manifest in the world" (p. 249). In other words, by considering those truths evident, Diane can autonomously and singularly draw from them the strength to react and act: she can give into the temptation of Syracuse and advise an enlightened despot, she can accept the political challenge and pit opinion against opinion, she can –and this would be the most appropriate choice– embody those principles, as a consequence inform her existence, and bear testimony *through her own example*:

> This teaching by example is, indeed, the only form of 'persuasion' that philosophical truth is capable of without perversion or distortion; (…) philosophical truth can become 'practical' and inspire action *without violating the rules of the political realm* [emphasis added] only when it manages to become manifest in the guise of an example. (p. 247-248).

It can be painful to be separated from the world. Nonetheless, it also implies keeping up the autonomous strength to act at all times, even in the most adverse conditions. As such, the transcendence of philosophical truths guarantees their autonomous capacity to prompt action and therefore to become manifest and return to the world. The embodied truth is viral in its force, it restores *trust* in human potential, or rather it manages to use the trust developed in the person –Socrates who does not flee, Diane who continues her battles– to bear witness to, strengthen and divulge the truth that he or she expresses. Therefore, it is trust that acts as the fundamental glue, the bridge linking philosophical truths and the world, the trust that Socrates earns by accepting the unjust penalty counts and is perceived as proof of the truth of what he was asserting: namely, that it is better to suffer evil than to commit it.

Diane's second disorientation is more underhand: it concerns factual truth, the real circumstance of the possible adoption of a pig at the White House. These are worldly truths in the most radical sense of the word, not only do they concern the world as it is, but they are ontologically worldly, their status depends on concrete factors such as eye-witness accounts, documents, proof. They cannot be achieved on their own outside a context of relations –Diane remains in doubt precisely because she does not dare to ask, to exchange opinions–. Here personal example remains out of focus: affirming factual truth in a context of generalized errors or lies testifies to the *parrhesiast*'s courage, but does not corroborate the truth being shouted out. This is why, even though Arendt's conclusions are optimistic in the end, "facts are superior to power" (Arendt, 2006, p. 259)

and "reality takes its revenge on those who dare to defy it" (p. 256), in other passages concerning factual truths, she admits that in some cases their very survival is at risk (p. 244).[6] Therefore, the being of the world is risky, too risky, so much so that Arendt advises those asserting the factual truth to remain at a distance from the political world:

> The teller of factual truth, when he enters the political realm and identifies himself with some partial interest and power formation, compromises on the only quality that could have made his truth appear plausible, namely, his personal truthful-ness, guaranteed by impartiality, integrity, independence. (p. 250)

Those who tell the factual truth must at least in part cut themselves off from the world, assuming a "standpoint outside the political realm" (p. 259) able to guaran-tee "non-commitment and impartiality, freedom from self-interest in thought and judgment" (p. 262). Arendt explains that the courts of law and universities need to be independent to guarantee a truth that cannot be accused of partisanship. Here the key role of *trust* is even more evident: factual truths are based on the credibility of those who uphold them. Their intrinsic weakness can only be compensated if the people and institutions called upon to assert factual truths are wholly above suspi-cion. We *trust* in the witnesses; we *trust* in the documents, in the people who col-lected them, safeguard them, classify them; we *trust* in the people who control the institutions devoted to ascertaining the truth and so on, in a domino effect whose central element is, only apparently paradoxically, no longer the truth in itself, but the trust in the people asserting it.

This is where the twofold paradoxicality of the relationship between truth and the (political) world lies, as reconstructed by Arendt: the truth is infrastructure, a founding element in a common world, but, in order to carry out this function, (philosophical) truth is or (factual) truth must be at least partially alien to the (political) world which is, and must be, the domain of opinion. And while, safe in its almost transcendent position, the task of philosophical truth is to appear in the world through example, factual truth, at the mercy of the world, has to gain space and distance itself at least in part from that same world. In both cases, a third, intrinsically relational element reconnects truth and the world: trust.

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6 Ibid., p. 244.

Truth-making / Assuming the truth

Despite the complexity and variety of the classification built by Arendt, I think it is possible to pinpoint two difficulties with her reasoning: the simultaneous under- and overestimation of the strength of politics in conditioning, imposing and divulging certain truths.

First of all, concerning factual truths, the examples used by Arendt are clear, unambiguous: Germany invaded Belgium and not the other way round; Trotsky had a role in the October Revolution, making the analysis a bit simpler. In reality, only in extreme cases does politics need to completely overturn the existent, asserting the totally false and denying or hiding the absolutely true. More often –or rather always, and inevitably– politics "plays" with different truths: it emphasizes some, putting them on the centre stage and making them politically decisive, while it pushes others to the sidelines, making them secondary and partially irrelevant. Moving within the real, politics selects some aspects of it, giving them importance and therefore practical force. It does not create the reality *ex novo*, but moulds it by seeking to highlight some elements to the detriment of others. Perhaps the most banal example is the birth and diffusion of a "national sentiment", namely, the enhancement of national belonging as a politically decisive given. At a certain moment,

> states began as never before to create national education systems; to impose standard national languages; to organize expositions, museums, artistic subventions, and others [sic] means of displaying cultural production or heritage; to construct communications networks; to invent national flags, symbols, anthems, holidays, rituals, and traditions. (Tilly, 2002, p. 165)

Little is completely invented in this state-led work to nationalize the masses. Instead, some "truths" are (have been) taken, encouraged, resignified and above all highlighted, blown up and absolutized; more than disowned and completely hidden, other forms of belonging are sterilized, marginalized and therefore made politically uninfluential. This triggers a circle of self-confirmation and self-empowerment of that politically driven truth: pushed by the idea of nation, states compete and clash with each other, boosting national sentiment, and providing new truths to celebrate, remember and monumentalize. When politically absolutized, a truth initially immersed in other truths helps to create a world in which it is effectively "more true" than others. Indeed, it may be an

inevitable process, a constitutive element of politics –as well as of law– which "reflects on what exists" while "actively ordering and modifying" it (Hauriou, 2004, p. 379, own translation). The same political language is intrinsically performative, even when it sets out to be realist: it reflects and assumes pieces of the real, while automatically placing upon them a surplus of importance and centrality, and therefore helping to alter the very thing it wishes to describe.[7]

Second –and in a substantially specular manner–, Arendt overestimates the capacity of politics to impose and divulge a philosophical truth (clearly in the form of a shared opinion). Again, the clearest example calls into question the Founding Fathers and the truths they *considered* evident. On discussing the inevitable metamorphosis of those truths into opinions, Arendt writes: "Their validity depends upon free agreement and consent; they are arrived at by discursive, representative thinking; and they are communicated by means of persuasion and dissuasion" (Arendt, 2006, p. 247). In other words, by doing politics –that is, imagining the positions of others in the mind and then discussing, communicating and debating in the townships and assemblies, with the strength of persuasion and maybe of example– those truths that became opinions achieved a sufficiently wide consensus to then be written into the act of constitution of a new political body. Namely, it is politics and its tools that have the power and the duty to develop those opinions (unduly called "truths") and to try to divulge them as much as possible. Indeed, similar affirmations appearing in non-political spheres remain politically sterile:

> There exist (…) philosophical or religious statements that correspond to this opinion [i.e. equality] – such as that all men are equal before God, or before death, or insofar as they all belong to the same species of *animal rationale* – but none of them was ever of any political or practical consequence, because the equalizer, whether God, or death, or nature, transcended and remained outside the realm in which human intercourse takes place. (pp. 246-247)

In my view, it is an overestimation of the power of politics. More convincing to me is the idea, implicitly supported by Weber, that politics depends at least partially on discourses of truth (world images) over which it does not have complete control, and it

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7 At one extreme is Laclau and the concept of people, a politically driven discursive construction, wholly political sum of various questions linked by a significant void; this operation to construct the people is, for Laclau, the very essence of politics (Laclau, 2008).

assumes and accepts as true. A world image is a set of cognitive assumptions about the world as a totality and about all the partial totalities that make it up (nature, humankind, society and history). These issues escape the true/false dichotomy because they concern objects which are by principle indemonstrable, the blind point of every possible enlightenment: whether the world is the stage for Providence or a jumble of nonsensical events; whether people are good or bad by nature; whether history is heading towards the best or descending towards the worst, no option can ever be verified without the shadow of a doubt, and yet it is inevitable to "choose one" in order to have a criterion for our practical orientation in the world. In fact, humankind has always taken an image to be true. This is why Blumenberg speaks of *vérité à faire*: a pragmatic truth, which expresses itself in the capacity to generate practical attitudes, to concretely direct human life in the world; a truth with "practical power" (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 29), "through which man understands himself, orients his evaluations and his practical objectives, assesses his possibilities and necessities and imagines himself in his essential needs" (Blumenberg 1961, p. 69, own translation). These are unverifiable truths that impact on politics and define its possible evolution:

> deciding questions such as: 'are people good or bad by nature?', 'are they determined by their inclinations or by the environment?' or 'are they a factor or factum of their stories?', can only be deferred or defined as senseless from a scientific point of view, not from a practical one. (Blumenberg, 1981, p. 126, own translation)

It takes a long time for world images to come into being and crystallize, through an always specific and situated relationship between ideal horizons –prophetic messages, religions, the intense activity of intellectuals, cultural uprisings in the broad sense– and material conditions. This is why to a certain extent they dominate over politics: they decide its magnitude, its ability to give sense to the lives of those devoted to it, its degree of inevitability, and give it a direction and room for possible evolution. On analysing religious world images, Weber marks how a vague idea such as redemption only assumes a specific meaning when seen through a *Weltbild* able to define " 'from what' and 'for what' one wished to be redeemed and, let us not forget, 'could be' redeemed" (Weber, 1991, p. 280). The definition of the good to pursue and the bad from which to flee has an impact, *from the outside*, on politics: if redemption is the peace of saints in the afterlife, it is more likely that institutions with a religious basis and inclination will acquire strength and legitimacy. Instead, if redemption is material well-being, then it will be institutional

forms that can boast greater productive and/or redistributive efficiency that will gain consent. In other words, more than imposing a true-discourse able to shape particular ways of living, politics and its institutions work if they are in line with the true-discourse represented by the world image and if they respond to and grasp the requirements and needs outlined by the *Weltbild*.

Arendt does not sufficiently emphasize the fact that there was already an underlying pre-political consensus over those "truths" between the Founding Fathers and American society due to a world image conditioned both by the specific material conditions and the Puritan imprint of that same society. The composers and heirs of the *Mayflower Compact* shared a religiously founded diffidence towards all authority, a hypertrophy of subjective ethical consciousness that disqualified the device of sovereignty and a sense of equality owing to a shared infinite distance from an omnipotent (and stern) God: "the Great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipotence, our divine equality!" (Melville, 1972, p. 212) Therefore, more than being created and spread in the townships and political discussions, those truths deemed evident made those townships and discussions possible, having already been created and diffused by a shared world image. Concerning truths by principle unverifiable but in practice inevitable, it is the world image and not politics that has the last word; in its intricate and always specific osmosis of ideal and material conditions, the world image decides over those truths that politics then transcribes, uses, accepts and makes its own.

The ground trembling under our feet

Alternative facts, fake news, post-truth: these are some of the expressions most widely used in contexts of diagnosis of the present. In 2016 *post-truth* was even elected word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries: a prefix that seems to indicate not so much a discontinuity in time, as the 'posts' on Facebook and Twitter –which have become a fundamental political tool– and the abbreviation of *military post*, signalling how truth has become and is perceived as the outcome of battles between different powers: therefore, not a truth that imposes itself but *is* imposed.

In what way can what has been said so far help the uncanny sensation of a trembling, wobbling motion –as Arendt said– experienced by Diane and ourselves to be taken seriously? World image, performative power of politics, trust: these are the three poles that emerged as fundamental in defining the relations between politics and truth, and

it is along these three lines that I will try to understand what has changed, where the rupture took place that is driving Diane crazy. First of all, however, the explanation of an excellent exclusion: in this paragraph I will not deal with the topic of the Internet or the social media in particular –a subject that would be reductive to describe as "simple" political communication and which makes a great contribution to moulding subjectivities and society–. It is precisely because of its importance and centrality that it will not be examined here. I believe it requires exclusive reflection, using technical, journalistic, IT and semiological skills that I do not possess. Excepting not only conspiracy theories or extreme cases, but more profoundly, the political and economic contexts that direct their use,[8] the independent legality and internal operating mechanisms of platforms such as those of the social media seem to empower phenomena that have a drastic impact on the construction of shared truths, amongst which: the genesis of no-discussion bubbles of consent; the extreme simplification of the topics analysed; the speed of the news and the short-livedness of attention; the emotive-only turn of communication –*if it bleeds it leads*– and the bulimia of communication; and the role of irony in the public airing of extreme positions and questioning historical factual truths – see *Pepe the Frog* and the Holocaust.[9] And this is just the tip of the iceberg; too many topics for just one paragraph.

Rather, if the world image really establishes the set of truths grasped and taken up by politics, there should always be a socially shared true discourse, a base on which to stand. So, what is the truth of our world, and why, despite this, is everything wobbling? To sum it up in a slogan, one could say: that is precisely the problem, the truth of our world image is that nothing is shared. More correctly, a completely nominalistic world image has asserted itself, with a dual insulating effect. On one hand, the senselessness of the world and its history is sanctioned; seeing the happenings in the world as a series of events without an objective direction implies that all guarantees against solitude are lost: individual action remains individual, it cannot be taken for granted that it will converge and integrate with other people's action, or come together to form a wider action, or that there will be any support from others along the way. On the other hand, and more directly, nominalism means that universals are no longer believable: all that exists is

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8 See the article by B.Y. Fong on Jacobin, 'Possiamo fare a meno di Twitter e Facebook?', https://jacobinitalia.it/13680-2/?fb-clid=IwAR1-np0XUAC2tgasDYRcDXsM7LcX48vuLRrdjE0AVVTCptBH06whyLUvBZ0. The piece claims that these platforms have a sort political unredeemability: that is, the problem is not that they are private enterprises or their subsumption under capitalistic logics. Instead, it lies more deeply, in their logic and internal dynamics, which can cause relational and even psychological issues.

9 Topics analysed by a wide range of excellent literature, amongst which: Lolli, 2017; Duffy, 2018; Gambetta, 2018; Ziccardi, 2019; Nagle, 2017; Han, 2017.

individuals and their demands. *There is no such thing as society* (also) means the absolute centrality of the self, the sovereign right of all individuals to express themselves and construct inevitably subjective meanings. On one hand, self-realization, self-affirmation and authenticity are indicated as the supreme good to aspire to; on the other, they are only deemed declinable in radically singular forms, with any agglomeration thought of as forced. The world and others are not an integral and constitutional element of the self –a self that is formed *in* relation, *with* and *against* the resistances of the world–, but threats to the authenticity and freedom of expression of individuals who think themselves at the same time sovereign and "natural", pre-relational and pre-social. The world and others therefore become the stage upon which to express and impose the self and a store of tools with which to potentially express and impose oneself.

This implies making all truths, whose objectivity allows them to act as a connector, binding together different individuals, out of reach. Not only does truth appear threatening, since by definition it places limits on the single person's free will, but more deeply, it is made inaccessible by taking the subjectiveness of building meanings to the extreme. Modern politics was based on assigning multiple evaluations to shared meanings; the shared and socially constructed meaning of an action or a conduct was then evaluated differently depending on the different political leanings. Today it is the very manufacture of meaning that is a strictly individual skill: the same act means as many different things to as many observers. The sexual exploits of Donald Trump are read by Diane Lockhart as an unacceptable degradation and commodification of the female body, and by her colleague Roland Blum as the apotheosis of sexual emancipation, wherein free women freely choose what to do with their bodies, without arrogant liberals prescribing what is *true* freedom and *true* emancipation.

The political catchment basins of the modern era –which answered to names such as liberalism, socialism and nationalism– arose as conglomerations of interests and opinions with a single, neat and clear meaning, with regard to which everyone took up a position. Today it is objectively impossible to define their meaning: they are subjectively loaded with different, at times contradictory meanings, broken up haphazardly according to personal leanings. It is no longer shared opinions that connect individuals, but the individual who rises up as the only connector of different opinions, whose identity is substantiated through that very, potentially unique, and wholly personal, patchwork of opinions and beliefs. Within a nominalistic world image, therefore, the problem with truth lies in its claims to objectivity and independence from the single person's will. The

problem of truth is that it wants to be shared, in a world image in which all sharing is at least potentially harmful to the single person's sovereign rights.

The world as a stage, the necessary backdrop where every person's exceptionality can be shown off, has little to do with the "world in common" which is both presupposition for and objective of political practice. And the loss of this reference to common truths produces that uncanny trembling. Therefore, political collectivities seem unstable and contingent conglomerations of unrelated atoms that form a momentary mass due to mere numeric aggregation. The public sphere cannot be a space of conflict, confrontation and changing opinions due to all people speaking their own language and rejecting all attempts at translation as inauthentic; so, this sphere "simply" becomes the place where the majority opinion counts –a technically prepolitical, entirely emotive, almost aesthetic opinion of personal taste, determined by private and fluctuating idiosyncrasies and manipulable as streams of opinion, fear or hope–. It is an opinion –or rather political mutation of the truth– matured in solitude, that solitude that condemns Diane to blur the true and the false. However, politics is also responsible for this situation, having both grasped and empowered this extreme individualization, through a strict normative, juridical and cultural setting (Dardot & Laval, 2014). All of those hazy of tax and monetary provisions and social policies that go under the generic name of "neoliberalism" have definitely grasped the demands for individualization posed by the world image, but at the same time they have empowered them, juridically fastening them down, even imposing them on those who did not agree or in spheres where they had not yet arisen.

The world as the stage for the self, the relationship with others as competitive, instrumental to or dangerous for the free and sovereign expression of one's subjectivity; the pivots of this world image weaken to the point of almost cancelling out that specific form of interpersonal relationship that Arendt already signalled –more or less implicitly– as fundamental in connecting truth and the political world: trust. Indeed, trust is always trust in others, it is a declaration of dependence on others and, in general, on the complex social construct we live. To trust someone or something is to renounce the sovereign and autarchic claim –illusion– that we alone can dominate all the essential variables for our existence. To trust is to allow ourselves to be called into question and be "contaminated" by others, building our own autonomy not against or regardless the relationship with the other, but within it. These reasons make a trust relationship particularly out of joint with the nominalistic image of the world. Taking up Arendt's classification again, those who try to embody and attest to a 'philosophical truth' by example

have a hard time: they are simply crazy or, more likely, they are hypocritically hiding selfish or egotistic interests in personal self-affirmation or social recognition –besides, is this not what they all do, what *we* all do? strikes up the *vox populi*.

It is in part a similar situation for the people or institutions which, according to Arendt, should guarantee the impartiality of factual truths, abstaining and distancing themselves from the political arena. It is before everyone's eyes how these institutions and the people who enact and represent them are (increasingly perceived as) biased voices, intrinsically interested, if nothing else, in their own survival and prestige. The same possibility that such a distance exists is now being drastically called into question, not always with democratic effect:

> Denouncing the cognitive limits of science and its compromises with political and economic power probably plays an ambivalent role towards 'weak' knowledge and interests: on one hand, it strengthens them; on the other, losing the protective umbrella provided by producing knowledge temporarily accepted as solid, reliable and hence fair makes them even more fragile. If all voices are equally biased then the one that shouts the loudest is bound to play a base hand. (Pellizzoni, 2006)

What is more, the "factual truths" which should provide the basis and direction for our decisions and preferences are in reality intrinsically probabilistic outlooks. While Arendt relegated these truths to the past, contemporary political practice is based on models able to predict the future effects of certain choices. We adopt specific tax policies in the reasonable hope that they will produce certain results, but we are nevertheless forced to move in the ring of potentialities, always open to denial, and never in the field of "truth". Not only do errors or interests always lie in wait, but the very complexity and speed of the existent undermine the solidity and reliability of these outlooks.[10] There is no way out: even when, in formal loyalty to the eternal task of science, we accept and claim the temporariness of its results –which are always open to contest and review– this temporariness becomes a political alibi, being used to "scientifically" justify and therefore benefit some parties to the detriment of others.[11]

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10 "Legislators may find themselves debating complex issues and potential objects of regulation which suddenly alter before their eyes, dramatically augmenting the hardships intrinsic to consensus building in the context of complex policy issues. They may finally succeed in pursuing a series of legislative initiatives only to discover that the social and economic presuppositions underlying their policy choices have already shifted" (Scheuerman, 2004, p. 48).
11 A canonical example of this situation is climate change: the inevitable lack of conclusive proof concerning its presence and anthropic nature is used to justify politics' lack of action.

But, again, this is just the tip of the iceberg. With its resulting dependence, trust is particularly irritating for the contemporary subjectivity; it is a relationship which is avoided, hidden or juridically filtered as much as possible by both parties in the trust relationship. Those who should be the object of trust want to avoid the responsibilities connected to it, and those who should grant it experience it as a painful and unmotivated loss of sovereignty. A real example is given by the institution, as sacrosanct as it is often actually farcical, of informed consent in the medical field: patients are offered a whole host of possibilities among which they can freely choose, while knowing that they are completely responsible for this choice (Chignola, 2018, pp. 117-120). However, the information needed for the consent is often unattainable: it would require time, data, exchanges of opinion, medical skills and skills to read the data that are not and cannot be rapidly at disposal. Therefore, the patients have to *trust* one doctor or another, and, at the same time, they have to and also want to believe that they have made a fully independent choice, while accepting the responsibility-evading pretence of being able to have real-time access to a wealth of skills and experience that others have amassed over years and years. The web of trust relations making up society is shrunk as much as possible –through a series of acquittances and personal assumptions of responsibility– and where it is not possible to eliminate, it is sterilized and hidden. When it emerges again in all its reality, it is thus seen as a usurpation of individual sovereignty, as unmotivated as it is violent.

The trembling that Diane feels is fully understandable, but it is not the disappearance of truth that is causing it. More than cause of the state of crisis of contemporary liberal democracies, post-truth is the visible symptom of a deeper problem, which in philosophical terms could be rendered as hyper-individualism or radical subjectivism, which is perhaps best expressed using a word from ordinary language: solitude. When taken to the extreme by the nominalistic world image, the thought of autonomy as counterposed to relations, and freedom as absolute individual sovereignty, implies the loss of that objectivity –which can be called truth or shared opinions– able to connect individuals together. Diane's problem is that she is alone in a world of lonely people, she is afraid of asking others for confirmation of their perceptions and has no public or political room in which to fiercely argue with those who do not share her truths, without stopping at agreeing to disagree.

In short, the demand of the day cannot be to restore a mythical (and unattainable) dominion of truth, dotting the ontological statute with those 'truths deemed evident', but instead to work on rebuilding relationships: by breaking isolation, reclaiming and

de-stigmatizing trust. If changing or imposing a new world image is the task of proph-ets, it could be more sensible to imagine radically new institutions, capable of breaking the echo chambers and reopening spaces of conflict, confrontation and construction of a bare minimum of shared opinions, reconciling autonomy as the aspiration towards self-government with the frank acceptance of mutual dependence. As Duso writes on reconstructing and commenting the genealogy of the State-form, it is the idea of free-dom as the possibility of *isolation* that enables the conjunction –or even the reciprocal implication– between individual and state sovereignty. The human material on which the State-form is based is the individual, individuals who are *free because they are alone* –and therefore free to privately pursue what is good for them–:

> we find a close tie between (…) the affirmation of individual rights and the posi-tion of an absolute power as the only possibility of their implementation. Being superior to all individuals, this gave them room to privately seek their own good, while avoiding mutual encounters and disturbance, that is, by creating the condi-tions for their isolation. (…) The term 'society' (… is taken) to mean a situation in which freedom is created as the single people's independence and therefore the possibility of their isolation. (Duso, 2007, pp. 73-74, own translation)

Perhaps we should start to imagine forms of institutionalization of our political co-existence different from the State, by trying to exploit that performative force of po-litical language to give strength, relevance and power to forms of cooperation which, more or less "clandestinely", already exist. The third season of *The Good Fight* begins with Diane Lockhart joining a group of militants called *The Resistance*.

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